



When You Can't See the Whole Plan

Two kinds of obedience: moving before God shows the plan, and obeying against your own doubt.

GENESIS 12 TO REVELATION (KJV) · A STUDY ON OBEYING WITHOUT INFORMATION, AND OBEYING AGAINST YOUR OWN DOUBT

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”

HEBREWS 11:8, KJV

If you're anything like me, you probably want a plan fleshed out entirely before you make decisions. Show me where it ends, show me how it works out, show me that it is safe, and then I will obey. That is the honest version of me, and I do not think I am rare. What I keep running into in Scripture is that God almost never operates the way I am asking Him to, and the people He used the most are the ones who moved before any of that was in their hands.

Let's break this down, because there are two different things happening in these stories and we tend to blur them. One group obeyed **without knowing the plan**. God gave the command and withheld the outcome, and they went anyway. The other group obeyed **against their own doubt**. They argued, questioned, and dragged their feet, and then did what He said. Those are not the same struggle, and it helps to see them apart before we put them back together.

Obeying before you know the plan

Here the issue is not that they doubted God. The issue is that God did not tell them how it turns out. The information they wanted was simply not given, and obedience meant moving into the blank space.

- **Abraham leaving home (Genesis 12:1).** “Get thee out of thy country... unto a land that I will shew thee.” The destination is withheld at the moment of the command. Hebrews 11:8 says it out loud: he went “not knowing whither he went.”
- **Abraham at Moriah (Genesis 22).** Told to offer Isaac with no explanation of how the promise survives it. The only reasoning he says is “God will provide himself a lamb” (v. 8). Hebrews 11:19 says he concluded God could raise the dead, but that is the author of Hebrews' inference, not a line Abraham speaks.
- **Noah (Genesis 6:13-22).** Builds for a judgment with no precedent. Hebrews 11:7 calls it being warned “of things not seen as yet.”

- **Joseph (Genesis 37-50).** No recorded word from God in the pit, Potiphar's house, or the prison. The meaning arrives only at the end: "ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (50:20). He did not have that sentence for roughly twenty years.
- **The priests at the Jordan (Joshua 3:13-16).** The water does not stop until their feet are already in it. The order of events is the whole point.
- **The widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:12-16).** She has one meal left for herself and her son, and is told to feed the prophet first.
- **Ruth (Ruth 1:16-17).** Leaves Moab with no promise of provision, a husband, or standing in Israel.
- **Esther (Esther 4:16).** "If I perish, I perish." Obedience with an openly unknown outcome, not confidence in survival.
- **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:17-18).** The sharpest one. God is able to deliver, "but if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods." They refuse to make deliverance the condition of obedience.
- **Philip (Acts 8:26-27).** Sent to a desert road with no reason given. He goes, and only then does the Ethiopian appear.
- **Paul (Acts 20:22-23).** "Not knowing the things that shall befall me there," except that bonds and afflictions await.
- **Habakkuk (1:2-3; 3:17-18).** Opens complaining that God is not answering, and ends with "although the fig tree shall not blossom... yet I will rejoice in the LORD." The resolution is worship without the circumstances changing.

Put them side by side and the shape is unmistakable. God gives a command and holds back the outcome, and faith is what walks into the part of the story that is still blank. They had the voice that gave the command, and for most of them that had to be enough.

Obeying against your own doubt

This second group is different, and honestly it gives me more hope, because these people are a mess about it. They argue, hedge, ask for proof, walk off angry. And God works with almost every one of them anyway.

- **Moses (Exodus 3-4).** Five objections: who am I, what is your name, they will not believe me, I am not eloquent, and finally "send... by the hand of him whom thou wilt send" (4:13). God's anger is kindled, Aaron is provided, and Moses goes.
- **Gideon (Judges 6-7).** He argues with the angel (6:13), pleads his family is nothing (6:15), asks for a sign (6:17), then asks for the fleece twice (6:36-40). Before the battle God says "if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant" and lets him overhear the Midianite's dream (7:10-11). God accommodates him again and again.
- **Barak (Judges 4:8).** "If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go." He obeys on a condition, and Deborah tells him the honor will go to a woman instead (4:9). He keeps the assignment and loses the honor.
- **Jeremiah (1:6).** "I cannot speak: for I am a child." God overrules the objection and sends him.

- **Peter (Luke 5:5).** “Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.” A fisherman told his trade by a carpenter, and he does it anyway.
- **Naaman (2 Kings 5:11-14).** Openly angry at the instructions, walks away in a rage, and obeys only after his servants reason with him.
- **Ananias (Acts 9:13-17).** He argues back: “Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done.” Then he goes and lays hands on Saul.
- **Mary (Luke 1:34-38).** She asks “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” and then says “be it unto me according to thy word.” Set her next to Zacharias in the same chapter (1:18-20), who asks a similar question and is struck mute. The text does not spell out the difference, so any explanation of why one was rebuked and the other was not is interpretation, not something Luke states.
- **John the Baptist (Matthew 11:2-3).** From prison he sends to ask, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” The man who called Jesus the Lamb of God. Jesus answers with evidence, not rebuke, then praises him publicly (11:11).
- **Thomas (John 20:25-28).** Refuses secondhand testimony, gets firsthand evidence, and gives the strongest confession in the Gospel: “My Lord and my God.”
- **Job (13:15; 42:3).** Demands an answer through most of the book, never gets an explanation of the wager in chapter 1, and ends with “I have uttered that I understood not.”

