

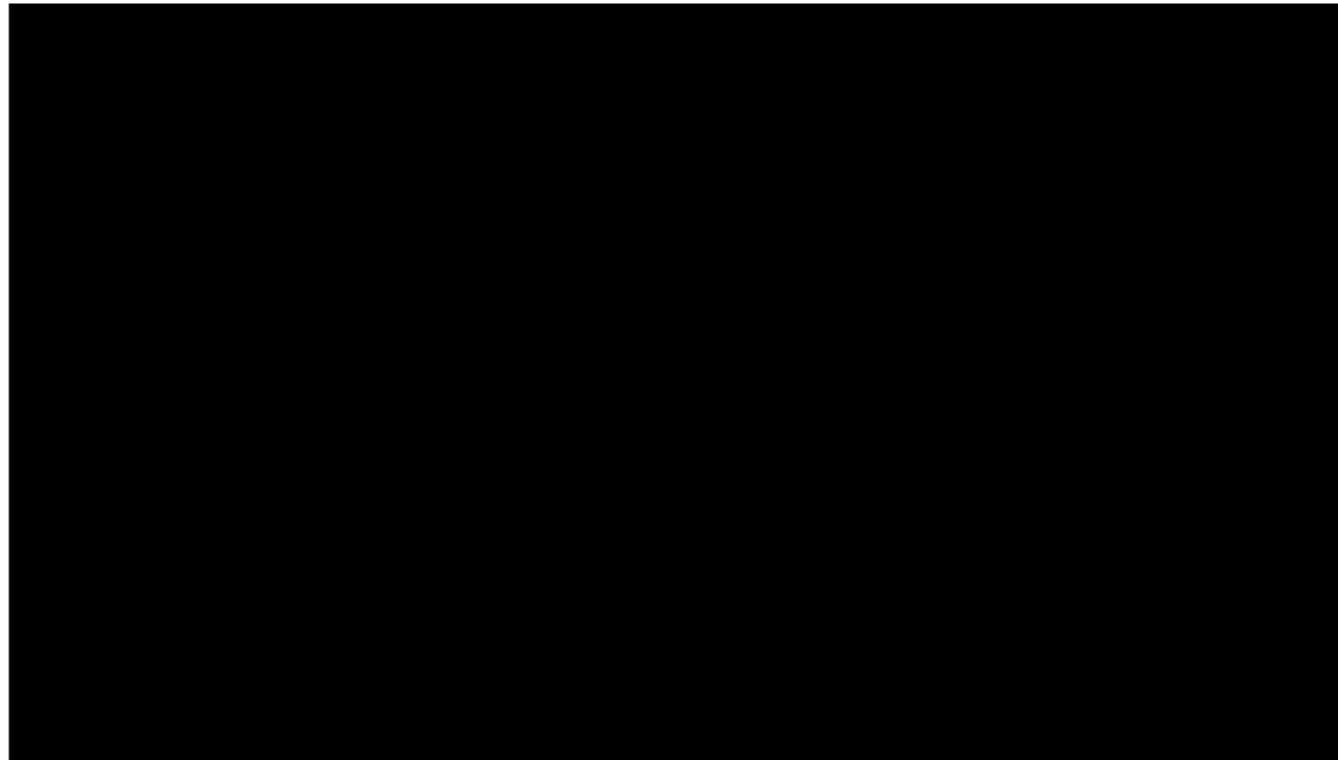
**Hebrews**



**Promises  
Faithfully  
Kept**



I remember in a psychology course in college that we were given stress tests, not physical but mental and emotional. We weren't put through a barrage. We were just asked to fill out a questionnaire regarding different major foundations in life: relationships, work, housing, health. Basically, each question had a numerical rating associated with it. The higher the number, the more stress you had in your life. The more stress you have, the more likely you are to make bad decisions that affect your life. It helped make clear for college freshmen and sophomores that we were vulnerable to breakdowns or fractured thinking if we took on too much stress at one time. If we did take on too much, we should realize our need for help.



Some stressors are placed on us outside of our control. Others are matters we bring on ourselves. There are things we can do to counter the stress: a healthy diet, exercise, good sleep.

But in all the matters, maintaining healthy, helpful friendships and relationships was very important. Relationships give us bearings, especially our relationship to God.

