

Building Christian Character From Comfort to Character Noah: A Portrait Of Faith

Scripture: Genesis 6:8-14; 22

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out.

Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

I want to start a series that I have titled "Developing Christian Character" Moving out of our comfort zone to a character zone" In doing so we're going to look at some Old Testament characters and talk about the character traits portrayed by each that God wants to develop in us as His children.

The theme of this series is simple: God seeks to stretch us to go beyond our comfort zone so He can grow our character.

In life, there are two zones to live in. One is the "comfort zone". It's safe. It doesn't require a lot of courage or faith or obedience. We can hang back and settle down in the comfort zone. The problem is that the comfort zone is a "no growth

zone".

You may think the worst that can happen is the longer you stay in it, the more you remain the same. But actually, the longer you stay in it the less you stay the same, because you slip into something less.

Either we're growing stronger in the development of Christ-like character, or we are growing weaker. So what needs to happen is that we need to stretch ourselves out of our comfort zone and get into the other zone, the "character zone".

The character zone isn't always safe. But it's in the character zone we experience the growth God wants for us. It's there God can develop our character to reflect that of His Son. It's only in the character zone that we find significance and are enabled to partner with God to build His kingdom and make a difference in our world.

How many of you know who Eric Liddell was. His devout faith is known to anyone who has seen the movie, Chariots of Fire, named Best Picture at The Oscars in 1982. In it Liddell refuses to run on the Sabbath at the Paris Olympics in 1924 – even though it means sacrificing his place in the 100m, a race he was by far a favorite to win. He changes events, switching to the 400m, and takes an improbable gold medal in a world record time. But the film didn't explain how Liddell, a quietly shy, gentle and profoundly modest man, found the inner-strength to make such a public declaration of his religion. Or how he resisted the temptations of fame and the guarantees of wealth that came afterwards, choosing instead to become a missionary in China. Or how his belief in God proved unbreakable, first

throughout the terrible conflicts and famines afflicting that country in the 1920s and 1930s and then during his two-year incarceration by Japanese troops in the Second World War, and in his death in that prison.

Questions are always going to be asked when someone is portrayed as if they're too virtuous and too honorable to be true. He really was that good a person. And the beginning of his story showed me how great lives often begin with the very smallest of steps.

For Liddell, these were taken in an anonymous spot called Armadale, which is 25 miles west of Edinburgh. Liddell had been asked to address 60-odd workers in a small hall. He had never preached before. Indeed, he had never declared his love of God except to those who knew him well; he was known only as an athlete. 'He'd been a secret disciple,' explained a friend. Liddell accepted the offer nervously, afraid his voice would fail him through lack of courage. But the morning after saying 'yes' to the invitation, he slit open a letter from his sister Jenny, a missionary in China. She had sent him a passage from Isaiah: 41.10. 'Fear not, for I am with thee; do not dismay, for I will guide thee'. No one posting a letter from China to Britain could know when it might get there. Mail could take up to a month or more to arrive. Reading and re-reading the quotation convinced Liddell that its arrival, was more than chance. It had come into his hands when he most needed reassurance. For Liddell, the timing was proof that divine inspiration was shaping his path. He believed God had spoken to him.

No one wrote down or could subsequently remember what Liddell said in Armadale. What followed it, however, was described as 'a life of dedicated service that only death could

end'.

Before Armadale, Liddell conceded: 'My whole life had been one of keeping out of public duties'. After it, Liddell sensed he was 'being called to do a piece of work' that he believed God would supply the necessary power'.

Liddell believed 'Jesus' life is the most beautiful life there has ever been,' which is why his own was a perpetual attempt to mirror it. He tried to 'be like him in character' and also 'be like him in outlook,' he said.

And all this began for him, not at the Olympics but in front of 60 men in a tiny corner of Scotland.

In this character tour of the Old Testament, we'll see how God stretched folks in order to develop Christ-like character in each of them. Today, we begin with Noah, who is a portrait of faith. And if you don't believe it you start building an ark in your back yard.

A pastor once asked an adult Sunday school class to write a job description for Noah. This is what they wrote. Wanted: Person to build, maintain and sail a large ship. Must be civil engineer with experience as a zoologist. Must have experience in public relations, navigation and carpentry. Benefits: free 40-day world cruise, and your own free shovel. Must be able to stand noise and foul odors. Above all, must have patience.

In 1988, Robert Fulghum published his best-selling book, *Everything I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. Recently, somebody suggested another book title: *Everything I Need to Know I Learned from Noah*. For example...

- * Don't miss the boat.
- * Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.
- * Stay fit. When you're 600 years old, someone may ask you to do something big.
- * Don't listen to critics; just do the job that needs to be done.
- * Build your future on high ground.
- * For safety's sake, travel in pairs.
- * Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.
- * When you're stressed, float a while.
- * Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.
- * No matter the storm, when you are with God, there's always a rainbow waiting.

