

Passing God's Tests

Genesis 22:1-14

Pastor Danny Lee

ROLLER COASTERS & LIFE¹

Think of your life in terms of a roller coaster ride. Most of us would prefer a smooth, comfortable ride that doesn't upset or surprise us too often. We prefer a "normal" quiet life without much disrupting or disturbing us. *But what is a "normal" life?* I might define "normal" as life happening my way, on my terms, according to my desires. If things do not go according to my plans, then my life is upset and not "normal."

Realistically, a normal life is one that feels like a roller coaster ride. There are major ups and downs, twists and turns, spins and drops. No one knows the "track" (or plan) of their life except God. Everyone's path of life will be different from the next. Life is both exciting and terrifying; slow, steep climbs often turn into fast, stomach-twisting drops. There is a start and an end to every life; it is the ride of life that is unique and unknown to every individual.

On a roller coaster, there is one thing that secures the rider: the car and its safety constraints. Your willingness to ride a roller coaster depends upon your trust and confidence in the safety of the car to carry you through the ride. People respond in different ways to riding roller coasters, like those who are *terrified, get sick and anxious because they are not in control of the ride*. There are also those who *enthusiastically enjoy the ride and readily welcome the exhilaration of not being in control*. The car may be equated to your faith and trust in God to carry them through the ride of life. No matter how intense, frightening or thrilling life may be, do you have FAITH that the situation is never out of God's control and life is on the right track?

TESTS OF GOD

The life of Abraham and Sarah was anything but boring. The journey God had led them through required them to leave their hometown, travel as strangers in a foreign land, interact with people who did not share their same views, all the while trusting in the direction and promises of God's Word with minimal results. Along the way they made some poor decisions which resulted in strained relationships, the birth of an unwanted son and disaster with neighbors. Yet in all these things they continued to persevere, wait patiently and maintained trusting faith in the God who called them.

After 30 years of walking with God (Gen.12-21), the promise of a son – who was the major component of God's promises to Abraham – was finally realized. But for Abraham, the biggest "twist" and "drop" in his life of faith came after receiving this blessing. God purposely designed a test for Abraham to reveal the depth of his faith in the promise of God and prove the sincerity of his love in the God of the promise.

¹ adapted from John H. Walton, *NIVAC Genesis*, pp.517-18

A test from God is not to be interpreted as a cruel joke which He throws into the lives of people to make them uncomfortable. God is a God of careful, purposeful design who is involved in the details of your life with specific purpose in every circumstance His children encounter. The purpose and providence of God is one of the more complex, yet magnificent ways in which God works all things out for His glory and the good of His children. In Genesis 22, WE SEE FROM GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ABRAHAM TWO REASONS WHY GOD TESTS HIS CHILDREN.

I. GOD'S FINAL EXAM

^{ESV} **Genesis 22:1-2** *After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I."² He said, "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 of which I shall tell you."*

GOD TESTS HIS CHILD TO REVEAL THE DEPTH OF YOUR FAITH

The purpose of this test is found in God's response after Abraham completes the task, *"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"* (22:12). There was only one reason why God initiated this test and it wasn't for God's benefit, it revealed and confirmed the faith of Abraham.

[God] tests some value, quality, or attribute by stretching it to its limits. In most cases He is testing the faith and faithfulness of individuals... by expecting them to obey in difficult circumstances.²

A major difference between Satan's tactics and God's tests are that Satan tempts so that you might fail; God tests so that He might prove your faith and love in Him. However, God does not set you up for failure, but prepares and provides every opportunity to succeed (1 Cor. 10:13). For Abraham, the test was directed towards his willingness to sacrifice the one person who was designated to be the fulfillment of God's promises. The dilemma was his trust in God alone, over his love and affection for the son whom God had given him.

○ **Tests are sometimes sudden and steep**

There are a few unique elements regarding the nature of the test. First, there was no warning to Abraham about the coming test. Usually God began His conversation with a promise or blessing for Abraham and his resulting task.

At this point Abraham had received his promised son, was at peace with his neighbors and continued in faithful worship to God (Gen. 21:22-34). This test would reveal the motive of Abraham's faith: *was it for personal gain or simply his love and trust in the Everlasting God.*

² John H. Walton, *NIVAC Genesis*, p.510

This would be the steepest ascent of Abraham's faith as he was charged to offer Isaac as a sacrifice to God. In fact, he was not offered any assurance or knowledge beyond the duty he was charged with.³ And, the type of offering he was commanded to perform was the "burnt offering," which meant Isaac was to be completely consumed on the altar.⁴

- **Tests are often personal and costly**

The test was seemingly a conflict of interests. Isaac was the promised son through whom God's promises to Abraham would be fulfilled. Yet, there was no mistake in God's command that Isaac is to be the specific sacrifice [*"only son"* – unique; special for a specific purpose]. This test would pit Abraham's emotions and instincts against his will to obey. This test would also reveal if Abraham was more attached to the promise of God (his son) than in the God of the promise.

