

## Faith to Surrender 5-27-07

Genesis 22:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. <sup>2</sup> Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." <sup>3</sup> Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled 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. <sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. Genesis 22:1-4 (NIV) to be continued...

We are often tempted by our own desires, those of the old nature. Those temptations are not sent by God, but we can learn from them about our condition. (James 1:13-14) We learn about unsundered areas in our mind and heart. Then there are tests that God does send our way, at least to those who are people of faith who will learn and grow from them. I'm not sure if Lot had tests from God. It seemed that he never got past dealing with his own temptations. But Abraham was a man that was growing in faith. (Psalm 11:5) What follows is a list of the things Abraham went through from Warren Wiersbe's *Be Obedient* series. I've changed some of his terms from 'test' to 'temptation'. Watch for the difference.

The first test was the 'family test'. God called Abraham to leave his family behind in Ur and go to a land that God would show him. (Genesis 12:1) He left but compromised on that test. Next was 'the famine test'. He failed this one. He went to Egypt and called his wife his sister. (Genesis 12:19) But upon returning to the Promised Land, he was victorious over the 'fellowship temptation' allowing Lot to pick the best of the land. (Genesis 13:9) He was also victorious in the 'fight test' over the kings of the North. (Genesis 14:15) Abraham also passed the 'fortune temptation' when he said no to Sodom's wealth. (Genesis 14:22,23)

Are you noticing the difference between test and temptation? Temptation comes from within, whereas a test comes from the Lord. Abraham failed the 'fatherhood temptation' when he and Sarah became impatient and fathered Ishmael through Hagar. (Genesis 16:2) He took the 'fear temptation' and failed by going into Gerar and again calling Sarah his sister. (Genesis 20:2) In the last chapter, we saw him pass the 'farewell test' when with a broken heart he sent Hagar and Ishmael away. (Genesis 21:14)

Now he is facing the greatest test of his life. The fact that he continues to be tested is a sign that he is growing in faith. He is probably between the ages of 112 and 120, which would make Isaac between the ages of 12 and 20. <sup>1</sup> Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Genesis 22:1 (NIV) Notice that term 'tested'. If God has never tested you, it may be that your life is more like that of Lot than Abraham. (Deuteronomy 8:2) That may sting, but I hope you would rather know the truth than deceive yourself. Tests are when the voice of the Lord comes to you, through his Word, or the still small voice in your heart, and

**Commented [notes1]:** 13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. James 1:13-14 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** 5 The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates.

**Commented [notes3]:** 1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. Gen 12:1 (NIV)

**Commented [notes4]:** 19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" Gen 12:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes5]:** Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left." Gen 13:9 (NIV)

**Commented [notes6]:** 15 During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. Gen 14:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes7]:** 22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath 23 that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' Gen 14:22-23 (NIV)

**Commented [notes8]:** 2 so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. Gen 16:2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes9]:** 2 and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her. Gen 20:2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes10]:** 14 Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba. Gen 21:14 (NIV)

**Commented [notes11]:** 2 Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. Deut 8:2 (NIV)

you hear something that is difficult. (Proverbs 17:3) It may be to share Jesus with someone, or to give generously above what you are comfortable with, or even to take your life in a different direction. There are only three grades, pass, compromise, or fail. You obey, or you obey part of it, or you don't obey at all.

**Commented [notes12]:** 3 The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart. Prov 17:3 (NIV)

Tests usually cause your mind to go into overdrive. Imagine what went through Abraham's mind when he heard verse 2. <sup>2</sup> Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." Genesis 22:2 (NIV)

Here are a few of the things that may have gone through his mind. "That is what the pagans do. This is the child of promise. I've given up Ishmael and now God wants me to give up my Isaac? Isn't God contradicting Himself? Isaac is made in the image of God. I can't take his life. Maybe it was another god that spoke to me. Hasn't God forbidden murder? (Genesis 9:5-6) How would I face Sarah if I went through with it." On and on through that sleepless night he must have thought of every scenario and angle to get out of the clear and definite command of God.

