

A PROMISE TESTED

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God calls on His people to place a deep faith in Him, a faith that believes God can do the impossible.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Genesis 21–22; Hebrews 11:17-19

+ **SETTING:**

For years, Abram lived believing God's promise that he would have many descendants—that he would become a great nation and through his offspring all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. God's promise carried him through trials and troubles, though at times Abram unwisely tried to help the process along. God even changed Abram's name as a sign of this promise, and Abram became Abraham. Through many long years, Abraham's faith in God did not waver. And then one day, Abraham's faith became sight.

DAY 1

READ:

Genesis 21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 21:1-5

NOTES

One of the most comforting phrases about our God can be found in Genesis 21: “the LORD did what He had promised.” God is a God of faithfulness. There is no promise that God makes that He doesn’t subsequently fulfill. The proclamation about the Lord in Numbers 23:19 is apt, saying that God is not a man—He is not like those who lie or change their minds. If He speaks, He acts, and if He makes a promise, He will fulfill it.

God had promised to give Abraham and his wife Sarah a child even in their old age. The fulfillment of this promise stretched beyond Abraham and Sarah’s human experience. Sarah had never been able to have a child with her husband. But the promise that God made to her was sure because it was made by the Creator of heaven and earth. He has the ability to open and shut the womb at His will.

The most amazing promise that we find in Scripture, however, is God’s promise to save humanity from sin. That promise stretches all the way back to the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15). We see that promise fulfilled in the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God.

The promise of salvation is so secure for those who surrender to Jesus in faith that nothing can separate us from the salvation that He obtained for us by dying on the cross. As Paul says in Romans 8:38-39, that “nothing” includes death, life, angels, rulers, things in the present, things in the future, powers, height, depth, or any other created thing—which means everything except God is included in that “nothing.”

God’s promises are sure and true. He will never break them.

How does God’s faithfulness to His promises give you hope in the midst of brokenness?

DAY 2

READ:

Genesis 22

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 22:1-2

NOTES

The testing of Abraham is one of the most startling passages in all of Scripture. The idea that God would ever direct one of His followers to sacrifice his or her son almost sounds like a cruel joke. But God did command Abraham to make a sacrifice of his son Isaac. Yet God was not instructing Abraham to do something immoral, nor was He changing His mind about what sin is. (Remember: God doesn't change His mind.) God was testing Abraham's resolve in His goodness, meaning that He was seeking to expose Abraham's willingness to obey Him even if it meant losing his most valued gift.

Abraham would choose to obey God's command, believing the outcome would be different than the death of his promised son. Abraham believed God to be good and true to His word, so he believed that Isaac would grow up to have a family of his own. Though God's command required a father to put his son to death, Abraham's actions show that his allegiance and obedience belonged to the Lord and to the Lord alone. Truly, God was his God.

Today, and everyday, God isn't asking His followers to put their children on an altar to be sacrificed, but God does want our complete allegiance and obedience. One of the hardest things for people to recognize is that the more we have in this world, the more our possessions cause us to desire this world over the next. Almost like a gravitational pull, the more we have, the more we are weighed down by our desire for this world. That's not to say that it's bad to have possessions, but we, like Abraham, must be willing to give up even our most valued possessions for the gospel of Christ.

What do you have that you might find difficult to give up, even for Christ? What can you do to remind yourself that whatever that thing is, it belongs to the Lord?

DAY 3

READ:

Genesis 22:1-10

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 22:3-10

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The Bible reveals that there is anarchy somewhere, real thoroughgoing anarchy in the heart of men against God; therefore the need is strong that something should come into us from the outside to readjust us, to reconcile us, to turn us round, to put us right with God. The doctrine of the atonement is the explanation of how God does that."¹

—Oswald Chambers (1874-1917)

The level of faithful obedience Abraham displayed in his willingness to offer his only son as a sacrifice to the Lord can only be had through full confidence in God's promises. He believed that the Lord would raise Isaac up from the dead if necessary (Heb. 11:19). The language of Abraham reaching out to take the knife to slaughter his son is not an exaggeration. But he stretched forth his hand and gripped the handle in faith. He raised the knife in faith. And he would have brought the knife down upon his son in faith. God's promise to Abraham was how Abraham got his son Isaac in the first place, and that in spite of his and Sarah's old age. This same promise was the basis of Abraham's hope that this sacrifice would not end in the death of his son.

We can trust God's promise of salvation no matter what life might throw at us. Even in our worst sin, God's promise of salvation remains true for those who have trusted in Him. The promise of salvation, which includes the hope of our resurrected life with God for eternity, is the promise that gives us the freedom to be completely obedient to God even when it might mean great loss.

For most of us, we might not risk the loss of our lives, but we could still lose a great deal by being obedient to the Lord. Obedience could mean losing some of our closest relationships, perhaps even with family. It might mean giving time and finances to the point that it hurts. Perhaps one day it really could mean risking our lives for the gospel of Jesus. Whatever it might be, the promise of salvation—a relationship with God forever on a restored earth—is a promise that far outweighs anything we might risk losing in this world, even our lives.