A couple of honest notes

Before anybody turns this into a formula, look at what the texts do. The pattern is that God **frequently accommodates weak faith rather than punishing it**. Gideon gets four confirmations. Moses gets Aaron. Thomas gets the wounds to touch. That should encourage anyone obeying scared.

But it is a tendency, not a rule, and I will not sell you a rule the Bible will not back up. Zacharias is the notable exception, silenced for his question. Barak keeps the mission but loses the honor. The texts do not hand us a single uniform result. Faith is the point; the outcome is God’s to set, not ours to bank on.

Jonah is the deliberate contrast. He hears clearly, runs, obeys only after the fish, and then resents the outcome (4:1-3). That is obedience without trust, and it is the warning underneath both good lists.

One category to keep separate. Gethsemane belongs somewhere else. “Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39) is not doubt about the plan. Jesus knew the plan exactly, down to the cup and the cross and the reason for it. That is submission with full knowledge, not obedience into the unknown. It is the highest thing here, and it is a different thing than what Abraham or Gideon were doing.

The Gospel underneath it

Every person on both lists is a partial picture of one Person who did it completely.

We obey without seeing the end. Jesus obeyed while seeing the end with total clarity. In the garden there is no blank space and no withheld information. He knows the betrayal, the trial, the nails, the wrath, and the

tomb, and He still says “not as I will, but as thou wilt.” Hebrews 5:8 says He learned obedience by the things He suffered, and Philippians 2:8 says He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. The one man who could see the whole plan obeyed the hardest thing in it.

And that matters for the scared obedience this lesson is about, because your standing with God was never going to rest on how clean your faith was. Moses stammered, Gideon needed four signs, Naaman had to be argued into it, Thomas demanded proof, Job never got his answer. If acceptance depended on obeying without doubt, that whole hall of faith would be empty. It rests instead on the obedience of Christ counted to you.

So you do not have to see the whole plan. You were never promised it. You have what Abraham had, the voice of the One who gave the command, except now that voice has a face and a cross and an empty grave behind it. He has proven, at the highest cost, that He can be trusted in the part of the story you cannot see. Put your foot in the water.

Your challenge this week

Name the blank space. Write the one place where God has made the next step clear but has not shown you how it turns out. That blank is where the faith goes.

Find your “but if not.” Take the thing you are quietly making the condition of your obedience, and rewrite it the way the three Hebrews did: obey first, outcome left with God.

Bring the doubt out loud. Take your questions to God the way Moses, Gideon, and Thomas did, honestly and to His face, instead of letting them talk you out of moving.

Take one Jordan step. Pick the smallest concrete act of obedience you have delayed for more information, and do it this week before the water parts.

Check your heart against Jonah. It is possible to obey and still resent it. Ask whether you are moving with trust or just going through the motion.

Preach Gethsemane to yourself. When fear says God cannot be trusted with what you cannot see, answer it with the garden. He obeyed knowing everything it would cost Him, for you.

Go deeper

Obeyed without knowing the plan

- **Genesis 12:1-4** and **Hebrews 11:8**: the call and the “not knowing whither.”
- **Genesis 22:1-14** and **Hebrews 11:17-19**: Moriah, and what Abraham said versus what Hebrews infers.
- **Genesis 6:13-22**; **7:5** and **Hebrews 11:7**: Noah and things not seen as yet.
- **Genesis 50:15-21**: the meaning of the ordeal, delivered only at the end.
- **Joshua 3:9-17** · **1 Kings 17:8-16**: the step before the miracle, and the widow’s last meal.
- **Ruth 1:16-18** · **Esther 4:13-16** · **Daniel 3:16-18**: three “whatever it costs” obediences.

- **Acts 8:26-40 · Acts 20:22-24 · Habakkuk 1:1-4; 3:16-19:** sent without the reason, and worship with circumstances unchanged.

Doubted, questioned, resisted, obeyed anyway

- **Exodus 3:1-4:17:** five objections and one reluctant yes.
- **Judges 6:11-40; 7:9-15 · Judges 4:6-9:** how much God accommodated Gideon, and what Barak lost.
- **Jeremiah 1:4-10 · Luke 5:1-11:** the objection overruled, and the net let down at His word.
- **2 Kings 5:1-14 · Acts 9:10-19:** obedience talked into a man.
- **Luke 1:26-38** next to **Luke 1:18-20:** Mary and Zacharias side by side. Notice what the text says and what it leaves unsaid.
- **Matthew 11:1-11 · John 20:24-29 · Job 13:15; 42:1-6:** honest doubt, firsthand evidence, and worship without an explanation.

Hold these next to it

- **Jonah 1:1-3; 3:1-3; 4:1-3:** obedience without trust, as the contrast.
- **Matthew 26:36-46 · Hebrews 5:7-9 · Philippians 2:5-8:** submission with full knowledge of the plan. A different and higher thing.