# Epic Movement of CRU
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## Righteous Faith
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Hebrews 11 lists outstanding people of faith, including Abraham and Sarah, calling them the "great cloud of witnesses." I would like to explore the faith of Abraham and Sarah today. I will be referencing the New Living Translation, unless I state otherwise. Hebrews 11:8 says:

> It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. And even when he reached the land God promised him he lived there by faith–for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob (Abraham's son and grandson), who inherited the same promise. Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God.
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> It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise. And so a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead–a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.
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> Hebrews 11:8-12 NLB

These few verses are an extremely brief summary of an excruciatingly long process God led Abraham and Sarah through until they developed the faith that qualified them to be counted among the "great cloud of witnesses." The depth of their faith did not just automatically happen, but was a product of years of struggle as they earnestly sought to see God's call and mission for them fulfilled. Their journey of faith spans ten chapters of Genesis–Chapter 12 through Chapter 22. Abraham was seventy-five years old when he first received God's call, mission and vision which only began to be fulfilled when Abraham and Sarah gave birth to their first son, Isaac, twenty-six years later when Abraham was over one hundred years old. I don't have the time to share with you all that happened during their amazing and difficult journey, but I would encourage you to read or review it. I believe there is so much more that you will identify with and glean from that relates to where each of you are in your journeys of faith. I know I did. But I will share a small portion of the lessons I learned in the short time we have this morning. I do want to say before I begin that I am not making a theological statement about saving faith, or saying that one must be old to be truly faithful, but I will reflect on how Abraham and Sarah's relationship with God grew more intimate over time, which facilitated their growing into the type of people that the author of Hebrews encourages us to emulate.

So, what can we learn from Abraham and Sarah's example? First, God measured Abraham's righteousness according to the health and intimacy of his relationship with Him, not by his behavior, though as Abraham's relationship with God deepened, his actions reflected greater trust in God. God equates right relationship with Him with righteousness, and righteousness with faith.

We often confuse faith and belief—equating them—thinking that belief equals faith—we think the more we know about God and believe in him, the stronger our faith. But I believe Abraham and Sarah's example reveals that while knowledge, belief and obedience are foundational to faith, faith is more than that. Belief in God only becomes faith in Him when it grows beyond the head, beyond the convictions of the heart, surpasses mere obedience and right behavior, and enters the realm of mutual love and trust.

In Matthew 7:21-23 according to the NIV, Jesus taught his disciples,

> "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"
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> Matthew 7:21-23 NIV

I believe Jesus is not necessarily talking about bad people here. They don't seem to be acting harmfully or immorally. In fact, these people are not only good on human standards, they seem to know a lot about God–they believe in Him and respect Him enough to call Him "Lord." Additionally, they seem to be involved in ministry–they might even be on CRU or Epic staff. They are working to meet people's physical and spiritual needs and God is using them. They are prophesying, driving out demons and performing miracles, and, as a result, the Lord's name is being exalted. Because of them, God is honored and praised. But Jesus says they aren't doing the Father's will–he calls them "evildoers" and says, "I never knew you." What is the Father's will if it isn't knowing a lot about God, believing in Him, obeying Him, helping others and glorifying the Lord's name? Apparently, all this "good stuff" will not enable people to enter the kingdom of heaven (not that we shouldn't do these things). Jesus calls these seemingly good Christian ministers "evildoers" because Jesus, from His perspective, didn't "know them."

I think Romans 14:23 is addressing something similar when it says, "everything that does not come from faith is sin." For believers (who one hopes would be striving to live as God desires), whether God judges our actions as sin or righteousness has less to do with what we do as whether we are doing it as a result of our faith. This "faith" as referred to in Romans seems to mean the same thing as "being known" by Jesus in Matthew. It is *this* kind of faith that was credited to Abraham as righteousness–despite his disbelief, deceitfulness, manipulation, self-effort, and floundering along the way, from Abraham's first receiving God's promise to finally seeing a mere fraction of God's expansive promise to him fulfilled by being able to hold in his arms his first offspring and descendant, Isaac.

I believe Genesis Chapters 12 through 22 recounts how God transformed Abraham and Sarah's relationship with Him from simply knowing *about* Him and *believing* from a distance, to finally having a deep, intimate relationship of love and trust

where they opened themselves up to the Lord and allowed Him to know them from the inside out. Of course, the Lord, in His omniscience, knew everything about them–the Scripture says God "counted the hairs on their head", "knew the thoughts and intents of their hearts" and "was nearer than their very breath." But what is meant here by "knowing" is the way Adam and Eve first "knew" each other and God Himself in the Garden of Eden before the Fall—before their guilt and shame led them to cover themselves up and hide–before the Fall–when they were naked and unashamed.

