

The Test of Faith

Tests of God: #4

Genesis 22

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. This is what the ancients were commended for. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Thou changest not. Thou compassions, they fail not. As thou has been, thou forever will be. Great is Thy Faithfulness, Lord unto me. Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart. Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art. Thou my best thought, by day or by night. Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light. Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow. This is my story. This is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long. This is my story. This is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long.

There is a reason your heart resonates, your spirit testifies, and your soul bears witness to those great hymns of the faith. That reason is this: we all know what it is like to take God's greatest test of all. It's that one test that doesn't have a time limit and seems to have an unlimited number of questions you are forced to answer. Adam and Eve took it. Noah took it. Moses took it. David took it. Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Nathanael, Matthew, Thomas, James the Son of Alphaeus, Jude, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot did too. It seems to occur every morning and every evening. It seems to occur every second, every minute, and hour of every day. It is the Test of Faith. It is the one test of God that's designed to leave you saying "This is my story, and this is my song" when it concludes. For in the Test of Faith, God's goal is to teach you by heart that faith really is the substance things hoped for and the convictions of things unseen. But I'll assure you, friend, it is the hardest one to take.

You see, people of God, the Test of Faith is a Certain Disruption that is sure to come in your life. "Some time later, God tested Abraham." Abraham's Test of Faith wasn't a matter of "if." It was a matter of "when." It's also an Urgent Disruption that is sure to come. "Abraham. Take your son, your only son, whom you love and go right now — right this very minute — to the region of Moriah. For I have a sacrifice in mind." "Today," the Scripture says, "if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts (Heb 4:7). Abraham didn't. He obeyed immediately and with urgency. It's also a Competitive Disruption. "Abraham, I know that your son is the child I promised to you and your barren wife. But I want to make sure you are not worshipping the gift. No sir, I want to make sure you are worshipping the Giver." And it's also a Purposeful Disruption. "Abraham now that I know that you fear me — and that you walk by faith — I will bless you far beyond anything you can ever think, ask, or imagine. The Bible tells us: "the eyes of the Lord roam the earth to and fro throughout the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him." May His eyes fix their gaze on us today as we learn from Genesis 22 about the test it seems like we are always taking: the Test of Faith.

1. A Certain Disruption (22:1)

- **Silence in the Library:** (1) On occasion, I like to go to the public library to study. (2) At the librarian's counter, there is a sign that says, "please be silent." (3) That means no talking. No laughing. No giggling. (4) But I found it through experience it also applies to Indiana Jones ring tones. (5). A disruption is a noise in the midst silence. God spoke to Abraham in Gen 12 and told Him to "go to the land I will show you." He's been silent. Now he's going to disrupt his journey. (6) We can be certain he disrupts ours as well to test our faith.
- *Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.*
- **Certain After the Good:** (1) "Some time later" is a definitive marker in the language of the OT. It's the writer's way of saying "after everything that has happened before." Some of it was good, some not so good. (2) When God called Abraham to the land he would show him, he went as the Lord told him (Gen 12). (3) When he promised a son — Isaac — he believed God. And God credited it to him as righteousness (Gen 15).
- **Certain After the Not So Good:** (1) Abraham was relocated numerous times. He lived in Ur, then Haran, then Hebron, then Shechem, then Bethel, then Beersheba. (2) His father Terah died in Haran. (3) Famine drove Abraham to Egypt for survival. (4) He lied about Sarai being his wife. (4) He separated from Lot had had to come to his rescue when Lot was captured by the Elamites in Sodom.
- **App:** For Abraham, the question was not "if," "how," "what," or why." It was "when." That's true for us in our Test of Faith. It's a certain disruption.

