

Living by faith

**Learning from the life of
Abraham**

Duncan Watkinson

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By Duncan Watkinson

This booklet has been written to help fulfil the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations. We believe that you will benefit from studying this book by yourself, but that you will be blessed even more if you do it in the context of a discipling relationship with another Christian, or together with a small group of believers.

In the process of writing this book, we have drawn from a wide cross section of God's church. We are extremely grateful for the many insights we have received from different sources. Special thanks go to my daughter Grace, who worked diligently on collating and editing taped messages and notes. She contributed invaluable to bringing this booklet to publication and it was a joy to have her cheerful and capable assistance.

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1. Children of Abraham

Welcome to this study on ‘Living by faith’! This is an essential subject for every Christian - look up **Hebrews 11:6** and complete this sentence:

Without

Faith is vital for all people who want to live in a way which pleases God. In this booklet, we will examine what faith is and how it works. To help us understand what the Lord is looking for, we will study the life and experiences of Abraham. He is a famous bible character and is mentioned in all the Gospels, the book of Acts and several epistles. Before we go any further, write down anything you already know about Abraham:

.....
.....

If you are doing this study with others, share your observations with each other. Now turn to Genesis 11 and read **verses 26-31**. Summarise everything you learn about Abraham from these verses:

.....
.....

This is how the bible account of Abraham begins. **James 2:23** gives a concise summary of Abraham’s life. Read it and answer these questions:

What did Abraham do?

What was Abraham ‘credited’ with?

What was Abraham called?

James wrote some two thousand years after Abraham died. Abraham was still remembered then, and we are looking at Abraham’s life 4000 years after he lived. Not many people from that time are still impacting lives today! What is even more amazing is that every Christian is related to this great man. Read **Galatians 3:7** and complete the sentence:

Understand, then

.....

When we are born again, we become part of the family of God. See **Galatians 3:26**. Now read 1 **John 3:10**, and write down whose child you

are if you are not born again:

Briefly relate when and how you were born again – and what you felt immediately after accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour.

.....
.....

If you are not yet a child of God the Father, you can become one by:

- acknowledging to God that you are a sinner
- believing that Jesus Christ died to take the punishment for your sins
- confessing your sins to God clearly and specifically, asking him to forgive each of them
- deciding to follow Jesus and obey all his commands

Becoming part of God’s family is the best thing that can happen to anybody. But, when we’re born again, we also become part of Abraham’s family. Read **Romans 4:16** and write out the last sentence in full:

.....
Here are some ways in which the family characteristics of Abraham’s life should be true for all Christians too. After all, we are his children!

A. Abraham was saved by grace

Read **Joshua 24:2-3** and write down what Abraham was doing before

God called him:

Do you think Abraham had done anything to deserve God’s attention?

Who initiated Abraham’s walk with God?

Now read **Ephesians 2:1-3**, and put in your own words how Paul describes our state before we became Christians:

.....
We were in a similar condition to Abraham’s. Now read **Ephesians 2:4-5** and answer the following questions:

Had we done anything to deserve God’s attention?

Who initiated our walk with God?

Complete the statement in v5: *it is*

Abraham became the undeserving father of all who believe. In the same way, we were undeserving nobodies but we became sons of Abraham when we responded to the Lord in faith. It's all grace!

B. Abraham was saved through faith

Like us, Abraham was saved by grace – it was all God's sovereign work.

Write out **Genesis 15:6** in full:

.....
This sentence occurs several times in the bible and it explains how Abraham got right with God – and also how Christians do. What was Abraham's part in his salvation (being declared righteous)?

.....
Read **Ephesians 2:8-9** and notice that we also were saved, through faith.

Where did this faith come from?

What has NOT earned our salvation?

Read **Romans 4:2-5**. What was Abraham's involvement in his salvation?

.....
What did not justify Abraham?

Abraham was saved by grace, through faith. He did not perform any religious works to try and win God's approval. He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. God reconciled Abraham to himself in exactly the same way as he dealt with us.

C. Abraham lived by faith

Abraham was not only declared righteous by God but was also invited to live by faith. To do this, he believed what the Lord spoke to him and then did what he had said. Read **Genesis 12:1-5** and answer these questions:

What did the Lord ask Abraham to do?

How would you summarise the words of the Lord in vv 2-3

.....
What did Abraham do in response to the Lord's words?

.....
We need to learn how Abraham lived this life of faith and obedience and that is what the remainder of this booklet is about. We are called to walk in the same faith and expect the same promises as Abraham. Remember that the reason we are learning to live by faith is because this is the only way we can please God. Now turn to **Romans 4:16-17**:

To whom was the promise given?

Whose father is he?

What two things does verse 17 say that God does?

1.

2.

We can only please the Lord if we live by faith. This is not a boring, religious life but is the most exhilarating way anybody can live on earth. Abraham's children belong to a God who is able to bring the dead to life and make non-existent things come into being. What an exciting God!

D. Abraham's life made a difference

Abraham is still remembered as a man of faith thousands of years after he died. How would you like to be remembered? What are your dreams? What would you like to be known for? Jot down some of your ideas:

.....

God wants each of our lives to be fulfilling and worth remembering. John Piper suggests the following prayer if you really want your life to count for something worthwhile:

Lord, let me make a difference for you that is utterly disproportionate to who I am.

Assignment

1. Pray the above prayer each day for the next week, meditating on each word and recognising that the life which really counts is lived by faith - and it has to be lived for the Lord.
2. Keep your appointment for lesson 2.

2. The promises to Abraham

In lesson 1, we saw that the Lord made several promises to Abraham, which we will now look at in more detail. To understand their importance to us, look up **Galatians 3:29** and write out this verse in full.

.....
Every Christian has a share in the promises the Lord gave to Abraham, and has the right and responsibility to inherit these promises. **Genesis 12:1-3** contains seven promises to Abraham – and to us. Before going on to the next section, read the passage again to see if you can identify them.

