

The Tests of God

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[0 : 0 0] I don't like them. I never have. As a matter of fact, when I was a student, I had two recurring nightmares. The first one is naked in a high school hallway. I don't know why you dream that.

I studied dreams as a minor in psychology. I never figured out what that was about, but that has nothing to do with the sermon, but I had to be honest. I got two nightmares. Anyway, the second was that at the end of a semester, don't make that come back to haunt me, but anyway, at the end of a semester, I have an exam and I haven't been to class. It's a class I signed up for and I never went to the class, and now I don't know what to do. So I don't like tests.

I sure don't like pop quizzes and are tests that you're not expecting. And today, we look at one of the biggest tests, probably in all of history, but we sure look at the biggest test in Abraham's life. And it's not in a classroom. It's at a place of worship. Now, in Hebrews chapter 11, they have a list of those who lived by faith. It's a wonderful example of how to live by faith and what they did in their lives that stood out to live by faith. It is what's often called the hall of fame of faith. And Abraham is one of the, he's in the foyer of the hall of fame of faith. And you don't get there without going through some trials in your life, some tests in your life. And this is probably the climax of his life. He has withstood his toughest test of faith in our passage today.

And it's pretty crucial for us too, because we learn a lot, I believe, from this passage about one of the most difficult subjects of our faith. And that is the tests of God. They're often unexpected.

They're often misunderstood. They can be very frustrating. However, they're always for a purpose. And they're always timely. For instance, this could not have taken place at any other time in Abraham's life. And God had been preparing him, at least indirectly so, for a hundred years, literally, for this test. Yet, even with that, the demanded sacrifice is admittedly hard to grasp. Now listen, this is a familiar story to many. But if it is not to you, brace yourself. Okay? Genesis chapter 22, beginning in verse 1, it says this, after these things, God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and he said, here am I. He said, take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of

[3 : 04] Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you. So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to a place of which God had told him. On the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, stay here with the donkey. I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father, Abraham, my father, my father. And he said, here am I, my son. He said, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. So they went, both of them, together. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac, his son, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham,

Abraham. And he said, here I am. And he said, do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him. For I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from me.

And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked and behold, behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

So Abraham called the name of that place the Lord will provide. As it is said to this day, on the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, I pray today that more than the historic details of Abraham and Isaac's life, as important as they may be, that we'll instead see the relation of this story to our own lives.

God, I speak to folks today, some of which are going through tests. Some of them have been through tests and some of them will go into tests. But God, I pray today that you'll give us guidance.

[5 : 58] Guidance for what has happened to us. Guidance for what is happening to us. Guidance, oh God, for what will happen to us. And help us, Lord, to trust you more after learning the truths of your word.

In Jesus' precious name. Amen. What an event. Why was Abraham asked to do this? Now, don't let the end result take away from the difficulty of the story because when you suffer difficulty from a test of God and you're in the middle of it, you feel the weight of it. So I want you to feel the weight of what Abraham dealt with. This was a three-day walk with Abraham and Isaac. And there was some pondering going on on that walk. Isaac's wondering, how is this all going to work out? And Abraham's going, how is this all going to work out? Now, I could tell you about pagan rituals of that day that would make something like this rather common. It was a familiar concept for pagans of that day to make those kinds of sacrifices. Those rituals that made the society more susceptible to understand the story than we do today. But I can't soften the request.

And any way you soften it, the demanded sacrifice, it's difficult to grasp. But the lesson from it is invaluable. Anyone that God is going to use, he's going to test.

It relates to every one of us because God wants to use you. And in order to make you ready for that, he has to test you. I don't pretend to say that every test is the same. I don't believe you ought to ever tell anybody, I know exactly what you're going through. Because you don't. You may have lost the same kind of relational loved one as they did, but those relationships were different. You don't know exactly those circumstances. You may have had a relative that got into trouble like yours has got into trouble. And so you understand that somewhat, but all those circumstances are different.

You may be going through a health crisis right now or a relational crisis right now or a personal and mental crisis right now. And the reality is when somebody tells you, I know exactly which. No, they don't. No, they don't. Maybe they've suffered through the same kind of test that you've went through, the medical test and all those things, trying to find a diagnosis. Maybe they've dealt with that. Maybe they've had similar confusions than you have.

[8 : 59] But the reality is we're all individual. I mean, listen, no temptation exceeds you except what is common to man. There's a commonality among us. But when it comes to the difficulties of our life, we don't know exactly what anybody is suffering for that. So each situation is different, even when they look the same. And when we bring into a test or a dilemma, what we bring into that is different for every person. You can emphasize or empathize or you can sympathize with them, but don't ever pretend to know you understand completely what they're going through because you don't.

