

Passing Your Faith On

Heb. 11:20-22

Series "More"

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This series we have been talking all about having a living faith. Today, I want to talk to you about having a dying faith. You know, as a Pastor I have the

privilege - and I use that word purposefully...I have the privilege to be with a lot of people as they come to the end of life on this side of eternity.

It's NOT a part of the job I look forward to necessarily, but it is a part of the job. I've set beside a number of bedsides, and read scripture, sang hymns, and prayed. I've looked into the teary eyes of family who are struggling with seeing their loved one pass. It's a sacred time...it really is.

And one thing it's done for me on a personal level is, it's had a sobering effect on/in my life. Being with someone in their final hours...performing funerals...it has a way of making me reflect on my own life, and forces me to acknowledge anytime I'm around death that this is one day going to be me.

Illus. Susanna Wesley –I came across the story this week of a woman who died well. Susanna Wesley. She was the mother of 19 children. Only 10 survived to adulthood. She was married to an Anglican rector who was not home often and they struggled financially their entire lives.

Despite the family's poverty, and the overwhelming responsibilities Susanna had in taking care of the home, she was VERY intentional about her children's spiritual formation. She set aside one hour each week for private conversation with each child to talk to them about the Lord and their relationship with him.

She homeschooled all of them, teaching them to read using the Bible – she invested in them heart and soul.

In July 1742, Susanna was on her deathbed. She was 73, surrounded by several of her children. And her final words to them: "Children, as soon as I am released, sing a psalm of praise to God." She died peacefully, and her children honored her request.

Now here's what makes this remarkable. Two of those children around her bed were John and Charles Wesley. John would go on to travel 250,000 miles on horseback preaching over 40,000 sermons, sparking the Methodist revival.

Charles would write over 6,500 hymns including "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," and "And Can It Be." From Susanna's kitchen table education and weekly spiritual conversations came a movement that literally changed the world.

She died singing, and her sons gave the whole world songs to sing. This is what I want us to talk about today - dying well and passing your faith on.

In fact, this is what I'm calling the message today:

I'm calling the message: **Passing Your Faith On**

Hebrews 11:20-22 -- "By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones."

Three men - ALL in the Hall of Faith - and they are mentioned because of what took place primarily at the end of their life. But before we look at them individually, I want you to see the full context. Look back at verses 13-16:

Hebrews 11:13, 1 -- "These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar...Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."

This is key here. All these men we're talking about today died "in faith" believing promises they NEVER saw fulfilled in their lifetime. They died looking forward...trusting God...and passing their faith on to the next generation.

Let's take them one at a time. We'll look first at Isaac, and to do so we need to turn in our Bibles to Genesis 27.

Let me condense the story for us. Isaac was the "son of promise". If you missed any of these messages from the last few weeks, make sure to go back and listen.

He was the one that went up with his dad to Mt. Moriah and his dad put him on the altar to sacrifice him because God had told him to - (God was testing

Abraham). Abraham passed the test, and if you remember from last week's message, God provided a ram to be sacrificed INSTEAD of Isaac.

Isaac was able to live...and I'm sure after a number of counseling sessions led a very normal life (kind of joking!).

Illus. Bill Arnold Show - I was actually teaching this past week's message on a radio show that I am frequently able to guest teach on, "The Bill Arnold

Show" out of Minneapolis, and someone called in and asked, what do you think Isaac was thinking when he was going up that mountain and then being laid on the altar?

Well, the Bible doesn't say BUT because Isaac is a "type" of Christ in some ways, and this is just my personal opinion here, I think that he was submissive to his earthly father, Abraham, just as Jesus was submissive to his Father.

Now, there's a big difference of course. Jesus fully understood His mission and actively embraced it; Isaac was more of a passive recipient. But I believe Isaac trusted his father.

However...isn't this true? Sometimes we can grow up in a home where faith is important, but it doesn't mean it will be important. I've seen it, kids grow up here, mom and dad bring them to church, but once they leave home the faith they grew up in and grew in - well, it gets stunted... sometimes there is no growth for years!