1. The land (v1)

In **Genesis 12:1**, the Lord told Abraham to go to the land he would show him, but in **Genesis 13:14-17**, he explained that his promise was to give him the land. Read these passages and answer the questions:

In which direction was Abraham told to look?

How much of the land was promised?

Whom was it promised to?

Where was Abraham told to walk?

The only land Abraham actually owned in his lifetime was a burial ground for his wife, but he established Spiritual authority over a vast territory. In fact, his inheritance was even bigger than the land he saw. Read **Romans 4:13** and fill in the blanks:

Abraham and received the promise that he would be

We are Abraham's offspring so the whole world is our inheritance. God wants us to enjoy this world - and to establish his kingdom wherever he puts us. Whether we're in an office, factory, college, shopping complex, church building or home, we should expect to bring in something of God's presence – because, in the end, it will all belong to us and our family. Write down some ways you could establish God's kingdom and make his presence felt in the places where you live and work:

.....

2. Multiplication of people (v2)

God multiplied Abraham into many nations – Ishmaelites, Edomites and Israelites. God’s heart has always been to have a large family, a community of people who love and trust him. He enjoys increasing numbers and seeing his family grow. The apostle Peter saw remarkable numerical growth within his lifetime. Look up the following verses and write down (or guess!) the total number in the group on each occasion.

- John 1:40-42**
- Acts 2:41**
- John 6:66-68**
- Acts 4:4**
- Acts 1:15**
- 1 Peter 1:1**

And how many will be in heaven, according to **Revelation 7:9**?

.....

Peter and the early disciples experienced dramatic growth – part of the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham. We too can confidently expect growth in the church. It is inevitable – the Lord has promised.

3. Personal blessings (v2 - I will bless you)

Most of us like getting blessed! God favoured Abraham with many material benefits – wealth, possessions, long life, peace and health – and we should also pray for and expect God’s material blessings. But, in Christ, he guarantees us many spiritual blessings as well. According to **Ephesians 1:3**, what has our heavenly Father blessed us with?

.....

Ephesians 1:4-14 lists many blessings. Write down some of them here:

.....

As David exclaimed, *Surely I have a delightful inheritance.* (**Psalms 16:6**)

4. A great name (v2)

In the 1960’s, the Beatles sang:

*He’s a real nowhere man, sitting in his nowhere land
Making all his nowhere plans, for nobody*

Being a nowhere man is a horrifying prospect. Nobody wants to be nameless, ignored, or insignificant, so many people seek fame through selfish ambition and competitiveness. But God’s desire is to give each

family member a great name in his way. Abraham had a taste of this in **Genesis 17:5** when his name was changed from Abram to Abraham.

Similarly, a great name was associated with us when we became Christians. Before that, we may have been buddhists, catholics, hindus, muslims, pagans, parsees, protestants or sikhs – or something else! When we acknowledged Jesus Christ as our Lord, the name of Christ was linked to ours. How does **Philippians 2:9** describe the name of Jesus?

.....
Being called ‘Christian’ is a huge privilege, but God also desires us to have a great name in another way. He longs for us to be welcomed into heaven as heroes. Read **Matthew 25:21** and answer these questions:
What were the first words of greeting the master spoke to the servant?

.....
What did the master appreciate about the servant?

.....
What was the reward the master gave the servant?

.....
It will be the same for us. If we are faithful in doing what our Master tells us, we will have a great name in heaven – the only place that counts!

5. Usefulness to God (v2 - you will be a blessing):

Not only do Christians receive blessing, they are also a source of blessing to those around. Abraham was a blessing to his nephew, Lot, in many ways. He gave him land, rescued him and interceded for him. We should also expect to bless those around us as we care, pray, give, help, serve and so on. People should be blessed simply because we are there. Write down one or two ways in which your family, colleagues, friends, neighbours or outsiders have already been blessed through you:

.....
‘The best thing that can happen to anybody is that a Christian moves in next door.’ Is this a reasonable statement? Is it true for you? Discuss.

6. Anointing (v3 - I will bless those who bless you):

Christians are anointed. Those who bless us will be blessed, but those who oppose us will suffer. Read **Matthew 10:40-41** and write down what happens to those who receive prophets and righteous men:

.....

People receive blessings because they receive us and what we say. The promise to Abraham is that people who curse us will be cursed. We should not gloat over this, but leave this in the hands of the Lord. Read **Romans 12:19-20** to see how we should behave when we are cursed.

7. International impact (v3 - all peoples on earth)

The last promise of Genesis 12 is that all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Read **Matthew 28:19; Mark 13:10; Luke 24:47;** and **Roman 16:26** and write down the phrase which occurs in each verse:

.....

God’s children should expect to affect people from every nation. We can do this through prayer and actually going, but many of us require a new attitude to ‘foreigners’ who live near us. They are not intruders or strangers, but people whom the Lord expects us to reach out to in love. The greatest blessing we can bring to anybody is to share the Gospel with them. Summarise the following powerful statements about the Gospel:

Romans 1:16

Colossians 1:6

.....

The Gospel has the power to save and change people from every nation.

We are children of Abraham and we share in each of the promises given to him, but we will not inherit them automatically. As we respond in faith and obedience, we will enjoy the great advances God has planned for us.

<p>Assignment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read through the promises to Abraham and pray that you will inherit each of them in your own life. 2. Write down any personal promises you have received from the Lord – a word from the bible or a prophecy. Pray for their fulfillment. 3. Memorise at least three (3) general promises from the bible.

3. The object of faith

A. Faith defined

If you were asked to say what faith is, what would you write down?

