

## Friendship with God

Genesis 22:1-18

I'm sure most of us remember the movie *Toy Story* with Buzz Lightyear, Woody, and the whole gang. It was released in November 1995 and became the highest-grossing film of that year. My oldest son was 7 years old at the time. Although I can't remember the last time I watched it, I can still hear that unforgettable song:

*You've got a friend in me...  
You've got a friend in me...  
When the road looks rough ahead,  
And you're miles and miles from your nice warm bed...  
You've got a friend in me.*

That song stays with you not only because it's a catchy tune, but because the message deeply resonates with a core human need: real friendship.

Do you recall the first time in the Bible when God said something wasn't good? In Genesis 2:18, after creating Adam, God declared, *"It is not good that the man should be alone."* This isn't just about marriage — it's about our deep need for relationships, friendships, and companionship. God designed us for connection.

Most of us want friends who stick with us through thick and thin. Proverbs 18:24 declares: *"A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."*

It's been said that a true friend is still there when everyone else runs out on you.

Now, no one epitomizes this kind of great love more than Jesus. Because of this, we sing that classic hymn with passion:

"What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear..."

Jesus is the greatest Friend we could ever have. He proved it by laying down His life for us.

As He told His disciples in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

But today, Genesis 22 flips the question on us.

**Main Idea:** Jesus has already proven He is the greatest Friend we could ever have.

The question He is asking each of us today is: “Do I have a friend in you?”

It’s important to note that the Bible uses the word “friend” in rich and powerful ways for three specific people.

- Abraham was called “the friend of God” in James 2:23. Isaiah 41:8 also says of him: “*But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend.*” The Hebrew word for friend here speaks of covenant love and loyal affection—a relationship built on deep trust and radical obedience.
- Moses experienced God speaking to him “face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Exodus 33:11). The Hebrew word here means a close companion—marked by openness, honesty, and intimate access.
- Lazarus was the only individual Jesus explicitly called “our friend” (John 11:11). The Greek word *philos* describes a beloved, cherished companion—the kind of friend whose door was always open to Jesus. John also notes that Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (John 11:5). Though He had many followers, His relationship with this family was clearly closer and deeper.

Warren Wiersbe put it well:

Jesus doesn’t have favorites, but He does have intimates (close friends).

He doesn't love one child more than another, but He does draw especially close to those who draw close to Him. Not simply because He makes room for them, but because they make room for Him. They make themselves wholly available. They hold nothing back.

That's the kind of friendship God is looking for—and that's exactly what we see in Abraham.

This morning we will consider three reasons Abraham was called "The Friend of God."

### **1. Radical Obedience – He didn't withhold anything from God**

Let's begin with Abraham's **radical obedience**. After years of waiting, Abraham finally held his promised son Isaac in his arms. But then one day God said, *"Take your son, your only son, whom you love... and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will show you."*

Notice his response in verse 3: *"Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey... and went..."*

No argument. No delay. No negotiation. He obeyed instantly, even when it cost him what he loved most.

Later God says, *"Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me"* (v.12).

Abraham wasn't selective about his obedience. He obeyed without delay and not only when it was convenient or when he had it all figured out.

Beloved, the dangers of delayed or selective obedience are serious. Delayed obedience is still disobedience. It hardens the heart (see Hebrews 3:7-8, 13), quiets the voice of the Holy Spirit, and often leads to greater testing or discipline.

Selective obedience is especially deceptive. In 1 Samuel 15, God commanded King Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites and everything that belonged to them. Saul won the battle but spared King Agag and kept the best livestock. When confronted, he claimed he had obeyed and that the animals were for sacrifice.

The response of Samuel the prophet cuts to the heart of the matter:

*“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice... For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Samuel 15:22-23).*

Saul’s partial obedience was actually complete rebellion in God’s eyes. He obeyed only the parts that suited him and the people, while redefining God’s clear command to fit his own preferences. As a result, God rejected Saul as king. This one act of selective obedience marked the beginning of the end of his reign.

We do the same thing today when we pick and choose which parts of Scripture we’ll follow—obeying the comfortable commands while ignoring the costly ones (like keeping sex for marriage, and serving the body of Christ with our time, talents, and treasure). Selective obedience is self-deception that leads to spiritual decline.

It’s important to note also, that obeying the general will of God (what is clearly revealed in Scripture) opens the door for God to reveal more of His specific will for your life.