Sometimes, our faith doesn't grow past that of our parents...it doesn't mature. It doesn't develop past childhood, and I think this is true of Isaac.

The fact is, we don't have a whole lot about him in the Bible, and I think it's because there may not have been a whole lot to write about!

We don't really see anything great that Isaac does. There are no exploits that we are aware of...nothing that you could say is a MAJOR move of faith. In fact, it appears that Isaac was pretty weak spiritually.

He marries a beautiful lady by the name of Rebekah. And Rebekah, like Isaac's mom, Sarah is unable to have children. So, he prays and asks God to open her womb, and God answers his prayer.

I'm sure he had heard his mom and dad tell him the story of his birth through the years and I bet it inspired him to pray.

BTW - just a point of application here: Mom and Dad, we ought to share the stories of the victories God gives us in life. We ought to share the stories of the struggles and the things we have gone through and how God answered our prayers to our children. We have no idea how God may use these stories we tell them to inspire them in their walks with God down the road.

Isaac knew God could answer prayer - specifically prayer about opening the womb and he prayed for his wife, and God answered. Rebekah became pregnant...and she didn't just become pregnant with one, she became pregnant with TWINS - and they were having wrestling matches in her womb!

It was like a war within, and the Bible says that Rebekah inquires of the Lord. She knew something wasn't right, and listen to what the scripture says in:

Genesis 25:23 – “And the Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.’”

She and Isaac (you know they spoke of this) are told before the children are born that they will have two boys, and that they will father/represent two nations and the older shall serve the younger.

Now, it's important to realize that it was customary in that day for the firstborn child to receive the blessing from the father concerning inheritance and legacy. The firstborn was given certain rights and responsibilities...they were considered privileged - this came with the birth order!

The father's blessing wasn't just a nice prayer or good wishes spoken over their children - these patriarchal blessings were prophetic declarations about how God's promises would continue through specific family lines.

And right up front the Lord says, “the older shall serve the younger!” In other words, "Isaac, the blessing goes to the younger.”

The kids are born however and daddy, Isaac plays favorites. Esau, the oldest is born, and he is like a chia pet! He's got hair all over him! That's literally what his name means. “Esau” means “red and hairy”.

He grows up to be a hunter...he's a man's man, and Isaac loves him. Esau cooks the game he kills, and his daddy loves what he puts on the Traeger. In fact, when it's time to give the blessing toward the end of Isaac's life, this is what he asks Esau for! Isaac asks Esau to go out, kill some game and come back and cook it for him, then he will bless him.

This is Esau -- who by the way, is impulsive...you read (Genesis 25:29-34), he's short-sighted...appears to live by what his flesh appeals to. He may have been the first-born, and his daddy's favorite, but he was NOT who God chose to continue the family lineage through - that would go to the younger brother, Jacob.

Now, Jacob was a piece of work himself. I mean, when Esau is being born (you can read about this later) Jacob is grabbing his heel! It's as if he wanted the family blessing before he was even aware of it. That's what his name means -- "heel grabber". It also means, "deceiver". And this characterizes Jacob's life.

Where Esau is a man's man, Jacob has soft hands...he's a mama's boy. Nothing wrong with that - he was just wired differently than Esau. Camping to Esau was out in the woods. Camping to Jacob was a night at the Four Seasons - they were just different.

And Jacob being close to his mom, I am sure she had told him about the message she received from the Lord that he was to one day receive his father's blessing. And it just seems he was out to get it -- even if it meant taking it from day one.

He actually struck up a deal with Esau at one point for Esau to sell the birthright to him! Again, Esau was impulsive, and did it, but Jacob was a deceiver and looking for a way to take advantage of his brother and take the birthright from him.

Can we just pause and say, what a dysfunctional family?! Hey, aren't you glad God uses people despite their dysfunction?!

This is a good reminder that every person mentioned in Hebrews 11 had "feet of clay"! All of us are messed up and it's only by God's grace that he chooses to use any of us.

Isaac was a mess up! Most of what we know of him isn't that great. He settles in a place called Gerar (it was inhabited by the Canaanites, a pagan people).

