

## Giving Up Your Isaac Genesis 22:1-24

Take a moment and think about what is of greatest value to you. It could be a person – your spouse, children, grandchildren. It could be a thing like your career, an heirloom, your health, a hobby, your home. What is it you would find most difficult to give up if you were asked to do so?

Our passage today in **Genesis 22** is a familiar one in which Abraham's faith is once again tested, a test about what he values most. All the tests of faith leading up to this one have prepared him for what will be the apex of his faith encounter. If this test were to have come at an earlier time, Abraham would have failed and failed miserably. If that was the case, we would not have him as our example of the Father of faith. His story in the Bible would be short. An increase of faith always falls on the heels of an exercise of faith. So if we are going to build the muscles of our faith it requires time, patience and the continued exercise of our faith starting out small and building as we go along with the Lord.

The current "raw" bench press record is 739.6 lbs. established on Sept. 1, 2019. A "raw" bench press means that the person was not wearing a supportive t-shirt. The guy who set the record did not just decide to go out on September 1 and lift all that weight. It took years of training, dedication, diet, discipline, and incrementally adding weight one pound at a time.

It's the same with faith. God builds our faith muscles one test at a time over time. Abraham is no exception. God took him 25 years earlier when he had no faith to the point in which we find him in our text today. God's test of faith is going to measure the depth of that faith, the obedience of that faith, and the willingness of that faith. Everyone of us is no different than Abraham. We can argue all we want that he is a super-giant of the faith because he has his name etched in the records of Scripture in **Hebrews 11** all for posterity to read about. But the reality is that he began like anyone else. We are no different than him. God calls us to a daily life of following Him by faith. What God called him to do

was different than what He calls us to do, but it is all a walk of faith. He became a giant of faith because of how he responded to each test – in faith.

One year while visiting family in New York we took a trip to Cooperstown and walked through the Hall of Fame where all the baseball greats are enshrined. Not every baseball player gets there. They had to have stellar careers that was spawned by lots of hard work.

We can think the same thing about the Bible's Hall of Fame and think that only the great's make it, but in reality, our faith started just like theirs. There was a time when, like Abraham, we also had no faith and then at whatever age we were when the spiritual eyes of our heart was opened up by God's Spirit and we trusted God as Savior, our journey of faith began. It was small at first, and like Abraham, there were times we failed. But today looking back we see how our faith has grown. It's even possible that you may have already experienced a test of faith similar to Abraham's. Oh, it may not be the exact thing, but it was something in which God was asking you, do you love that thing, whatever it is, more than Me? That's what it boils down here for Abraham. Will he trust God because of his love for God and walk by faith or will he walk by sight because he loves his son more? It's no different for us no matter what that thing might be. It boils down to this question: **When it comes to our faith or trust in God, what sacrifice are we willing to make?**

So let's take a look at **Genesis 22** and see first that faith's test calls out. We find it in **verses 1-2**.

### I. FAITH'S TEST CALLS OUT – vs. 1-2

Let's keep in mind the difference between testing and tempting. We read in **James 1:13** that God never tempts anyone to sin. That verse says He is neither tempted Himself to sin, nor does he tempt anyone to sin. We learn in **I Corinthians 7:5** that Satan is the one who tempts, not God. The word test means to try and most often it is translated to prove. You test the value of gold, you test the strength of steel. **One author notes that "Satan tempts us because he wants us to fail. God tests us**

because He wants to confirm our faith.”

**Exodus 20:20** “Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.’”

Remember that this test came after a series of other tests. On the first day of class a student is typically not given a test on a subject he has yet to study. The test comes after a series of homework assignments and quizzes and then comes the test. That’s what happened to Abraham.

Our text begins by telling us that this test from God came some time later. It is unclear when the “sometime” was. Isaac is probably in his teens since he was tasked with carrying the cut wood up the mountain for the sacrifice. We note in **verse 1** that the call of faith is clear.

#### A. The Call Of Faith Is Clear – v. 1

Time has passed. Abraham has enjoyed watching the son of promise grow up. It’s a joyful time because in Isaac is the fulfillment of God’s promise. As the saying goes, life is peachy keen. It couldn’t be better. He could sit out in his hammock and watch his son grow up chasing fireflies, hopping like a toad and trying to make rocks skip in the river. What God said He would do has happened and Abraham could rest assured that the mantle of headship could safely pass on to his son.

Let me remind you about something important when it comes to growing faith. It is always waiting and listening. Sometime later God spoke. His voice was clear and distinct. It was a voice Abraham had become familiar with and when he heard it, he knew it was God speaking. His faith had developed an ear for God, to listen not only for Him, but to listen to him.

