

ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Portrait of a Hero . . . Warts and Everything

Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–12, 17–19



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In our final study of Abraham's amazing journey of faith, we reflect on a man who walked through life as a "friend of God" (James 2:23) but who was anything but perfect. The author of Abraham's biography painted a realistic portrait of the old Patriarch, warts and everything. Abraham soared the heights of godliness but also plummeted to the depths of fear and foolishness.

The benefits of studying the real Abraham are fourfold.

- *We can translate truth into life.* What does it mean to be a "friend of God" and walk closely with Him? Abraham gives us a flesh-and-blood example to follow.
- *We feel a closer kinship with the person we've admired from a distance.* Discovering that Abraham's family was not so different than ours reminds us that God still uses imperfect people.
- *We are stabilized when we have similar experiences.* Think of Abraham and Sarah's heartache through years of infertility, their grief over moving away from their homeland, or their intense family conflicts. The lessons they learned can instruct and steady us in our hard times.
- *We are enabled to maintain a divine perspective.* Although Abraham strayed periodically into worry and fear, he always returned to a divine perspective. We can learn from him to move beyond failure and keep our eyes on God.

Quotable

*Great things
await you if
you're willing
to obey without
knowing all
the details.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Portrait of a Hero . . . Warts and Everything

Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–12, 17–19

Did you experience these benefits during our study of Abraham's life? Did you see truth more clearly or feel a closer kinship with Abraham? Were you stabilized in hard times? Did this study help you see God's perspective when you were tested? If so, we've learned some valuable spiritual lessons together. Keep these lessons in mind as we replay the highlights of Abraham's life with Hebrews 11 as a guide, and let's grow more!



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

The author of Hebrews opens chapter 11 with this definition of faith:

Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.
(Hebrews 11:1)

This truth may seem abstract and theoretical at first, until we see it modeled by Abraham and Sarah. Write a prayer asking the Lord to help you grasp the concepts of faith and hope through our review. Write your prayer in this space.



Observation: Abraham's Faith

A key principle in the *Searching the Scriptures* process is observation. Remember to look for repeated words, commands, questions, emphatic statements, and images or figures of speech. Reading different Bible versions can give you a fresh perspective of the same passage. If you don't have different versions handy, there are plenty of Web sites that can help you (biblestudytools.com, bible.org, or biblegateway.com, to name a few).



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Portrait of a Hero . . . Warts and Everything

Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–12, 17–19

Read carefully and slowly Hebrews 11:8–12, 17–19. Look for the repeating phrase, *by faith*. Circle this phrase in your Bible, if you wish. How many times does it appear? Write down what Abraham and Sarah *did* by faith.

Recall the phrases which define faith from Hebrews 11:1: “reality of what we hope for” and “evidence of things we cannot see.” What were the “realities” for which Abraham and Sarah hoped? (Hint: look closely at Hebrews 11:8, 11.)

Imagine Abraham and Sarah with their feet planted on the Promised Land and their arms holding the promised child. These realities that they could see with their eyes and touch with their hands and feet were evidence of “things” they could *not* see or touch. What were the things Abraham and Sarah did not experience but still, by faith, believed God would accomplish (Hebrews 11:10, 12)?

Abraham and Sarah didn't live to see the city or the nation God promised, but with eyes of faith they saw them in the distance and welcomed them (11:13).



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Portrait of a Hero . . . Warts and Everything

Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–12, 17–19

The Heights: Abraham's Abundance of Faith

In what specific ways did Abraham express his faith? Let's scan the mountain range of his life and observe four pinnacles of faith.

When Abraham was called, he obeyed. Abraham expressed his faith by obeying “when God called him to leave home and go to another land” (Hebrews 11:8). Abraham took with him his family and his possessions, knowing very little about his destination. God didn't even give him a map! What typical travel aids that we usually take with us on journeys did Abraham *not* have when he embarked on his journey?

According to Chuck Swindoll, an essential element of faith is not knowing:

Great rewards await if you obey without knowing all the details. It's a principle God wants each of His followers to experience. Learning to trust Him is like making a journey step after step. Faith builds upon faith. When we trust, we receive unexpected blessings. This strengthens our confidence and inspires us to trust God again as we take another step.¹

What Abraham was promised, he believed. Abraham took God's promise literally. What promise did Abraham believe, and what sacrifices do you think he made by living “like a foreigner, living in tents” (11:9)?



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Portrait of a Hero . . . Warts and Everything

Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–12, 17–19



Correlation: Paul's Perspective on Abraham's Faith

Read Romans 4:19–21. What additional insight can you glean from Paul's teaching about Abraham? Try reading the passage in *The Message* for a more colorful description of Abraham and Sarah's faith. You can find *The Message* at biblegateway.com. What do you discover?

