

Anywhere

FAITH

**OVERCOME EXCUSES, INSECURITIES,
AND FEARS AND SAY YES TO GOD**

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*Anywhere Faith: Overcome Excuses,
Insecurities, and Fears and Say Yes to God*

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IF I DON'T KNOW WHERE I'M GOING, HOW DO I KNOW WHAT TO PACK?

Lessons from Abraham

Just before Christmas one year, my husband and I made a grand announcement at the dinner table. “We are going somewhere fun, so everyone needs to get ready to go!” We didn’t tell our kids where we were headed or give them any juicy details. Just the essentials: “Go to the bathroom, put on your shoes, and grab your coat. We’re going out.”

The questions began precisely one second later: “Where are we going?” “Is it far?” “Have we been there before?” “Is it really fun?” “Will it last a long time?” “Will we have to walk around a lot?” “Is it outside?” “Will we get cold?” “Does it have to do with Christmas?”

They get this from me.

I hate surprises, and I’m a question asker by nature. I like information, all of the information, so I can fully prepare before doing anything or going anywhere. I like agendas, travel itineraries, schedules, and day planners. So I should

have expected this pushback from our kids when we dared to surprise them.

It should have taken them no more than five minutes to get ready. Instead, they launched into a twenty-minute inquisition, which then evolved into full-out whining during the ten-minute drive to our “fun” destination.

We assured them: “You will like this. It will be fun. Fun, we tell you! You are ruining this moment of fond family memories and beautiful Christmas traditions that we will treasure for all time!”

They were destroying our moment of parental joy. We wanted to surprise them with a memorable trip to see a Christmas lights display that we felt would be beyond their wildest imaginations. I wanted it to be a warm and fuzzy event they would tell their grandchildren about when they sing our praises to future generations.

They acted like our surprise was an instrument of torture.

By the time we arrived, our three daughters were practically hysterical, protesting the “boring” place we had to be going to and how they really just wanted to go home.

Then we parked in front of a building decked out in Christmas lights and tuned the radio to the right station. Christmas music filled our car, and the lights danced and flashed in perfect synchronization to the songs being broadcast. Finally, my kids stopped whining. We even started hearing giggles at the funniest songs and oohs and aahs of appreciation when the lights dazzled in just the right way.

When the show ended, one of my daughters asked, “When can we come back?”

That’s when I gave the Mom speech: “We love you. We promised we were taking you somewhere fun, and you

complained and whined about it. You didn't believe us. You could have spoiled the whole trip!"

My husband chimed in: "The next time we say, 'Let's go,' just get ready and trust us."

Trust us. This is going to be worth it. That's what we wanted them to understand.

We should have an established track record with our kids by now, and they should be able to trust that we love them and we've promised good things for them. Not only that, but they should also trust our definition of *fun* and believe what we're saying is true.

Instead, they've inherited from me a need to be "in the know" and aware of all the details.

A few weeks later, I heard commotion in the halls at our church during the midweek children's activities. I peeked around the corner of the choir room and saw a line of pre-schoolers, my daughter included, following their teachers down the hall. Every time the kids stopped, the teachers gave them instructions: "Go down the stairs. Turn right. Go in this door. Go out that door."

The kids were learning about Abraham and his journey to an unknown destination. God called him out of a place called Ur and told him to go, but He didn't tell Abraham where he would end up or what to pack or how long it would take to get there.

So I watched these tiny tots trek all over the church with excitement. They couldn't wait to find out the next step in their journey as they chattered down the hall about the possibilities. As I watched them, though, I wasn't thinking, *God, I want faith like Abraham.* Instead, in one moment of deep soul honesty, I realized I was actually thinking, *That would be my worst nightmare.* I wouldn't know whether to pack an overnight bag or rent

a U-Haul. I wouldn't know whether to bring the swimsuit or the ski jacket. If you don't know where you're going, you don't know how long it will take or what you'll need for the journey! You'd have to . . . *trust God* . . . instead of trusting your own plans.

For Christians, Abraham is our favorite go-to guy as an example of radical obedience and uncomplaining, unquestioning faith. That's why my daughter and her friends were pretending to be Abraham while exploring all the nooks and crannies of our church building. It's fitting that we give Abraham superfaith status. Not only did he pack his camels and head out into the desert ready to follow anywhere God led him, but he also passed an even greater faith test.

Abraham and his wife, Sarah, waited almost three decades from the time God promised them a baby to the moment when they held their precious and beloved son Isaac. When Isaac was born, Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah was ninety. This was a miracle child—truly a gift from God and the fulfillment of the promise that Abraham would be the father of many nations.

Yet Scripture tells us that God continued to test Abraham's faith. Years after Isaac's birth, God asked Abraham to hike up the mountain with his growing son and build an altar. Then Abraham was supposed to tie Isaac to the stones and kill him as a sacrifice to God.

