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Scripture Text: Genesis 12:1-4 and Hebrews 11:8-10

Message Title: *Obedient Faith*

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version, 2011.

Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.

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Obedient Faith

Introduction:

In my remaining four Sundays with you, I want to share with you sermons from texts that have been particularly important to me in my life and ministry, and I trust will likewise be helpful to you. I want you to join me as we look at faith in the life of Abraham in Genesis. We'll include the New Testament books of Hebrews and Romans because of their comments on the faith of Abraham.

Chapter 11 of Hebrews is "one of the most extensive essays on faith in the New Testament" (Guthrie, 2103), listing some of the great heroes of faith in salvation history. The one about whom Hebrews has the most to say is Abraham, arguably the greatest believer ever, and the most venerated leader among the Jewish people. We will note that Abraham had obedient faith. The pastor who wrote Hebrews holds forth Abraham's example to the new Christians to whom he is addressing his letter, and exhorts them to demonstrate true, saving faith by their similar persevering faith before the challenge of seemingly insurmountable odds. The believers, who were being pressured to revert to their pre-conversion

Judaism, are encouraged to follow the example of their spiritual father, Abraham, and keep on following Jesus, who will lead them all the way in their pilgrimage of faith.

The call of Abraham is the beginning of the history of the people of God, both Old and New Covenant. As Warren Wiersbe comments, Genesis 12, with the call of Abraham, marks a new beginning, following a series of dismal failures beginning with Adam and Eve (Wiersbe, 11). Now, instead of giving up on mankind, God calls forth a new people, beginning with Abraham, who will eventually bring forth the promised Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Both Jesus and Paul refer to Abraham as the father of all who believe, and the example of saving, obedient faith (John 8: 31-59; Romans 4:1-25).

Follow as I read, first the historical setting in **Genesis 12:1-9**, and then as I read the comments of the writing pastor in **Hebrews 11:8-10**.

In James 2:23 we read that Abraham was the friend of God. He was the only person so designated until we hear Jesus referring to all who obey him as his friends, in John 15:14. James also says that faith that saves is a faith that works, and, like the faith of Abraham, obeys God (2:14ff). Obedient faith, then, allows us to be the friends of God, and if we truly are his friends, we will obey him, just like Abraham obeyed God.

This morning I would like for you to consider with me what the Spirit of Christ is saying to us about obedient faith. Like Abraham (or Abram, as he was still called at this setting of our text in Genesis), we too always stand at a juncture in our faith. Every day of our lives we must choose to follow Jesus in obedience or choose our own way. As a church, you stand at an important juncture, as you seek a new under-shepherd to lead you in the days and years ahead.

One of my favorite gadgets is a GPS navigational system, which has in most cases faithfully guided us to our destination, following the route programmed into the CD. Although this system is usually very reliable, yet it is not infallible, and is also unaware of recent detours caused by street and highway construction. And so, when all is said and done, I have often had to make the decision when I come to a juncture in the road.

If we would be people of obedient faith, every time we come to a crossroads in life, we will, like Abraham, take the road of obedience. Not only East Madison Baptist Church, but you also may be approaching an intersection in your life, such as a family or job transition. It may be a personal, family, educational or career-related decision that will affect you and others for years to come and perhaps for the remainder of your life. It could possibly be the most important, life changing decision you will ever make. Possibly it is a decision about your relationship with Christ. Whatever it is, your decision, even though you may think it small or totally "secular," will impact your relationship with God, either for good

or for ill. This morning I believe our text challenges us to follow the good example of Abraham, and become the friends of God by our obedient faith. In several ways that we will note this morning, you and I share a similar experience with Abraham, as he ventured forward in an exciting new chapter in his life. Even though his story is about 4000 years old, it is as relevant as if it were today.

I want you to join me in the challenge of obedient faith in God, the kind of faith that...

Obeys despite the unlikely

There are several unlikely factors in God's calling of Abraham. First...

God's call is unlikely

It was unlikely that God would continue to work with fallen, sinful humanity. Beginning with Genesis 3, there is a succession of failures and grievous sins, which Warren Wiersbe says are being repeated today. And so, asks Wiersbe, what would you do with such people you had created in your own image? Whereas our impulse would be to destroy mankind and start all over again, creating a people with a mind and heart to obey, God does the unlikely. He gives, in the call of Abraham, a new beginning (Wiersbe, 19f). And aren't we glad that God did? And also, we can be glad that he didn't give up on us. His call is unlikely and...

