

Abraham's Faith is Tested

(Genesis 21 - 22)

Introduction

Ask: What is something that you really, really want? Something you've been begging your parents for; maybe even praying to God for?

Let's say that you finally got that thing you've desired. How would you feel? Now say, that your parents asked you to give it away to someone else. How would you feel about that? Would you be angry?

Today we're going to find out that Abraham was asked to give up the most precious thing in his life; something he'd waited many years for. Will Abraham trust God's motives? Would he obey?

Opening Prayer

Father, sometimes we don't understand Your ways. Sometimes it's hard to follow You and be a Christian in this pagan world. But Lord, we know Your way is the right way. Help us Lord, to have the faith we need to trust and obey You, even when it doesn't seem to make sense to us. Help us to be like Abraham. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. (James 1:2-3 NLT)

Lesson

Last week we began a new series of lessons on the life of Abraham, the father of the children of Israel, the first Jew.

To review, let me ask you some questions:

1. What did God ask Abraham to do? (To leave his country and go to a place he did not know even existed.)
2. What did God promise Abraham? (That He would make his descendants into a great nation.)
3. What happened to Abraham's nephew, Lot? (He chose to live in Sodom and Gomorrah and lost everything he possessed.)
4. What should we do to be sure we don't miss out on God's great plan for our lives? (Trust and obey God.)

Last week we learned that when Abraham was seventy-five years old, God made a promise to him that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth, if you could possibly count it. But there was one small problem. Sarah and Abraham hadn't been able to have any children.

This morning we'll be picking up the story about 25 years later and they still hadn't had any children! This makes God's promise that Abraham's descendants would be a great nation seem impossible, doesn't it? But we know nothing is impossible for God.

Open your Bibles and read with me from Genesis 21...

Genesis 21:1-3

The LORD kept his word and did for Sarah exactly what he had promised. ²She became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would. ³And Abraham named their son Isaac.

Sarah was amused to have a baby at the age of 90. So, she named him Isaac, which means "laughter." Can you imagine how happy she was to finally have a baby after so many years of waiting?

Genesis 21:5-7

Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. ⁶And Sarah declared, "God has brought me laughter. All who hear about this will laugh with me. ⁷Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse a baby? Yet I have given Abraham a son in his old age!"

God said they would have a whole nation full of descendants and they knew they had to have at least one to start with. Weren't they patient? It's hard to wait for a long time to get something you really want that's been promised to you, isn't it? They waited 25 years for God to fulfill His promise to them. But they never gave up hope because they knew that God always keeps His promises.

But sometime later God tested Abraham by asking him to do what must have been the hardest thing in the world for him to do.

Genesis 22:1-2

Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. "Abraham!" God called. "Yes," he replied. "Here I am." 2 "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."

Isaac was a young man by this time (likely between 20 and 37 years old). How could God possibly fulfill His promise to Abraham's descendants if Isaac was killed now? God was truly testing Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice the promised son for whom he had waited so long.

Abraham didn't understand God's purposes, but he obeyed and began the journey the next morning...

Genesis 22:3

The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about.

Can you imagine how hard this was for Abraham? Notice Abraham didn't question God, nor did he argue with God; he immediately obeyed God. He got up early, saddled his donkey, got the wood for the fire loaded, and set out for the place God had told him to go.

Ask: Why do you think God tested Abraham's faith? Was God trying to see if Abraham had faith? We know that God is all-knowing. Surely, He knew the depth of Abraham's faith.

God tested Abraham's faith to strengthen and confirm it **to** Abraham because He knew that Abraham was going to need to have stronger faith.

Ask: Did you know that God tests our faith, as well? [Review Verse for Today]

When our faith is tested it causes us to rely on Him and trust Him more. God wants you to have faith to obey Him even when it's hard. He uses these tests to make our faith "muscles" stronger.

Ask: How do you get strong muscles? You have to exercise them. It's the same with our faith. The more we practice using our faith the stronger it gets.

When we go through Hard times, it causes us to put more faith in God. He wants us to remember that He is in control of all things and has a special plan that He is carrying out in each of our lives.

Ask: What are some times when it is hard to trust God? Can you think of a time when you felt helpless and sad?

[Teacher, discuss: Maybe during a thunderstorm? Or, if they have heard their parents argue. Or, perhaps their parents have separated or divorced? Or someone in their family died? Or, someone made a promise they didn't or couldn't keep? Or, they have had to move to a new city and leave all their friends behind.]

These are all hard things that could make you get angry with God or feel discouraged.

Ask: What helps us to have the faith we need to obey God even when it's hard?

Remember God's promises. He is in control and always keeps His promises.

Ask: What are some of the promises of God? He will:

- Never leave you.
- Always comfort you.
- Strengthen you.
- Supply all your needs.
- Be your helper.
- Direct your paths.
- Forgive your sins.
- Help in time of need.

It isn't always easy to trust God, but He promises to give you strength and courage. Remember that God doesn't cause the bad things to happen, but He promises that all things will work together for good for those that love God and are called according to His purpose.

When our faith is strong, it makes us better able to help others who are going through hard times.

God had asked Abraham to do a very difficult thing, but Abraham was so confident in the Lord that he immediately obeyed. God wants you to have faith to obey Him even when it's hard, just like Abraham.

Genesis 22:4-6

*On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵"Stay here with the donkey," Abraham told the servants. "The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then **we will come right back.**" ⁶So, Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together,*

Notice that Abraham said, "**we** will come back to you." He knew that God had some plan to fulfill the promise even if he didn't know what it was. He even knew that God could bring Isaac back to life again if He wanted to (Hebrews 11:19). Abraham had faith that both he, and his son, would return.

