

ABRAHAM

An All-In Life

Sacrificing for God

Devotional

Genesis 22

*Why? Why would a good and loving God ask an obedient and faithful man to do this? The answer can be found in the original language of Moses, the inspired, human author of Genesis. The Hebrew word *nasah*, translated "tested" in Genesis 22:1, has the idea of proving the quality of something, usually by putting it through a trial of some kind. God wanted to prove the validity—the authenticity—of Abraham's faith.*

Remember, though, that God is omniscient. He knows all things, including the future. He knew the heart of Abraham better than Abraham did. The purpose of the test was not to satisfy God's curiosity. This was not an experiment. The appointed patch of ground at the top of a lonely mountain in the land of Moriah was to be Abraham's proving ground. This would be the time and place where any question about his faltering faith—so evident in his lying (twice) to save his skin and his pathetic attempt to fulfill the covenant through his wife's handmaid—would be put to rest. His family would see his faith, his friends would see it, we would see it by virtue of this record, and probably most important of all, Isaac would see it. If ever faith would be put on display, this would be the day.

THE ISSUE IN QUESTION: DID ABRAHAM LOVE THE GIFT OF GOD OR GOD HIMSELF?

Allow me to put Abraham's test on hold and rush into the twenty-first century. This has to be one of the toughest questions any parent has to consider: Do I adore the gifts God gives me more than I adore the Giver? Have I begun to worship the relationships that God has granted me rather than the One who gave me these delights?

DON'T BE TOO QUICK TO ANSWER.

The word worship comes from an Anglo-Saxon term meaning "worthship." When we worship something, we are affirming its value to us. We do that with our actions as well as with our hearts. A parent must ask, Do I assign more worth to my child than I do my God? To answer that question, follow the trail of your sacrifices. Tally the results. Be painfully honest now. For whom do you sacrifice more—or more often?¹

¹ Excerpted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Great Days with the Great Lives* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2005). Copyright © 2005 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc.

Open it

1. If you had to go back to high school and take a test on a particular subject which would you pick?
How confident are you that you could pass the test?

Read it

Genesis 22

Explore it

2. How did God test Abraham?
3. What question does Isaac ask his dad?
4. What keeps Abraham from killing Isaac?
5. What did God provide Abraham because of his faithfulness?
6. How does God respond to Abraham's passing of the test?

Apply it

YOU WANT ME TO DO WHAT????

God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, is one of the most moving stories in the Bible. If we could approach it as if for the first time, it would hit us with shock, confusion, and perhaps even anger toward God. It would be hard enough if God took Isaac from Abraham; but it seems inconceivable that God would command Abraham to kill his own son! It seems opposed to God's loving nature. It seems like an impossible, unreasonable, and illogical demand. And Abraham's unquestioning response staggers me! How could he obey without a word of protest? Abraham's obedient surrender is the high point of faith in all history. It stands like Mt. Everest above where most of us have been. I can only stand below and point up to its heights, aware of how my own faith falls far short.²

7. What makes this story so powerful and meaningful to so many audiences that are separated by both time and culture?

8. What themes do you see within the storyline? Which of these seems to take center stage for you?

9. How can this story make readers uncomfortable? What questions or concerns do you have with it?

² Sermon excerpt by Steven Cole entitled "Ultimate Surrender" found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-45-ultimate-surrender-genesis-221-24>

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Following the incredible stress and tension Abraham faced in his family, he entered a period of unprecedented tranquility. He experienced harmony in his family, and he was at peace with his neighbors. More importantly, his relationship with God grew deeper and more meaningful than ever before. He had no greater friend than the One he had come to know and love as the Almighty and Everlasting God (Gen. 17:1; 21:33).

At the human level, Abraham's greatest source of fulfillment focused on his young son, Isaac. As they climbed the gently rolling hills surrounding Beersheba and together viewed the beautiful and productive country to the north, I am confident they often reflected on God's promise to give Abraham and his descendants that land. Isaac's youthful and expectant spirit certainly ignited the old man's heart with incredible joy and excitement. Memories must have often flooded Abraham's soul reminding him of God's faithfulness.³

During these days and years of both sunshine and shade under the tamarisk tree he had planted in Beersheba (21:33), little did Abraham realize that this restful and fulfilling experience was preparing him for a severe and sudden storm—an incomparable test of faith. It is a scene in history surpassed only by one other great event: when “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” to die for the sins of the world (John 3:16). God issued a command to Abraham that confronted him with a choice few men have ever had to make. What the Lord asked Abraham to do must have shattered every nerve in his old and deteriorating body and certainly stretched to the breaking point every bit of spiritual fiber in his faithful soul.⁴

10. The years preceding the testing of Genesis 22 Abraham had experienced a time of great calm and tranquility in almost every area of his life. In what ways can times of peace be good for our walks with God? Can too much peace and tranquility in our lives be detrimental to our faith walks?

