

Living by Faith, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: Faith That Surrenders All: Abraham and Isaac

Hebrews 11:17–19

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson sits at the center of the entire study because it shows faith under the heaviest possible weight, and it carries serious doctrinal stakes. The supreme test of Abraham is the Scripture's clearest demonstration that genuine faith and obedient action cannot be separated. The writer of Hebrews does not say Abraham merely believed God could raise the dead; he says 'by faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac.' The faith Hebrews 11 praises is, from beginning to end, a faith that acts. This is the standing biblical answer to the doctrine of salvation by 'faith only,' and James fastens his argument to this very event: 'faith was completed by his works,' and 'a person is justified by works and not by faith alone' (James 2:21–24). Be prepared to make that case plainly and warmly. We are not teaching salvation earned by human merit, and we are not pitting faith against grace. We are teaching that the only faith that saves is a living, trusting, obedient faith, the kind that hears God's word and does it. This protects the class from a false security that says a person may believe yet refuse to obey the gospel, and it sets up the New Testament pattern of responding to Christ in believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Him (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27; Mark 16:16).

A second doctrinal thread is resurrection hope. Hebrews 11:19 tells us how Abraham could obey: he 'considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead.' Abraham's obedience was reasoned, not reckless. He had weighed God's promise against God's command and concluded that the God who gives life can give it again. This same resurrection power is the ground of the believer's courage in every costly obedience, and it points forward to the resurrection of Christ and the hope of our own. Teach the class that faith does not require us to understand God's reasons; it requires us to trust God's character and His proven power.

Finally, this lesson aims squarely at the heart and the formation of disciples. Every believer holds something they are afraid to surrender, an Isaac of their own. The spiritual-formation goal is to lead students toward the freedom of open hands, toward trusting that the God who asks for everything is the God who provides and the God who raises the dead. Handle the emotional weight of this passage with great tenderness. The aim is not to manufacture guilt but to cultivate the kind of trust that can lay our most treasured things on the altar, confident that nothing surrendered to God is ever truly lost.

Question 1

Student Question: *Hebrews 11:17 says that 'by faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac.' The text stresses that he 'who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his*

only son.' Why does the writer underline that Isaac was the very son tied to God's promise, and what does this tell us about the nature of the test Abraham faced?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by helping the class feel the full weight of what was at stake. Isaac was not simply a beloved child; he was the promised child, the son of the covenant, the one through whom God had pledged to make Abraham a great nation and to bless all the families of the earth. The writer deliberately calls him Abraham's 'only son' and ties him to 'the promises.' This was the single thread on which God's entire future hung, and it was that thread God asked Abraham to cut.

Make clear what kind of test this was. It was not a test designed to make Abraham fail, and God never intended Isaac to die, as the ram in the thicket would prove. A test in Scripture is meant to reveal and refine, to bring the heart's true loyalties into the open. God already knew Abraham's heart; the test was to prove and strengthen a faith that had been growing for decades. Years earlier Abraham had run ahead of God with Hagar; now, fully matured, he would trust God to the very limit.

Draw out the agonizing logic of the test. Abraham was being asked to choose between his love for the gift and his trust in the Giver, and even more, between his understanding of the promise and his obedience to the command. The deepest tests of faith almost always come at the point of what we love most. God was not after Isaac; He was after Abraham's heart, and through Abraham, He was teaching every generation what surrendered faith looks like.

Close by connecting this to the believer's experience. God rarely tests us in the areas we hold loosely. The test comes where the treasure is. Help the class see that the very intensity of this test is a measure of how completely Abraham had to trust, and how completely God could be trusted.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Isaac as the promised son through whom the entire covenant was to be fulfilled
- The biblical purpose of testing as revealing and refining faith, not causing failure
- God testing at the point of our deepest love and treasure
- The difference between loving the gift and trusting the Giver
- Faith matured over decades into willingness to obey at the limit
- God's knowledge of the heart and His desire to prove and strengthen His people

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the writer stress that Isaac was the son of the promise?
- What is the difference between a test that reveals faith and a temptation that aims to destroy it?
- Why do our hardest tests so often come at the point of what we love most?

