

PART 3

I WILL BE FAITHFUL

When you are devoted and make God your priority, then faithfulness follows. You want to honor him in everything you do, and your decisions reflect your consistent willingness to trust him. You have pre-decided that your obedience grows out of the depth of your relationship with Jesus as you follow the example he set for how to interact with others. Being faithful means not only focusing your time and attention on God but also stewarding all resources entrusted to you. Your faithfulness allows you to practice generosity, compassion, and hospitality for God's glory and the advancement of his kingdom. Here are the key principles you will learn in part 3:

- You must pre-decide to be faithful because it will never happen by accident.
- Every interaction is an opportunity to add value, every resource an opportunity to multiply, and every prompting an opportunity to obey God.
- Rather than living a natural, self-focused life, you can live a supernatural, others-focused life because the Holy Spirit lives in you.
- Multiplying what you've been given in the kingdom of God is faithfulness.
- Because God is relational, he loves to speak to us through his Word and his Spirit, through circumstances, and through other people.
- When God prompts, directs, or speaks to you, your response will take faith.
- You will overestimate what you can do in the short run but vastly underestimate what God can do through a lifetime of faithfulness.
- When you're faithful with a little, God will trust you with much.

LESSON 5

EVERY INTERACTION IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ADD VALUE

When we choose to be faithful, we have no idea how God might use even a single word of encouragement to change someone's life.¹⁴

CRAIG GROESCHEL

Joanna Gaines has become one of the most successful interior designers in the US in a relatively short period of time. Together with her husband, Chip, Joanna has been credited with the mainstream popularity of “farmhouse style,” a hallmark feature in the homes they renovate. Much of Joanna’s ability to transform an aging fixer-upper into a warm, inviting, contemporary home stems from her ability to imagine possibilities.¹⁵

“Doing flips that are fast and fun is how I fell in love with design in the first place,” she revealed to *Architectural Digest*. “They’re proof that you don’t necessarily have to take down walls or have a huge budget to transform a space—sometimes

THINK AHEAD WORKBOOK

even small adjustments can make a big impact.”¹⁶ Joanna clearly has a creative knack for knowing which interior elements to keep and which to alter or eliminate. She knows how to make interiors inviting by recognizing opportunities for adding functional value, which in turn adds market value.

Unlike Joanna Gaines and other talented designers, many people struggle to recognize the potential when they walk into a room. They overlook the ways that professionals with natural talent, educational training, and personal experience view architectural features and interior proportions. With practice and passion, however, would-be designers learn to see beyond what’s in front of them.

When it comes to our interactions with other people, we can follow a similar example set by Jesus. He transformed human lives by knowing every encounter with someone contained an opportunity for blessing them.

- What do you usually notice when entering a home for the first time? What details tend to draw your attention?
- How often do you imagine ways a space could be more functional, inviting, and attractive? How often do you take steps to make such changes or help others make these changes?
- When you meet other people for the first time, do you tend to be more curious about them or more skeptical of them? Do you assume they want something from you or that you have something to offer them? Both?

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- How would you interact differently with other people if you focused on looking for ways to add value to your encounter? Why?

EXPLORING GOD'S WORD

Jesus added value to every human interaction he had during his life on earth. He saw them beyond their appearance, their social status, their titles or wealth. He saw their hearts, their needs, their fears and worries. He offered himself to each person in a unique way that reflected the love of his Father. The example Jesus set inspires us to look for creative ways to engage others.

Take Zacchaeus, for example. You may not be able to imagine the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus without humming that song you learned as a child in Sunday school about Zac being such a “wee little man.” Whether you learned that memorable tune or not, its lyrics remind us that Zacchaeus was used to being overlooked. Short in stature and apparently despised for his corrupt profession as a tax collector, Zacchaeus heard that the man claiming to be the Messiah would be passing through town (Luke 19:1–10). Too short to see above the gathering crowd, he ran ahead of Jesus and climbed a sycamore-fig tree.

Perhaps Zac thought no one would see him up there. That he could just remain invisible and spy on this visitor’s interactions with the crowd. Which likely means that the diminutive tax man was surprised—if not startled—to look down and see Jesus looking up at him. “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today,” Jesus said. So the wee little man “came down at once and welcomed him gladly” (Luke 19:5–6).