.....
Many people have different ideas about faith. They might describe it as:

1. A nice feeling of security and certainty inside me
2. Something which I can work up by quoting the right bible verses
3. The optimistic feeling I have when everything's working out well
4. What others need when they're going through difficulties
5. The glow within me after a 'good' time of praying for an issue

Does your definition look like any of these? Some contain elements of truth but real faith is centred in the Lord, as these men of God explain:

John Piper: *Faith looks away from itself to the worth and ability and grace and strength of another... Faith calls attention to the worth and ability of the one trusted.*

Benny Hinn: *Faith is believing in the character, truthfulness and integrity of God.¹*

Imagine that you have a serious plumbing problem in your kitchen and it is flooded. You approach three plumbers who respond as follows:

Plumber A: You ring him up because he's well known. He promises to come at 9am. You wait until 11am and he never arrives.

Plumber B: When you ring, he promises to come at noon. He arrives at 1pm and works for 15 minutes. Water starts gushing out soon after he leaves. There's no answer when you phone him.

Plumber C: You ring him at 2pm and he promises to be there at 2.30pm. He arrives 2 minutes early and works diligently. He repairs your problem and leaves his mobile number in case of further problems. There are none.

¹A Godward Life by John Piper, Bk 2 Multnomah Publishers; Benny Hinn's Newsletter

Three months later you have a plumbing problem in the bathroom. Which plumber would you contact first?

Give your reasons for contacting him:
.....

You chose plumber C because he was trustworthy. Faith is a response to another’s faithfulness. It’s not some ‘mushy’ feeling inside, but simple common sense to go to Plumber C. In the same way, it’s common sense for Christians to have faith in God. Because he is faithful!

B. The faithfulness of God

When you look up the phone book, you cannot tell which plumber is faithful. However, if you look at the bible, you will find God’s faithfulness referred to over and over again. As you read the following verses and fill in the blanks, allow adoration to rise in your heart:

Deuteronomy 32:4 *He is the, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just.*

A who does, upright and just is he.

Psalm 86:15 *But you, O Lord, are a God, slow to anger, abounding in*

Psalm 91:4b *... his faithfulness will be*

Psalm 100:5 *For the LORD is good and his faithfulness*

Psalm 145:13b *The LORD is and toward all he has made.*

Isaiah 25:1 *O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for you have done marvelous things, things*

1 Corinthians 1:9 *God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our*

Lord, is

2 Thessalonians 3:3 *But the Lord is and he will*

Hebrews 10:23b *for he who promised is*

Revelation 19:11 *I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called*

With justice he judges and makes war.

However good Plumber C was, he's nothing compared to our faithful God! Spend some time worshipping him, expressing some of the above.

C. Faith comes from God

Not only is faith a common sense response to the character of God, but the Lord himself is the source of faith. Look up **Ephesians 2:8** and you will see that faith is the gift of God. Complete **Romans 12:3**, *...in*

accordance with the measure of faith

Paul assumed that everyone in the church in Rome had a measure of faith. God had given it to them – and he has also given a measure to you. Even though you may feel that you have no faith, the bible is clear that there is already a measure within you. It is true that your measure can be increased but please do not think that you start from zero.

In **Luke 22:32**, Jesus warned Simon Peter about his coming temptation and he told him that he had prayed for him. What had Jesus prayed for?

.....

Jesus knew that Simon Peter already had a 'measure of faith'. According to **Luke 17:5**, after one of Jesus' more difficult teachings, what did the apostles say to the Lord?

.....

Mark 9:14-27 tells how Jesus cast out a demon from a boy. Verse 22 includes an understandable plea from the boy's father, 'But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.' Write out Jesus' reply in full:

.....

Why do you think Jesus posed a question first?

.....

Jesus knew God's faithfulness and power, so it seemed strange for the man to say, 'If you can...' Didn't the boy's father know who Jesus was and that he had spoken creation into being? That man could be excused for not knowing, but we Christians should never question God's ability. *Everything is possible for him who believes* - because he believes in the one who can do all things. Now write out **Mark 9:24**:

.....

Each of us should pray this man's cry for ourselves. We do have a

measure of faith – but there’s still a lot of unbelief to be dealt with. Before moving on, shut your eyes and pray this man’s request.

D. Faith turns us to God

Most of us realize that we need faith when we face a problem. Whilst Jesus told us that your Father knows what you need before you ask him (**Matthew 6:8**), he also taught in the same sermon, that we must pray and cry to God. Look up **Matthew 7:7-8** and write out these verses in full:

.....
.....

The Lord delights in answering our prayers, but he does not always answer them in the way we expect. 2 Samuel 11 tells the tragic story of David’s adultery with Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba, followed by the planned murder of Uriah. The next chapter tells how the prophet Nathan skilfully confronted David, who, to his credit, immediately acknowledged that he had sinned. Part of the Lord’s punishment was that the baby born to Bathsheba should die. Now read 2 **Samuel 12:15-20**:

What did David do when his son fell ill?

.....
What did David do after his son died?

.....
Even though his son had died, David could worship the Lord because he knew the ‘God of faithfulness’ who stood behind the entire situation. He could have got angry or suicidal and done something desperate but instead he chose to worship God. David recognised the faithful God behind his personal tragedy. Our most serious requests are pinpricks against the vastness of the God who created and upholds the entire universe. We should keep crying to God for our needs, but if we do not get what we asked for, we should still worship him as the faithful God.

<p>Assignment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At the back of this booklet, make a list of as many of God’s attributes as you can think of. Start with the verses on page 12. Use this list to help you praise and worship our faithful God. 2. Decide on a specific prayer request and pray for it every day. Make it specific so that you will definitely know when it is answered.

4. Growing in faith

Faith is directed towards the trustworthy character of God – he can be relied upon! Not only should we know that he can be depended upon in all situations, but we also need to learn to exercise faith in specific areas.

This is how we grow in faith. Read **Romans 10:17** and fill in the blanks:

Consequently,..... comes from the message, and the message is through the word of Christ.

