

“Abraham: The Final Test” // Hebrews 11:17–19 // *Hebrews 11: Broken People and Famous Faith #6*¹

Hebrews 11:17–19... There’s an old story I like to tell that I want to put into your mind to guide us as we think about this final chapter in Abraham’s life.

It’s the story of the first time I went rappelling off of Hanging Rock out in Danbury, NC. As teenagers, my friends and I had taken up rock-climbing as a kind of hobby, and one day one of them suggested that instead of climbing up the rock face, we should rappel down it. He claimed he’d done it many times before. As a 16 year old, I was pretty dumb, so I believed him.

There were five of us out on the mountain that day, but somehow I got volunteered to go first. (The fact that my “expert” friend didn’t volunteer to go first should have been the first sign that something was amiss.) But, certain types of wisdom come only with age, and so we tied my belay rope around a tree, and I stood with my back toward this 75-foot drop, and my friend told me just to “lean back.” I remember thinking, “Lean back?” It just felt wrong. And then, in a *flash*, my ability to ascertain a person’s trustworthiness matured more in the space of a few seconds than it had the entire 16 years of my life up until this point. I had put my life into the hands of a friend who consistently wrote checks with his mouth that his brain couldn’t cash. So, I became instantly wiser, but still, my manhood was on the line; because, when you’re 16, your manhood is always on the line. I

¹ Works consulted: Michael Kruger, *Hebrews for You* (The Good Book Company); John Owen, *Hebrews* (Crossway Classics); Tim Keller, “[Abraham and the Test of Faith](#)”, October 30, 1994, Redeemer Presbyterian; Redeemer Presbyterian; Tim Keller, “[Real Faith and the Only Son](#),” June 17, 2001,

knew this was a defining moment in the life of J.D. Greear. Men are made in these moments. So are martyrs, of course, but I was more focused on the ‘men’ part.

I stood there for a few seconds trying to work up my courage: I prayed to receive Jesus into my heart again (that’s not a joke). And I did this (crossed myself) just in case those guys were right. And then, I held my breath, closed my eyes, and leaned back.

I’m sure it wasn’t any longer than a nanosecond, but it felt like an eternity as I drifted backwards into open air, suspended between heaven and hell, waiting to see if the rope would catch. And when it did, there I stood, perpendicular to the rock face and parallel to the ground, held above a 75 foot death-drop by a rope secured to a flimsy tree, all engineered by a friend who couldn’t hold down a job. In fact, when the rope caught, he seemed pleasantly surprised, and he said, “OK, now you gotta jump backwards.” So, once again, calling forth every ounce of courage I could muster, I leapt from the rock with all my might, and I sprung... maybe 2 inches. Another jump—6 inches. Another—4 feet. Then 10 feet. A few jumps later, I was standing on *terra firma*, at which point I’m pretty sure I burst into the gift of tongues.

I started to unhook from the rope, and I looked back up to the top and saw my best friend was next up. I watched as he tied himself into the belay system. Now, a few important details about this guy: he was better looking than I was, more athletic, more popular with the ladies; I hated this kid, but he was my “best friend.” From 75 feet below I could hear him being given the instructions, but he was even more scared of heights than I was, and so when it came time to lean

Redeemer Presbyterian; Joby Martin, “[Mountains Week 1: Abraham and Isaac](#)”, March 10, 2019, The Church of Eleven22; Craig Groeschel, “[Exponential Week 1: Seed of Faith](#)”, March 12, 2018, Life Church; Sidney Griedanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis*. And others as noted throughout.

back, he didn't budge. That is, unless you count shaking in terror. (I could see him going like this (shaking)). Well, after a couple of LONG minutes, he took one of his legs and searched down below for a foothold. He found one, and then another and then another. He slowly worked his way down the rock face, one foothold at a time.

Of course, that's not rappelling. That's rock-climbing using a rappelling rope as your safety net.

Now, about 20 feet down the rock, the rock face went from (\) angle to (/) angle, meaning that there was no way for him to get a foothold; to get over this spot he'd have to let go of the rock altogether and fully commit to the rope. But he wasn't ready to do that. So, I watched him hesitate. I watched him try to find a foothold. And eventually, I watched as he gave up and climbed back up to the top and walked the trail back down to the base.

