

MEN
of the
WORD

NATHAN
BUSENITZ

GENERAL EDITOR



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

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Cover by Koechel Peterson & Associates, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota

MEN OF THE WORD

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Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Men of the Word / Nathan Busenitz, general editor and the Leadership Team at Grace Community Church.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7369-2981-3 (pbk.)

1. Men (Christian theology) 2. Christian men—Religious life. I. Busenitz, Nathan.

II. Grace Community Church (Sun City, Calif.)

BT703.5.M455 2011

248.8'42—dc22

2010035544

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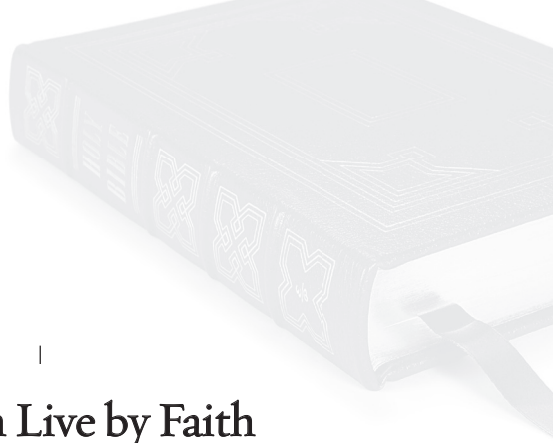
Printed in the United States of America

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 / VP-SK/ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Real Men Live by Faith

Lessons from the Life of Abraham

NATHAN BUSENITZ

It has become popular in our society to talk about *faith* as though it were some sort of mystical force or magical power. Countless movies, television shows, and songs reinforce the idea that you can achieve any goal and overcome any challenge *if only you have a little faith* or *if only you just believe*. Whether that faith is placed “in yourself” or in some other fantastical force (like the power of love or the promise of change), the point is always the same: Believe hard enough, and dreams can come true. To our postmodern culture, *what* people believe in is not all that important. The critical thing is simply that they *believe*, and that their faith—whatever its object—makes them happy and furthers their lifestyle.

Biblical faith could not be more opposite. It is defined by a confident trust in and full dependence on the only right object of faith—God Himself. The reality is that faith is only as good as the object on which it rests. For the postmodern secularist, having faith “in yourself” is an extremely limiting and discouraging prospect. Faith based on that kind of fantasy is nothing more than fiction. But for the Christian, faith in God is the key to facing any circumstance of

life. God is infinitely powerful, wise, good, faithful, and loving. To depend on Him is to say with the apostle Paul, “If God is for us, who is against us? . . . For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:31,38-39).

When we read about the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11, we learn that “by faith [they] conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women [even] received back their dead [sons] by resurrection” (verses 33-35). Through faith, the Old Testament saints accomplished some incredible things. Or perhaps better stated, *God* accomplished incredible things through those who believed in Him. That is an important clarification. The biblical heroes did not simply believe; they believed *in God*. Their faith was unseen, but it was not blind. God was the source of their power and strength. He was their focus and the object of their faith. Their confident trust and full dependence was placed in Him.

Void of the right object, faith is nothing more than wishful thinking. It is pitiful and powerless. But placed in God, faith is the essence of salvation and the heart of the Christian life. The pages of Scripture are filled with examples of people who walked by faith. One of the foremost was a man from Mesopotamia who, while childless, left his homeland to follow God, and as a result became the father of a great nation.

A MAN NAMED ABRAHAM

Abraham is one of the most famous and beloved characters from all of biblical history. His story, found in Genesis 11–25, has been

retold countless times—from the rabbis of Old Testament Israel to the Sunday school teachers of today. He has been the subject of songs, sermons, books, and theological discussions. Both the Jews and the Arabs look to him as their physical ancestor; and the New Testament declares him to be the spiritual father of all who believe (Romans 4:11-12; Galatians 3:29). The Lord certainly kept His promise to Abraham when He told him, “[I will] make your name great” (Genesis 12:2).

It is easy for us, over 4000 years later, to take Abraham’s life for granted. We’ve heard the stories so many times that we already know how everything will turn out. Yet unlike us, Abraham did not have the luxury of knowing exactly how the story would end. He simply had to trust God for the future, living by faith in the midst of daily trials and temptations.

As with all of us, there were times when Abraham did not trust the Lord as he should have (see Genesis 20, for example). Yet on the whole, his life was characterized by a steadfast faith in God and His Word. Even when the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham went far beyond his own lifetime, he continued to trust and obey. It’s no wonder that the New Testament looks back to his life as a model of faith that all believers should follow.

In this chapter, we will consider four lessons that Abraham’s example teaches us about being men of faith.

1. Men of Faith Submit to God’s Plan

The year was 2091 BC, and Abraham (who was then called *Abram*) was 75 years old. Though born in Ur, his family had since moved to a town named Haran, located in northeastern Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq), just east of the Euphrates River.

