

# Faithful Searchers

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Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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## Hebrews 11:8-16

*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having, seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*

It is no secret at my house that I am a John Wayne fan. I still enjoy watching one of his movies even though I may have seen it a dozen times and know every line before they're spoken. One of his movies, entitled *The Searchers*, is not one of my favorites, but still is a good movie. It was Wayne's favorite of all his movies. Natalie Wood co-starred in the film and portrayed a girl named Debbie Edwards, who had been kidnapped by marauding Comanches when she was young and was reared as an Indian. John Wayne, who played her uncle Ethan Edwards, and Jeffrey Hunter, who played Martin Pawley, set out on what would end up being a five-year journey to find Natalie Wood. Five long and bitter years, years during which others encouraged them to give up the search, Ethan Edwards answered in John Wayne fashion with a line that he repeats throughout the movie, "That'll be the day." He was on a mission that would cost him his life if need be. He was on a search that would not end without the discovery.

What are you searching for today? Are you on a mission, a quest that has seen many disappointments and failures? And does it seem like it's been a long time since you began this search? The fact is we all are on a journey of searching. But many of us are searching for something that we are not sure of. For those of you who can define what you're searching for, many of you would have to confess it seems so elusive, and some of you have decided that it is impossible to find.

You might as well try to catch the wind with your hand as to continue to follow your dreams. There have been moments when it looked like the breakthrough was coming, times when things were rolling in the right direction and any day would bring the long sought after prize. But, like the wind, it sneaked out of your grasp.

Would you consider me cruel if I exposed your heart and said that some of you have retreated into the so-called safe region of monotony? No great expectations ever exist there and thus no great failures happen, but neither does success. Nothing risked, nothing lost—and nothing gained. The region of monotony is a place where dreams are forbidden. Desires are prohibited. Hearts are sealed and locked tight against hope. It's a place to which we retreat because in monotony we can live with ourselves. No one wants to live with a failure. We have come to the realization that our lives are not like the movies. We are not John Wayne, and we do not always find what we search for. And therefore, to ward off the disappointment that unfulfilled hope brings, we just quit hoping. We call dreaming kid's play and we mock lofty goals as pure idealism. We opt to have our feet firmly planted on the soil of reality rather than try to traipse among the stars and the moon. And so we live our lives without the sense of adventure and without the risk of disappointment. We live mediocre and dull lives. For a few moments watching a television show or movie, we get a feeling of excitement as we transpose our pitiful existences into the life of the hero. This is all the excitement we can stand. But the truth is we really want more. Our hearts beat with a desire for more. But for mental and emotional peace we deny such a desire.

This is not the way God intended the Christian to live. Jesus was a risk taker. He lived on the edge. He courted danger and pursued with wild abandon a search that He would not quit. Some of you probably have never viewed our Lord in this manner. You argue, "How could God court danger and take risks if He is God. There are no risks for God." Yes, this is true, but Jesus was also a man. Don't forget he is both "Son of God" and "Son of Man." Jesus was on a journey that would cost Him His life, but He is the only man who has ever lived on this earth having experienced the full abundance of life eternal without interruption. He truly lived life to the fullest. There is something to be said for living on the so-called edge, wouldn't you agree? The Bible says, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). He was on a quest for joy, and the cross was just part of the journey.

You can't have high hopes and not experience bitter pain. The search for the Promised Land cannot happen without Red Seas and bitter waters, and you never occupy it without giants and walled cities opposing you. The dream cannot come true without dream wreckers trying to shatter them with words like, "it can't be done" and "you'll only get hurt in the end." Joseph, the dreamer, had his Egyptian prison; Moses had his desert exile; David had his hiding in caves, and Jesus had His cross. Hope certainly can put excitement into your monotonous life, but it can also bring pain. In fact, it will bring pain. It's just part of it. It's a part of the search, the search for love, happiness and glory. In Hebrews 11:8-16, we discover some men and women who ventured out of the safety of monotony and their routine lives to pursue the adventure. In verse eight, we find God interrupting the monotonous life of an idolater named Abraham and putting in his heart the search for a promise.

## THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

I want to challenge you, you who have run to the safe confines of a routine life. I want you to know that God does not intend for any of us to live that kind of life. You are falling so short of the life God wants you to have and of a heart full of desire. Oh, a life of glory, and of love, and of acceptance. So to those who are Christians, please listen, God wants you to live to His fullest.

In verse eight I want you to look at the call of Abraham.

*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went (Hebrews 11:8).*

Again, I remind you that this whole chapter is ultimately about the glory of God. God is the one who produces faith in these great saints. It was by the word of God that Abraham believed and had faith. The Bible says “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” God spoke to Abraham and when God spoke, Abraham believed. Now we can gain much truth if we stop and think about this. When God spoke to Abraham the first time in the Ur of Chaldees, Abraham was probably somewhere around the age of seventy-five and an idolater.

The Chaldeans did not worship one idol, they worshiped many idols. So we must ask the question, what takes a man from his religion? What turns his system of beliefs round? What happens to a man that so shatters his lifestyle that he is willing to pick up his bags and go to a place that he doesn't even know? The answer is, God steps into your life. The kind of change that Abraham experienced not only changed his life on this earth but changed his eternal destiny. God invaded Abraham's life by grace.

How many other gods had Abraham prayed to and never heard a reply? I wonder how many idols had he prayed to for rain when there was a drought? Did ever one of those idols respond and answer? I wonder how many times he bowed the knee to some statue and asked for a favor and the idol responded with a voice? And how many times did Abraham bow his knee to all of his gods and ask for the one thing that he could not have, a son, an heir? Never did he hear a voice, much less get an answer. But one day God, the only God, broke into Abraham's life. Abraham was not even looking for Him. Talk about amazing grace! Marvelous grace! God pursued him and found him and spoke to him. How many times Abraham prayed for Sarah's womb to be open, but not a stone or a wood idol ever spoke to him, but this God spoke.

Dear friends, I think that is why Abraham got up and left. After all those many years of praying, he never had a god respond one time, and now this God of heaven and earth sought him and spoke to him. Why would he not respond? God spoke to Abraham, and notice what it says. “Abraham . . . obeyed.” Now I want to ask another question. It says that he obeyed and that he went out not knowing whither he went. Is this what is called blind faith? Or is it loving trust? Some would say it is blind faith, and they would try to teach you and me that is what faith is, it is just a step in the dark. It is like Indiana Jones in *The Last Crusade* as he is nearing the end of a maze to find

the Holy Grail. He comes to a gulf between these two walls. A great chasm separates Jones and the grail. At that moment he must make a decision—either go back without the prize or take a leap of faith. Indiana Jones steps out into the chasm, a leap of faith, and to his surprise there is a walkway that supports him that he could not see until he stepped on it. Is that what faith is like, a leap in the dark? Or is it a loving trust in someone on whom you can depend? There is a big difference. It is a difference that we need to find the answer to.

I say faith is a loving trust. You know when God speaks to you that He has never gone back on His word; He has never defaulted on a promise. He will do what He says. That is not a leap into the dark. There is evidence when God speaks. Again, let's remember Hebrews chapter eleven and verse one. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." God does not ask you to leap into blind presumption. He expects you to follow wherever He goes. God spoke to Abraham and told him that He wanted him to get up and get out of the land of his birth, leave his family, and go to a place that God would not tell him beforehand. But God said, "Follow me." It is that very statement that keeps this from being a blind leap of faith.

Because Abraham did not know where he was going didn't mean God didn't know. All Abraham had to do was stay close to God and go wherever God went. How do we want to walk? We want God to walk with us while we lead the way. We want to lead God around and have Him follow us. God didn't ask Abraham, nor does He ask you and me, to walk with Him only if we can see where we are going. He wants us to trust Him. He wants us to be so in love with Him that it doesn't matter where we go. All that matters to us is that we are wherever He is.