God asked Abraham to give up the promise.

But it doesn't even have to be as spiritual as all that. God gave Abraham this son, and then he told Abraham to give the boy back. "Kill him with your own two hands," seemed to be the message.

If it were me, and God called me in the night to sacrifice one of my beloved children, I would do some stalling. I'd try to

reason with God or at least bargain with Him. I'd likely prepare a grand speech to remind God that Isaac couldn't possibly be both the promised son *and* a sacrifice. I'd ask a million questions and then probably call up some pastors and other Christian mentors to see what they thought. I'd do some Google searches on "sacrifices to God" and "obedience to God" and maybe check out some books on the subject of faith from my church library.

Not Abraham. There was no stalling.

In Genesis, God's Word tells us: "So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him" (22:3).

Early in the morning.

Abraham didn't even hit the snooze button on his alarm to put off the task for five minutes. God called in the night, and early the very next day, Abraham chopped the wood for the sacrifice, saddled the donkey, and gathered his travel companions to go to the holy place God had described.

In Hebrews 11, the writer stuns me by saying that Abraham was willing to obey God in the most radical of ways because "he considered that God was able even to raise [Isaac] from the dead" (v. 19). While I'd be busy stalling, rationalizing, questioning, fretting, and fighting with God, Abraham simply believed in the impossible. God could raise Isaac right back up from death if He chose.

Faith like that inspires me, but it can also flatten me. I can set my good Christian-girl-self up against Father Abraham and feel like the ultimate failure.

My heart's desire is obedience. My passion is Christ. My longing is for faith like Abraham's and that deeply intimate,

personal, and consistent relationship with God that Abraham had. James writes that “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God” (2:23). Abraham’s unwavering belief in the character and might of God made him God’s friend, and I want friendship like that with God too.

When I was sixteen years old, I found a poetic prayer written by David Livingstone, the well-known missionary to Africa, and I copied it on a page inside the front cover of my Bible:

Lord, send me anywhere,
 Only go with me.
Lay any burden on me,
 Only sustain me.
Sever any tie but the tie
 That binds me to thyself.

I meant that prayer with everything inside my teenaged heart. At youth conferences, I threw my hand up in the air and cried while offering myself to full-time ministry or missions or any wild and radical calling God might have for me. I was ready to be used by God and to serve Him by doing whatever He wanted and by going anywhere He wanted me to go. Over time, God’s calling for me has worked itself out in a million daily decisions that did not lead me to foreign missions or full-time ministry in any traditional sense. Still, that prayer reflects my heart. I want to be willing to go anywhere God sends me and choose Him over everything else.

For so many of us, our hearts truly echo that same desire. We want to mean it when we sing, “I Surrender All” at church on Sunday morning. We want to be fully devoted followers of Jesus, not halfhearted or lukewarm or on the fence. We want to

be Abraham, yet we know deep down that if God called us to the unknown, we might not leap up to pack the camels. Instead, we might think:

I'm not good enough for this. God needs someone more spiritual than I am.

I'm too old or I'm too young.

I don't know enough! I'm not trained enough! I'm not equipped!

What if I heard God wrong?

Maybe we face insecurities and fears, obstacles and worries just like these. Even though we love Jesus and want to follow Him anywhere, we're humans formed of dust, and sometimes the dust clogs our spirit a little.

Or maybe, just maybe, we love Jesus but make excuses for why we can't follow God, at least not right now, or not in the way He's asking us to go.

We say:

"I'm too busy."

"I'm happy where I am and don't really want to change."

Too often, though, we try to cram ourselves into arbitrary categories. We either have faith or we don't. We are either Abraham (the poster child of faith) or Jonah (the runaway prophet). It's black or white, hot or cold, good or evil.

When we look at Scripture, however, we see average men and women who tried to obey God but had to overcome some of the same obstacles we face. God called them, but they didn't all respond as Abraham did—setting out on the journey without complaint or rising early in order to hike up the mountain.

Even Abraham made mistakes along the way. Even he had moments when he trusted his own plans more than God's. Two different times during his travels, he was afraid that foreign kings would find his wife so beautiful they would kill him in

order to marry her. So he told her to lie and say that she was his sister rather than his wife. Even after God exposed Abraham's first lie, Abraham tried the same old deception a second time! Sometimes even Abraham's faith broke down under the temptation to take matters into his own hands.

The truth is that our faith "superheroes" weren't superhuman at all. When God called them, they responded with honesty—sometimes telling God they didn't know if they could do what He was asking.

Moses wanted God to send somebody else.

Gideon worried about whether he heard God correctly.

Elijah felt alone.

Isaiah felt unworthy.

Esther was terrified.

Just like them, when God calls us we so often answer with "Yes, God, but . . ."