Question 2

Student Question: *Think of something you treasure deeply, a relationship, a dream, a sense of security. If God asked you to hold it loosely, even to surrender it, what would your heart's first response be, and what would that response reveal about where your trust truly rests?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and it should be handled with gentleness. The goal is not to produce guilt but honest awareness. Most of us discover the true location of our trust only when something we love is threatened. Invite the class to notice, without shame, where their grip tightens and their stomach knots, because that is often where an Isaac lives.

Help students distinguish between loving good gifts and clinging to them as ultimate. It is right to love a spouse, a child, a calling, or a future. The danger comes when a good gift quietly becomes the thing we cannot trust God with, the thing we would disobey to keep. Naming that is not a sign of weak faith; it is the beginning of deeper surrender.

Move toward hope. Open hands are not empty hands. The believer who surrenders a treasure to God does not lose it into a void but places it into the care of a faithful Father. Encourage students that the very act of bringing our fears and treasures honestly before God begins to loosen their hold on us and to relocate our trust where it belongs.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest self-examination of where our trust truly rests
- The difference between loving good gifts and idolizing them
- Discovering hidden idols at the point where surrender feels impossible
- Surrender as entrusting treasures to a faithful Father, not casting them into a void
- Bringing fears and treasures honestly before God as the first step toward open hands

Discussion Prompts

- What is your heart's first response when something you love feels threatened?
- How can you tell when a good gift has become something you cannot trust God with?
- What does it look like to hold a treasure with open hands rather than a clenched grip?

Question 3

Student Question: *God had said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named' (Hebrews 11:18), yet now He commanded Abraham to offer Isaac up. How could Abraham obey a command that seemed to contradict God's own promise, and what does this teach us about trusting God's character even when His ways are beyond our understanding?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the apparent contradiction squarely before the class, because Abraham felt it fully. God's promise required a living Isaac; God's command required a dead one. From the ground, the two could not be reconciled. Abraham was not spared the tension; he walked into it. This is the crucible of mature faith, the place where God's word seems to collide with itself and the believer must choose whom to trust.

Show how Abraham resolved the tension. He did not resolve it by softening the command or doubting the promise. He held both as true and concluded that God must have a way he could not yet see. The next verse tells us his reasoning: God is able to raise the dead. Abraham trusted that God's character and power were equal to God's word, even when the path between them was hidden.

Draw the principle for the class. Faith does not require that we understand how God will keep His word; it requires that we trust the God who has spoken. There are seasons when obedience and our understanding of God's promises seem to pull in opposite directions. In those seasons, faith obeys the clear command and entrusts the unseen resolution to God.

Guard against a wrong application. This does not mean we should expect God to command us to do what His revealed word forbids. God will never contradict His own Scripture, which is our complete and sufficient authority (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Abraham's situation was unique and pre-Scripture, a direct test from God Himself. The enduring lesson is the posture of trust, the willingness to obey God even when His ways are higher than ours and we cannot trace His hand.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Holding God's promise and God's command together without softening either
- Trusting God's character and power when His path is hidden
- Faith that obeys the clear command and entrusts the unseen resolution to God
- God never contradicting His own revealed word (2 Timothy 3:16–17)
- The posture of trust when God's ways are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8–9)

Discussion Prompts

- How did Abraham hold both God's promise and God's command as true?
- What is the difference between understanding God's plan and trusting God's character?
- When have you had to obey before you could see how it would work out?

Question 4

Student Question: *When God's commands or His providence have not made sense to you, how have you tended to respond, with trust, with delay, with quiet resistance? What helps you keep obeying when you cannot yet see how things will work out?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Invite honest reflection on our usual patterns. Few of us respond to confusing commands or hard providence with immediate, whole-hearted trust. More often we delay, we bargain, we look for a loophole, or we obey outwardly while resisting inwardly. Naming our default response is the first step toward growing past it. Create a climate where people can be honest about their struggle.

Point to Abraham's example as a model of prompt obedience. Genesis says he 'rose early in the morning.' He did not delay, debate, or wait for a clearer explanation. There is a quiet strength in obeying quickly, before fear and rationalization have time to talk us out of it. Help the class see that delay is often where faith leaks away.

Offer practical help for obeying in the dark. What sustains obedience is not a clearer view of the outcome but a firmer grip on God's character, remembering His past faithfulness, His promises, and His proven love. Encourage habits that feed this trust: time in Scripture, prayer, the fellowship and counsel of the church, and recalling specific times God has been faithful before. We obey forward by remembering backward.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest awareness of our default responses to hard or confusing commands
- Prompt obedience as a mark of mature faith (Genesis 22:3)
- Delay as the place where faith often leaks away
- Sustaining obedience by remembering God's character and past faithfulness
- Spiritual habits that strengthen trust: Scripture, prayer, and the fellowship of the church

Discussion Prompts

- What is your usual first response when God's leading does not make sense?
- Why is prompt obedience often easier than delayed obedience?
- What helps you keep walking forward when you cannot see the outcome?

Question 5

Student Question: *Hebrews 11:19 says Abraham 'considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead.' What does this reveal about the reasoning behind Abraham's obedience, and how does resurrection power give the believer courage to obey God in costly situations (compare Romans 4:17-21)?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Highlight the key word: Abraham 'considered,' or reasoned. His obedience was not blind or reckless; it was thoughtful faith working through the problem. He had concluded that since God had promised offspring through Isaac, and since God was now asking for Isaac's life, God must be able to give that life back. Faith here is not the absence of reasoning but reasoning that begins with the trustworthiness of God.

Bring in Romans 4:17–21, which describes the same Abraham as fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised, the God ‘who gives life to the dead.’ This is the bedrock of biblical faith: God is the giver and restorer of life. Abraham staked his son and his future on the conviction that God’s power is greater than death itself. The text even says that, figuratively speaking, Abraham did receive Isaac back from the dead.

Apply resurrection power to the believer’s costly obedience. The reason we can lay our treasures on the altar is that we serve the God who raises the dead. Nothing surrendered to Him is finally lost. This is more than an Old Testament hope; it is fulfilled and guaranteed in the resurrection of Christ, which secures our own resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20–22). When obedience looks like loss, resurrection faith answers that God can bring life out of death.

Encourage the class with the practical courage this gives. The fear that paralyzes obedience is almost always the fear of loss. But if God can raise the dead, then the worst that surrender can cost us is not the final word. This is the quiet confidence behind every costly act of faithfulness, and it is available to every believer who rests on the God of resurrection.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith as reasoned trust grounded in God’s character, not blind recklessness
- God as the giver and restorer of life who raises the dead (Romans 4:17–21)
- Resurrection power as the ground of courage in costly obedience
- Christ’s resurrection as the guarantee of our own (1 Corinthians 15:20–22)
- Nothing surrendered to God ever finally lost
- The fear of loss overcome by resurrection hope

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Abraham ‘considered’ or reasoned his way to obedience?
- How does belief in the resurrection change the way we face loss?
- Where would resurrection faith give you courage to obey God right now?

Question 6

Student Question: *Abraham reasoned his way to obedience by remembering what God was able to do. When you face a hard step of obedience, what truths about God do you most need to call to mind, and how can you build the habit of preaching those truths to yourself?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Help the class see that faith is fed by truth, not by willpower. Abraham obeyed because he had a settled conviction about who God is and what God can do. When we face hard obedience, our feelings will often argue against it; what steadies us is calling to mind what is true about God regardless of how we feel.

Lead students to name specific truths worth rehearsing: God is faithful to His promises, God is good even when His commands are hard, God is able to do what seems impossible, God works all things together for good for those who love Him, and God raises the dead. Encourage them to gather a personal store of such truths from Scripture so they are ready in the moment of testing.

Make the practice concrete. Preaching truth to ourselves can look like memorizing key passages, writing down promises, praying Scripture back to God, and reminding ourselves out loud of His past faithfulness. The aim is to build the habit so that when the hard step comes, the heart already knows where to look. Faith grows strong in the quiet rehearsal of God's character long before the test arrives.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith fed by rehearsing truth about God rather than by willpower
- Specific truths to call to mind: God's faithfulness, goodness, power, and resurrection life
- The practice of preaching Scripture to oneself
- Building a personal store of God's promises before the moment of testing
- Remembering God's past faithfulness as fuel for present obedience

Discussion Prompts

- Which truths about God do you most need to rehearse when obedience is hard?
- What does it look like, practically, to preach truth to yourself?
- How can you prepare your heart now for the tests that have not yet come?