The Church is the people who in this world recognize that we are weak and have acknowledged our need for a savior. Our vulnerability, then, is not a reason for shame but provides the avenues by which God's strength shines in us and through us.

As Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 12:7–10

a thorn in the flesh was given to me . . . so that I would not exalt myself. 8 Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness."

Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. 10 So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Read with me from Hebrews 11:13-22

To put it in the thoughts of the author of Hebrews, by means of Christ we are to come to God in our time of need. When stresses tempt us to close off everyone, including God, that is when we must realize our need forgot the most. Instead of turning from him we need to trust him all the more and come to him.

**13 These all died in faith, not  
having received the things  
promised, but having seen them  
and greeted them from afar,**

**and having acknowledged that  
they were strangers and exiles  
on the earth.**

**14 For people who speak thus  
make it clear that they are  
seeking a homeland.**

**15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.**

**16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.**



**17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises**

**was in the act of offering up his  
only son, 18 of whom it was  
said, “Through Isaac shall your  
offspring be named.”**

**19 He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.**

**20 By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.**

**21 By faith Jacob, when dying,  
blessed each of the sons of  
Joseph, bowing in worship over  
the head of his staff.**

**22 By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.**



**We may be social outsiders now,  
but keep trusting God that we  
are citizens of a greater city.  
(vv. 13-16)**

We may be social outsiders now, but keep trusting God's promise that we are citizens of a greater city. (vv. 13-16)

Miscommunication/misunderstanding last week—good emphasis on the city we are looking forward to and on the need to live as missionaries wherever we are.

- Verse 13 starts a shift in how the author was speaking about the patriarchs. He begins to focus on the manner with which each of the patriarchs, from Abraham through Joseph, faced death. They faced death according to faith.

- o What does living in the land of Caanan have to do with death? Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for most of his life, lived in the land that they were promised to have as theirs, but they did not try to make it fully theirs. This is yours but not yet. They were content to trust that God would keep His promise in His time.

- o So in the land that they were promised would belong to them, they were treated as strangers and temporary aliens. Imagine going to a home with your lawyer and your name is on the deed of the property, but other people are living there. Your advocate tells you just to work as a groundskeeper until the appropriate time to reveal that you are the proper owner.

- o The patriarchs were treated as paupers in the place their descendants would have princes.

- Do you ever get tired of waiting, waiting for Christ to return and make everyone aware of the truth He is king? In making people aware that He is king, His people will be shown to be of His kingdom at that time. Sometimes it feels like our circumstances make it harder to wait.

- Let's keep in mind today that the world doesn't know what to do with us, at least it doesn't know what to do with us if we actually speak up as witnesses for Christ. The world is fine with us minding our own business. Christians tend to make great workers because of our perspective that our work is part of our worship unto Christ. We tend to make great citizens who contribute toward our cities and try not to complain, at least not too much.

- They don't know what to do with us when we start speaking up about Christ because Jesus sets people free from the fears of the world and the darkness of sin. People can be controlled by other people if others know what fears or temptations control them. I grew up on a farm. We knew how to get cattle from one area to another. We had one person guarding escape routes with shockers, rods that emit an electric shock similar to a dog training collar. It was enough to promote fear in the cows to keep them from going that route. Think kind of like how internet trolls and celebrities or politicians try to cancel people out. Don't speak up, or the world might shock you with



the cancel mob.