My friend had gotten to a place on the rock that could only be passed by those fully leaning their weight on the rope. In the Christian life, there are places of obedience you will never get over until you have fully trusted yourself to God; there are sacrifices you will never make; fields of obedience you'll never walk in, because you don't fully trust him yet and haven't fully, hands off, committed yourself to him yet. And so, God puts you through multiple tests--multiple shifts of angle in the rock face, so to speak--to reveal whether you have that kind of faith and, if not, to develop it in you if you're ready.

² Though, there is a significant amount of of debate about Isaac's exact age during this incident. Jewish tradition has Isaac as a 37-year-old—which assumes that the events of Genesis 22 are concurrent with Sarah's death in Genesis 23:1. Josephus, a Jewish historian, put Isaac at 25 years old. Other scholars, pointing to the language of Isaac as "a boy," say he must have

That's what is going to happen to Abraham. During his life, God put Abraham through 3 tests, each one more difficult than the one before:

- **Test 1** we looked at a couple of weeks ago: It was to "leave everything familiar, Abram, all your creature comforts, everything you depend on for security, and follow me to an undisclosed location. I'm not even going to tell you where it is: just close your eyes and take my hand."
- **Test 2**, which Bryan walked us through last week, was for Abram AND Sarah. God told them in their old age, I'm going to bless you with a child, a child that will spawn a great nation with offspring as numerous as the sand in the seashore. I know you're in your 90's, Abram, but I want you to trust me that I can and will do this.

Today is test #3, the hardest test of them all: **Hebrews 11:17** By faith Abraham, when he was tested (there's our keyword), offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises (IOW, the one who had left everything for God, and trusted God for this miracle baby) **was in the act of offering up** (that very) **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.

Let's jump back to Genesis 22 to take a look at this story the writer of Hebrews refers to. (Again, Genesis 22, if you want to turn there).

Abraham had Isaac when he was 99 years old, and Isaac at this point is probably about 15.² **They had called his name "Isaac,"**—which meant "**son of laughter**"—because the whole situation was just

been younger. But since he carries on his back all of the wood for the sacrifice, he could not have been a young child. The text isn't precise about his age, but given all of these details, it seems likely to imagine Isaac as at least high-school-aged at the time—old enough to be a strong young man, but young enough to still be referred to as a child.

<https://www.gotquestions.org/how-old-was-Isaac.html>.

absurd: Abraham and Sarah are over 100 years old and they have a new kid in diapers. I mean, imagine them going to the new parent orientation: everyone there is in their 20's and newly married with their whole lives ahead of them, and here they come in in their wheelchairs.

(Ge 22:1) After these things God **tested** Abraham (there's our word again) and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I."

BTW, "here am I" there is **not just Hebrew for "hello."** "Here I am" was the response of a servant to a Master. It's Abraham saying, "Here I am, Lord, I'm ready to obey." Which, when you think about it, is pretty remarkable. Abraham is over 100, and he's already accomplished some pretty impressive feats of faith. You almost think he'd be ready to say, "Look, I've done my part. Left my homeland and my security at 75; had a miracle baby at 99; I've done my part." But, as Pastor Bryan said last week: Faith is not something you show one time and then ride out for the rest of your life. Every chapter of your life brings new tests of faith. And that applies especially to those of you in your retirement years.

2 (So God) **He said, "Take your son,** (BTW, scholars tell us that the language here in this story **slows down dramatically**. You see, up until this point, the story of Abraham has progressed at a **pretty fast clip**: "**And this happened; then this; then that.**" **But** here in chapter 22, the pace just slams to a crawl. (It's like when you're running toward the ocean with your kids and you hit the water and suddenly every step just slows down rapidly. That's what happens to the pace in this story). You should read it like this, "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."**

- This **'son'** represented **everything** to Abraham. He was the fulfillment of God's promise; the focal point of all Abraham's hopes for the future. Everything Abraham wanted in life;

everything he and Sarah had hoped for the future; the one single thing that made Abraham's life a success was this child.

- And now God says, "**Offer him up to me** as a burnt offering!"
- Now, I **know you ask the question, "Well, how could God ask something like this?"** and I'll deal with that in a moment... but for now, just see this for what it was. Let Isaac represent the one thing that you **treasure and trust** most in life. That **one thing that makes life worth living** to you.
 - If you are young, maybe it's a dream that you have--a dream of getting married, having a career.
 - If you're older, maybe it's something you already have--your family; your retirement savings; some milestone you've reached in your career; or, maybe it's your dreams for your kids.
- Whatever it is, **something happens** and you are asked by God to give that up.
- That **request might come in the form of an act of obedience**: God says, "Hey, walk away from this to do this."
- Or, it might come through some involuntary act of suffering God puts you through: God takes something out of your life that you love and depend on and you don't know why.

