

The Faith Test

Genesis 22

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: As I think back over the years, perhaps my favorite Christmas as a boy was the Christmas of 1986. I was 10 years old, and I had one request. I wanted a dog. Not just any dog — I wanted a purebred, American Kennel Club-registered Labrador Retriever. I'll never forget getting up about 4:30 AM that Christmas morning and running into our living room, opening my presents, and it was then that my dad opened a door and that puppy ran in and began licking me on my bare back.

There is something very special about the friendship between a boy and his dog. I named him Jake. It was awesome until that Summer, when our area had an unusual flea infestation, and my dog was covered in fleas. The vet gave us some drops for the dog, but he recommended that if you really want to get rid of the fleas, you need to dip the dog. He gave us specific instructions to fill a tub with the dip mix and get the dog completely under the water just long enough to soak him really well.

Now, labs like water; they have webbed feet, but let me tell you, they don't like being held under at all. You see that dog knows that he was created to breathe air, not water. Now there was nothing in me that would hurt that dog. But I'm sure that he was convinced that I was trying to kill him.

Here's what I want you to know today – if you walk with God, there will be times when you will swear He's trying to kill you. But in fact, he's making you.

The proverb writer said, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend". Today, we will see the friend of God wounded by the Shepherd of his soul.

CONTEXT: To this point, Abraham's life had been a perpetual series of tests...

- In **chapter 11**, God gave Abraham the **family** test. He called upon Abraham to leave his home, his mother, father, and relatives, to move out of Ur and go to the land of Canaan.
- In **chapter 12**, he was given the **famine** test. When a famine came to Canaan, the Bible says he departed from God's will and went down to Egypt.
- In **chapter 13**, he was given the **fellowship** test. When a conflict arose between him and his nephew Lot, instead of demanding his way, he gave Lot his choice of land.
- In **chapter 14**, he was given the **fight** test. Because we are told there, he defeated all of the kings of Sodom who had kidnapped Lot, and he rescued him. He was also given the fortune test in that chapter because he was offered all the wealth of Sodom, but he turned it down.
- In **chapters 15 and 16**, he was given the **fatherhood** test. God had promised to Abraham and Sarah that they would have a boy. But they were impatient; they

would not wait on God, and he fathered the child called Ishmael by his servant Hagar.

- By the time we come to **Chapter 22**, Things have settled a bit for Abraham. Isaac had indeed been born, and Hagar and Ishmael had been sent away.

A treaty had been struck at Beersheba with Abimelech, the Philistine King. And they were enjoying a time of peace. The last thing we see in Chapter 21 was Abraham planting a tree, a sign that he planned to put down roots and raise his family in the fear of the Lord.

Abraham calls upon the Lord as ***El Olam*** – the Everlasting God. This designation of the Lord as Everlasting God or Enduring God says it all, evoking the “stability, security, and permanence” that Abraham now felt in the covenant and in his relationship with God.

*This was the setting Moses provided to set the backdrop for the test that God was about to thrust upon Abraham. Abraham would now face the greatest test of all, the **faith test**.*

TEXT: Genesis 22:1–19 (NAS) ¹ Now it came about after these things, that **God tested Abraham**

Aren't you glad that God clued us in on the fact that this is a test? That clue serves as a cushion against the shock that follows.

¹ Now it came about after these things, that **God tested Abraham** - , and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ² He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.”

God designated his demand with three phrases:

Take now your son – For the Patriarch, the title of son meant more to him than what it means to us. To us it means **hope, potential a future**. For Abraham, it meant all of that, But also that the boy was the **evidence** that Abraham was no fool to leave his past in Ur.

This boy was the culmination of all of Abraham's faith journey up to this point. He was Abraham's faith that became sight. What he believed God for, he could now hold. And above all, **his birth was miraculous**. Both Abraham and Sarah were well past the point of producing children, but God enabled it.

