

What we want to zero in on is in verse 17

- By faith, Abraham, **when he was tested**, offered up Isaac

Abel was faith **worshiping**

Enoch was faith **walking**

Noah was faith **working**

Abraham was faith **willing**

Sarah was faith **waiting**

Abraham, here, is faith **well-trying**

Well-trying meaning: Tested, proved

- And he would be well-trying
- He had already been tried in the call to leave his country and wait for Isaac
- But this would be the greatest test of faith yet!

Abraham's faith would be tried, tested, and stretched beyond imagination

Genesis 22:1-2

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."

Human sacrifice was not beyond the range of Abraham's experience

- Human sacrifice took place in Ur and it was part of Canaanite culture
- Human sacrifice was familiar to his conceptual worldview
 - The Word and the Law of God had not yet been given to shape his worldview or his doctrine of God

Here is what a **burnt offering** meant to an ancient Middle Easterner:

- First cutting the offering's throat
- Then dismemberment
- Then a sacrifice by fire in which the body parts were completely consumed on the altar
 - This is the horror Abraham faced

We might ask: How can God be so cruel? Subjecting Abraham to unbearable anguish!

- But has not God Himself done the same?
- Should He not teach us the value of willingly giving up that which is most precious for righteousness sake.
- We are repulsed that God would ask for Abraham's only begotten son
 - Do we value Isaac (and our own sons) above the Son of God?
 - Wrong thinking (Anthropocentric)

Genesis 22:1-2

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 tested Abraham (Genesis 22:1) (Cf. Hebrews 11:17)

- **What does it mean that God tested Abraham?**
- **Why would God do that?**
- **Does God still do that today?**

Testing has to do with faith

- God tested Abraham to strengthen and build his faith
- In order for faith to grow (be strengthened and built) it must be exercised
 - Cf. Muscles
- God will give us opportunities to 'exercise' our faith—testing

Go to James 1

Testing is different from tempting

- God does not tempt people
 - **James 1:12-14**
 - There is a difference: Temptation is designed for our failure
Testing is designed for our growth (apart from failure)
 - Temptation is from Satan
 - Testing is from God

There is fruit and blessing that comes from testing

- **James 1:12¹**
 - **Been approved = passed the test** (NIV = **stood the test**)
 - When the **test** has been **passed**
 - There is the promised state of being **blessed**
 - And the promise of **the crown of life**
 - There are 5 crowns mentioned as rewards in the NT
 - **The crown of life** probably refers to specific blessings in the life to come
- There are definite benefits in this life
 - **James 1:2-4**
 - **the testing of your faith produces endurance (steadfastness) (patience)**
 - Part of the fruit of the Spirit (God is that way) (Cf. **Gal 5:22**)
 - So we **consider it all joy** (v. 2)

¹ The NASB is correct in saying "under trial" as opposed to the KJV and NKJV which say "temptation". See the Greek: **πειρασμός** (*peirasmos* 3986) *temptation* –s: a putting to the test, proof, trial; also, in a bad sense, temptation (this specific meaning occurs only in 1Pe 4:12).

- Not the trial or testing itself, but the promised outcome
- Cf. Romans 5:3-5 (NLT)
 - 3 We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance.
 - 4 And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.
 - 5 And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.
- This is of tremendous value
 - 1 Peter 1:7 (NLT)
 - These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.
 - Genuine faith will get you further in this life and the life to come than pure gold
 - And our faith is made genuine (like pure gold) through the process of testing

Without testing we do not have the opportunity to succeed and therefore grow

- It forces us to make decisions and act (to “exercise” our faith)
- Sets us up for success not failure

It is important to realize that Abraham's test came after substantial spiritual growth and blessing

- God works with us progressively and won't give us more than we can handle by His grace
- The good things God had recently done in Abraham's life, as well as what he had learned from both his moments of faith and his moments of failure were the ground for greater testing and growth
- Going through the process of **waiting on God** (purging and fortifying) had worked a work in him that made him the man that could do anything God asked of him

To answer our questions:

- What does it mean that God tested Abraham?
 - He put him through a difficult trial
- Why would God do that?
 - In order to grow his faith, develop in him greater character, and greater hope to the glory of God
- Does God still do that today?
 - Absolutely. Maybe right now.
 - (we often fail to recognize tests, or we call our own messes tests)

So what can we learn from both the faith and testing of Abraham?

In a nut shell: God will sometimes test us in regards to what we value highly to make sure we value Him most. (or love most)

Abraham's faith was radically tested, and he came out successful

There are 3 reasons why:

Remember the description of faith from Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the **conviction** of things not seen. (conviction = being firmly convinced)

1. Abraham was convinced about God's goodness
2. Abraham was convinced about God's plan
3. Abraham was convinced about God's power

Go to Genesis 22

1. Abraham was convinced about God's goodness

- That made him able to do this thing
 - Faith/trust in the fact that God is good!

How do we become convinced of that, like Abraham was?

