

## Old Testament Examples of Spiritual Fitness Hebrews 11:1-40

### INTRODUCTION:

When I was a lad running around on Grandpa's farm in Douglas County, IL, I decided that when I grew up I wanted to be an Indian princess. It made perfect sense at the time. Roy Rogers usually shot the Indian braves and married the princess and then she lived happily ever after. I wanted to live happily ever after and I really admired Roy Rogers

What about you? When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up? And why did you want to become that? Very often that aspiration becomes a goal because we admire someone and want to be like him or her.

So what about now? Who do you admire? To whom do you look up? Do you have any spiritual heroes who inspire you?

Hebrews 10:36 instructs that *"You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."* We need to persevere if we want to receive our reward. The reward is reserved for those who finish the race.

But here's the deal: we cannot persevere without being fit. I can run a step or two; I might even be able to run a short sprint. But to run a marathon requires stamina that I do not have. I would have to get fit before I could keep going for the long run.

After having told us to persevere, to inspire us to do so, the author of the book of Hebrews spends an entire chapter giving examples of notable Old Testament characters who were spiritually fit and who persevered. The objective is that we will look up to these people, that we will admire them and that we will want to be like them.

This morning, we are going to take a few minutes to look at some of these examples with the hope that they will inspire us to spiritual fitness, to perseverance and to our reward.

### I. ABEL

The first Old Testament character whose example is cited is Abel. We don't really know very much about Abel except that he was the second born son of Adam and Eve. He was the world's first sibling, suffered as the object of the world's first case of sibling rivalry and was the first person to ever be murdered.

But these are not the reasons that Hebrews 11 includes Abel as an example for us to emulate. Abel is an Old Testament example of spiritual fitness because he offered a better sacrifice than his brother did. Hebrews 11 says that Abel's sacrifice caused God to speak well of him and that because of the example of his sacrifice, Abel himself still speaks to us.

What made Abel's sacrifice commendable to us? I don't know that I can say definitively but I do know that Abel's sacrifice was the best portions of the best animals in his flock while Cain only brought what the Bible calls "some of the fruits of the soil." Abel offered God the best that he had and that is an example for us to follow.

## II. ENOCH

The second Old Testament character who is named as an example for us is Enoch. As with Abel, so with Enoch, we know very little about him...except that Enoch lived to be 365 years old and walked with God the whole time. That is perseverance. And his faithful perseverance was rewarded by God in a most remarkable way. Enoch never died. He walked with God on this earth for 365 years and then suddenly he was walking with God in heaven and he never experienced death.

The older King James translation of Hebrews 11:5 reads:

<sup>5</sup> *By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.*

Enoch was "translated". Usually, we think that when someone translates something, he takes a message that is in one language and renders it in a different language. But in this case, it was the man that was rendered differently. Enoch was in human form one moment and was in his heavenly home in the next.

Enoch is an example to inspire us to walk with God throughout this life so that one day we can walk with Him in the next.

## III. NOAH

While we know precious little about Abel and Enoch, we know a bit more about Noah. Noah's story occupies chapters 6, 7 & 8 of the book of Genesis. And my guess is that you are familiar with Noah and his story.

Noah is an example to us of benefiting from God's protection. God was going to destroy the world with a universal flood but God made provision for Noah and his family to be saved. All Noah had to do was follow God's instructions.

God told Noah to build an ark: a kind of 3-story barge. God told Noah exactly how to build it: how long, how wide and how high; what kind of

wood and what kind of sealant. God told Noah how many doors and windows to put in the ark. God told Noah exactly how to build his ark of protection so he could be saved from the coming destruction.

God told Noah exactly and Noah obeyed exactly. Noah didn't decide to add skylights or headlights. Noah didn't improvise and substitute different lumber or different dimensions. Noah did not modify the blueprint to include sails. He did not change a thing. He simply obeyed God's plan for salvation and as a result he was saved.

Noah's example should be an inspiration to us all. If you do exactly what God tells you to do to be saved, you will be. No one else obeyed God precisely like Noah and his family did and, as a result, no one else was saved like Noah and his family were.

#### **IV. ABRAHAM**

The next example that Hebrews 11 records for us is that of Abraham. Abraham is an example of someone who believed God, trusted Him and acted upon that trust.

- Abraham trusted God when He said that Abraham was going to receive a whole country as his own land.
- Abraham trusted God when He said that Abraham would be the father of multiple nations and nationalities even though he was already a very old man.
- Abraham trusted God when He asked Abraham to offer his only begotten son as a human sacrifice. Because Abraham trusted God, he made all the necessary preparations to sacrifice Isaac and when God saw that Abraham was prepared to follow through on His command, God stopped him and spared Isaac.

Abraham was not a perfect man but he is an example to inspire us to act on our faith and not merely speak of it.