Can you imagine what Isaac was thinking about all this? Let's read...

Genesis 22:7-8

Isaac turned to Abraham and said, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "We have the fire and the wood," the boy said, "but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" ⁸"God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son," Abraham answered. And they both walked on together.

Abraham's answer showed that he had complete confidence in God.

Genesis 22:9

When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

So, Abraham built an altar and tied his only son to it! Notice that Isaac did not try to resist his father.

As they climbed the mountain, Isaac was the one carrying the large pile of wood. Wood enough for a burnt sacrifice would have been very heavy. If Isaac was strong enough to carry the wood up the mountain, then he was probably strong enough to resist being sacrificed and fend off Abraham if he had wanted to.

Ask: Why do you think Isaac didn't fight off his father?

The fact that Isaac allowed himself to be bound and placed on the altar shows that Isaac completely trusted his father and he knew that his father completely trusted God. Both Abraham and Isaac knew that God good and never makes mistakes.

Genesis 22:10-12

And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice. ¹¹At that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Yes," Abraham replied. "Here I am!" ¹²"Don't lay a hand on the boy!" the angel said. "Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son."

As Abraham picked up the knife to kill Isaac, the Lord stopped him. Now God knew that he would hold nothing back from Him. Abraham was willing to give everything to God, even his only son. He had shown his faith by obeying God without questioning.

Genesis 22:13

Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son

God provided a substitute; Abraham offered the ram instead of Isaac.

Ask: Why is this story in the Bible? What is this story a wonderful picture of?

God provided a substitute for us. God the Father sent His beloved Son, His only son, to die on the cross in our place. He was our Substitute. That's why we call Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Ask: In what ways was Isaac like Jesus?

Isaac allowed himself to be placed on the pile of wood; Jesus allowed Himself to be nailed to the wooden cross. Isaac was willing to die on the altar; Jesus was willing to die for your sins and mine on the cross.

God never intended to allow Abraham to kill his son. God's command to sacrifice Isaac was to foreshadow God's sacrifice of His own Son.

God the Father sent His beloved Son, His only son, to die on the cross in our place. Jesus was our Substitute. That's why we call Him, the Lamb of God. God provided the perfect sacrifice to take our place.

Abraham had faith to obey God even when it was difficult. God was testing Abraham to see if he would be willing to give up his son, just as God the Father gave His Son.

Closing Prayer

Lord, help us to show our faith in You by obeying You even when it's hard. Help us to put our faith in You even though we don't understand

why things happen the way they do. Help others to know by our actions this week that we are trusting in You, Lord. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Game Center

Musical Chairs

Preparation:

1. Number paper squares, one for each child, and tape them to the front of each chair so the number is visible to you.
2. Place the chairs in a circle.
3. Divide the children in to teams. (For example, Boys against Girls.)

Procedure:

- Have the children walk around the chairs as you play music. (Not as separate teams, but all the children mixed up together.)
- When the music stops, have the children quickly find a chair to sit in. Only one student per chair.
- Roll dice to see which child gets to answer the question. (Depending on the number of children, you may need more than one dice.)
- For a correctly answered question the child gets 100 points for their team.

Or, use the following questions in another game or discussion:

Review Questions:

1. Why did God's promise that Abraham's descendants would be a great nation seem impossible? (He was 75 when he got the promise and when he was 100 he still hadn't had any children!)
2. What does the name "Isaac" mean and why did Sarah call him that? (Isaac means "laughter." Sarah thought it was funny that she had a child at the age of 90.)
3. How long did Abraham and Sarah have to wait for God to fulfill His promise? (25 years)
4. How did God test Abraham's faith? (God asked Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering.)
5. Why did God test Abraham's faith? (God tested Abraham's faith to strengthen and confirm it **to** Abraham because He knew that Abraham was going to need to have stronger faith. God was testing Abraham to see if he would be willing to give up his son, just as God the Father gave His Son.)
6. Do you think Abraham understood God's purposes? (No!)
7. If Abraham didn't understand why God was asking him to sacrifice his son, why did Abraham obey God? (Because he trusted God and believed God had a good reason to ask him to do such a thing. He had faith in God.)
8. Why does God test our faith? (To strengthen our faith. When our faith is confirmed we are better able to help others who are going through hard times.)
9. What helps us to have the faith we need to obey God even when it's hard? (Remembering He is in control of all things and has a special plan that He is carrying out in each of our lives.)
10. When you live by faith in God that means you truly believe God's promises. What are some of the promises of God? (He will never leave you, always comfort you, strengthen you, supply all your needs, be your helper, direct your paths...)
11. Why didn't Isaac fight off his father when Abraham tied him to the altar? (Isaac had complete confidence in his father and he knew that his father trusted God.)
12. What did God do when Abraham raised the knife to kill Isaac? (God provided a sheep, a substitute.)
13. Why is this story in the Bible? What is this story a wonderful picture of? (God provided a substitute for us. God the Father sent His beloved Son, His only son, to die on the cross in our place. He was our Substitute. That's why we call Jesus, the Lamb of God.)
14. In what ways was Isaac like Jesus? (Isaac allowed himself to be placed on the pile of wood; Jesus allowed Himself to be nailed to the wooden cross. Isaac was willing to die on the altar; Jesus was willing to die for your sins and mine on the cross.)

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