

Ripple Effect

Hebrews 11:8 NIV

By 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.

What Is Faith?

Thirty years ago I went on vacation to Florida and while there I took a ride with a stunt pilot in an airplane that had an open air cockpit. I buckled my seat belt and up we went; just the two of us. For just fifteen dollars, I got the opportunity to get thoroughly sick to my stomach and weak in my knees. As we gently flew over the beach of St. Augustine, I grew impatient, wanting more of a “thrill ride” than I was getting. I wondered when the stunts would begin. Just as I was getting entirely too comfortable, the pilot turned around and asked me if I wanted to do some stunts. “Of course”, I stupidly replied and so off we went. First, we did a four point barrel roll and for what seemed like an eternity, we flew upside down. If I had anything in my shirt pocket, it would have fallen straight into the Atlantic. Then he took me up into the sky, pointing directly at the sun and as we ascended, everything turned red and I fought to remain conscious. Suddenly, the pilot killed the engine and we flipped over and we went straight down toward the water. It was unbearable, I was so scarred. Without warning as I stared down at the Ocean flying toward me, I blacked out. But then we pulled out of the dive and with a pounding headache crushing my joy, we returned to the tiny airport. I crawled out of the cockpit and with my legs wobbly and my heart pounding, I stumbled over to my friends who

congratulated me on my courage to go up in the plane. No one else went; no one else was willing to put their lives in the hands of the stunt pilot after they had seen my flight past death's door. No one else had the faith I did to give it a try.

Faith is a most practical thing, one of the most practical matters we face. We can say we have faith but the truth is we don't if it does not manifest itself in a practical change in behavior. My friends could have said they had faith in the stunt pilot's skill in flying or in the capability of the plane to keep them aloft but they did not really until they actually strapped on their seatbelt and climbed up into the sky in the care of both plane and aviator. We might say we have faith but do we? Would we really have faith in God if we lost our retirement? How would anyone know we had faith? Would we really have faith in God if a teacher of ours made a negative comment about the Bible? How would anyone know we had faith? Would we have faith in God if at the job interview we were told that we would be working on Sunday mornings? How would anyone know we had faith? Would we have faith in God if we got in a car accident and it was our fault? How would anyone know we had faith? Would we have faith in God if we were at a club with friends? How would anyone know we had faith? Would we have faith in God if our supervisor told us to lie about something? How would anyone know we had faith? Would we have faith in God if our boyfriend or girlfriend started pressuring us to have sex? How would anyone know we had faith? What is faith practically?

This topic came up in a cell group recently and it centered around the action of Abraham who was commanded by God to go to Canaan and settle there but after he arrived found there was a famine and so he relocated to Egypt where food was plentiful. I was still considering his

action when during my morning Bible reading I came upon the dilemma of David before he was made King of Israel by the people. He had already been anointed the next king of Israel by God through the actions of Samuel the prophet yet he was, in the eyes of everyone else, still an underling, (and a hated underling) of the reigning king, Saul. In 1 Samuel 24 we discover David's plight. King Saul, due to his jealousy of David's popularity among the people, had decided to kill David. Time after time though David escaped Saul's violent and deadly wrath and was forced to go into hiding with a group of six hundred fellow outcasts of society who looked to David for leadership. Saul, with his vast army had come after David but was having a terrible time catching him. Finally, in the desert of En Gedi, King Saul caught up with his prey. The only problem was, he didn't know how close he actually was. When Saul went into a cave to relieve himself, he was within arm's reach of the hiding David and his men. David's companions urged him to kill Saul then and there and so rid himself forever of his enemy and the danger Saul brought them all. David was already anointed king by God and the men with David were stoked by the prospect of David gaining the reins of the Kingdom at last. We can only imagine the relief they felt at no longer having to hide from the terrible danger of Saul's army and finally being able to settle down with their wives and children at peace.

