

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Amen.

Some time later God tested Abraham. He called to him, “Abraham!” Abraham answered, “I am here.”² God said, “Now take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah. Offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains there, the one to which I direct you.”

³Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, along with Isaac his son. Abraham split the wood for the burnt offering. Then he set out to go to the place that God had told him about. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.

⁵Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go on over there. We will worship, and then we will come back to you.” ⁶Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and loaded it on Isaac his son. He took the firepot and the knife in his hand. The two of them went on together.

⁷Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father?” He said, “I am here, my son.” He said, “Here are the fire and the wood, 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 went on together. ⁹They came to the place that God had told him about. Abraham built the altar there. He arranged the wood, tied up Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

¹⁰Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹The Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, “Abraham, Abraham!” Abraham said, “I am here.” ¹²He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”

¹³Abraham looked around and saw that behind him there was a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴Abraham called the name of that place “The LORD Will Provide.” So it is said to this day, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.” **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Friends,

Many of you know that when I was 40 I went back to school to study for the public ministry. At 40 years of age, school is harder because your mind doesn’t remember as well as it once did and so it takes longer to study. But I enjoyed those years and the classes that I had to take, except for one aspect – I hated to take tests. I did pretty well on some but there were others where I didn’t do so well but the tests were always a good measure of where I was in my academic progress. I learned a lot from those tests that I had to take.

I would like to think that now that I am no longer in school I don’t have to worry about tests but I know, and I think many of you know too, that, **“Life is full of tests.”** As we consider this portion of scripture we will see that, **“Sometimes God Tests Our Obedience to His Word,”** **“Sometimes God Tests Our Trust in His Promises,”** and finally, through all this, we have, **“The Absolute Assurance of God’s Mercy.”**

I. Sometimes God tests our obedience to his Word. As we consider the events before us in this portion of scripture, this wasn’t the 1st time that God tested Abraham’s obedience. More than 25 years earlier God had commanded Abraham to pack up everything he owned and to move to a

land God would show him. And that is exactly what Abraham did. He left family and friends and obeyed God's command.

Abraham always tried to obey God's commands but once again God gives Abraham a specific command, but this one might be a little harder to obey. You see, God had promised to give Abraham and Sarah a son but they had to wait 25 years for God to fulfill this promise. Isaac, their son, was an only child and Abraham and Sarah loved him but now God was asking Abraham to sacrifice his son. Was this command about obedience or was there something more?

In a way, God was asking Abraham, "Who do you love more – Isaac or me?" As Abraham chose to obey God he was showing his love to God. I don't know if Abraham struggled with this choice or not but the very next day he made arrangements to follow through with his obedience to God's command. He took action to travel the path that God had asked him to go.

God has given us a lot of commands in his word. Does God expect our obedience to his commands? Yes he does. Every day and in different ways we face temptations to break God's commands – a test of whether we love God or not. Jesus said, **"If you love me you will obey what I command."** (John 14:15). So how are we doing?

Husbands, do you love your wives as Christ loved the church? Do you put her needs above your own? And wives do you submit to your husbands as to the Lord? Parents are you bringing up your children in the training and instruction of the Lord. Do we love the Lord with all our heart and our mind and our soul or do we let other things take priority in our lives over God and his Word? Did you spread any gossip this week or tell a lie or think about getting even with someone. Every day our obedience to God's commands are tested and some days we choose the right answer and take the right action and on many other days our obedience is lacking even though we might know what is right.

Thankfully, Jesus was obedient to his Father all the time. He took the punishment for all the times we are disobedient and fail the test. He forgives us and continues to speak to us through his Word to encourage us, to teach us and to help us to be more obedient to God's commands the next time. We can only love and obey him because he 1st loved us in such a wonderful way. But that's not the only test that comes our way on a regular basis. Sometimes God tests our trust in his promises.

II. This test for Abraham was not only about obedience but it was also about his trust in the promises of God. God had promised Abraham that he would make him into a great nation but in order for that to happen he needed a son so that he could have descendants. God promised that the Savior would be born through his descendants but in order for that to happen he needed a son. But now God was asking Abraham to give up his son, Isaac.

How was God going to fulfill his promises to Abraham? Abraham didn't know but he did know that all things are possible with God and he trusted God. We catch a glimpse of this trust in God as he tells the servants traveling with them, **"Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go on over there. We will worship, and then we will come back to you."** And then later on as Isaac asks, **"Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt**

offering?”⁸ Abraham said, “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” Abraham trusted God to work this out so that God’s promises would be fulfilled. Abraham didn’t know how God was going to do it, but he trusted God completely. Isn’t that what faith is all about?

Does God ever test our trust in his promises? The obvious answer is yes. He promises to work everything out for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28) but then we ask ourselves, “What about all the people who are dying from the flu? Or what about those killed or injured in the school shooting this past week?”

When we run into a serious health diagnosis it tests our trust in God. When we lose our job or get into a car accident it tests our trust in God. When we are having financial difficulties and think living together with someone without the benefit of marriage will solve our problems, it tests our trust in God. When life knocks us down and we don’t know where to turn it is testing our trust in God.

So many times we want to rely on ourselves and all our abilities but our abilities don’t even come close to what God can do for us. Trusting in God is to have faith that God will provide according to his promises, even though we are not sure of how he will do that. Trusting in God is to look to him to guide us, even though the path might be difficult for us to follow. But we have God in our lives and our 2nd lesson reminds us, **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”** (Romans 8:31-32). God loves us, speaks to us through his Word and wants us to trust in the absolute assurance of his mercy and love.

III. Abraham passed the test. He obeyed God even to the point where he was about to sacrifice his son before God stopped him. He trusted God to work everything out and God did. And as he told Isaac, God also provided a substitute for the sacrifice – that ram caught in a bush.

A thousand years later, in the same place, God would provide an even greater sacrifice as he sent his son Jesus to be the perfect lamb to take away the sins of the world – yours and mine included. That is a plan of salvation that mankind would never have devised but God put this plan together even before the beginning of the world because of his great love and mercy for us.

God gives us absolute assurance of his mercy. Scripture tells us, **“This is good, and pleases God our Savior,⁴ who wants all [people] to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”** (1 Timothy 2:3-4). That included Abraham and it includes you and me. God wants us to be one of his children. He has shown his love for us by giving us his Son as the sacrifice for our sins and all he asks is that we obey him and trust him. Not because we have to but because we want to and in this way we can say thank you as we show our love for our Savior.

And even when our obedience and our trust fall short, God still loves us and forgives us. He still speaks to us through his Word to guide us and help us grow in our faith so that we can be obedient and trusting. May this assurance of God’s great mercy and love for each and every one of us help us as we go out into the world and face daily tests. May this assurance of God’s great mercy and love for us bring us peace and comfort as we continue to have God in our lives. Amen.