

## **Faith's Desire Hebrews 11:8-16**

### **Introduction**

Ultimately, *what we pursue in life expresses what we desire most*. What we think will make us happy the most. That's why living by faith roots itself in the desires of the heart.

To live by faith you have to believe God richly rewards those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Psalm 37:4

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. <sup>11</sup> By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven

and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

**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.

1. A Promised Place (8-10)
2. A Promised People (11-12)
3. A Lifelong Pilgrimage (13-16a)
4. A Giving God (16b)

### **1. A Promised Place (8-10)**

**8** By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. **9** By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. **10** For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

A place—we need a place to call home. An enclosed garden—Adam and Eve. A city. A dwelling place. To be homeless feels inhumane. A place we belong. A place to work. A place to rest. A place of safety. Even if we enjoy traveling, when we come back we often realize once again that there's no place like home.

The text further describes this place as an inheritance—and then, more definitively, a city with foundations designed and built by God.

Abraham left city life, comfort, family, the status quo. What would he take such risk? Not because he's a dreamer with an extraordinary amount of wanderlust. He goes because God has commanded him to do it. He goes because he trusts God to make good on His promise to give him an inheritance—a forever home.

*True faith answers God's call with obedience. We do not have to know exactly where we are going or what the journey will entail. We just need to know that God has told us to go.*

Abraham's desire is set on an inheritance from God. Clearly more than just the promised land of Canaan.

Because Abraham's was seeking something more than an earthly inheritance, he, his son, and grandson lived in tents like nomads. Their lifestyle expressed their true destination—their ultimate goal. Abraham was a very wealthy man, but he lived in a tent. It's not that he was against city living. He just was focused on a particular city. The city of God. It's real. It has foundations. God designed it. God built it. It's the capital city of the universe. Hebrews 12 tells us that there are innumerable angels there. That the souls of saints made perfect are there—the assembly of the firstborn, that is Jesus. That Jesus Himself is there and God the judge of all.

*Could anyone tell by the way we live that we are confident the heavenly city of God is real?* That "the fields of hope in which we sow are harvested in heaven"? That our desires are not earthbound. That we live for more than our family estate here on earth? That we are willing not to put down roots here because our hearts are fixed on our forever home?

It is right to work. It is good to invest. It is fine to carry out your part in fulfilling the creation mandate to exercise dominion over your part of the earth. But is it clear that we live are seeking first the kingdom of heaven? Is it obvious that we are trusting God to meet all our temporal needs as we pursue His eternal priorities?

What are priorities God has commanded that will sometimes force us to choose between earthly and heavenly goals?

The weekly cadence God created was to work six days and to rest from work one day to give us time to refresh through worship. Faith in God desires time with God, understands our need for communion with Him and His people. If that's what you're seeking you will protect the Lord's Day when God's people gather to hear the Word and worship. You will use the other six days for the earthbound stuff.

God rewards generosity and commands us to give back a portion of what He has given to us as an act of gratitude and faith. People whose desire is fixed on an eternal inheritance live generously and give joyfully. They are not stingy. The way Paul talks about giving in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 implies that if you aren't a giver you are spiritually stunted or possibly even unregenerate. God is a giver and so are His people. They have skin in the game—funding missions, helping the needy, supplying the cost of worship. Jesus declared in Luke 16 you cannot serve God and serve money. Even if you are very religious and can quote lots of Bible.

Matthew 6:19-21

**19** "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, **20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

## **2. A Promised People (11-12)**

**11** By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. **12** Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

When God promised Abraham a place, He also promised him a people. Human beings not only need a home. They need a people to whom they belong. A home without a people is empty. God promised Abraham a people. All the people of the earth would be blessed through His offspring. They would become citizens of the heavenly country. They would be the children of God and would inherit the homeland with Abraham.

Genesis 12:1-2

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's

house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

Abram gives up family to obey God. But God will make Abram father of a much larger family.

Genesis 13:14-17

Genesis 15:4-6

<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man [Eliezer of Damascus] shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." <sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 17—changes name from Abram to Abraham: "High Father" was changed to "Father of a Multitude." For years whenever people asked him about his children as one named Abram, "High Father," he had to reply, I have none. And then, in the year before Isaac's birth, he becomes Abraham, "Father of a Multitude"—a multitude of none, unless you count Ishmael. And then, after Isaac's birth, a multitude of "one." As a very old man, Abraham became a grandfather to twins

Jacob and Esau. He died when they were 15 years old. And only one of them, Jacob, was the one through whom God would fulfill His promise.

Genesis 17:15-21

**15** And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. **16** I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." **17** Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" **18** And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" **19** God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. **20** As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. **21** But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."

Genesis 18:10-14

**10** The LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah



your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. <sup>11</sup> Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. <sup>12</sup> So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" <sup>13</sup> The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' <sup>14</sup> Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

What God promised Abraham and Sarah was humanly impossible. But despite their doubts, they believed enough to take action in keeping with God's promise. The whole line of Messiah was the result of a miracle. Jesus himself was virgin born—impossible for human beings. The angel's response—"Nothing will be impossible with God." (Barren Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptist, forerunner of Jesus the Messiah.)