Their exchange did not go unnoticed, though. Onlookers immediately threw shade—and shame—on them both: “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner” (Luke 19:7). In one fell swoop, they condemned Zacchaeus as a sinner and implied Jesus must not be much better if he’s willing to be the tax collector’s guest. But as you

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can see below, Jesus had the last word, making it clear that his encounter with Zacchaeus wasn't an exception but the way he approached everyone he met.

¹ Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

LUKE 19:1-10

- Have you ever been in a situation where you felt like Zacchaeus, wanting to blend into a crowd only to be singled out? If so, how would you describe it?
- What was uniquely unexpected about what Jesus said to Zacchaeus and the way he viewed the need of this man whom others despised?

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- What implied message did Jesus convey by inviting himself to the tax collector's house for a meal? How did Zacchaeus respond to this underlying message?
- How does the way Jesus interacted with Zacchaeus inspire you to relate to people whom others condemn? Can you think of anyone in your life right now who's like Zacchaeus?

EMBRACING THE TRUTH



Just as he demonstrated with Zacchaeus, Jesus viewed every opportunity as a way to encourage, to meet a need, to share God's grace. He never followed popular opinion or let the criticism or contempt of others prevent him from conversing, healing, touching, or eating with someone Christ encountered. As his followers, we are called to follow his example and consider every interaction with another person as an opportunity to add value to their lives.

We do this by showing them grace—just as Jesus did with the woman caught in adultery and brought before him (John 8:10-11). We do this by meeting needs—just as Jesus did with the crowd of more than 5,000 who needed lunch (see Matthew 14:13-21). We do this by forgiving others when they hurt us or mess up—just as Jesus did when his friend and disciple Peter denied even knowing him (John 18 and John 21). We do this by building up others when they are suffering or grieving—just as Jesus did when his disciples began worrying about all the turmoil surrounding them (Matthew 6:31-34). We do this by blessing, serving, and speaking words of life—just as Jesus did by washing the feet of his disciples at their last meal together before his death (John 13:1-5).

If you are faithfully following Jesus, every interaction is an opportunity to add value.

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- What stands out to you about the way Jesus engaged with everyone he met? How did he often surprise them or upend their expectations?

- How often do you think about Jesus' relational style when you're interacting with others? When has recalling the way Jesus added value to others caused you to be more patient, kind, compassionate, or forgiving?

- Based on what you know about your own relational style, what do you often do when interacting with others that reflects Christ's love? What do you often do, or fail to do, that needs to change in order to add value to your interactions?

- Of the many encounters Jesus had with individuals during his life on earth, which ones stand out to you? Why?

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CHOOSING HOW YOU CHOOSE

Choosing to be faithful by adding value to others means pre-deciding to put them before yourself. Viewing every interaction you have—with difficult family members, inconsiderate neighbors, competitive coworkers, comparative friends, overwhelmed waitstaff, slow cashiers, everyone—as an opportunity to add value to their lives requires being intentional. It asks you to see people beyond the roles they play, the jobs they do, the contextual scripts. It requires seeing them the way Jesus saw them—vulnerable, needy, frustrated, hurting, lonely, ashamed, hungry, thirsty, prideful, humble, and more like us than different.

Pre-deciding to be faithful by adding value to others also demands that you suffer, that you wait, that you take time, that you give, that you listen, and that you love. These responses may not come naturally—in fact, they may often go against your human tendency to overlook others because you're so caught up in your own life. Which is why faithfulness must be intentional. You're never going to fall into faithfulness or automatically put others' needs before your own.

- What are some of the reasons that you sometimes struggle to add value to others when you interact? Check all that apply.
 - Too busy, usually in a hurry
 - Impatient, looking ahead
 - Defensive, skeptical of others' motives
 - Concerned it will require too much
 - Fear of getting too involved in others' problems
 - Kindness might be exploited
 - Others talk too much
 - Too many responsibilities and obligations already
 - Can't afford possible financial expense
 - Sets precedent for them to want more from me
 - Makes me feel too vulnerable
 - Other: _____

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- Generally, when you're with the people you encounter daily, are you more inclined to be reserved and contained or outgoing and curious?
- What aspects of adding value to others makes you most uncomfortable? Why?
- When have you most recently let others see Jesus in you by the way you interacted with them?

