

Living by Faith, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: Faith That Goes Without Knowing: Abraham's Call

Hebrews 11:8-10

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson presses on one of the most practical and searching truths in all of Scripture: that true faith obeys. Hebrews 11:8 does not say 'by faith Abraham believed,' but 'by faith Abraham obeyed.' The doctrinal stakes are high, because much of the religious world has divorced believing from obeying, treating faith as a mental persuasion that saves apart from any response of the will. Hebrews will not allow that separation. The faith it commends is the faith that loads the wagons and walks out the gate. Be ready to show the class that Abraham's faith and his obedience are not two things but one, and that this same union of trust and obedience is what the New Testament calls 'the obedience of faith' (Romans 1:5; 16:26). This is the seedbed for understanding how we obey the gospel of Christ.

Equally important is the theme of following God without seeing the outcome. Abraham 'went out, not knowing where he was going.' Faith is content to know the One who calls even when it does not know the road. Press the contrast with our deep cultural demand for guarantees, control, and full information before we commit. And do not miss verse 10: Abraham could live in tents and hold this world loosely because he was looking forward to the city whose builder is God. The pilgrim identity of God's people flows directly from a heavenly hope.

The spiritual-formation aim is to cultivate surrender. The goal is not merely that students admire Abraham, but that they grow willing to follow God into the unknown, to hold the familiar and the secure with an open hand, and to obey before they can see how things will end. Aim at the place in each heart that wants control and a guaranteed result. Help the class see that the pilgrim who has fixed his eyes on the eternal city is freed to obey now, and that Jesus is patiently forming exactly this kind of trusting, obeying, forward-looking faith in His people.

Question 1

Student Question: *Verse 8 says, 'By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.' What does it tell us about the nature of faith that Abraham's faith expressed itself as obedience, and what does it mean that he obeyed 'not knowing where he was going'?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by drawing the class's attention to the precise wording, because it carries the doctrine. The text could have said 'by faith Abraham believed God's promise.' Instead it says 'by faith Abraham obeyed.' For the writer of Hebrews, faith and obedience are not two separate steps;

the obedience is the faith in action. This is the same pattern we saw with Abel offering and Noah preparing. Real faith does something.

Then sit with the remarkable phrase 'not knowing where he was going.' Abraham was given a command and a promise, but not a map. He knew the God who called him, and he did not yet know the destination. This is the very texture of faith. It rests its weight on the trustworthiness of the One speaking rather than on a clear view of the outcome. Faith that demands to see the whole road first is not yet faith.

Help the class feel how counterintuitive this is. We want to evaluate the destination before we agree to travel. Abraham reversed the order: he settled the question of whether God could be trusted, and then the unknown destination became something he could live with. The certainty was not in the circumstances but in the Caller.

Press the application toward the heart. Most of us have, at some point, told God we would obey as soon as He clarified everything. Abraham shows another way. He obeyed on the strength of God's word and discovered the faithfulness of God as he walked. This sets the tone for the whole lesson: faith is a trusting obedience that moves before it can see.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith expressed as obedience, not as bare mental belief
- Trust resting on the character of the One who calls rather than on a clear view of the outcome
- The willingness to follow God into the unknown as a mark of genuine faith
- Faith that demands full information before obeying as a counterfeit of true trust
- The God who is known and trusted even when the road is hidden

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Hebrews say Abraham obeyed rather than simply that he believed?
- What does it cost a person to obey 'not knowing where they are going'?
- How does knowing the One who calls make an unknown destination bearable?

Question 2

Student Question: *When God has made His will clear to you, do you tend to obey promptly, or do you wait until you can see how the obedience will turn out? What does your pattern reveal about your trust in Him?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, so create room for honesty rather than guilt. Most of us carry a habit of negotiating with God, agreeing to obey once we can see that the obedience will

be safe or successful. Naming that pattern is the beginning of growth, not a verdict of condemnation.

Help students see that delayed obedience is often disguised disobedience. When we wait until we can see the outcome, we have quietly made our own sight the condition of our trust. Abraham did not do that. The question gently exposes where our practical confidence really rests, in God or in our ability to predict results.

Move the class toward hope. Prompt obedience is a muscle that grows with use. Each time we obey before we can see, we discover again that God is faithful, and the next step becomes easier. Encourage students to identify one area where God's will is already clear and obedience is simply waiting on their willingness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between prompt obedience and obedience that waits to see the outcome
- Delayed obedience as a form of practical distrust
- Honest self-examination of our negotiating with God (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- Obedience as a muscle strengthened by repeated trust
- The clarity of God's revealed will where no further sight is needed

Discussion Prompts

- In what situations do you most often wait to see the outcome before you obey?
- What does our delay reveal about where our trust is resting?
- Where has God's will already been made clear, awaiting only your willingness?