This "knowing" is when we know that we are known by God and yet are unashamed and unafraid because we are totally safe and secure in God's love, grace and forgiveness, no matter what—this is when we have arrived at the faith that is credited to us as righteousness—the same faith that was credited to Abraham as righteousness. This kind of faith is when we absolutely know we can't, but God can!

When God initially called Abraham, God did not fully reveal his call in its entirety—only that Abraham was to "go" with Him and that He would do the rest. This is God's instruction to Abraham as recorded in Genesis 12:1-2:

> "**Leave** your country, your relatives, and your father's house, and **go** to the land that **I will** show you. **I will** cause you to become the father of a great nation. **I will** bless you and make you famous, and **I will** make you a blessing to others. **I will** bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed **through** you."

God's original call to Abraham was straightforward, emphasizing only his family. God promised Abraham that he would become a "father" and "all the families of the earth" would be blessed through him. In this initial call, God told Abraham that his family would become a great nation, but He did not expand on Abraham's mission or promise Abraham any land until later. In God's time, the Lord promised Abraham land as far as he could see and as far as he could walk in any direction. He told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the "dust of the earth," and later, that they would outnumber the stars in the sky.

It is in Genesis 15 that we are told that Abraham believed God who "counted him [Abraham] as righteous because of his faith." It is only at this critical juncture of Abraham's faith development that God unveiled for Abraham details about his future descendants, who would be oppressed slaves for four hundred years in a foreign land, but four generations after that, they would return with wealth and possess the land God promised them.

God's call and vision for Abraham and Sarah grew and became more detailed as their faith grew. It is as if God kept the call and vision far beyond their human reach so it was always a stretch of faith, but it was never too heavy for them to bear–but because it was a stretch, they had to be ever more dependent on God for the fulfillment of his vision for their ultimate destiny. This reminds me of something Steve Douglass said to me forty years ago when we were doing international strategic planning together. Steve said something like, "I don't know who needs to have more faith, Bill (Bright) or us. Bill receives visions from God as to what He is going to do through Crusade, but we have to believe God for all the details as to how the Lord is going to get it done." God's call to and mission and vision for Abraham and Sarah's lives grew as their faith did.

Genesis 17 records what I believe was the turning point in Abraham and Sarah's faith journey, when God finally determined that they were ready for the birth of their

promised son. The Lord made an everlasting covenant with both of them and revealed that they would not become the parents of only one nation, but a "multitude" and their descendants would be "countless," they would possess the land "forever," and God would be their God eternally. When God initiated this eternal covenant with Abraham he fell to the ground before the Lord as he had done before, but this time Abraham could not help but laugh to himself in disbelief. I believe this is when Abraham finally arrived at the recognition that he could not believe what God was telling him, it was completely and utterly beyond his own human imagination and control–only then was God able to fulfill His promise. The same thing happened with Sarah when God revealed that she would give birth to a son when he arrived a year later. Like Abraham, Sarah laughed silently in disbelief. Of course, the Lord heard her laugh and she foolishly denied it, but God enabled her to give birth a year later, just as He had promised.

In their lifetimes, Abraham and Sarah only saw the very beginning of their call and mission fulfilled by the birth of their son, Isaac; they never saw its fulfillment. This is true with all the other people of faith Hebrews 11 lists. Verses 13-16 says,

> All these people died still believing what God has promised them. They did not receive what God has promised them, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it.
>
> Hebrews 11:13-15

Similarly, later in the chapter, Hebrews says,

> All of these people we have mentioned received God's approval because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. For God had far better things in mind for us that would also benefit them, for they can't receive the prize at the end of the race until we finish the race.
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> Hebrews11:39-40

Hebrews implies that these people of faith didn't just have individual races to run and finish, but rather, they were running the same long distance, cross-country race, much like the Olympic torch relay, which ends at the finish line which was the shared goal of all the faith runners. The ultimate vision and promise God gave to Abraham and Sarah and to all the people of faith in Hebrews 11 is the same as God's ultimate vision and promise for us.

Why did God take so long to give Abraham and Sarah their first descendant? Why does He take so long to dramatically act in our lives and ministries sometimes? God patiently developed in Abraham and Sarah a solid foundation of faith, which would be robust enough to be sustained through successive generations–and he does the same thing with us. Son and grandson, Isaac and Jacob, are listed with Abraham and Sarah among the cloud of witnesses. We all know the faith mortality rate of ministers' and missionaries' kids. Obviously and fortunately, it didn't happen to Abraham and Sarah's offspring. If God had selected the quick-and-dirty approach and instilled nothing more than a shallow "name it and claim it" faith in Abraham and Sarah, how far would the chain of faith have extended?