Question 7

Student Question: *Genesis records that Abraham told his servants, 'I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you' (Genesis 22:5), and that he said, 'God will provide for himself the lamb' (Genesis 22:8). What do these words reveal about Abraham's confidence, and how does his trust foreshadow the God who would one day provide the true Lamb on another hill?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Draw the class's attention to Abraham's striking words. 'We will come again to you.' He fully expected to return with Isaac alive. This was not a slip of the tongue but the language of settled faith, consistent with his conviction that God could raise the dead. Abraham obeyed expecting that God would somehow keep His promise even through this.

Then consider 'God will provide for himself the lamb.' Abraham spoke better than he knew. On that mountain God provided a ram caught in the thicket, a substitute to die in Isaac's place. Abraham named the place 'The Lord will provide.' This is one of the great moments in Scripture where God's provision of a substitute shines through.

Now lift the class's eyes to the fuller picture, with reverence. Centuries later, on a hill not far away, God provided the true Lamb, His own Son, who was not spared as Isaac was spared. Where the ram died in Isaac's place, Christ died in ours. The God who said to Abraham, 'I will provide the lamb,' kept that promise finally and fully at the cross. John the Baptist would point to Jesus and say, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29).

Let the wonder of this land on the class. Abraham's faith was vindicated, and his words became a prophecy of the gospel. The God who provides is the God who gave His Son. This is the deepest comfort for anyone asked to surrender something costly: we are trusting the God who held nothing back from us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Abraham's confident expectation that he and Isaac would both return
- God's provision of a substitute, the ram, in Isaac's place
- The place named 'The Lord will provide' (Genesis 22:14)
- Abraham's words foreshadowing God's provision of the true Lamb
- Christ as the Lamb of God provided at the cross (John 1:29; John 3:16)
- The God who provides as the deepest ground of our surrender

Discussion Prompts

- What do Abraham's words 'we will come again' reveal about his faith?
- How does the ram in the thicket point forward to the cross?
- How does knowing that God provided His own Son help you trust Him with your treasures?

Question 8

Student Question: *Surrender is rarely a one-time act; it is a daily yielding of what we hold dear. What is one area of your life right now where God is calling you to a deeper, more practical surrender, and what would the next obedient step actually look like?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Help the class move from the dramatic to the daily. Most of us will never face a Moriah, but we face countless smaller altars: the surrender of our plans, our reputation, our resentments, our control, our anxieties about the future. The faith that surrenders all is usually expressed in a thousand ordinary yieldings rather than one grand gesture.

Press gently toward specifics. General resolutions to 'trust God more' rarely change anything. Encourage each student to name one actual area, a relationship to release, a fear to surrender in prayer, a sin to abandon, a generosity to begin, an obedience long delayed. The next step should be concrete enough to act on this week.

Offer encouragement, not pressure. Surrender is not a single heroic moment but a habit grown over time. Each small act of yielding strengthens the next. Remind the class that the God who asks for our surrender is gentle with us in it, and that He gives grace for each step. The goal is forward motion, not instant perfection.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Surrender as a daily habit rather than a single dramatic act
- The ordinary altars of plans, control, resentment, and anxiety
- Concrete, specific steps of obedience rather than vague resolutions
- Each act of yielding strengthening the next
- God's gentleness and grace in the process of surrender

Discussion Prompts

- Where is God calling you to a deeper surrender right now?
- What would the next concrete step of obedience actually look like this week?
- How have small acts of yielding strengthened your trust over time?

Question 9

Student Question: *James points to this very event and says, 'Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works,' concluding that 'a person is justified by works and not by faith alone' (James 2:21-24). How does Abraham's obedience on Moriah show us that genuine, saving faith is an obedient, acting faith rather than belief alone? How does this guard us against the idea that we are saved by 'faith only,' and what does it teach us about responding to the gospel (compare Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27; Mark 16:16)?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson, so give it the fullest treatment, and teach it warmly. James reaches back to Moriah to make one of the most important points in all of Scripture: faith and works are not rivals; they are inseparable companions in genuine, saving faith. Abraham's faith was not merely something he held in his mind; it was 'active along with his works,' and it was 'completed by his works.' The Greek word behind 'completed' means brought to its goal, perfected, made whole. Faith that never acts is faith that has never reached its purpose.