Question 3

Student Question: *Abraham was called to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house (Genesis 12:1). Why does following God so often require leaving something familiar and secure behind, and what does this teach us about the cost of faith?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the scene from Genesis 12:1. The call was deeply costly: country, kindred, and father's house were a man's identity, security, and inheritance in the ancient world. To leave them was to let go of nearly everything that defined a settled life. God's call to Abraham was a call to release his grip on the familiar.

Draw out the principle. Following God frequently requires leaving something behind, not because God delights in our loss, but because our hands are often too full of lesser things to receive what He is offering. The familiar and the secure can quietly become substitutes for trusting God Himself. Letting go is how faith makes room for God's promise.

Be careful to teach the cost honestly. Faith is not free. Jesus would later call disciples to leave nets, tables, and family loyalties to follow Him. The point is not that everything earthly is evil, but that nothing earthly may take the place that belongs to God. Whatever we will not surrender, we have not truly entrusted to Him.

Bring it home with hope. Abraham left much, but he gained more: the presence and promise of God, and ultimately a city with foundations. What faith releases is never lost in the hand of God; it is exchanged for something better. Help the class see that the leaving is the doorway, not the destination.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The costliness of God's call: leaving country, kindred, and father's house
- Familiar securities that can quietly substitute for trust in God
- The pattern of leaving to follow that runs through Scripture (Matthew 4:20; Luke 14:33)
- Nothing earthly permitted to hold the place that belongs to God
- What faith surrenders exchanged for something better in the hand of God

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God so often ask His people to leave something familiar behind?
- How can good and comfortable things become rivals to trusting God?
- What did Abraham gain that made the leaving worth it?

Question 4

Student Question: *What is something familiar, comfortable, or secure that you sense God may be asking you to hold more loosely or even to leave behind for His sake?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites real vulnerability, so model it gently and give people time. The thing God is asking us to hold loosely is rarely obvious to others; it might be a comfort, a relationship, a source of security, a plan for the future, or a settled way of life. The aim is honest naming, not public confession.

Help students distinguish between leaving and holding loosely. God does not call everyone to physically leave their home as Abraham did. More often He calls us to loosen our grip, to hold our comforts and securities as gifts rather than as idols, ready to surrender them if He asks. The question is whether anything in our lives has become non-negotiable apart from God.

Guide the conversation toward a concrete next step. It is one thing to admit a tight grip and another to begin to open the hand. Encourage students to name one specific way they could hold that thing more loosely this week, whether through prayer, generosity, or a deliberate act of surrender.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Holding the comforts and securities of life as gifts rather than idols
- The difference between leaving entirely and holding loosely
- Identifying anything that has become non-negotiable apart from God
- Surrender expressed in concrete, specific action
- Open-handed living as the posture of the pilgrim

Discussion Prompts

- What comfort or security would be hardest for you to release if God asked?
- What is the difference between enjoying a gift and clutching it as an idol?
- What is one concrete way you could begin holding that thing more loosely this week?

Question 5

Student Question: *Verse 9 says Abraham 'went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents.' Why is it striking that he lived as a stranger and sojourner in the very land God had promised to give him, and what does this reveal about how God's people are meant to relate to this present world (compare 1 Peter 2:11)?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Highlight the paradox in the verse, because it is the heart of the matter. Abraham lived in the land of promise as a foreigner. The land was his by promise, yet he dwelt in tents, owning no city, settling nothing permanently. He lived in the inheritance as a stranger. This is a deliberate picture of how faith relates to the world.

Explain the significance of the tent. A tent is the home of a traveler, not a settler. It says, 'I am passing through; I have not arrived.' Abraham could have built a fortress city, but his way of life testified that his true inheritance was still ahead. The tent preached his hope to everyone who saw it.

Bring in 1 Peter 2:11, which calls believers 'sojourners and exiles.' This is the New Testament's word for the same reality. God's people live in this world, but they are not finally of it; they are travelers whose citizenship is elsewhere (Philippians 3:20). This pilgrim identity is not gloom about the world but freedom from being enslaved to it.

Apply it carefully. To live as a sojourner does not mean to despise this life or to be careless with it. It means to refuse to treat this world as our final home, to keep loose our grip on possessions and comforts, and to live with our eyes on what is to come. Help the class feel the freedom in this: travelers are not weighed down by what they cannot keep.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Living in the land of promise as a stranger, the paradox of the tent

- The believer as sojourner and exile in this present world (1 Peter 2:11)
- Citizenship in heaven shaping life on earth (Philippians 3:20)
- Pilgrim identity as freedom rather than gloom
- Refusing to treat this world as our final home while not despising it

Discussion Prompts

- What does Abraham's choice to live in tents say about where his hope was set?
- What does it mean for a Christian to live as a sojourner and exile?
- How is a pilgrim's outlook a freedom rather than a burden?