God calls the unlikely

God takes the initiative and calls Abram to follow and to become the father of a new nation, his people. There is no logical reason why God would call Abram, of all people, for this place in the history of his salvation. And we can say the same thing about our own calling to salvation, to follow Jesus Christ in an everlasting relationship of eternal life. Scripture consistently reveals that God takes the initiative toward us, and that there is nothing we have done or could ever do to merit God's free gift of eternal life. Paul makes this abundantly clear, in passages like Ephesians 1 and 2. And Jesus himself reminds us, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (John 15:16).

There are many factors in the choice of Abram that are consistent with Paul's observation in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 that God chooses the weak, lowly and insignificant in order that his power and glory might better be seen. Abram came from the "dark paganism" of Ur of Chaldea, modern-day Iraq (Hughes, 95). And God continues to call people out of rank paganism and total unfamiliarity with the biblical Gospel, but who have an open-ness to revelation. Abram was 75-years old. And add to that, God called Abraham to become the father of a nation, and

his 65-year-old wife, Sarai, was barren, which would seem to bring this whole calling to “a screeching halt” (Walton, 397). Also God called someone who had to make a journey with his family, leaving the familiar, for a distance of 500 miles. That’s less than an hour by jet travel, but by camel caravan, averaging 20 miles a day, that’s about a month-long excursion. It does seem that God could have been a bit more “logical” in his choice of someone to be the father of his new nation! No doubt Abram wondered, “Why me?”

Faith obeys despite the unlikely and also...

God promises the unlikely

And to this unlikely pagan, God made an unlikely promise—that he would be blessed and that he would be a blessing (Genesis 12:2). God was calling Abram into a personal relationship of faith. The Word and Spirit of God initiated this new life in Abram that gave him the blessing of saving faith, the gift of eternal life. This is the eternal life that we have through faith in Jesus. It all begins, continues and ends with the grace of God, proffered through what would take place some 2,000 later, when the Son of God would be crucified on a cross. As Jesus himself said, “Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56). “Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3, 20-25; Galatians 3:6). So, Abram was blessed with God’s free gift of eternal life, by believing in Christ *to* come, just as we are blessed with eternal life by believing in Christ who *has* come. Abram was blessed with faith and become known as “the father of all who believe.”

And the Lord promised Abram that he would be a blessing and that all peoples on earth would be blessed through him (verse 3). Abram was called to be a conduit of God’s grace and blessings to a nation and for perpetuity. And you and I who are saved by the same grace share the same calling. We have been blessed in order to be a blessing. We are, as someone has said, not cisterns of God’s living water, but are to be aqueducts, through which his blessings flow to others. As Abraham was called from paganism to following the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, so we are called to show the lost world of paganism, a world without hope and without God, what he is like and how they too can know him.

A friend of mine shared this with me through his church e-mail:

“A Mercedes TV commercial a few years ago showed a Mercedes crashing into a concrete wall during a safety test. An engineer in a white lab coat walks over after the crash and kneels down to examine the damage, which is minimal. A reporter then asks the engineer about Mercedes’ energy absorbing car body. After the engineer tells all about the unique design the reporter asks him why Mercedes doesn’t enforce their patent on the design, a design evidently copied by several other companies because of its success. “The engineer then replied matter-of-factly, ‘Because some things in life are too important not to share.’”

How true this is. There are many things in life that fall into this 'too important not to share category.' Advances in science, in medicine, in technology. But all of these pale in importance to that of sharing the gospel."

And we, like Abram are allowed the incredible privilege and responsibility of sharing the blessings of God. And incredible it is that is able and willing to use us as a blessing to others.

And, obedient faith...

Obeys despite the unknown

Our text says that "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" (8). By faith he went out into the unknown. Abraham's father had moved the family from a place called Ur, Abraham's birthplace, somewhere roughly around modern-day Iraq. And they were living in a place called Haran at the time God called him to leave the security of the family place to venture toward the unknown.

Obedient faith trusts in the goodness of God

Abraham received the gracious and effectual call of God, and he responded in trusting faith. Despite his pagan background, Abraham heard the call of God and responded with obedient faith and trust.

A.W. Tozer says we don't need to feel sorry for anyone who leaves behind anything to follow Jesus. The great pastor and writer said he was weary of hearing people brag about the great life they left to follow Jesus. Tozer said, tongue in cheek, that he, for one, "gave up a lot" to follow Jesus. He said he gave up a hot, smelly Akron, Ohio rubber factory where he was making tires for an hourly wage. He said also, as a young man, he was afraid of death and afraid of life, and he said he gave up all that fear to follow Jesus. In addition, he said he gave up his selfish earthly and materialistic ambition "that I could have never have achieved, in order to follow Jesus" (41ff).

