

How to Pass Life's Greatest Tests

Hebrews 11:8-19

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. ¹¹ By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. ¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵ And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. ¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” ¹⁹ concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.”

For the past few weeks we have been looking at how God continues to meet the needs of His people. Today we are going to look at Abraham and draw some truths from the test that he went through. I have found that life, for the most part is simply a test, and unfortunately most of us do not have passing marks.

I saw a cartoon about a country preacher with his hands folded and praying and saying, "It's just me Lord. Lord, you know how much I ask. I never ask for much. But Lord could You just grant me one thing.

Dignity. Dignity, Lord! That's all I ask for. Just dignity." The next frame is a huge zap of a lightning bolt and he is standing there with his pants down around his legs revealing underwear with hearts on it and he is saying, "This is a test, ain't it, Lord?"

Life is a series of tests. James says that the problems that we have, that come to us, are actually tests. In the life of Abraham we are going to see four tests. Even though your circumstances will vary, God will test you in the exact same four areas that He tested Abraham.

After years of college and seminary, I have learned that it is helpful to prepare for tests. In fact, the tests I like the best are the tests where the teacher gives you the questions in advance. Like an open book test.

But the fact of life is, some teachers are downright mean. They like to trick you. They like to keep the test questions hidden. They want to get you into the room, throw up the screen and the questions are on the blackboard and you are in utter panic.

That is not the way God is. God wants you to pass His test. In fact He wants that so much He tells you in advance the way you are going to be tested. You can count on it. **You will be tested these four ways in life.** He wants you to pass so He tells you in advance. There is only one thing about God's tests. **You do not know the timing.** God specializes in pop quizzes. Some of you are going through a test right now. **You may not even know it but you are.** Therefore, we are going to look at Abraham and the tests he went through and how do you find out if you are a real believer.

1. **The first test is that of major change.** Hebrews 11:8 says, "By faith Abraham when he was called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance obeyed and went even though he did not know where he was going." **The first test of life is that of major change.** God asked Abraham to pick up every thing he had and move to another place. Abraham asked, "Where?" That is the question.

The first test is the Where question, “God, where am I going?” “I’ll tell you later. I’ll let you know.” “How long is it going to take?” “I’ll let you know.” “How do I know when I get there?” “I’ll let you know.”
Would you follow God like that?

A major change. That was difficult for Abraham. In the first place he was 75 years old. When he was ready to retire, God said, “You are ready to aspire.” When he is ready for social security, God says, “You are ready for social insecurity.” When he is ready to hang it up, God says, “Get it down and dust it off.” When he is ready to sit back and take it easy, God says, “You are ready for the biggest adventure of your life.”

Not only that but he was wealthy. He had a lot to move and they did not have Moving Vans in those days. He had camels, cattle, sheep, and servants. He was a fat cat in the Mesopotamian city of Ur. God says, “You are going to leave Ur and go to a place you do not know. But follow Me.” And he picked up everything and immediately, without excuse, he took off.

Here is the first test of a real believer. A real believer will follow God's leading without knowing where.

Some of you are asking the “Where?” question right now. “Lord, where do You want me to work? ... Where do You want me to live? ... Where do You want me to retire? ... Where do You want me to go to school?” It is the “Where?” question. It is a major change and this is a test.

2. The second test is delayed promise. This test causes us to ask “When?” “By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents as did Isaac and Jacob who were heirs of him of the same promise.” There is a word that is used twice in that sentence – “promise.” **Promise is a very important word in the vocabulary of faith.** The question is “When?”

What have you been expecting God to do in your life that hasn't happened yet? Abraham had to wait three generations. What are you waiting on God to do? **Moses waited eighty years.** **Noah** waited 120 years. God always gives His believers the Waiting Test.

3. The third test is an impossible problem. "By faith Abraham even though he was past age and Sarah herself was barren was enabled to become a father because he considered God faithful who had made the promise." We have talked about Abraham before. **Abraham is 99 years old and he still does not have a child.** And God says that Abraham was going to be the father of a great nation. He had already changed his name to "Father of many nations." How embarrassing!

