

I Want Better

Living between leaving and arriving

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ECHO CHURCH

Hebrews 11:13–16
NKJV

August 2, 2026
YEAR 1 • MONTH 8 • WEEK 1

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth... But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

Hebrews 11:13, 16

Hebrews was written to believers who were tired. They had already suffered for their faith. They had endured public humiliation, stood with people who were imprisoned, and accepted the loss of their possessions because they believed God had something better for them. Now the pressure had continued, and some of them were thinking about drawing back. So the writer points them to a family who understood what it means to keep believing when the promise stretches beyond your lifetime: Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob.

God had promised this family a land, descendants, a covenant, blessing that would reach every nation, and ultimately a lasting city. They saw pieces of it. Abraham held Isaac in his arms, but he never saw descendants as numerous as the stars. He walked through Canaan, but he never possessed it as a nation. When Sarah died, he still had to buy a plot of ground to bury her, and he described himself as a foreigner and a visitor. They received the evidence of the promise without receiving its fullness.

That is where many of us live too. You have left what was familiar, but you have not fully entered what God showed you. You have obeyed, but you are still waiting. You have changed, but your circumstances have not caught up to your transformation yet. This message is about that middle space, and about a group of people whose faith was measured not by what they received, but by the direction they kept moving.

Watch the movement of this passage. They **saw** the promise from a distance. They became **assured** that God was trustworthy. They **embraced** what they could not yet possess. They **confessed** that they belonged somewhere else. They kept **seeking** a homeland. They **refused to return** to what they left. They **desired better**. And God **prepared a city**.

MOVEMENT ONE

They Died Still Believing

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises...” Hebrews 11:13a

They died still believing. Faith did not keep them from dying, but dying did not make them abandon their faith. They reached the end of their lives without changing their minds about God. That confronts an idea many of us

quietly carry, that faith is only proven when we get the outcome we wanted. Sometimes faith receives the miracle. Other times faith is what carries you when the miracle does not come on your timetable.

You can stay faithful while praying for healing that has not shown up. While waiting for a child to come back to God. While building something another generation will finish. While serving without recognition. While obeying without seeing results yet. While grieving an outcome that did not match your expectations. These believers did not die because their faith failed. They died with their faith still working.

Now hear the balance. “Not having received the promises” does not mean God broke His word. It means they did not see the completed form of it yet. They received beginnings, evidence, and installments, but not the full inheritance. And we do have to be honest about the difference between a promise God actually made and a preference we simply want Him to satisfy. God has not obligated Himself to meet every personal expectation. He has obligated Himself to His own character, His Word, and His redemptive purpose.

◆ PR THOUGHT

Mature faith says, even if I do not see everything I expected, I will not let disappointment rewrite what I already know about God.

MOVEMENT TWO

Vision Without Possession

“...but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed...” Hebrews 11:13b

They saw through faith what they could not touch. That is spiritual perception, the ability to recognize what God is doing beyond what your present circumstances are showing you. Sometimes God lets you see something before He lets you possess it. You can see the family you want to build while you are still healing from the family you came from. You can see freedom while you are still confronting old patterns. You can see purpose while your present season still feels confusing. Seeing it afar off means having vision without possession. Faith does not deny the distance between where you are and what God showed you. It simply refuses to believe that distance has the authority to cancel God’s purpose.

Then they were assured. They became convinced the promise was reliable because the God who made it was trustworthy. Their circumstances did not support the promise. Abraham was old, Sarah was barren, and they owned no permanent piece of the land. But they decided that God’s character carried more weight than their conditions. You are surrounded by competing voices too. Culture says it should happen quickly. Social media says you are behind. Comparison says everyone is moving faster than you. Fear says nothing will change. Assurance settles the matter on the inside before your circumstances confirm it on the outside. It does not mean you never have questions. It means your questions do not get the final vote.

What they were assured of, they embraced. They welcomed the promise as real and let their future shape how they lived in the present. It is possible to want the promise while resisting the process attached to it. We want the healthy marriage but resist the healing it requires. We want influence but resist obscurity. We want purpose but resist preparation. To embrace the promise means you stop treating your current season as wasted time. If God is developing you, you participate. Embracing the promise means becoming faithful before you become visible.

And what they embraced, they confessed. Biblical confession is more than saying positive words. It means bringing your words, your identity, and your conduct into agreement with what God has revealed. Their confession

showed up in how they lived. They trusted God without complete information. They obeyed without immediate fulfillment. They refused to let their surroundings define them. Your real confession is not only what you say during worship. It is what your lifestyle declares about where you belong.

◆ PR THOUGHT

What they saw produced assurance. What they were assured of, they embraced. What they embraced, they confessed. Faith moves in that order.

MOVEMENT THREE

Strangers and Pilgrims

“...confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth... for they seek a homeland.” Hebrews 11:13c-14

A stranger was a foreigner living without the full privileges of citizenship. A pilgrim was a temporary resident traveling toward another destination. They were present, but they were not permanent. That is how we are called to live in the world. We work, build families, serve our communities, create, vote, lead, and enjoy life. But our identity is not ultimately handed to us by politics, possessions, popularity, titles, status, or cultural approval. A pilgrim can appreciate where they are without confusing it for where they are going. We are not called to escape the world. We are called to live differently inside it.

Their confession revealed their pursuit. When they called themselves strangers and pilgrims, they were admitting they were searching for something beyond their surroundings. They did not have to advertise it. The way they lived made it obvious. That raises a question for us. Does the way we live make it clear that we are looking for something greater than what this world offers? If our highest goals are comfort, recognition, money, influence, and personal success, our lives may not look much different from the culture around us. The evidence of faith is not merely church attendance. It is a life whose priorities reveal a different destination.