There was only one flaw in the developing plan. David was not willing to kill his king. He was dead set against violating God's law and taking the life, by his own hand, of the ruler of his nation. It would have been a direct violation of how the Lord has the Universe ordered. Nothing so tempts us as an easy way to gain what we want and maybe even need. David could have justified killing Saul because it was merely an act of self-defense. He could have made it a moral imperative by

swinging the matter into the sway of deliverance for his men and relieving them of their terrible circumstances. Nearly any action can be pulled over this way. The temptation may or may not have been suffocating for the future king. We don't know how it pressed upon him but the upshot of it was that he refused the easier way and held back his sword from Saul's throat. It was in fact an act of faith on David's part; one that smarted nonetheless. He made a practical confession of his faith in God by shrinking back into the cave when he could have exited triumphantly. By giving in to the Lord's authority in the matter, David trusted God to preserve his life, take care of his men and their families and hold to his promise to make him king. It was faith in God and nothing less that saved Saul's life and held back David's hand. Faith here was not a noble thought, nor a loving affection; it was a act based on the decision to not violate God's law to make life better for himself or those closest to him. Faith was trust that in every part of life, God would be obeyed and that in the end God Himself would make all things right for him.

Another example makes this clearer. Ruth the Moabite had married a Jew who had immigrated to Ruth's pagan homeland of Moab. When Ruth's husband died and her father-in-law also died, Ruth was a widow along with her mother-in-law. Ruth was not homeless; she still had her relatives and certainly still had her country and religion to lean upon but when her mother-in-law Naomi decided to go back to Israel, Ruth followed suit. She also left and went to Israel. Now, she did not know what to expect when she arrived in Israel. She could be despised and hated, treated like a slave or left to fend for herself. Looking back, we have the testament of history to reassure us of her decision. Ruth though did not have the same hindsight. All she had was the command of God to have no other gods before the Lord. In Moab, that would

have been nearly impossible. In Israel though, Ruth could worship the Lord as sole God freely and without hindrance. The familiar culture and comfortable tongue were not enough to keep Ruth back nor was the kinship that she had in Moab. She in faith struck out because she wanted to obey the one great command to love the Lord God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Faith was not a winsome feeling of affinity; it was a hard, cold decision to troop off with her mother-in-law and trust God to provide for her. How could Ruth have said she had faith in the Lord if she did not do something about it; in this case obeying God when it cost her dearly?

Now there is a ripple effect in faith. It is illustrated perfectly with Ruth. If she had not gone to Israel to live within the one true God, she would not have met Boaz. If she had not met Boaz, she would not have given birth to a son named Obed. If she had not given birth to that son Obed, he would not have been the grandfather of David. If Obed had not been the grandfather of Obed, then Mary would never have been born and given birth to Jesus. There is most certainly a ripple effect in every act; we just cannot be sure what that might be. If Abraham had acted in faith, he never would have fathered a rival son through his wife's servant Hagar. If Rachel had acted in faith and left behind her father's idol, she would not have brought her husband's curse upon her own head. If Paul had not acted in faith and rejected his Pharisaic upbringing, the Church might have remained only in Palestine and the nations around it. Faith and the lack of faith have long lasting ripple effects. We just don't know what they are until their fruit ripens.

Every act, not done in faith veers us off into the direction of chaos and satanic disorder. How far it takes us and how much destruction it brings, we don't know. Every act done in faith out of obedience to

what God clearly says to do steers us straight in the planning and watch care of Christ. There is a ripple effect each time we decide to follow God regardless how it looks and not follow God because of how it looks. Obedience to God keeps us in line with God; disobedience catapults us out of that same line. You cannot have it both ways when it comes to living your life. Either in faith you do what God says and you live out the ripple of God or you without faith don't do what God says and you live out the ripple of Satan. It always comes down to this. We fear our circumstances, fear our finances, fear our relationships or fear our health and do what we think best or we walk with God and fear nothing but the evil Satan wants to bring us if we don't act in faith. Every act must be subordinate to faith in Christ or else we run the risk of veering off the cliff. What if David had killed Saul in the cave because he was scared? We don't know. What if you had an abortion instead of giving birth because you were scared? We don't know. What if you quit when God said keep going? We don't know. What if you didn't speak out when everyone else believed a lie? We don't know. What if you gave up on a friend? We don't know. What if you had courage and did what God said? We don't know. What if you gave it your best when failure seemed certain? We don't know. But wouldn't you like to be sure you are doing what God told you to do and in faith shake your fist at fear? Take a chance this week. Do something by faith. Pass out a Gospel tract. Openly express your love of Christ. Let a grievance go and bless the person who hurt you. Say "no" to a certain sin. Leave the old land behind and go where you have not been yet. Walk along with old Abraham. Walk in faith.