Many believers say they never sense God’s leading. Could it be that we are disobedient to what is already plain in the Word of God like, fleeing sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18), being baptized as a public declaration of faith, or devoting time to prayer and the Word? God is not likely to give specific direction (a ministry call, a relationship, a major life decision) if we are ignoring the clear commands already written in Scripture.

Friendship with God means loving Him more than anything else. Who or what is your “Isaac”? What are you holding back from God today — your career, your comfort, your relationships, your finances, your future plans? Abraham showed he was God’s friend by not withholding anything. (We’ll unpack this more fully in the third point.)

## **2. Unshakable Trust – He believed God would provide**

Next, Abraham showed he was a friend to God through his unshakable trust. As they climbed Mount Moriah, Isaac asked, *“My father!...Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”* (v.7). Abraham’s answer is pure faith: *“God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son”* (v.8).

According to Hebrews 11:19, Abraham believed that even if he sacrificed Isaac, God was able to raise him from the dead.

True friends trust each other even when it doesn’t make sense. Friendship with God means trusting Him when the promise looks like it’s dying on the altar.

It’s important to highlight that this moment on Mount Moriah powerfully points forward to the cross. Abraham was willing to offer his only son, the son he loved. Yet at the last moment, God provided a ram as a substitute. Centuries later, on that same ridge, God did not withhold His own only Son. He gave Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins.

Romans 8:32 declares this breathtaking truth: *“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”*

When it looked like the worst possible moment — the Son of God dying on a cross — it was actually the greatest provision in history. Jesus provided for our deepest need: forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and eternal life. What felt like total defeat became our greatest victory.

This speaks of a powerful counterintuitive truth: As Daniel Henderson puts it:

“The worst of times are often the best of times. They just don’t feel like it at the time.”

In the middle of the trial, the pain, the confusion, or the loss, it rarely *feels* like God is doing His best work. Abraham walking up that mountain with a heavy heart didn’t feel like the highlight of his life. The disciples watching Jesus die didn’t feel like the turning point of history.

You may be in a place right now where something important to you feels like it’s dying on the altar—a dream, a relationship, a season of life, or a promise that seems dead.

But in those very moments, God is often doing His deepest work: refining your faith, deepening your trust, and preparing a greater provision than you could have ever imagined.

The worst of times strip away our self-reliance and teach us to cling to God alone. They become the best of times because they produce the richest fruit and the closest intimacy with Him.

Let me add that faithfulness in little things is a prerequisite for God trusting us with more. Jesus taught this principle clearly:

*“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.”* Luke 16:10

In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25), the servants who faithfully stewarded small amounts were rewarded with greater responsibility, greater joy, and greater intimacy with the master.

God grows our capacity through small steps of trust before He entrusts us with bigger assignments.

Consider the story in the novel and now movie *Project Hail Mary*. The main character, Ryland Grace is the best person for a desperate, one-

way space mission to save humanity—but he resists. It’s too risky, too many unknowns. So the world leaders literally force him onto the ship by putting him in an induced coma so he can’t refuse.

But what began as resistance became the greatest adventure of his life. He wakes up in the unknown, faces impossible odds, forms a profound friendship with an alien ally, grows in courage, and ultimately saves humanity—all because he was pushed into the mission despite his fear. Friendship and a purpose worth sacrificing for would later fuel his bravery.

This is true of the Christian life, except that God is not going to put us in a coma. He won’t force us onto the ship. We have to step out in faith. We won’t walk on water unless we get out of the boat (Matthew 14:28-29).

Faith is never passive; it is active obedience in the face of fear and uncertainty. When we choose to step out, we discover that the God who called us is faithful to meet us there.

### **3. Wholehearted Worship—He drew near to God’s heart**

Finally, Abraham showed he was a friend to God through wholehearted worship. In Genesis 22:5, Abraham called his incredibly difficult journey “worship”. On Mount Moriah he built an altar, arranged the wood, bound his son, and raised the knife.

At the moment of total surrender, God stopped him, provided a ram, and spoke again—reaffirming the covenant with even greater promises.

Abraham didn’t just follow rules—he was drawing near to God with his whole heart. Through this costly act of worship, he stepped into deeper intimacy with God.

But notice something powerful: **it was his intimate knowledge of God that enabled this kind of worship.** Abraham had walked with God for decades. He knew God’s character—faithful, good, powerful,

and trustworthy. That relationship gave him the confidence to give God his very best.

This speaks to the danger of **idolatry**. Idolatry isn't limited to statues; it is anything that takes first place in our hearts.