**Commented [notes13]:** 5 And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.

6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. Gen 9:5-6 (NIV)

Because we have the recorded word of God to refer to, and because God has spoken His final word in and through Jesus (Hebrews 1:2), we need not fear facing something exactly like this. But that does not mean that God will not ask us to do things that we dread. Why do you think the Apostle Paul said that he had to die daily? (1Corinthians 15:31) You see, the flesh is always desiring things contrary to the direction of the Spirit. Every day the Christian must be determined to crucify the flesh and walk in the Spirit with the help of the Holy Spirit. (Galatians 5:24) That is one of the main reasons people reject Christianity. They aren't willing to pay the price. They intuitively know it means dying to self, giving up our Isaacs.

**Commented [notes14]:** 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. Heb 1:2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes15]:** 31 I die every day--I mean that, brothers--just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. 1 Cor 15:31 (NIV)

Fact is that the Christian life is a wonderful adventure. The flesh life is boring after walking in the Spirit. There is nothing more thrilling than to see someone surrender their life to the Lord and watch the transformation from darkness to light. (John 8:12) Watching God at work is exciting! But my flesh would rather sit in front of a TV with a beer and be entertained. I can let God's word speak to my soul, or I can let my old nature tell me what it wants to feed my soul. The problem with western Christianity is that we think we can serve two masters. (Matthew 6:24)

**Commented [notes16]:** 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Gal 5:24 (NIV)

**Commented [notes17]:** 12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12 (NIV)

The fruits of the flesh come with an exciting rush of feeling, but end with a price tag that is more than you ever wanted to pay. (Galatians 5:19-21) The fruits of the Spirit are not always as instantly pleasurable, but they are life giving and bless the lives of others. Their end is glory. Moment by moment we choose between the two. Abraham had a choice before him, surrender or selfishness, belief or defiance.

**Commented [notes18]:** 24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

**Commented [notes19]:** 19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. Gal 5:19-21 (NIV)

This passage is a stumbling block for many people. They ask how God could do such a thing. It certainly is odd that God should ask Abraham to do what He later condemned other nations for doing. (Leviticus 18:21) We must understand that God is outside of time. He already knew exactly how Abraham would respond. He knew the end of the story. He even knew that we would study it millennia later and wonder. He knew that Isaac wouldn't die. He knew the work that would go on in the

**Commented [notes20]:** 21 "Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD. Lev 18:21 (NIV)

heart of Abraham, and the wonderful fruit that would come from it. He knew it would challenge people throughout the ages to truly put God above the dearest thing in their life. In an amazing parallel, He was painting a very precise picture of the extent He would go for us. (Romans 8:32)

**Commented [notes21]:** 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Romans 8:32 (NIV)

Something very similar has happened in a thousand lives since. God has called individuals to do things that separated them from family, to go to mission fields, to travel almost continually, to go where they could not safely or practically take their children for the sake of bringing life to the lost. Those people placed their Isaacs on their altar and stepped out in faith trusting God for the outcome. (Matthew 10:37,38)

**Commented [notes22]:** 37 "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Matt 10:37-38 (NIV)

For others it was something dear but not so precious as a child. Perhaps it was a home or hometown where they were comfortable, a job they enjoyed and were successful at, or to give up their worldly wealth to live a life of faith. I love to read biographies like those of Charles Cowman, Sundar Singh, and Adoniram Judson. Each one is a repeat of the Abraham story of faith to surrender to God. Some of their stories are even more heart wrenching, if you can imagine that. But something in their faith to surrender everything for their love of Jesus fans the flame of love in my own heart. They challenge me to run the race all out like the Apostle Paul.

(1Corinthians 9:24) Set beside those hero's sacrifices, my petty regrets and the cry of my flesh look so weak and unimportant. They found the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:14) They followed our example of faith, Abraham. When the call of God is clear, I think of them and the decision is not as hard.

