

The Testing of Your Faith

Hebrews 11:17-19

Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

Take your Bibles and turn to **Hebrews 11:17**. I want to talk to you today about the testing of your faith. Someone once said, "A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted." For example, how would you like to get on an air plane that had never been tested? How would you like to have a surgeon operate on you that has never been tested? God wants you to have a faith that can be trusted. As you go through life God will direct you this way and then that way and He will tell you to make this decision and not that decision. When those times come you want to have a faith in God that will not waver, quit, and turn away.

Now look at **Hebrews 11:17-19**. "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, (18) even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' (19) Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."

God is going to give you or allow you to go through trials and difficulties in order to test your faith. Your faith is going to be tested all through your life. **1 Peter 1:6-7** says, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. (7) These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." When God leads you into a time of testing it is not to harm you or hurt you or simply to make your life miserable. It is to refine you and strengthen you. He allows you to go through all kinds of trails to prove to *yourself* that your faith is genuine resulting in praise, glory, and honor when Christ comes back.

Hebrews 11:17 is the New Testament commentary on the Old Testament story. To understand what Hebrews is talking about with Abraham you have to go back to the Old Testament. So let's put a book mark in Hebrews 11 and go back to Genesis 22. Let's understand the story so we can understand the application. The Bible says that God put Abraham to the test.

I am going to read **Genesis 22:1-14**.

Here we see Abraham's faith being tested. Your faith will not be tested exactly like Abraham's but your faith will be tested. From Abraham's faith test we see three tests that each one of us face. This test of our faith can be examined by three questions. Three questions that test our faith.

Question 1: Can you trust God with the possessions He has given to you?

Question 1, can I trust God with the possessions He has given to me? Now back to **Hebrews 11:17**, "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son." This test of Abraham's faith was over a gift that God had given to Abraham. God had blessed Abraham with a son. Abraham loved his boy very much. But now God is testing Abraham's faith with his son.

Why the test? Could it be that Abraham is coming to love Isaac more than he loves God? Could it be that he is coming to love the gift more than the Giver? Could it be that God is moving into second place? God will never take second place in your life to anything or anyone. Many of us want to give God a place in our lives. But let me say it clearly, God does not want a *place* in your life. God desires, deserves, and demands *preeminence* in your life. He is not interested in being a part time God in your life. He is not interested in your heart being a duplex.

Many of us like to have God in our lives. But how many of us say, "God I love You supremely. I love You more than what You have given to me." Sometimes we allow the blessings to replace the Blesser. We have to be careful that our blessings don't become curses. Let me give you a significant verse. **Malachi 2:2**, "If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honor My name," says the Lord Almighty, "I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings." Did you hear that? Blessings can become a curse. God goes on to say, "Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honor Me."

Now it was not wrong for Abraham to love Isaac. I love my children with all my heart. But no one can truly love his child until he loves God as he ought. God is not asking Abraham did he love Isaac. He knew he loved Isaac. What God wants to see demonstrated is Abraham's love being greater for Him than for his son.

After the resurrection Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Do you love me more than these?” Jesus was standing by the sea shore and asking Peter, “Do you love me more than your brothers? Do you love me more than these boats, nets, fish, and this way of life? Do you love Me more than these things? Peter I will not take second place in your life?”

The test of faith is not primarily between love and hate, but between two loves. Those things we love dearly and that which we must love supremely. The question we must all ask ourselves is, “Do I have any love in my heart that is greater than my love for Jesus Christ?” Don’t allow what Jesus has given to you, to replace Jesus.

Think through the blessings in your life. Your spouse, your children, your grand children, your health, your money, your house, your job, your safety, your future, your intelligence, your salary, your ministry, your clothes, your retirement, or your church. Give it back to God. Don’t allow the blessings in your life to steal your love away from God.

Is there anything that you would not give back to God that God has already given to you if He asked you for it? You say, “God, You gave it to me, why would You ask for it back?” God might say, “That’s none of your business. Just trust me.” Is there anything that you would not be willingly to give back to Him if He asked you for it? Now listen carefully, anything God has given you, you can trust Him with. Anything God has not given to you, you don’t need. (Repeat it). God is saying, “Yes, I gave you Isaac, now take him up to the mountain and sacrifice him to Me. Trust Me on this.” Yes, I gave you that family, that job, that ministry, that house, that income... do what I say to do with it and trust Me on this.

Question 2: Can you trust God with the purpose He has for you?

