

- **Main Passage:** Genesis 22:1-14
 - **Purpose:** To understand that we can trust God to provide, especially in the midst of trials, because of who He is.
 - **Session Snapshot:** The passage at the heart of this session is familiar to all of us. It's also one that we often struggle with. But it doesn't have to be that way. The story of God calling Abraham to surrender his son to sacrifice is one of the most powerful and emotionally fraught stories in the Bible. And yet, God intervenes according to His nature to show Himself faithful to Abraham and Isaac. We can't miss the fact that God tested Abraham's faith, but as we will see, testing is a big part of what it means to follow God.
-

GETTING STARTED

Kick-off your time together with a quick connection time or reviewing what you did in the last session.

FIRST, remind your group that this is week 4 of their video series on Abraham and that it's part of a larger study looking at the real men of the Bible.

THEN, if you want to start with asking men for prayer requests, checking in on how their weeks have gone, or any other housekeeping tasks, do so.

FINALLY, if there are no questions or other input, transition into the *Digging In* section of your leader's guide.

DIGGING IN

Jump into the session by watching this week's video.

FIRST, play the video. You can access the video by logging into your Iron Hill Press account.

THEN, when the video is over, lead men in a short discussion based on what Rick covered. Feel free to come up with your own questions, or consider asking some similar to those below:

- **Has God ever called you to do something that didn't seem to make sense to you at first but turned out to be God's perfect plan? What was it about God that empowered you to move forward in faith even though you didn't understand how it would all work out?**
- **Abraham called the name of the place where he put Isaac on the altar, "the Lord will provide." Do you agree that God is indeed the Lord who provides? How do you know this? How did Abraham have to discover this? As you have gone throughout your life as a Christ-follower, how have you experienced God's specific provision in your life? What did this experience do to your faith in God?**

- Can you think of a time when God asked you to surrender something you loved, or that mattered greatly to you? How did you respond? What did you learn about God during that process?
- Respond to this statement: How we respond to testing or trials says a great deal about who we believe God to be.
- Rick said that God allows us to be tested but does not tempt us. How do you make sense of these two concepts? How would you explain the difference to someone young in their faith or curious about how God works?

FINALLY, transition into the *Opening the Word* portion of your time together by saying something like the following:

- **As Christians, we are not promised an existence with no trials or challenges. On the contrary, the Bible shows us that not only do we experience trials in this life, but they also occur with God's knowledge so that He might grow our faith. This equation might not make sense to us at first pass. But this lesson will help us realize that in God's economy, it's more important that we would know Him than it is that we would be comfortable. Let's take a closer look.**

OPENING THE WORD

Spend time going deeper into a specific concept Rick introduced in the video.

FIRST, explain that you're going to take a more in-depth look at Genesis 22:1-14, but before you do so, it's important to examine the context for the passage we'll be studying. Do so by reviewing the bullet points below:

- **Author:** While there's no specific author named within the text, Moses is the accepted author for Genesis, with some editing and additions done after his death (such as the account of his death!).
- **Time frame:** It's difficult to establish with any certainty a date for the completion of the Pentateuch (a name for the first five books of the Bible—including Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—of which Genesis is a part). Most of the material originated from Moses himself, and depending on the date of the Exodus (which is also not known for sure), that would make the date for the writing of Genesis sometime in the 1400s or the 1200s BC.
- **Purpose:** Genesis details the earliest history of our world, including creation and Adam and Eves' fall. It also focuses on the emergence of Israel, not only as God's people but as the group God would work through to bring redemption to the world.

THEN, read or have a volunteer read Genesis 22:1–8. Before jumping into the discussion, make it a point to stop and say something similar to the following:

- **The story of God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac sounds harsh to our ears, but child sacrifice was common to the people groups that surrounded Abraham during this time. To be clear, God never asked nor expected His people to engage in child sacrifice. In fact, one of the minor applications of this story is God repudiating a common but detestable practice of the day. But the point is that God's instruction to Abraham would have seemed culturally acceptable to Abraham. Yet, Abraham would soon find out that God's way and the world's way are never the same.**

Direct your group's attention back to the beginning of the passage. Lead them in a brief discussion by asking something similar to the following:

- **Where we pick up in Abraham's story, Isaac has been born and is a young man, though there is great debate about how old he was at the time of this story. We know that Abraham and Sarah waited 25 years from the time of God's promise until Isaac was born. And now Isaac has lived with Abraham for some time. Abraham treasures Isaac, something God Himself points out. Why do you think God may have gone out of His way to state the truth that Isaac was beloved by Abraham?**
 - *Answer:* We don't know for sure why God would say it, but it seems that God was communicating to Abraham that He knew how much Abraham loved and valued Isaac. Suppose God did not state that He was aware of Abraham's affections for Isaac. In that case, Abraham may have been inclined to disobey God because he could have felt that God didn't know how much he loved Isaac and therefore was asking him to do something unfair or incorrect.
- **Vs. 3 is so powerful in its simplicity. "So Abraham rose . . ." What does this tell you about Abraham?**
 - Answers will vary. But at the least, Abraham was obedient.
- **What about Abraham's past with God empowered him to act in such great faith?**
 - Answers will vary. But God had proven faithful to Abraham before. He had led Abraham to a land that He eventually showed Abraham, but Abraham had to trust that God would deliver him and his family (which He, of course, did.) God was also faithful to give Abraham and Sarah a son. Abraham had a history with God, and God had always proven faithful in the past.
- **We will never know the answer to this, but why do you think God may have tested Abraham in this way? Why would God ask Abraham to do this?**
 - The answer is in the response of the angel to Abraham.
- **Look at vs. 5. How is this verse a great statement of hope?**
 - *Answer:* Abraham told his men that he and Isaac would be returning, even though God had told him that Isaac would be sacrificed.
- **If vs. 5 demonstrates hope, vs. 8 is a resounding demonstration of faith. "God will provide . . ." Can you think of a time in your life when, faced with long odds, you fell back on the simple truth that God provides? Would you share with the group what you learned about God through His provision in your time of distress?**
 - Answers will vary. If you have a story that you would share, be prepared to do so.

NEXT, have a volunteer read Genesis 22:9-14. When they've finished, jump back into a discussion. Consider asking something like the following:

- **This is a question that can't be answered, but it's hard not to ask it. What do you think was going through Isaac's mind as Abraham was binding him and laying him on the wood?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **Vs. 12 tells us what we need to know about WHY God allowed Abraham to undergo this test. What can we see from the angel's response about why God tested Abraham?**
 - *Answer:* God wanted Abraham to love Him more than he loved Isaac. God wanted Abraham to trust Him and not in the future that an heir might provide him. God knew what Isaac meant to Abraham but wanted Abraham to discover what God meant to him.
- **God provided for Abraham. God proved faithful. God acted within His character and made a way for Abraham to both be faithful and not sacrifice his son. How does God act to keep us faithful even as He allows us to be tested?**
 - Answers will vary.

FINALLY, say something like:

- **Rick mentioned 1 Peter 1:6-7, which says, "[6] In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, [7] so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and**

glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Peter gives us a clue about how God values genuine faith. Our faith, which is truly made genuine when we journey alongside God through trials, is more valuable than gold. As humans, we may be tempted to have a weak faith if it means we don't have to be tested. But God knows that is not for our best or His glory. God allows us to experience trials so that we might grow closer to Him. Abraham experienced this. And we can too.

Remind your group that we study the men of the Bible to apply the lessons they learned to our own lives. Ask if there are any questions about what you have discussed so far, then move to *Accepting the Challenge* so that you can begin applying what you've learned.

ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE

Focus your group's attention on the takeaways from your time together.

FIRST, explain that you want to challenge the group to focus on the takeaways from this session. Consider starting this portion of your session by asking your group what they think are the main application points from your session. Allow discussion to go until there are no more suggestions.

Then, if necessary, supplement your discussion with the following application points. Say something like:

- **God made a promise to Abraham, and in the face of great confusion, Abraham chose to rely on God's character and faithfulness. Do you rely on God in the midst of tough times?**
 - We are more inclined to trust God when we have experience trusting Him and seeing Him prove Himself worthy of our faith. Have you ever stopped and written down a list of the times God had proven faithful to you? It's a powerful exercise that strengthens and grows our faith. Consider taking a moment this week and writing down times from your past where God was faithful in providing for you. Use this as a way of becoming more faithful as you move forward in your relationship with God.
- **There are things in our lives, good things, things that we love, that can become idols if we're not careful.**
 - Our families are a blessing from God. But if we love our family more than God, they are an idol. Our health is a blessing from God. But if we love our life on this earth more than God, our health is an idol. Money is a blessing from God. But if we love money and material things more than God, then money is an idol. Even the best things in our lives, sent to us from God, can become idols if they compete for our heart's affection. Is there anything in your life that is an idol right now? What work do you need to do to get the order of your life back on track?
- **Abraham's faithfulness had to inspire Isaac. Who in your life is inspired by your faithfulness?**
 - If this question is tough to answer, you have work to do. Either you are not as plugged-in to the people around you as God would have you, or your faith is not strong enough to be inspiring. Either way, there is work to be done.

If it feels appropriate, allow some discussion about the kind of processing they find themselves doing.

FINALLY, encourage men to continue to marinate on these points in the week to come. Challenge them to listen to what God is trying to tell them and to respond accordingly. If there are no more questions or input, close your time together in prayer.