

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

"THE MISSING PIECE OF HOW" HEBREWS 11:11-12

This Week's Core Competency

Hope – I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 6:19, 20, *We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.*

People are fascinated with the way things work. For many, a sense of wonder, an expansion of understanding, and a smile of satisfaction come from learning the "inner workings" of a machine, a market or a mystery. Award-winning author and illustrator David Macauley has sold millions of copies of his books to eager enthusiasts all wanting to know how things work. His most popular creation *The Way Things Work* (and the updated *The New Way Things Work*) was on *The New York Times* Best Sellers list for over 50 weeks and still remains as the number one best selling science and technology book for teenagers on Amazon.com.

Macauley's illustrative success highlights our need to know "how." If we can figure out how something works, then maybe we can make it

*It is a glorious thing to know that
your Father God makes no mistakes . . .
It is the glory of God to conceal a matter.
It is our glory to trust Him, no matter
what.*

–Joni Eareckson Tada

work for us. And if we can make things work for us, maybe we too will no longer seem broken. Maybe we too will work. Life would operate more smoothly for us if we only knew how it all worked. Logistics—don't you just love logistics!

This fascination with logistics has now gone digital. HowStuffWorks.com, is an award-winning website and video network offering easy-to-understand explanations of how everything you can possibly imagine actually works. North Carolina State University Professor Marshall Brain founded the site in 1998 and it is now run by the Discovery Channel.

Consider how the website describes itself: "From car engines to search engines, from cell phones to stem cells, and thousands of subjects in between, HowStuffWorks has it covered. No topic is too big or too small for our expert editorial staff to unmask . . . or for you to understand. In addition to comprehensive articles, our helpful graphics and informative videos walk you through every topic clearly, simply and objectively. Our premise is simple: Demystify the world and do it in a simple, clear-cut way that anyone can understand."

If we could just "demystify" the world, then everything would be better, right? Unfortunately, not everything in life comes with "how-to" diagrams or demystifying video explanations. Sometimes God asks us to trust Him, without posting how He is going to work out the details. Striving to understand "how" can sometimes become a poor substitute for hope in the One Who knows all.

For Discussion

Jake looks up to you. With God's help, Jake recently turned his life around. He began giving up some serious addictions with the help of a recovery group. "God is great!" Jake confides in you, "But sometimes, He almost seems cruel in His silence. I ask Him to do things, but no answer comes. I know I am supposed to trust God, but I could trust Him so much more if He would just clue me into what He is doing." How would you encourage Jake?

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Hebrews 11:11-12

11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age- and Sarah herself was barren-was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. 12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. (NIV(c)1984)

Cf., another translation

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. (ESV)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- *Draw an arrow connecting words about faith in v. 11.
- *Put a box around the phrase in v. 11 that indicates *impossibility*.
- *Circle the phrase in v. 11 that is *miraculous*.
- *Double underline the *action* word in v. 11 that displays hope.
- *Circle the word "promise" in v. 11 and draw an arrow to the one who made it.
- *Write the name of the man called "one man" above this phrase in v. 12.
- *Put a box around the phrase in v. 12 that indicates *impossibility*.
- *Circle the word "descendants" in v. 12 and draw an arrow back to the *miraculous* phrase in v. 11.
- *Connect "stars" and "sand" with a line and write Genesis 22:17 on this line.
- *Underline the words in v. 12 that indicate *measurement*.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. The subject (main actor) of verse 11 is difficult to determine. Make your case for whom you think is the subject (main actor) of verse 11.
2. Women are mentioned specifically 3 times in this chapter of faith (Hebrews 11). What is significant about the relationship of women to faith?
3. How did faith play a part in Abraham and Sarah's ability to conceive and birth a child?
4. What made the situation difficult and most likely impossible according to verses 11 and 12?
5. Who is the one man and who are the descendants in verse 12?
6. Did Abraham and Sarah ever experience the fulfillment of God's promise as mentioned in verse 12?
7. What relationship do you see between one person's faith and the destiny of many others?
8. What similarities do you see between Abraham and Sarah's faith and Mary's faith (Lk. 1)?
9. What similarities do you see between Abraham and Sarah's faith, Mary's faith and your faith?
10. **Discussion:** If God makes a promise, but does not fulfill that promise until generations later, is he still faithful to the original recipients of the promise?

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Hebrews 11:11-12 continue the story of Abraham's faith in a faithful God. God had promised Abraham a new land (Genesis 12:1-3) as well as a new lineage (Genesis 13:16;15:5). Even more specifically God promised that Abraham's wife Sarah would bear him a son (Genesis 17:19; 18:10). The writer of Hebrews retells the story in a fashion similar to Genesis, detailing how Abraham trusted God first for a new place (Hebrews 11:8-10). Abraham then trusted God for a son when both he and his wife were well past the years of their fertility (Hebrews 11:11-12).