Question 6

Student Question: *In what practical ways do you find yourself living as though this world is your permanent home rather than a place you are passing through? Where do you most need to recover a pilgrim's outlook?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by naming how easily we settle in. The pull to treat this world as home is rarely a conscious decision; it shows up in the slow accumulation of comforts, the anxiety over earthly security, the way our calendars and budgets reveal where our hearts have set down roots. Invite the class to look honestly at the evidence of their own lives.

Help students locate the symptoms. Living as a permanent resident often looks like worry about the future, a grip on possessions, resentment when comforts are threatened, or a faith that rarely costs anything. The pilgrim, by contrast, travels light. The question is meant to surface where we have quietly unpacked for good.

Offer a hopeful path forward. Recovering a pilgrim's outlook is not achieved by guilt but by lifting our eyes, just as Abraham did, to the city with foundations. Encourage practices that keep the eternal in view: generosity that loosens our grip, the Lord's Supper that points us forward, and regular remembrance that we are travelers. The aim is a lighter, freer way of living.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Settling into this world revealed in our calendars, budgets, and anxieties
- Symptoms of permanence: worry, a grip on possessions, costless faith
- Traveling light as the mark of the pilgrim
- Practices that keep the eternal in view and loosen our grip
- Recovering a pilgrim outlook through hope rather than guilt

Discussion Prompts

- Where do your time and money show that you have settled in as a permanent resident?
- What does a worry or a grip on possessions reveal about your sense of home?

- What habit could help you recover a traveler's lighter way of living?

Question 7

Student Question: *Verse 10 says Abraham 'was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.' How did this forward look enable Abraham to live in tents and let go of earthly security, and what does it teach us about the place that heaven should hold in the heart of a believer?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Draw the connection the text makes. Abraham could live in tents precisely because he was looking forward to a city. The verse explains his pilgrim life by his forward gaze. He let go of earthly permanence because his heart was set on something permanent that God Himself was building. Hope, not grit, is what freed him to hold this world loosely.

Contrast the tent and the city. The tent has no foundation; it is pulled up and moved. The city has foundations; it is enduring, settled, designed and built by God. Abraham traded a settled earthly life for a settled eternal hope. He chose the foundations he could not yet see over the comforts he could.

Teach the place heaven is meant to hold. This forward look is not escapism; it is the engine of a faithful life. People who are sure of the city to come are freed to live generously, obey courageously, and suffer patiently here. A faith with no eternal horizon collapses into a grasping at this world. The eternal, when believed, reorders the present.

Make it personal. Ask the class honestly whether heaven functions as a real, motivating hope in their daily decisions, or merely as a doctrine they affirm. The difference shows in how loosely they hold this world. Help them see that fixing the heart on the city of God is what makes a pilgrim's freedom possible.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The forward look to the city with foundations as the engine of Abraham's pilgrim life
- The contrast between the foundationless tent and the enduring city built by God
- Heaven as a motivating hope, not mere escapism
- Eternal hope freeing the believer to live generously and obey courageously
- The heart fixed on the city of God as the basis of a pilgrim's freedom

Discussion Prompts

- How did looking forward to the city free Abraham to live in tents?
- What is the difference between the tent with no foundation and the city built by God?
- Does heaven function as a real, motivating hope in your daily decisions?

Question 8

Student Question: *When you examine your own hopes and daydreams, how much are they shaped by 'the city that has foundations' compared to the comforts and achievements of this life? What would it look like to set your heart more fully on that city?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question gets beneath our stated beliefs to our actual longings. Our daydreams reveal where our treasure is. Many sincere believers affirm heaven yet rarely long for it, because their imaginations are full of earthly comforts, achievements, and securities. Invite the class to notice honestly what they actually find themselves hoping for.

Help students see that the heart can be retrained. We do not set our affections on the city of God by sheer effort but by feeding the imagination on God's promises, by Scripture, prayer, worship, and the company of God's people. What we behold, we begin to desire. Setting the heart on the eternal is a habit cultivated over time.

Move toward the concrete. Encourage students to name one practice that would lift their gaze: reading the Scriptures that describe our hope, giving in a way that stores up treasure in heaven, or simply pausing to remember where they are headed. The goal is not to despise earthly joys but to keep them in their proper place beneath the city to come.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Our daydreams and longings as a window into where our treasure lies
- Affections retrained by feeding the imagination on God's promises
- The difference between affirming heaven and actually longing for it
- Concrete practices that lift the gaze toward the eternal city
- Earthly joys kept in their proper place beneath the city to come

Discussion Prompts

- What do your daydreams reveal about where your heart has set its hope?
- What practice might retrain your longings toward the city of God?
- How can you keep earthly joys without letting them become your final hope?

