



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

HEROES FROM HEBREWS



You Want Me to Do What?

Hebrews 11:8–16

Tim Badal | June 17, 2018

In our series, “Heroes from Hebrews,” we’ve been learning what different men and women of the faith did to honor God in their day when He called them to live lives of obedience. We saw how Abel, by faith, worshipped God well and was commended for that. We saw how Enoch walked with God during his life and how, because he pleased God, God did not allow him to experience death. Rather, Enoch was carried directly to heaven because of his faithfulness. Then Noah worked with God by building an ark to save his family from the flood that God used to destroy humanity.

Today we’ll be looking at Abraham, one of the great patriarchs of the faith. We’ll learn that Abraham went where God called him to go. Like Abraham, we are also on a journey, and there will be times in our lives when God will call us to do things we might not be comfortable doing. But we’ll see how Abraham exhibited faith and was commended for his faith.

We’ll deal with Abraham again next week, because the book of Hebrews dedicates a large part of this chapter to him. But let’s read the first part of his story now in Hebrews 11:8–13.

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

These days, knowing about our ancestry is a big deal. There are commercials offering to tell us about our DNA. Ancestry.com will help us to discover our “people group.” A lot of people are surprised by what they learn regarding their history. I have the luxury of being part of an immigrant family. An important part of an immigrant’s story involves learning about their heritage. My dad was born in Iraq and grew up in Baghdad. When he was 16 years old, he was the second person in our family to come to America. It’s amazing to think about this.

My dad did not know English. He had only seen glimpses of America on television in a store in downtown Baghdad. He knew very little about the land to which he was going. But at age 16, his parents put him on a plane and sent him here to start a new life, with the intention that he and his brother could eventually make a way for the entire family—or actually, the entire Badal clan—to come here as well. But that was not the beginning of his story—it was the end.

I remember asking, “Why America?” There were other places my family could have immigrated to. Why Chicago? My dad lived in a desert land. Right now, in Baghdad it’s 125 degrees. Why would he come to a place that gets down to 25 below zero? That made no sense. He’d never seen snow except on a faraway mountain peak.

When I was about ten years old, I really wanted to know their story—and it amazed me when I heard it. The story started around the turn of the last century, when the World’s Fair took place in Chicago in 1933. From a commercial standpoint, it was kind of the Olympics on steroids. Two families—one from Iran and one from Iraq—came to trade goods at that fair and learn to become better merchants. Those two sets of couples were my two great-grandparents.

Many say the Chicago World's Fair was the greatest World's Fair ever. It was at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. For the first time in human history, lights shone all over Chicago, because they had wired the entire city with electrical lighting. No more flames. There were incandescent lights on every street—which was the first large-scale lighting project ever. My great-grandparents had never seen anything like that before. They also saw their first automobile in Chicago.

Before they returned to their native lands, these two couples had met in Chicago and had had dinner together. They might have been among the few people from the Middle East at the Fair. Over dinner, the two couples decided that their children would marry. In other words, my grandfather and grandmother had an arranged marriage. But the other thing that happened was that these two couples later urged their grandchildren—including my dad—to one day move to America. "There's no place better than America and there's no better place in America to be than Chicago, Illinois."

My dad had a concept of what life in Chicago would be like. As the story goes, in the late 1950s our family was gathered in my grandparents' home in Baghdad. The men sat around drinking tea and talking about how great life in Baghdad was. But then my great-grandmother ran into the room and said, "Stop talking like this is your home. This isn't your home. I've been to America and it will knock you off your rocker. It is so much better. My hope and prayer and dream are that my family will one day be in America."

And that's what happened. In 1964, my uncle came to Chicago, where he enrolled at a little school called Aurora University. Four years later my 16-year-old dad followed him to America. One of the funny stories about Dad's first days in America took place while he was in the New York airport. He decided he wanted to buy a bottle of pop. All he'd ever had before was Coca Cola. So he pointed to the bottle in the hand of the guy next to him, "I want one of those." He paid his money and took his first drink. What he didn't know was that he had not purchased Coke, but Dr. Pepper. He said to himself, "No wonder Americans are so healthy. They drink cold medicine."

Dad arrived in America not knowing the language, having no job lined up and only owning what he could carry with him. He came to live with his college-age brother who hopefully would steer him in the right direction. I don't know about you, but I have a 15-year-old son, and I don't let him go to Aurora by himself, let alone to another country with his older brother. What an amazing story!