- We also could use feed and hay to draw them in as a more delightful treat than the regular grass they consumed. This was especially helpful for any new cows that needed to be branded, as the world seeks to lure us in and then tell us we belong to it and not Christ.
- If any of the cattle had decided that the pasture beyond the shockers was worth it, they could have gotten over there. Any one of them was more powerful than the men holding the shockers. Any one of them could have said no to the feed and hay. Others around you may be communicating “Don’t worry about speaking about Christ or living for him. Come enjoy the next high feeling that the world can give you.”
- We as Christians do not want to be like mindless cattle. We do not want to go with the world’s agenda. We know that a greater city is still to come, so we should patiently trust God as we live intentionally in this world, even as the world rejects us for doing so. We overcome this world by the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony about Christ.
- We also do not want to be like the people from the Village, the movie by M. Night Shymalan. They ran away from society because of the terrible sins that society had met upon their families. They formed a community that was pre-industrial revolution inside of a walled and forested nature preserve. The problem is that sin still arose within the people as they had children. We cannot let ourselves be conformed to this world, nor can we escape this world. We are to be a light in this world and let our light so shine that the world wants to praise God with us.
- Do you know Jeremiah 29:11? “For I know the plans I have for you” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.” Many times people have tried to claim that as personal promises of prosperity now or the near future, but that is not what the context promotes. It was written to God’s remnant in Babylon who would have to endure a lifetime in Babylon, in the midst of a pagan nation, living as social outsiders. God would deliver them in His perfect timing as they continued to trust Him. What were they to do in the meantime? It is the same we are to do now. They were to pray for their city, to do their work well, invest in their family and neighbors. They were to live like they were in their homeland and worship God through their lives. They were always to look forward to the day God would rescue them. In so doing they were to be a blessing to the surrounding people as a witness that their God was the only true God.
- Remember the people for whom you should pray: They’re the people where you work and play, where you shop, study, and stay.
- As we pray for them, God will give us opportunities to share with them why we live our lives differently. Christ’s love compels us to no longer live for ourselves but for the one who died for us and rose again. Don’t JUST wait for the kingdom of heaven to come, realize that the King has already come once to set you free from sin. He is coming again and will close the door of salvation. Today is the day of salvation. Bless and love so that the world wants to have this same life it sees you have.
- Look at the promise the author of Hebrews gives us. For those who keep trusting God throughout life, it will be shown that He is not ashamed to be your God, to be your Father. But as Christ says, if you are ashamed of Him in this life, then He will be ashamed of you in the presence of the Father and His angels. I know the world has not liked binary options in the past few years. But those are the two roads. We can either give in to the world by giving up Christ, or we can confidently say we have gained Christ, even if it costs us the world. We choose Christ, and as we pray and seek opportunities, others in the world will want this same Jesus who gives you hope.

**We are vulnerable to suffering and death, but keep trusting in the God who rescues, even raising the dead. (vv. 17-19)**

We are vulnerable to death, but keep trusting in the God who raises the dead. (vv. 17–19)

- As I pointed out earlier, the preacher is focused for this section on the deaths of the patriarchs. He is not JUST saying that the patriarchs knew they would not see the fulfillment of God's promise in their lifetime. He is also communicating about how they passed along this promise to the next generation. God had made a covenant with Abraham and was keeping this covenant through a particular lineage, which would ultimately be fulfilled in Christ Jesus. But for each of them toward the ends of their lives came a big moment in which they were tested, whether they would continue trusting God and act on that trust or not.
- For Abraham, that test came in Genesis 22. It is a story that strongly anticipates Christ and the gospel. Christ Jesus, as the Only Son, would be the sacrificial lamb who would die in our place in order to bring about God's covenant to Abraham to bless all nations.
- As these verses point out, Isaac was referred to as Abraham's **ONLY** son. Ishmael had been born to Abraham by Hagar, but that was Abraham trying to do God's job for Him. God brought about the promised heir Isaac and referred to him as the **ONLY** son, the only one by whom these promises would come about. Clearly stating in the text that He was going to test Abraham, God told Abraham to go up on a certain mountain to sacrifice his son.
- Abraham was presented with a difficult situation. He knew God had promised to bring about many nations and the blessing of all nations through Isaac. He also knew that God was true and perfectly good. He also knew that God was all powerful. So how could God ask him to sacrifice his son and still somehow keep His word? It's the logical conclusion of trusting this God. "If all of these things are true about God, then God either will intervene to change the situation, or He will raise Isaac from the dead." Abraham trusted that God would keep His promise to bring offspring through Isaac. So if he was to slay his only son as God had commanded, then God would also raise his only son.
- While this story strongly anticipates Christ's sacrifice, the author is using it to encourage the faith of his audience who feared death.
- We are vulnerable to death, whether by chronic sickness, sudden illness, by fast moving vehicles, by violent people, by old age. It is not just death that tempts us to turn our backs on Christ, it is any form of extreme physical suffering. A wise guy in this church once told me that he is not afraid of death, but it's the dying part that he's worried about.