Faith grows as we hear truth about who God is and what he has done for us in Christ. It also grows as we hear his promises for our own lives. This is what happened to Abraham, as he heard the Lord speak to him on many occasions. In your own words, summarise what the Lord spoke in each of these passages. In the last column, write a **C** for a command from the Lord, **P** for a promise, or **O** for other.

Reference	Summary of what the Lord spoke	Type
Genesis 12:1		
Genesis 12:2-3		
Genesis 12:7		
Genesis 13:14-17		
Genesis 15:1		
Genesis 15:4-5		
Genesis 15:7		
Genesis 15:9		
Genesis 15:13-16		
Genesis 15:18-21		
Genesis 17:1-16		
Genesis 17:18-20		
Genesis 18:10		

Genesis 18:13-14		
Genesis 18:17-21		
Genesis 18: 26-33		
Genesis 21:12-13		
Genesis 22:1-2		
Genesis 22:15-18		

Abraham’s existence seems to have been dominated by hearing God’s voice – both promises and commands. He learned to live by faith through hearing God’s promises. As we have seen, we are all heirs to Abraham’s promises and we should be exercising faith to inherit them.

Being part of a church or a movement also gives us the opportunity to inherit the promises of men and women of God who have gone before us. As Jesus said to his disciples in **John 4:38**, *I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour.* One way we reap is by exercising faith for the promises given to those who laboured ahead of us.

Not only should we stand in faith for promises given to Abraham and men and women of God who have gone before us, but we also need to hear God for ourselves. Here are some suggestions from Abraham’s life:

1. Have a walk with God

The Lord’s first words to Abraham were totally unexpected but Abraham soon settled down into a more regular relationship. Read these four verses and write out what Abraham did and where:

- Genesis 12:7**
- Genesis 12:8**
- Genesis 13:18**
- Genesis 22:9**

All these verses talk about altars which Abraham built in response to what the Lord had spoken to him. An altar signifies:

a) Sacrifice

An animal was offered on an altar to appease God. Christians know that Jesus Christ gave himself as the perfect sacrifice on the Cross and that they never need to make another sacrifice for sin. However, **Romans 12:1** tells us that God wants us to make another sacrifice. What is it?

.....
 What do you think this means in general?

.....
 And what do you think it could mean for you personally?

.....
b) Remembrance

Altars are a visual reminder of transactions with the Lord. Each time he passed close to an altar he had built, Abraham would be reminded about what had happened there between the Lord and him. We do not build altars, but it is wise for us to write down things the Lord speaks to us, so that we can reflect on them later. If we don't 'build an altar' in this way, we will probably forget many things the Lord has promised.

Do you maintain a record of things the Lord has spoken to you?

Y NO

If not, do you think you should?

Y NO

If you keep a record, have you looked at it recently?

Y NO

2. Develop listening skills

The Lord did not make an appointment to speak to Abraham, but he 'turned up' when he chose. Similarly, we must be open to hear from the Lord at all times. The Lord speaks to us through the bible, prophecy, human authority such as church leaders and parents, dreams, visions, an inner voice, circumstances, a sense of inner peace and occasionally in an audible voice.

Read **Genesis 15:7-11**. This was a solemn moment when the Lord was

confirming his covenant with Abraham, but something tried to get in the way and sidetrack the event. Answer the following questions:

What came to spoil the occasion?

What did Abraham do to them?

If we want to hear God we will often have to chase away ‘birds of prey’. There are many distracting voices such as:

Desires food, drink, sex, sleep

Distractions wandering thoughts, television, sport

Devil evil thoughts, temptations

Are there ‘voices’ around which so affect your time with the Lord that you cannot hear from him? If so, what are your biggest battles?

.....
.....

Despite these difficulties, we should never stop expecting to hear the voice of the Lord. In **John 10:27**, Jesus promised, *‘My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.’*

Read **Psalm 23:1-3** and thank the Lord for being your shepherd – and that he promises to lead and guide you. Then keep your heart and mind open to hear his voice. Faith comes from hearing the Lord speak.

Assignment

1. Spend some time alone with the Lord this week. Decide in advance how long a time this should be and then work out how to drive away all distractions so that you can focus on hearing God. You may need to take the telephone off the hook, close yourself in a room or arrange for the children to be looked after. You may even decide to fast.
2. Record everything the Lord speaks to you during this time.

5. The walk of faith

Abraham went out not knowing, to which country he was going, But he knew the Lord would show him, each step of the way. And he learned a vital lesson, in his doubt and his transgression, When the Lord said he would bless him, he'd do what he'd say.

*For Abraham walked by faith and not by sight
He knew that the Lord was at his side,
He was learning from the living word, trusting in the mighty God
Who made sure everything turned out just right.*

This is the first verse and chorus of a song the Lord gave me before we left England for India in 1981. Abraham is a model of faith and we are told to live like him, trusting in God. Write out **Corinthians 5:7** in full:

.....
Some older translations use the more accurate translation 'walk' instead of 'live'. Life is meant to move progressively forward – by faith – but this faith is tested in the many trials we face along the way. Here are some of the realities which Abraham discovered about walking by faith.

A. Faith is being sure of the unseen

Complete **Hebrews 11:1**: Now faith is being sure of
..... and certain of

Faith is an inner assurance that God will cause his promises to come to pass. Read **Genesis 12:1-4** (again!) and answer the following questions:

When would God's promises to Abraham happen?

How many could Abraham see at the time?

What did he do in response to the promises?