DETERMINING YOUR DECISIONS

One of the most powerful motivators for being faithful and adding value when you interact with others is your own experience. You have undoubtedly been blessed, comforted, encouraged, supported, and inspired by the way so many others have chosen to interact with you. There are probably a few key people who were instrumental in leading you to follow Jesus. Others may have helped you grow, provided friendship and fellowship, offered wise counsel, or given you money or material items to meet your needs.

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Reviewing chapter 3.2 in *Think Ahead*, you see the example that I cited as being pivotal in my life and in my calling. After being told that I was not cut out for the ministry, I was devastated and shaken—until my pastor and mentor Nick reminded me that no human being could stop me from doing what God had called me to do. With kindness and compassion, wisdom and understanding, Nick cut through the pain of my rejection and added inestimable value to someone he believed in and cared about.

You may have someone like Nick in your own life, someone who offered encouragement, support, or wisdom at a crucial turning point for you. These individuals show us what Jesus looks like in how we interact with others as well. They reinforce Christ's example, demonstrate generosity, and minimize the personal cost in order to make a crucial difference for others.

You have most likely already added value to the lives of the many people you've encountered in your life. But now is the time to be even more determined to show them what they likely don't expect—love and acceptance, patience and forgiveness, provision and encouragement. Show your faithfulness by surprising them with the grace of Jesus.

- Who comes to mind when you think about people who have added spiritual value to your life? Who are the two or three who have been there for you at crucial moments?

- Based on all you've received from them and the example set by Jesus, who in your life right now can you bless in a significant way?

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- What's required for you to add more value in your relationships at work? Which colleague needs what you can provide the most?

- What's one way you can bless a stranger you encounter today?

LESSON 6

EVERY RESOURCE AND PROMPTING IS AN OPPORTUNITY

*If you commit to following Jesus, he will lead you.
He will prompt you. Faithfulness means feeling compelled to obey,
even when you don't know what will happen next.¹⁷*

CRAIG GROESCHEL

You never know when a temporary prompting from God will become a permanent calling on your life. Just ask Dr. David Vanderpool. A dedicated and successful surgeon, Dr. Vanderpool and his wife, Laurie, enjoyed a fulfilling life in an affluent part of Nashville, Tennessee. They were active in their church and other ministries, supported many community programs, and raised their family with the same Christian values they held.

With experience as a medical missionary, Dr. Vanderpool felt called to help residents in Haiti following the devastating earthquake there in 2010. Registering

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7.0 in magnitude with aftershocks of 5.9 and 5.5, the disaster claimed more than 300,000 lives, with an unknown number of wounded and injured.¹⁸ In his book *Live Beyond*, Dr. Vanderpool explained, "I thought that I was just going to Haiti for a few weeks to provide disaster relief. Little did I know that weeks would turn into months, and three years later, Haiti would become my permanent home. Little did I know that when the Lord gripped me to go in 2010, it was a permanent grip."¹⁹

Their obedience to God's prompting in the wake of such overwhelming need prompted the Vanderpools to sell their home and all their belongings in order to move to Thomazeau, Haiti, and establish a medical clinic as well as a school. Today, *LiveBeyond*, as their medical ministry is called, has saved hundreds if not thousands of lives by offering free medical treatment, neonatal care for mothers, and weekly food distributions. They have multiplied their resources beyond measure as they continue to advance God's kingdom.

- Can you relate to what Dr. Vanderpool and his family experienced in response to God's prompting? What intrigues you most about their story?
- While the Vanderpools' choices may seem extreme, they did not decide to move to Haiti all at once. Where or in whom are you currently investing your resources and wish to invest more?
- Does the Vanderpools' story scare you, excite you, or both? Why?

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- What's a need—either large or small, local or global—that you feel prompted to address in some way? What does this need stir in you?

EXPLORING GOD'S WORD

Your faithfulness to God is reflected by how you handle the resources he's entrusted to you. Everything you have comes from him so that you can fulfill your purpose in serving others and advancing his kingdom. Every talent, ability, skill, and experience along with every dollar, possession, vehicle, and gadget—God trusts you to use those for more than your own pleasure and convenience.