**Commented [notes23]:** 24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 1 Cor 9:24 (NIV)

**Commented [notes24]:** 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Phil 3:14 (NIV)

<sup>3</sup> Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled 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. Genesis 22:3 (NIV) He had decided. It may not make sense, but he would obey. He didn't prolong the waiting. He acted at first light of dawn. He took two servants along with Isaac and a donkey. He cut the wood himself. I wondered why a man with hundreds of workers would do that himself. Then I thought about being in his sandals. You could tell the servants to pick the driest of wood and to be sure to include quickly ignitable kindling. You couldn't tell them that it was because you wanted the fire to burn quickly to shorten your agony. It was too important to leave it to others. I would have done it myself.

This is for a burnt offering. A burnt offering began with the slitting the throat of the offering and draining the blood. Then the offering would be dismembered and set on the fire that would consume it completely to ash. (Leviticus 1:10-12) That would take a lot of wood. It is Isaac's funeral bier. Abraham must have only spoken when necessary, fearing his grief would give away what was taking place within him. But with steadfast resolve he found the night before, he finished the preparation and began the journey.

**Commented [notes25]:** 10 "If the offering is a burnt offering from the flock, from either the sheep or the goats, he is to offer a male without defect. 11 He is to slaughter it at the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides. 12 He is to cut it into pieces, and the priest shall arrange them, including the head and the fat, on the burning wood that is on the altar. Lev 1:10-12 (NIV)

We can see his actions as steps of faith. It began with him hearing from God way back in Ur. He was willing to listen and at least make an attempt to obey. A life of faith begins with a heart that is willing to hear God's plan for our life. After taking the first leap of faith, temptations and tests came his way. He learned from some, passed some, and had to repeat some, but he was moving forward. He refused to stagnate.

He believed God and God counted that as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6) The next step is the call to total surrender. Seeing that God has always been right, that each test was for his good, Abraham was beginning to see that God asks because God cares. (Deuteronomy 4:40) He is not a dictator in the sky that is demanding, but a loving God that is calling us to something greater. That something greater is a life that glorifies God. (Romans 15:5,6)

Now, at the call to have faith to surrender all, Abraham obeyed. He did not hesitate or allow his mind to convince him to disobey. He set out in faith. The willingness to hear the initial call comes first. It is followed by an attempt to obey. The many tests and temptations strengthen resolve in the good purposes of God. The call to full surrender comes, and we each decide if we will turn back to a self directed life or go on in faith and love God with our all. Abraham decided to go on. Will you?

<sup>4</sup> *On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.* Genesis 22:4 (NIV) Then there is the journey. We have to walk in that faith. There may have still been some debate in Abraham's mind, but the issue was settled the night before he left. God set the location. God saw that Abraham had plenty of time to be certain of what he was about to do. We call it counting the cost. (Luke 14:28)

Jesus told us that if we are going to follow Him, we must first sit down and count the cost. He compared it to a man that was building a structure. He has to know if he has the money to complete it. He also compared it to an army going to war. (Luke 14:31,32) You have to know what you have and what you are up against. He said that if we set out on this journey and turn around, we aren't fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62) You have to come to the realization that God is worth it all!

Something had taken place in the mind of Abraham. He had turned over the promises of God in his mind and reasoned that God cannot lie. God had said that Sarah would be the mother of the promised child. (Genesis 18:10) He had seen the miraculous pregnancy and birth. God had said that it was through this son that all the nations of the earth would be blessed. (see verse 18) God promised. God made a covenant.

Abraham understood that this was a test. He knew that since God must be faithful to His word, if he offered Isaac as a burnt offering, God would resurrect Isaac from the ashes. If reproductively dead bodies could have a child (Romans 5:19-21), if angels were sent to answer his prayers for Lot's family, if his band of men could defeat four kings and their armies, if God could give dreams to a pagan king to save his wife and the child in her womb, then the LORD was right when He said, "Nothing is too hard for me!" (Genesis 18:14) He reasoned that if he obeyed, God could raise up Isaac from those ashes.

