

The Gospel Project® for Adults

Leader Guide, Unit 02, Session 3

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GOD'S TEST OF ABRAHAM

CORE PASSAGE: GENESIS 22:1-14

CONTEXT

In keeping with God's covenant, Abraham's promised child finally arrived with the birth of Isaac. A few years later, God called to Abraham again; this time He commanded Abraham to take his son up a mountain and offer him as a sacrifice there to the Lord. Why would God ask Abraham to do such a thing? God put Abraham to the test to demonstrate Abraham's complete devotion to Him and, as we will see, God's merciful provision. This remained a fulfillment of God's promise and ultimately pointed to a greater fulfillment yet to come.

KEY CONCEPT

The Lord tests our faith so it may be proven by obedience.

As you read Genesis 22:1-14:

- Identify Abraham's actions that indicated he trusted God absolutely.
- Consider how the gospel gives us encouragement to respond to tests and trials with faith.

TIMELINE

God Makes a Covenant with Abraham to Bless His Family Through Sarah (Genesis 17)

Abraham and Sarah Give Birth to Isaac, the Promised Son (Genesis 21)

Session Study: God Tests Abraham's Obedience with a Command to Sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22)

Sarah Dies and Is Buried (Genesis 23)

Abraham Finds a Wife for Isaac (Genesis 24)

DAILY READINGS

Day 1: Genesis 20:1-18

Day 2: Genesis 21:1-7

Day 3: Genesis 21:8-21

Day 4: Genesis 21:22-34

Day 5: Genesis 22:1-19

Day 6: Psalm 66



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages:

<https://www.qrfy.com/GeWwLz6RDH>

PERSONAL PREPARATION

FAITH IN GOD IS TESTED BY GOD (GENESIS 22:1-6).

Circle Abraham's actions that demonstrated his obedient faith.

1 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he answered. **2** “Take your son,” he said, “your only son Isaac, whom you love, go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.” **3** So Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took with him two of his young men and his son Isaac. He split wood for a burnt offering and set out to go to the place God had told him about. **4** On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. **5** Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship; then we’ll come back to you.” **6** Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac. In his hand he took the fire and the knife, and the two of them walked on together.

Tests do two things—they confirm what we know and what we don’t know. In fact, until we are tested, it’s hard to know for sure what we know at all. Tests are necessary proof.

Abraham’s test in Genesis 22 was the hardest of his life, though in some ways, it was not unlike the test he had already faced in Genesis 12. He again was called to go somewhere unknown—“one of the mountains I will tell you about”—just as he was in Genesis 12 when God called him to “go . . . to the land that I will show you.” Likewise, he was called to make an incredible sacrifice. In Genesis 12, the sacrifice was to leave his home and all he knew. In Genesis 22, it was giving up his “only” promised son. Each was a test for radical obedience by faith in God’s promises. First, Abraham trusted God with his hope for a son. Then he trusted God with the life of that son.

Leader Note: God’s testing of human beings is a difficult biblical truth to grasp in light of God’s omniscience. God knows who trusts Him and who does not. He Himself grants faith (Eph. 2:8-9). God’s testing, therefore, is not to determine if we have faith or not but to reveal the quality of our faith. No one is perfect in faith or obedience. Abraham certainly wasn’t, as Genesis shows (Gen. 12:10-20; 16:1-6; 20:1-18). But as

the apostle James might have put it, using Abraham's test as an example, what we do in a test is proof of what we believe (Jas. 2:14-24).

What are some tests of faith that you have experienced in your life?

It is difficult to find a better example of obedient faith than Abraham. He did not delay. God called, and Abraham responded immediately. God told him to take Isaac up the mountain and offer him there, and Abraham rose early in the morning to begin the trip. With each step of faith, Abraham put his life more firmly into God's hands. He had to trust God at the very deepest core of his being. Therefore, he serves as a remarkable example of a believer's faithful response to God's Word, no matter the circumstances.

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"The test, instead of breaking him, brings him to the summit of his lifelong walk with God."¹
–Derek Kidner (1913–2008)

So deep was Abraham's faith that what was impossible with man, Abraham believed to be possible with God. The author of Hebrews, speaking of these events, tells us that Abraham "considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead" (Heb. 11:19; cp. Gen. 22:5). As Abraham walked with his son those three days, he knew what God asked him to do, and he knew the kind of God he served. He had already trusted God for his son once. He could do it again. He would do it again. The test was underway.