And by the way, if you don't know what to say, don't say anything. Okay. I have heard more preachers fill up an empty spot with words because you could tell you didn't know what they said, what they had to say. Your presence makes a difference when somebody's going through a dilemma. I promise you.

All of God's tests are not the same. There's some common characteristics, and I want to focus on the common characteristics of those tests because they're found here in this account.

But they're all different. Let me give you the commonalities. The tests of God are unexpected.

I doubt when a test comes you ever understand the timing of it. But never does it come out of the blue. God knew it was coming for him, and he placed it in his infinite timing where it needed to be for the circumstances.

[10 : 48] And Genesis 22 verse 1 begins by saying, after these things. That's what the ESV that I use, the English Standard Version, that's how it describes it. It says, after these things. To me, that's a poor translation.

They got it wrong. Because in the Hebrew, it says, in the fullness of time. This is more than just another chronological event.

This is in God's timing. It's a divine appointment. And when Abraham's life was ready for God's test, God allowed it.

It's like when Christ said, the hour is at hand. It's like in Luke 9 31 when he says, he set his face towards Jerusalem. It was time to endure the last week of Christ at that point.

And when Jesus knew there with the disciples, the time was up. He said, the hour is at hand. God's time has come. In the same kind of way, when Abraham had experienced enough, when he had grown enough faith, he didn't understand it, but when he had grown enough faith, God had a test.

[12 : 02] God understood exactly where he would be, and God has a time for everything. Ecclesiastes 3 lists many. I'll give you an example in the very beginning of it. It says, Ecclesiastes 3 verse 1 says, there is an appointed time for everything, and there is a time for every event under heaven.

Therefore, the time had come for Abraham. Although we may never understand it, God has a time for everything that we experience, and his timing is always right.

Does it always seem right? No, it does not seem right. And that's the problem. We don't look forward to the test. I've never liked the test, nor the timing of them.

God's tests are unexpected. What we see is limited, and what he allows is unexpected, but God sees it all the time. Therefore, you can rest in his judgment and know that what happens to us is in his time.

Has the rug been ripped out from under you? I promise you, God's still on the throne, and it's in his timing. The other thing is this.

[13 : 17] I wish I could sugarcoat this, but I can't. The tests of God are difficult. They're difficult. Now, I want you to understand, a test of God is not a temptation.

God does not tempt. James 1, verse 13 through 15 says, Let no one, when he is tempted, say, I am being tempted by God.

For God cannot be tempted with evil. For God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Then desire, when it is conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. Tempting is what we walk into.

Ushered along by the evil one, God does not do that. If you wonder, there are two differences between a test of God and a temptation. One is, we lead ourselves into temptation.

[14 : 20] God don't lead us into temptation. We lead ourselves in that. That scripture tells us that. When we are caught up and lured and enticed by our own desires, God leads us into a test.

Second thing is, tempting involves evil. Testing is different. I want you to notice in verse 2, it says, Your only son whom you love.

Now, if you've been following along and tracking us for these last few weeks, you know that's not his only son. He's got another son with Hagar, his maidservant.

When his wife could not have a child, they took alternative means, which was not what God had in store, and Ishmael was born. God doesn't mission to Ishmael.

Ishmael is his first son, but God speaks as if he does not exist because Isaac was the son of promise. Isaac was the son that Abraham had been waiting on.

[15 : 30] And I want you to get the weight of this. Isaac is the one that all of God's promises were based on. Everything we know, even the childhood song we sing, Father Abraham had many sons and many sons of him.

It all came back to Isaac. The nation of Israel would come through that bloodline. All of Abraham's future, his heritage, his legacy, were held in the life of Isaac.

Isaac, he looked to the birth of his son for decades, yet he was a hundred years old before his boy was born. And now God speaks of Isaac.

And when God spoke of Isaac, he spoke of Abraham's everything. It's tough. It is the things that we love that God will often ask us to put on the altar of sacrifice.

Now I want you to hear me. That don't mean he's going to take it. Whether he takes it or not, we walk away with it in its proper place.

[16 : 54] It's his. By the way, it was his to start with. But it has to register with us.

It's his. Whatever it is. When you put what you love on the altar of sacrifice, whether God takes it or not, it's his.

And that is the proper perspective that we are to have about our stuff. About what's ours.

Remember, God does not give us tests to see where we are. He knows that. He gives us tests so that we can see where we are.