We are talking about the testing of your faith. The first question that test your faith dealt with your possessions and blessings, can you trust God with what He has given you? **The second question that will test your faith is, “Can I trust God with the purpose God has for me?”** We have talked about the possessions He has given to us, but what about the purpose He has for us. Again **Hebrews 11:17-19**, “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac [that’s the possession] as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, (18) even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned [that’s the purpose].’” God had given Abraham a purpose. God told Abraham he would have a son and that son would have sons and so on and so on. Through Abraham’s offspring Abraham would have a great impact on many people. Abraham understood

his purpose, but now God says put that purpose and dream to death. You know that did not make sense. That did not make any sense whatsoever.

Faith is not primarily believing God in spite of the evidence *it is obeying God in spite of the consequences*. In spite of the consequences. Not knowing why. Not having to know why. Obedience is the great proof of our faith and our trust in God. When we know we have a word from God we don't pass it front of the judgment bar of our own understanding and reasoning. We just simply obey.

We are to obey God. Now let me tell what kind of obedience this must be.

First, it must be informed obedience. Now don't just go out there and make some kind of sacrifice just to show God how much you love Him. You will make a horrible mistake. Be in tuned with God. Listen to what God is speaking to your heart. Abraham heard from God. Many Christian are endeavoring to do things for God that God does not want done. God has not promised to bless any endeavor that He has not commanded. We must hear God in order to obey God. It must be informed obedience.

Secondly, it must be intentional obedience. You say, "I'm informed." Great, but do you report to God for duty. Obedience is not mere absence from doing wrong it is actively seeking the will of God for your life. Ignorance of God's will is not an excuse.

Third, it must be immediate obedience. Back in **Genesis 22:3** we are told "Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey." In Verse 2 God gives the command and verse 3 Abraham sets out to obey God. There is no wait, there is no delay. As soon as he could he got on the road to do what God told him to do. Procrastination is a form of disobedience. Has God told you to say something, do something, give something, change something, and you are waiting. Don't wait. Obey. Sometimes a test of faith requires immediate obedience.

Question 3: Can you trust Him with the promises He has made to you?

When your faith is tested it will be tested with the possessions and blessings that God gives you. Will you do what God says to do with them, even when it makes no sense and you have to give them back? What if God seems to change your purpose in life and direction in life? Will you trust God with your future? **Here is the third question, can I trust Him with the promises He has made to me? Hebrews 11:17** says, "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, (18) even though God had said to

him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.'" God had promised the fulfillment of many things through his son Isaac. From Abraham's perspective, the death of Isaac would be the death of God's promise to him. But thank God for **verse 19**, "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." Abraham had already learned that God is the God of the impossible. God has already performed a miracle by giving him a son when he was 100 years old and his wife 90 years old. He knew that God was a God of miracles. Abraham did not know how God would do it. He just knew that God would somehow get it done and keep His promise. Now watch this: God did not let Abraham sacrifice Isaac. Why? It wasn't Isaac that God wanted, it was Abraham. God wanted Abraham's heart completely. He wanted Abraham to trust Him without reservation.

Hebrews 11:19 says, "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead." The word "reason" means to consider, to calculate. It is the Greek word we get our word *logic* from. Abraham is thinking and calculating in his mind that God gave him the boy, "I can trust him with God, and if God wants me to sacrifice him, I will and God can bring him back to life. God has a purpose for my life and I will trust You with it. God you made a promise I trust You with that. Then I reason that you are going to keep your Word and You cannot lie. I don't have to understand, I don't have to have all the answers, I don't have to know the results, I don't have to know how, when, where, why, or what all I need to do is trust You and walk by faith in this matter."

God gave him back his son and Abraham called that place Jehovah-Jireh, God provides. There was a ram there to take Isaac's place. He was there no sooner and later than when he was needed. For God is always on time.

Conclusion

Is there any good gift that you are unwilling to surrender? Your finances, your health, your children, your grandchildren.

Is there any obedience that you are not willingly to perform? Even though it does not make sense are you willing to obey?

Is there any promise that you cannot trust God with even when it does not make sense? Remember, we do not live by *explanation* we live by *faith* in God's promises. A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. God wants you to be strong in faith because without faith it is impossible to please God.

Before we end our time together I want to tell you how you can know Jesus Christ as the Lord of your life and know without a doubt that when you die you will go to heaven and spend forever with a God who loves you more than you can ever imagine. One of God's purposes for your life and a promise He gives us is found in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Listen carefully, you don't have to know everything about Jesus, about God, nor do you need to know everything about following Jesus to become a believer. The Bible says "whoever believes in Him" shall have eternal life. You don't have to know it all, to receive it all. When you become a Christian you will grow in spiritual maturity and understand the wonders of surrender at a greater level. But right now God is asking you to place your faith in Him to save you. Are you ready to do that? [Lead in a prayer of salvation]