How does God promise of salvation give you confidence in your obedience to the Lord, even in the face of potential loss?

DAY 4

READ:

Genesis 22:11-19

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 22:11-14

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #58: CHRIST AS SACRIFICE

There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently, "once and for all," take away sins.

"Do not lay a hand on the boy!" Those words must have filled Abraham with an amazing sense of relief. Imagine the rising level of apprehension within Abraham as he traveled for three days. Then ponder the tension tightening as he tied his son down to the altar and reached for the knife. Surely Abraham thought, "Is God really going to make me do this?" But though the scene gets more and more tense, Abraham's faith in God's promise never wavered.

From the very beginning of the journey, Abraham believed that God would provide something else for the sacrifice. He believed that even if he did carry out the Lord's command, the Lord would raise his son from the dead. Even though we get close, we never have to read of the miracle of resurrection in this story. Instead, as Abraham was about carry out the Lord's command, he was stopped by an angel. And when he looked up, he saw a ram caught in a bush. Just as he had believed, God provided another sacrifice.

This story is a great picture of what God the Father did in sending His Son. One of the main differences, however, is that there was no substitute for Jesus. In fact, He was our substitute. He was sacrificed on the cross on our behalf in order to reconcile us to God. We deserved the wrath of God, but instead, Jesus placed Himself on the cross because God loved us and He wanted us. We could never pay the penalty of our sin; we could never satisfy our debt. But God loved us so much that He was willing to pay the penalty in our place, so the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

What are some ways you regularly remind yourself about Jesus' sacrifice for sinners like you?

DAY 5

READ:

John 18–19

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 18:1-11

NOTES

The story of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane is a story that for many conjures up all sorts of sad emotions. In Gethsemane, we are faced with the reality that even though Jesus desired to save us, He didn't desire to suffer and die on the cross for its own sake. Crucifixion was the absolute worst form of torture during Jesus' day. The Romans had perfected it through much practice. It was also humiliating with the person being crucified and placed right outside the city gate, stripped naked, for all to see.

John's Gospel doesn't record the part of Jesus' prayer to God in the garden about "the cup." All of the other Gospels record Jesus' praying to the Father multiple times to let the cup of divine wrath pass from Him. Jesus, the Son of God, existed in perfect, unchangeable, and infinite bliss as a Person of the Trinity, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit—and always would. According to His human nature, however, Jesus, the Son, while on the cross experienced the curse of sin and separation from God that all humanity deserves.

Jesus' question in John 18:4—"Who is it that you're seeking?"—had an obvious answer. Jesus knew it was Himself whom Judas, the temple guards, and the Roman soldiers came to take. One of the reasons He asked them this question was to keep His disciples out of harm's way. With this question, Jesus essentially stepped in front of His disciples and said, "I am here to die for them."

If it were not for Jesus' sacrifice, no one would ever conquer sin and enter God's presence. However, because Jesus experienced the wrath of God in our place, we don't have to worry about divine wrath being poured out on us. By grace through faith we are saved (Eph. 2:8).

How does Jesus' willingness to go to the cross on our behalf affect the way you see sin in your life?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"In the ram that hung in the tree and had become the sacrifice in the place of Abraham's son, there might be depicted the day of him who was to hang upon the wood like a ram and was to taste death for the sake of the whole world."²

-Ephrem the Syrian
(c. 306-373)

POINT 1: God provides the son of promise (Gen. 21:1-5).

Through many long years of God's _____ ,
and in spite of some moments and choices of
_____ on Abraham and Sarah's part,
the Lord fulfilled His promise, and Isaac was born.
_____ is impossible with God.



How should this biblical account affect our hope in God's promises?

The name Isaac means "he laughs." Abraham and Sarah previously laughed in _____ at God's promise, but later they laughed with _____ at the birth of their son in their old age.

POINT 2: God demands the sacrifice of the son of promise (Gen. 22:1-10).

God tested Abraham not to _____ him or to
_____ what would happen but to " _____ "
Abraham's resolute faith in real time and space.



What are some truths about God's tests that we should know?

Abraham was willing to make the sacrifice of his son because he _____ God's purposes were unstoppable and His promises certain.



How have you seen faith in God lead to extraordinary acts of obedience?

POINT 3: God provides a substitute for the son of promise (Gen. 22:11-14).

Abraham's willingness to give up his son was a _____ of what God Himself would do one day in the sacrifice of His _____ .

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How should we respond to the grace of God in providing His Son as a sacrifice in our place for our sins?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have experienced God's resurrection power in Christ Jesus, we share the gospel with everyone, trusting that God can give new life to all who are spiritually dead.

- **HEAD:** How does Jesus as our substitute affect the way we see the need for repentance?
- **HEART:** How does Jesus as our substitute push us to seek accountability for our sin?
- **HANDS:** How might you share the gospel with someone who feels he or she can never be good enough for God?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Real satisfaction comes not in understanding God's motives, but in understanding his character, in trusting in his promises, and in leaning on him and resting in him as the Sovereign who knows what he is doing and does all things well."³

-Joni Eareckson Tada