



Group Session

Small Group Study

Overview

After the Flood, Noah and his family repopulated the earth. One of Noah's descendants (through his son Shem) was Abraham. God promised to make Abraham the patriarch of many nations. Through him all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. God's great blessings came to Abraham, as they often do to us, through the great sacrifice of obedience. Abraham had to leave his home, much of his family, and his culture. Later, he had to trust God for a son in his old age. The most challenging

sacrifice that God required was by far the greatest, but Abraham passed the test with flying colors.

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Engage

QUESTION

What did you enjoy most about going to school?

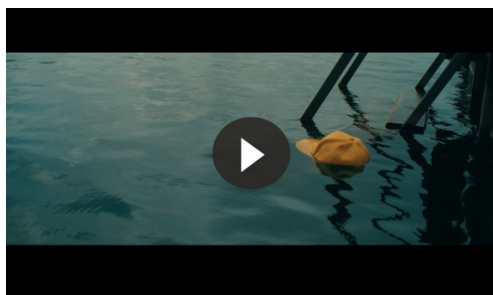
Taking tests probably wasn't high on your list of things you enjoyed. But school tests are easy compared to the test that God gave Abraham.

Watch

As we watch this video, consider this question:

QUESTION

What is a test you have faced that grew your faith in God?



Consider

One day a chicken and a pig were discussing the difference they were making in the world. The chicken said, "For example, look at all the people out there who love having bacon and eggs for breakfast!"

"That's true," replied the pig, "but there's just one problem. For you it's a contribution; for me it's a sacrifice."

The pig had a point. Similarly, the investing world claims, "No risk, no reward." The physical fitness world tells us, "No pain, no gain." And for those who follow Him, Jesus said that we need to give up our life, not hang onto it, in order to save it (Matthew 16:25). Sacrifice is at the heart of what Christ did for us in going to the Cross, and sacrificial obedience is what He calls us to if we are to walk in His resurrection life. Our sacrifice is not a sacrifice for sin—Jesus did that for us—but it is the laying down of our will, preferences, comfort, and even physical lives, in order to walk in His Spirit and fulfill His mission.

Mathematics is full of numeric equations, but sometimes, verbal equations are just as helpful. This is one of those times. What we can apply from the story of Abraham and his son Isaac could be summarized in this simple equation:

Faith + Obedience = Sacrifice Honored by God

Faith means that we need to go past our own resources in order to trust God. Obedience means that we will do what God tells us to do, no matter what it might cost us. The result is the kind of "sacrifice" that not only honors God, but that God honors in return.

Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were old and she was childless when God had promised them a son (Genesis 18:10–11) in fulfillment of a prior promise that Abraham would become "the father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5). God eventually gave that miracle son to them. His name was Isaac (Genesis 21:1–5). Then, shockingly, God asked the unthinkable of Abraham.

QUESTION

Have you ever made a personal sacrifice on someone else's behalf? If so, describe the experience and why you did it.

What the Bible Says

God doesn't ask us to face a test without being there with us. Let's look at how Abraham's experience can reinforce that for us.

The Ultimate Sacrifice

Read Genesis 22:1–2.

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We could imagine no more difficult a sacrifice than the one that God asked Abraham to make. Before the birth of his much-loved son Isaac, Abraham had received world-impacting promises from God about his descendants. Now God asked Abraham to offer that son as a burnt offering to Him. Though God's people would later find out that He was incredibly repulsed by child sacrifice (2 Chronicles 28:3; Jeremiah 19:5), Abraham may have known this about Him. Yet we will see that Abraham obeyed without hesitation in spite of the pain and questioning that he must have wrestled with deep inside.

QUESTION

Think of a time in your life when God tested you. What do you think those tests were preparing you for?

The Cost of Obedience

Read Genesis 22:3–9.

Faith and obedience cannot be separated. Yet if the Holy Spirit is to work through us with power, faith-inspired obedience and obedience-centered faith will need to mark our lives. The testing of those things in our spiritual lives is never easy. Just as Jesus was later tempted in the wilderness for forty days before He started His public ministry (Matthew 4:1–11), so Abraham was also being tested. Testing usually precedes blessing because God desires to see what is really in our hearts.

QUESTION

Beyond his love for Isaac, what was it about this act of obedience that would have been so hard for Abraham to understand?

The Lord Will Provide

Read Genesis 22:10–18.

Abraham obeyed the Lord and found God's miraculous provision in two ways: a ram to sacrifice instead of his son (Genesis 22:13) and the reassurance that God would fulfill His word to bless the nations through Abraham (Genesis 22:15–18). Abraham called the place of his testing *Yahweh Yireh* which means "the LORD will provide" (Genesis 22:14). Ultimately, this same Father God would provide His own Son Jesus as the sacrifice for us all.

QUESTION

In what ways have you found the Lord honoring obedient faith in your life? How has He provided for you and blessed you?