- Psalm 34:8
 - *O taste and see that the LORD is good;*
 - *How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!*
 - A persuasive verse and a personal goal (in my life)
- To **taste** means to experience
 - Engage with God, try God, trust God, give God a chance
 - Look for ways to taste God (worship, obedience, surrender, study, trust)
- When we experience God we will become convinced of His goodness
 - This will increase our faith and affect how we live
 - **It made Abraham willing to obey God immediately**
 - **Genesis 22:3**
 - *Abraham rose early in the morning*
 - That is real faith/trust in the fact that God is good
- Sometimes we believe that God is good, but not that He is better (Which is the point of Heb.)
 - So we want to obey, just not right now
 - He is good so we are willing to obey
 - We think we have something better so we don't obey right away
 - Augustine:
 - *"As I prayed to you for the gift of chastity I had even pleaded 'grant me chastity and self-control, but please not yet.' I was afraid that you might hear me immediately and heal me forthwith of the morbid lust which I was more anxious to satisfy than to snuff out" Confessions p. 198*

2. Abraham was convinced about God's plan

- Hebrews 11:17-18

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.**"

- It made Abraham willing to obey persistently
 - **Meaning even when things were prolonged and difficult**
- **Genesis 22:4-8**
 - The wood, the three days, the donkey, the wood again, the questions
 - It wasn't an easy task. He had to be persistent in obedience.
 - Persistent: continually, firmly or obstinately on a course of action in spite of difficulty
 - **It wasn't an easy task. He had to be persistent in obedience.**
- Being convinced about God's plan allowed him to **continue** in obedience
- How do we become convinced of God's plan?
 - For the nations and for you
 - Try it out. Do things God's way for a while
 - Be convinced of His wisdom
 - Build faith (exercise faith)

Channel Island for 7 years and waiting on God

- Much of that time was spent being convinced that God's plan was better
- Because the family surfboard business plan was awesome!
- I became convinced more and more of the greater wisdom and value of God's plan as I obeyed

3. Abraham was convinced about God's power

- Made him willing to obey ultimately
- **Genesis 22:9-18**
 - He went all the way
 - God stopped him at the last moment
 - But as far as God was concerned, Abraham passed the test (v. 16 and Heb. 11:17)
 - **By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac**
 - **Offered up** = In the **perfect tense** in Greek
 - **Meaning:** The action was completed and the finished results are continuing on and are now in existence
 - **What were the results:** *indeed I will bless you greatly* (v. 17^a)
- Abraham passed the test and got blessed—why?
 - Because he was convinced of God's power
 - Hebrews 11:19
He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead
 - Genesis 22:6
*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.**"*

- ...**we will return to you (convinced of the resurrection)**
- First use of the word worship in the Bible
- Notice that this most pivotal event in Abraham's life was a worship event
- **Being convinced of God's plan, He was then convinced of God's power**
 - If God was going to make a multitude of descendants come from Isaac, and bless all the nations through them—Isaac would have to live
 - Therefore, God would simply have to raise him from the dead!
 - Hebrews 11:19 (**He considered**)
 - **He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead**
 - **λογίζομαι** (*logizomai*)
 - to occupy one's self with reckonings or calculations; hence, to reckon or count, to reason, to think, consider, conclude.
- Abraham reasoned, calculated, and concluded that God would have to **and was able to** raise Isaac from the dead to keep His plan and promise
 - Not blind faith, but reasonable faith that employs the intellect God has given us
 - It was more reasonable to believe that God was powerful enough to raise from the dead, than to conclude that he would break his promise or forfeit His plan
 - **That is great faith!**
 - A **future hope** helped his cope with the current challenge (That is faith)
 - Hebrews 11:1 (New Century Version)
 - **Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it.**
- Abraham had great faith and passed the great test (and received the blessings)
 - Because he had already been exercising faith
 - It had grown and was growing and this was godly progression

James 2:21-23

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," **and he was called the friend of God.** (Cf. Hebrews 11:6)

God will sometimes test us in regards to what we value highly to make sure we value Him most. (or love most)

- Abraham proved that he loved God the most and his faith was proven by his willingness **to put on the altar** that which was most precious to him
- Me and the family surfboard business
 - I like Abraham (on a much smaller scale) was convinced that God's plan was better (**I put it on the altar**)
 - But it wasn't without (and isn't without) moments of doubt (Cf. Abraham)
 - **Faith that never doubts is a dead faith because it is never exercised**
 - **Faith sometimes requires us to be willing to let go of the seen for the unseen** (and that can be hard)

Being convinced of God' goodness and plan and power

When John Bunyan was in jail for preaching the Gospel he was deeply concerned about his family. He was especially grieved about his little blind daughter, for whom he had a special love. He wrote:

"I saw in this condition I was a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children. Yet, thought I, I must do it; I must do it. The dearest idol I have known, what err the idol be, help me to tear it from Thy throne and worship only Thee."²

John 21:15

...Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

- What was Jesus referring to as 'these'?? (not sure)
- But what is sure is that Peter needed a heart check
- Whatever 'these' were, they were valuable enough to Peter to be competing with Jesus for first-place or—first-love

Elijah confronted Israel on Mt. Carmel (I Kings 18:21)

How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him...

Paul got it (Philippians 3:7-8)

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but **rubbish** so that I may gain Christ

God will test us by laying His hand on what we love most... and then He will bless us.

By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac...

What do you need to offer up by faith?

Faith that:

- God is good
- God's plan is better
- God's power is able

² As quoted in John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Hebrews)* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 335-6.