Question 9

Student Question: *Abraham's faith was a trusting obedience that followed God's call even without knowing the outcome. Scripture calls this 'the obedience of faith' (Romans 1:5; 16:26) and presents it as the heart of how we respond to God. How does Abraham's pattern of leaving the familiar to obey God's call help us understand what it means to obey the gospel of Christ today, and why is faith that merely believes without obeying not the faith Hebrews is describing (compare Hebrews 5:9; Mark 16:16)?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, so give it the most room and care. Notice first how the chapter consistently speaks: 'by faith Abraham obeyed.' For the writer of Hebrews, faith and obedience are inseparable. The faith that pleases God is never a bare mental persuasion; it is a trust so real that it acts, leaves, goes, and follows. Abraham is the great pattern of believing that obeys.

Bring in the phrase Paul uses to bookend the letter of Romans: 'the obedience of faith' (Romans 1:5; 16:26). It is a striking phrase, joining the two words much of the religious world keeps apart. Saving faith is an obedient faith. It is not that we add obedience to faith as a separate ingredient; rather, faith that is genuine expresses itself in obedience, just as Abraham's did when he walked out of Ur. This protects us from the error of 'faith only,' which the New Testament plainly denies (James 2:24). The faith that saves is the faith that obeys.

Now draw the line from Abraham to the gospel of Christ. Abraham heard a call, left the familiar, and went where God led, not knowing the outcome but trusting the One who called. In the same way, the gospel is something to be obeyed, not merely admired. Hebrews 5:9 says Christ became 'the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.' This is why Jesus said, 'Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved' (Mark 16:16), joining belief and obedient response in a single breath.

Make the gospel response explicit, because this is where the pattern lands. Just as Abraham's faith moved him to leave Ur and follow God, genuine faith in Christ moves a person to respond to His call: to hear the word, to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, to repent of sin, to confess Him before others, and to be baptized into Him for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27), and then to walk faithfully with Him from that day forward. Baptism is not a meritorious work we boast in; it is the obedience of faith, the moment trust takes God at His word and is buried with Christ to rise to walk in newness of life. To say one believes in Christ but refuses to obey His call is to claim a faith Abraham would not recognize and Hebrews does not commend.

Close with wonder and warmth. The same God who called Abraham out of Ur calls sinners today out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His Son. He still asks us to leave the familiar and follow Him before we can see the whole road. And He is still faithful. Help the class see that obeying the gospel is not the end of faith's journey but its true beginning, the first step of a pilgrim who has set his heart on the city whose builder is God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith and obedience as inseparable, 'the obedience of faith' (Romans 1:5; 16:26)
- Abraham as the pattern of believing that obeys and follows without seeing the outcome
- The rejection of 'faith only' as the faith the New Testament describes (James 2:24)
- The gospel as something to be obeyed, Christ the source of salvation to those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9)
- Belief and obedient response joined together (Mark 16:16)

- Obeying the gospel: hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ for forgiveness (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27)
- Baptism as the obedience of faith, not a meritorious work, the burial and rising with Christ to newness of life

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Scripture join believing and obeying in the single phrase ‘the obedience of faith’?
- How does Abraham’s leaving of Ur help us understand what it means to obey the gospel?
- What does it mean that Christ is the source of salvation to those who obey Him?

Question 10

Student Question: *Looking back over Hebrews 11:8–10 as a whole, name one place where God is calling you to step out in trusting obedience before you can see the outcome. What is one concrete way Jesus is forming a pilgrim’s faith in you this week?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers the whole lesson and turns it toward transformation. Abraham obeyed without seeing, left the familiar, lived as a sojourner, and looked forward to the city of God. Now ask each student to bring the passage down to one specific place where God is calling them to step out in trust before the outcome is clear.

Encourage concreteness over generality. A real step might be obeying the gospel if a person has never done so, surrendering a comfort they have clutched, beginning an obedience they have delayed, or making a costly choice that only makes sense if God and eternity are real. The point is a genuine step of trusting obedience, not merely a warmer feeling about God.

Close by lifting the class’s eyes to Christ, who is forming this pilgrim faith in His people. Jesus Himself walked the road of trusting obedience for our sake, and He is the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Remind the class that the aim is not stronger willpower but a life increasingly shaped into His likeness, learning to trust the Father and travel light toward the city to come. Pray over the specific steps named.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal application of Abraham’s faith to one concrete area of life
- Trusting obedience that moves before the outcome is clear
- Obeying the gospel and surrendering comforts as concrete steps of faith
- Christ as the author and perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:2)
- Spiritual formation into a pilgrim’s likeness as the aim, sealed in prayer

Discussion Prompts

- Where is God calling you to step out before you can see the outcome?

- What is one concrete step of trusting obedience you can take this week?
- How can this class pray for and encourage you as you take that step?