Leader Note: In Genesis 22, Abraham didn't know he was being tested. It is likely we won't know either, unless we view all of life as periods of faith-testing from the God who loves us. When confronted with a command that seemed to nullify God's promises, Abraham trusted God to reconcile the differences and obeyed believing God would prove Himself to be true. When we face tests, we should think through the same biblical lens, particularly in light of God's gospel.

How does the gospel help us face various trials and trust God despite our circumstances?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Abraham fully intended to obey the Lord and sacrifice Isaac, the son whom God had promised to carry the covenant forward. Abraham believed the Lord would be faithful to that covenant, so he reasoned that God would even raise his son from the dead if necessary (Heb. 11:17-19).

Abraham's faith was a resurrection faith, and we share in his covenant and faith when we believe in Jesus, God's one and only Son, crucified and raised from the dead for our salvation.

FAITH IN GOD IS PROVEN BY OBEDIENCE (GENESIS 22:7-14).

Mark off two sections by the phrase "Here I am" and summarize each section in one sentence.

7 Then Isaac spoke to his father Abraham and said, "My father." And he replied, "Here I am, my son." Isaac said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" 8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." Then the two of them walked on together. 9 When they arrived at the place that God had told him about, Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood. He bound his son Isaac and placed him on the altar on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" He replied, "Here I am." 12 Then he said, "Do not lay a hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your only son from me." 13 Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son. 14 And Abraham named that place The LORD Will Provide, so today it is said, "It will be provided on the LORD's mountain."

As Abraham and Isaac neared the mountain, the story slows down, and the details become very deliberate and weighted with meaning. Isaac finally spoke, and so began one of the most dramatic conversations in the Bible—the only conversation between Abraham and Isaac we have recorded.

Isaac was confused about what they were doing, so he asked his father a question. He noticed the fire and the wood, but without a sacrificial lamb, what were they going to do up on that mountaintop? Abraham's answer was not a white lie to help both parties endure the question; rather, it could have been Abraham's life's motto: "God himself will provide" (v. 8). Abraham's walk with his son was proof of the faith that resided in his heart. But there was still more to do,

so they walked on.

How might you share with others the truth that “God himself will provide”?

Abraham did not delay when they arrived. He built an altar, arranged the wood, and then bound his son and placed him on the wood. The very same wood Isaac carried up the hill was now his bed as his father raised the knife over him. What must Isaac have felt inside? What must Abraham have felt?

Abraham’s obedience to God’s command is remarkable. What else could drive him to such a place with such an intent? Only God’s command and faith in the God who gave it. But at the right time, the angel of the Lord called Abraham’s name, and he responded, “Here I am.” Abraham’s ears were always open to hear from God.

Abraham had passed the test. His obedience proved the depth of his faith. He truly feared God. God knew this already, of course. He is omniscient. Perhaps, however, it was new information to Abraham. His faith was not theoretical. It was real and active. He believed God would provide, and God did. God always had. He always will.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

FAITH: Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one’s life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

One day, near where Abraham and Isaac stood that day to offer the ram in the thicket, another Son would ascend the hill carrying the wood to which He would be bound (see 2 Chron. 3:1). That day, the Son would not have a substitute—He was the substitute. The sacrifice would be made. God would finally and ultimately provide the sacrifice to atone for the sins of His people, and a sacrifice would never again be needed.

Leader Note: Isaac here is a type, a foreshadow, of Christ. Like Isaac with his father, Jesus obeyed the direction of His Father, but Jesus knew that He would be sacrificed to do the will of God (Isa. 53:10; John 10:17-18; 19:30). Jesus fulfilled what Isaac foreshadowed. When Abraham said the Lord would provide and then the ram in the thicket was revealed, God was pointing to Jesus’s better sacrifice to come—“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

What parallels do you see between the events of Genesis 22 and the gospel?

GROUP EXPERIENCE

Listen to session-by-session training every week on Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify ministrygrid.com/gospelproject • gospelproject.com/leader-training.

ARRIVAL

Ask: As group members arrive, ask: “Growing up in school, how did you prepare for and respond to tests?” Be prepared with an answer of your own after hearing from other group members.

