

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: In Faith, One Step at a Time

Lesson: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

***11** Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. **2** This is what the ancients were commended for. **3** By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*

***8** By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. **9** By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. **10** For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. **11** And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she^[a] considered him faithful who had made the promise. **12** And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. **13** All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. **14** People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. **15** If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*

(Slide 1) Do you like superheroes? Who was your favorite superhero when you were a child? When I was my son's age, I liked Jim Carrey's *The Mask*. His green face, his super-energetic and witty gestures captured my attention. I liked him so much that I even begged my parents to buy me sneakers with his character on them.

As I grew older, I liked other superheroes like Spider-Man. In America, I think almost everyone knew about Iron Man since childhood, but I first encountered Iron Man in high school when I watched the movie in a theater. At first, I thought the name "Iron Man" sounded silly, so I didn't expect much. But I ended up being completely attracted to the character, and for a while I couldn't get him out of my mind.

Many people love superhero stories. Maybe it's because superheroes are usually brave, righteous, and able to defeat villains through their extraordinary abilities, restoring order. Through their stories, we dream of

a new world different from our own.

In other words, unlike superheroes, most of us are weak, sometimes anxious when facing difficulties and uncertainties, sometimes afraid, and sometimes shaken.

When I was a child, I loved superheroes very much. But at some point, I began to connect more deeply with stories not of those who are so different from me, but of those who, though weak and ordinary like myself, still overcame hardships. I even found comfort through their stories.

(Slide 2) One of my favorite people in the Bible is Abraham. I think I have shared about him with you several times before whenever I had the chance.

When you think about Abraham, what comes to mind? The father of countless descendants like the stars in the sky? The father of Isaac, whom he had at the age of 100? A man with great righteousness and deep faith who obeyed God's word? At first glance, Abraham seems almost like the superheroes I mentioned earlier—a great figure.

But when you look closely at his life, you can see that he, like us, was human—afraid, anxious, and shaken when faced with uncertainty.

God called Abraham when he was 75 years old. God told him to leave the home where he had lived for 75 years and go to a place he did not know, which God would show him, and promised him countless descendants. We might think that Abraham followed God's word because he was already a man of faith, but in fact, he was born and raised in a family that believed in and worshiped other gods. Until he was 75, he didn't know God deeply, nor did he have a strong faith in Him. Yet God chose him, came to him first, and revealed to him who God was and where he should go.

If you were Abraham, how would you have responded? What if one day God suddenly appeared and told you to leave your hometown and your family where you were born and raised?

He might have doubted God's promise. He might have even considered ignoring God's words. Maybe he actually did doubt and tried to ignore them, because he didn't know God well. And when he decided to follow God's word, there was no GPS in those days. Facing a journey to a place he had never known, he must have felt anxious and afraid. At that time, God said to him: *"Do not be afraid. I am your shield, your very great*

reward.”

Even though Abraham didn't know everything, because God came to him first and made a promise, he stepped forward in faith into a new journey.

About eight or nine years ago, I was preparing to study in the United States. At that time, my only experience of America was a one-month trip to New York and New Jersey. As the day to leave for America came closer, my anxiety grew. Traveling in America for a short time and living there for a long time are two very different things. Yet, despite my fears, my preparations for studying abroad were going smoothly—as if America itself was calling me.

One day, while I was in the middle of that anxiety, my pastor called me and told me the story of Abraham. He also shared that he had studied in the U.S. before. There were many difficulties, but every time, God protected him and his family. He told me that just as God had done for him, He would also do for me. Those words became a great encouragement to me.

The story of Abraham is not just about leaving one's hometown to move somewhere else. I want you to focus on the fact that while Abraham had no trouble making a living in his homeland, he had no children—and the sense of emptiness that may have brought. And when God came to him with a promise of a child and told him to leave for a new land, Abraham must have felt uncertain, doubtful, afraid, and uneasy about the unknown journey.

Our lives may look different from one another, but like Abraham, we also face times we don't want—times of uncertainty, emptiness, and unanswered questions. Times that make us feel heavy and helpless just by thinking about them. In such moments, what has sustained your life? What has kept you from falling down, and allowed you to take even small, slow steps forward?

A couple of weeks ago, I had hernia surgery. People say hernias are common and simple to treat, but since I had never had surgery before, my mind was full of complicated thoughts until the day came. As the day drew near, maybe because I was nervous, I looked up information about the surgeon who would operate on me. I quickly found out about his long experience, but there was only one sentence in his introduction. And that single sentence gave me peace:

(Slide 3) *“I am a disciple of Jesus Christ and hope to show His love to everyone I meet.”*

While preparing for this surgery, I deeply felt God’s detailed care. My wife doesn’t drive often, so it wasn’t easy to get to the hospital. I was worried we might have to spend a long time there with our child. But one church member contacted me the day before the surgery and on the surgery day, offering to drive me to the hospital. When we arrived, I was checking in with the nurse when she told me she had seen me before at a community ecumenical service. Later, while I was in the waiting room in my hospital gown, a nurse came in to explain the anesthesia for the surgery—and it turned out he was the son of one of our church members! Seeing him relieved my nervous heart.

Then, the surgeon I mentioned earlier came in, explained the procedure, took my hand, and prayed for me. After that, I was taken to the operating room. If you’ve ever had surgery, you probably know what comes next. When I opened my eyes, the surgery was already over. Later, my wife told me that apparently, when I woke up, I was speaking only in English for about 30 minutes to my wife and son—though I have no memory of it. They told me I kept saying things like, *“Praise the Lord, thank you God, thank you doctor, thank you nurses. The surgery experience was not too bad. I can do this several more times.”*

Through this surgery, I experienced once again that God works in my life—sending His angels ahead of time, protecting me, and making me feel as if I was surrounded by His escort. God is indeed a good God.

Friends, faith does not begin only after we know everything and all our fears have disappeared. Abraham began his new journey without knowing everything. At times he was anxious and afraid. I, too, felt anxious before my surgery. But God came first, made a promise, walked with me, and gave me help at the right moments.

(Slide 4) Hebrews 11 says: *“Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”* Even when we cannot see, God’s promise to be with us is what holds us up.

Whatever uncertainty you may be in today, whatever emptiness you may be going through, the same God who called Abraham is with all of us. So do not be afraid. Take one step at a time in faith. And along the way, may you experience the grace and protection that God has prepared for you. Amen.