Make the central claim plainly. Abraham was not justified by a bare belief that sat quietly in his heart. He was justified, James says, 'when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar.' His faith and his obedience were one act. Believing God and obeying God were not two separate things for Abraham; the obedience was the faith made visible. This is why James can draw the conclusion that the rest of the New Testament confirms: 'a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.' That last phrase is one of only two places in Scripture where 'faith' and 'alone' appear together, and the Holy Spirit put them there to deny that faith alone saves.

Address the common objection directly, because students will have heard it. Some teach that we are saved by 'faith only,' that obedience plays no part in coming to Christ. But Scripture never says we are saved by faith only; it says the opposite. This does not mean we earn salvation by piling up good deeds, and it does not diminish God's grace. Salvation is entirely God's gift, received by faith. The point is what kind of faith receives it. The faith that saves is the obedient, trusting faith that takes God at His word and does what He says. Dead faith, the faith of demons who 'believe and shudder' (James 2:19), saves no one. Living faith obeys.

Bring this home to the gospel itself, gently and clearly. If genuine faith always acts, then genuine faith responds to the good news of Christ in the way God has appointed. The New Testament shows us that response: hearing the word, believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, repenting of sin, confessing Him as Lord, and being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27; Mark 16:16). Just as Abraham's faith took him up the mountain in obedience, saving faith takes the believer to Christ in the obedience of the gospel, and then on into a faithful life. Baptism is not a meritorious work that earns salvation; it is the appointed expression of trusting, obedient faith, the moment we are united with Christ in His death and raised to walk in newness of life.

Close on a note of assurance and warmth. This teaching is not a heavy burden but a gracious clarity. It frees us from the false comfort of a faith that says the right words but never bends the life, and it gives us the solid ground of a faith that trusts God enough to obey Him. The same faith that justified Abraham on Moriah is the faith God asks of us: not belief only, but belief that surrenders, follows, and obeys, resting all the while on the God who provides the Lamb.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith and works as inseparable companions in genuine, saving faith (James 2:22)
- Faith 'completed' or brought to its goal by obedience (James 2:21-23)
- Scripture's plain denial of salvation by 'faith only' (James 2:24)
- The difference between dead faith and living faith (James 2:19, 26)
- Salvation as God's gift of grace received by an obedient, trusting faith, not earned by merit
- The obedience of the gospel: hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27; Mark 16:16)
- Baptism as the appointed expression of faith, not a meritorious work

Discussion Prompts

- What does James mean when he says Abraham's faith was 'completed by his works'?
- Why does Scripture explicitly say we are not justified by 'faith alone'?
- If genuine faith always acts, how should faith respond to the gospel of Christ?

Question 10

Student Question: *Looking back over Hebrews 11:17–19 as a whole, what is one concrete way Jesus is forming you through Abraham’s example, calling you to surrender something to Him in costly, obedient trust this week? What is the next step He is asking of you?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers the whole lesson and turns it toward transformation. Abraham trusted God with what he loved most, obeyed before he could see the outcome, reasoned from God’s power and character, and discovered that the God who asks is the God who provides. Now ask each student to bring that down to one specific place in their own life.

Encourage real concreteness over good intentions. Surrender might look like releasing a grip on a relationship, forgiving someone God has been prompting them to forgive, obeying the gospel if they never have, surrendering a fear about the future in prayer, or finally taking an obedient step long delayed. The phrase ‘this week’ matters; transformation happens in particulars.

Close by lifting the class’s eyes to Christ, who is the goal of the whole study. Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), and He Himself walked the road of total surrender, trusting the Father even unto death and into resurrection. As we surrender our Isaacs, we are being formed into His likeness, learning the same trust He lived. Pray over the specific steps named, and remind the class that nothing laid on God’s altar is ever lost in His hands.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal application of Abraham’s faith to one concrete area of surrender
- Costly, obedient trust expressed in a specific next step
- Christ as the author and perfecter of faith who walked the road of surrender (Hebrews 12:2)
- Spiritual formation into the likeness of Christ as the aim of the study
- The assurance that nothing surrendered to God is ever lost
- The role of prayer in taking a step of costly obedience

Discussion Prompts

- What is the one Isaac God is asking you to lay on the altar this week?
- What is the next concrete, obedient step He is calling you to take?
- How can this class pray for and encourage you in that step of surrender?