This is walking by faith. He had no evidence to prove that he was right - he simply believed the word of the Lord and left. Read **Romans 4:20-21** and write down three things which kept Abraham strong in faith:

.....
Each of these helped Abraham walk by faith, and they will also help us as we turn our attention to the Lord. But many of us are more like Thomas. When Jesus appeared to the other disciples in **John 20:19ff**, Thomas was absent

and he couldn't believe that Jesus had really been there. In v25, he protested *'Unless I see...., I will not believe it.'* When Jesus appeared a week later, he spoke straight to Thomas. Read **John 20:29** and fill in the blanks of what Jesus said:

'Because you have me, you have; blessed are those who and yet have

This is the challenge of walking by faith – we cannot see where we are going. But we will be blessed as we step out even though we do not see.

B. Faith looks foolish

Faith is not just a leap into the unknown but it will often require a step of obedience which appears foolish to other people – especially those who are close to us. **Genesis 12:1** tells us that Abraham left his nation, his home and his family and walked by faith. Abraham looked foolish in three ways - imagine him explaining his actions to Sarah!

Abraham's position	Sarah's possible response
He didn't know where he was going	You think the Lord will show you? Let's just wait here till he does!
He had absolutely no proof that he had heard the Lord.	How come you're so sure it was the Lord? Who is this new Lord of yours anyway?
The promise was for later	Just show me something now. When I see that, I'll be happy to go.

Probably Sarah did not respond like this – 1 **Peter 3:5-6** commends her attitude of submission to Abraham, her master - but most of us could identify with some of the possible comments. Like many husbands since,

Abraham had to lead his wife in a difficult step of faith. For a married couple, it is vital that both husband and wife stand together in faith.

Some people will think us 'crazy' to even try to walk by faith. Have you ever taken steps of faith that looked foolish? Describe some:

.....

C. Faith is uncomfortable

Not only did Abraham look foolish when he set out, but he also had to go through many difficulties because he had chosen to obey the Lord. He showed his trust in God when he left his country, people and father's house

to go to the land promised by the Lord. Those who follow Jesus should be willing to do the same. Read **Luke 14:26**, 27 and 33 and summarise what Jesus taught those who wanted to be his disciples:

- v26
- v27
- v33

Abraham certainly qualified as a disciple of Jesus! Read **Hebrews 11:9** and write down what Abraham endured because he stepped out in faith:

.....
Faith takes us out of our comfort zones and moves us from the known and secure into the unknown and insecure. We are motivated to move out because we have heard the voice of God and we know we can trust him.

Would you be willing to go through what Abraham endured?

YES NO

Give reasons for your answer:

.....
In **Luke 5:4**, Jesus challenged Peter with an instruction about fishing. Peter had been fishing all night and had not caught anything, but Jesus now asked him to risk his reputation and turn his back on his experience. It must have been embarrassing for him to go back to fishing in full view of everybody. Read the whole incident from **Luke 5:4-11** and notice:

- He obeyed because Jesus said so. Faith came from hearing the Lord.
- They caught a large number of fish. Faith produced fruitfulness
- Peter recognised his own sinfulness and the Lordship of Jesus. Faith led to revelation.

It's easy to justify not taking risks so that we avoid discomfort and embarrassment but, to be useful to God, we have to step out in faith.

D. Faith produces results

Peter's faith and obedience caused a massive catch to be brought in. The Lord doesn't want us just to grow in faith for it's own sake, but he wants us to learn to exercise faith so that we see definite results. It brings glory to him when we bear much fruit (see **John 15:8**), and we will only bear fruit when we step out in faith. Read **Mark 16:17-18** and notice that the signs and wonders mentioned will accompany those who believe. Write down the five

signs which the Lord promises will accompany those who believe - men and women who live by faith:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Have you experienced any of these signs yet?

YES NO

Please be ready to discuss your answer – and your experiences.

Actually, it’s probably unwise to try numbers 3 and 4 unless you are forced to, but it is encouraging to recognise how the Lord responds to faith, even in those situations. The question for us, though, is whether we are stepping out in faith regarding 1, 2 and 5? Would people give Mark 16:20 as a testimony to your life, like they did to the early disciples?

Here it is for you to read about yourself to the Lord. It will impart faith to you: *Then I went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with me and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.*

The starting point is going out. You cannot be a believer without going out and exercising your faith – whether you are praying for the sick in your office, in the street or at the shops. You’ve got to go, and as you talk about the Lord Jesus and exercise faith, the Lord will come in and authenticate his word with signs and wonders. Isn’t that what you want?

Assignment

1. Ask the Lord to give you an opportunity to exercise faith – it may be for salvation, healing, deliverance, financial provision, a relational problem or a spiritual gift. When the situation arises, ask him to put much faith into your heart and then start praying and acting in faith.
2. Be ready to share your experience when you meet for Lesson 6.

6. The obedience of faith

A. Faith is proved by obedience

Read **James 2:17, 26** and summarise the teaching of these two verses:

.....
James is not talking about the faith we exercised when we first believed in Jesus. As we saw in **Ephesians 2:8-9**, we are saved by faith, not by works. Here, James is teaching that the faith we profess is proved to be genuine only when it results in appropriate actions or works. If somebody tells you that your house is on fire, you will act quickly if you believe him. But if you think he's joking, you'll sit back and ignore him. In the same way, genuine faith in Jesus will result in actions. Read these verses and write how Abraham showed that he believed what the Lord had said:

Genesis 12:4

Genesis 13:18

Genesis 17:23

Genesis 22:3

His obedience was immediate, whole-hearted and undoubting. How is yours? When the Lord last gave you an instruction, did you obey immediately? Write down your answer with a specific example:

.....
Faith is not lazy or casual, and does not give us any excuse to postpone. We sometimes even use prayer as a delaying tactic, 'I will pray about this and see' or 'I'll wait for God's timing.' If the Lord has spoken, we should do what he says, when he says it and in the way he says.

B. Obedience doesn't come naturally to us

Read **Matthew 28:19 – 20** and answer the following questions:

What were Jesus' disciples told to do?

What two things were they told to do to make disciples?

.....