Even though they didn't know anything, and they weren't promised anything, on the word of their grandparents they believed in something. In a matter of four years after my father arrived, the rest of the family—aunts, uncles and the entire clan—made their way to Chicago because of a dream of their grandparents.

Today we're looking at the story of a man who heard a voice from heaven, Who told him, "Leave everything you know and go to a place I'll tell you about. And when you get there, it will knock your socks off." Believing God's word, Abraham got up and headed out—not knowing where he was going or what he would find there. Based only on the word of God, Abraham went.

We need to realize that sometimes God's ways are clouded, but in those cloudy moments, we still need to trust resolutely in the will and plan of God. But as we always do, let's back up and look at who this man was. Abraham is one of the most well-known men in all of human history. Three major religions trace their beginnings to him.

- The Jewish people say he is the father of their nation. Every Jew wants to trace his lineage back to Father Abraham.
- Islam says he is the prototype of all their great prophets. They claim that Abraham is the father of the Islamic faith.
- Christianity doesn't claim him as a physical ancestor, but believe we are spiritual descendants. According to Romans 11, whoever trusts in Jesus Christ by faith through grace is "grafted in" to Abraham's family.

There's no doubt Abraham was a great man. Three quarters of the book of Genesis is dedicated to Abraham and Sarah and their journey of faith together, along with their son Isaac and grandson Jacob. Then another large portion of the book contains the story of his great-grandson Joseph. Hebrews 11 also dedicates about a third of its attention to Abraham's life. Compare that to people like Noah, Enoch and Abel, who are only given a verse or two. So we'll be taking two weeks to look at the life of Abraham, but in some ways we'll only be scratching the surface.

It isn't just the Old Testament that speaks of Abraham. The New Testament also mentions Abraham and his life over 70 times. This guy is definitely important. But when we come to a person of his stature, we can sometimes think he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, that he had everything going for him. But while he was definitely a great man of faith, he also had some really weak moments in his life. Despite some real mountain-top experiences, there are times when we wonder, "Why would you do such a thing, Abraham?"

But if we're going to apply principles from his life to our own, we need to understand who he was. First, Abraham was raised as a spiritually pagan man. In Genesis 11 we read that he lived in a place called Ur of the Chaldeans. This was an ancient city in southern Iraq—which lets me connect my dad with Abraham.

During this time, there was a lot going on in this region. Right before the calling of Abraham, we read the story of the city of Babel. You might remember the tower they built. The city of Babel was built by a man named Nimrod in the central part of what is Iraq today. So the epicenter of God's work in that day took place in that land.

God called Abraham from the Ur of the Chaldeans. You might think God chose him because he was a perfect man—the head of his class, brilliant, deeply spiritual. After all, he would become the foundation of God's people to whom God's promise and covenant would be given. So we would think he would be a "prime, grade-A steak" kind of person. The kind of steak you want on Father's Day—the best of the best.

But that's not the case. We know Abraham came from a pagan family. His father was named Terah, which means he was named after one of the gods of Ur of the Chaldeans. We are told in the Midrash, a Jewish writing from before Christ, that Abraham's father was a priest to their moon god Herke. Not only was he a priest, but he had the job of leading in the worship of that god. When Abraham was a young boy, he would help his father with the idols being used for the worship of their various gods.

Not only was Abraham raised as a pagan, but he was also raised in an intellectually advanced culture. We might wonder what life was like 4,000 years ago. After all, many of the younger people among us probably think the 1970s are prehistoric. But 4,000 years? We might think Abraham was a Neanderthal—the kind of man who might drag his wife around by her hair or carry a club and grunt a lot. Maybe you picture Abraham as the "missing link," a hairy beast who really had no language. "Me Abraham—you Sarah."

Both secular and biblical history paint a different picture. About 100 years after Abraham died, there was a manuscript written that we still have today, called *Hammurabi's Code*. It came from Iraq and in it are some of the most sophisticated laws representing a very sophisticated justice system. It gives us the history of the Sumerians and the Akkadians around the time of Abraham.

One of the ways we know this was a sophisticated society is through their decision to write their history. They understood that it was important to keep a record of history. We can conclude that Abraham was a man of reason. We also know from archeological findings that his land had working sewer systems. They had major municipalities and areas of commerce. They had clear forms of governments. In many ways his time was like ours, when laws and justice ruled in their land.