The word **"son"** is used **10 times** in these verses: Take your son, Abraham, your only son. The son that you love. God is asking Abraham about the most important thing in the world to him and saying, "Do you trust me with THIS?" It's a heavy question. In fact, from this point on, **no one really talks**—there is only silence. The gravity of this test is almost unbearable.

Tim Keller says that the **hardest tests of faith** are those where God seems to take you "off of the path of blessing and put you on the road to disaster." Where what God asks of you seems to go opposite the path of blessing, opposite of where you always thought you were headed in life: For example:

- You are in a situation where you know that to tell the truth is going to lead to the loss of money or even your job.
- Or, you are called to do volunteer work in the church even though your own children are not following God
- Or, you are Christian parent with a teenage son who's dying of cancer being called to continue obeying and serving God, trusting God as a powerful, loving and wise God in the midst of all though it doesn't feel like it.
- Or, refraining from sex outside of marriage feels like you are depriving yourself of something that could really provide comfort and companionship for you in a challenging season in life; and, everyone around you does it and you seem like a total oddball not to
- Or, to resist the homosexual desires in your heart seems like it will only lead to unhappiness and loneliness in life, and you're being called to trust God that his way is better even though it doesn't feel like it.
- Or, saying yes to going onto the mission field feels like you're going backwards in life--away from security and retirement and toward instability and it just makes no sense. Everyone thinks you're crazy for even considering it.
- Or, God is calling you to go overseas but to do so would mean leaving behind grandkids who you think need you; or maybe it's the other way... to go you're going to have to leave parents and they're objecting.

And you're like, "God, I hear you calling, but this doesn't feel like the right thing. This is leading to unhappiness and destitution, not blessing." Dr. Keller says:

You're not really in a test until your wisdom seems to contradict God's wisdom. You have not been tested until it looks like to obey God will lead to a kind of death and will require some resurrection. When God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham saw only death, but he trusted that somehow God would resurrect him. Some avoid tests by refusing to consider the possibility that a loving God would want anything other than our immediate comfort. *But if you have a God who only fulfills your short-term desires and never contradicts you, you don't really have a God; you are your own God.*

In other words, if obedience has never been hard for you, really hard, I doubt whether you are really, actually following God. In the Christian life there will be tests where what God asks you to do is totally the opposite of everything you think should happen, that you always assumed would happen.

3 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. **4** On the **third** day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. **(The third day!** Y'all. This journey took 3 days! I'm pretty sure in 3 days I would have talked myself out of this. Wouldn't you? Real faith, real trust, isn't shown by your exuberance at the beginning; it's shown by your follow through in the end.

So, let me just ask real quick: Where have you started off obeying God in something, only to fall back from it on day 2 or 3?

- Maybe it was a command God gave you to break off a relationship;

- to stop some bad habit, or start some new one. To read the Bible each day. To pray nightly with your spouse. To take out your grandkid once a week and spend time with them.
- Maybe it was a financial sacrifice--to tithe, or to go beyond the tithe. And you started off so well, but days 2 and 3 came and you just stopped.
- Again: you **don't show your faith** by your enthusiasm on day 1; you show it by your commitment on days 2&3.)

5 Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and **worship** (interesting word he chose there, right? What he's doing is an act of worship. And then, watch this, after we do that) **and we will come again to you.**"

- **Did you catch that?** "**WE** will come again to you." Abraham was convinced that somehow they were BOTH coming back.
- **And Abraham didn't know how God was going to do that.** In fact, it seems like Abraham assumed God would just resurrect Isaac after he'd killed him. But he said, **God has a promise to fulfill**, and I don't know how'll do it, I just know that he will. Abraham, by this point, was used to following God to places he didn't know with no idea how he was going to get there. "*Just close your eyes and take my hand.*"

6 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. **7** And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "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?" **8** Abraham said, "**God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.**"

Honestly, that might be the greatest human statement of faith in the whole Bible: *God will provide for himself a lamb*. And now we see what Abraham has been doing for those 3 days in that dark silence. He's been reminding himself of the **promises of God**, rehearsing them

again and again in his mind. He'd been thinking about God's character.