Faith leaves behind the old life of sin and unbelief and the consequences of death and hell. Abraham is called in Scripture the father and the model of faith for all true believers. And, as Paul says to the Romans, we, like Abraham, are justified by believing/trusting in Jesus and by turning from our old life of sin. You don't know all that's involved in following Jesus, but you must ask him to save and forgive you, and begin to follow him wherever he leads. You're saved by grace alone, but you also have a new relationship of dependence on and obedience to Jesus.

Abraham was seventy-five years old when God called him to believe in and to follow him. He was already “drawing his Social Security,” yet God called him to a whole new life and purpose, and to step out into the future, the unknown future. Are you willing to follow Jesus? Think of your present situation. Are you willing, by faith and trust, to follow Jesus with your vocation, career, retirement, and your entire well being? Are you willing to trust God with your and your family's needs? We certainly have a lot more evidence than did Abraham for who God is, and for his goodness and love revealed in Scripture and supremely in Jesus. Obedient faith trusts despite the unknown and thus...

Obedient faith perseveres

Hebrews 11:9 tells us Abraham "made his home in the promised land." He didn't go as a tourist. He was ready to stay where God sent him. And sometimes it's a greater “step” of faith to remain where we are, amidst difficulties and discouraging circumstances, than to step forth on a new venture. Obedient faith stays put or steps out to follow Jesus, despite the unknown factors, and the only assurance we have that our saving faith is genuine is that we keep on following, being assured of his wisdom, love and purpose, and trusting in his infallible guidance by Scripture and the Holy Spirit. We don't know specifically where he will lead us, but we do know that at all times he will be with us.

In fact, those of us who claim to be heaven-bound Christians, we know we are God's "being-saved" children because we continue to follow Jesus into the unknown future. We can all testify that it is worth it to follow Jesus. We wouldn't have it any other way. And, we can't stop following Jesus now. The moment we stop following him, we forfeit the assurance we have been forgiven and that we are saved by his grace. A Christian who is not right now following Jesus is left with only his/her memory of a past decision, which may or may not have been a genuine conversion. We have salvation assurance by our present ability to say “Jesus is Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:3) and by making our calling and election sure. This we do by growing in the graces and virtues of the Spirit (2 Peter 1:5-11). Obedient faith obeys despite the unknown, by persevering, and...

Obedient faith is prompt

Faith obeys God, despite the unknown, and obeys promptly. The Greek in the Hebrews 11:8 text underscores the immediacy of the verb "obeyed," in the way it is connected with the present participle translated "when called," indicating “a very prompt obedience.” Abraham obeyed while the call was “still sounding in his ears” (Morris, 118). The *English Standard Version* translates verse 8 better: “By faith Abraham *obeyed when he was called...*” When God calls we don't have the luxury of waiting till we feel more secure, and get all our family and personal circumstances in order.

The decision to delay obedience is disobedience, regardless of what you might claim are your intentions. Jesus never commands us to obey him tomorrow. He doesn't give us the luxury of experimenting with other dreams and ambitions we have for ourselves, and then do his will as the last resort. He is worthy of our best and immediate obedience, and is worthy of more than the leftovers of our lives (See what Jesus says about delaying in following him, in Luke 9:57-62).

Peter Marshall, the great Scottish Presbyterian preacher and Chaplain of the U.S. Senate, who had an enormous influence on our presidents and other political leaders, related his testimony in a message titled "Under Sealed Orders." As a young boy living near the coast of Scotland, he would watch the Royal Naval destroyers lift anchor and launch out to sea. Young Marshall learned that the ship's captain would have received an envelope that would contain the ship's mission and destination, after the ship had launched out into the unknown. In much the same way, Peter Marshall received his call to go to America for theological training, not knowing where he would live, who would support him, where his ministry would take him (Marshall, 3-6). But God had plans for him beyond his greatest dreams.

Marshall closed his testimony by saying,

*"Though you may not know what will be your harbor,
You will know your Pilot, and all will be well" (42).*

Faith obeys God, despite the unknown. Also, faith in God...

Obeys despite the uncomfortable

Genesis 12:8 describes how Abram pitched his tent in this new, far-from home-land. In Hebrews 11:9 we read that "By faith he (Abraham) made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise."