Regarding how Abraham interacted socially, we can assume he was socially connected. We are told in Genesis 12:1–2 that God came to Abraham and told him to leave his country and his kinfolk to move somewhere else. Abraham obeyed, but he also took his father with him, which tells us they were close. We know that if you choose to take your family members with you on a long journey, that means you love them.

Years ago my father-in-law said to me—after we had taken him and my mother-in-law with us to Disney World in a van—"I've always wondered if you love me or not. But now I know it to be true. We travelled 22 hours in a van and you never kicked us out."

When Abraham began his journey, Terah was about 200 years old. Abraham himself was about 75. But clearly Abraham wanted his dad to be part of whatever God was leading him into. We also read that Abraham decided to take his nephew Lot as well. This is because Lot's father, Abraham's brother, had died. As a loyal and caring uncle, Abraham chose not to leave this young man without a father figure in his life. In fact, Abraham treated Lot as his own son. Later he gives him the nicer land to settle. He allowed Lot to choose what he wanted, then gave that land to him. He loved his nephew.

But as a reminder to us who are fathers, Lot's life did not go the way Abraham's life went. We need to remember how important our lives are to our children. Lot lost his father to death, which may be part of the reason he struggled later. Fathers have the ability to be a blessing to their children, if nothing else by being present in their lives. Lot's uncle was good to him, but he couldn't really take the place of his father.

Finally, Abraham brought his wife with him. Of course, we might ask if there was any reason why Abraham would not have taken Sarah with him. But we are told that she was barren—and had been for a very long time. Her child-bearing years were over. In that society, barrenness was regarded as a curse. Abraham might have taken this opportunity to find another wife who would be able to make him the father of a great nation, as God had promised he would be. But in fact, Abraham never says anything negative about Sarah. Rather, he loved her deeply and never left her.

So, here's this pagan man who has worshiped the moon god, who is part of an advanced society and who is closely connected with his family. He hears God's voice and obeys Him, as we read in our text this morning. God tells Abraham to leave behind everything that would give him security and to go to a place he knows nothing about. There was no mention of a destination—God just said, "Go. When you get to where I want you to be, I'll let you know. But I want you to trust that I'm going to do great things in your life."

Faith in God means trusting Him when His ways seem insane.

Let's think about the insanity of this situation. Sometimes God calls us to do insane things. From a human standpoint, God's call made no sense. He was 75 years old. Based on the life expectancy of his day, he would have been about my age—middle age.

I recently heard that you only like the music you grew up with by the age of 25. Once you hit 25, you don't like new music. I thought that sounded a little funny, but then I looked at the music I like—and it's all from before I was 25. Music today stinks—amen? By the time you're 40, you're settled into who you are. You're established in a community. By that time, you're probably married. You probably have kids. You've gotten settled into a career. You've got a life.

At 75, halfway through his life, Abraham is doing well in Ur. But then God tells him, "I want you to leave everything you know, everything you're comfortable with, and go."

Turn now to Genesis 12:1 where we read, "*Now the Lord said to Abram.*" Notice when this word came. Was it in the middle of his journey or before he started? In Acts 7:2, Stephen tells us while Abraham was still living in Ur of the Chaldeans when he heard from God.

We don't know how Abraham heard God's voice. We don't know if God was visible to Abraham or if an angel came. There was a Bible documentary a few years ago that portrayed Abraham as hearing God's voice in the wind. That's a reasonable speculation, but we really don't know. We can assume there were no pyrotechnics this time or Moses would have mentioned them in Genesis. No fires, no flashes of lightning, no miracles—all we know is what God said:

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

What do we read next? "Abraham pondered God's words." No, that's not what it says. Does it say, "So Abraham postponed it"? Or "Abraham asked lots of questions"? No. Look at what it says: "*So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.*"

You might be thinking, "Well, of course he would go, Tim. He just heard a voice from God. If I heard a voice from God, I would go too." I want you to respond in your mind with the word, "Baloney." It's not as clear-cut as we think. Moses, who wrote that Abraham heard from God and goes, is the same Moses who knew what it was like to hear a voice from heaven telling him to do something extraordinary.

Fast forward to the book of Exodus. Moses had lived in Pharaoh's household because God chose to save him from death as an infant. But as an adult, he had rashly tried to deliver his people on his own, then had to flee Egypt for his life. He married a Midianite woman and spent the next several years tending his father-in-law's sheep. While he was out in the wilderness, he came upon a bush that was ablaze but not consumed. Even more bizarre, a voice came out from that bush that claimed to be the voice of God. That doesn't happen very often.