³ Getz, Gene A.. Men of Character: Abraham (Kindle Locations 2813-2820). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁴ ibid

FINALS WEEK

At this point in Abraham's faith journey, Isaac has become a young adult. The Hebrew term na'ar can refer to a young male from infancy (see Exodus 2: 6) to young adulthood (see 2 Samuel 14: 21; 18: 5). Isaac was old enough to travel without his mom, engage his father in reasonable conversation, and climb a mountain carrying an armload of firewood. Having enjoyed several years with his son— perhaps as many as fifteen— Abraham had his faith put to the test with an unusual and unexpected command. God said, "Take your son, your only son— yes, Isaac, whom you love so much— and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you" (Genesis 22: 2).

As a father, I can easily imagine the anguished questions that must have run through Abraham's mind. Why must I give up my only son? How will Isaac produce descendants, as promised by God, if he's dead? How can God require a human sacrifice like the detestable pagans of Canaan? But we see no indication of hesitation, no reluctance, no resistance, no argument, no bargaining, no pleading, no delay whatsoever.⁵

11. Put yourself into the shoes of Abraham. What thoughts and feelings would have filled your heart and mind upon hearing this message from God?

12. Abraham would obey immediately and seemingly without hesitation. How hesitant are you to following God's commands? What needs to change for you to respond as Abraham did?

⁵ Swindoll, Charles R.. Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith (Kindle Locations 2981-2989). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

- 13. Some might say that Abraham was foolish to make such a quick decision regarding such a life and death situation. How are we to reconcile such quick action on Abraham's part and the need for us to be thoughtful and prayerful regarding major decisions in our lives?**

DAD, AREN'T WE FORGETTING SOMETHING???

Did God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac? Yes. Was it a legitimate request? Yes. Did Abraham know in advance how the story would end? No. Specifically, did he know about the ram in the thicket? No. Well, then, what was it that Abraham knew? He knew what God had asked him to do and he knew that God had promised to give him a son through whom he would bless the world. What he didn't know was how God was going to reconcile his promise (to bless the world through Isaac) and his command (to offer Isaac as a sacrifice).

- 14. While none of us are being asked to sacrifice our children to God, we are all as believers to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God. (cf Romans 12:1) What do we know about God that makes such a command not only reasonable but, in many ways, a logical response to what God has done for us?**

- 15. This test did not just involve Abraham but also involved Isaac and some might think that such an ordeal could have negatively impacted or even traumatized any young person. Is it wise for parents to allow their children to share in the tests that God brings? What truths would Isaac have learned through this difficult testing of his father?**

Hebrews 11:17-19

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, **18** of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." **19** He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

16. Abraham's hope was built upon a profound confidence in the plans of God. No matter what happened on that mountain Abraham knew that Isaac was safe in the hands of God. How can knowing God's attributes and plans give us confidence amidst great times of difficulties?

SWEET SURRENDER

At age 21, Jim Elliot, who was martyred in Ecuador seven years later, wrote, "One does not surrender a life in an instant. That which is life-long can only be surrendered in a lifetime." (*Shadow of the Almighty* [Zondervan], p. 91.) The Christian life is a process of yielding all of myself that I know to all of God that I know. As my self-knowledge grows, I discover areas of my life that I thought were given over to the Lord; but they were not. At that point I must yield that new area to Him. And I will perceive new facets of God which require me to yield new areas of myself. **So God begins the process of pulling out from under us all the props we lean on, until He alone is left.**⁶

17. Would you sacrifice your life to God if He gave you nothing back but a deeper walk with him? How much do the benefits and blessings of God motivate your obedience?

⁶ Sermon excerpt by Steven Cole entitled "Ultimate Surrender" found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-45-ultimate-surrender-genesis-221-24>

God wants to bring each one of us to the place where we surrender everything to Him and trust Him totally with all that is precious to us. It's what Jesus meant when He said, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). When you've surrendered all to Him as Lord, then you'll obey Him unflinchingly, even when He asks you to do that which is most difficult.⁷

18. Isaac was one of the most important things Abraham had in his life and yet God demanded it be put on an altar as a sign of worship. What one thing do you struggle to put on the altar? Why?

19. The story of Genesis 22 points to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary. How does the love of God expressed at the Cross encourage you when life is tough and you are weak?

20. Take a moment to examine your own heart and trust in God's goodness and eternal plans. How ready would you be to obey God if you sensed his leading for you to take a big step of faith? What might hinder you from this?

⁷ Sermon excerpt by Steven Cole entitled "Ultimate Surrender" found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-45-ultimate-surrender-genesis-221-24>

Note: This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups