

Faith Comes by Hearing from God

It is truly amazing that an idol worshipping pagan, like Abraham was, could be stopped in his tracks by a personal encounter with God to such a degree that the course of his whole life was radically redirected and relocated – that is what the transforming power of faith can do!!!

Today, we are going to explore this transforming power of faith in Abraham's life from the New Testament perspective of the writer of the Book of Hebrews as he explains the impact and inner workings of faith in Abraham's experiences.

Heb 11:8-10

⁸By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

A number of years ago, while I was working for Compassion Australia, I began to become aware that my time with Compassion was coming to an end. I didn't know exactly when, and I didn't know what I would be doing when I moved on, I just knew that I would be doing something different somewhere else in God's kingdom.

Have you ever been in a situation like that? That is exactly the situation that Abraham found himself in! Let's look again at that reference to Abraham in the Book of Hebrews:

This is a beautiful picture of exactly how faith works – Abraham's response of faith in God's word to him set him on a journey - a journey of faith!!! And this is the type of journey that we are all on, and particularly for us at Chelsea Community Church. So today, we are going to take the time to explore this realm of 'faith' to better understand how it was working in Abraham's journey, which will help us to understand it better in our own life journeys.

This is going to be a genuine 'faith journey', both individually and as a church, and unless we approach it in this manner, we run the risk of selling ourselves short on what God is wanting to achieve in and through us over this time. My challenge to all of us is this: that we all intentionally lean into this process with active faith, trusting God to reveal to us his plan and purpose as we move forward with him.

In the lead-up to the writer of Hebrew's example of Abraham's response to God, which we just read about, he has built a framework that explains the need for faith and how it works:

⁶And without trusting, it is impossible to be well pleasing to God, because whoever approaches him must trust that he does exist and that he becomes a rewarder to those who seek him out.
(Heb 11:6 – Complete Jewish Bible)

What is being referred to here, is the power that is inherent in biblical 'faith' – it is **'faith in someone'** borne out of the experiences of a personal relationship, rather than just **'facts about someone'**, which are unrelated to our own experience of that person.

Life is a journey for all of us and one of the key elements of our faith journey with God is the issue of trust - *can I trust God to always be with me to lead, guide, and provide for me???*

So, let's address this biblical concept of 'trust', which clearly implies a *known relationship* that is at the heart of any biblical revelation – our God is a relational Being who loves us and makes himself known to us – he 'reveals' himself to us. And that is exactly the point that the writer to the Hebrew Christians is wanting to make. We need to explore how he constructs his thinking by looking at the previous verse:

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken from this life so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found because God had taken him away." For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. ⁶And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe (trust) that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Question: When it says "By faith, Enoch was taken..." – what does that mean?

Answer: Because of his faith which he had received through his relationship with God!!!
"One who pleases God" is one who is in 'right' relationship with God – a trusting relationship!!!

In other words, we come to trust God because *we come to know* him, and we learn through those 'discipling' experiences that he and his word are trustworthy!!!

So, the first thing for us to understand regarding 'faith' is that it is totally relational in nature. The reason for that is that God is totally relational in his nature – Father, Son and Spirit created us out of his love for relationship and for the purpose of having a relationship with us.

So, 'faith' is the outcome of our reciprocal relationship with our Creator/Saviour – God reveals himself to us through his Word and Spirit, creating faith within us, which we respond to by means of the faith that he has planted within us – this is both what *pleases God* and *nourishes our souls!!!*

These Scriptures make clear the reality that 'faith' is 'a capacity to believe/trust' – that we receive from God the Holy Spirit on the basis of who Jesus is, and what he has done for us, and consequently, what he is saying to us.

So, how do we receive faith????

The apostle Paul gives us some clarity on this process in Rom 10:8-9, 17, which he is citing from Deut 43:11-14. The context of this passage is around Paul's explanation, firstly, of how the 'word of faith', or more precisely, the 'word that produces faith' operates, and secondly, of the need for the Gospel to be preached in order for people to hear it so that faith can then be produced in the hearers as they are impacted by it.

⁸ *But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: ⁹ If you **declare with your mouth**, "Jesus is Lord," and **believe in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

¹⁷ *Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. (ESV)* Rom 10:8, 9 & 17

Heinz Cassirer, a Jewish philosopher who has come to faith in Jesus, translates this verse like this: *Faith, then, comes through what is heard, and what is heard has its source in its having been spoken by Christ.* (A New Testament Translation)

So, faith comes by hearing the living word of Christ to our hearts – or even more simply, faith comes by hearing a word from God!!!

Jesus makes the same point in Matt 4:4 in his response to Satan's temptation:

⁴ *Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

Matthew expresses Jesus' response, which is a quote from Deut 8:3, that the life of faith is one that depends on the sustenance brought to us by God's word being spoken to us.

The phrase, 'Every word that comes from the mouth of God', is couched in the Greek of the New Testament, as **a present participle**, which is literally saying, 'every word that is *currently coming* from the mouth of God' – in other words, it is what God is saying 'now' is what generates faith. Even though it was written centuries ago, God can be speaking it 'now' to us through the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit!

Jesus said, *"...the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."* Jn

14:26

Tell my story of hearing from God as an 18yo on my way to work one morning!!!

It is the Holy Spirit who causes the written word of God to become the *living voice* of God to our human spirit – this is where faith comes from!!!

This is where the faith that Abraham had received from God came from – when God tapped Abram on the shoulder and spoke to him the way he did, faith was ignited in his heart.

We are going to follow Abraham's faith journey over the next month or so, and learn with and from him that the journey of faith is an ongoing one that develops in strength and intensity as we grow in our relationship with our Creator and Lord.