

Genesis 22:1-14 O.T. 17 (NRSV)

¹After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ²He 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 that I shall show you.” ³So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.” ⁶Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” ⁸Abraham said, “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.

⁹When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹²He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” ¹³And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called that place “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”

Genesis 22:1-14 O.T. Page 17***“Trust Test”***

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. Holy God, we come seeking your face. Open our eyes to see your glory and open our ears to receive your wonderful Word of Life. In Jesus’ precious Name we pray, **Amen.**

Introduction: What’s God’s track record with you? Has God been faithful? Has God been generous? Has God been protective? Has God lived up to your expectations? **Or are you** disappointed with God? Do you wish God would answer you more quickly? Do you wish God would make your life easier? Do you wish God would be more attentive? Perhaps those are some of the questions that mull around inside your head with you think about my opening question: **“What’s God’s track record with you?”**

Now you might think that that’s a great question. You might think that question goes to the very heart of the Christian faith. But there’s another question that sounds kind of similar that’s actually a much greater question. It’s a question that’s far more important, far more intimate, and far more revealing. For this question, we turn the point-of-view around. Instead of thinking of things from **our point-of-view**, we turn around and think of things from **God’s point-of-view**. So rather than asking, “What’s God’s track record with you?” we ask, **“What’s your track record with God?”** Have you been faithful to God? Have you been generous with God? Have you been dependent upon God? Have you lived up to God’s expectations? **Or is God** disappointed with you?

Wow, it’s amazing how quickly we can **begin to feel uncomfortable** when we stop asking that question from our point-of-view and start asking that question from God’s point-of-view. **God’s track record** with us is just so much better than our track record with God.

PAUSE

Move I.

God wants to be trusted and God wants to trust us. God isn't just interested in God's own point-of-view. God's also interested in your point-of-view. After all, trust really is a two-way street. You trust God and God trust you. Mutual trust is the foundation of any wholesome relationship. But when it comes to each of us and our relationship with the Almighty, there's an undeniable imbalance. At first glance, the relationship looks like **King Cong and the lowly damsel in distress**. God is infinitely more powerful than us. God is, well, God, and we're just lowly created creatures. **God could easily crush us** with his bare hands. The imbalance between God and us is downright staggering. God is infinitely more pure, infinitely more moral, and infinitely more dependable than we could ever be. **How can** there be mutual trust in such an unbalanced reality? The answer is as simple as it is profound. The basis of trust between God and you isn't a balance of power, but on a **balance of love**. Just as a parent trusts their child, God trust us, and just as our children trust us, so we trust God. Love bridges the vast gulf between God and us.

Our Bible Lesson today from Genesis, the first book of the Hebrew Bible, is one in a series of stories that deals with the unique relationship between God and a man whom God named, **Abraham**, which means "father of a multitude." It was years earlier when Abraham was already 75 years old, that God first promised Abraham that he would have offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky. Well, **if you've ever look up into the sky** on a dark and moonless night; the number of stars you can see is overwhelming. There are more stars than anyone could ever count. And that's what God's saying in his promise to Abraham. Abraham's will have more descendants than anyone could ever count.

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From the stories about Abraham in the book of Genesis, we learn that it would be another 25 years before Abraham and his wife Sarah would finally have **their first child**, a son they named Isaac. By then, Sarah was 90 years old, and Abraham was 100! Isaac's birth had to be a miracle, because Sarah was well past childbearing age, and it would be several more millennia before Pfizer would devise its little blue pill.

So that's some of the back story leading up today's story, which the editors of the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible* have titled "*The Command to Sacrifice Isaac.*" Now, if you had been reading through the stories in the book of Genesis that tell of the many twists and turns of the relationship between Abraham and God, I have to tell you when you read the title of this story, it's a real shocker. This title blows you over and knocks the wind right out of you. For a quarter of a century God had promised Abraham offspring and he and Sarah remained childless, and now that's it been another couple of decades and Abraham and Sarah still have only this one son, and **what's God telling Abraham to do?** In **Genesis 22:2 (NRSV)**, we read, "**And God 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 mountain that I will show you."** This command is very troubling. **First, logic tells** us God's actually sabotaging God's own plan by issuing this command. How does slitting Isaac's throat possibly service God's purpose? You don't get more descendants than anyone can count by killing the only descend that you have. So, this command is troubling because it contradicts God's own promise. **Second**, this command is troubling because it contradicts God's own character. The **Canaanites** might have practiced child sacrifice to their god Molech, but the God of Abraham makes it clear that child sacrifice is immoral (Leviticus 18:21). **Yet here it is in black and white**, God's commanding Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Has God gone over to the dark side?