We know that is true because of the verses that follow and specifically because of Hebrews 11:17-19. <sup>17</sup> *By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son,* <sup>18</sup> *even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."* <sup>19</sup> *Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.*

**Commented [notes26]:** 6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. Gen 15:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes27]:** 40 Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time. Deut 4:40 (NIV)

**Commented [notes28]:** 5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 15:5-6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes29]:** 28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? Luke 14:28 (NIV)

**Commented [notes30]:** 31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

Luke 14:31-32 (NIV)

**Commented [notes31]:** 62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Luke 9:62 (NIV)

**Commented [notes32]:** 10 Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Gen 18:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes33]:** 18 and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." Gen 22:18 (NIV)

**Commented [notes34]:** 19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. Romans 4:19-21 (NIV)

**Commented [notes35]:** 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son." Gen 18:14 (NIV)

Here is where we really need to learn from our father of faith. This is one of the most important applications we can make from this story. What has God done in your life? If you are here this morning, most of you have had that first call of God to come out of world ways, out of your self-centeredness and follow God. (Ephesians 2:3-6) Do you realize what a miracle it was for you just to hear the call? It is an even greater miracle that you began to attempt to obey the call! That was followed by temptations and tests. Have you written them down? Have you shared your journey with your children and with others? You were tempted and you failed sometimes, sometimes you resisted, and if you went on you were tested.

**Commented [notes36]:** 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. Eph 2:3-5 (NIV)

You faced giants that threatened to take your health, your relationships, and most of all your love for God. But you made it through by the grace of God. You endured. Think of the times you relied upon God and He saw you through. Since He saw you through those trials and tests, when the big one comes, the call to have the faith to surrender your all, will you look on your faith journey, like Abraham, and believe that nothing is too hard for God? Will you follow his example and lay the dearest thing in your life on the altar? Will your story of surrender be as inspiring as so many who have gone before us who are now in the stands cheering you on? (Hebrews 12:1) It may not be as dramatic, but it can be just as inspiring.

**Commented [notes37]:** 1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Heb 12:1 (NIV)

I'm sure the previous words from the Lord spurred Abraham on through those three days. *Walk before me and be blameless.* (Genesis 17:1) I wonder if the image of the smoking firepot going through the carcasses of those animals came back to mind again and again? (Genesis 15:17) Faith comes by hearing the testimony of God. (Romans 10:17) Abraham was recalling the faithfulness and power of God as he journeyed to Moriah, and so can we as we journey to our Moriah. As we do, our faith grows.

**Commented [notes38]:** 1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty ; walk before me and be blameless. Gen 17:1 (NIV)

**Commented [notes39]:** 17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. Gen 15:17 (NIV)

Next week we will conclude the journey to Moriah and see the wonder of a timeless God. We'll see that He has so much more in mind than we see on the surface. He is not only dealing with us, helping us grow, taking us to higher ground, but He is redeeming the world. Our eyes are often unable to be lifted up to see the grand scheme in our little test, but it is there nonetheless.

**Commented [notes40]:** 17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17 (NIV)

What is dearest to you? Is it a loved one, or some physical thing, or perhaps even the reservation to do what you desire? Can you put it on the altar? God isn't asking you to set it aside just to show you who is boss. He is telling us to put first things first for our sake and His glory. You see, when we have the right priorities, life is more meaningful, richer spiritually, and filled with His peace and joy, not to mention eternal benefits. (Matthew 6:33) When Abraham did it God's way, he ended up with a life and legacy that was incomparably greater than if he had demanded his own way. You are his children if you step out in believing faith.

**Commented [notes41]:** 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matt 6:33 (NIV)