Whatever we believe we cannot live a meaningful, worthwhile life without — that becomes our functional god. If God is merely a means to an end (to get success, family, comfort, or security), then our love for Him is conditional.

Abraham showed that his greatest love and allegiance was God Himself. He was willing to lay down his most precious possession.

And laying Down Your Isaac is not just an Abraham thing — it's a call for every follower of Jesus.

What does this look like in practice? In her powerful book *When I Lay My Isaac Down: Unshakable Faith in Unthinkable Circumstances*, Carol Kent shares her own heartbreaking story. When her only son, Jason, was imprisoned for manslaughter (a shocking act that came after he tried to protect his stepdaughters from an abusive situation), Carol was forced to surrender the person she valued most — her “Isaac” — into God's hands. Like Abraham, she had to release control, stop manipulating outcomes, and trust God in the midst of unimaginable pain.

Carol Kent writes about the power of relinquishment:

“When we release our grasp, our relinquishment puts a stop to our manipulation of other people and releases the Holy Spirit to do the supernatural through the power of prayer.”

Through this surrender, she discovered deeper intimacy with God, new purpose (including launching a prison ministry), and the reality that God can bring beauty even from our deepest losses.

Do you know that the very first time the word “worship” is used in the Bible, it comes from the lips of Abraham? As he prepared to obey God with the best that he had — his own beloved son — he told his servants:

“Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship...” Genesis 22:5

A.W. Tozer once expressed a sobering reality in his day: I fear that for the most part, people are worshipping *worship* rather than worshipping God and communing with Him.

Let’s be honest — we can raise our hands in worship, sing loudly, and feel moved by the music, but get it twisted.

Worship is not first about our hands; it’s about our hearts.

What has captured your heart — the music, the atmosphere, or the Man, Christ Jesus?

That will be put to the test not by what you amen on Sunday, but by what you practice on Monday.

Abraham’s worship cost him everything. It was proven genuine on the mountain before a real burning altar of sacrifice, not in a comfortable gathering.

True worship always leads to surrender.

That’s why James 2:23 says,

*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God’s friend.”*

Abraham was saved by faith, not works — but his living faith was proven genuine by his works. And faith grows as we draw near to God’s heart.

Worship is far more than lifting hands and singing songs; it is a heart captured by the glory of God, resulting in total surrender—holding nothing back.

Jesus said in John 15:13-15: “

*“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends... I no longer call you servants... Instead, I have called you friends.”*

Jesus calls you His friend.

But are you living like a friend to Him?

Are you obeying Him radically without delay, or selective hearing?

Are you trusting Him completely — even when you can’t see how it will all work out?

Are you worshiping Him with total surrender — holding nothing back?

Friendship with God will both enable you and call you to lay down your “Isaacs,” but it will give you something infinitely greater—deeper intimacy and satisfaction with the God of the universe.

Let me give you five Practical Takeaways from Abraham’s journey...

Abraham showed himself to be a friend of God in that...

1. **He gave God his undivided attention.** He didn’t practice selective hearing. As we heard last week from James 2, we must move beyond being mere hearers. We are called to obey the whole counsel of God.
2. **He obeyed without hesitation.** Abraham rose early in the morning and set out immediately

3. **He persevered through a very difficult journey.** For three days he walked toward the mountain, not led by his feelings but sustained by faith. He endured because he trusted God's character more than his circumstances.
4. **He worshiped not just with lifted hands but with open hands.** He gave God the most important thing in his life, showing that he worshiped God for who He is — not merely for the gifts He gives.
5. **He believed God would provide exactly what was needed in His perfect time.** TobyMac captured this truth well: "Don't let the gap between God's promises and God's timing make you doubt Him. Wait on Him because He not only provides but He's building your trust in the process."

## **Conclusion**

On that same mountain where Abraham offered Isaac, centuries later God did what He stopped Abraham from doing — He gave His only Son, Jesus, as the sacrifice for our sins. Jesus is the Lamb God provided. He is the greatest demonstration of friendship the world has ever seen.

Have you come into a relationship with God through Jesus? Have you turned from your sin and trusted Him as Lord and Savior?

If you have, have you moved into this deeper level of friendship—the kind of intimate friendship where Jesus can truly say, "Yes, I have a friend in you"

Maybe you've slipped back, or you've gone far with the Lord but you're still holding something back. Today is the day to lay it all down on the altar.

Go from this place as a true friend of God — obeying radically, trusting completely, and worshiping wholeheartedly — all for the wonderful name of Jesus, our Savior, our Lord, and our greatest Friend. Amen.