We read in **Exodus 3** that one day while tending sheep, Moses saw the strangest sight. A bush was on fire, but it was not consumed. Going over to investigate he heard a voice speak. It was the voice of God. It called to Moses. He responded “**Here I am.**” For 40 years God had not spoken to Moses as

he lived in Midian tending sheep, learning the wilderness. Now God spoke and Moses was ready to listen.

In **I Samuel 3:1-10** we have the account of another time God spoke clearly. It is a sad commentary on the state of man’s heart in those days because it says that “**in those days the word of the Lord was rare.**” God was going to speak now to a young boy. We read in **verse 7** that “**Samuel did not yet know the voice of the Lord.**” At first, when he heard the voice, he assumed it was that of old Eli, the priest. After the third time Eli realized it was the voice of God so that when He spoke the fourth time Samuel responded “**Speak Lord, your servant is listening.**”

When God spoke to Abraham he said “**Here I am.**” The word implies the same as how Samuel responded. It is the response of a servant, one who is ready to do what he is asked.

The voice of God is clear. **He has spoken to us in His Word, but are we listening? Does our faith allow us to listen for Him and to listen to Him and respond as a willing servant?**

Don’t let it be said of us that the word of the Lord was rare in those days. The call of faith is always clear. **Are you listening for it?**

The second thing we find in these opening verses is that the call of faith is costly.

#### B. The Call Of Faith Is Costly – v. 2

I’m not sure what Abraham was expecting when God spoke. I’m fairly certain it wasn’t what he heard Him say. Maybe he thought God would commend him for raising such a fine boy. “I’ve been watching him grow. He’s turning out to be a fine young man. Keep up the good work, you’re doing a great job. As a matter of fact let Me heap on a few more blessings to go with the one’s you’ve already been given. I’m going to bless your socks off.”

But that’s not what he heard.

**“Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah.”**

Now up to that point everything seemed good. Maybe God wanted him to take Isaac on a little trip to have some man to man time. They could do a little fishing and hiking up in the mountains. There has to be some streams teeming with trout. It will be a great trip. But before he could get all excited and tell Sarah and Isaac the good news, God finished his sentence. It was one of those moments like when you're sitting in the doctor's office and you get the news of a terminal illness or that a loved one was suddenly killed in an accident. Time stops and the world suddenly closes in on you. You can't seem to catch your breath, and you hear nothing else. Life as you know it has suddenly changed. **“Take the son you love, Isaac, and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”**

Suddenly God doesn't seem so benevolent, so loving, so trusting. We can only imagine all the thoughts that must have gone through his mind. They would have been my thoughts. God, how could you? You promised. What about this great nation that was supposed to come through him? What will come of Your plans? What will Sarah think? She'll be heartbroken. Why now? We waited so long for him. How can I sacrifice my own son? I'd rather chop off my own arm. How about if you take me, I'm old and lived a good and full life. He is just starting out. It isn't fair!

**Sound familiar?** We have all probably had those kinds of conversations with God somewhere along our journey of faith.

But then, that's me. He may have had some of those thoughts, but I think his reaction was different and we'll see it in **verse 3**. When the call of God is clear to follow Him, it can be costly. Abraham was being asked to give up what was the dearest thing to him. In Isaac was not only the perpetuation of his family lineage, in him was the promise of the seed through whom would come the redeemer, the One who would save mankind from their sins. It was through Isaac that the promise of blessing all the

nations of the world would come about.

When God asks us to walk in faith it will require that we relinquish all ties to the things of earth, even the things that we hold most dear. Think for a moment what the salvation of mankind cost God as He sent His only Son, the Son He loved, to become a man and take man's sin, sin He neither committed nor deserved and bore it all on the cross.

God will test our heart to determine how much we really love Him and trust Him. Such a test of faith is summed up by the hymnist as he writes

All to Jesus I surrender,  
All to Him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust Him,  
In His presence daily live.  
I surrender all,  
I surrender all,  
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,  
I surrender all.

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**Proverbs 17:3 “The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart.”**

Just as fire removes impurities to leave what is most valuable in those precious metals, so God uses the tests in our lives to remove everything but absolute faith and love for Him. God was testing what was in Abraham's heart. **In this test, would God find that Abraham had surrendered everything?**

Henry Morris writes that **“God did not want Isaac slain, but He did want Abraham's full love.”**

Three Hebrew men stood before one of the most powerful and cruel kings ever. They refused to bow to his golden image willing rather to suffer the pains of a furnace than deny the God they trusted by faith. They had surrendered all.

Their friend and contemporary, Daniel, went as he always did and prayed to the true and living God knowing that his disobedience to the king's edict would mean the lions' den. He had surrendered all.