Faithfully stewarding what the Lord has given you is not about maintaining status quo either. God wants you taking risks to invest what he's given you to multiply its impact. It may seem challenging enough to hold on to what you have, but if you're committed to holding on rather than investing in, then that's where to start—by pre-deciding to express your faithfulness by viewing every resource as an opportunity.

This commitment requires you to think ahead in order to hear your Father someday proclaim, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21). This response echoes the words spoken by the master to two of his faithful servants in the parable Jesus told about risking our resources (Matthew 25:14–30). Each of these two servants invested the bags of gold entrusted to them and earned significant dividends.

The third servant's choice, however, and his master's rebuke, reveal what happens when we play it safe:

²⁴ "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

THINK AHEAD WORKBOOK

²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?’

²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸ “So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.’”

MATTHEW 25:24-29

- Does the harshness of the master’s rebuke surprise you? Why do you suppose he’s so upset when the third servant actually did think ahead about how upset his master would be if the money was lost?
- Do you agree that it’s “wicked” and “lazy” to risk nothing with your resources? How does this motivate you to take greater risks for God’s kingdom?
- How would you have responded to the third servant in this situation if the money had been yours? Why?

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- Which resources entrusted to you have not been risked and invested for maximum impact? What's kept you from taking greater risks with these resources?

EMBRACING THE TRUTH

Our human tendency to focus on our own needs often gets in the way of recognizing the opportunity we have to add value and multiply impact in the lives of others. Our culture tends to condition us to focus on acquisition and consumption rather than facilitation and generosity. Choosing to be faithful to God requires us to make his concerns our concerns—and his concerns are always about people.

It may feel counterintuitive to hold what you've been given loosely and view it as a resource to be risked in order to be multiplied. You may want to think about what compels you to hold tight to more than you know you need. Because Jesus encouraged his followers not to worry about their future needs and to rely on God to provide for them. Rather than always chasing more, your faithfulness emerges in knowing that you can risk your resources. You don't have to hoard for the future because God will make sure you have everything you need.

- ³¹“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

MATTHEW 6:31-34

- How often do you find yourself focused on what you lack rather than on what you've been given? What effect does focusing on deprivation rather than abundance have on your faithfulness?

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- How does worrying about your future needs undermine your present faith? How do you usually stop yourself from worrying once you realize you're sliding into that mindset?
- When has God most recently met a need for you? When has he most recently prompted you to meet a need for someone else?
- What's one resource you know you need to share more frequently and generously? Who can you bless with this resource today?

CHOOSING HOW YOU CHOOSE

In order to view your resources as opportunities to bless others, you need to be mindful of all you've been given. Conducting a resource inventory of what God has given you to steward is a great way to begin. Some resources may seem obvious based on your education, your job training, your bank account, and your possessions. But try to think beyond these resources and consider your unique experiences, places you've traveled, other languages you speak, your hobbies and interests, or your favorite musicians and sports teams. Everything about you and your life can become a resource when surrendered to God out of faithfulness.

After you've listed as many resources as possible, consider how these could be invested and how their impact could be multiplied. With these opportunities in mind, think about the risk required of you to pursue such successful profits for God's kingdom.

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YOUR RESOURCES

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Job experience: _____

Skills and abilities: _____

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Languages you speak: _____

Personal hobbies: _____

Personal passions and interests: _____

Causes and charities you care about: _____

Ministries you've served in: _____

Clubs, teams, and industries you're part of: _____

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Based on this list of resources you've compiled, choose five or six that you want to consider investing and risking for maximum impact. List them below and consider how God might want you to steward them.

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DETERMINING YOUR DECISIONS

When God prompts you to do something, you may not immediately recognize the result—or, for that matter, ever entirely know the impact your faithfulness might have. Being sensitive to his prompting usually requires spending time with God and being attuned to his Spirit. This requires eliminating those distractions we discussed in the previous session. With fewer distractions, you can practice stilling your heart before God and listening for his voice. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, said, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

Discerning God’s prompting through the Holy Spirit within you often requires taking action—doing something you might not normally do, giving away something you probably would have held on to, saying something to someone without fully understanding its significance. Or, you may immediately have an understanding of why God is asking you to do what he’s prompting you to do or say. Either way, his prompting is an opportunity to demonstrate your faithfulness by being obedient.