But there is the problem, isn't it? That is the rub of this thing. There is something about waiting on God in faith that we resist. I think we resist it for several reasons. First, to walk this way does not allow for input from us. How much input did Joseph have on where God led him and the means which took him to Egypt? None. He had no input or control. When you walk by faith with God you have no input, you have no control, and that is why we don't like walking by faith. We want to be saved by faith, but walking by faith is another issue, and often we resist it. Although we are saved and love Him with all of our hearts, we want a situation where we can have input. We at times would prefer a committee type of situation where we have a voice and some say on where and how we go. But the Lord will not tolerate that. He asks you to latch on to Him and to trust Him. Surely He knows where He is going, and that is why I said a few moments ago, it is not a decision about what you do, what ministry you have, where you work, who you marry, It is all dependant upon Him who is leading us. We are to follow by faith.

Another reason we find walking by faith so difficult is because there is a fear of the unknown. We don't know how He is going to get us there, or the path which He uses. That can be frightening. You can speculate about where He will take you and the means by which He will get you there, but you will seldom be right. He is going to take you in a way which you cannot calculate, for He wants you to desperately depend upon Him.

Yet another reason we don't like to walk by faith is because what if we are wrong in where we thought was God's leading? The fear of disappointment and failure cripples. Dear friends, many of us have banished ourselves to a routine and dull life that seems safe. It is really safe to get up at a certain time, go to a job, perform the job, go home, eat dinner, watch television, go to bed, and turn around and get up and do the same thing the next day. We are afraid to believe God for anything daring or big. God created man for something big. God has placed a sense of destiny in each one of us, a yearning to be involved in something bigger than ourselves and enduring beyond us. There is something in us that desires, craves something more than the routines of our melancholy, monotonous lives. You were designed for greatness.

Are you uncomfortable with that statement? You say, "But our doctrine says we are depraved and corrupt." Absolutely. We are that and more, but that doesn't destroy the purpose God designed for us. He intended us for glory and for greatness. This is the message of David in Psalm eight. It was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s favorite Psalm. It says in verse four,

*What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet (Psalms 8:4- 6).*

Man was designed for greatness. But as a result of sin and the fall, fear has entered the human race that can cripple the best of men and women. When God speaks to us saying, "I want you to walk with me where I will lead you" we ask Him, "Where to?" His reply is, "Trust me," and we panic.

There is something that says let's retreat into the shelter of safety, which is nothing other than routine and monotony. Don't let your heart throb with desire, don't ever hunger for something bigger than the routines of your everyday lives. If you do these things, you probably will fail. That kills the walk of faith and it kills it quickly.

## **THE COVENANT OF ABRAHAM**

What should our response be to the promises of God and the call of faith? Our example is our text - Abraham. In verse nine the writer says that a promise was made to Abraham as well to his descendants.

*By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise (Hebrews 11:9).*

God established a covenant with Abraham. He made this covenant promise to Abraham several times in his life. I think he did that because it was long in coming. He had to reassure Abraham's faith. In Genesis chapter thirteen verses fourteen through sixteen we see the promise restated to Abraham again.

*And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered (Genesis 13:14-16).*

## **THE CHASE OF ABRAHAM**

What I believe we now need to see is how Abraham responds to the covenant of promise. After God made this promise to Abraham, Abraham pursued the promise. This was marvelously impressed upon my mind and heart a year and a half ago when I was reading this. Again verse nine along with verse ten,

*By faith he sojourned In the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

God spoke and faith leaped into the heart of Abraham and he began to follow God. It says he journeyed in the land of promise like a stranger; let me say a few things about this. First, Abraham threw mediocrity and caution to the wind when he left his home. He rejected earth's security. Abraham had not been a nomad for the first seventy-five years of his life. He lived in a permanent dwelling, a home, and he had a permanent job. He did everything just like you and I do. But once God called him, he left a permanent home to dwell in a tent. He left the familiar to dwell in the unfamiliar. The author says a "strange country." Friends, Abraham rejected the routine, and he refused to live by the world's wisdom of caution. That is the life that you and I are to live. Not a nomadic life but a life that is not dependent upon the world or its system.

