

A Faith That Walks Into the Unknown

Genesis 12:1-9

Teacher's Guide

Introduction: Stepping Out When You Cannot See the Road

In 1953, a beekeeper from New Zealand named Edmund Hillary stood at the base of Mount Everest and stared at a peak no human being had ever reached. Climbers had attempted it for decades. Some turned back. Some disappeared in storms. Some froze before they reached the summit. No one knew if it could truly be done. Photographs could not capture the danger. Maps were incomplete. The final ascent was a mystery to everyone who approached it.

Yet Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, a Sherpa guide from Nepal, believed the climb was possible. They trained for months. They endured thin air, brutal winds, and temperatures that froze their water bottles solid. The higher they climbed, the more uncertain the path became. On the final day of their ascent, their oxygen systems nearly failed. The last ridge was so narrow that Hillary later described it as “walking on the blade of a knife.” But step by step, they moved upward into a future they could not fully see.

When they reached the summit on May 29, 1953, they became the first people in history to stand on the highest point on earth. Reporters later asked Hillary how he kept going when the path was unclear. His answer was simple. “We trusted our guide.”

Stories like that resonate because they show us what is possible when people step forward without knowing exactly where the next step will land. They remind us that courage is not found in seeing the whole path, but in trusting the one who leads.

Genesis 12 opens with a moment like that. God speaks into Abram’s settled life and calls him to leave everything familiar. There is no map. There are no details. There is only a promise from the God who knows the road even when Abram cannot see it. Abram steps forward because he trusts the One who calls him.

That step becomes the doorway into the story of redemption. Through Abram, God will build a people, form a covenant, and launch the mission that leads to Christ. His faith becomes the first ascent in the climb of God's redemptive plan.

Genesis 12:1–9 teaches us that faith begins with hearing God's call and trusting Him enough to take the next step. The God who called Abram still calls His people today.

Opening Question

Can you remember a time when God led you to take a step of faith without showing you the full picture?

Possible Answers:

- Moving to a new town or starting a new job
- Making a difficult decision without knowing how it would turn out
- Beginning a ministry you did not feel fully prepared for
- Trusting God in a season of uncertainty

I. The Call of God Interrupts an Ordinary Life (vv. 1–3)

What's Going On Here?

1) God Speaks Into Abram's Life With a Clear Call (v. 1)

Abram's story begins with divine initiative. God breaks into an ordinary life in an ordinary place and issues an extraordinary call: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." Each command touches a deeper layer of Abram's security. His country represents his sense of belonging. His kindred represents cultural identity. His father's house represents family protection and inheritance. To leave all three is to surrender every human safety net. But God does not give explanations. He gives a simple command. Faith begins here.

This is consistent with how God works throughout Scripture. He called Noah to build before the storm came. He called Moses to stand before Pharaoh before the sea parted. He called the prophets to speak before anyone listened. God's redemptive work always begins with His voice. He calls, not because Abram is impressive, but because God is gracious. The story of Abraham begins where every story of faith begins, with a God who speaks.

2) God's Call Includes a Promise That Reshapes Abram's Future (vv. 2–3)

God's command is immediately followed by a promise. He tells Abram that He will make him into a great nation, bless him, make his name great, and make him a blessing to others. What God promised is remarkable in light of Abram's circumstances. Abram is seventy-five years old, childless, and without land. Yet God declares that Abram will become a nation and that his name will be great.

This stands in stark contrast to Genesis 11. The builders of Babel tried to make their name great through human effort and failed under judgment. Now God Himself promises to make Abram's name great, not because of Abram's achievements, but because of God's covenant grace. The blessing God gives includes land, lineage, and a future filled with the presence and favor of God. The promise reshapes Abram's identity and his destiny. God is not simply altering Abram's geography. He is redefining Abram's future by His sovereign purpose.

3) The Blessing of Abram Will Become the Blessing of the World (v. 3)

God completes His call with a sweeping declaration. Those who bless Abram will be blessed. Those who oppose him will face God's judgment. Abram's life is now linked to God's redemptive plan. Blessing and curse are no longer random or tribal. They flow through Abram because God has chosen to work through him. The promise extends beyond Abram's lifetime. It becomes generational, national, and eventually global.

The final line of verse 3 reveals the heartbeat of the Old Testament: "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." This is God's missionary purpose. The call of Abram is the beginning of God's plan to reverse the curse of Genesis 3. It is the covenant that will lead to Israel, to David, and ultimately to Christ. Paul later says in Galatians that the gospel was preached beforehand to Abraham when God said these words. Abram's obedience opens the door through which God will send His Son to bring salvation to the nations.

This is not just a personal calling. It is a global movement. The God who calls Abram out of Ur is the God who will bless the world through the Savior who comes from Abram's line.