God told Moses, "Take off your sandals, for you're standing on holy ground." He went on, "I know who you are, and I have something for you to do. My people in Egypt are in bondage and you're the man to liberate them." Moses however didn't respond in the same way Abraham did. He responded the way Arnold Drummond did in *Different Strokes*—"What'chu talkin' 'bout, God?"

Moses had a whole list of excuses why he wasn't the man for the job.

- "I don't talk too good." God responded, "Listen, I'm God. I can use a stammering fool to accomplish My purposes."
- "Well, how can I be sure, God? How is Pharaoh going to know that?" So, God did some pyrotechnics. He turned Moses' staff into a snake. That's pretty cool. Then He had Moses put his hand in his cloak and when Moses pulled it out, the skin was falling off it because of leprosy. "What did You do to my hand, God?" "Put it back in." He did, and his hand was healthy again.
- Even after a burning bush that doesn't get consumed, a voice from heaven, a staff turning into a snake and his hand turning leprous and then healed, Moses still came up with more excuses.

Some of us are hearing the voice of God and we are like Moses rather than Abraham. We have excuses. We postpone doing anything. We do everything except what Abraham did. Abraham heard from God, and he went. No questions, no grumbling, no nothing. "God, I hear You. I'm going to do what You say."

I think if Abraham had hesitated at all, Moses would have been glad to record that. He was probably irritated that Abraham wasn't as hesitant as he had been. But Abraham obeyed even the insane calling of God. Why would I call it insane?

Sometimes God calls us to unfamiliar places.

Abraham's calling was insane because he was being sent to an unfamiliar place. He had no idea where he was going. Hebrews 11:8 tells us, "*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.*" God basically said, "I want you to trust Me, because I'm going to make you great."

We live in a society where we can turn on our televisions and see people selling all kinds of things that promise to make us great or that will make our lives better. If we just pay three installments of \$19.99, we can experience that greatness. Sadly, those promises are never kept.

But Abraham was hearing from a faithful and trustworthy God. When God asked him to trust Him and to obey the call to go, Abraham believed God wouldn't let him down. Some of us are being called to unfamiliar places. It might not be a call from Iraq to Israel, but God might be calling you to minister in an environment that you know nothing about.

This last May one of our high school students, Mikayla Williams, was named valedictorian of her class. She's the daughter of Tully and Monica Williams. At the graduation ceremony, she gave a nine-minute recorded speech. As I listened to what she said, I was blown away. In her speech she talked about growing up in the town of Newark, which is a small, rural Illinois community. She said she had a wonderful circle of familiar friends who made her feel safe and comfortable. Then at some point her parents decided to change churches and they moved to a church that was very unfamiliar. As she continued her story, she told that at one point she went on the Aurora mission trip. On this trip, she was connected with Urban Youth Ministries. So in front of all her classmates and all those in that gymnasium, she said, "It changed my life. And it's all because my parents moved from what was comfortable to something that was unfamiliar."

Time and time again, God does His best work when He calls people to that which is unfamiliar to them. Why does He do that? Because when we're in an unfamiliar place, we have to trust Him a lot more than we trust ourselves. We might not know where we're going, but that's okay—because God is with us.

Sometimes God calls us to trust in unrealized promises.

Abraham had to take another big step of faith, that of trusting God for unrealized promises. Hebrews 11:9 tells us, "*By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents.*" What was the promise in this "land of promise"? God had essentially told him he would be the greatest man who ever lived. But when Abraham took that first step of faith, nothing great had happened yet.

I would imagine that as he was preparing to leave, people came up to him as they did to Noah and asked, "Abraham, what are you doing? Why are you leaving?" "Well, I heard a voice from God." "Herke?" "No, a different God. And this God told me I am to go somewhere." "Where is that?" "I don't know." "Well, what are you going to do?" "I don't know." "Well, how are you going to live?" "I'm not sure." "Why would you do that?" "Because God says He's going to make me great. He's going to make this a great move for me, my family and my descendants. God is going to use me to do great things."

Brothers and sisters, it's sometimes good for our friends, family and coworkers to hear us say, "God has called me to something and I don't know why. But He told me to do this and that's why I'm doing it." We want our spiritual lives to be tied up in a box with a bow on top, but God doesn't always work that way.