Abraham was a first-generation believer. According to Joshua 24:2, he had grown up in a pagan family. Being from Ur, he had probably been raised as a worshiper of the Sumerian moon god Nannar, also called Sin. Abraham’s father, Terah, may have even

been named after this deity, since his name is derived from the Hebrew word for moon.¹

The Jewish historian Josephus recorded that Abraham was, in fact, a great astronomer.² When the Lord saved him, Abraham realized that the sun, moon, and stars were not gods, but only created bodies operating according to God's grand design. The astonished stargazer, armed with a new understanding of the universe, soon began to publicly denounce the astrology of his neighbors. But they did not want to listen. His faithful proclamations about the true God were met with what Josephus called a "tumult" of opposition.

It is in that context that God told Abraham to move his family to Canaan, promising to make a great nation of his descendants (Genesis 12:1-3). What a promise! Yet for Abraham it meant leaving behind everything he had ever known—including the home where he had settled and the place his father died. The call to leave tested whether he truly believed the Lord. Almost surely it would have been easier to stay in Haran, where things were familiar to him. He had never been to Canaan, the land to which God commanded him to go.

But Abraham didn't make excuses or complain (see Genesis 12:4-5). Instead, he responded in obedient faith, as the author of Hebrews explained: "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8). Though his path was unknown to him, Abraham submitted to God's plan, confident that the Lord would send him exactly where he needed to be. His own preference might have been to stay in Haran. But he obeyed the Lord's command without hesitation, knowing that God's will was best even if it required a dramatic life change.

2. Men of Faith Rest in God's Justice

Upon settling in the land of Canaan, Abraham and his nephew

Lot decided to part ways because their herds of livestock were getting too large to keep together. Abraham graciously gave his nephew first choice as to where he would raise his flocks. So Lot selected the most fertile land for himself, near the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In this case, the greener grass was not the better choice. The cities that bordered Lot's pastures were incredibly wicked. And Lot soon came under their influence. He eventually settled in Sodom (Genesis 13:12-13)—a place so perverse that its name is a synonym for debauchery. Sodom's sin was so hateful to God that He determined to destroy it with fire from heaven.

When Abraham learned of the Lord's intention, he interceded for the city—not in defense of its wickedness but so that God might spare any righteous people who lived there (Genesis 18:20-33). It was, after all, the home of Lot and his family. Abraham likely knew others in the city too because, some time earlier, he had rescued Sodom's inhabitants from an invading army (Genesis 14:1-16). After Abraham pleaded on the city's behalf, God assured him that even if there were only ten righteous people there, He would not destroy it (Genesis 18:32).

But there were not even ten righteous souls in Sodom. According to Genesis 19, there was only one righteous man (cf. 2 Peter 2:7) and he was far from perfect. Though Lot was rescued, along with his two daughters, Sodom was utterly destroyed. Yet Abraham's intercession proved that he knew God to be a patient executioner—One who wielded His anger carefully and only with just cause.

Abraham's confidence in God's perfect justice is especially evident in Genesis 18:25, where he said to the Lord, "Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" The Lord's perfect character, as Abraham knew, meant that even in dispensing His wrath the right thing would be done. Though Sodom would be destroyed, Abraham had no reason to doubt God's righteous goodness.

In our own day, many people wrestle with the implications of divine wrath. The question is often asked, “If God is love, how can He punish sinners both in this life and the next?” The answer, as Abraham’s example illustrates, is ultimately found in God’s righteous character. His wisdom is faultless and His judgments are pure. Knowing that God is gracious, Abraham fervently interceded for the city of Sodom. Then, knowing that God is holy and just, he rested confidently in the fact that the Judge of all the earth will always do what is right.

3. Men of Faith Wait on God’s Timing

In Genesis 17, God promised Abraham that he would have a son through his wife Sarah. But there was a problem. Both Abraham and Sarah were very old, and Sarah had been barren her whole life. Nevertheless, God’s promise was clear: “I will bless her [Sarah], and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her” (Genesis 17:16). In fact, when the Lord visited Abraham in chapter 18, He reiterated this guarantee: “I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son” (verse 10).

Sarah’s response, when she heard what God said, was probably the same reaction we would have had if we had been in her situation. She laughed in disbelief, wondering how she and Abraham could possibly bear a child at their advanced age (Genesis 18:11-12). Abraham too had initially responded with doubt-filled laughter (see Genesis 17:17). Yet Romans 4:19-21 indicates that his disposition soon changed to one of confident hope: “Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.” Even when childbearing seemed physically impossible,

Abraham chose to believe God's promises rather than focus on the scientific impossibilities of his situation. And God was faithful (see Genesis 21:1-2).

Through their newborn son, God would fulfill His promise to make of Abraham a great nation, as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5). That promise must have been particularly meaningful to Abraham, given his background in astronomy. He and Sarah, in their old age, finally had the baby boy they had awaited for so long. Their son's name, Isaac (meaning "laughter"), pointed both to their initial disbelief in God's promise and the subsequent joy they found in His faithfulness. God had assured Abraham, years before, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.' And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise" (Hebrews 6:14-15).