God has placed us on this planet for a short moment. Life now is a training period for Heaven itself. We are to live as Christ lived, which means living on the edge, living with a purpose, and committing ourselves to something bigger than ourselves. You can't get there by doing what you are doing now. If you want the same results, just keep doing what you are doing now. But if you want something more for yourself and for your life to weigh and count for eternity, you are going to have to let the heart fill with desire again. You are going to have to let your heart experience adventure as well as disappointment and not be afraid of it. Abraham chased a promise. Verse ten says he "looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God." He was constantly moving. As you read the life of Abraham in Genesis chapter twelve through chapter twenty-five, you read over and again that he journeyed and sojourned. Constantly you see Abraham being uprooted, moved, shifting, never staying in one place very long. In fact, when Sarah his wife died, he had no land of his own to even bury her. He had to purchase a cave to bury his wife. Here he was in the land that God had "given him" but didn't even own land to bury his wife. Now what drives a man to live such an unconventional life? What draws a man to leave his homeland?

How do I explain this to you so that you can see this man's faith in God? What would motivate you to quit your job, sell your home, pack your things, rent a U-Haul, get in the truck, and when your wife looks at you and asks, "Where are we going, sweetheart?" you look at her and say, "Honey, I don't have a clue." That is exactly what Abraham did. What drives a man like that? In Abraham's case it was faith in a promise, the promise of a city.

Now we do not have recorded in the book of Genesis, or anywhere else, except right here in Hebrews a promise that God made to Abraham of a future city. If he was looking for a city whose builder and maker was God, then he had to have received a promise for the city. Therefore, while he was in the land of Canaan he never stayed in one place because he was still looking for that city. He was looking for a city that didn't have tents and cords and stakes for its foundation, but a foundation that was secure and stable, whose builder and maker was God. I cannot help but believe that for the first few years in Abraham's trek through the land of promise, he was looking for a physical city. He never quit the search.

## **THE CONFESSION OF ABRAHAM**

But Abraham in his lifetime on earth never received the promised city. This leads us to the confession of Abraham. During his life he was chasing after this promise of an inheritance and a city, but there is a confession made in verse thirteen that states he never got the promise in his lifetime

*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth (Hebrews 11:13).*

This is the chapter about faith. Today we are told that if you have faith you will always get what you pray for. When we think of faith, we think of somebody who is so bold to believe God for the impossible and the impossible happens, like Moses at the Red Sea, David with the giant, and Daniel in the lions' den. You normally don't think of faith and not getting your prayers answered do you? But that is exactly what the text says, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises."

Notice how they died, they "died in faith." Abraham never quit the chase for the promise. In Acts chapter seven verse five, Stephen gives us insight into this matter. In Stephen's defense, Stephen gives this testimony about Abraham, "And he gave him no inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child."

How do we reconcile this? If God promised Abraham an inheritance, how could God not give him the fulfillment of the promise? No wonder the Sanhedrin got upset with Stephen that day. He was attacking the very foundation of their whole system of religion. God made a promise to Abraham and Stephen says God did not give him any inheritance. How could this be?

God made many promises to Abraham, but two particular promises need to be highlighted. The first was Abraham would own the land in which he journeyed and the second was for a city that God had built. Abraham never received Canaan as an inheritance, but it was given to his descendants. He died without obtaining them. So here is the question, why believe these promises and continue to pursue them up to the moment of death? Why in his dying breath does he still look for the promise? The answer is in verses fourteen, fifteen and sixteen of our text Hebrews eleven.

For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

Abraham was older now. He had matured in the faith and realized that God didn't make this promise for the here and now, rather, it was a better country; something better than this old wasteland that he had been traveling in for over a hundred years. Abraham got what God promised. He got something better than what he first expected. He professed that in this world he was a stranger and a pilgrim. This world was not his permanent dwelling place.

*This world is not my home,  
I'm just a passing thru.  
My treasures are laid up  
Somewhere beyond the blue.  
The angels beckon me  
To heaven's open door.  
And I can't feel at home  
In this world anymore.*

How can you understand Stephen when he says God made a promise but Abraham didn't receive it? How do you understand God's faithfulness in light of this? The answer why Abraham did not receive the promise during his life, but lived his life as a stranger is found in this passage. It is that he, Abraham, desired a better country. It was not that Abraham was deceived by God. God kept His promises—death does not end our lives. Jesus told us that whoever believes in Him never dies. There is a wonderful lesson for us, dearly beloved. It is a lesson for the Christian who is struggling under difficulty, who has had to linger there long, wondering "Why do I continue to strive against hope? Why do I keep the fight of trying to hold on to the flame of fire, the flame of hope that is now just a smoldering glimmer?"