- He'd probably **replayed that encounter in Genesis 15** I told you about where God took responsibility for both sides of the covenant. He rehearsed that again and again. God, you said..., and you promised..., and I believed.
- **This is important: What drove Abraham up the mountain** was not the strength of his character; it wasn't even some kind of gold star of faith he was trying to earn. What drove Abraham up that mountain were 3 words; the only 3 words that will sustain you during any difficult season of obedience→ "**GOD. IS. FAITHFUL.**" Always. Always. Always.

9 (And) 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.

- By the way, **kudos to Isaac** here. **If Isaac were strong enough to carry the wood**, he surely would have been strong enough to evade a frail old man.
- But here he is **crawling up on the altar**, trusting God and his daddy.
- The **only way Isaac would have done this was that he had inherited his daddy's trust in God**. He'd heard his dad talk about the faithfulness of God all the time and **saw his dad live** it out daily in front of him. And somewhere along the way, Abraham's **trust in God had taken root** in Isaac's heart, and now he obediently trusts God and his dad and climbs up on the altar.

10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.

- Now, let me take a moment to address the question many of you asked at the beginning: "**How could God command something like this?**"

- Well, Abraham recognized this wasn't some kind of arbitrary murder command. If so, Abraham could just have *stabbed Isaac* in the tent. **No, something much deeper** was going on.
- **You see, the offering of the firstborn in the Old Testament symbolized the debt every man owed to God.** Throughout the Old Testament, God lays claim to each Israelite's firstborn because it represented their very lives.
 - **At the Passover**, God killed the firstborn of every household that did not have the blood of a firstborn lamb on the doorpost.
 - In the **Hebrew sacrificial** system, God required the **first-born of the cattle or sheep** to be sacrificed to him, as well as the **first fruits** of the grain.
 - **The firstborn sons**, he said in **Numbers 8:17**, also belonged to him, and could only be redeemed back to the parents by means of a sacrifice.³
 - **In other words, in Jewish culture, the life of the first-born was forfeit** unless some sort of redeeming sacrifice was made.
 - **God was showing that there is a debt that every person, every family owes to him, and it goes to the depth of our very lives.**⁴

That's why Abraham understood what God was asking of him. Tim Keller says, "If Abraham had thought God had told him, 'Kill Sarah, and then I know you love me,' he would have never done that—he would have concluded that he was hallucinating because God would not have commanded senseless murder like that. And God would not have said it because it would have been murder. But when God said, 'offer Isaac,' Abraham knew exactly what that meant. The firstborn represented his very life and the debt every man owes to God."

³ "For all the firstborn among the people of Israel are mine, both of man and of beast," Numbers 8:17. Cf. Exodus 22:29; Numbers 3:46.

This was a one-time demonstration, something God never asks again, and something he would never ask today. (I hope that helps a little, but *let's get back to the story*: **Here's Abraham, with the knife now suspended in the air**, and **11** ~~But~~ the angel of the Lord called to him **from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!"** And he said, "Here am I." (Speak, Lord, your servant is listening).

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."

Abraham passed the test. He showed that there was nothing he would not entrust to God; and no place he would not go with God.

13 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. **14** So Abraham called the name of that place (Jehovah Jireh) "*The Lord will provide*"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

In Hebrew literature, what you name a place is extremely significant, because it encapsulates the significance of what happened in that place. **So, isn't it interesting** that they call this place, "*The Lord provides*," and not "*How Abraham obeyed?*" **You see, something more important than Abraham's impressive obedience is demonstrated here**, and it's God's commitment to his people. And *God's commitment to us is more important than our commitment to him, and his commitment to us becomes the basis of our commitment to him.*

⁴ Keller, "Real Faith and the Only Son."

You see, centuries later, another Son, another ‘one and only Son, whom the Father loved,’ would walk up a mountain. In fact, it was that very same mountain. **Scholars tell us that Mount Moriah where this occurred was** precisely where **Calvary, the place Jesus died on the cross, would have been.** And just like Isaac, **that Son would willingly** crawl up on the wood in obedience to the Father’s command. **This time, however, the knife would** not be stopped in mid-air; it would slash straight through the heart of Jesus.