Tests are tough. They're tough. Third thing is this. The test of God demand obedience. There are two signs of Abraham's sure obedience here.

[18 : 05] First is how he obeyed. I want you to notice he went when God told him to. Verse 3 says, so Abraham, let me give you the context.

take your son, your only son whom you love and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

That's verse 2 of Genesis 22. Verse 3 begins, so Abraham rose early. He didn't even wait until mid morning. He got up.

He got up and got after it. I think that's significant. It does not speak of a struggle with going when God told him to go. Did the Bible leave that struggle out?

I don't believe it did because the Bible speaks of his struggle watching Sodom burn and the difficulty of that. He did struggle there but he does not struggle here.

[19 : 06] He just went because he knew he could trust God. And I'm telling you folks, just trust God. Go with the Lord and trust him.

As you pray, you can question. As you go, you can pray. And as you pray, you can question. Whatever, but move in the direction of obedience for God.

He went to the place where God had told him. And by the way, when he started, God hadn't yet told him where exactly he was supposed to go. He learned along the journey.

I'm a planner. I can ruin a vacation. Okay? A couple of years ago, right, when things were coming out of COVID, but yet people were wanting you to travel and all that stuff, I watched a movie about South Dakota and that area, and I wanted to go.

And I wanted to hit it before everybody else hit it. And so as soon as school was over, I booked us a trip where we would see all of the Northwest in about four days.

[20 : 23] I was a test to see if my family would stay together through the trip. We'd be scattered throughout the West. I think we was going to book about 400 miles a day.

Look. Look. But Millie was graduating from the eighth grade, and I found out late in the process that there was an eighth grade graduation.

So much to my chagrin, because nobody wanted to go but me anyway. I told Millie, I said, listen, your gift for getting out of the eighth grade is to get out of middle school and go to high school.

And that's it. We ought to be in the West. But I went begrudgingly and I canceled all my plans. I love to plan. I love to plan it out and know what the deal is. But the reality is you can't plan out the test of God.

You got to trust him. You got to move and trust him along the way.

[21 : 36] Not only did he go when God told him to go, but he went where God told him to go. He went to the place where God had told him. It was not easy. It was three days away.

It was not a long journey. But I'm telling you with what was going on, it was a long journey. Can you imagine the pondering on that trip?

Scripture also tells us why he obeyed. Verse 12 says, God said, do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him.

For now I know that you fear God seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me. He feared God.

Now, I want you to understand there's two types of fear, at least two types. There's a phobia kind of fear, an irrational fear, the kind of fear that I have for snakes, for instance, okay?

[22 : 43] I may run a fit, but I ain't going to handle a snake, I can tell you that. And I've always had this sick fascination with snakes. I mean, that's my favorite part of the zoo to go to, to watch and to look and all that stuff.

However, if there was one on this stage, I wouldn't be on this stage. When I was growing up, there was a creek that went through our neighborhood and there was a bush that hung over that creek and one day I was down the creek and I saw a snake in that bush.

Another day I saw another snake in that bush. Some days I saw two snakes in that bush. So I got fascinated with seeing them and scared and all that stuff. One day I went down there and looked and the snakes were green and so they matched the bush.

It was hard to see and I didn't see any. So dejected and somewhat glad, as weird as that is, I started home and all of a sudden I looked down and on this little rock was a little snake, a little brown snake sunning, about that long.

By the time I looked at him, he had his head raised up and his tongue out and I started running. I lived about a quarter of a mile away and I ran all the way home, worried that snake was chasing me down the road.

[24 : 05] I have an irrational fear of it, okay? That's not the fear this is talking about. The other kind of fear is a fear of respect.

This has more to do with the character of the one respected than it does the one doing the respecting. It's not a fear of punishment.

It's a fear of reverence. My dad's a whistler. He'd work in the garage and he had one of those big tube radios where it had to warm up when you hit the button.

And he played instrumental music, elevator music out there and he'd whistle to it while he was out there working. But he also had another whistle that was somewhat legendary and that was the come home whistle.

And when he wanted his boys to come home he'd walk outside and he'd whistle. And when dad whistled it was time to come home. one time I know as the bird flies that I was over a half a mile away from him and I heard him whistle.

[25 : 28] And the moment I heard him whistle I commenced running. Jumping creeks, running through woods. I commenced running because I wanted to get home and beat the dreaded second whistle.

I'm just going to be honest with you. I don't ever remember being punished for not coming home. I never remember being scolded for not coming home.