God demands that Abraham kill his only son; within the context of the cycle, God demands that Abraham kill the promises God has made... Of course, son and promises cannot be separate, but the weight of meaning lies in the fact that Isaac is a gift who embodies God's promise of blessing, land, and nationhood. The test is one of obedience and trust. In essence, it is a test of Abraham's relationship with Yahweh. It asks whether Abraham's trust is really in God, and not simply in what God has promised. Abraham has built altars before and sacrificed to this God, when God renewed the promises. Is he willing now to build an altar and sacrifice the promises themselves, embodied in his son, in order to demonstrate his unswerving trust in the God who stands behind the promises?⁵

Just as God's purpose was to see what Abraham was prepared to give up,⁶ likewise God tests us to see what you are willing to give up. Faith requires a willingness to give up whatever you value, more than God.

³ Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History: Old Testament*, pp.70-71

⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *NICOT Genesis*, p.103

⁵ T.W. Mann, *The Book of Torah*, p.45

⁶ Walton, p.513

II. ABRAHAM'S PASSING GRADE

Genesis 22:3-14 *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 the place of which God had told him...¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." ¹² He 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."*

GOD TESTS HIS CHILD TO PROVE THE SINCERITY OF YOUR LOVE

As much as Abraham might have struggled and questioned the method of God, his trust in God controlled his will to obey over his personal feelings. Trusting faith in God will always reveal itself in obedient actions. The proof of Abraham's trust and love for God is evidenced by his complete obedience.

- **Sincere love immediately obeys**

The description of the account does not reveal all the emotion, tension and confusion that must have gone through everyone's minds. This was no quick task to be completed; instead, there was plenty of time to think through what was involved. God intentionally sent them on a three day journey, no doubt extremely stressful. The anticipation of the journey and Abraham's task obviously tormented him. The Scripture does not need to explain all this but instead focuses in on the purpose of God and the actions of Abraham. *God is most honored when we prove our love for Him by our faithful obedience.*

It is "obedience which does not hold back even what is most precious, when God demands it, and commits to God even that future which He Himself has promised."⁷

- **Sincere love trusts god over circumstances**

Hebrews 11:17-19 *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, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.*

The author of Hebrews offers insight into Abraham's faith. He had internal confidence in the unseen, believing God could raise the dead and return his son. Abraham's faith was fully proved and perfected by his complete confidence in the power of God and his total obedience to the word of God. This led to God providing for his need because He was pleased with Abraham's priorities.

⁷ Hamilton, p.112

God's faithful provision is to be highlighted above the faith of Abraham. God had been promising and preparing Abraham for several years to bring him to the point of this test. The purpose of the test was to reveal to Abraham and others that God is to be the focus of faith and love. There is one priority God is most concerned with: *is God Himself, or the benefits He provides as the motivating factor for your relationship with and worship of Him?*

We can agree that God knew ahead of time what Abraham was going to do. But there is ample evidence throughout Scripture that God desires us to act out our faith and worship regardless of the fact that He knows our hearts. God wants us to pray even though He knows what we are going to say and may already have the answer in motion. He wants us to praise Him even though He knows how we feel. God asks us to express our faith and love. It is honoring to Him for us to demonstrate those things that He knows exist because it pleases Him.⁸

III. PASSING GOD'S TESTS

Genesis 22:15-19 *And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven¹⁶ and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.*

After Abraham passed the test, God reaffirmed His promise and blessing to him. This reaffirmation solidified for Abraham that God is faithful to His promises and is absolutely trustworthy to be obeyed. Don't miss the focal point of this test. It is clearly not to be on the supposed "greatness of Abraham's faith." Instead, it is on the goodness of God's promise and the power of God's love to empower obedience.

God tests you because He loves you. God tests you, not so He can learn how you will respond – He already knows the answer – but to reveal what your heart loves. If you think God's tests are too steep or personal, please remember the extent of His love for us. God's love cost Himself steeply and personally in the death of His own Son Jesus Christ.

If we're to understand the cross, humanity must lay hold of the reality of what it means to sacrifice something that we consider immeasurably precious for the sake of righteousness.⁹

⁸ Walton, p.514

⁹ Britt Merrick, *Big God*, p.151

If you still have the lingering question of “*How can I be sure to pass the test(s) God has planned for me?*” The answer is found in Abraham’s example before his final exam. Abraham’s faith strengthened and matured through his consistent acts of obedience prior to this test. Abraham was not perfect, but he was faithful to obey God’s Word, believe His promises and trust in His sovereign goodness. Likewise, it is your consistent obedience to God that prepares you for His tests in life. Passing these test reveal the depth of your faith in the good promises of God and the sincerity of your love in the God of the promises.