What did the new disciples they made have to do?

.....
Making disciples involves teaching people to obey. Becoming a disciple means learning to obey. The reason that we have to learn to obey is because, before we became Christians, we did not obey what Jesus taught. Obeying the Lord does not come naturally to any of us, so perhaps we should appreciate Abraham’s obedience far more! The apostle Paul understood that obedience was the central issue. Read **Romans 1:5**. What was God’s purpose in making Paul an apostle?

.....
In **Romans 16:19**, Paul expressed his joy over the Christians in Rome.

What had caused Paul’s joy?

A few verses later, Paul spelt out the purpose of the Gospel. Read **Romans 16:26** and complete the sentence: *so that*

.....
It was not just obedience that delighted Paul, but the obedience that came from faith. Some people do what is right but they are motivated by fear, jealousy, legalism, selfish ambition or a desire to prove themselves. The Lord expects us to obey with faith – totally convinced that what he says is the best possible thing for us, simply because he is the one who says it.

One thing that stands out about the life of Jesus was his obedience. Read **Philippians 2:8** and summarise what this verse tells us about Jesus:

.....
We might think it was easy for Jesus to obey because he was the son of God, but read what **Hebrews 5:8** tells us and fill in the blanks: *Although*

he was a son, he learned *from what he*

Obedience did not come naturally to Jesus. It meant a series of conscious decisions to do what his Father told him to do. It is the same for us.

C. What does it mean to obey?

In 1 **Peter 1:14**, Peter addressed ‘God’s elect’ as ‘obedient children’.

When we were born again, we became children of our Father in heaven. The Lord expects all children to obey their parents – especially his own sons and daughters. In fact this is the only specific bible instruction for children. Write out **Colossians 3:20**:

.....
An obedient child has been defined² as one who obeys his parents and other trustworthy adults by:

- 1. doing exactly what he’s told to do.
- 2. immediately when told to do it.
- 3. without any resistance or tantrums, but joyfully
- 4. whether a parent is there or not. See **Philippians 2:12**

God’s aim for all children is 100%, first time, joyful obedience.

Although he was the meekest man in all the earth, Moses did not obey the Lord in this way. Read **Exodus 3:11**, 3:13, 4:1, 4:10 and 4:13 to read a fascinating number of ways of saying ‘no’ to the Lord.

Have you ever used any of these?

S NO

If so, how and when?

Read **Matthew 7:24** – 27, which tells the story of the wise and foolish builders. The difference between the two men was not what they heard, but whether they put it into practice. It was their obedience which made the difference between building on rock or sand.

If sand = 0 and rock = 10, rate your own obedience between 0 and 10:

Many Christians repeat the sad example of the foolish man, who built his house on the sand. **James 1:22** warns us that we can deceive ourselves if we merely listen to the word. He tells us, ‘Do what it says.’ We must be those who obey the word and put it into practice.

On various occasions, the apostles were brought before the Jewish leaders. Read through **Acts 4:1-20** and answer these questions:

What did the Sanhedrin tell Peter and John to do? (v18)

.....
What was their reply?

Now read Peter’s response to a similar instruction in **Acts 5:29**. The Lord is looking for men and women who passionately obey him and his word and do not give in to pressure exerted by people or circumstances. You will be blessed if you learn to be an obedient child of your Father in

heaven. Read **Luke 11:27-28** and write out **v28** in full:

D. Obedience delights the Lord

Read 1 **Samuel 15:22** and answer these questions:

What does the Lord delight in?

.....
What does he not delight in as much?

.....
1 **Samuel 15:22b-23** says that: *To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.*

These verses make a contrast in two areas :

Rebellion is like and is the opposite of

Heeding is the opposite of which is like

Although Saul regretted his disobedience, he had to live with its effects.

1 **Samuel 15:26** records the consequence of Saul’s sin. What was it?

.....
Like Saul, our entire future is determined by how we respond to God. He hates rebellion and the arrogance which says ‘I know best.’ The Lord delights in obedience. May each of us be a delight to him.

In closing this study, write down some present day examples of how a person might be asked to obey the Lord. Be as imaginative as possible!

.....

<p>Assignment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Look at your life and think of areas where you are particularly disobedient - maybe to a certain authority. Repent of this and ask the Lord to help you be a delight. You may also need to ask for forgiveness and for his grace so that you can obey in future. 2. Look through the bible to find out more on obedience and how important it is. Be ready to share other verses on obedience when you meet to do lesson 7.
--

7. The fight of faith

Often we receive a promise from the Lord and step out in faith, but there is a long waiting time when nothing seems to be happening. At least 25 years passed for Abraham between the Lord speaking to him in **Genesis 12** and the birth of his son, Isaac, in Genesis 21. That's a long time!

Waiting is one of the most difficult things in any situation, but especially when nothing seems to be happening. **Hebrews 11:8**, 11 and 17 tell us what kept Abraham going. What are the first three words of each verse?

.....
That explains Abraham's essential disposition, but to stand in faith he had to fight a battle in his mind and we will have to do the same. **Hebrews 11:1** tells us that *faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*. To stand in faith, I must decide that I am not going to assess things by what I see and hear, but I'm going to look at things with faith. The battle to do that – and to keep on doing it - is in the mind. **Hebrews 11** gives three keys, which Abraham used to fight the good fight of faith:

1. He was looking forward (**Hebrews 11:10**)

Looking forward is an exercise of the mind. Many of us can look back and see all sorts of things that have gone wrong – problems, difficulties, heartaches, things that shouldn't have happened, pain, hurt, unfairness, injustice and so on. Looking backwards often includes self-pity, unforgiveness and regret and it does not help us at all. In fact, it pulls us down. People of faith are those who are looking forward. What are you looking forward to the Lord doing in your life and circumstances?

