

Outline

Impossible Joy – A Lifetime Achievement

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Hebrews 11:6 NIV

Last week in church we came together to embark on a journey to find joy in our lives and came across this verse in the Bible. It really seems like a tough sell and that God is just being mean to us. But if you remember, I compared God being pleased with us to my being pleased with my children and it is not when they argue with me that I get displeased or when they even do stupid stuff. My displeasure is built into the idea that I hurt when they do not let me help them with my EXPERIENCE in life. If they will just trust me, I will absolutely help them in life and reward their existence. I live for it! And when they seek my help, we both live in unified fellowship and love and hope.

That’s what God means when He says, **“Without faith it is impossible to please God...”** Impossible Joy only comes through a life that is lived in Faith – Faith is the belief that God exists and that He desires to reward my life with Joy if I earnestly seek Him to take advantage of His Infinite Experience. Impossible Joy is only possible in my life when I choose to believe in Him and earnestly seek to achieve His rewards in life on His terms rather than my terms. Living life on my terms leads only to doldrums spotlighted by moments of happiness. Living life on God’s terms leads to Impossible Joy that remains consistent in high times and low times. God desires that I trust His wisdom, His experience, His provision, and that I seek a full life from Him who can provide it no matter the circumstances. Happiness is the absence of sorrow and the creation of a positive feeling for a moment in time. Joy, on the other hand, is the utter acceptance that life is good and that God is in control and will do nothing to hurt or destroy me, but can be trusted to be in control in good times and bad. Joy is a contentment that all will be okay, because God is in control. A person can experience moments of happiness in a joyful life, but joy may not exist in the happy moments of a person’s life. The life of Impossible Joy is only possible through an utter dependence on God and trust in His leading of my life.

Impossible Joy is only achieved in life when we choose to live a life of faith in God, trusting Him to lead, to provide, to know what is best for our life. Only as we choose to obey Him will we find that our spirits will be filled with Impossible Joy. The first verse in Hebrews 11 (NIV) illustrates this for us: **“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”** Don’t be so quick to just whip by this verse as a cute little quote. This is tough stuff. This is almost impossible to achieve. Look more closely at just what it is saying. If I live my life by faith, the faith that verse 6 says is a must to be able to please God, then I have to just accept and believe and be sure of, not what I have in hand and can achieve on my own, but simply on the hope of what has been promised. And further, I must absolutely trust and believe and be certain of what I do not see. And what is it that I do not see – God!

That is scary stuff. Which by the way is the chief gateway emotion of faith – Fear. Faith always involves fear, for when I put my trust in hopes and try to be certain of the unknown, I am called to do things that are outside my comfort zone, obey commands that no one else is doing, step off the cliffs of the firm foundation of safe, knowable routine, controlled livable situations. And

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yet there is very little purpose of life found in the routine, in the comfort zone. God speaks to all of us everyday and asks us to trust Him and follow His lead into the unknown. It is outside the comfort zone that we find God waiting. And it is where God is that we find the Impossible Joy of a fulfilling life. God is never in the ho-hum existence of the mundane, the safe existence. **God does not desire you to stay the same**, live the same as you have always been. He desires you to live this adventurous life with Him just outside your comfort zone into the life of the unknown – That is Faith – That is the stuff of Impossible Joy.

This chapter in the Bible, Hebrews 11 is full of examples that prove my point. But I want to just settle on one that God talks about here. His name is Abraham. He is an Old Testament guy. And here is the thing that sticks out about this guy when the Bible introduces him to us – nothing sticks out. This guy just seems to be an ordinary guy. You probably could not pick him out in a crowd – Vanilla Man and no sprinkles to go. As a matter of fact when the Bible first introduces us to him in Genesis 11, he is only called Abram – like he isn't even worth the effort of a full name – just kidding:

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah. Now Sarai was barren; she had no children. Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. Terah lived and he died in Haran. Genesis 11:28-32 NIV

Sounds pretty average, right? Abram was somebody's son. He had a couple of brothers, one of whom died. He got married, lived with his parents – not much has changed in 5,000 years – his dad had a job, got transferred, and took Abram and his family to live with him at the new job. Then Abram's dad died. Not a very spectacular life. Just an average guy doing average stuff, living an existence. Sure there were the momentary jolts of happiness with a birthday celebration, some beers with the boys on Saturday night when they would go out "camel tipping," a raise at work, the Sunday afternoon nap, but not much else. Abram was the average guy – not a superman of faith on whom God looked down and said – "Now there's a human that's doing something and I think he just might be the guy who could do great things for me. He is a man of FAITH!" I don't see it in the introduction! Abram was pretty much like you and me – Average. Nothing wrong or evil in his life, but nothing spectacular in his life either.

But it is the next verse that is spectacular in Abram's life and that sets his life into an adventure of growth outside the comfort zone, causing Abram to become someone God brags about in Hebrews 11. Look how Genesis 12 begins:

God told Abram: "Leave your country, your family, and your father's home for a land that I will show you." Genesis 12:1 TM

Comfort zone crashing time! Exit for the unknown dead ahead. Extreme likelihood for failure just around the corner! You gotta' be kidding me! Abram had it going pretty good right now – Sure it was an average life, but it was pretty settled and provided for. He knew the town pretty

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good. He was living in his father's house that he had inherited. His dad had left him a little nest egg – the job was good. His wife was in a routine and felt secure. Staying right here is just the thing that would be the smart, safe move – work toward retirement, take the pension, maybe even save up enough to get a little place on the lake and live, not richly, but maybe comfortably, then just like dad, live to a good old age and die a happy man. SCCCCCCCCRRRRRRREACH. The cd is about to skip!