Discussion Question

What stands out to you about the way God ties Abram's personal obedience to His global plan for redemption?

Possible Answers:

- God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary purposes
- Personal obedience has generational and global impact
- God's plans are bigger than our circumstances
- Blessing is meant to flow outward, not inward

II. Abram Obeys Immediately and Walks by Faith (vv. 4–6)

What's Going On Here?

1) Abram Goes Without Knowing the Destination (v. 4)

Abram's response to God's call is immediate and wholehearted. Scripture records no hesitation, no bargaining, and no request for further clarification. "So Abram went, as the Lord had told him." Those words summarize what genuine faith looks like. Abram walks out of Ur, a major city with security and prosperity, and steps toward an unknown land because the God who speaks is trustworthy. Hebrews 11 emphasizes this moment as a defining act of faith. Abram goes out "not knowing where he was going." He does not walk by strategy. He walks by promise. At seventy-five years old, an age when most people settle into familiarity, Abram begins the greatest chapter of his life. His obedience is not rooted in youthful enthusiasm but in mature confidence in God's character. This movement mirrors the pattern throughout Scripture. Noah entered an ark before rain had ever fallen. Moses approached Pharaoh before signs had been shown. Joshua stepped into the Jordan before the waters parted. Faith acts on God's word before seeing God's provision.

2) Abram Does Not Travel Alone (v. 5)

Abram obeys God's call in a way that immediately touches the lives of those around him. Sarai, Lot, their servants, and all their possessions journey with him. His obedience is not isolated or private. It affects a household, a clan, and the beginnings of a future nation. Sarai's presence is significant because she is central to the promise, even though she does not yet know how God will accomplish it. Lot goes with Abram, and later events will show how connected the promise and the tests of faith will become for their family. Scripture consistently shows that the faith of one person influences many others. Noah's family enters the ark because Noah believed. Rahab's family is saved because she trusted the God of Israel. The obedience of leaders shapes the path of those under their care. Abram's journey reminds believers that their steps of faith ripple outward into the lives of spouses, children, friends, and generations to come.

3) Abram Arrives in Canaan: The Land Looks Occupied, Not Promised (v. 6)

Abram arrives in Canaan only to discover that the land God promised is already inhabited by the Canaanites. The gap between promise and reality becomes immediately obvious. God said He would give Abram the land, yet every part of it is already claimed. This is a foundational lesson in the life of faith. Often God's promises are spoken long before circumstances begin to align with His word. Abram's first sight of the promised land is one of tension, uncertainty, and testing. He stands in a place that God says belongs to him, but nothing suggests that it will be his. In fact, what he sees contradicts what God has spoken. This moment sets the tone for Abram's entire life. The promise will require waiting. The waiting will require trust. The trust will require worship. The promise of the land will not be fulfilled in Abram's lifetime, but he will see enough of God's faithfulness to know that the promise stands. The challenge of Canaan's presence prepares him for the long road of walking with God, where the visible world often lags behind the invisible certainty of God's word.

Discussion Question

Why is it important for believers to trust God's promises even when their circumstances do not yet match what God has said?

Possible Answers:

- God's timing is different from ours
- Faith focuses on God's character, not current conditions
- Waiting is part of God's refining work
- Circumstances may challenge us, but God's word remains true

III. Abram Worships the God Who Leads Him (vv. 7–9)

What's Going On Here?

1) God Appears to Abram and Confirms the Promise (v. 7)

For the first time in Abram's life, God appears to him. This marks a turning point in the biblical story. God does not simply speak from a distance. He reveals Himself in a personal way and affirms the promise He had spoken. "To your offspring I will give this land." Abram stands in a land filled with Canaanites, yet God declares that this land will one day belong to his descendants. God's appearance strengthens Abram's faith by reminding him that he

is not walking alone. Throughout Scripture, God often confirms His promises as His people take steps of obedience. He appeared to Isaac at Beersheba. He appeared to Jacob at Bethel. He appeared to Moses at Sinai. The pattern is consistent. God meets His people as they walk with Him. Abram does not receive all the details at once. He receives enough for the next step. God leads him one promise at a time.

2) Abram Builds an Altar: Worship Marks His Journey (vv. 7-8)

Abram responds to God's revelation by building an altar. This becomes the first altar in the land God promised. Worship is Abram's first act in the land of promise. Before he builds a home, before he gains any possession, before he sees any fulfillment of what God said, Abram worships. The altar becomes a declaration that God is faithful even when the promise has not yet materialized. He builds one altar at Shechem, a place of religious and political significance in the land. Then he moves to the hill country near Bethel and builds another. His life becomes a rhythm of movement and worship. He pitches a tent for himself, but he builds an altar for God. Tents are temporary. Altars are declarations. This contrast reflects Abram's priorities. He does not put his permanence in the land. He puts God's faithfulness at the center of his journey. Worship becomes the anchor of his walk.