My own calling as a pastor fits that paradigm. I've told you this story before. I was asked to serve as pastor here when I was only in my mid-20s. I hadn't preached very much. The leaders had ten qualifications for the pastor they were looking for. I still have the paper that lists them. Of those ten qualifications, I met one of them: I was saved. But there was even question whether that was true.

When I was asked to serve as pastor, I understandably had lots of doubts. The day after the elders had come to me and said, "We believe you are God's man to help lead this church in the years to come," a man with whom I'd had very little contact called me. He

was an older man named Keith Henderson who faithfully cleaned our church. He and his wife had been in the church for a very long time.

Out of the blue, Keith called me and said, “Tim, I need to talk with you.” There was a quiver in his voice. “I had a dream last night. You were in the dream. Can I tell you about it? I can’t shake it and I don’t know what to do with it.” At that time, Village Bible Church was in the middle of a very difficult season, and the future of the church was up in the air.

Keith told me, “I dreamed I came to church and it wasn’t empty like it had been for a while. It was busting at the seams. Everybody was talking about what God was doing in and through Village Bible Church. I didn’t know anyone in the audience. The only person I knew was you—and you were up front preaching. I don’t understand this, but God keeps telling me I need to tell you that you need to be our pastor.”

I said, “Keith, did anyone say anything to you about this?” He said, “No.” I told him, “Yesterday the elders extended an offer for me to consider being the pastor. You had to have known about that.” He said, “I haven’t talked to anybody. I don’t know what to do with this dream. I’ve never experienced anything like it before.”

Now, looking back at 16 years of ministry—and whether you believe in dreams or not—that man’s dream has become a reality. Village Bible Church is a booming place where God is using us not only here in these four walls, but in our communities and at five campuses. Now we’re sending teams out across the world to share the love of Jesus Christ. It’s because of God’s faithfulness to us as a people.

But here’s the crazy thing. That first step in making the decision, the week before the church voted on me, I stood right where I am now and I read a letter. I recently found that letter and had to laugh at my lack of faith. In that letter I gave a whole bunch of points about why you shouldn’t vote for me as your pastor. One of those points was, “I think at some point I will run out of sermons.” Some of you might say, “Amen. You ran out of sermons five years ago.” My faith was so small that I thought I would run out of material—and I would have, if I was trusting my own strength. But God takes us one step at a time. Had you asked me a year or two before that calling was realized what I thought the next 16 years of my life would look like, pastoring would never have crossed my mind.

God sometimes calls us to the insane things. He will give us promises and sometimes even a glimpse of where He’s taking us, but it could take a while before we see it. During my first few years, this church was not full. Those were some of the hardest years of my ministry and I started wondering if I was being called to close this place down. Was God just disciplining me? But God told me, “It’s going to be hard for a little while, but I’m going to let you see something great.”

Sometimes God calls us to be okay with unclear destinations.

Finally, we need to be careful, because God sometimes calls us to unclear destinations. Abraham did not know where he was going or what he would be doing. Some of us are wondering the same thing. “God, I’m here, but I don’t know what You have in mind. I’m not sure what I should be focused on.”

Remember, Hebrews 11:9 tells us that when Abraham reached the Promised Land, he still lived in tents. He didn’t put down roots or build permanent structures. He didn’t know what God was up to, so he stayed ready to move if God told him to. Some of us find ourselves away from where we should be with God because we’re so rooted in the place we live and the work we’re doing. If God wanted us to go somewhere, we wouldn’t be able to go. “Sorry, God. I have too many commitments where I am.”

But Abraham chose to live in tents so he would be available and so God could shape his life however He wished. It might be a good idea for some of us to pull up some of our roots and say, “Not my will, God, but Your will be done. Here’s my house, my car, my bank account, my community. Here’s my life. I’m placing it on that altar of worship to You. However You want to use me—whether here or somewhere else—I’m ready to go, as difficult as that might be.”

Faith in God means trusting Him when His ways seem impossible.

The first mention of Abraham in Hebrews speaks of his leaving the place he knows and heading to a place he doesn’t know. It’s insane. God also will sometimes call us to trust Him even when things seem impossible. The next thing Hebrews tells us is that Sarah is to be commended. Hebrews 11 continues:

¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

They arrived in the Promised Land and 25 years pass by. Sometimes living by faith doesn't guarantee a quick response. Abraham is 75 when he leaves his home and arrives in Canaan. Now he's 100 years old and Sarah is now 90. Any prospect of them having kids is gone. In fact, we see in Genesis 15 that Abraham began to question God.