Obedient faith is for "campers" and "refugees"

Faith demands that we make our home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country, i.e., in tents. Commentators suggest that the closest equivalent in might be those staying temporarily in refugee holding camps, such as Syrians along the border of Lebanon, or like refugees in Europe or in Africa, staying in temporary settlements. For the most part, immigrants and refugees venture forth not knowing where they will eventually end up. Our text says Abraham "obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going."

Your next employer can be very thorough in describing your work assignment, but you probably will not know what you've gotten yourself into until your first day

on the job. As I review my previous pastoral positions, search committees did their best to inform me. But basically I didn't know where I was going, or what I was getting into. I couldn't have known, and the churches that called me couldn't have known what they had gotten themselves into either! In a sense, as pilgrims all of us are clueless as we begin the life of obedient faith.

It is possible to be entrusted with material prosperity, as most of us are compared with the rest of the world, and enter the kingdom of heaven. But the reason Jesus warned the rich about the human impossibility of entering the kingdom, is that it is so easy for the prosperous to forget we are just refugees and fugitives as far as this world is concerned. Certainly for Nancy and me in recent years, we have been reminded of how impermanent our earthly location can be. No doubt this is true for some of you here today. Two years ago, while still living in Belgium, we bought a townhome in Madison, where we didn't know a soul except by electronic communication. And this house will belong to us only as long as we can use it, but then it will eventually belong to someone else.

Faith obeys God despite the uncomfortable and impermanent because we are refugees and sojourners on this earth; and...

Obedient faith is for the vulnerable

Abraham's obedience took him into a strange and even a dangerous land. He faced immediate famine and also the opposition of foreign kings (Genesis 12-14). He soon realized how vulnerable he was.

We believers have learned from our Lord that this world is not our permanent address. It's a fallen, unredeemed world, and society apart from Christ is under Satan's reign. Jesus said because of that, we, his followers would suffer, as he did, the rejection, hostility, and opposition of the world (John 15:18-16:4). We are redeemed people, living, loving, and serving in an unredeemed world. We are not immune from its suffering, hostility, and dangers. God may call you, even as he does many of our missionaries, to serve him in what, by all human measures, is a dangerous place.

And each one of us is called to follow Christ in a cruciform life of constantly dying to self and sharing in Christ's sufferings. The protection promised in the Psalms is not to be understood as shelter from temporal trials and dangers, but rather as the security of our faith that holds on through life's storms. The will of God is safe only because it's the place where Sovereign God wants us. And he will not allow anything to happen to us that will harm our relationship with him, or that will hinder our service to him, and rob us of the opportunity to glorify him. If we are stricken by what the world deems as tragedy, it is because of the permission of a perfectly wise, loving and all-powerful God, who knows what is for his glory and our eternal good (Romans 8:28).

Faith obeys God despite the uncomfortable, and like Abraham, we have to "camp out" in a hostile environment. We are called to change the world by loving the lost, even our enemies, who often will reject the gospel and us. We need to remember we are members of another society, citizens of another and a distant City (Hebrews 11:13-16). And it seems we are vulnerable to the dangers and hostilities of this world. But the perspective of the life of obedient faith enables us to see there is no truly safe place apart from being in the will of God.

If we are comfortably "at home" with unbelieving friends and a worldly, secular society that is hostile toward God, something is seriously wrong with our fellowship with him. Jesus said that to be friends with the world is to be the enemy of God, and to be his friend is to suffer the enmity and hostility of the world (John 16: 33; 15: 18f; Luke 6:26). Sometimes this hostility comes from the confessing church, which contains "cheat" among the wheat (Matthew 13:25ff). There will always be the "Alexanders" and the "Diotrephes" among us (2 Timothy 4: 14; 3 John 9f). Your obedience to God's will may bring you stiff resistance from inside the church and the context of Kingdom service.

William Carey experienced resistance and scorn from his fellow church leaders who totally opposed his missionary vision to take the gospel to India. The Apostle Paul knew resistance and betrayal, and was personally hurt by the opposition in the churches, but never allowed opposition to deter him from his mission. In fact, he seemed to think that opposition from Satan's people was a confirmation he was faithfully following the Savior (1 Corinthians 16: 8f). Like Paul, we need to be able to distinguish between those who are truly in the Kingdom and those who merely belong to the church, and then not be surprised when unsaved church members act like the devil. Why shouldn't they? They are his children (John 8:42-47).

Obedient faith is for those who are willing to be vulnerable to the attacks of the world apart from Christ, and are yet confident in the providential care of God. And so...