3) Abram Continues to Journey: Faith Is Forward Movement (v. 9)

Abram continues south toward the Negeb. His journey does not end with worship. It continues because faith always moves toward what God has promised. This movement shows that following God is not a moment. It is a life. There will be moments ahead when Abram falters. There will be seasons when his faith struggles. But here, at the beginning, he models a life of trusting God with every step. God's call is not simply to reach a destination. It is to walk with Him in dependence. The promise will take years to unfold. The land will not be his in his lifetime. The offspring will not come quickly. But Abram keeps walking because he trusts the God who called him. Faith is not defined by what we see. It is defined by whom we follow.

Discussion Question

How does Abram's pattern of worship and movement challenge and encourage your own walk with God?

Possible Answers:

- Worship reorients my heart in seasons of uncertainty
- Faith involves moving even when I do not see the whole path

- God meets His people in their obedience
- Faith is strengthened by remembering God's past faithfulness

Living Out God's Grace Today

A. Trust God Enough to Take the First Step.

God rarely reveals the full story at once. He gives a word, not a map. He offers a promise, not a blueprint. That is how He called Abram. He spoke, "Go," and Abram stepped forward because he trusted the One who was speaking. Scripture shows this pattern again and again. God told Noah to build before rain had ever fallen. He told Gideon to attack with three hundred men instead of thirty-two thousand. He told the disciples to cast their nets in daylight when fishing conditions were worst. The first step of obedience is always a step into the unknown, but it is never a step alone. God walks with those He calls. Many believers hesitate because they want full understanding before they move. Genesis 12 teaches that deeper understanding usually comes after obedience, not before it. The life of faith begins with movement toward God's voice.

B. Let God, Not Your Circumstances, Define Your Future.

When Abram reached Canaan, nothing looked like a promise. Everything looked like a contradiction. The land was occupied. The future was uncertain. The promise of God stood in tension with the reality Abram saw. This is a central lesson of Scripture. God speaks His purposes long before our circumstances catch up to them. Joseph heard he would rule long before he was thrown into a pit. David was anointed king long before he stood before Goliath. Mary was told she carried the Son of God long before she saw a miracle in her hands. Faith learns to hold on to God's word even when sight cannot yet confirm it. Circumstances change. Seasons shift. But the promises of God remain steady because they rest on His character. Faith is not blind optimism. It is confidence in a God who keeps His word even when life feels unsettled.

C. Build Altars Along the Way.

Abram did not simply travel. He worshiped. He built altars in the places where God spoke, appeared, or confirmed His promise. These altars became markers of memory. They reminded Abram who God was when the journey grew hard. They testified to future generations of God's faithfulness. Today believers can build spiritual altars by pausing to remember, to thank, to worship, and to declare God's goodness in every season. A prayer journal becomes an altar. A song sung in difficulty becomes an altar. A testimony shared with a friend becomes an altar. Worship shapes faith as much as movement does. Abram

pitched tents for himself, but he built altars for God. That contrast reveals the posture of a pilgrim whose heart is anchored not to a place but to a Person. Worship along the journey strengthens us for whatever lies ahead.

D. Remember That God's Plans Are for His Glory and the Blessing of the World.

Abram's call was never merely about Abram. God's intention was always global. Through Abram's obedience, God promised to bless the nations. This forward movement reaches its climax in Christ, the descendant of Abram through whom salvation comes to all who believe. God blesses His people so that His glory may be known and His mercy may be extended. The church stands in this same calling. Believers are not saved to sit still. They are saved to shine. Every decision of obedience becomes a thread in the larger story of redemption God is weaving through history. Just as Abram's journey shaped generations after him, the faithfulness of God's people today shapes families, churches, communities, and even nations. The call to Abram reminds us that God writes His global mission through ordinary obedience.

Conclusion: Faith Follows the God Who Calls

Genesis 12 opens the story of redemption through a simple truth: God calls, and faith follows. Abram steps into the unknown with a promise and a God who keeps His word. He walks by faith, worships in uncertainty, and trusts the God who leads him. His journey becomes the foundation for the people of God and the pathway that leads to Christ. Today, God still calls His people to trust Him, walk with Him, and believe that His promises will stand. The God who led Abram is the God who leads His people still.

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank You for calling us to walk with You, even when we cannot see the full path ahead. Give us the faith of Abram, the courage to obey, and the humility to worship along the way. Strengthen us to trust Your promises and follow Your voice. Make our lives a blessing to others as we live for Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.