"I want to obey, but I'm ashamed."

"I want to follow you, but I'm afraid."

"I want to believe you, but I could be wrong and I'll mess this up!"

All of this can hold us back from intimacy with God and from the spiritual growth we desire. We become afraid to move forward. Afraid that we'll mess it up and fail. Afraid the task will be costly or we'll get hurt. Afraid that we heard wrong and we'll miss out on God's will.

So maybe we get a little stuck.

A. W. Tozer said, "We can be in our day what the heroes of faith were in their day—but remember at the time they didn't know they were heroes."

Perhaps that is the reminder we need. If we look only at the end result of these faith heroes, we can lose sight of the journey

and everything they overcame along the way. The heroes and heroines of our faith were regular men and women living out ordinary lives. They knew how it felt to be insecure or afraid or skeptical or busy, but they chose to obey God anyway. They didn't follow Him *without* fear. They followed Him *in spite of* fear. They didn't follow Him *without* insecurity or questions. They followed Him *despite* all of that.

This isn't a book about obedience; it's not about how to obey God, why you should obey, what steps to take in order to obey, or even the blessings that come when you do obey.

It's not a book about how to discover God's purposes for you or find your calling.

This book is about dialogue and relationship. It's about friendship with God and how you respond to Him when He asks you to obey and to trust. When He invites you to put on your shoes because He's going to take you somewhere, what goes on in your heart and mind? What do you say? How do you react? God called men and women throughout Scripture to follow Him, and their answers in that moment of their calling revealed the honest truth about their heart condition and their faith condition.

Maybe you're already like Abraham. You grab your sneakers and your coat and hop into the minivan, ready for the ride.

Or maybe you're like me. We love God and want to follow Him. We want to be "anywhere faith" Christians and pray like David Livingstone did: "Lord, send me anywhere, only go with me." But we have struggles—or even excuses—that hold us back. We want to be God's friend like Abraham was, but we have parts of our heart hidden away out of shame or cordoned off because we're afraid of losing control.

Here's the truth: As long as we hide our struggles from God or from ourselves or from other Christians, we'll stay stuck.

We'll shove those issues into the darkness, and they will weigh us down and chain us to that place.

So we bring everything to Jesus. When we finally stop trying to fix ourselves and stop trying to be good enough in our own merit, we give God the room and the freedom to do the work. We bring our mess and our need to Him and He rescues us. We confess that we feel afraid, and He brings us peace. We admit that we feel unworthy, and He clothes us in His righteousness. We tell Him the truth—we don't want to go—and He reveals His sovereignty and His grace.

The psalmist says:

As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear
him.

For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust. (103:13–14)

We don't have to pretend with God. He knows the truth of our hearts better than we do. He has compassion for us, sometimes more compassion than we have for ourselves. While we beat ourselves up for not being perfect, He remembers that He formed us out of dust. While we try to hide, He asks us to come out so He can rescue us. We don't have to look like super-Christians when we feel afraid or play at being Abraham when we really want to run away. We just need to bring Him our brokenness so He can make us whole and holy.

He invites all of us to travel on this journey of faith. It may not be as fun as a Christmas lights display. Still He invites us into His presence, and He promises that it will be “worth it”—worth any sacrifice, effort, or price we pay. Surely we can trust Him.

After all, He loves us: “So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16).

He will never leave us: “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6).

He will work out everything we go through for the ultimate good: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

With promises like that, how can we hold back any longer? When He tells us to grab our shoes and our coats and get in the minivan because we're going for a ride, let's tell Him the truth: “God, I'm afraid or uncertain or insufficient, but I'm coming! I'll go with you anywhere.”

Write It

Write out this verse in your own handwriting:

As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear
him. (Psalm 103:13)

Think & Talk about It

1. If God were to ask you today to follow Him on a journey like Abraham's, what might hold you back from going "anywhere"? (Fear, insecurity, wanting to make sure you heard God correctly, people pleasing, doubts, wanting to know all the details ahead of time?)

2. When you think about faith like Abraham's, do you tend to be "inspired" or "flattened," feeling as if you could never measure up to that? Why?

3. How does it make you feel, knowing the people in the Bible weren't perfect and had some of the same struggles we do? Is there anyone in the Bible you already know you can relate to?

Live It

On a separate piece of paper, write yourself some “travel papers.” Include your name and the date, and write, “Destination: Anywhere.” You can also copy down the prayer from David Livingstone from this chapter or any verses that encouraged you from the reading or from your own time in God’s Word. This can be as simple as scribbling something out on an index card or as elaborate and artistic as you want to make it. Take the time to pray, asking God to help you follow Him “anywhere”—no more holding back, no more excuses, no more giving in to fears or insecurities.

Once you’re done, use it as a bookmark while you read this book, and consider taping it into your prayer journal or Bible.