A lone figure knelt in a garden grieving over the burden that rested on His shoulders. So heavy was

the weight of what faced Him, we read that He sweat great drops of blood. Jesus, concluded His prayer to His Father by saying that it wasn't His will He wanted to do, but the will of His Father. Throughout His life, Jesus had surrendered His all.

God was asking Abraham if he was willing to surrender his all, the son he loved, in faith.

**“Abraham”**

**“Here I am”**. It is the answer of a servant who has been summoned by his master to do something for which he must obey.

**“Take your son to Moriah.”** We learn in **II Chronicles 3:11** that this is the future site of Jerusalem and the very spot where the Temple would be built. Currently Islam's Dome of the Rock sits there. It is the place where Abraham was to offer Isaac. When God made the covenant with Abraham, he was to seal it with circumcision. It was a symbol of complete surrender to God. Abraham had committed to obey God sealed by the sign of circumcision. For him, there was no greater test of obedience than what God was asking him to do right then. By this command God was showing Abraham and Isaac and all the generations to follow what true faith and obedience looks like.

Abraham, take the son you love and sacrifice him.

**Is there something God is asking us to sacrifice?**

Faith's test called out. It was clear and spoke of the cost it required. It was a high price to pay. **Would he obey?** It is in **verses 3-12** where we see that faith's task challenges obedience.

## **II. FAITH'S TASK CHALLENGES OBEDIENCE – vs. 3-12**

I find five challenges to faith in this passage.

The first is that faith challenges our will.

### **A. Faith Challenges Our Will – v. 3**

Notice the opening of **verse 3** where it says **“Early the next morning.”**

Here is the answer to Abraham's obedience. It can be assumed that God spoke to him in the night and

early the next morning he got his provisions around and headed out on their journey. What had to be settled before this conversation with God was the matter of his will. I somehow don't think that he wrestled with the decision all night and finally made up his mind. I think that had been settled. He had let go of his pride a long time before this. I say that based on **Romans 4:20-21**.

### **Romans 4:20-21**

His faith had brought him to the point of letting go of his own will to obey the will of God.

It really comes down to a matter of faith vs. pride.

Pride is about what I want.

Faith is about what God wants.

Pride says I won't. Faith says I will.

Pride says I can't. Faith says I can.

Pride says not today. Faith says right away.

Pride says it costs me too much. Faith says its cost is of no concern.

The Phillips translation reads **“He drew strength from his faith, and while giving the glory to God, remained absolutely convinced that God was able to implement his own promise.”**

Here's the same in the Message. **“He didn't tiptoe around God's promise asking cautiously skeptical questions. He plunged into the promise and came up strong, ready for God, sure that God would make good on what he had said.”**

Faith will challenge our will. **Have we given up our pride to obey God?**

### **B. Faith Challenges Our Walk – vs. 4-5**

We read in **verse 4** that on the third day Abraham looked and saw their destination in the distance. For over a decade, God had remained silent. He spoke and told Abraham to go to a mountain He would show him. Every step on this walk was one of faith. Every step was another opportunity to go forward or turn around and go back. When he saw the destination in the distance, the walk may have been more difficult, but then faith that believes in the promises of God keeps him moving forward.

### **Proverbs 3:5-6**

The person who walks by faith knows that God will make his paths straight.

Realize though, that the walk of our faith may be challenged by others so that faith challenges our words.

### C. Faith Challenges Our Words – vs. 6-8

The challenge didn't come from Sarah. It didn't come from his servants. It came from his son.

When they came to the mountain he got off the donkey he had been riding, took the fire, the knife, and the wood and began the arduous climb upward.

**“Father”**

**“Yes, my son”**

**“The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”**

**“God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son”**

Again, notice the tender affection between the two in how they address each other. Their conversation says to me that Isaac could trust his father because he saw that his father trusted God.

Notice, please, something we read in **verse 8** that can easily be missed, but is of importance.

**“And the two of them went on together.”**

It implies a willingness on Isaac's part. He was not forced to go. He didn't walk behind. He didn't run ahead. They walked together. Faith is sometimes a journey of two walking side by side trusting together, that although they don't know the path ahead, the trust in God has told them “this is the way, walk in it. **Was Isaac going to believe his father, that God would indeed provide? Did Abraham really believe what he said that God would provide?** Faith challenges our words.