If Abraham could have seen down the years—and because of his faith in God, in a sense he did—he would have seen not only the twelve tribes of Israel but also people from every tribe and nation on earth being born into his family of faith and become heirs of the promise—like the stars of the sky or the sand on the seashore. All the families of the earth

would be blessed through faith in his offspring—Jesus the Messiah, Son of Abraham, Son of God.

*God's people are the result of His miraculous intervention. Isaac. Jesus. Every sinner who repents and believes, born again into God's family by the power of the Holy Spirit, not human power. Apart from miracles none of us who are trusting in Jesus would be here. Children of God through faith. "Children of the promise."*

You and I don't fare well isolated. We need a home. We need a family. No home will do but God's eternal home. No family will do but God's family. His children. Our brothers and sisters in Christ. One of the hallmarks of those who are truly born again is that they have a heart for others in the family. They desire to be with them. They fare best actively connected to them, serving the Lord together, serving one another in love. Show me a person who does not love God's children and I'll show you a person who does not love God either. Faith in God desires a people who exist because of Him. Our forever family.

Matthew 19:29

Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

### **3. A Lifelong Pilgrimage (13-16a)**

**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.

They lived their whole life here on earth without receiving all God had promised. We often forget the long years that stretched between what God promised and when even the first stages of fulfillment came. The history of it condenses it all.

They greeted the things promised from afar—they welcomed them, embraced them, hailed them. Doing so came from their recognition that because of their connection with God, here on earth they are strangers, that is, foreigners, and they are exiles—those who make their home in a place only for a limited time. They may it clear that their hearts are seeking their homeland.

Abraham could have gone back to Haran or to Ur, but he and all those like him are looking

for a better country than where he came from or where he lived in Canaan. A heavenly one.

If your heart stops yearning for something better than this world offers, you may fall prey to the lie that turning back is how to gain your happiness. Many a professing Christian has done that. It's a disastrous retreat from the rigorous pilgrimage God has called us to. *Your destination makes the journey totally worth it, however difficult it may be.* And if the struggles turn you back, it's the stuff of tragedy. Abel taught us that the faith is worth dying for. Enoch and Noah, that it's worth going totally counter-culture to a world rushing into the jaws of divine judgment.

Philippians 3:18-21

**18** For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. **19** Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. **20** But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, **21** who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

No way that Abel wishes he had denied the faith to extend his life. No way that Enoch

pires away wishing he had lived on earth as long as most of the patriarchs. No way Noah wishes he had not spent all those years—120 of them—building the ark. No way Abraham wished he had stayed in Ur, worshiping the moon goddess with the rest of the pagan culture he came from.

*Nobody who perseveres and reaches the end of the journey will wish he or she had turned back from following Jesus. Nobody. Not one.* But be assured. Hell will be full of people suffering from vain regrets. Don't be one of them.

Matthew 28—Great Commission

“Going, make disciples of all ethnicities.”

Acts records Christians' going everywhere, taking the gospel with them.

#### **4. A Giving God (16b)**

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

It is God who gives us a promised place—a homeland, a heavenly country, a city He designed and built. It is our inheritance.

It is God who gives us a promised people. Children of the promise, born again by the

supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, given eternal life from God the Son.

*But the greatest gift of all is this: God Himself. Heaven would not be heaven without God. Our forever family would not be unified and loving but for Him. Father, Son, and Spirit—all three Persons of the Godhead—have given themselves to us. The triune God is glad to be ours. That is why He has built a city for us.*

1 John 1:3-4

<sup>3</sup> That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

One of the most precious names for Jesus is Immanuel—With us, God!

He has promised us that He will be with us all the days even to the consummation of the age. And when all is said and done. We will be with Him—according to Revelation 22:4, we will see His face. Think what that will be like. Looking into the face of the God who has loved you from before the foundation of the world, who sent His Son to ransom you with His own lifeblood, who gave you the Holy Spirit to transform you from the inside out, who gives you an inheritance of sinless

immortality among the saints of light, a new universe where sin and death are gone forever, and all is perfect—your forever home. *When God gives you Himself, you gain everything worth having.*

Hebrews 11:6

He is a rewarder of them who seek Him.

When you read the Scriptures, look for Him.  
When you walk through the house of the day,  
look for Him.

When you shoulder the burden of your work,  
do it for Him.

Worship Him.

Walk with Him.

Work for Him.

He's a giving God, and His greatest gift to us  
is Himself.

## **Conclusion**

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## Discussion Questions

1. It is natural for us as human beings to desire a place to call home, but why is it important that the home we desire most be the city God has built?
2. What does God's promise to give us a forever home tell us about God's character and God's heart toward us?
3. What are some ways you express that the heavenly city is your home, not this world?
4. God has created a new people of God through Jesus Christ, but it took miracles to bring it about. How does the miraculous origin of God's people, including every born again believer, shape your view of your brothers and sisters in Christ?
5. Why do you think Hebrews would point out that the people in this chapter who lived by faith died without seeing the fulfillment of God's promises to them?
6. What experiences here make you long for a better country, that is, a heavenly one?
7. How does your desire for that better country give you strength to persevere in faith through the troubles and trials you face here?



8. How should the reality that the best gift from our giving God is the gift of Himself shape your daily life in your worship, walk, and work now?