.....
Abraham's focus was a city. Today, cities are often dirty, crowded and dangerous, but in Abraham's time, cities represented civilization, security, stability, neatness, tidiness and good government. As Christians, we are looking forward to a city, described in **Revelation 21:10ff**. Read about the city and then write down:

With what will this city shine?

Jesus taught us to pray '*your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*' (**Matthew 6:10**) More than anything else, this prayer should bring the glory of God down to earth. God wants us to be his instruments to

bring the order, cleanliness and goodness of heaven down to earth. Our life is meant to add to the glory God receives. This list shows some areas where we can bring glory to God:

1. Seeing people saved
2. Showing God’s mercy in hospitals, prisons, slums
3. Standing up for truth and justice
4. Praying and interceding
5. Exercising spiritual gifts - miracles, healings, deliverances, prophecy
6. Generating money for and giving generously to the work of the Lord
7. Being fully committed to Growth Teams (cells) and church-planting

Look at this list and tick any in which you have already been involved. Circle those you believe the Lord wants you to be doing in the future.

Explain which you have marked and why.

.....
Pray that the Lord will use your life to bring glory to him in these areas.

Helen Keller was a remarkable woman. Although born blind, she started an international organisation to help the blind and improve their lives. She was once asked, ‘Is there anything worse than being born blind?’ She replied, ‘Yes, to be born sighted but have no vision.’

2. He considered him faithful (Hebrews 11:11)

To stand in faith requires that we look to God and consider the faithfulness of his character. Turn to page 12 and remind yourself of some aspects of his perfection. When we face difficulties, we quickly forget that the Lord created and upholds the entire universe. He is big and powerful! Yet our problems seem so vast to us that we forget the extent of God’s power and love. We find ourselves assessing God by what he does with our little difficulty and forgetting his utter dependability.

Abraham considered him faithful. The word ‘consider’ carries the meaning of thinking about something until a logical conclusion is reached. Make a note of some personal experiences which would lead you to reach the considered conclusion that the Lord is trustworthy:

.....
Considering God faithful is a vital way of winning the battle in the mind.

Another trap for some of us is that we so want to gaze upon the Lord that we ignore the reality in front of us. You may have heard people say ‘I’m

healed!’ when obviously they are not. This is dishonesty and does not bring glory to God – in fact it makes his followers look rather silly.

Abraham avoided this problem. Read **Romans 4:19**.

How old was Abraham at this stage?

What condition was Sarah’s womb in?

Did Abraham try to hide from these facts?

S NO

What did he do about them?

.....
Abraham was totally real about the magnitude of the miracle that was required, but he did not allow his faith to weaken or waver, because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. In **Romans 4:20**, there is another key which helped Abraham maintain his faith. He gave glory to God. We do not know how, but perhaps he did what Paul and Silas did when they were in jail in **Acts 16:25**. Look it up and write down two keys for glorifying God – as well as protecting one’s faith.

3. Abraham reasoned that God could (Hebrews 11:19)

Not only did Abraham consider the Lord faithful but he also knew how powerful God is – he could raise the dead. Abraham had the faith to believe this for Isaac - and this was before Jesus rose from the dead. 1 **Corinthians 6:14** records that, By his power God raised the Lord from the dead. But Abraham had recognised God’s power centuries earlier.

We live after the resurrection of Jesus and it should be much easier to believe in the power of God. Again, this is a battle in the mind. Abraham must have had an internal argument going on as he reasoned with himself that God could really raise Isaac from the dead. If you were trying to reason with yourself about God’s great power, what arguments would you use to strengthen your faith. If possible, include bible verses:

.....
One day, Jesus was on a mercy mission to the dead daughter of a local ruler, but his journey was interrupted. Read about it in **Matthew 9:20-22**

How long had the woman been sick?

What did the woman do?

What did Jesus attribute her healing to?

What had the woman said as her declaration of faith?

.....
Like Abraham, this woman had reasoned that God could, although she believed that she had to touch the edge of Jesus’ cloak to release the power of God. Thankfully, we don’t have to press through crowds to get into God’s presence. See **Hebrews 4:14-16**. However, the question we need to ask ourselves is whether we have really reasoned that God could.

4. Some things which kill faith

In **Numbers 14:1-4**, the people of Israel were responding badly to the negative report which the spies brought back. Each of the things they did helped to kill faith. And each started in their minds. Here they are

1. **Self pity** – they wept aloud. Self pity is a faith killer and makes you feel miserable too. Don’t start sliding down that slippery slope.
2. **Grumbling** (v2) against leadership. It is so easy to find fault with others, especially those over us in the Lord, but it squashes faith.
3. **Despair** – ‘if only’ is a stupid way of starting a sentence. If you find yourself saying it, cut it out. It only kills faith.
4. **Accusing God** (v 3) We are really throwing faith out the window when we start lashing out at God and blaming him for our problems.
5. **Wild assumptions** – we’ll fall by the sword; our families will be taken as plunder. Have you noticed how easy it is to make fearful assumptions about almost anything?
6. **Rebellion** (v4) – they wanted a new leader to take them back where they had started. This is looking back, not forward - a faith-killer!

God stopped the people of Israel from entering the promised land for 40 years, primarily because of what they thought and said - not because of what they did. Circle any ‘faith killer’ in the above list which might stop you taking hold of God’s promises for your life. Acknowledge them to those who are doing this study with you. Then pray together about them.

<p>Assignment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Throughout this week, make it a practice to think correctly about God, knowing that he is faithful and able. 2. Watch out for faith killers. Kill them before they kill your faith!
--

8. Tests of faith

This final study looks at some tests of faith which Abraham faced. Although he failed some, he remains the father of all who believe and his life encourages us to keep living by faith, even after we have failed tests of our own. These tests will also help us not to make the same mistakes.

