

“Testing Faith”
Genesis 22:1-19

Tests! Tests! Tests! Tests can really be overwhelming at times! Often taking tests can result in much anguish and anxiety, sleepless nights, stomachaches, and headaches. I imagine many here can relate with that, whether one is taking a driving test, a test at school, a test to get into college, a test to secure a job, or any kind of a test for that matter. Yet, we come to realize after taking a test how much that experience can result in us growing and maturing as individuals. Tests are instruments to gauge our knowledge of what we know to be true. Because God, our Heavenly Father, loves us so much, He periodically puts us through challenging tests to enable us to grow in our faith and sincere trust in Him. We must never forget that God wants and desires total commitment and obedience from His children. The tests He puts you through and how you respond evidences to Him the depth and sincerity of your experiential faith and the degree of your commitment, obedience, and trust. Over my many years as a Christian and a pastor, both personally and as a pastoral counselor, that truth has been continually proven to be wonderfully true. Unfortunately, for each of us, because of the negative connotation of tests and testing, and our subsequent reactions and responses, we lose the spiritual benefit that God has for us during those testing times. Fortunately and providentially because of Abraham’s and Isaac’s response to God’s testing, we can learn how to grow and mature in our faith.

So, as we look at these verses in Genesis, I want to emphasize the following truth: as Christians, the testing of your faith is essential if you are to develop the sincere commitment, obedience, and trust that pleases, blesses, glorifies, and honors Him.

By anyone’s account this can be a very heavy and overwhelming test that God has given Abraham. What?! Is God actually demanding that Abraham sacrifice his son Isaac? How could a loving God ever demand such a thing?! One’s first reaction needs to be tempered by the significant Hebrew word that Moses, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, used for God. “Elohim” refers to that attribute and characteristic of God that describes a God Who is a personal, loving, and covenant-keeping God, a God who has a covenantal relationship with His people. It implies an intimate, unconditional, loving relationship.

Consequently, then, a loving God’s heart’s desire is that a Christian truly trust Him and His Holy Word. Look at verses 1-3. This was not a happenstance test. This was not something Abraham brought on himself because of some sin. It was a purposeful, God-ordained test. Elohim God came to Abraham to test him. God described what the test was to be. Bottom line: Sacrifice your only son, Isaac! Kill him - burn him up for Me! Oh, my! What a test! Can you imagine what Abraham might have been thinking?

Can you imagine the internal conflict, the mental and emotional struggle? Remember, God had originally promised him a son many years earlier. Then when he was 100 years old, Sarah, his wife, gave birth to Isaac! His son was to be the channel through whom all of his posterity would be blessed by God. Now that same God is telling him to kill Isaac!

Let me ask you, what kind of testing or trial is God placing in your life this day? What about the tests of the past? Abraham acknowledged God’s Word. Abraham did not flinch but responded immediately and boldly, “Here I am.” How are you responding to God in the midst of your testing, a testing that comes from Elohim, a loving and compassionate God who loves unconditionally and eternally? Abraham did not let his natural senses and temporal understanding interfere with an abiding trust and faith in Elohim. Look at verse 3, “*Early the next morning he saddled his donkey, he cut wood for the sacrificial fire.*” Then from verse 9, “*he built the sacrificial altar and bound his son in preparation for the sacrifice.*” Throughout those days of traveling he rested in the promise of His faithful and loving God that God would keep His promise and His descendants would be blessed through Isaac. Abraham walked by faith not by sight! “*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the confidence in things not seen.*” In verse 5, Abraham said, “*After WE worship we will come back to you.*” Then in verse 8, “*God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.*” And his most dramatic and intense moment of faith was expressed in verses 9 and 10, “*When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.*”

Do you and I exhibit such committed faith and trust in God when we are tested in our lives, we who have the totality of God's Word before us and the faithful witness of Abraham and other godly men and woman of the Bible to encourage us? We have the fulfilled covenant promises of God, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the Word of God to assure us that God will never leave us or forsake us. Therefore, let us not fall back into fear, anger, or hopelessness when God is in the midst of using all of our life experiences to increase and purify our faith in Him as He draws us into that deeper and more intimate relationship with Him our Heavenly Father. Let us break the all too frequent habit of tenaciously holding on to temporal things, family, and loved ones, our personal dreams and desires rather than on a total commitment to trust God for whatever He has for us to experience in our living of life in this world. Remember the words of the Apostle Paul, "In all things give thanks as that is the will of God in Christ Jesus for your life."

It is through exercising such faith and trust that a loving God positively responds when a Christian trusts Him in all of life's circumstances and tests. Look at verses 11-14. At this point another name for God or Lord is used, Jehovah-Jireh—The God Who Provides—our God who sustains us and truly provides everything for us according to His predestinating eternal will and love. The hand of Abraham, holding the knife, stayed by the perfect timing of God! The ram to be sacrificed conveniently located and provided by God! When Abraham demonstrated total trust in and holy fear of Almighty God and His Word that response in the midst of this test truly blessed and pleased God!

In chapter 11 of Hebrews, sometimes called "the faith chapter," the writer describes the depth of that faith, "*Abraham considered that God was able even to raise Isaac from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back from death.*" And from Galatians 3:6, "*Consider Abraham, he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.*" Abraham's faith was a faith that had grown and grown and grown over the many years of testing under the mighty hand of a loving God who always had provided as He had promised! Based on God's Word and His undying love for you, His child, you can be assured that no matter what the test, as you truly trust Him, no matter whatever the outcome, He promises to fully accomplish His perfect will in your life. His perfect will for you is perfect, no matter how you may humanly receive it at that moment in time.

Oh, dear friends, may we sincerely commit this day to trust God's promise that He will provide all we need, spiritually, emotionally, and physically to meet life's challenges. To believe and rest in what He provides is indeed His perfect will for us. When we do trust with such confidence and hope He truly does provide bountifully, more than we can even ask or think. For this account of Abraham and Isaac reveals this wonderful concluding truth that a loving God bountifully blesses the Christian when trust in Him is sincerely evidenced. Look at verses 15-18. God is so pleased with Abraham's faith and trust that He reaffirms and swears upon His holy name that all the promises of the Covenant made earlier will be totally fulfilled. A reaffirmation from God that Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son would, through His death on the cross, fulfill for all time this worldwide covenantal promise of God! Praise the Lord! That promise includes you and me here today! I believe it also can be a real encouragement to you that no matter how difficult the testing, no matter how long the duration of the testing, no matter how much temporal pain and suffering may be involved, ultimately, as one included in the covenant promises of God, as one who is saved by the shed blood of God's only Son—Jesus our sacrificial lamb—we have God's true promise that He will bring good out of every situation for His glory and honor and our richest eternal blessings!

As we celebrate communion at the Lord's table let us reaffirm our commitment to evidence more consistently trusting faith in God and His Word when being tested, knowing God did not prevent His Son Jesus, Who trusted in His Father totally, to die on the cross so that the covenant promises made to Abraham would be fulfilled in Him for our richest blessings and eternal life! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!