

THIS IS A TEST, THIS IS ONLY A TEST • by Isaac Landis

KEY VERSE:

“Abraham said, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.’ So the two of them walked on together.” Genesis 22:8 (NRSV).

FAITH STORY:

Genesis 22:1-19

FAITH FOCUS:

God decided to test Abraham, so he told him to take his only son Isaac and offer him as a burnt offering at a place God would show him. So, Abraham took Isaac and two young men with him the next morning to follow God’s command. When Abraham found the place he was to sacrifice Isaac, he took his son and went on the mountain with him. He built an altar and bound his son on it. He then raised the knife to kill him, but an angel of the Lord called to him and told him to not lay a hand on his son. Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in the bushes and sacrificed it in the place of Isaac. The angel called again, this time telling Abraham of the blessing God has given him.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students realize that God desires absolute obedience from us.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

Students will think about what it would be hard for them to give up to God.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 A box of toothpicks.
- 2 Bibles for everyone.
- 3 Copies of the skit for eight students.
- 4 A bag filled with MP3 player, DVDs, CDs, pictures, something representing sports, stuffed animals, car keys, food, soda—anything that symbolizes something that is valuable to your students.

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (10–15 minutes)

- 1 Hand out three toothpicks to each student. Explain that they are going to tell “the hardest thing I ever had to do” stories. Each time a person tells a story, everyone who hasn’t experienced the same hard thing has to give the storyteller a toothpick. Begin with your own story and go around the group. When everyone has told a story, see who has the most toothpicks and lead a “pity party” for them. (Everyone says Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!)
- 2 Ask the students what they think is the hardest thing they may have to do in the future. You can lead this as a serious discussion, or choose to have fun with it, encouraging students to think of the most outrageous hard thing they might have to do.

CONNECT: (10 minutes)

Divide students into groups of 2-3. Ask each group to think of a hard thing that God asked someone to do in the Bible, and to prepare a pantomime to show the group. (Don't allow the crucifixion of Jesus because everyone would probably choose that.)

If anyone chose the story of Isaac and Abraham, commend them for leading into the Bible story they'll be studying.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (10–15 minutes)

1 Ask for volunteers or assign the parts in the skit. Tell them to act out the skit, not just read it.

2 Lead a discussion after the skit: Some possible questions:

How would you have felt if you were Abraham? Isaac?

Do you think Abraham knew God would stop him just in the nick of time?

Obviously, Abraham had a lot to lose in this deal, and it was more than just a son.

What else did Abraham stand to lose? (Isaac was his only son, his heir, and he represented God's faithfulness to him.)

What did God have to lose? (Finding out that Abraham wasn't obedient would be hugely disappointing to God.)

Why did God put Abraham through this test? (God needed to know if Abraham was absolutely faithful if he was to be father of the chosen people.)

What happened in the end? God blesses Abraham because of his faithfulness, and makes him a chosen nation.

APPLY: (10–13 minutes)

Bring out the bag of items you brought, and dump its contents on the table or floor. Ask the students to find an object from the bag, or in their wallet/purse that is something really important to them—something they couldn't imagine not having. This object can be the actual thing that is hard to give up, or it can represent something hard to give up. Next, go around the group and ask students to share the object that they chose and why. (Allow them to pass if they aren't comfortable with sharing.) This can be done in smaller groups if your class is large or time is short.

RESPOND: (5 minutes)

Invite students to close their eyes and to repeat the following prayer after you.

God, it's hard for me to trust you.

(Repeat)

It's really hard for me to trust you with people and things that I love.

(Repeat)

I don't know if I could do what Abe and Isaac did.

(Repeat)

Take the loves of my life, Lord.

(Repeat)

And teach me how to give them up to you.

(Repeat.)

These are the things that I offer to you.

(Encourage students to think of their own things and allow time for them to do that.)

Thank you for your faithfulness to me, Lord.

(Repeat)

Help me to be faithful to you.

(Repeat.)

Amen.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

The four fall stories (Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Tower, and Flood) define the sin problem that God seeks to correct in the rest of the story. The sin problem is the loss of shalom community. This has four aspects: separation from God, ourselves, others, and all creation. God calls Abraham to be the father of His chosen people. Chosen means called for a mission, not God's favorite people, as it is so often understood. God makes a covenant with Abraham and tries to work through an unfaithful and less than perfect people. Most of our beloved stories in the Old Testament come from a few selected memories of salvation history. These stories often show of God's providence, as he intervenes in history to keep the promise going. One such story is God's testing of Abraham.

This story starts out by saying that it is a test. We as readers know right from the start that God is testing Abraham's obedience. However, we need to remember the incredible contradiction that this must have seemed like to Abraham. God had told him that he was going to be the father of a great nation, but God is now telling him to sacrifice his only son. It is important to remember that both God and Abraham had a lot to lose here. Abraham could have lost his only son, the promise of his future, and God could have found that Abraham was not obedient (Roop 147). Isaac was more than a son, "he was the promise to which Abraham's life was dedicated. To sacrifice him was to forsake the long-range goal" (Speiser 164).

However, Abraham passes the test, and an angel calls from heaven before he can kill his son. God now knows that Abraham fears him, so he will bless him and make his offspring as numerous as the stars. The fear of God here denotes absolute dedication (164). It was necessary for God to test Abraham, because he needed to be willing to die for God's purpose. The patriarchs needed a firm faith in God's divine plan if it was going to work. This was the only way the biblical process could survive when all seemed lost (166).

WORKS CITED:

Roop, Eugene F. **Believers Church Bible Commentary: Genesis**. Ed. Elmer A. Martens and Howard H. Charles. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1987.

Speiser, E.A. **The Anchor Bible: Genesis**. Ed. William Albright and David Freedman. Doubleday and Company, Inc. 1964.

THIS IS A TEST, THIS IS ONLY A TEST • Skit : Genesis 22:1-19

Characters: Narrator, God, Abraham, Isaac, two men, angel, a ram

Narrator: After these things God tested Abraham.

God: Abraham!

Abraham: Here I am.

God: Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.

Narrator: So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him.

On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away.

Abraham: (to the 2 young men) Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.

Narrator: Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and knife. So the two of them walked together.

Isaac: Father.

Abraham: Here I am my son.

Isaac: The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?

Abraham: God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.

Narrator: So the two of them walked on together. When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But an angel of the Lord called to him from heaven.

Angel: Abraham, Abraham!

Abraham: Here I am.

Angel: Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.

Narrator: Abraham looked up and saw a ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time

Angel: By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And all your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice."

Narrator: So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.