Obedient faith is for the victorious

"By faith he (Abraham) made his home in the promised land...." (Hebrews 11:9).

Not until Jesus comes will this old world become the Promised Land. And in the meantime, our Promised Land is living in the abundance of Jesus' life. Evangelicals are incorrect in saying Canaan and the Promised Land represent heaven and life after death. By faith we now participate in the spiritual blessings of our Promised Land, i.e., the Kingdom that is both within us and around us. Let's not forget that, as far as this world and culture is concerned, we live in "Tent City". We aren't in pursuit of "these other things," but rather are seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Our values and goals are Kingdom ones, and we are investing our lives and our resources in eternal

matters. The world doesn't understand or accept this, and is disturbed by and hostile to this witness of our lives.

Although Abraham had his testing times, he overall had an abundant, joyful, and profitable life. What greater life could there be than to be the friend of God, and on the very cutting edge of his work and purposes in the world? He was privileged to see the miraculous, incredible promise of God fulfilled, and had "all things richly to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6: 17). Grace enables us, even in times of physical and emotional discomfort and uncertainty, to be "happy campers." Our joy is to be found in our relationship with Christ, and we know our joy will be even more abundant in the life to come.

Finally, faith in God...

Obeys despite the unfulfilled

Hebrews 11:10 tells us that Abraham, in his obedient faith, "was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." Abraham discovered that...

Life has its disappointments

God called Abraham to go and possess the Promised Land. Yet, during his mortal life, as Stephen said in his sermon to the Sanhedrin, God "gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground" (Acts 7:5). As obedient people of faith, we live in the land of what FW Robertson called "*the illusiveness of life*" (as distinguished from "allusiveness" and "elusiveness," 487ff).

Even those who live for this life are disillusioned because popular culture and marketing have convinced them that everybody deserves to have and can attain a prosperous, luxurious and pleasure-sated life. When you don't have all the luxuries and expensive toys and status, then disillusionment sets in. I've seen an auto bumper sticker that expresses this vain pursuit of the material: "The one who dies with the most toys wins."

But also as believers, who like Abraham, are looking for the Eternal City, we are bound to be disappointed with the events and experiences of this life. Certainly believers can never be satisfied with the things of this world. But also we will never be fully satisfied with our spiritual life in this world. This is because all that God has called us to and for cannot be consummated in this life. This is true even about Kingdom matters and labors in this life. The vision God gives us seems to leave us disappointed as far as what we can see is concerned.

CS Lewis wrote, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in the world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world" (Lewis, 287).

That for which we grasp is always just beyond our reach. We might say also we live with the *elusiveness of life*. There is always something that needs to be added or removed in our character in order to grow in holiness. And, there are always, even in our little spheres of influence, other souls to be won, and ministries to be done, and so much more of God to be enjoyed.

The illusive part is this life, not the next. The totally fulfilled life is yet to come. We are bound to be disappointed in this life.

I know by now that all my dreams and aspirations will never be fulfilled. Some of those, even in the ministerial realm, were probably distended and distorted by my selfish ambition. As John Piper points out, our joy and delight is to be found in God, as we glorify God *by* enjoying him forever (Piper, 15ff). Nothing in this life, not even church work, is to replace the joy and delight and satisfaction we find in God himself. And, we have a homesickness for heaven that can never be fully satisfied in this life. As citizens of the eternal city we are all expatriates, regardless of our country of origin. The renewed heaven and earth is our country of destination.

In fact, the possession of the promised blessings to Abraham took place in the lives of his offspring, reaching all the way to Joshua, Jesus, and to those of us in the New Covenant.

No doubt William Carey had a vision for the conversion of India, Judson for Burma and Livingstone for Africa. But a lot of their time on earth was consumed by years of disappointment, hardship and thankless, seemingly unfruitful labor. For people of faith, life has its disappointments because of the unfulfilled, but...

God will keep his promises in time and/or eternity

God wasn't deceiving Abraham, but was leading and teaching him that a lot of what he had thought he would experience and receive in this life would have to await future generations and the consummated Kingdom. So, he learned to look for a future and permanent City, one that had foundations, and that would last forever; one that was being built in his heart and in the hearts of all of God's people. By faith Abraham saw what John saw 2,000 years later in Revelation 21 (Stedman, 123f).

You parents here today, your greatest work in life may be right under your nose. Your children and grandchildren will be some of the greatest work you do. "Hats off" to you moms who are able and are making sacrifices financially to stay home with your child during those early formative years. Dads, you will probably not

have regrets that you didn't spend more time at the office. Probably, your mid and end life regret will be you didn't spend more time with your family. The love, guidance and direction you give your children today will impact eternity, and are worth the best you can give.