Discernment, of course, requires comparing your prompting with what’s true about God based on his Word. It also helps to have a certain level of self-awareness and the ability to distinguish between your own various thoughts and the direction of the Spirit. Like many aspects of faithfulness, learning to listen for God’s prompting improves with practice and helps you strengthen your trust in the God you love and serve.

- How often do you pause to listen for God’s prompting during an average day? How do you discern whether an idea, urge, or risk is from God?

- When was the last time you heard or sensed God’s Spirit prompting you to do or say something? How did you respond?

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- How have you benefited by someone else acting on the prompting they received from God? What did their words or actions mean to you?

- How willing are you to obey a prompting from God's Spirit even when it does not logically make sense? When it's not convenient or easy?

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LESSON 7

FREE TO RISK

*A life of faith is a life of risk-taking.*²⁰

CRAIG GROESCHEL

Dan Cates is a professional poker player and winner of two consecutive championship titles at the World Series of Poker held annually in Las Vegas. Now in his early thirties, Cates has won more than \$11 million since going pro when he was still a teenager. He cites his moderation in taking risks as the key to both his career and financial success. “You want to push yourself a little, but not too far,” Cates explains. “This is always true in everything.”²¹

According to Cates, the most successful poker players learn to take appropriate risks while pulling back when necessary. “Push yourself a moderate amount in all aspects,” Cates urges. “You want to pursue growth, but pursue it a moderate amount, basically.”²²

Now, clearly, the risk when playing poker varies from the risk taken when you step out in faith in obedience to God (and in no way am I recommending gambling). Playing poker and other forms of gambling rely on chance as much as skill in order to win money for the player. Pre-deciding to be faithful to God by living a life of risk-taking has something much greater at stake—the impact you can have when you add value, maximize your resources, and act on God’s prompting.

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- Do you enjoy the thrill of taking risks in most areas of your life, or do you usually resist taking risks because they make you so uncomfortable?
- What do you think about Dan Cates's advice to "risk in moderation"? What have you relied on to help you know when to take a risk and when not to risk?
- When have you felt the freedom to risk big for God's kingdom based on recognizing an opportunity and sensing his prompting?
- What often holds you back from taking a leap of faith when you know you need to risk? What are you afraid of?

EXPLORING GOD'S WORD

Life fundamentally requires risk: taking action without knowing exactly what will happen as a result. The life of faith is no exception—and may actually include more and greater risks. If you seek to add value to someone's life, it will mean putting their needs above your own. When you do that, it feels like *risk*.

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With multiplying resources, you take necessary risks in order to maximize the return on your investment. As you recall from the parable of the three servants who were entrusted with the bags of gold, their master assumed they would use what he gave them to produce more. When the third servant buried his gold to ensure he wouldn't lose it, his master rebuked him for failing to risk anything. It makes you wonder whether his master would have preferred that this last servant risk his resources and lose some rather than play it safe with no possibility for profit.

Faith requires that we risk—and God continues looking for faithful people. People willing to trust him and step out in faith. To do what may not seem logical or reasonable according to human standards and our mortal senses. God's Word tells us that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). Which means you cannot play it safe and please God.

Therefore, pre-deciding to live faithfully includes choosing a life of risk-taking. You will see risk as a common denominator in the lives of virtually every person who lived a great life of faith in the Bible. In fact, in Hebrews 11, sometimes called "the faith hall of fame," you find various men and women remembered for their extraordinary faith—which inherently includes the extraordinary risks they took. They knew that it's impossible to be faithful to God and to play it safe.

¹ Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for.

³ By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. . . .

³² And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— ³⁸ the

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world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

³⁹These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, ⁴⁰since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

HEBREWS 11:1-3, 32-40

- Why do you think there's a correlation between adversity and living by faith in this passage? How do challenges present opportunities for living faithfully?
- Based on the definition of faith at the beginning of this passage, why is risk inherent to living by faith? How does taking a risk demonstrate confidence in what you can't see but know is true?
- Do you agree that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6)? Do you then agree that as you live out your faith without risk, it is impossible to please God?
- Choose your favorite Bible translation and read verses 4 through 31 in Hebrews 11. Which of the giants of the faith listed stands out to you right now? Why?

