

The Great Unknown

1. Warm-up question: Jeff mentioned how one day recently hearing the familiar sound effects of “Bewitched” from a TV down the hallway gave him warm feelings all over. Most of us find a lot of comfort from that which is familiar. What’s something familiar that makes you feel good – maybe a TV show or song or place or smell or sound or particular kind of food?
2. If the familiar is comfortable, the unknown can be downright frightening. Not knowing what to expect makes us anxious. That’s why we often have so much fear of the future. Should I stay in my current job or make a change? Should I go back to school? Should I get married (or divorce)? Should I make peace with my siblings or keep a distance? Should I retire? What’s going to happen to me in my old age?
 - a. For each of us, the future bristles with questions and uncertainty. What’s something about your future that you often find yourself wondering about? How does the uncertainty make you feel?
 - b. We make a big deal out of our birthdays. We circle the date on the calendar, and every year when it rolls around, we pause to celebrate, give thanks, and take stock of where we are in life. But there’s another really important date on the calendar each year that passes without us knowing it – the date of our death. If you knew the date of your death (but not the year), how would you feel each time that date rolled around? What thoughts would it evoke? Would you like to know the date (but not year) of your death? Why or why not?
3. When ancient mapmakers reached the outer reaches of the then known world, on the edges of their maps to the north, south, east, and west they would inscribe three Latin words: *Hic sunt dragones*, which means beyond this point “there be dragons.” Some ancients saw those three words and thought, “I ain’t gonna risk no dragons. I’m staying put. I’m playing it safe.” Others thought, “I wonder what’s out there. I wonder what it would be like to actually see a dragon. I might discover a whole new territory. I’d love to go!”
 - a. When we bump up against the Great Unknown, there are two basic ways to respond. Option #1 – Be cautious, play it safe, maintain the status quo, so as to preserve what we’ve got. Option #2 – Be bold, try something new, embrace reasonable risk, in search of something even better. Which approach comes closer to describing you? Give an example from your life to illustrate.
 - b. What are the pros and cons of being an Option #1 person? What are the pros and cons of being an Option #2 person? Is one of these options inherently better than the other? Which kind of person do you want to be?
4. In this week’s scripture passage, Abram faced a stark choice between Option #1 and Option #2. Read Genesis 11:31 – 12:7.

- a. Verse 31 tells us that Abram’s father, Terah, moved his family out of their original hometown of Ur with the intention of going to Canaan, but ended up stopping along the way in Haran and settled there. The text doesn’t tell us why Terah left Ur or why he settled in Haran. What are the possibilities for why Terah never finish the journey to Canaan?
 - b. When in your life have you set out to do something, but got waylaid and never completed your goal. How did that feel?
 - c. Haran became Abram’s familiar and comfortable home. But when his father died, something stirred in Abram and he heard God calling him to go to “the land that I will show you.” Abram headed toward Canaan, not knowing exactly when or where God would tell him to stop and settle. Having only lived in Ur and Haran, Abram had no idea what his new home would be like. Hebrews 11:8 tells us, “By faith [Abram] obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and **he set out, not knowing where he was going.**” Why do you think God didn’t tell Abram where he was going?
 - d. Tell us about a time in your life when you had to step out of the familiar and comfortable on a journey of discovery that might lead to who-knows-where.
 - e. Abram took the leap of faith because he sensed God had something better for him than the status quo. He sensed God saying, “I will make of you a great nation.” Genesis 2:2. Joseph Campbell once said, “Every great journey beings with leaving home.” What do you think that means?
5. Hebrews 11:6 tells us, “Without faith, it’s impossible to please God.” Hebrews 11:1 says, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” In other words, faith is the ability to hope for that which we can envision in our mind’s eye, but cannot yet physically see.
- a. Jeff said, “The reason faith is so hard is because everything about the future is unknown. But that’s also why faith is so important. Faith is what allows us to challenge the future. Without faith, we become mere collaborators with the status quo, enablers of the status quo. Without faith, your future will be no better than the present. Faith is what allows us to improve the future for ourselves and others.” Do you agree or disagree – and why?
 - b. Jesus said, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed . . . , nothing will be impossible for you.” In other words, even just a little bit of hope for a brighter future can motivate us to step out into the unknown and accomplish something that would otherwise be impossible. When have you see that happen in your own life?
 - c. Where in your life right now is God calling you to step out by faith into the Great Unknown? What holds you back? Are you ready to step out?

Genesis 11:31 - 12:7

³¹ Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there. ³²The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

12 Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, ⁶Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.' So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.