There are people who begin reading the Bible and when they get to this verse, **they throw up their hands up in despair**, and say, if that's what this God is like, I want nothing to do with such a God. I'd rather believe in no God, than in Abraham's God. **Here we are** just 22 chapters into the 66 books of the Bible and they're already throwing in the towel. They certainly don't trust God, and they could care less if God trust them. Oh, if people would only give God the benefit of the doubt and keep reading. The story's ending is even more surprising than its beginning. **Yes, God definitely wants to be trusted, and God does want to trust us.**

End I.

Move II.

So, God puts us to the test. God develops a track record with us while we develop a track record with God. God demonstrates God's own trustworthiness while exercising our own trustworthiness. This is all part of what we call the ups and down of life. The story the editors of *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible titled "*The Command to Sacrifice Isaac.*" The editors of the *New International Version* chose to title "*Abraham Tested.*" The story itself tells us that it's a test. **Genesis 22:1a (NRSV)** opens with these words, "**And after these things God tested Abraham.**" So, the story itself is telling us that this is a test.

I want you all to listen to this familiar sound for just a moment:

{Play "*Emergency Broadcast System Test.mp3*" [0:10]}

Who can tell me what that sounds means? Yes, it means that the broadcasters in your area have activated the emergency broadcast system. Most of the time, immediately after you hear that sound, an announcer comes on air saying, "This is a test of emergency broadcast system. This is only a test. In the event of an actual emergency, you will be instructed to stay tuned for further information." Whenever you heard that sound followed by those words, you know it's only a test and you can relax. **Well, for the readers of Genesis**, the purpose of that brief declaration in Genesis 22:1 is to get the reader to relax. It's a warning that what you are about to read will sound very frightening, but it's only a test. God's still in control and you can be assured everything is gonna turn out ok. I feel badly for those people who go off the deep end and give up on God when they read God's command to Abraham in Genesis 22:2, but it's really their own fault, because they have failed to heed the disclaimer of Genesis 22:1. **Remember** this is only a test.

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Have any of you ever participated in a trust building exercise. You know, that's where you have to fall backwards into the arms of your waiting team members. Even though you can't see them, you have to trust them to catch you, so you won't get hurt. I guess those kind of trust exercises can be a good thing, but ever since one of those silly Geico Auto Insurance commercials aired a number of years ago, I can't help but wonder about the usefulness of those exercises.

{Play Video “Geico Gecko Trust Exercise.wmv” [0:14]}

The CEO of Geico wants to demonstrate that trust is the key when talking about Geico, so he decided to fall backwards and let the Geico Gecko catch him. He assures the Gecko that he can do this just before he begins to fall. Of course, the commercial cuts away just as you figure **the poor Gecko** is about to get squashed flat. After that commercial first aired there were rumors racing all over the internet that the Gecko was dead. But of course, **it's only a test**. No one is every really supposed to get hurt in a test.

I think there are a lot of times we feel like that poor Gecko when God puts us to the test. We figure God is so big he's gonna squash us flat. God has complete confidence in us, but we have zero confidence in ourselves. But we need to remember **it's only a test**. God will never test any of us in a way that will hurt our immortal soul. **God wants** to build up our trust. **So, God does put us to the test.**

End II.

Move III.

But God's trustworthiness doesn't depend on ours. When we fail, when we don't live up to God's expectations of our lives, God still keeps up his end of the bargain. What God has promised, God still does. **God is trustworthy and true.** I can't begin to tell you how reassuring this is.

As I said earlier, the central portions of the book of Genesis tells a lot of stories about the relationship between God and Abraham. There are 50 Chapters in Genesis, and the account of **Abraham's birth** as the first-born son of Terah appears at the end of Chapter 11. What follows are **some 20 stories** about key events in Abraham's life before the account of Abraham's death appears in Chapter 25. Abraham walked the face of the earth for 175 years and those 20 stories in Genesis constitute pretty much everything we know about Abraham.