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EMBRACING THE TRUTH

As the author of Hebrews points out at the end of describing these men and women of extraordinary faith (11:39–40), none of them received the fulfillment of what they had been promised during their lifetime. Why? Because “God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:40). These individuals trusted in God and demonstrated amazing faithfulness despite not experiencing all that God promised them until Jesus came, died on the cross, and rose again.

Their willingness to believe God without necessarily understanding or seeing with their human eyes what he was doing reminds us once again of the risk involved. We can rely on what we observe and experience with our mortal senses, or we can dare to believe in the invisible spiritual realities identified and described in God’s Word: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12).

Whatever you rely on as the basis for living your life requires risk. You can continue making decisions rationally and logically, which is nonetheless subjective. Or, you can dare to trust the God of the universe and follow the example of his Son, Jesus, through the power of his Holy Spirit.

- When have you been faithful to take a risk and seen the result? How did knowing you were part of this result affect your view of the way God often works?
- When have you been reluctant or chosen not to risk by faith because you could not imagine any possible positive outcome? How willing are you to relinquish control and just obey God without understanding the reasons behind it?

THINK AHEAD WORKBOOK

- If your name were someday added to the faith hall of fame in Hebrews 11, what would you be known for? What have you already overcome by faith that demonstrates God's power, love, and purpose in your life?
- How many big risks of faith do you estimate taking in your life so far? What has to change in your life in order for your faith legacy to be one based on risk?

CHOOSING HOW YOU CHOOSE

If risk-taking does not come naturally for you, it might seem unfair for God to seemingly ask more of you than others who enjoy the thrill of taking risks. Regardless of how faithful risk-taking makes you feel, everyone who follows God must deal with uncertainty. Of course, everyone who doesn't follow God faces uncertainty as well. But most of the time we live our lives based on what seems probable and predictable based on past experiences and certain assumptions and conclusions we've drawn.

The only problem is that we often form false assumptions and inaccurate conclusions. Because we don't know all the variables, details, events, relationships, and motives in what unfolds around us, we try to close the gaps between what we know and what we don't know by inference. Our brains are wired to connect dots in order to help us process data, learn information, and avoid past mistakes. But we all know that our emotions can get in the way, and we form beliefs around what we feel, perceive, and assume.

When it comes to risks of any kind, we may be biased against them because we associate them with past times when we risked being vulnerable only to face rejection. Or we may have risked being generous but never received acknowledgment, let alone a thank-you. We might have gone for a promotion we felt like God wanted us to move into, only to be overlooked in favor of someone less qualified

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and experienced. In order to become more comfortable with faithful risk-taking, it's good to recognize your current associations, perspectives, and biases.

With this goal in mind, complete the following:

- False assumptions about risk:

- Inaccurate conclusions about risk:

- Personal biases toward or against risk:

- What God says is true about risk:

DETERMINING YOUR DECISIONS

Experiencing the freedom to risk by faith comes with practice. It also requires a commitment to continue acting on what you've pre-decided based on what you know God expects from you. Living faithfully never happens by accident but by being intentional in how you steward the resources, opportunities, and relationships entrusted to you.

Remember, as you are faithful in each small risk, God will trust you with more. Your responsibility is to be obedient—not to control the outcome. Trust God with the outcome. You may overestimate what he can do in the short run

THINK AHEAD WORKBOOK

with the risks you take, but you will vastly underestimate what God can do through a lifetime of your faithfulness.

As you consider what it means for you to be more faithful by being more of a risk-taker, let's identify some specific ways you can move forward. Use the following prompts to help you reflect:

Probably the biggest faith-risk I've ever taken was _____

What I learned about God from taking that big risk was _____

What I learned about myself, my fears, and my doubts was _____

One person with whom I believe God wants me to risk more is _____

One resource currently entrusted to me that I know God can use for more is _____

The next big risk of faith I want to take most likely involves _____

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