² But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."

When Abraham was 75, God promised he would have a son—and then nothing happened for the next 25 years.

It's in these impossible moments—in the waiting room of life—that our faith is tested most. It's when God seems distant and His promises are as yet unrealized. In these times, three things take place.

When faith is tested, we have a tendency to doubt God's provision.

Our first tendency in these times of waiting is to doubt God. "God, where are You? Why aren't You keeping Your promise? Why are You making me a laughing stock in my community? You say You have a plan, but I can't see it happening." Abraham believed his possessions would be inherited by his household slave, which didn't make sense to him.

When faith is tested, we have a tendency to do our own thing.

It's one thing to doubt, but then Abraham and Sarah—knowing that he and his wife were too old to bear children—came up with their own plan. Be careful, when you're waiting for God, that you don't do your own thing. We don't have time to get into the story, but Sarah came up with the idea that since she couldn't have a child, she would give her handmaid Hagar to Abraham so he would have a child by her. And that's what happened. Abraham foolishly brought another woman into his family. All kinds of problems resulted from that decision. Ishmael was born, but he was an heir produced by Abraham's own plan rather than God's.

Some of us who are in God's waiting room are trying to solve our problems without God. We see with Abraham that when he was cooperating with God, God blessed him, but when he chose his own ways, God wasn't with him.

This can lead to future disruptions.

I can tell you that every time I do something in my own strength, I fail. But when I'm in step with God, He always allows me to see His better way. Doing our own thing can lead to incredible disruptions. We doubt God's providence, then everything goes wrong. When Abraham took a second wife and had a child by her, Sarah ended up hating Hagar and her son. Hagar and Ishmael were abandoned by their family and believed they were abandoned by God.

We must be careful in the waiting room of life not to do things our own way.

His promises are incomparable.

This brings us to the final reason we should go the way of Abraham. Hebrews 11:13–16 says:

¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Why do we choose the way of faith instead of our own way? Because the ways of God are incomparable. The writer of Hebrews said the reason Abraham chose God's way was that God promised him something better than he could gain on his own.

I want you to know, Christian, that God has promised something greater for you than you will ever accomplish on your own. I understand that we might not fully realize it now, but God has a great plan for us. Paul quotes Isaiah in 1 Corinthians 2:9, "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him." But we might say, "It isn't here yet." No. It is at the end of the road of the life of faith that these things will become ours. Start taking that journey now, step by step. In doing so, wonderful things will come to us.

We will live differently.

We have to live as aliens and strangers (Ephesians 2:11–22; Hebrews 11:13–16). That means the rest of the world will go on living as though their lives belonged to them, trying to make life the best it can be for them. Why? Because they have 70 or 80 years on this earth and that's all they have. They'll take nothing to the grave.

But brothers and sisters, we are just traversing this world, because we know when we die, we'll stand before Jesus, and He will invite us to spend eternity with Him. The way we live today has a direct impact on how we will spend eternity—and that will cause us to live very differently from the world around us.

We will long expectantly.

Why did Abraham do this? Because he was promised something better than he had on his own. You and I have also been promised a city whose foundation isn't built by man. It will be a heavenly city designed and built by God. It's our great hope that one day we will reside in a land built by God for His people.

Whatever happens in this world—the good, the bad or the ugly of life—all of this is just a fraction of what we will live through, because we're looking forward to a city that has been prepared for us. Jesus told His disciples in John 14:2–3, *"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."*

We will love gratefully.

We long for heaven and that means we need to love gratefully. We're on a journey during which God may call us to insane and impossible things. We're thinking, "This journey is hard." But the Bible tells us that it's God's pleasure to be our God. What that means is that God loves riding next to us as we journey through this life of faith. He knows at times we'll go sideways, but He doesn't say, "Let Me out of the car." Rather He says, "I'll be with you. I'll never leave or forsake you. You are My child and I am Your God. We're going to do this thing together."

Whether you're going through good times or bad, whether God is calling you to the common or to the insane, never forget that you have a God by your side Who will walk with you every step of the way and He—maybe not you—but He knows where you're going. He says, "The One Who started the good work in you will be faithful to see it to completion" (Philippians 1:6). He did with Abraham, He's done it in your pastor's life, and I know He wants to do it in your life as well.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Note: This transcription has been provided by Sermon Transcribers (www.sermontranscribers.net).