1. The Canaanites - Genesis 12:6

Arriving in the land of Canaan does not even look like a test, but, centuries later, Abraham's descendants were terrified by these people. Read **Numbers 13:31-34** and write down some of the inner thoughts and assumptions which the people had about the Canaanites:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

The effect of these assumptions stopped the Israelites, but Abraham passed his first test! We do not live amongst Canaanites but many of us are wrongly concerned about the people around us – what will they think? Our fear of man can compromise our walk of faith. Write down any ways in which the fear of man has stopped you living by faith:

.....

2. Famine - Genesis 12:10

As soon as they arrived in Canaan, a severe famine broke out. Abraham and Sarah must have wondered what they had let themselves in for. Was this the blessing the Lord had promised? Things often go wrong when we step out in faith and it is understandable to feel a little anxious – or is it? Anxiety seems respectable but it is 'a mild form of atheism' and leads to faithless decisions. The bible warns us against it. Read **Philippians 4:6**

What are we allowed to be anxious for?.....

What must we do instead?.....

In **Psalm 139:23**, David prayed Test me and know my anxious thoughts. The Lord tests us to reveal our anxieties. What do you get anxious about?

.....
Confess these anxieties to God – and then apply **Philippians 4:6** to them.

3. Egypt - Genesis 12:11

In his anxiety, Abraham stopped walking by faith and decided to go to Egypt. And, in fear, he started guessing what would happen. He then:

- 1. assumed that Pharaoh would find Sarah attractive
- 2. assumed that his life was at risk because of this
- 3. assumed that he could only stay in Egypt if he told a lie
- 4. forgot that the Lord had promised and would watch over his word

Often our assumptions start ‘What if?’ Write down some of the things you have made faithless assumptions about:

.....
This incident shows how quickly assumptions lead to unbelief – and how easy it is to lie to help God! Yet the Lord faithfully rescued Abraham - because he was committed to fulfilling his promises.

4. Lot - Genesis 13 and 14

Abraham could have abandoned Lot. When the herdsmen quarrelled, he could have sent him away. After all, the land had been promised to Abraham – not Lot. And Abraham was not obliged to rescue Lot from his captors. But faith and promises do not give us the right to be unloving. Read Paul’s famous words in 1 **Corinthians 13:2** and fill in the blanks:

if I have a that can, but have not I am nothing.

Abraham passed this test with flying colours, by resisting the temptation to be unloving. Our desire to see a promise fulfilled cannot permit that.

5. Melchizedek - Genesis 14:17-20

Abraham returned weary from battle and met a man of God. He must have been tempted to keep the spoils of war and not even think about being generous. But Abraham gave a tenth of all his possessions to Melchizedek. This reminds us that giving to the Lord is important, especially when we do not feel like it. It is an essential - and exciting way of growing in faith. Write out **Luke 6:38** and try to memorise it too.

.....

Our giving is a faith test – we can only prove the truth of God’s promise after we have given. Now look up **Malachi 3:10**. Giving is the only area in which the Lord says ‘Test me in this’. It may seem illogical – but it’s true. Consider your giving – is it generous? Does it demonstrate faith?

.....

6. Sarah’s suggestion - Genesis 16

This was probably the biggest test and the most disastrous failure for Abraham, but we all will face a similar test at some stage. The temptation is to take things into our own hands to try and make God’s promise happen now – not later. Our faith and patience are both being tested. Read the whole of Genesis 16 and answer these questions.

What did each person have to endure because of Abraham’s haste?

Hagar

Ishmael

Abraham

Sarah

Each one suffered because Abraham did not trust the Lord enough to wait for him to fulfil his promise. But the amazing thing is that God’s grace came to everybody – they were not abandoned! Rushing ahead of God is dangerous and often has sad consequences, but the Lord has promised in **Hebrews 13:5**, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’

7. Circumcision - Genesis 17

We have seen that living by faith is often uncomfortable and Abraham faced this when the Lord told him to be circumcised in **Genesis 17:10**. It was not designed for Abraham’s comfort but as an expression of the Lord’s covenant. Although it was a painful way of showing his faith, Abraham obeyed (See **Genesis 17:26-27**). In **Acts 16:1-3**, Paul required the same step of obedience from Timothy. Circumcision was not needed for his salvation, so why do you think Paul asked Timothy to do this?

Christians are like tea bags - you have to put them in hot water before you know how strong they are.

8. The final test

After many years of waiting, Isaac, the child of promise, was finally born. When Isaac had grown to about 12, the Lord set Abraham his final exam. Read **Genesis 22:1-19**. The Lord was testing Abraham to see if he trusted him enough to be willing to kill his son. What a test! But by now, Abraham had built a stronghold of faith in his mind, and was totally convinced of the Lord’s faithfulness. But why did the Lord do this? Read

Genesis 22:12 and fill in the blanks: *Now I know that you
..... because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.*

Abraham got a ‘first class pass’ in his final test. It may seem strange but a man or woman of faith must also have a healthy fear of God. We need to see God as loving and kind - but also as the one who must be obeyed.

Abraham persevered through each test of faith. Not every promise was fulfilled in his lifetime, but he did see Isaac grow to manhood, ready to carry the promises into his generation. Abraham showed Isaac how to live by faith – and left a potent example to his children in the 21st century.

Read **Hebrews 10:35-36** and fill in the blanks: So do not throw away *your.....; it will be*
You need to..... so that when you have done the will of God, you will

As **Hebrews 10:38** continues, my righteous one will live by faith. If we have acknowledged Jesus as Lord and desire to please God, we have no real alternative to living by faith. It is exciting and challenging - and will include difficult tests along the way. But as we live by faith, the Lord will richly reward us – whilst we are on earth, and also when we meet him face to face. So don’t hold back! Take the risk! Live by faith!

Assignment

Review the entire study and note down on the next pages the key things you have learned. Come back to it from time to time so that you can see the progress you are making in living by faith.