Moving to a new land would have been challenging and perhaps even frightening. Great faith would be required of Abraham to see God move him to a new place and a new possession. But to see God create a new life from impossibility was even more incredible than the promise of land. So impossible was this promise from God that both Abraham (Genesis 17) and Sarah (Genesis 18) laughed at the absurdity of the thought. Genesis 18:11-12 describes Abraham and Sarah's incredulity: "Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?'"

Faith often involves being sure of a probable hope (Hebrews 11:1a). God instructed Abraham to look out over the Promised Land from the North to the South and from the East to the West and to even walk through the land that was to be given to him (Genesis 13:14-17). Abraham was shown in advance in this case what God was about to do. But if we can only believe in God when He shows us what is possible, we miss out on the other side of faith. Abraham and Sarah would also learn that to trust God is to also trust Him in things "unseen" (Hebrews 11:1b). Faith is more than just trusting God to do the probable. Faith also involves at times relying upon God to do the impossible. Trusting God for the transfer of property is one thing (the probable). Trusting God for transformation from death to life is entirely another (the impossible).

Both Abraham and Sarah were blessed for their faith in the God of the impossible. Their partnership in the conception and birth of Isaac even at their advanced ages shows that their faith

was not just a mindful belief. Together they partnered with God in a miracle. Verse 11 does present an interpretive challenge. For centuries, scholars have debated whether Abraham or Sarah is the subject of verse 11. Did God empower aged Abraham with his barren wife to produce a child or did Sarah trust God who empowered her to conceive? Debate over the grammar of verse 11 often overlooks the more profound realization that both Abraham and Sarah participated in this miracle. Both were required to trust God to do the impossible.

Faith also involves another dimension of trusting God. We may be asked to trust God to fulfill His promises even when we might not be present to experience His fulfillment. Hebrews 11:12 states that "descendants as numerous as the stars" would come from Abraham. Abraham never got to see these numerous descendants in his lifetime. He was blessed to raise his son Isaac, but had no more experience with the promised descendants than with his solitary son. Sometimes the "unseen" involves future generations. What you and I do today when trusting God may have impact that we could never imagine on the future. Your faith today may be tomorrow's inheritance. Faith is more than an individual affair. We have no idea what can grow out of our trust in the Almighty. The fruits of our faith may never be tasted personally but may be harvested by unknown and future beneficiaries.

The faith of Abraham and Sarah in God to bring about a miraculous birth foreshadows the miraculous pregnancy of Mary and birth of our Savior. Mary was told she was going to have a child, just as Sarah was informed. Instead of being too old like Sarah, Mary did not have a husband with whom she could conceive a child. "How can this be," asked Mary (Luke 1:34). She did not laugh like Abraham and Sarah, but she was equally aware of the impossibility of her situation. Joseph too could not see how God could do such an incredible thing as bring a child into the world from a virgin. Yet when instructed by God, Joseph chose to trust and take his part in the miracle of naming the Child he did not father with the name of "Savior." Neither Mary nor Joseph could understand "how" God was working His will. Yet both followed God's lead and both experienced the fruit of their faith.

Future generations will forever be the beneficiaries of this young couple's faith.

God is asking you to trust Him. What probable process is He leading you through currently (school, training, childrearing, retirement, etc)? How can you trust God with what you can see? Beyond that, what is God asking you to do that

seems impossible? God is not asking you to be foolish. But He may be asking you to trust Him in areas that seem entirely out of your grasp. Finally, what are you trusting God to do that you will never see? What are you doing in your faith that will influence future generations, never to be known by you?

The Message of the Passage

God faithfully keeps his promises. Trust him, even if your situation seems impossible and you do not understand how God can possibly fulfill what he has promised.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

- Write about what God wants you to know . . .

- Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

- Write about what God wants you to do . . .

“The Missing Piece of How”

(Use the space below for Sunday's message notes)

v.11 **faith** "The writer repeated this word (Gr. *pistis*) 24 times in chapter 11. It occurs in the first and last sentences of the section forming an *inclusio*. Classical orators and authors frequently used lists of examples to motivated their hearers and readers to strive for virtue. These lists also appear in Jewish and early Christian literature indicating that this was a distinctive literary form. Another feature of this chapter is the anaphoric use of *pistis*, 'faith.' *Anaphoria* is the rhetorical repetition of a key word or words at the beginning of successive clauses to give unity, rhythm, and solemnity to a discourse. *Pistis* occurs 18 times without an article (anarthrous) in verses 3-31 but nowhere else in Hebrews. This literary device serves to stress the importance of faith and to unite the chapter" (Thomas Constable, *Notes on Hebrews*, soniclight.com, 99-100).