Our lives and influence have eternal implications, especially for our families. We are citizens of God's Eternal City, the New Jerusalem, God's people who will descend with him when he returns to establish his kingdom on this earth. All we long for deeply will then be fulfilled, such as our longing to know God in sinless perfection and fellowship, and to be reunited with those beloved departed whom we remember.

Our eternal fulfillment in heaven, in addition to being like Jesus, and serving him day and night in his temple (1 John 3:2; Revelation 22:3), will be others. It will be our being welcomed and surrounded by those whom God enabled us to lead to salvation, and to be enriched and encouraged by our love and ministry (Matthew 25:37ff). These people who were the fruit of his life and ministry Paul called his joy and his crown (Philippians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:19). Jesus said these folks, who benefited eternally from our lives, would welcome us into eternal dwellings (Luke 16:9).

Faith obeys God despite what now seems but an illusion, and an unfulfilled promise. Faith obeys when all we have is the "down payment." Paul spoke of the Holy Spirit as a down payment, an earnest, and a guarantee of the fullness and the fulfillment to come (2 Corinthians 1:22). I'm convinced we don't know how to live, and will not be motivated to give ourselves steadfastly to the work of God until and unless we have this eternal perspective, this resurrection hope within us (1 Corinthians 15: 58).

This is why the greatest leaders in social reform and those who have done the most for this world have been those whose permanent address is in heaven. Obedient faith is faith that looks out toward the unfulfilled promises of God, and is motivated to serve God primarily because this world is not all that there is. We know we are serving and obeying God for time and for eternity. What we do for Jesus and only what we do for Jesus will truly last. Thus, obedient faith, like Abraham's, obeys despite the unfulfilled.

Conclusion:

Some here today need to begin obeying God through saving faith. In simple trust you need to turn from your past life of sin, and, like Abraham, trust God with your life and begin to follow him wherever he leads. You don't need to know now all he will lead to do and to become, but you simply need to take him at his Word, and trust him one step at a time, till he leads you to heaven.

Faith obeys God even though you don't have all the answers to all the questions. Think about all Abraham didn't know when he heard God's call and followed him. And as we are saved by faith, so we continue to live by the same kind of simple, child-like trust and obedience.

In fact, the moment we stop obeying God, we forfeit the assurance we have of saving faith, since the evidence of salvation is obedience. I challenge you to launch out into your future by obedient faith or be content to remain where you are, geographically, in steadfast trust and obedience. I charge you to experience the fullness of the life of God, the life he has for you.

Each one of us needs the consistent strengthening of faith. Some of you may be at a crisis point in your life, when God is revealing to you what he wants you to join him in doing. Because he is calling you, he will be faithful to provide you with the resources that are within the scope of his sovereign grace. He will be with you, as he promised Abraham, Peter Marshall, and all believers who live by obedient faith.

When we returned to the US about 20 months ago, I bought a car I had selected when we were still in Belgium. The first thing I bought when I picked up the car in Wichita, Kansas was a GPS navigator called a Tom Tom. That amazing piece of equipment navigated me through all the way to Chicago, and through its maze of streets and on to Madison, and eventually to our new home, which also I had bought when in Belgium. But the Tom Tom had limited or obsolete data, and had difficulty getting us to our house, and even guided me to a roadway close to our house that was marked, "No vehicles allowed." My GPS didn't get me all the way home.

We are all given God's grand Global Positioning System, and his will see us all the way home. He is the faithful Shepherd and the infallible Navigator of our lives, the lives of those of us with obedient faith.

Questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. What are some of the factors in the life of Abram (later to be named Abraham) that made it seem unlikely that he would become the father (founder) of the people of God?
2. Are there any factors in your life that perhaps make it difficult for you to be completely obedient in living for and serving God?

3. Abram obeyed even when he apparently knew very little about God, having been reared in a pagan environment. What has there been in your understanding of God that has made it difficult, perhaps, to trust him?
4. What are the circumstances in your life that would make it difficult for God to lead you into a new direction for your life?
5. In what ways are we as followers of Jesus to think of ourselves as “strangers in a foreign land” (Hebrews 11:9), regardless of our geographical location?
6. What do you think is the “Promised Land” for followers of Christ?
7. What crisis of faith do you think you may be facing, either now or in the near future? Ask God to help you to faithfully trust and follow him.

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