He was supposed to just sojourn there, NOT live amongst them. The people there, think Rebekah is gorgeous and out of fear for his life, instead of trusting God, he tells them that she is his sister - how do you think that went over?

It seems that Isaac abdicates leadership in his home time and again. He should have gotten in the middle of these two warring boys, but he didn't! And ultimately, he comes to the end of his life - he KNOWS he should be blessing Jacob, but appears to be running his own play!

Illus. Examples to follow - This is an example NOT to follow! Look, let's make the decision that we're going to follow the Lord NOW and keep following to the day we die.

Let's not think our plans are better than the Lord's! Let's not run our own plays -- this is what Isaac does!

Genesis 27:1-4 – “When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son and said to him, ‘My son’; and he answered, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me, and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.’”

Here he is wanting to bless Esau (when God has spoken otherwise), and if you're familiar with this story, you know what happens.

Rebekah overheard their conversation. She puts the fun in dysfunctional and concocts a plan with Jacob to gain the birthright. The deceiver is going to deceive his old man - and he does! Rebekah cooks up the meal that Isaac likes. She puts Esau's clothes on Jacob AND just in case Isaac brings Jacob close (because his eyes are failing him - he's an old man). They put goat hair on his back and hands to make him feel like Esau.

And the plan works! The deceiver (Jacob) deceives his old man, and he gets the blessing, and this begins a 20-year run for Jacob as he leaves his home terrified of the wrath of Esau.

Our focus right now is on Isaac though. When he realizes he's been deceived, look at what he feels and look at what he says:

Genesis 27:33 – “Then Isaac trembled very violently and said, ‘Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed.’”

In other words, “God, your will be done.” He knew the Abrahamic promise was coming through his sons...and he realized EVEN if it wasn't what he wanted, God had accomplished it. The blessing was coming through Jacob, NOT Esau, and in his death Isaac finally surrendered his will to the will of God.

If you keep reading the story, he does bless Esau (though it's not THE blessing that Isaac gets) and here's what I want you to see. Isaac is in Hebrews 11 because of his faith.

I'm going to put this in bold, and you will see this is true for him, Jacob and Joseph.

They died in faith, believing the promises of God and passing their faith on to the next generation.

This is the main point and take away from today's message. To die well means we die in faith, believing the promises and passing our faith on to the next generation.

Isaac didn't do much right his whole life, but in the end, he died in faith believing the promises of God. He believed the promise that was made to his father,

Abraham that his descendants would be innumerable and that he would be the father of a nation and of a people. It came through Isaac, and it would continue through Jacob.

Now NOTE this: Isaac didn't see the fulfillment! That's why we can say (and why the writer of Hebrews can say):

Hebrews 11:20 – “By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.”

Isaac died in faith believing the promises of God and passing his faith on to the next generation.

Isaac's story reminds us that it's never too late. You may have lived 70, 80, 90 years running your own plays, making a mess of things spiritually, but you like Isaac can surrender today. You CAN finish well.

This story shows us that God's grace is sufficient even for a lifetime of spiritual complacency and wandering. If you're here today and you know you haven't been living for the Lord like you should take hope from Isaac. Get right with God and finish strong.

What about Jacob? He's the next one mentioned there in Heb. 11.

Hebrews 11:21 – “By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.”

Now, if Isaac didn't get it right until the end of life - essentially his deathbed, Jacob shows us a man that got it right about 50 years before he died.

So, Jacob deceives his dad (which btw - we always think he was a teenager when he did this) in reality, he was around 77 years of age.

He goes on the run because he's terrified of Esau and (rightly so). The Bible says that Esau comforted himself (Gen. 27:42) with thoughts of killing Jacob.

That's some real brotherly love right there! I told you it was a dysfunctional home!

Jacob runs...and he stays on the run for 20 years! He has some real ups and downs in this time. Just read (Genesis 28-30) - talk about consequences of sin!

You see it play out in Jacob's life. He's running from Esau and he's running from God.

Ultimately (and I'm cutting this story WAY short) the woman he is married to that he loves is Rachel...he was married to her sister, Leah too - but again, for sake of time, we can't cover that Jerry Springer episode!

