



What are some of your fears? Maybe a child dying or persecution or going into debt or friends not liking you or public speaking? There are so many things we can be afraid of. But did you know there are healthy fears? For example, I love staring at a fire. How about you? But I don't want to get stuck in one. I absolutely love intense thunderstorms. That's something that Michigan doesn't often have. I grew up in Illinois and remember many earthshaking storms. I love it, but I wouldn't want to get struck by lightning or even drive through a monsoon.

Now, what does this have to do with fear? Well, really, it is more what we'd call respect, right? I have an awe at the power of the storm. I am mesmerized by fire. And I respect their power! From a Scriptural perspective, that's the idea of a **healthy fear. Recognizing power, being in awe, and not wanting to experience its punishments.** This can be translated to human relationships, too. I would say that as a child, I had a healthy fear of my dad. I looked up to him. I was in awe of my dad in so many ways. He was my best man in my wedding. But I didn't want to disappoint him. I had a healthy respect and value of my dad.

While there can be healthy fears, there are also unhealthy fears. An **unhealthy fear is ascribing too much power and attention to something, not wanting to live without it.** So, think about Abraham's experiences in his life where, instead of having a fear of God, and trusting the Lord – he submits to his own schemes. He values his physical life more than God. He values Sarah or having a child more importantly than trusting the Lord. Think about Lot. Lot valued the earthly pleasures of Sodom more than honoring the Lord. The reality is that when we live for lesser things, that fear binds us and takes us away from God. And to be away from God, who is Life, is to embrace death. So, throughout the Bible, we're called to fear God! We were made for awe in him. We were made to live!

Now, this faulty fear isn't just an Abraham or Lot problem. This is a problem for all humanity. We are all prone to fear things of this world above fearing the Lord. But we were made to fear the Lord – to be in awe of him, knowing his power, and not wanting to sadden his heart. Humans were made to make much of God! And so, in the narrative of Abraham, we get insight into how the Lord patiently tests Abraham so that Abraham will live for the Lord's glory – and not just for his own ways. Last week, we saw through the birth of Isaac, the sending away of Ishmael and Hagar, and the agreement with Abimelech how Abraham was genuinely trusting the Lord. All the trials in Abraham's life were purifying his faith. And we see that in Genesis 21. But there's one more test of Abraham. It's a test of tests that clearly reveals that Abraham fears God above everything else. And before we read the text, I'll give you the main idea of the sermon: **The one who fears God worships the Lord, obediently surrendering to God and trusting in God's provision and goodness.** Let's start with

1. **The one who fears God. . .(vv. 1, 12).**

In verse 1, we read, “After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’”¹ Then in verse 12, Moses quotes the Lord saying, “¹². . . ‘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.’”²

The reason I’m reading these verses first is so we get the context of what’s taking place here. We readers are told that God is testing Abraham. This is the purpose of this narrative – the testing of Abraham. You may be tempted to think about Isaac and what he must be thinking in the midst of all of this. Or, you could wonder if Abraham even told Sarah what God told him. We’re not told any of those details; so, I’m not going to talk about those things. The point is Abraham’s testing.

So, what does it mean that God is testing Abraham? Remember what I said a couple months ago about God’s tests. He’s not testing like how modern teachers test – to see how much of the information we know. He tests in order to purify and/or reveal the purity of something. These are always God’s intentions. And we will see that here. Now, what is God wanting to reveal in this test? Verse 12 says it: that Abraham fears God. This is the goal. This ought to be the goal of all who believe in God. This is the goal of God in all people who follow after him: to fear God!

Do you remember the preacher’s words in Ecclesiastes 12? ¹³ **The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.** ¹⁴ **For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.**³ God is the Judge. God knows everything. God is not simply more powerful than anything. He *is* power. He *is* the Creator! What’s the point of life? Fear God and keep his commandments. Live in awe of him. Live in amazement and reverence, desiring to obey him and not wanting to dishonor this powerfully good Being.

Ventura, do you realize this is God’s goal in your life? If we were made to fear God, and if you have turned to the Jesus for forgiveness of sins and restoration with God, then God is intent to free you from worldly fears and find life in knowing him truly! Now, if you fear God, what are the fruits (or, results) of fearing him? That leads us to the second part of the main idea:

2. . . .worships the Lord. . . (v. 5).

Read verse 5 with me: ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.”⁴

I know I’m jumping around a little right now, but let this lay the foundation for when we read the narrative. Fearing God leads to worshipping him. Abraham is on the way to sacrifice, and he says that he’s going to *worship* the Lord. A man named Allen Ross wrote, “**The true worshiper fears the Lord; that is, the true worshiper draws near the Lord in love and adoration and reverence but shrinks back in fear of such an awesome deity**” (*Creation & Blessing*, Ross, p. 400). Think again about my illustrations of Mt. Rainier or a fire or a thunderstorm or even an amazing and godly dad.