The word seek means active pursuit. They were not just daydreaming about another country. Their lives were actually moving toward it. Abraham was looking for the city whose builder and maker is God. He was not chasing better geography. He was chasing permanent belonging in the presence and purpose of God. What you consistently pursue, prioritize, and sacrifice for is what reveals what you are truly seeking.

◆ PR THOUGHT

A pilgrim can appreciate where they are without confusing it for where they are going.

MOVEMENT FOUR

The Road Back Was Still Open

“And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.” Hebrews 11:15

Abraham left Ur and later Haran, places tied to familiarity, family, culture, and stability. Ur was not a terrible place. It was established and prosperous. He left what was familiar to follow God toward a place he had never seen. The danger was not that the old country still existed. The danger was that he could keep revisiting it in his mind. There is a difference between remembering where God brought you from and romanticizing it. Memory

becomes dangerous when it makes bondage look better than obedience.

That is exactly what happened to Israel in the wilderness. Under pressure they remembered the food of Egypt but forgot the oppression. Their present discomfort made them romanticize their former bondage. It happens to us when obedience gets costly and compromise starts looking reasonable. When healing gets hard and the old coping mechanism feels comforting. When singleness gets lonely and an unhealthy relationship looks attractive. When progress feels slow and familiar dysfunction feels safer than unfamiliar freedom. Sometimes you do not actually want your old life back. You just want relief from the difficulty of your new one.

Notice this too. They had the opportunity to return. The road back was still open. Abraham knew how to get there. His faithfulness mattered precisely because going back was genuinely possible. God does not always remove every exit. Sometimes maturity is having the opportunity to return and choosing not to. There will always be a door back to old habits, unhealthy relationships, familiar dysfunction, and comfortable compromise. But the availability of an exit does not mean God is authorizing your departure. Not every open door is God's direction. Some doors are simply testing whether you still believe that where God is leading you is better than where He brought you from. And to be clear, this is never about staying in an abusive or dangerous situation. Refusing to return means rejecting spiritual regression, not staying trapped in harm.

◆ PR THOUGHT

The availability of an exit does not mean God is authorizing your departure.

MOVEMENT FIVE

They Desired Better

“But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country... for He has prepared a city for them.”

Hebrews 11:16

But now signals a decisive change in desire. They did not overcome the pull of the old country just by gritting their teeth. They developed a stronger desire for what God had in front of them. That is worth sitting with. The answer to an unhealthy desire is not always more discipline. Sometimes it is a greater desire. Better is one of the great themes of Hebrews: a better hope, a better covenant, better promises, a better sacrifice, a better possession, a better resurrection, a better country. But better does not always mean easier. God's better may require leaving the familiar, walking without complete information, enduring uncertainty, serving without recognition, and waiting longer than you expected. Abraham's journey was harder than staying in Ur. It was better because God was in it. Better is not defined by comfort. Better is defined by alignment with God.

The writer tells us what better means. It is a heavenly country, something God Himself would establish. Heavenly does not mean their earthly lives were unimportant. Abraham raised a family, managed resources, negotiated with neighbors, fought battles, built altars, and buried people he loved. He lived a full earthly life while knowing earth was not the end of his story. We should work, create, build families, serve our communities, and pursue justice too. We just do it without expecting the present world to satisfy an eternal longing. Our ultimate hope is not a perfect career, a painless life, or an uninterrupted run of prosperity. Christian hope does not merely say my circumstances will eventually improve. It says even if everything does not improve the way I wanted, God has prepared something no earthly disappointment can cancel.

God is not ashamed to be called their God. He named Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, people who made mistakes, felt fear, and sometimes responded poorly, yet kept orienting their lives toward Him. He was not ashamed of them, not because they were flawless, but because they kept believing, kept seeking, and kept moving toward Him. Their faith did not make them perfect. It made them faithful. The question is not whether you have ever stumbled. The question is whether stumbling changed the direction of your pursuit. God is not looking for people who never stumble. He is forming people who refuse to make stumbling their permanent address.

They were seeking a homeland, but God was preparing a city. They lived in tents, but God was preparing something permanent. A tent is temporary, movable, and vulnerable. A city means permanence, protection, community, inheritance, and belonging. While they were walking, God was preparing. While they were waiting, God was preparing. While they were living in tents, God was preparing. While they were dying in faith, God was preparing. The promise was not failing simply because the preparation was invisible.

◆ PR THOUGHT

Better is not defined by comfort. Better is defined by alignment with God.

THE MIDDLE SPACE

Between Leaving and Arriving

Many of us are living between leaving and arriving. You have left what was familiar, but you have not fully entered what God showed you. You have obeyed, but you are still waiting. You have changed, but your circumstances have not caught up yet. That middle space is exactly where the old country starts to look attractive again. So let this passage steady you. Do not confuse unfamiliarity with God's absence. Do not confuse difficulty with wrong direction. Do not let delay make dysfunction look desirable. Do not return to what God delivered you from just because the road toward better got uncomfortable. Do not measure God's faithfulness only by what you receive in this lifetime. And do not let what you have not received erase the evidence of what God has already begun.

You may be living in a tent season while God is preparing a city. The tent is temporary. The journey is uncomfortable. The promise may look distant. But God is still trustworthy.

◆ PR THOUGHT

You may be living in a tent season while God is preparing a city. The tent is temporary. The preparation is not.

SUNDAY DECLARATION

"I left because God called me. I continue because faith is carrying me. I refuse to return because I desire better. And I can desire better because God has already prepared something greater."

Echo Church • Worship & Word • Pastor Rich Saunders Jr.