Transition: We likely took a lot of tests growing up, and even though test-taking may not be a normal activity for us these days, we can still remember the nerves, the questions, and even the wonder, *Do I really know this stuff?* Maybe you looked forward to tests and prepared thoroughly; maybe you dreaded them or never felt ready for them. In today’s passage, Abraham got a pop quiz unlike any we took in school.

CONTEXT

Say: If you trace Abraham’s life from God’s call in Genesis 12 through his wandering through Canaan and Egypt, past his meeting with angels and all kinds of family drama, you can see that Abraham’s decades of walking with God were marked with learning experiences. Just before Genesis 22 begins, the family drama has subsided, the covenant was enacted, the promised son was given, and Abraham was living at peace with his neighbors. We might read Genesis 12–21 and think that Abraham passed his big test. But there was more.

RECAP

Ask: Pop quiz: How many of each kind of animal did Moses take on the ark?
(0; Noah was on the ark with 2 of each kind and 7 pairs of those considered clean and all birds [Gen. 7:2-3])

Quiz: Now for a group pop quiz. If you were able to prepare for the group experience this week, one by one and quickly walk us through the narrative of Abraham’s test with any important details you noted.

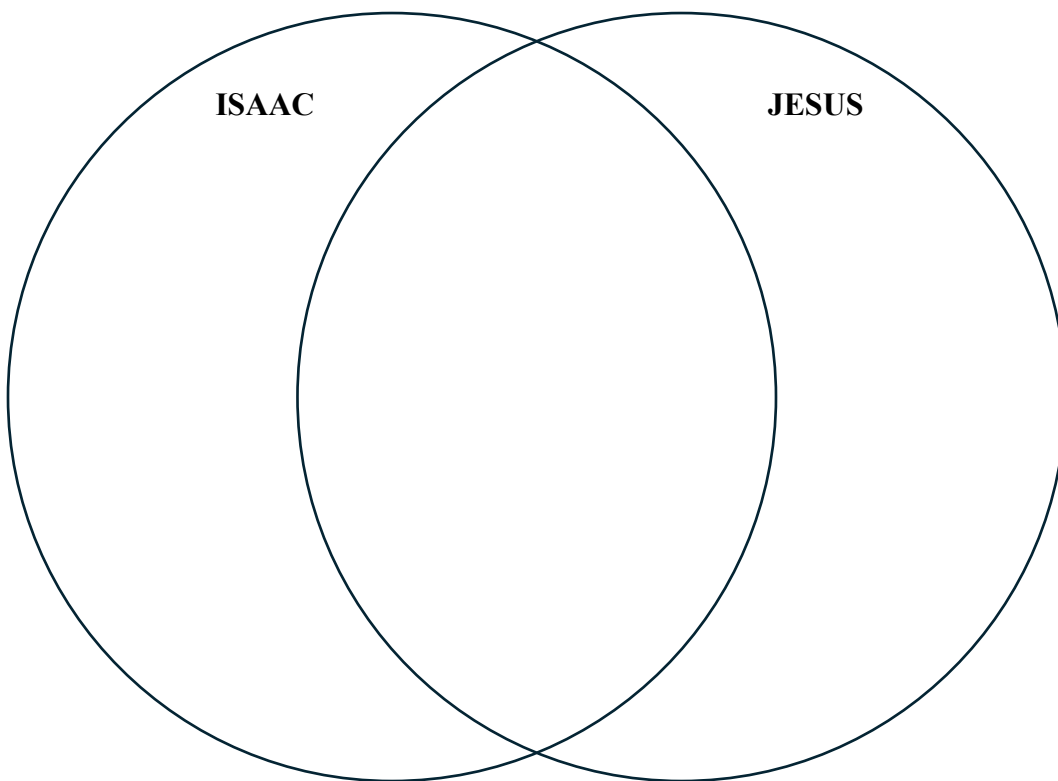
Transition: As we consider Genesis 22 today, we hopefully will see how Abraham’s test connects to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Abraham’s test revealed the mettle of his faith, set Abraham as an example for our faith in obedience, and proved God is faithful. But on a grander scale, this test points us to the Father’s gracious command and the willing sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of God, for the provision of our salvation.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Diagram: Direct your group to page 82 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a Venn diagram for comparing and contrasting the sacrifices of Isaac and Jesus. Recreate this diagram on a board in your room so you can record the group's findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

The Ultimate Sacrifice

Compare and contrast Isaac's and Jesus's sacrifices in the diagram below.