The test of a real believer? A real believer will expect a miracle without knowing how God intends to do it.

4. The fourth test is a senseless tragedy. Abraham faced it. And this is the test that causes us to ask "Why?"

The fact is there is a lot in this world that does not make sense. And one of those things is a senseless tragedy. A tragedy that we cannot understand.

God asked Abraham to sacrifice his own son, Isaac. Isaac, "the miracle boy!" "the miracle baby!" "the promised child!" "the one whom all of Abraham's hopes and dreams and fulfillments are all going to be seen." God says, "That is the child I want you to sacrifice!" He represented everything Abraham held dear.

Our response to that is typical. It is unfair. Why would God even require something like that?

"By faith, Abraham when God tested him offered Isaac as a sacrifice. And even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.'" **Abraham was having a test and it was a**

test of his commitment. It did not make sense, it was ridiculous, and it was tragic. There was no precedent for this. **Abraham did not know about God like we know Him.** He did not know the nature of God. He had never seen Jesus. **He did not know God was loving and compassionate.** All he knew was God was saying, "Kill your son!" **It did not make sense.** There is a lot in the world that does not make sense. It was a test of his commitment.

Abraham had no assurance that God would save Isaac or spare him. He didn't have any assurance of that. But look at what he did have, as seen in verse 19, "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead and figuratively speaking he did raise Isaac back from the dead." **What was Abraham's confidence?** "If God can give me a son at age 99 when my wife and I are already physically incapable of bearing children, if God can do that kind of miracle, He can raise him from the dead after he's been sacrificed." That was his confidence.

But here is the point of Abraham's life. This is why he was such a great believer. Abraham decided that, "God has a right to make any demand on my life He so chooses, and I trust Him to do what is right."

That is also true for you and me. Because God is God He has a right to make any demands on your life just because He says so. You would not even be alive without God. **You would not have anything without God.** And He has a right to do as He pleases. And it is a test.

Some of you right now might be going through the "Why?" test in life. And you are asking God, "Why?" "God, why did I get fired?" "Why did you let my spouse have an affair?" "Why did my kid run off and get on dope?" "Why am I going bankrupt?" "Why?" "Why did I have a miscarriage?" "Why did my parents die?" "Why did my child have to die?" In your mind it was just a senseless tragedy.

Now listen carefully to this statement: there is nothing wrong with asking questions. I think Abraham did just like we do. There is nothing wrong with asking, "Why?"

But the issue is how do you respond when you do not get an answer? When God is silent to the “Whys?” That is the test of a real believer.

Do you know why we have so many spiritually immature people, spiritual midgets? Because we always demand an explanation for everything.

Some of you might be facing the second test in life. And you are dealing with this **Delayed Promise.** And you are saying, "God, “when are things going to turn around? When are You going to answer my prayer?” It is a test of your faith.

Maybe you are dealing with the Impossible Problem. And in your own viewpoint you think there is no way. Just like Abraham looked and said, "There is no way I can father a kid at 99." How? "How are You going to do it, Lord?" “How are You going to help me?” “How are You going to change me?” “How are You going to get me out of this mess?”

Some of you are grieving. And you have had a **tragedy.** In the deepest part of your heart you are saying, "Why?" “Why is this happening?” God says it is a test of your faith.

How do you rate as a believer tonight? How do you rate as a real believer? Some of you are saying, "I flunked! I did not pass the test at all." One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Mark 9:24, "A man comes to Jesus and says, 'I want you to heal my son.' Jesus said, 'If you have faith to believe, I'll heal your son.' God acts in our lives according to faith. He says, 'Lord, I believe. Help me with my unbelief.'" **I love it because Jesus healed the boy on the basis of that.** It was enough. The man simply said, "God I want to believe. I do believe. Help me with all my doubts." God said, "That's enough! He's healed." **It does not take a lot of faith.** It takes just a ***little faith*** in a ***big God*** that gets big results.