You see, I don't think God lets us stay comfortable. I think He is constantly speaking to us everyday. You know those thoughts that you have that just seem out of character for you and you pass them off as last night's pizza being bad or just the idiosyncrasies of the weirder part of your personality? Yeah, those thoughts. It ain't the pizza, I promise you. Abram did not get a hold of some bad Palestinian mushrooms here. In the fleeting thoughts of his mind, God spoke to Abram and told him something wild! "Trust me. Let's make a move. I'm gonna' do some great things with you Abram."

["I'll make you a great nation and bless you. I'll make you famous; you'll be a blessing. I'll bless those who bless you; those who curse you I'll curse. All the families of the Earth will be blessed through you." Genesis 12:2,3 NIV](#)

You gotta' be kidding me! What did God think He was doing? This is Vanilla Man – minus the sprinkles! He is as average as average as you can get. I think that is why Genesis 11 ends so boring when talking about Abram. But that is how God is; He loves to take the unspectacular and make it spectacular. He loves to take the impossible and make it possible! He takes a whole Bible to show that He is the King of taking the average life that is only highlighted by blips of happiness on the radar screen and growing that life, when that life puts its faith and trust in Him, to a place where Impossible Joy characterizes that life's daily existence. The very next verse changes Abram's life forever:

[So Abram left just as God said. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot with him, along with all the possessions and set out for the land of Canaan and arrived safe and sound. Genesis 12:4 TM](#)

Abram listened to the voice of God in his heart – in his fleeting thoughts – and he obeyed that voice without question. God did not tell Abram where to go or what the endgame would be. He just said – "I want to you to go to a land that I will show you." Hebrews 11 says it best as God brags all over Abraham:

[By an act of faith, Abraham said yes to God's call to travel to an unknown place that would become his home. When he left he had no idea where he was going. By an act of faith he lived in the country promised him, lived as a stranger camping in tents.](#)

[Hebrews 11:8,9 TM](#)

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Was Abram scared? You know he was. He was following a voice in his head and going to a place of which he had no idea. And I am sure that Sarah his wife was right there asking him if he forgot his map and nagging him to stop and ask directions, and his nephew Lot was on the back camel with the constant question: "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" And Abraham was wondering: "Am I crazy? Did I really hear God?" But the cool thing is that Abram obeyed God's voice and went. There is no reason to believe that Abram ever even knew God before this time. However, as the chapter closes, Abram hears the voice of God again as he arrives in the Promised land of Canaan.

God appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your children." Abram built an altar at the place God had appeared to him. He moved on from there to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent between Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. He built an altar there and prayed to God. Genesis 12:7-9 TM

What happened? It got easier to hear the voice of God. God spoke to Abram again because he had obeyed him and Abram easily recognized his voice. Then almost immediately at Bethel, Abram prayed for the first time seeking to hear from God. He worshipped God because he was getting used to hearing God's voice in his heart. The Impossible Joy was taking over Abram's heart. And God began to lead Abram.

I don't have time to tell you the rest of the story, but I want to challenge you to read Abram's story of Impossible Joy that led to a very fulfilling life – all because of one step of faith where he chose to believe the invisible and hope for what was to come: that God was real and that God rewards those who earnestly seek him. It's a very human story and you will enjoy reading it, for it is full of adventure, battle, mistakes, sex, and romance, human interest and intrigue. But it is a story illustrating a life lived in faith, believing God has our best interest in mind. It is a story that illustrates that hearing God and knowing God is a lifetime achievement, one which you will get right some of the time, like you saw in Abram's start today. But also one where just in the next chapter, you see Abram make a big mistake and try to control his own destiny and happiness and God lets him. The result: hurt, confusion, a lack of peace, and a time period of immense stress. I'll let you read about it. In the end God wants us to see an ordinary, average, vanilla guy, who gets to have some extraordinary God moments and a fulfilling life because he steps out of his own routine and comfort zone, chooses to trust God, and obeys God's voice in his fleeting thoughts. He becomes a person of impact within his family and community, and by the shift of life that he begins with his small spark, spawns both the Jewish and Muslim races through two very different sons, both of whom God blesses mightily, and ultimately, Jesus and his followers called Christians. God even changes Abram's name to Abraham, which means, "Father of many nations." That promise Abraham never saw fulfilled; it happened long after his death. But Abraham's influence lives on even until 2009, because of one small step of obedience illustrated in [Hebrews 11:1 NIV](#) - **"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."**

So I ask you, Mr. Vanilla – Ms. Average – are you content with your life of routine, low impact, "doldrumatic" existence? Nothing wrong with being average – we all are. But are you making

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an impact that will live long after you are dead and gone? Are you living a life of Impossible Joy that is resulting in a contentment that life is good and God is alive in your life? Is life a wonderful adventure in which you know God is using you to make this world a better place in some way? God loves to make hot fudge sundaes with sprinkles out of vanilla! And it all starts today with you deciding just like Mr. Vanilla, Abraham, to do one thing:

Obey God's Voice in your Fleeting Thoughts! Today. What is God saying to you that you are putting off? Is God asking you to simply believe in Him (even though you can't see Him physically)? Is God asking you to do the tough job of seeking forgiveness from

another or to extend forgiveness to another to end a feud? Is God asking you to leave your job, take another job, be content with the job you have? Is God asking you to minister to your neighbor who needs help but you're too shy to get to know them? Is God asking you to tell somebody in your life about how God has loved you and changed your life through your belief in His Son Jesus and the power of His resurrected life? Is God asking you to follow Him and identify with Him by being baptized at our next Baptism? How is God asking you to make your Vanilla Ice Cream into a Hot Fudge Sundae with Sprinkles? It will take a step of faith and obedience on your part!

Think about that while the band plays the last song. Then take out your program and write down your Hot Fudge Sundae commitment to God today to obey His voice.

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