Despite their infertility, aging Abraham and Sarah believed against all odds God could fill their empty arms with a son, just as He promised. "Don't let the odds of any situation keep you from trusting God," advises Chuck Swindoll.²

When Abraham was tested, he trusted. The author to the Hebrews peers inside Abraham's mind to reveal the thought that bolstered Abraham's faith when God told him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Observing Hebrews 11:17–19, what reassurance helped Abraham trust when tested?

Do you remember the comment Abraham made to his servants when they arrived at the mountain for the sacrifice?

"The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back." (Genesis 22:5, emphasis added)

Don't miss the implication of the little pronoun *we*: "we will come right back." Somehow, Abraham knew Isaac would return with him. What trust!



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Portrait of a Hero . . . Warts and Everything

Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–12, 17–19

When Abraham was blessed, he shared. For this final point, we exit the halls of Hebrews 11 and scale the hillside overlooking the Jordan valley, where Abraham offered Lot first choice of the land (Genesis 13:5–10). And then, we fast-forward to the end of Abraham's life when he gave all he had to Isaac and gave generous gifts to his other sons (25:5–6).

What is the source from which Abraham's generosity flowed? Find the wellspring in Genesis 12:2–3; 13:15; and 24:35.

The Depths: Abraham's Lack of Faith

Between the pinnacles of faith in Abraham's life plunge three faith-deficient valleys.

When he was afraid, he retreated. Abraham retreated geographically by fleeing the famine-stricken land for Egypt, and he retreated personally by lying about his marriage to Sarah and abandoning her when Pharaoh took her into his harem (Genesis 12:10–13).

When he became impatient, he listened to the wrong counsel. Abraham couldn't wait for God to fulfill His promise of a son, so he took Sarah's unwise counsel and fathered a child with Hagar (16:1–2).

When he faced a similar test, he repeated the same failure. In a situation with Abimelech that mirrored the situation with Pharaoh, Abraham lied again. Isaac acquired his father's bad habit and jeopardized Rebekah in the same way (26:6–11).

Whether Abraham climbed to the heights of faith or sank to the depths, he never abandoned God . . . and God never abandoned him. Now let's look at the meaning we can glean from our review of Abraham's life.



Interpretation: What Does It Mean?

Bible stories are rich sources of principles for godly living. We learn best by example, don't we? Lists of points are quickly forgotten, but the story of Abraham's willingness to release his son, for example, sets memorable pegs in our minds so the next time we're called to trust God, we have some guidelines to hang on to.



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Portrait of a Hero . . . Warts and Everything

Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–12, 17–19

What are the timeless principles from Abraham's life that God's Word sets like pegs in your mind? Look over the observation section of our study, and write down the principles that stand out to you.

Do you sense God leading you? *Follow!* Has God made you promises? *Believe!* Are you experiencing a time of testing? *Trust!* Has God blessed you? *Share!* Let Abraham and Sarah's example be your guide on your own amazing journey of faith.

Application: Valuable Lessons We Can Learn

Abraham's story is our story. We're all nomads in this world and scaling heights of faith and slipping into valleys of fear. Despite the ups and downs, we're always moving forward to our eternal destination, "confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God" (Hebrews 11:10).

Conclude this series by telling the Lord how you intend to put into practice one or two of the concluding principles from this study. What will you do in the coming days to make Abraham's faith your own?

Now, let's pray with hearts of praise to Abraham's God . . . who is our God too.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the magnificent way You speak to me from the life of a man and his wife who lived more than 4,000 years ago. Though the people and places are unfamiliar, the truths linger as lifelong companions. I pray You will use an imperfect person like me in the same way You used imperfect Abraham and Sarah. You are the perfect One, forgiving and patient—the only One worth following and worthy of praise. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 249.
2. Swindoll, *Abraham*, 251.



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Portrait of a Hero . . . Warts and Everything

Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–12, 17–19

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

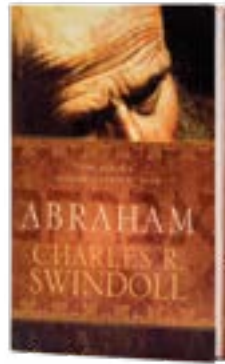
STUDY



Tools for Digging Deeper



**Abraham: One Nomad's
Amazing Journey of Faith**
by Charles R. Swindoll
Classic CD series



**Abraham: One Nomad's
Amazing Journey of Faith**
by Charles R. Swindoll
Hardcover book



**Faith for the Journey:
Daily Meditations on
Courageous Trust in God**
by Charles R. Swindoll
LeatherLike book

For these and related resources, visit www.insightworld.org/store
or call USA 1-800-772-8888 • AUSTRALIA +61 3 9762 6613 • CANADA 1-800-663-7639 • UK +44 1306 640156

For the 2017–2018 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Searching the Scriptures Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



www.insight.org | www.insightworld.org

Copyright © 2013, 2014, 2017 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide.
Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.
Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application