v. 11 **Abraham/Sarah** The subject or main actor of this verse is debated. Sarah is made the subject by many translators (KJV, ESV, NASB). Yet others see Abraham as the subject of this verse (NIV1984). F. F. Bruce in his commentary on Hebrews makes a lengthy four-point case as to why Abraham is the subject of verse 11. One of his arguments is that verse 10 and verse 12 are about Abraham. He states, "In verse 12 it is still Abraham's faith that is the subject so that verse 11, if it refers to Sarah is a digression. Even so it would not be an irrelevant digression; Sarah was very much involved in the fulfillment of the promise that Abraham would have a son" (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT, 300).

v. 11 **Enabled/empowered** Perhaps the most controversial phrase in the section. Literally means "given power to plant or deposit seed." "The phrase is a fixed hellenistic idiom of the specifically male function of producing sperm. The sexual expression must be understood in the normal active sense of Abraham's part in the generation of Isaac." (William Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 47b, *Hebrews 9-13*, 354). Yet others have seen this phrase to mean that Sarah was empowered to bring forth a new line of descendants—an "establishment" or "foundation" (as elsewhere in the NT) and seed as "posterity." This view would translate verse 11 something like "By faith Sarah herself received power for the founding of a posterity" (P. E. Hughes, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 475).

v. 11 **past the age** "The aged couple lacked the physical ability to cause birth, but faith introduced them to the power that brought about the birth of Isaac. 'Past age' (which could refer to either of the two . . .) draws attention to the area in which faith had to operate. On the merely human level, there was no hope. But for Abraham there was hope. He knew that God had made a promise and he knew that God is 'faithful'" (Leon Morris, "Hebrews," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12:120).

v. 11 **considered** Another way to think about faith. The word when used as a noun means "judge" or "ruler." In verbal form it means to think with judgment, critique or high value—"to regard as particularly important;" "to esteem" (Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, NT:2233). The same word is used in Hebrews 11:26 to show the value of one thought over another. To "consider" God faithful is not a passing whim. It is a final statement of valued judgment and conclusion.

v. 12 **good as dead** "In Rom 4:19, Paul uses the verb to refer to the impotence of the aged Abraham, and the subst. to refer to Sarah's inability to become a mother (cf. Gen 17:17; 18:11 f.): 'And he [sc. Abraham] was not weak in faith when he considered that his body had died—he was nearly one hundred years old—and the womb of Sarah [also was] dead' Nevertheless, against all human expectations, God fulfilled his promise to them. Heb 11:12 (pass.) mentions the same with similar wording" (R. Dabelstein, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, NT:3500).

v.12 **descendants** "Those generated" by Abraham and Sarah. This word occurs 97 times in the NT and is used primarily of the father's role in producing children (See Mt 1). It is often translated "begat" or "begotten" (A. Kretzger, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, NT:1080).

v. 12 **stars/sand** "There is a contrast here between the one man and the innumerable descendants. A similar contrast between the 'one' and the 'many' descended from him occurs in Paul's Adam theology of Romans 5:12ff. The imagery of the innumerable stars and grains of sand comes directly from the Genesis account (22:17;cf. 32:12). It is a vivid reminder of the magnitude of the promise of God, especial directed to the one who was good as dead. Teeming life was to come from apparent death, a superb example of God's ways differing from man's example of what is possible" (Donald Guthrie, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 233).

Family Time

Family time will help you take a break from your busy schedule and spend time connecting with your family.
Tips for your Family Time: Keep it simple! Be flexible! Do it often! HAVE FUN!!

Do you remember sitting in science class and watching your teacher make an egg squeeze through the small mouth of a bottle and remain intact? I remember thinking it was a miracle. How could that happen? In our sermon next week we will have two stories of something impossible happening. First, Abraham and Sarah find out they will become parents in their old age. Secondly, young Mary learns she will be the mother of Jesus. How can these things happen? It's because we serve a God who specializes in the impossible. Sometimes we come up against mountains that seem insurmountable. How in the world can God work this one out? He can because He is God and there is no other! Hebrews 11 is filled with stories of heroes of the faith who trusted God despite their situation. They teach us that we don't always have to know how; we just have to know who. Use the egg experiment this week to not only impress your kids but to point them to our God who makes all things possible. You can find out how at <http://www.sciencebase.com/science-blog/egg-in-a-bottle.html>.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Hebrews 11:11-12

1. Why was Abraham surprised to learn he would become a father?
2. Read Luke 1:26-37. What impossible message did the angel give Mary?
3. Read Luke 1:37 out loud

What Do You Think

1. Did Abraham and Mary each trust God in their situations?
2. Has your family, or someone you know, ever faced an impossible situation? If so, how did God help them through it?

What R U Going To Do

There are many stories in the news today about people in difficult situations. Ask your parents to help you look through the newspaper or online to find a story. Cut (or print) it out and post it somewhere so your family can pray for the people involved this week.

MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Hope- Coping with the problems of life and death with the help of Jesus

Memory Verse

Isa 9:6 "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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