Abraham is a type of the saint whom the Lord has promised to give the earth to. "The meek shall inherit the earth." The earth is ours, this world is ours. One day there will be no more war. There will be no more sickness; there will be no more suffering. It is going to be ours. I applaud and commend preachers who want to make that a reality now. They believe in a theology that says the church can influence this world and literally turn it around for God, and then He will come back and sit on the throne of His kingdom. We will change the world and then Jesus will



come back. I applaud that kind of zeal, but it is not scriptural. The Bible says that that promise will not be ours in our lifetime; but there is coming a glorious day when He will change the world and not us. He will transform it, and He will judge it with fire. Abraham was willing to live for a dream, and, friends, you and I are to live just like Abraham, as pilgrims in this world. We too are in search of a “city whose builder and maker is God.” Yet in our lifetime on this earth we will not receive it. We, like Abraham, are to live like pilgrims in a strange land and look for the Celestial City. But one glorious day that City will appear and will be brought down to the earth and we will receive the promise.

Abraham’s life teaches to never stop trusting God and to not allow death to rob us of faith. Abraham was willing to live for a dream and a hope even if it meant dying to obtain the dream. Even if in this life his hands never clasped the prize, he would not live life without the desire for the promise. For years he searched for his dream’s fulfillment and only in death did he discover it. What fueled this kind of determination? Faith. Faith allowed Abraham to understand a truth that we still struggle with, and that is that death is not the end of life. He believed God when God said He would do certain things for Abraham, and, therefore, if death came before the promises were fulfilled, it meant that death was not the end and after death the promises would be his. Besides for seventy-five years Abraham had lived in the safe region of monotony before God stepped into his life with a call, and he did not want to return. I believe Abraham was willing to live the nomadic lifestyle and be a stranger, a pilgrim in a strange country, because it fed something in his heart that all of us have within our desire.

Abraham was living for something bigger than himself. In each one of you there is that same longing to live for something bigger than yourself. Faith is the only way in which you can pursue it, faith in the promise of God that He has built a city for us. Our world is collapsing around us. Today the majority of teenagers admit they do not see their futures being better than they are now. If such pessimism reigns in our children, how will it be better?

Who of you today long, crave, hunger for something different from the monotonous lives you live? That is why sin is so appealing to so many. It affords them the only titillation and excitement they believe possible to them. Men are not naturally or genetically alcoholics, drug addicts, sexual deviants, fortune hunters, fame seekers. These are just the means by which they try to satisfy the craving of the deepest recesses of their heart-to know happiness, acceptance and love. God created us in His image, and although that image is marred and mangled, it is still there. The image of God has within it the love of glory, and when that is planted in a creature of clay, there will always be a longing in the soul of that something bigger than himself.

Oh, our lives are so very short, it is like the fog that was here this morning, and now it is gone. Let me tell you something else about fog, it is not only short lived, but it has no permanent dwelling place. Fog has no place to stay, and that is exactly what our lives are to be like in this world. We have no part in this world. I love this country, but this country is not my home. Democracy is not my government. I belong to a government which has a King and the King rules. I am just a stranger here. No wonder our society doesn’t make sense to us. We don’t have a feeling of

permanency here! We must not feel permanent here. We had better not like it here too much.

I ask you what will you live this day and every day of the rest of your lives for? Safety and convenience? Will you live today solely for the purpose that you can live another? Did you get up this morning with the prospect of finding adventure in God, or because it was another day and you must go through the motions of another day? Is that all you're living your life for? You have been assigned a certain number of days. That is your life, the allotment of days. When you retire this evening you have one less day to live. How will you spend this day? Will you, like the foolish servant fearing his master, dig a hole and plant your Investment? Will you play it safe or will you throw caution to the wind and risk trusting God for your dreams. God made you to dream. Listen to Him and He'll give you the dream you are to pursue, and when you have heard Him, then faith will be yours to follow the dream. Amen.