Reflect

The Lord tests us to grow us. He wants to reveal what is really in our hearts and refine us, removing the impurities and compromises that keep us spiritually weak. As with Abraham, these tests usually involve two things: obedience to something that the Lord is asking us to do and trust for His provision beyond our resources. This is the pathway to a life of faith. The writer of Hebrews tells us that pleasing God without faith is impossible (Hebrews 11:6). The apostle Peter reminds us that our trials will demonstrate genuine faith (1 Peter 1:7). It is the testing of our faith that brings the fruitfulness in our lives that will bring glory to God. Remember that important word equation:

Faith + Obedience = Sacrifice Honored by God

Listen to God

The goal of *Listen* is not only to gain an understanding of God's Word, but also to pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Choose the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

Would you say that you have totally submitted your life to Jesus and to His will for you?

QUESTION

Are there steps of obedience that the Holy Spirit has been speaking to you about? What might be making those steps difficult?

QUESTION

What role does personal sacrifice play in your spiritual walk right now?

QUESTION

What are the promises that you feel the Lord has personally given you? Do you see the Lord preparing you for their fulfillment?

QUESTION

In what areas of your life are you seeking the Lord to provide for you? Are you seeing evidences of His provision?

QUESTION

Who in your life is going through a test of faith that you could be an encouragement to? What could you specifically do?

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and remember to pray for them during the week.

Before next time, continue to listen with the personal devotions.

Did You Know?

Although hard to pinpoint, it is traditionally thought that Mount Moriah, where Abraham took Isaac to offer him as a sacrifice, is located where the Temple Mount presently stands in Jerusalem. Throughout centuries of Jewish temple worship, that location has been associated with the offering of sacrifices.

The first Jewish temple, built on this site by King Solomon, was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Under the preaching of the late Old Testament prophets Haggai and Zechariah, a smaller second temple was built in approximately the same location. Years later the King Herod referenced in the Christmas story broadened that temple's surrounding plaza and expanded the temple itself. That temple, in turn, was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, as predicted by Jesus (Matthew 24:1–2). It was never rebuilt. Today a portion of the western retaining wall from Herod's expanded temple plaza is one of Judaism's most holy sites.



Personal Devotion

Listening to God is something we need to do every day. Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1

Read Genesis 22:1–18 (if time allows).

Look back over the Group Session and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions.

QUESTION

What do you sense that God is saying to you?

Personal Devotion

Day 2

Read Hebrews 5:7–9.

Jesus' relationship with His Heavenly Father was one of both love and obedience (John 15:10). Hebrews 5:8 tells us that even Jesus learned obedience through His suffering. Just as sacrificing Isaac was a test of obedience for Abraham, Jesus going to the Cross as our sacrifice was a test of His obedience.

QUESTION

List the words that describe Jesus' emotions and passions in this passage of Scripture.

QUESTION

What do you think the writer meant by saying that Jesus learned obedience through suffering (Hebrews 5:8)? What does this have to do with the testing of your own faith?

QUESTION

How does reverence for God (Hebrews 5:7) relate to the concept of obedience in your life?

Personal Devotion

Day 3

Read Hebrews 11:17–19.

Here we have a glimpse into the remarkable faith that Abraham had as he obeyed God in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac. This was a true test, in part because God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac before Isaac had any children. Naturally, Abraham may have questioned how God could fulfill His promise to give Abraham descendants through Isaac.

QUESTION

How did Abraham make sense of this apparent conflict between what God is asking him to do and what God had already promised him (Hebrews 11:19)?

QUESTION

2 Corinthians 5:7 tells us that we need to prioritize belief over what we see. What is Paul teaching us here about the life of faith?

QUESTION

In what ways do you struggle with conflicts between your human reasoning and faith in God?

Personal Devotion

Day 4

Read Romans 12:1–2.

In the first eleven chapters of Romans, Paul lays out the case for the gospel of Jesus Christ. (See Romans 1:16.) Now in Romans 12:1–2, Paul pivots to the practical life applications of that proposition. Interestingly, he uses “sacrifice” language to do so.

QUESTION

How is worship defined in this passage?

QUESTION

What does it mean in Romans 12:1 to sacrifice yourself to God?

QUESTION

Where in your life do you need to allow God to transform your thoughts? (Romans 12:2)

Personal Devotion

Day 5

Read Romans 4:1–25.

Abraham's faith was first evidenced by his trust that God would give him a son in spite of his old age and his wife's dead womb. Paul portrays Abraham's faith as a picture of our faith in the same God who brought His Son (Jesus) from a dead tomb.

QUESTION

How is Abraham's faith described in Romans 4:16–21? What does that tell you about what faith should look like in our lives?

QUESTION

How would you paraphrase Romans 4:25 regarding Jesus' death and resurrection?