Your only son – Was this Abraham's only son? Practically speaking, yes. Ishmael had been sent away. A divorce took place between the wife and the husband, and between the son and the father. There would be no leaning upon Ishmael as a hope of fulfilling the promise of God. Abraham had only one son left – Isaac. It would happen through

Isaac or it would not happen at all.

Whom you love – Don't think for a minute that Abraham's journey of faith had been a series of *mathematical equations*.

No doubt, his knees buckled, his stomach twisted into a knot. For a brief moment, despair, doubt, disillusionment, and disappointment flooded his soul. This is the son that he LOVED!

Whatever else God may be, he is not robotic.

- While he is consistent, he is not predictable.
- While he is faithful, he is not prudish.
- While he is loving, He is not beyond trying the limits of a man's soul in order to make more of a man out of him.

This would be near impossible for Abraham, and God knew it.

1. PRINCIPLE ONE – What you hold onto the most, God will often ask you to release.

Chuck Swindol said it this way, *"A disciple holds all things loosely."*

This is to prove what you truly value.

The phrase **worship** is taken from an Old English phrase that means worth ship or an attribution of worth. What is God worth to you? Therein lies the quality of your worship.

- **Esau** would appraise God and his blessing as less valuable than a bowl of soup.
- So to the **Rich Young Ruler** – God asked Am I more valuable than your money?

It has been said that a man will relinquish anything at a moment's notice for his God.

Now, for Abraham, it was Isaac. Do you value me more than your son?

"Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah,

The word Moriah literally means *"foreseen by God."* It is not coincidental that God wanted this event to occur on Mt. Moriah. In the mind of God, this was "the place," and there was no other place, any place like this place. Why did it have to be this place?

Because it was on Mount Moriah that the Lord Jesus Christ died for us. **II**

Chronicles 3:1 tells us that the temple was built on Mount Moriah. Today, you can go to that same Temple Mount, walk a short distance to the north, and you will run right into Calvary, the place of the skull.

ILLUSTRATION: Out of all of the planets in all of the galaxies, God chose a little blue planet called Earth. Out of all of the expanses of land on planet earth, God chose the sands of Canaan, and out of all of the mountains that sprang out of the land of Canaan, God chose one Mountain called Moriah. It is on this mountain that redemption would occur.

“Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.”

³ So Abraham rose early in the morning

Some say his early rising was a sign of his prompt obedience, but I imagine something else. I don't expect this dad slept all night. I doubt he slept for the next three. Can I be sure of that? No, but the next verse gives us a subtle hint to Abraham's state of mind -

³ So Abraham rose early in the morning and **saddled his donkey**, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; **and he split wood** for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

Gordon Wenham calls us to notice the order of action—first saddling his donkey and then cutting wood—the progression is illogical, which indicates that Abraham was quite disoriented, yet he nevertheless obeyed.

- There are times when you will obey with a trembling hand.
- There are times when you will obey with gritted teeth.

But the fact remains – you obeyed.

2. PRINCIPLE NUMBER TWO – Obedience at times is very difficult.

ILLUSTRATION: *Erwin McManus pastors a Church on the coast of California. He tells the story of a man who was converted in his Church, and it came time for his baptism. This particular baptism was scheduled to take place in the Ocean, which, for many, was going to be exciting and invigorating, but for one particular man, it was terrifying. Turns out that a couple of years ago, he had been bitten by a shark, and he hadn't gotten in the ocean since. He requested an accommodation and said, “Would it be ok if I got baptized in a regular baptistry?” McManus said, “Ordinarily it would be fine, but for you... I think you NEED to do this”. Was it easy for the man? No – it tried his very soul... but he obeyed.*

⁴ On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. ⁵ Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and **we will worship and return to you.**”

Now, did Abraham understand God’s directive? Yes. Was he lying to the young men by saying, “We will return to you”? I don’t think so.

Abraham engaged in what I call Divine Logic. You see, Abraham understood two things.