In other words, **on the very mountain** where Jesus would die, a **drama was enacted** hundreds of years before he was born. **Abraham played the part of God the Father,** and Isaac played the part of Jesus, God’s Son, but **only up until the moment** that God stopped the sacrifice and pointed to the ram caught in the thicket. At that point, the story diverges, because Jesus would actually die. **By the way,** the ram caught in the thorn bushes was **caught by his horns,** which means his body would have been unblemished.

Jesus was the unblemished lamb that the angel was pointing to who would take Isaac’s place. And Jesus, the true Lamb of God, would **willingly stay on the altar** as the Father plunged the knife of justice into his chest for our sins. And **because of that WE could know** (just as God said to Abraham) that the Father truly loves us since he “has not withheld HIS son, his only son,” from us.

You see, this story is not first and foremost about Abraham’s commitment to God; it’s about **God’s commitment** to Abraham. That’s **WHY** the mountain was commemorated as, “The Lord will provide,” not “How Abraham obeyed.”

When it is all said and done, and you look backwards over your life, the thing that will stand out is not your great sacrifices for God, but his **steadfast faithfulness to you.** Pictured first and foremost in Jesus.

So, let me clarify 3 things, tell you a story, and then I’ll be done: Here’s the 3 things I want to clarify: **1. The nature of God’s tests. 2. Why we need them;** And, **3. How to pass them.**

1. The nature of God’s tests

As I said, **throughout your whole life, as you walk with God,** God will at times take away something that you think you need to see if you really trust him.

- It might happen through a command that he gives to you--like Abraham, he asks you to walk away from something you think you need for life and happiness.
- Or, it might happen through some involuntary suffering he puts you through. Some unanswered prayer. You’re convinced you need something and for whatever reason God is not giving it: a spouse. A job. A baby. Healing of some kind.
- And in that moment of weakness, when whatever earthly thing you depended on or thought you needed is withheld from you, you discover firsthand that God is better and more reliable than whatever it was that you thought you needed.
- **Can I use a silly example?** When I was a kid, I was deeply impacted by that final scene **in Star Wars I,** or I guess technically Star Wars IV; the first one that came out--where Luke is trying to guide his X-Wing fighter down that crevice in the Death Star to that single exhaust shaft where he can fire his torpedo and blow up the Death Star. As Luke is nearing the spot where to fire his torpedo, he turns on his targeting software--even with the help of the software it’s a nearly impossible shot and the pilot just in front of Luke has just missed. But now Luke’s got his chance. But as he gets close to the moment of taking his shot, he hears a voice telling him to put away his targeting mechanism and just use “the Force.” Luke does it and the power of the Force guides the torpedo right into the shaft and boom, the Death Star turns into galactic dust.

- Now, let's be clear: Star Wars is not a Christian movie; at best, it's neo-Buddhist, so I don't regularly try to draw spiritual inspiration from it. But, there's a picture in that that I love. Maybe God has taken out something you thought you needed--a friend; your health; a support at work; a savings account. Something. And now he's about to show you the meaning of "My strength is made perfect in weakness."
- Listen, not everything in life that seems bad actually is bad. Sometimes God takes out good things from your life so you don't turn them into idols and start to depend on them in place of God.
- Sometimes God takes out even good things so that in our weakness we learn to depend on him.

And that all leads me to #2...

2. Why we need God's tests

Put simply: We turn even God's best gifts into idols. John Calvin said that the human heart is an idol factory, turning even the best of God's gifts into idols.

Idols are not usually in-and-of-themselves bad things; they are usually good things we turn into God-things that then become bad things *to us*.

Isaac is probably the best biblical example of that. Right? I mean, if there were ever a child that was a gift from God, Isaac was it, right? He was God's miraculous means by which God would fulfill his promises to Abraham. I mean, if there had ever been *anything* you could consider a gift of God, Isaac would have been that, right?

But it's possible, you see, to turn even the best gifts into an idol, and that's what Abraham had done with Isaac. **Sin**, you see, is like a judo expert; it takes your forward momentum and uses it against you. Sin

takes the best things God has put in your life and tries to turn them into liabilities.

Listen to this--**this is counterintuitive, but true:** *The greatest potential enemy of God's work in your life is not your sins, or your bad habits; it's the good things God has put into your life.* Your marriage. Your family. Your job. The good gifts from God that you start to depend on in place of God, like Isaac.

Isaac was Abraham's son, his "ONLY" son. The "ONLY" thing he lived for anymore. The greatest threat to God's work in your life, Tim Keller says, are your "onlies."

