

## **“Dying To Live” Hebrews 11:17-22**

**Context:** The author defines faith as two conditions with two results: (1) a heart condition that stands under, supports, and results in hope and (2) a heart condition so convinced of unseen divine reality that it results in actions based on that conviction. The author proceeds with a series of examples from Old Testament saints to show what faith looks like in real life in order to persuade the readers away from apostatizing back to their former Jewish lifestyle of ritual. At this point, the author directs the audience to the example of their Jewish forefathers who demonstrated their faith at a time of death without ever seeing the fullness of God’s promise. Yet they willingly proclaimed God’s word through their words and actions. These examples culminate in Jesus who is the perfect example of faith as well as its perfecter. The culmination is found in the pivotal verses that sum up the basic purpose of the book, that is, ‘to cast off any weight or entangling sin by fixing the reader’s eyes upon Jesus, the initiator and perfecter of faith’ (cf. Heb. 12:1-3).

**Life Principle:** The exercise of dying daily can only be achieved when one has a proper perspective of the character of God and who they are in light of their relationship with Him. (Heb. 11:17; Luke 9:23-26)

### **1. Testing death – Hebrews 11:17-19**

God’s blessing to Abraham was based on the lineage of Isaac. No other descendant was to be the fulfillment of God’s promise (cf. Heb. 11:18; Gen. 21:12). This intensified the testing of Abraham’s faith when he was asked to sacrifice his “only son” (Gen. 22:2). The testing was not to coerce Abraham into sin, but to demonstrate the quality of his faith. The question was whether Abraham would believe the unchangeable promises of God or hold the promised child to a greater value. In understanding the power of God in this present world, he was willing to sacrifice the gift God had given him. His faith was based on the unchangeableness of God’s nature and rooted in the hope of what was to come.

### **2. Promises proclaimed at death – Hebrews 11:20-22**

The blessings God had promised to Abraham were passed down to each of the patriarchs and reaffirmed by God to each one. Each of them saw the faithfulness of God toward their father as well as the faithfulness of their father toward God. Although being deceived, Isaac blessed Jacob out of faith by not revoking the blessing that he had given, and giving a secondary blessing to Esau. Jacob also blessed the sons of Joseph taking them as his own and blessing them prior to the other brothers of Joseph. Each blessing was done at a time near death and concerned the “things to come.” They are testimonies concerning the hope the patriarchs held toward a future fulfillment and deliverance. This is elevated with the example of Joseph, who near death, made mention of a future deliverance that would occur. He recognized that Egypt (a symbol of this world) was not his home nor his resting place.

### **For Further Study:**

- This passage begins with a reminder of the sacrifice of Isaac. Read Genesis 22:1-19 to get a full perspective of God's command and Abraham's response. The idea of being tested plays an important part of Jewish tradition (Attridge, Hermeneia: Hebrews, p.334). It also speaks to the Hebrews' audience. As a study method look up this word "tested" to understand its full implications. What does it mean to be tested by God? Is it the same as temptation (cf. James 1:13) What part does testing play in our sanctification (cf. James 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-10)?
  
- This section speaks of the sacrifice as being completed. How did Abraham complete the sacrifice of Isaac? How does Genesis 22:5 demonstrate Abraham's understanding of the power of God mentioned in Heb. 11:19? How can this example of faith help us if God was to ask us to sacrifice His gifts?
  
- Hebrews 11:20-22 discusses the blessings of Isaac and Jacob to future generations (v.20-21; Gen. 27:27-29, 39,40; Gen. 48:16,20) along with the command of Joseph to have his bones removed from Egypt (v. 22; Gen. 50:24-25). All these events occur at the time of their death. All were watchful for the future blessings and deliverance. Look at the doctrinal statement under "The Doctrine of Last Things" footnotes 10-11 and 13. How can the future hope of deliverance affect the present watchfulness of our daily lives? Do we truly live as if we believe Christ will return?

### **Transformation exercise:**

Read Hebrews 11:17-19 and meditate on the this account of Abraham. Ask God if there is anything in your life that He may be asking you to lay down as a sacrifice and expression of faith in Him.