I don't ever remember not coming home when I was called. I just knew to come. My dad expected me.

my father never asked much of me. He never does. But when he has I've tried to deliver. And supper was ready.

And it was time to come home. And I had a fear of him. I didn't fear what he would do. I didn't fear what he wouldn't do.

[26 : 38] I just knew what he wanted. And I respected him. The test of God demand obedience.

And Abraham heard the whistle of God and he knew to obey. the test of God also demand faith.

They demand faith. Abraham knew whatever God would ask he would trust him. How? Because he walked with God. And when you walk with folks you know whether you can trust them or not.

You learn them. And he had learned God. He had lived with him and he knew him and so he could trust him. There are two sure signs of that. The first one is seen in verses four and five.

When it says on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar and then Abraham said to his young men get this now. Stay here with the donkey. I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.

[27 : 50] Did you catch that? He knew they would worship and he knew they would come back. He didn't doubt God would somehow take care of the matter and Hebrews chapter 11 verse 17 through 19 gives us insight into how he thought it would be handled.

It says 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 of whom he was said through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead from which figuratively speaking he did receive him back. He gave up Isaac and God gave him back.

He trusted that his willingness to sacrifice to God would lead to worship and that is exactly what happened and he knew God was at work before he ever went up that mountain.

He trusted God with that because God will provide. I can promise you as well in every test God will provide and when God provides it will change your worship.

[29 : 05] When you see God come through it will change your worship. Verse 13 and 14 tell us that just as Abraham had said God provided and it was time to worship.

Our job is to obey. God's job is to provide and when we choose not to obey we try to go our own way and when we obey we don't go our own way we trust him.

You may not like the experience of a test but the benefit of God's test outweigh the agony I can promise you and in that we are changed.

Lastly the test of God are blessed. Sure don't feel like it in the middle of it.

I can't explain to you how God will bless you through your trials and through your test. That may be some of the most distinct differences that you will ever hear in people's testimony when they talk about how God came through for them.

[30 : 15] God is an individual God that gives us what we need whether we know what it is or not. But let me tell you three ways that God blessed Abraham.

Three blessings and I'll close. Three blessings that I want you to see about Abraham. One is he walked away from this with an even stronger commitment to God than he had before.

I want you to notice something. God never wondered how Abraham would respond. God knew it. Why? Because he's omniscient. He knows all things.

But now Abraham would never question his own level of obedience again. He knew that he could and he knew that he would trust God.

Makes a world of difference. Second thing is this. What he had now was the Lord's. He might be sitting at his table but he's not his.

[31 : 21] He's the Lord's. What's God asking of you?

Give it over to him. trust him with it. You may get to keep it but it'll never be yours again once you give it to him.

And it's our job to be stewards of the blessings that God gives to us as long as he allows us to have them.

And one more blessing he got. He knew he did what God asked. he walked off that mountain knowing that he did exactly what God told him to do.

That he obeyed God. And that makes my friend a world of difference in your life. When you've trusted God, when you've obeyed God and just let him have it and watched him work in the midst of that.

[32 : 37] it is my goal that I will stand before the Lord one day and he will look at me and say well done my good and faithful servant.

You obeyed. You trusted. Trust God in your test.

He will not let you down. He's good for it. With every head bowed and every eye closed, I don't say any of this lightly.

Because I walk through valleys with many of you. Many of you I pray for daily.

Because I know the struggles that you're going through. I know the difficulties. I'm also well aware that for those that I know of, there's that many more that I have no idea about.

[33 : 48] Whatever it is that you're facing today, give that to the Lord. Give that to the Lord. It may be that you've never really surrendered your life to Christ.

You've been playing the game or hanging pretty close, but you've never surrendered your life to Christ. And the good news is, when you give love and surrender your life to Christ, he won't take it from you, but it'll be his.

You've never done that and would like guidance in that you come today. As soon as we stand and sing, you come. Maybe you have done that, but you've never acknowledged that publicly.

It's just something you've done privately. And the first step of obedience is to follow him in baptism. Or maybe God's leading you to be a part of this fellowship. fellowship. You know God's drawing you here.

It's clear to you. I just encourage you to trust him with that. Or there may be something else in your life that you've just got to give over to God.

[35 : 01] You can do that where you are. You can do it at this altar. You can do it with a pastor praying for you. But today, let's trust God. He's worthy to be trusted.

Lord Jesus, lead us right now. Have your will in your way with every one of these folks today, dear God. Help them to feel the power of your presence, the direction of your spirit, and work and move in our midst right now, oh God, I pray.

In Jesus' name, amen.