2. An Urgent Disruption (22:2-5)

- **Urgency in Teenagers:** (1) In my 49 years on earth, I've observed only one successful method for developing a sense of urgency in teenagers. (2) It's sure not the phrase "do it now." For the phrase "do it now" will certainly be greeted with "I'll do it in a minute." (3) Instead, it's an unexpected fire alarm test while your teenagers are watching tv after you've said, "do it now" and they responded with "I'll do it in a minute." (4) If that ever happens to you friend, go with an unexpected fire alarm. You'll see urgency really quickly. (5) What God interrupted Abraham by calling out to him, he expected Abraham to obey. Not "in a minute." But right then and there, with urgency. (6) Urgency is always what he looks for in us as well.
- ² Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you." ³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.⁴ On the third day

Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

- **The Three Imperatives:** (1) There are three imperatives in verse 2. All in the present tense. All of which required immediate action from Abraham: (a) Take; (b) Go; (c) Sacrifice. (2) "Abraham, it must be dealt with now." (3) "Abraham, it cannot wait." (4) "Abraham, my time is always 'now.' So, take, go, and sacrifice.
- **His Imperatives, Our Imperatives:** (1) "Now is the time of God's favor. Today is the day of salvation." (2 Cor 6:2). (2) "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." (3) "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." (James 4:13-14). (4) Take, Go, Sacrifice. It must be dealt with now. It cannot wait. God's time is always now. So, take, go, and sacrifice.
- **App:** The faith God required yesterday is insufficient for the faith of today. The faith God will require for tomorrow is also insufficient for the faith of today. God's time is always now. So, take, go, and sacrifice, with urgency.

3. A Competitive Disruption (22:6-8)

- **Cats in the Cradle:** (1) And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon. Little boy blue and the man in the moon. "When you coming home, dad?" "I don't know when." But we'll get together then. You know we'll have a good time then. (2) We resonate with that song because it deals with the battle of competing priorities. (3) Abraham's battle was different. The battle that raged in his spirit temptation to value the gift above the Giver. So, God tested him.
- ⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.
- **The Competition in Abraham:** (1) Notice the emphasis in v6-8 on the proper nouns: Abraham and Isaac: (a) Abraham took, Abraham replied, and Abraham answered, (b) Isaac spoke and Isaac said. (2) The dialogue paints a picture of intimacy and closeness. It's perfectly right and normal for a father to love his son. (3) But the great command is "love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and strength." (4) Abraham's son had taken God's place in his life. And the Lord will never allow that to happen. He loves us too much to let us perish in treasuring the gift above the Giver.
- **The Resolution in Abraham:** (1) Genesis 22 is often a target for critics inside the church and outside of it. "It seems cruel of God to ask that of Abraham. What kind of cruel God would ask such a thing? And it seems cruel that Abraham would carry out such an assignment to the point that he would mislead his son when he asked him: "where is the lamb for the burnt offering." (2) Verse 8 gives us the answer: "God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering." There was something in his spirit that said: "I will obey the commands knowing all is not as it appears to me. I know God's character. I know the promises he made. I know there's no precedent for child sacrifices for life itself is sacred and Isaac is created in God's image. I even know God can raise the dead." Oh no, his answer wasn't misleading. It was truthful: God will provide the sacrifice. That's why Abraham responds immediately to the angel's intervention in the verses immediately following.
- **App:** Do you know what Moriah means in Hebrew? It means provided by Jehovah. And sometimes it takes a competitive disruption for us to learn that that's called a Test of Faith, a test that's designed to get you to worship the Giver, not the gift.

4. A Purposeful Disruption (22:11-14; 15-18)

- George Bernard Shaw – (1) "This is the true joy in life, being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one. Being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap. And being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy." (2) Abraham lived that quote. After the test, he learned God's purposes for it.
- **To Provide (22:11-14):** ¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ¹² "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." ¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram^[a] caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."
- **To Bless (22:15-18):** ¹⁵ The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time¹⁶ and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸ and through your offspring^[b] all nations on earth will be blessed,^[c] because you have obeyed me."
- **App:** Now faith is the substance of things hoped for and the conviction of things unseen. It was for Abraham. It is for us. Amen.