

Dear Ladies,

Someday we'll have to do a study in Hebrews 11. I'm not sure when. But I'd love to spend time examining each of the characters whose portraits hang in the Hebrew Hall of Faith. We got to spend just a little bit of time with our friend Abraham this week and hopefully each of us walked away with a better idea of what faith can do.

Sometimes Faith can be a tricky subject to grasp. We're asked to believe some pretty spectacular things as we grow in faith, like God speaking the world into existence, donkeys giving advice to their riders, young boys slaying giants with small stones or dead men rising from their graves. Jesus tells us we need only to have faith the size of a mustard seed but sometimes even that can be more than we can handle. He gave his audience the tiniest thing they conceive to allow them to contrast the smallness of their faith with the bigness of their God.

Paul gives us, and his Roman audience, something a bigger than a seed. He gives us Abraham, in all his glory. As much as I love knowing all the powerful ways faith carried Abraham throughout his days, what helps me most is hearing about his flaws. I love knowing that this pillar of biblical strength is the same man who lied to cover his wife's identity and who got ahead of God's plans for his family by sleeping with his servant girl. I guess I like my heroes to have a bit of an edge to them. I like knowing they can fail because I do so more often than I care to admit.

What I especially like is that his failing makes the whole story more believable. If all we ever read in our studies was about perfect people and their perfect little lives we'd toss our bibles in the trash. Instead we see a few of Abraham's warts and learn about the high opinion God still had of him, and it makes it easier to accept that perhaps God loves us too.

For as much time as we spent this week clarifying heavenly debits and credits, and the significance attributed to a very small piece of male flesh, there is but one main truth that I want each of us to walk away with this week. It is faith's job to accept what grace delivers. Please take some time this week to consider what grace is delivering in your life. I promise it'll be good.

Love as always, Renee

Now on to this week's lesson

Read Romans 5:1-6

1. What are the benefits to those who are justified by faith?

2. Show the progression from suffering to hope. How can you use this to comfort others in the midst of their suffering?

Read Romans 5: 6-11

3. Verse 6 in the NIV reads "while we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly" What does this tell us about our lives before coming to Christ?

4. Has anyone ever willingly laid their life on the line for you or someone you know? Describe what that experience was like.

5. What steps did we need to overcome in order for Christ to die for us?

6. Using verses 9-11 for reference, is there a difference between being justified through Christ's life and being justified through His death? What does that mean for you?

Read Romans 5: 12-21

7. Is it fair that we are declared guilty for something Adam did thousands of years ago? Why or why not?

8. What do you think Paul means when he writes "Adam is the pattern of the one to come"?

9. To what gift does Paul allude? Explain the relationship between trespasses and "the gift".

10. Verse 20 states "...but where sin increased grace increased all the more" What hope does that bring?

For personal growth:

Over and over in Romans 5 shines the promise that justification is available to all through grace and grace is absolutely available to all. Where are you trying to earn God's favor rather than simply receiving it as a gift? When do you put yourself outside the circle of God's love? Are you trying to limit God's power of forgiveness by refusing to accept this gift? What do you need to change in your life to allow you to view yourself as a precious child of God, worthy to receive this gift?

For the good of the group:

What does this passage reveal about the character of God and how can you try to emulate that character in your own life?