

## Faith that Finishes Strong

**A bumper sticker read**, “Don’t take life so seriously. You won’t get out of it alive.”

The story was told by Harry Truman...a man was in a deep coma. He stayed there for a long time. People thought he was dead so they sent him to a funeral home and stuck him in a coffin. At two o’clock in the morning, all alone in this dimly lit room, he sat up and looked around. “Good night!” he said, “What’s going on? If I’m alive, why am I in a casket? And if I’m dead, why do I have to go to the bathroom?”

**Some children** were asked what they thought about dying and heaven.

Their answers were surprising:

Alan, age 7,

“God doesn’t tell you when you are going to die because He wants it to be a big surprise.”

Aaron, age 8,

“The hospital is the place where people go on their way to heaven.”

Raymond, age 10,

“A good doctor can help you so you won’t die. A bad doctor sends you to heaven.”

Stephanie, age 9,

“Doctors help you so you won’t die until you pay all their bills.”

Marsha, age 9,

“When you die, you don’t have to do homework in heaven unless your teacher is there too.”

Kevin, age 10, is very courageous

“I’m not afraid to die because I’m a Boy Scout.”

Ralph, age 8,

“When birds are ready to die they just fly to heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>There was a very cautious man  
Who never laughed or played.  
He never risked, he never tired  
He never sang or prayed.

<sup>2</sup>And when one day he passed away  
His insurance was denied  
For since he never really lived  
They claimed he never died.

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<sup>1</sup> Good Housekeeping, 1979.

Today in our study of the Heroes of Faith we see the common thread of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph that at the end of their lives they finished strong by faith. Faith defeated death!

<sup>20</sup>By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.

<sup>21</sup>By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

<sup>22</sup>By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.”

Heb. 11:20-22

The theme of Hebrews 11 is that in the face of overwhelming, life-threatening situations and death, God’s heroes were victorious because of their faith.

Though Able is dead, he still speaks...

Enoch, by faith, did not see death, but was taken up.

Noah, by faith, prepared an ark, and saved himself and his family from the flood.

Abraham offered his son, and by faith received him back from the dead.

The writer to the Hebrews speaks of three heroes, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, who at the end of their lives faced death triumphantly by their faith.

“All three of these men believed God in the face of death. Their faith had sometimes wavered in life, but it was strong and confident in death. Death is the acid test of faith. For hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, courts of law have taken a dying man’s word at face value. The need for lying and deception is over, and what is said on a deathbed is usually believed. So with our testimony of faith. Not only is the need for hypocrisy and pretense over, but it is extremely difficult to fake faith when you know you are facing eternity. A dying man’s faith is believable because a sham cannot stand this test.”<sup>2</sup>

Paul wrote,

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<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), p. 342.

“But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 8:37-39).

### **1. The Overcoming Faith of Isaac**

Isaac experienced God’s faithfulness through his father, Abraham, who is the known as the Father of faith. Having Abraham as his father meant that from his earliest youth he heard all that God had promised his father, Abraham.

Isaac must have been keenly aware of the age of his parents as he grew up with a father and mother that were nearly 100 when he was born.

When Abraham, in obedience to God, was about to offer him as a sacrifice he cooperated and experienced, first hand, God’s provision of a ram. He may have even heard the angel of the Lord stop his father from plunging the knife.

Later on Isaac received his wife, Rebekah, as a gift from God miraculously provided through an elderly servant. He experienced God’s provision of a wife, and rich material blessings. Now in his old age Isaac imparts the same blessing to his son, Jacob and then a blessing to Esau.

How many believers leave a legacy to their children when they die? If we studied the lives of the three patriarchs mentioned, we would grasp many lessons of life and faith. Here they are mentioned in regards to the power of faith in facing death. They died in full, confident faith.

As it says in verse thirteen,

“All these died in faith without receiving the promises,  
but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance,  
and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the  
earth.” (v. 13).

Their faith was in the promises of God, which they passed on to their children.

MacArthur writes,

They believed what they had never seen, and they passed on what they had never seen to their children. That is the assurance of faith. They had no inheritance to pass on but the promises of God, and these they considered a great treasure to bequeath their children. They had not seen the land possessed, the nation established, or the world blessed, but they saw the promises, and that was enough.”<sup>3</sup>

Faith in God is about believing God’s promises: what He said He will do. That’s what God is like. He is a covenant keeping God of truth!

They died defeating death, knowing that, even though they died, God’s promises could not die. That is the magnificent kind of faith, the kind of faith God honors.

Every man of God has been a man of faith, without exception.

Without faith it is impossible to please God (11:6)

Isaac went to Gerar because of a famine,  
and while he was there God spoke to him.

“Sojourn in this land and I will be with you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed...” (Gen. 26:3-4).

Isaac’s life seemed by far to be among the weakest of the Patriarchs. He seems to have more failures than successes – *a blot on the Old Testament record*.

In the end he finished strong because he believed the promises of God. He passed on the blessing to Jacob who was God’s man. Like a deathbed conversion, in the end he submitted, believed and obeyed.

## 2. The overcoming faith of Jacob

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<sup>3</sup> MacArthur, p. 338.

By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. (11:21)

Jacob was a lot like his father, Isaac, in many ways. He lived a very up and down life. "Sometimes he walked by faith and sometimes he stumbled by sight." Jacob had some experiences with God – dreams, bargains... and a wrestling match.

On his way to face Esau, his estranged brother, Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord. The account in Genesis shows Jacob's struggle,

"Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. Then he said, "let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." [crooked, supplanter]. He said, "Your name shall not longer be Jacob, but Israel [the face of God]; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." (Gen. 32:24-29)

Many of our prayers are like a wrestling match with God.

Jacob refused to release the angel until he received a blessing.

So, we learn the tenacity of faith from Jacob. - a rough and fighting faith.

Jacob's faith used leverage – a key element in wrestling,

*"I'm a descendant of Abraham and Isaac  
and I won't let go until you bless me,  
because you promised to bless me."*

Jacob died a man of faith, honored by God.

### **3. The Overcoming Faith of Joseph.**

<sup>22</sup>By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones."

Though Joseph spent most of his adult life in Egypt,

his heart was in the land of promise. (*Take my bones back with you!*)

**Joseph's final words to his loved ones,**

“I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you, and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob” (Gen. 50:24).

**In times of struggle, faith will bring us through.**

Two frogs fell into a deep cream bowl,  
 One was an optimistic soul;  
 But the other took the gloomy view,  
 “We shall drown,” he cried, without more ado.  
 So with a last despairing cry, He flung up his legs and said, “Good-bye.”  
 Quoth the other frog with a merry grim,  
 “I Can’t get out, but I won’t give in.  
 I’ll just swim round till my strength is spent,  
 Then will I die the more content.”  
 Bravely he swam till it would seem  
 His struggles began to churn the cream.  
 On the top of the butter at last he stopped,  
 And out of the bowl he gaily hopped.  
 What of the moral? ‘Tis easily found:  
 If you can’t hop out, keep swimming round.<sup>4</sup>

A race is determined by how you finish. You win by finishing strong!

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Heb. 12:1-3).

O God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come,  
 Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home!  
 O God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come,  
 Be Thou our guide while life shall last, And our eternal home.

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Knight, *Knight’s Master Book of New Illustrations*