- The world has been seeking to cancel Christianity for 2,000 years. One of its weapons it has used is death. In the late first century, a Roman governor named Pliny wrote to the emperor Trajan to ask him what he should do with Christians. Up to that point, he had interrogated anyone who claimed to be a Christian. After finding out that they were a peaceful group who gathered together once a week to worship Christ as God and that they were good contributors to society, he would give them the option of recanting Christ. They could give up Christ by worshipping the Roman gods, for the Christians made clear that they could not worship idols. If they refused, he was to have them beaten. If they then still refused, they were then to be killed. Why? Because the Christians worshipped a God who could not be seen nor controlled.
- Pliny's letter Trajan was within about 30-40 years of this letter to the Hebrews. Even closer to the time of this letter was Nero's targeting of Christians. He would go on to use them to light his garden at night by burning them. He blamed them for a fire he probably started in the city of Rome. The church was beginning to experience the initial wrath of Rome that would flame up to greater persecution.
- They were threatened with death in a way that is somewhat rare in our country but somewhat normal throughout the world.
- I am so appreciative to have grown up in a country with religious freedom. According to World Evangelical Alliance, an estimated 100 million Christians in 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith (The Voice of the Martyrs Canada | How many Christians are killed for their faith every year? (vomcanada.com) accessed on 7/30/22).
- The Voice of the Martyrs in 2014 estimated that 70 million Christians had been killed since Jesus's resurrection just because they professed faith in Christ. The author who composed this sermon in letter form had already written about death and how it is part of OUR weakness, the weakness of all people. It is for that reason that the Son had to be made like His brothers in every way, taking on our weakness. 14 Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the devil— 15 and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death.
- We may not have the concern of governmental persecution to the point of death in America, but death will still come for all of us at some point unless Christ returns first. Being a Christian should not keep you from making a will. Rather, as a Christian, you should be more keenly aware that you will die.
- If you have not accepted the truth that your life is brief and susceptible to suffering, you have missed the message of all of Scripture since the Fall. We are but a breath, a vapor on a cold morning, grass that grows one day and is cut the next.
- If you have never realized your vulnerability to death, you need to look to the one who was raised from the dead as hope for your salvation. Children and teenagers, this includes you. My high school 20th reunion is this fall. I saw that those celebrating it have put together a memorial of all those who have died since starting Kindergarten with us. One died in house fire while in elementary school. One died in high school when he broke his neck diving into a river. One died at age 35 from a heart attack. Life is short. Do not put off coming to Christ until tomorrow.
- To you who have suffered persecution, trust the power of Christ to rescue you more than the power of those persecuting you. To those who are progressing in age and sickness with the normal timing of this short life that we live, trust the power of God who raises the dead more than the fear of death.
- If you have not ever had to suffer for seeking to follow Christ, may God bless you by making you realize this is your opportunity to prepare for the day of suffering.
- Here's the thing about suffering, you don't prepare for it while you're going through it. You prepare yourself for persevering faith before it ever comes so that you don't give in to the temptation to walk away from Christ.

# Keep trusting God's sovereignty more than your best efforts in the mission of Christ. (v. 20)

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- If you are a Christian, you are to be on mission.
- Let me say that again, if you follow Christ, you follow Him on His mission to make disciples, gathering them as His people and growing them into maturity so that they live as lights in this world.
- When we discuss the story of Jacob and Esau, I find that we often do not consider Isaac within that story. The text leads us to consider Jacob and Rebecca's deception. We also are aware of Esau's previous choice of instant gratification over God's blessings.
- But the author of Hebrews focuses on Isaac's blessings, not just one blessing but two. Isaac was not the perfect father. Even when he first pronounced the blessing on Jacob, his plans did not go as planned. He had no intention of blessing Jacob, but he did. He was deceived, but he had to trust God to work out the fulfillment of the blessing.
- Isaac rightly understand that a blessing matters and is not to be withdrawn, especially since that blessing was about conferring the mediation of God's covenant promises to the next generation.
- May God give to you—  
from the dew of the sky  
and from the richness of the land—  
an abundance of grain and new wine.  
29 May peoples serve you  
and nations bow in homage to you.  
Be master over your relatives;  
may your mother's sons bow in homage to you.  
Those who curse you will be cursed,

and those who bless you will be blessed.

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- You may not realize that Isaac blessed both Jacob and Esau.

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- Esau begged him for a blessing, and Isaac gave him one.