It's Rachel's son, Joseph who the blessing will come through because it's going to come through his boys...down through Joseph's lineage.

Now, you remember Joseph. This is the boy with the coat of many colors. His brothers sell him into slavery, he winds up in Egypt. Every time something bad happens to him, the blessing of God seems to outweigh it and overshadow it, and he ends up being the Prime Minister of all of Egypt.

It's an AMAZING story that perhaps we can do a series on one day. Jacob is dying, Joseph has sons of his own at this point, and he brings them to Jacob - his is the scene of Hebrews 11 and Genesis 48-49.

Now, you need to know that Jacob got right with God after running from him for 20 years...and do you want to know how he got right with God? God broke him!

He returned to Esau and the land of his fathers, and before he meets Esau and before they reconcile, God gets ahold of Jacob's life.

You can read all about this in Genesis 32. The night before Jacob is supposed to meet Esau, he's terrified. He thinks Esau is going to kill him and his whole family. Jacob sends everyone across the river and he's left alone. And that's when it happens.

A man appears and wrestles with Jacob. Just picture this! It's dark...Jacob can't really even see who he is wrestling with (scripture tells us it's God – preincarnate Christ) – and Jacob the deceiver, Jacob the schemer, Jacob who has spent his whole life grabbing and manipulating, he's now in a wrestling match he can't win.

And here's what's happening in this moment...God is bringing Jacob to the end of himself. One commentator said it this way: in this fight, Jacob finally stopped scheming and started clinging!

The man (God-man) touches Jacob's hip socket and dislocates it. Jacob has been a deceiver his whole life, always trying to get the blessing through manipulation. But now, broken and beaten, he clings to God and says, "I won't let go! Bless me!"

And God does bless him. He changes Jacob's name to Israel. God blesses him, but it comes through brokenness...and for the rest of his life, Jacob limps.

Every step he took was a visual, physical reminder of the encounter he had with God, and the blessing of God that was pronounced over his life.

For 50 years, Jacob limped. Every step he took, he felt that hip. That staff he leaned on in verse 21? It was the walking stick of a broken man who learned to lean on God.

? - What has God used to break you? God KNOWS how to get our attention. Have you turned whatever he used to break you into worship, or are you still fighting and struggling with the Lord?

Fifty years AFTER this encounter, as Jacob is on his deathbed, he calls Joseph, his son...and his grandsons around him, and he blesses them.

Hebrews 11:21 -- "By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff."

What a picture! Bowing in worship...leaning on the staff! I'm sure he told his grandchildren what that staff represented...what it meant – that it was an instrument of worship for Jacob, a reminder of the night God broke him and blessed him.

And he does exactly what Isaac and all of these in (v. 20-22) does.

They died in faith, believing the promises of God and passing their faith on to the next generation.

Illus. How I want to go out! -- I have no idea if the Lord will allow this, but if you ask me, “Pastor, how do you want to go out?” I want to go out like this...with my children and grandchildren around me -- speaking of the goodness of God in my life and blessing them as I enter eternity. What a picture!

Isaac got it right at the end of his life. Jacob got it right about fifty years before he died. Joseph? Well, it seems that Joseph got it right early on, and lived for the Lord most ALL of his days even when NOTHING seemed to work out or go his way.

Joseph was betrayed and deceived by his brothers when he was just 17 years old. They were jealous of him...jealous of the coat his father gave him, jealous of the dreams God gave him. So, they sell him into slavery.

He ends up in Egypt, serving in the house of a man named Potiphar, and he rises to the top – God is with him, and he is put in charge of Potiphar's entire household. Things are looking up!

But then Potiphar's wife falsely accuses him of trying to assault her. Joseph did the RIGHT thing! He flees from temptation, he honors God - and what does he get for it? Prison. Wrongfully imprisoned for over a decade.

Think about that. Over ten years in an Egyptian prison for a crime he didn't commit. And yet through it all - the betrayal, the false accusation, the decadeplus in prison - Joseph remained faithful to the Lord.