I. Noah had a personal faith - v. 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

A. In some translations, the word "favor" is translated "grace."

1. Indeed, grace is unmerited favor; it's getting something we don't deserve. Noah benefitted from God's grace - that is only accessed by a personal faith.
2. "Through our faith, Christ has brought us into that blessing of God's grace that we now enjoy." - Romans 5:2

B. At this point, it might be helpful to explain the differences between Old Testament and New Testament salvation.

1. Some mistakenly believe Old Testament

believers were saved through observing the law of Moses or through offering animal sacrifices.

2. But no. O T believers were saved the same way that N T believers are saved, through personal faith.

3. Heb 11:7 says : By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

4. Heb 11:13 -All these people were still living by faith when they died.

5. Old Testament believers were saved through faith in the promised Messiah who would come.

6. New Testament believers are saved through faith in the promised Messiah who has come - Jesus.

7. Old Testament believers were saved by looking forward to the cross, while

8. New Testament believers are saved by looking back to the cross.

C. Noah was saved by grace through faith, just as we are today.

1. Now, one might expect this to be the case because of Noah's family tree. Some of his forefathers were great believers like Methuselah and Enoch.

2. This was passed down to Noah, but it didn't benefit anyone, including Noah,

until they chose to personally place their faith in God's promise.

3. "God doesn't have any grand-children."
4. That is, one does not inherit saving faith. It must be a decision made in response to God's truth that you own personally.
5. Noah had a personal faith.

II. Noah had a practiced faith - v. 9 Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.

- A. Which brought transformation to his life.
 1. To be righteous means to be right.
 2. God calls us to apply our faith to ourselves and correct what is wrong about us with that which is right.
- B. "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." - Romans 12:2 (NLT)
 1. To move from my comfort zone into the character zone, we must be stretched by challenging and changing our thinking to God's truth.
- C. Which brought separation from the world.
 1. If one isn't copying the behaviors of this world, then they will stand out.
 - a. Noah stood out from the world of his

day.

- b. The NLT says, "Noah was . . . the only blameless person living on earth at the time."

D. Which brought a dedication to God.

1. Two things are required to walk with anyone, including God.
 - a. Noah met with God.
 - b. If I'm going to walk with anyone, I need to have a place to meet them. It's there our walk begins. It's the same with God. Where do we meet Him? In His Word and in prayer.
 - c. Noah went with God
 - d. "Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?" - Amos 3:3 (NLT)

III. Noah had a powerful faith - vs. 11-22

- A. Noah's faith was powerful, because of the strength of the object of his faith - God.
 1. "Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, 'Why couldn't we drive it out?' He replied, 'Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for

you." - Matthew 17:19-20

2. The disciples' problem was they had faith in their faith, not faith in their God.
3. Noah had faith in a God he had come to know because he walked with Him daily .
4. Nowhere in the Bible are we told to take a "leap of faith." Faith is always described as a walk. Because Noah had walked with God, he was prepared for this next step.

Conclusion:

Noah's faith enabled him to see the invisible.

When Noah built the Ark, he was building it in the middle of a desert. He built the Ark on dry land. Most scholars believe it had never rained up until that point. How did Noah not wonder if he was crazy? He had trained himself daily to recognize the voice of God.

You see, even though the Old Testament believer did not have the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit we enjoy today, they could still ask for His ministry in their lives (Luke 11:11-13) and could recognize the voice of God through the Spirit's working.

"When the Spirit of truth comes . . . He will speak whatever He hears. He will also declare to you what is to come." - John 16:13 (HCSB)

The Holy Spirit speaks through "dreams and visions" (Acts 2:17).

"Every vision or dream from God comes in three parts: the what, the how, and the when." - Rick Warren

"Take delight in the LORD, and He will give you your heart's desires (what). Commit your way to the LORD (how); trust in Him, and He will act (when)." - Psalm 37:4-5

Noah's faith enabled him to experience the incredible. "By faith, Noah built a ship in the middle of dry land. He was warned about something he couldn't see, and acted on what he was told.

The result? His family was saved. His act of faith drew a sharp line between the evil of the unbelieving world and the rightness of the believing world. As a result, Noah became intimate with God." - Hebrews 11:7 (The Message)

Noah's faith enabled him to invest in the eternal - v. 10 Noah's sons were sufficiently impressed with their father's faith, for they evidently also believed, joining him in building and entering the ark. When you and I move from the comfort zone to the character zone, it not only makes a difference in us, but an eternal difference in others.

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v. 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

- II. Noah had a practiced faith
v. 9 Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.

- III. Noah had a powerful faith - vs. 11-14; 22
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