- If only I was married, everything would be great.
- If only my career/achievements were better, then my life would have real significance.
- If only I had a boyfriend.
- If only I had kids.
- If only I could make another 50,000 next year.

What is that "only" for you?

- If you want to know **what your Isaac is**, ask what you obsess about; ask what you are most driven to obtain? What do you most worry about losing? What have you worked hardest for in life?
 - For some of you, you've worked night and day, harder than everyone else around you, to become a success--and there's nothing wrong with that, but you do it because you think success gives you value and significance, just like Abraham thought a son would give him those things.
 - Your Isaac is anything which the thought of losing that thing fills you with absolute despair. What is that for you?
- **For Abraham, it was his son, his ONLY son**--so God had to deal with that. God's tests decenter things that have displaced God in our hearts.

So, again, what could it be in your life?

- Maybe it's your comfortable life in the Triangle.
- It could be marriage. Or a girlfriend
- Or your family
- Or getting pregnant
- Maybe your "only" is getting into a particular school. "Oh," you think, "if I could just get into this school, my life would have meaning and I'd have value."
- Maybe it's getting to some level of your career, getting some amount in the bank
- **For me, at times, it's been the success of this church.** This church is, by some measures, successful. And we recognize that as the blessing of God. But Veronica and I ask ourselves all the time--is this our Isaac? Is this our 'only'--our son, our only son, the son that we love, the son we couldn't imagine being without? (Just to be clear, I don't think so: I'm not planning to offer you up on the altar, so relax. But every year, I've told you, as part of our January fast, we lay our involvement in this church on the altar and say, "God, do YOU want us here?" "Do you want us to lay this down?" And thus far, every year he's said no, he doesn't want us to leave--but see, I don't want this good blessing to become my Isaac. That's not good for you or us! So every year I want to put it on the altar and tell him, "God, I love this church, but you, YOU are my ONLY only. You, and you alone, are my life and security and significance and hope." Y'all, those words are easy to say, but so hard to live out.

When God asks you to obey with your ONLY, and to walk into some chapter that feels like death--will you trust him?

3. How to Pass God's Tests

Abraham shows us that we gain the confidence to pass these tests from **3 2 places**:

- A. **Knowledge of God's character:** Let's go back to our verses in Hebrews now: **Hebrews 11:19** (Abraham) considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. ~~Abraham knew who God was, and he knew what God was capable of. Abraham had experienced God's ability to bring life to his sexually dead body and give him a miraculous son in his old age, and he'd seen God provide for him again and again and again. Abraham said, "Surely God will provide for me here. "The Lord has promised good to me; his word my hope secures; he will my shield and portion be, as long as life endures." And so Abraham made up his mind--wherever he is, that's where I want to be. Because wherever he is, no matter how bad or dead it seems in this place, he's the God of resurrection, and that's his declared intention for me. And if I'm NOT near him, then no matter how good this place seems, it's ultimately only death and destruction, a city without foundations.~~

~~Faith's conviction is that God is good and seeking him is worth the effort. It starts with knowing who God is and how he feels about you. Remember Martin Luther's statement: Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it.~~

~~Faith is being certain that God's favor is extended toward you and that that is what he is pursuing in your life. Faith is "...a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it."~~

The second place we get confidence to lean our weight on God...

B. Remembrance of God's Past Faithfulness: Again, this was Abraham's 3rd test. He'd seen God be faithful again and again and again, and he knew God wouldn't let him down now. When they came to take away Polycarp, one of the early church's first martyrs, he was 86 years old. They gave him a chance to renounce Christ. His reply, 86 years and he's never once let me down, why turn my back on him now? That's what Abraham said. Abraham could joyfully sing that song we love here at Summit, *"All my life you have been faithful; all my life you have been so, so good."*

At TSC we often say, ***"God's past faithfulness in our lives is his pledge of future faithfulness toward us."***

I'd encourage you to take some time to review God's faithfulness in your life from time to time. Recently, I met with a guy in our church named Todd Wilson who does this thing called "Life Mapping," where you trace out what God has done in your life as a way of helping clarify things he might be calling you to in the future. As part of the exercise I had to map out the history of my life, and as I did it I was overwhelmed, again, at the goodness God has woven into my life--and rarely through my looking or asking for it. I'm usually not smart enough or even aware enough to know what I need. God's goodness came through my parents. I was reminded how God put the right guides into my life at just the right times. How Veronica came into my life. How different friends and counselors and words of warning have come into my life without me even knowing that I needed to hear them, again, at just the right moments. Summit team members I wasn't smart enough to know that we needed that just, honestly, kind of

showed up, at just the right time, sent here by God to provide some insight or guidance or skill we needed.