- **God had said that Isaac was the child of promise.** He was the one through whom the prophecy would be fulfilled.
- **God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac to him.** That would require Abraham to cut the throat of Isaac, drain his blood, cut off his arms and legs, and then burn his body completely.
- **Somehow or another, God was going to have to put this boy back again.** Somehow God was going to have to reinstate that spilled blood. Somehow God would have to breathe again the breath of life. The promise of God demanded that Isaac have a child. That had not occurred. Abraham believed God for the unbelievable – a resurrection.

You say Pastor that’s quite a stretch – No not at all -

Hebrews 11:17–19 (NAS) ¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; ¹⁸ it was he to whom it was said, “In Isaac your descendants shall be called.” ¹⁹ He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

3. PRINCIPLE NUMBER THREE – God’s test requires you to engage in Divine Logic.

Mary had to use this same logic when the Angel told her that she would have a son. You must remember, nothing is impossible with God.

⁶ Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son,

It would be 2000 years later that another Father would lay wood upon the back of His only Son, and the Son would carry the wood up Mount Moriah.

6b. and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷ Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” ⁸ Abraham said, “**God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt**

offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together. ⁹ Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Years ago, I asked my son Cole, “Son, what would you do if I were about to sacrifice you on an altar”? He said, “Dad, I would run.”

Commentators tell us that Isaac was at least 15 to 25 years old. He could have outrun his 100-year-old father. He could have outpowered him. Yet he opened not his mouth.

As Isaiah would say of another silent son - **Isaiah 53:7 (NAS)** ⁷ He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.

Isaac was saying, “Father, not my will but your will be done”

¹⁰ Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹² He said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”

4. PRINCIPLE NUMBER FOUR – God’s Tests expose what was already in your heart.

Now – did God know the heart of Abraham already? Yes – why did he put him through this?

1. **The test established the heart of Abraham.** – Now Abraham could know that God was truly his greatest treasure.
2. **The test exposed the heart of Abraham** – Now, everyone else could know that God was truly his greatest treasure.
 - Whatever is in the well comes up in the bucket.
 - Whatever is in the cup comes out when it is jostled.

Whatever is in your heart comes out when you are tested. For some of us, it’s not pretty.

You need to recognize God is putting you through something to get that stuff out so you will confess it and forsake it.

¹³ Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind *him* a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son.

Do you see it? This Ram wore upon his head a **crown of thorns**, pointing to another who would bear a thorny crown.

Up until this point, Isaac has been the type pointing to Christ, but **the analogy could go no further**. For you see, Isaac also needed a redeemer; there must be a substitute also for Isaac.

Isaac's question would reverberate throughout the centuries for nearly 2,000 years - Father, here is the wood, here is the fire, where is the sacrifice? Where is the lamb?

2000 years later - the question was answered by the Prophet John when he beheld Jesus Christ and answered the question of Isaac -as he proclaimed, **"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (John 1:26)**

PRINCIPLE NUMBER FIVE – What we release to God, He replaces with something better.

¹⁴ Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will be provided."

Do you see the focus of the name is on the future – the Lord WILL provide.

ILLUSTRATION: Years ago, I read about a preacher who was backing out of his driveway. His little boy loved playing hide-and-seek with his daddy. And this preacher's little boy jumped out from behind the bushes and said, "Boo, Daddy." But Daddy didn't hear him because he was behind the automobile. This preacher heard that sickening thud as he backed out over and crushed the body of his little boy. And he picked up that crushed little body. The life had already gone from the little youngster. And he was so broken-hearted. Later on, he told a preacher friend about it.

And the preacher's friend's name was Bob. And this older preacher told the younger preacher, with the tears streaming down his cheeks, he said concerning the death of his son, "Bob, I wouldn't have done it for the world. I wouldn't have done it for the world. But God did for the world, for the world.

For God so loved the world, that He gave, He gave He gave His only begotten Son for the world.