Read: Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 22:1-6 aloud. Instruct your group to follow along in their PSG (p. 78) and highlight everything they can glean about Isaac from this passage.

Discuss: Ask: What phrases did you note concerning Isaac? (*"your only son"*; *"whom you love"*; *"offer him"*; *etc.*) Instruct your group to call to mind John 3:16 (read if necessary) and to record their notes in the appropriate places in the diagram in their PSG. Ask: How might we see that Isaac's relationship with his father points to the relationship between Jesus and His Father?

Read: Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 22:7-14 aloud. Again instruct the group to highlight the actions and words of Isaac in their PSG (p. 80).

Discuss: Instruct your group to begin calling out their notes and thoughts from the passage and

recording them in the appropriate places in the diagram. As necessary to help the discussion along, ask: How do we see a contrast between Isaac and Jesus in verse 7? (*Isaac was unaware of the fact that he would be the sacrifice; Jesus understood His life's purpose was to do just that.*) How are the words of verse 8 fulfilled in the life of Isaac? How are they fulfilled ultimately in the life of Jesus? (*God provided a substitute sacrifice for Abraham to use in the place of Isaac; the Father sent Jesus to be our substitute sacrifice.*) You may want to explain the connection between Moriah and the cross (22:2; 2 Chron 3:1) and Abraham's resurrection faith (Gen. 22:5; Heb. 11:17-19) as you point out any remaining connections for comparing and contrasting Isaac and Jesus. Conclude by briefly summarizing the group's contributions to the diagram with an emphasis on Jesus's sacrificial death as ultimate in the gospel.

DEBRIEF

We know that today's passage was a test. What grade would you give Abraham, and why? What grade would you give Isaac?

But more than a test, this passage is also a foreshadow of what was to come. What similarity or difference between the sacrifices of Abraham's son and God's Son stands out to you most this day, and why?

SUMMARIZE

Say: We should marvel at the faith Abraham displayed in his obedience to God's command, but this passage is not primarily about Abraham but about God. Isaac wondered where was the lamb for the sacrifice; Abraham declared that the Lord would provide, and He did. (Pass out copies of **Pack Item 8: The Lord Will Provide (handout)** to show how God was always providing for His people in Genesis.) And like the sacrificial ram God provided for Abraham, God provided Jesus, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), for us. (Call attention to **Pack Item 9: The Lamb of God (poster)** to further underscore this truth.) Knowing that it is the Lord who provides, we don't put our faith in our obedience but in Jesus and His obedience for us.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 83). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

Head: By the end of Genesis 22, Abraham knew the depth of his faith. Like Abraham, we can know that our faith is real as we follow God's call on our lives and we take one step after another in obedience to God's commands. We can know that our faith is real, ultimately, by beholding the cross of Christ and resting in His finished work.

Where do you feel the test of God today, and how can seeing it through the lens of the gospel help you take the next faithful step?

Heart: Abraham truly loved God, and God truly loved Abraham. They both truly loved Isaac. Because God provided a substitute for Isaac that day on the mountain, another Son eventually

came into the world through his line. Jesus came to live and die and rise again to show us the love of God.

How can you focus on the gospel today and receive the love of God for you?

Hands: Faith always leads to obedience. If we never obey, it is because we have never truly believed. Where God leads and tests each of us will be a bit different. We are all unique children of God by faith in Jesus. But God does call each of us to live out a life of faith in actions that are unique to who He made us to be. The question for each of us is not “Am I called?” but rather “To what am I called?”

What has God called you to do, and how will you take steps toward obedience in faith today?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Prepare for your tests of faith by studying and obeying now. Don't neglect your Bible study, spiritual disciplines, and prayer life in times of calm. Those are what prepare you for the tests that are certain to come.
- Read Psalm 66. Thank God that though He tests us, He brings us through. Pray for faithfulness during your tests in honor of Jesus Christ, who passed every test for us.
- Like Abraham's, your tests can become a powerful testimony glorifying God and helping others see His faithfulness. Consider sharing your own personal struggles with someone who may need encouragement this week.

Invite volunteers to share praises for answered prayer in the past week and prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 83 in their PSG so they can pray for these needs throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Close: Pray through Psalm 66:5-12, thanking God for His tests to refine our faith and His faithfulness to bring us through them.

References

1. Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 153.