"All my life you have been faithful; all my life you have been so, so good." God's past faithfulness is his guarantee of future faithfulness.

*So, **How Do We Pass God's Tests?** First, we have, like Abraham, A. Knowledge of God's character. 2nd, have B. Remembrance of God's faithfulness. Lastly, we...*

C. Look to the Lamb

I think of those last, final, defiant faith statements Abraham made:

- "Don't worry, Isaac, God will provide for himself a lamb."
- And then Abraham said to his servants, *"Don't worry. We will (both) come back again."*

Abraham was convinced a resurrection was coming--he didn't know how, but he knew that somehow A LAMB would be involved in that restoration. "God will provide for himself a lamb."

VAMP

And here we are now, and much more clearly now we see who exactly that Lamb was and how he would provide that resurrection for us. **It's not just that God would provide FOR himself a lamb, but that God would provide himself AS the lamb for us.**

- **Jesus, the Lamb of God, unblemished**, who crawled up onto that altar voluntarily and took into himself the knife of God's wrath so we could live.
- Jesus, who actually was killed and then resurrected from the dead so that I could be brought to new life and experience the power of that new life in all the dead parts of my life.
- And now I know that he loves me, because he did not spare his son, his only son, the son whom he loves, so that I could be saved.
- And now I know that my God will supply all my needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus, because he that did not spare his only Son, will he not also with me freely give him all things?
- And I know, **Ps 27:10**, that *Though my father and my mother have forsaken me, the Lord will take me in.*
- And **Isa 49:15**, *"Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? (Yet) Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; the walls (of your life) I keep continually before me.*
- And **Jer 31:20**, he says to me: *(Aren't you) my dear son? (Aren't you) my darling child? I will remember you always. My heart yearns for you; I will surely have mercy on you, declares the Lord.*
- For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that against which I have committed to him against that day.

Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it.

One of our leaders just got back from a mission trip, and they told me this story. One of our indigenous church planters in this area had

previously been a medical doctor. As a doctor, his life was relatively easy, at least financially speaking. But he sensed God calling him to ministry, and he said yes. He thought he had enough saved up to make sure he could make the transition, then he took the plunge.

But just after he resigned from his practice, his son was diagnosed with leukemia. But he wasn't phased. He was following God, and God would take care of him. And, he'd even done the smart thing and financially prepared for some emergency like this by saving up. He'd be okay, and before long, he thought, the funds from the church plant would kick in, and his son wouldn't see any change in his care.

The trouble was, the church kept hitting roadblocks. It took much longer to launch than he had anticipated. And he watched as his savings dropped, and dropped, and dropped ... and one day, it bottomed out at zero.

He was crushed. He cried out to God. He even confessed being bitter at God: "God, you were supposed to take care of me! I said yes to follow you, you were supposed to take care of everything. You haven't done your part!"

But then, during their next medical visit, the doctors called him in, awkwardly. They weren't sure what was going on. These doctors were friends of his. His son's leukemia was completely gone. The doctors had checked and rechecked the results, and it was gone.

This church planter told us, "It was only afterwards that I felt the Spirit of God speaking to me. He said, 'Juan, I had to get you to zero because only then would you learn to trust me.'" And now he says, "I

live by faith.” And through that faith, by the way, he has already planted 4 churches, one right in the middle of the biggest drug cartel area in the region. And our team got to be there on the ground and see it.

Now, a few things: 1. That’s why you should go on mission trips because you get to see firsthand stories like that one. 2. I’m not saying that every time if you wait long enough there’s a healing from leukemia just around the corner. That’s not always what happens. Sometimes God’s goodness is in letting us struggle and depend on him and him taking us home. So I’m not saying healing always comes. What I’m saying is that *those who wait upon the Lord will always find him faithful*. That faithfulness takes different forms, but it’s unfailing. Summit: the faith you showed at the beginning of your Christian life, to surrender your life and follow him, won’t be enough to propel you to the end. You’re gonna have to trust God again & again & again.

BOW HEADS

Where is he asking you to trust him now? What act of obedience is he calling you to?

Maybe just to trust him in general and surrender your life to him? Have you ever done that? You can pray right now!