### D. Faith Challenges Our Willingness – v. 9-10

The moment of decision had arrived. They had reached the summit and built the altar. The wood had been removed from Isaac's back and arranged around the altar ready for the sacrifice. Isaac looked around and saw no animal. What next? And there stood his father looking at his son with

the rope that perhaps had bound the wood coiled in his hands. Abraham walked over to his son and began to tie the rope around him. We can only imagine the pain that must have been etched in the face of Abraham, the look of grief in his eyes, the tears of anguish that streamed down his face as wrapped his son with the rope and then lifted him onto the altar. Child sacrifice was not unfamiliar to either of them. It was part of the pagan culture where they lived. **Was following this God to be no different than following the pagan gods?**

Isaac is a picture of Christ when we read in **Isaiah 53:7** **“As a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth.”**

Not only was Abraham willing to sacrifice his son, his son was willing to be the sacrifice. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice the son he loved was put to the test. It was a test of his faith. He was showing his willingness to believe in the promise of God no matter how difficult the task in obeying. It was also a test of Isaac's faith. **Would he believe the same God his father had come to believe and obey?** He was younger and stronger and could have run away or fought his dad, disobeyed, but he willingly allowed himself to be tied up.

Maybe God has in some way spoken to you and asked you to sacrifice something that you hold dear. It is a test of your willingness to obey, to trust. That kind of test not only challenges our willingness, it can also challenge our wholeheartedness.

### E. Faith Challenges Our Wholeheartedness – vs. 11-12

That simply means he did it with his whole heart. He held nothing back.

He never regretted choosing a path of following God.

He didn't hesitate as he was about to thrust the knife into his son, because he knew that Isaac was the son of promise and he knew that God could and would bring him back to life. He knew the promise wasn't going to be through another son, because God had told him the name of the son of promise would be Isaac.

Faith challenges our wholeheartedness. God affirms the heart of Abraham by stopping him and by revealing the heart of Abraham. **“Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from Me your son, your only son.”**

What a great testimony by God of his servant. He was wholeheartedly willing. What God asks of us will challenge our wholeheartedness.

Take a moment and ask yourself if the task of your faith is one of obedience. Evaluate it by the six challenges of faith we considered. If so, then we see in **verses 13-19** that faith’s thanksgiving celebrates openly.

### **III. FAITH’S THANKSGIVING CELEBRATES OPENLY – vs. 13-19**

#### **A. Faith Celebrates God’s Provision – vs. 13-14**

Here God provided for their worship. Abraham looked up and there was a ram caught in the bushes. He took the lamb and together father and son offered the sacrifice to God. It must have been a most joyous worship by both and Abraham called the place Jehovah Jireh – God will provide. Here is the substitutionary provision of the ram for Isaac, an apt picture of the substitutionary sacrifice Jesus made for us. The ram took the place of Isaac. Christ took the place of the sinner.

True faith celebrates God in worship in a way that reveals if God is really at the top of our list of what we cherish most. Rejoice in this, dear friends, that when God has made a promise, He will also make the provision to keep that promise.

*Kent Hughes writes that “the tester becomes the provider... That is what we need to see about God. As we see through the tests of growing a greater faith, as God tests us and stretches us, we believe, and He provides. He always has provided.”*

A deacon once said that “When God’s work is done in God’s ways it will not lack God’s support.”

Faith celebrates God’s provision.

Faith also celebrates God’s promises.

#### **B. Faith Celebrates God’s Promises – vs. 15-18**

This is an act of affirming once more the blessings God promised to Abraham, and He made an oath by His own name that it would happen just as He said because there was nothing greater by which He could make an oath (**Hebrews 6:13**). Abraham’s obedient faith led to the confirmation that he would receive abundant blessings, uncountable descendants, prevailing over their enemies, and all nations receiving a blessing through them. It is the first time the word obey appears in the Bible.

I was reading this week a brief history about the Jews around the world. Scientists estimate that there are approximately 10 million grains of sand in a cubic foot of sand. That’s a lot of descendants. Faith celebrates God’s promises.

#### **C. Faith Celebrates God’s Protection – v. 19**

This verse may seem inconsequential to the what we have just read, but it is a reminder that Abraham returned to Beersheba and lived a long time. He is still living in a pagan culture, but he is there living under God’s protection. Faith remembers that wherever we go, God is there. He will never leave or forsake us and that is something to celebrate.

The remaining verses show us that **faith’s timing carefully orchestrates (vs. 20-24)**. It is more than just a genealogy of Abraham’s brother, Nahor. It is an introduction to Rebekah whom we will meet in a couple chapters. God has a sovereign plan and we need to completely trust Him. Abraham shows us that walking in faith means obeying completely, surrendering everything and waiting on God to provide. Abraham believed and was willing to obey without hesitation.

**Whatever might be your Isaac, are you willing to give it up and in faith completely trust God?**