In our relay race, we are passing on the baton of faith. What kind of faith are we passing on? Are we fumbling around with the baton or dropping it? Or, are we passing on the depth of faith we inherited from our spiritual ancestors in the great cloud of

witnesses? We all make mistakes similar to those made by Abraham and Sarah when it comes to our own call, mission and vision we receive from God. Our tendency is wanting to measure our spiritual progress by concrete and measurable ministry objectives so that we can feel like we are progressing in our faith adequately, but we would do well to take Matthew 7 to heart and to consider whether we are measuring our progress by the right signposts. When we meet the Lord face-to-face, we do not want to be on the defensive by saying, "but Lord, didn't we do all these things for you?" Or, "but Lord, I know all this about you, isn't it enough?" Or, have we opened ourselves up to the Lord to be known by Him as He actually and completely knows us already? How much time have we spent in the Gospels getting to know Jesus?

The Jesus of the Gospels—the Jesus of history—is the visible likeness of the invisible God. When you grow more intimately in relationship with Jesus, you encounter the Holy Spirit within you, which the Word explains is the very Spirit of Christ, the very Spirit of Jesus himself. As we are told Ephesians 5:18, "Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you," we are being instructed that we should not to be controlled by anything or anyone else (including ourselves), but rather be controlled by Jesus' Spirit. The Spirit is not a neutral power source. The Spirit has a mind, emotions, and a will of His own—mysteriously, the mind, emotions and will both of the Son, Jesus, and the Father, God, as well.

"Spiritual breathing," a key concept originated by Campus Crusade for Christ involving spiritual exhaling based upon 1 John 1:9 which says, "But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong" and spiritual inhaling according to Ephesians 5:18 where the Holy Spirit is then able to refill us and retake control of our lives once again, is not like a gas station with a car wash where we go to have our cars washed and tank filled so we can simply go wherever we think we should go. "Spiritual breathing" should recalibrate our spiritual GPS to enable us to go where the Spirit of Christ intends to go and do through us what He wants to do. That is why it was better that Jesus went to the Father, so he could send us his Spirit to enable us to do not only what he did, but greater works. However, to prevent us from beginning to think ourselves to be greater than Jesus, we must constantly remind ourselves that the only way we will be able to do greater works is if Jesus' very own Spirit is at work in and through us, no longer confined to one finite human body as he was before he went to be with the Father, but is now freed to do so much more by inhabiting and working through all of us—all of our bodies.

What did Jesus do and how? If we are to run our leg of the relay race, which the Lord has set before us, we must keep our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. How did Jesus run his race? He said he only did what he saw the Father doing—Jesus was a Father-follower. So, to finish our race, we must follow Jesus as he followed the Father. I like the way the New Living Translation words Hebrews 12:1b-2a:

> And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish.

Don't be surprised if your leg of the race seems long and fraught with difficulty as Abraham and Sarah's–their race was hot, rocky and wound around all over the place—just as the Israelites' wilderness wanderings. The shortest distance between two

points was not a straight line between Egypt and the Promised Land. What appears a crooked line to us may well be straight to God when it comes to what must occur within us and our relationship with Him before we are ready to enter the Promised Land. We tend to blame our human leaders like the Israelites blamed Moses, even though the Lord clearly went before them in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. A detour, distraction or disaster might just be engineered for us by an omnipotent God to build up our faith and develop our character so we can take the next big step on the way to the fulfillment of God's call. Many times, the Lord uses us most when we are unaware of it–in the midst of those detours and disasters—because the spiritual life has more to do with being a witness than witnessing. Haven't people come up to you to tell you how positively you influenced them when you didn't even realize they were affected by your words or actions? Our call is to go and enter into the situations and places where the Lord leads so he can develop our relationship with and faith in Him. Then, we will be light and salt in a world of darkness and bitterness, until that same faith that the Lord has developed in us has spread to the point where the darkness is gone and the bitterness has been eliminated.

The kind of faith Abraham needed is the same kind we need today. Abraham had to believe that God could raise the dead and create something from nothing. Abraham, himself, was the dead man to be raised and the something from nothing was life from Sarah's barren womb. For us—it is the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. When we truly reach this point of faith, we laugh within ourselves because it finally dawns on us that nothing we can do will fulfill the call of God upon our lives and the mission and vision he has given us; we simply must "go" and God will do it.

Let's keep in mind God's promises:

> And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again.
>
> Philippians 1:6

> The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.
>
> 1 Thessalonians 5:24 NIV

> And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.
>
> Romans 8:28

The finish line is assured. As it says in Revelation 7:9-10,

> After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a mighty shout, "Salvation comes from our God on the throne and from the Lamb!"

And finally, Ephesians 3:20 –21,

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.