• Look, your dwelling place will be  
away from the richness of the land,  
away from the dew of the sky above.

40 You will live by your sword,  
and you will serve your brother.

But when you rebel,  
you will break his yoke from your neck.

- Isaac intentionally mirrored Esau's blessing to Jacob's blessing. He was not the perfect father, but his blessings show that he was looking for God to answer his prayer in the long term, trusting that God would work out His plan over time in ways that were out of Isaac's control. He could only do his part and trust.
- We are all to be disciple-makers. Isaac was seeking to point his two sons to the One True God in order that they might know Him and walk with Him in glad submission.
- Parents, you have the opportunity to make disciples every single day. Parenting is disciple-making. Are you making your children a disciple of Christ or a disciple of you?
- (Story of Spurgeon's drunk "disciple")
- Long term Christian disciple-making requires planning and prayer, patience and teaching, grieving and rejoicing. But, fathers and mothers, even if you work harder than all the rest of the parents on your block, you have trust God to work in your children's lives. You cannot save your child into heaven. Only God can. Yes, proclaim and model the gospel, but pray fervently that God brings salvation.
- Esau did not respond favorably to first hearing the blessing from his father. But how did Esau respond years later when Jacob finally came home with his large family? Esau welcomed Jacob as his brother peacefully. Even though Jacob showed deferment to Esau in certain ways, it was still clear that Jacob was the greater. It may sometimes take a lifetime of praying and proclaiming to some people, but don't give up on coming before God for the sake of you child, for the sake of your friends, for the sake of the many lost who have yet to believe or even hear the gospel of Christ.

# When confronted with your weakness, lean on God's provision and promises. (vv. 21-22)

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- The author ends this section on the faith of the patriarchs by highlighting Jacob and Joseph, the son who was taken from Jacob. Also, he makes sure to mention that Jacob was leaning on his staff blessing the sons of Joseph. Jacob had to lean on his staff because God had dislocated his hip as his blessing and reward after struggling with God all night. Jacob had been a deceiver watching out for himself. But then he is described as one who worshipped God through his suffering. In that worship through suffering, he was able to bless the two grandsons he never thought would exist. In 2015, Margeret Katz of New York was able to be reunited to her son who she was compelled to give up for adoption 50 years prior. She had only three weeks with him before he died from thyroid cancer, but those three weeks she considered a blessing.
- Jacob was blessed to see these two grandchildren before he died. Because He knew he was blessed in the midst of suffering, he was able to bless these them. He prayed that they would become abundant, just as God had promised to Abraham. Jacob had learned from His suffering that God was faithful and could be trusted to keep His promises. And so he worshipped and blessed others, even through suffering.
- And then Joseph is mentioned. Why? Because he wanted his bones to be buried somewhere else than where he died. What's that all about? God had promised to Abraham that his descendants would be brought back into the promised land one day after he grew them much larger in Egypt. Joseph had the power of influence to force a situation in Egypt prior to God's timing. He had the ability to pull enough strings to influence Pharoah to let him and his family return to Israel post-famine. But God was not done yet growing His people within the pagan nation of Egypt. When they were large enough, then He would bring them home. He was going to grow them in number and THEN save them by the revelation of His power.
- Joseph could try to force God's hand, but that had never worked out for his family before. Or He could trust God in His timing. God had kept his promises to this point. Through Joseph God had kept Abraham's line alive and then increased the people of Israel. So, surely God would keep the promise to bring Abraham's descendants home. As an act of faith toward the end of his life, Joseph had his family promise to exhume him and bring his bones into the promised land. He was saying that God is

going to keep His promise to bring His people home. He wanted God's people to look forward to it with hope.

- The original audience was thinking about turning their back on Christ so they could somehow be like Abraham and the patriarchs in their faith.
- But the preacher brought it home to them.
- You've been tempted to get off the trail that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob walked. Fear has distracted you from the truth that they were looking forward to Christ Jesus. Your healing and home are ahead with Christ. Be willing to be treated as different and weird, to be treated as if you don't belong, so long as you are identifying with Christ by faith. Trust God's eternal blessings in Christ more than this world's instant gratification.

Time for prayer acknowledging the need for God's to work in us to trust Him and repentance for not trusting Him as well as we should in particulars of life.