And you know the rest of the story. Eventually Pharaoh has a dream, that only Joseph can interpret. And in ONE DAY, Joseph goes from the prison to the palace. He becomes Prime Minister of all of Egypt at age 30.

God used Joseph to save Egypt from famine...and ironically, God used Joseph to save the very family that had betrayed him. His brothers come to Egypt looking for food, and Joseph, instead of taking revenge forgives them and brings his whole family to Egypt, including his father, Jacob.

Now, it's important to note - Joseph lived nearly his whole life in Egypt. He had power, position, prestige. He could have had a state funeral with all the pomp and circumstance Egypt could offer. But look at his dying request:

Genesis 50:22-2 – “So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's house. Joseph lived 110 years. And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph's own. And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.’ Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.’ So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.”

Joseph's final request was for his bones to go back to the Promised Land. He lived in Egypt nearly his whole life...but his heart was on the promise of God - and that land that was given to his forefathers and ultimately to him.

He could have said, "Bury me here in Egypt with all the honors." But instead he said, "Take my bones back to the land God promised." He died believing a promise he would never see fulfilled in his lifetime.

And what's beautiful is when the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt happened, you read in (Exodus 13:19), that's exactly what Moses did.

Exodus 13:19 – "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.'"

If you keep reading the story, you find in (Joshua 24:32) that they finally buried Joseph's bones in the Promised Land at Shechem - the promise was fulfilled!

Joseph's grandkids did exactly what he asked them to! Like Isaac and Jacob, Joseph:

They died in faith, believing the promises of God and passing their faith on to the next generation.

Three men. Three different timelines of surrender, but all three ended the same way: dying in faith, believing God's promises, passing it on to the next generation.

Church, as your pastor, I want to help you die well! And to die well - that doesn't mean you die with the most toys...the biggest home...it doesn't mean you die leaving some great inheritance to your kids (that may be great) but that doesn't equate to dying well.

Dying well means to die like these patriarchs. It means we die IN FAITH - believing the promises of God!

Listen: Salvation is a promise! Eternal life is a promise! God's faithfulness is a promise! We die believing these promises AND we pass our faith on to the next generation. This means we die, and our kids and grandkids KNOW EXACTLY what is most important to us, and that's the faith we have entrusted to them.

But here's the thing...passing your faith on isn't just something you do on your deathbed. It's something you do today! Right now!

How do we pass our faith on?

1. Live in light of your deathbed

Death is one appointment ALL of us will keep. It's coming!

The scripture tells us in: **Hebrews 9:27 -- "And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment."**

What do you want your children and grandchildren to remember about your faith? What promises of God are you clinging to? What legacy are you building? Don't wait until you're on your deathbed to get serious about passing your faith on. Start today.

2. Tell your kids and grandkids "God Stories"

Share with them how God saved you. Tell them about answered prayers. Let them know about the times God broke you and how you learned to worship through it. These stories matter!

Remember what we saw with Isaac! He prayed for God to give him a child because he no doubt heard his parents' story of the faithfulness of God in their life. Susanna Wesley's intentional conversations with her children paved the way for spiritual awakening across two countries and continents.

3. Point them to the promises of God

What promises are you living by? Are your children and grandchildren seeing you live for the promises of God?

Illus. Maw-Maw dementia – singing hymns

Psalm 78:4-7 - "We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done...that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments."

So, where are you today? You like Isaac - You've spent most of your life running your own plays. It's not too late. Surrender today and finish well.

You Jacob? God has broken you, but you're bitter and never embraced the brokenness turned it into worship? Ask God by his grace today to turn that limp into worship. Let it be a constant reminder to you of his faithfulness in your life.

Or maybe you're young and you have the opportunity to be like Joseph - to live faithfully from the start, trusting God even when nothing makes sense, and you feel like you're forgotten. Stay faithful.

Let's die well for the glory of God. And let's live well today, passing our faith on to the next generation SO THAT when our time comes, our children and grandchildren will know exactly what mattered most to us: Our relationship with Christ and believing in the promises of God.

Will you pray with me?