In waiting on the Lord for Isaac's birth, Abraham learned to trust God in everything. That lesson was vitally important because it helped prepare the aged patriarch for an even greater test—when God would ask him to give up the very son he loved.

4. Men of Faith Hope in God's Provision

In Genesis 22, God tested Abraham's faith to see exactly where his hope had truly been placed. The Lord said to Abraham, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the region of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you" (verse 2).

It is difficult to imagine what Abraham might have thought when he heard those words—maybe something like: *What is going on? This is the son whom You gave us, Lord, in our old age. When we thought there was no hope of having children, You gave us this boy. Your promise to me about being the father of a great nation is based on this child. He is the descendant who makes it all possible. And now You want me to sacrifice him? There must be some mistake.*

Yet if Abraham had any doubts, they didn't last long. God had

already proven His faithfulness to Abraham in the birth of Isaac. So when Abraham was asked to do the seemingly unthinkable, he responded with confident trust and without complaint.

As Abraham and Isaac approached the place for the sacrifice, Isaac noticed that something was missing. He asked his father, “Behold, the fire and wood [are here], but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham’s faith-filled reply was anchored in his right theology: “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22:7-8). Just moments later, when they reached the designated spot, Abraham tied up his son and prepared to slay him. What could he have been thinking at that moment? According to Hebrews 11:19, as he lifted the knife, Abraham “considered that God was able even to raise [Isaac] from the dead” (ESV). He was so confident in God’s promises that he reasoned, even if his son were to be killed, God would bring him back from the dead. Talk about faith! God had promised to raise up a great nation through Isaac (Genesis 15:5-21), and Abraham knew He would keep His word.

In Genesis 22:12-14, we read that God stopped Abraham from killing his son, instead providing for the sacrifice a ram caught in a nearby thicket. That provision not only spared Isaac’s life, it also pictured the once-for-all provision of Christ on the cross—whereby sinners are saved through His substitutionary sacrifice. Appropriately, “Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, ‘In the mount of the LORD it will be provided’” (verse 14).

Abraham had demonstrated that he was willing to trust the Lord with everything that he had, including his own son. His confidence in God’s promises never wavered; he knew the Lord would provide. Through his actions, he proved that his life was governed by both a God-centered focus and a God-grounded faith.

SAVED BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Our study of Abraham would be incomplete if we did not

consider one crucial aspect of his life. In Romans 4, the apostle Paul used Abraham's example to explain the heart of the gospel—namely, that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone and not on the basis of works. Like every believer before or since, Abraham was justified by faith. Commenting on Genesis 15:6, Paul wrote, “For what does the Scripture say? ‘ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.’ Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:3-5). The apostle's point was that Abraham was saved not on the basis of his own self-righteous deeds, but through faith. His right standing before God was a gift of divine grace, credited to him through no effort or merit of his own. He did nothing to earn his salvation. He simply believed God, and even his faith was a gift of grace, as it is for every believer (Ephesians 2:8).

By faith, Abraham trusted fully in God for his salvation. The same must be true for anyone who desires forgiveness from God and fellowship with Him. In faith, the sinner must recognize his spiritual bankruptcy, crying out for mercy and clinging to the cross. Only those who have been covered with the righteousness of Christ—their sins paid for through His sacrificial death—can enjoy a right standing before God. To quote again from Paul, “Now not for [Abraham's] sake only was it written that it was credited to him [as righteousness], but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification” (Romans 4:23-25). Later in Romans, the apostle reiterated the gospel message with these words: “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (10:9).

At the outset of a book on godly manhood, it is crucial to emphasize that real masculinity—the kind that pleases God—is impossible

apart from saving faith in Christ. The life of faith begins at the moment of regeneration. And those who have not yet experienced God's transforming grace cannot know the sweetness of growing in Christlikeness or walking in His Spirit. Like Abraham, we are called to walk in faith. And like Abraham, that faith begins at the moment of salvation.

LIVING BY FAITH LIKE ABRAHAM DID

Time and again throughout his life, Abraham responded with confident trust in God—even when, from his perspective, the future seemed uncertain. When he could have stayed in Haran, he submitted to God's plan instead. When Sodom was about to be destroyed, he rested in God's righteous character and perfect justice. When he was too old to have children, he believed God's promise. Even when the Lord's command seemed unreasonable—asking Abraham to sacrifice his precious son Isaac—he still placed his hope in God's provision.

In each of these decisions, Abraham put his full confidence in the Lord. Though he did not always know what the outcome would be, he had no reason to doubt or grow anxious. God had everything under control, and Abraham was content to rest in Him, knowing He is faithful. That is the essence of faith—full dependence on our sovereign God both for this life and the life to come.

When we place our hope in the Lord and follow His Word, we demonstrate the same kind of faith that characterized Abraham. To *trust and obey* is not just a well-known lyric; it is the heartbeat of a godly life. Though Abraham was not perfect, his life was marked by that kind of steadfast confidence in God. As such, he serves as a fitting example for us to emulate.