#### **V. ISAAC**

Abraham's son, Isaac, is given as an example of a man who gave his children the blessing of a hope for their future. Are you giving your kids, your grandchildren, the youth of our church and the youth of our community a reason to hope for their future? It is a shortsighted and faithless person who only lives for himself with no thought for the future of the next generations. And while that applies to our stewardship of the environment and our administration of the economy it also and especially applies to disciplining the coming generations so they have a hope that extends beyond the grave. What a tragedy it would be if we do not follow Isaac's example and instill the blessing of faith so that our children and our children's children have a hope for all their tomorrows.

**VI. JACOB**

The next example that is listed for us is that of Jacob, a son of Isaac. Jacob also left a blessing but in his case, what is noted is that he blessed his grandchildren. Some people say, "Grandchildren are the God's reward for not killing your children when you felt like it." That seems kind of harsh to me. Let me tell you what I believe: grandchildren are my second chance to be the kind of a man I wasn't with their parents. Jacob was an imperfect parent but he wanted to bless his son's children.

Hebrews 11:21 also says that "Jacob, when he was dying...worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff." What a legacy to leave for his family. As a frail old man who could no longer stand on his own, with his last breaths, Jacob worshipped.

A person's last words are important. A person's last acts have an impact. What kind of an impression do you think Jacob left on his family when he used the last ounce of his ebbing strength to worship God? What kind of example and what kind of inspiration is made by your worship? When they watch what you do and how you organize your life, are your children and grandchildren inspired to put God first? Jacob is named among the examples of spiritual fitness because of the priority of worship in his life.

**VII. JOSEPH**

Jacob's son, Joseph, gets a verse in Hebrews 11. Joseph was a dreamer. God used dreams to reveal to Joseph that he would become exalted and powerful and that even his family would bow down to him. History records that Joseph's dreams came true. He became the second-in-command in the world's great superpower of his day.

But in many ways, Joseph's final dream was his best. The closing verses of the book of Genesis record that when Joseph was 110 years old and knew he was about to die, he extracted a promise from his family that when God led them out of Egypt, they would take Joseph's remains with them.

I want you to think about that for a moment. Joseph's life had more ups and downs than the Screamin' Eagle at Six Flags. But in the end, he lived in Egypt as an honored citizen and as a celebrated statesman. But for all of that, Joseph knew that Egypt was not home. He experienced what Gloria Gaither felt when she penned these words:

*I don't belong And I'm going someday Home to my own native land  
I don't belong And it seems like I hear The sound of a "welcome  
home" band  
I don't belong I'm a foreigner here Singing a sojourner's song  
I've always known This place ain't home And I don't belong*

Joseph is an example of spiritual fitness because he lived like a sojourner, knowing that he wasn't home yet. Have you grasped that fact? You aren't home. I love the fact that Mrs. Gaither included a verse that tells us what our real home is like. She wrote:

*I belong To a kingdom of peace Where only love is the law  
Where children lead And captives are freed And God becomes a  
baby on the straw  
Where dead men live And rich men give Their kingdoms to buy  
back a song  
Where sinners like me Become royalty And we'll all belong*

Joseph's example inspires us to live the dream of a home where sinners like us become royalty and we'll all belong.

### VIII. MOSES' PARENTS

Moses, the leader of the Hebrews who brought them out of Egypt and led them to the Promised Land, was the son of Amram and Jochebed.

Moses' parents are specified as examples of spiritually fit perseverance because they did not buckle under the Pharaoh's edict to kill their baby boy. They kept him alive, they hid him as long as they could and then they surrendered him to God. They trusted God more than they feared the Pharaoh.

There have been different times in different places when people have had to declare, "I must obey God rather than man." Any time a person makes that declaration, he is following in the footsteps of the parents of Moses. Such courage is not for the spiritually weak but for the spiritually fit. The example of Moses' parents should serve to inspire us to aspire to spiritual fitness – for life.

### IX. MOSES

Amram and Jochebed's example must have inspired their son because it was written of Moses that "*he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger*" and that "*he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.*"

He persevered because he saw him who is invisible. Of all the experiences of Moses' life, surely the most memorable was when he was given the chance to see God. The incident is recorded in Exodus 34. Verse 5 says that the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with Moses. Later when Moses rejoined the people, they could see that he was different because he had been with the LORD.

What a challenge to each of us! Can our families, can our friends, can the people with whom we work, everyone who knows us: can they see that we've been with the LORD? We persevere because we spend time with the LORD.

**CONCLUSION:**

Having introduced the theme of perseverance in Hebrews 10:36 and having illustrated it in Hebrews 11:1-40, the author concludes in chapter 12 by stressing that, just as these notables ran the race of life with perseverance, so can we. And we should! But we have to do it the way they did: by getting rid of anything and everything that would hinder us from finishing strong for the Lord.

Today...this morning...right now...will you make a commitment? Will you promise Jesus that you will serve him faithfully and that you will give your life for him? After all, he gave his for you.

**INVITATION:**       #675 – *“I Gave My Life For Thee”*