

Act 7: Faith That Outlives You

By Pastor *Jake Wilkinson*

Here's a picture of me, my sister, and my grandmother.

My grandmother was the sweetest old lady. If you can't tell from this picture, we have some sweet old ladies in here — she was one of them. Wouldn't hurt a fly. Just the sweetest.

About two and a half years ago, my grandma passed away at the age of 97. She had a very good life, a very long life, and she was very ready to go.

This visit — or maybe the one before it — it was one of the last times I saw her.

I was planning a 10-year anniversary surprise for my wife. For Valentine's Day. Pretty romantic, right?

Thank you. That's what I was looking for.

(Audience laughs)

I was going to surprise her with a trip to Hawaii. She wouldn't know until the day before we were leaving.

How romantic is that?

No, hang on. Stop. Stop.

I was thinking maybe the week before. Is that better? Okay, all right.

That was totally my plan. I had things paid for. I used other people's credit card — don't worry, we were paying them back.

(Audience laughing)

Yeah, we paid them back.

It was always her dream. She'd never been to Hawaii. And I'm thinking, *How awesome am I?*

I'm sitting there with my grandma, holding her hand. She's sitting in her recliner, and I'm right next to her, telling her the whole plan.

And all I want from my grandma is for her to say how proud she is of me. What an amazing husband I am.

And I knew I was going to get it too, because I know my grandma.

I'm finishing the story — I've prepared everything, she doesn't know it, I'll tell her a week beforehand —

And I have never seen someone transform into something so different so quickly.

(Laughter)

It was like she went from sitting in her lovely recliner to sitting on a throne of ice.

She scowled at me.

This is the only time she has ever physically assaulted me in my life.

(Laughter)

She takes my hand — she has a ring on this finger — and she slaps my hand with it.

It hurt.

You can't hit her back.

Yeah. That wasn't even a thought.

Thanks for putting that in there though.

You can't run away either. She's grandma. You better just sit there and listen to what she's about to say.

My heart sank. I was so sure she was about to praise me.

And she said, "Shame on you, you chauvinist."

What was I missing?

She said, "How dare you rob your wife of looking forward to something for four months? You pick up that phone right now and you call her."

You know what I did?

I listened to grandma.

My wife starts crying — excited — and she was having a really hard time at work. That hope actually carried her through a really difficult season.

Grandma taught me two things that day:

1. **Legacy matters.**
2. **Hope has power.**

Older people here — you have something to teach our younger people. And younger people — we have something to learn from those who have lived and experienced life.

We need mentors.

I'm proud that Summit is a place that not only wants to promote that, but gets to promote it. How many churches don't get that?

And the second thing: hope can carry you through hard times.

We're finishing up our series on Abraham.

We're at the end of his life. In Genesis 23, Sarah dies. Abraham goes to great lengths to secure her burial site. He buys a cave. It costs a lot of money.

For all the mistakes Abraham made, this is one thing he got right: he cherished and loved his wife.

Gordon MacDonald, a pastor who is now 85, wrote an unpublished work called *The View from 80*. Fifteen lessons looking back at life.

Number one on his list:

"Put the most important people first."

Before anything else on the calendar — work, travel, opportunities — put your spouse and family first.

Because work and life will take over if you let them.

He grew up in a pastor's home where that didn't happen. He remembers seeing a couple who genuinely loved each other — respect, peace, admiration — and he thought:

Whatever that is, I never had it growing up. And I'm going to stop that cycle.

Life gets busy. It gets loud. But whoever your closest people are — keep them primary.

We weren't made to do life alone. We can't.

Abraham found success in many areas, but when Sarah died, he wept over her tomb. And later, when he dies, his two sons — who had massive disagreements — come together to bury him.

Legacy passed down.

That's why Abraham is called the father of all who believe — we see that in Romans and Hebrews.

He wasn't perfect. But he lived in a way that pointed forward.

One thing was unfinished: Isaac needed a wife to continue the promise.

So Abraham sends his most trusted servant with ten camels — lots of provision, lots of gifts — to find a wife for Isaac.

Rebekah isn't a gold digger. In fact, her brother later shows more interest in the wealth than she does.

She shows hospitality. She waters ten camels — which is no small thing. And she ultimately chooses to go.

Abraham lives another 35 years and watches God's promise continue.

And here's the summary of Abraham's life from Hebrews:

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going... For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”

Abraham never fully possessed the land. He owned a cave.

But he wasn't ultimately looking for Canaan.

He was looking for something beyond this world — a city built by God.

Legacy flows from what you believe about life.

Your decisions today will affect someone else tomorrow.

Have you ever had a roommate?

(Laughter)

Everything they do affects you. Even vacuuming at 2 a.m. and singing at the top of their lungs.

They're living in freedom.

But if your freedom harms someone else, is it really freedom?

True freedom is self-limitation for the sake of love.

That's not popular. Not even in my own heart.

But that's God's way.

Remember my grandma?

One of the last conversations I had with her, she said:

“I've believed in God my whole life. Why won't He let me die?”

I didn't have a great answer.

I said, “Grandma, part of it is because I need you.”

Before she passed, I had found an arrowhead on the beach near her home in California. My uncle had searched for years and never found one.

I gave it to her.

She said, “I can't accept this.”

I said, “It's ours.”

That arrowhead reminds me of her legacy.

During the Civil Rights Movement, she stood publicly for equality. She was spit on by white people for standing in a crowd advocating unity. She heard Martin Luther King Jr. speak.

Her oldest son attended an all-Black school. He dated a Black girl.

He was murdered because of that relationship.

She had a choice.

She could become hardened. Bitter. Racist.

Instead, she said, "We will never give in to this hate."

And she didn't.

Little did she know she would have a grandson who would fall to his knees in an all-Black church because it was the safest place he knew to go.

That is legacy.

Her decision shaped my life.

She wasn't perfect. But she loved well.

And when we grab hold of something bigger than ourselves — God's way of life — that legacy doesn't die.

It lives on in people.

Abraham wasn't perfect. My grandma wasn't perfect. But they pointed beyond themselves.

That's why Abraham is called the father of all who believe.

That's why we're here.

Let's pray.

Jesus, thank You for the promise that even in Abraham's death there is life.

There is life in the actions we take today.

Thank You for that responsibility. It's heavy, Lord — help us.

Too often we're human. And I thank You that You remember that.

Help us consider how our choices today affect the future.

Thank You for hope. It carries us through difficult things and pushes us toward right decisions no matter what stands in front of us.

We love You.

In Jesus' name, amen.