Many people consider Abraham to be one of the greatest men of faith who ever lived. **Jews, Christians, and Muslims** alike all consider Abraham to be a great patriarch and prophet of their faiths. And yet everything we know about Abraham is contained within those **20 stories in the book of Genesis**. God's promise to give Abraham **descends as numerous as the stars in the sky** has come true. Imagine, what might have happened if Abraham had followed through with God's command and **slit Isaac's throat** and offered him as a burnt offering. How might things be different? Well, clearly that would all just be fanciful speculation since that's not what happened. **But** you can be sure that Abraham would still have had countless descendants. God always keeps his promises.

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God's track record with Abraham was spotless. But Abraham's track record with God wasn't. The great man of faith had doubts. Eleven years after God promised Abraham descends too numerous to count; **Abraham and Sarah were still childless**. So, the couple decided to take things into their own hands. As was the custom in those days, when a woman of means couldn't have children herself, she would offer her handmaiden to her husband so he could have a child by her. **Sarah offered Abraham her handmaiden Hagar** and as they say, the rest is history. When Abraham was 86-years old, **Hagar bore him a son, Ishmael**. God blessed Ishmael and he gave him many descendants, but Ishmael wasn't the fulfillment of God's promise. 14-years later **God blessed Abraham and Sarah with their son Isaac**, and it's through Isaac that God chose to bring his only begotten son, **Jesus Christ**, into the world. Abraham might have waived in his trust of God, but God never wavered in his trustworthiness to Abraham.

We need to remember that even when we waiver and doubts creep in, **God will still remain faithful** to his promises to us. Our faith may falter and fade, our faith may run hot and cold. There have been and will be times when we let God down. But all thanks be to God, **God's trustworthiness really doesn't depend upon ours**.

End III.

Move IV.

So, you can always trust God to provide. God's is trustworthy. What God promises, God does. That's the real message of the story of Abraham's trust test. Yet in the story, we find the pending image of a child sacrifice so repulsive that we fly right past the key verse. **As Abraham and Isaac approached** the place for the sacrifice, with Isaac carrying the wood, and Abraham carrying the fire and the knife, Isaac made an obvious observation. In Genesis 22:7b (NRSV) we read, Isaac said, **“The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”** Yes, the key ingredient is missing. Only Abraham knows God's original command. Then in Genesis 22:8a (NRSV) **“Abraham said, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.’”** What a curious response. Is Abraham lying?

No, Abraham's trust in God is actually so great, that he knows that this is all gonna work out somehow. He's confident that he will sacrifice the required burnt offering. He's also confident that he'll still have offspring too numerous to count; even though logic tells us these two outcomes are mutually exclusive. So, **Abraham binds Isaac** and lays him on the altar, and as **he raises the knife** to slit Isaac's throat, the **angel of the Lord intervenes**, and our attention is shifted to a **ram caught** by its horns in a nearby thicket. God provides, catastrophe is averted, Abraham sacrifices the burnt offering, and Isaac lives on to give Abraham countless descendants. Oh, and of course **Abraham passes the test.** Abraham's faith is great because Abraham has a tested trust.

The lesson to take away from the story of Abraham's Test is that we need to be trustworthy, as we trust God to be trustworthy too. That's faith, great faith, **the faith of Abraham.** It's a faith that defines human understanding and relies upon the goodness of God. **So yes, you can always trust God to provide.**

End IV.

Conclusion: What's God's track record with you, and what's your track record with God? After all, trust really is a two-way street. **God wants to be trusted, and God wants to trust us. So, God does put us to the test.** God demonstrates God's own trustworthiness while exercising our own trustworthiness. That's why God tested Abraham. **But God's trustworthiness really doesn't depend upon ours.** Abraham had a son by Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar, but 14-years later God still gave Abraham and Sarah a son. **So yes, you can always trust God to provide.** Abraham proved trustworthy and God provided a ram caught in a nearby thicket. Abraham's and God's trust was a ***Tested Trust***, and Abraham passed the test.

I want to end this message this morning by reading just the first verse of a song by **Richie Fike and his wife Dana** that's appropriately called, "***Tested Trust***." The words take the form fervent prayer:

**Give us a tested trust,
Give us a weathered faith.
We want to know your love.
We want to see your face.
Give us a tested trust.
Help us to know you're real.
Bigger than all we want.
Greater than all we feel. Amen**

Farewell

10:30 a.m. Closing Hymn: "Trust and Obey" Red Hymnal No. 467
All Four Verses

Sending Forth: Life's many trust tests serve to make your faith strong. Be trustworthy, as you always trust God to provide. Go forth with a tested trust, have faith, and be faithful. **Amen!**