The one who fears God *worship* the Lord! This should make complete sense, but it needs to be stated explicitly. The one who fears God ought not to worship people, money, acceptance, power, reputation, or any other number of things. And you could say, “How do you worship those things?!” And that’s a great

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 22:1.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 22:12.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ec 12:13–14.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 22:5.

question. As I said last week, the word “worship” is an accounting term in the Hebrew. It means “worth-ship.” What do you give most worth to practically in your life, will, emotions, and desires? That’s what you worship! And why do you worship those other things? Because you fear them. You can’t imagine living without it.

So, think about people who are addicts. They can’t imagine living without alcohol or drugs. Or think of a workaholic. They can’t imagine being worth anything unless they are successful in a job. Or think of a people-pleaser. If people don’t love them and appreciate them, they feel worthless. What about you? **What can you not imagine living without? Do you maybe worship that? How would fearing God and worshipping him set you free from the bondage you’re in?** But I’m getting ahead of myself. So, now, with the third point, we’re going to jump into the narrative:

3. . . .obediently surrendering. . .(vv. 2-6, 9-10).

Verses 2-6 say, “² [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 mountains of which I shall tell you.’”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.⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.’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.”⁵ Then verses 9-10 read, “⁹ 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.¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.”⁶

The narratives in Genesis are so intriguing because you can tell by the way Moses writes that he either wants us to feel things moving quickly (like with Abraham meeting God at his tent and feeding the angels) or in situations like this where everything feels like it’s moving slowly. There is a purpose in all of this, and I think we can understand the purpose here. It’s painful for me to even read. God doesn’t simply say, “Take you son and go.” God says, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love. . . .” Several times in this narrative, Isaac is referred to as Abraham’s son. This is the child God promises him over 30 years ago, and now God is telling him to do the inexplicable. This makes no sense. And some modern commentators highlight how horrible this sounds by actually accusing God of being just like the gods of Canaan by telling Abraham to sacrifice his son. However, does God actually allow Abraham to do this? No. God is testing Abraham. But Abraham doesn’t know what’s going on. God calls Abraham to sacrifice what he loves most.

And God does so in a very unique way. The verbiage here is similar sounding to when God called Abraham to take his family and go to the land he was promising him – way back in Genesis 12. The wording here would be picked up by Abraham. God is calling him to do something shocking, even seemingly crazy. But had God shown himself faithful to Abraham in the past? Did God take care of Abraham in the land? Yes. Did God reveal himself in situations with other nations – showing his power to judge and even destroy? Absolutely. Did God reveal himself as gracious to Abraham when Abraham feared others more than God? Yes. Now God calls Abraham to take his son and go to the land of Moriah to sacrifice his only son through Sarah (the promised seed of the woman), the son whom Abraham loves.”

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 22:1–6.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 22:9–10.

By the way, Moriah is the area where Jerusalem is today. 2 Chronicles 3:1 refers to Moriah as Jerusalem. So, the place of Abraham's sacrifice is more than likely the Temple Mount of Jerusalem. So, this very first sacrifice is where thousands of sacrifices took place over the ages – sacrifices communicating people's fear of God, worship of him, and sacrificial dependence on him.

Those who fear the Lord, worship him and obediently surrender. This is what is again shocking to me. Abraham has been known previously as waffling in his dependence on the Lord. But in the previous chapter, he obeys and trusts the Lord even with removing his Ishmael. God said he'd take care of him. He can trust the Lord. But what about with Isaac? Is Abraham hanging his hopes on Isaac or on the God of Isaac? He clearly rests his hopes on God. He doesn't pray and ask God to change his mind. He also appears resolute in obeying. This slow progression to sacrifice his son is painful to even read, but Abraham perseveres to the sacrifice.

Abraham doesn't do this because this is easy. He does this because God had been purifying his faith over and over again – and now Abraham's faith is coming forth as gold. And that leads us to the next point:

4. . . .trusting God's provision and goodness (vv. 7-8, 10-14).

Verses 7-8 say, ⁷“And Isaac said to his father Abraham, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ He said, ‘Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’ ⁸Abraham said, ‘God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.’” So they went both of them together.⁷

Stop here. Isaac is curious as to how there can be a sacrifice without an animal. If I was in Abraham's shoes, I'd be crying the entire time, and then if I heard Isaac's questions, I'd be overwhelmed with sorrow and then just begin weeping. Yet, that's not what we hear from Abraham. The author of Hebrews gives us a little more insight into Abraham's mind, when he wrote, ¹⁹**“He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead. . .”**⁸ Abraham couldn't understand what was going on, but he rose above the circumstances and trusted God was good even though the command was murderous.

Abraham trusted God is good. Oh that we too would always believe God is good. I'm reminded of Joseph when he speaks to his brothers decades after they sold him into slavery, and what does he say? He says, **“. . .you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. . .”**⁹ Or, think of Job after all of his children die. He says, **“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”**²² **In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.”**¹⁰

God's design for the trials in our lives is to purify our faith so that we all can believe he is good all the time. So that even when circumstances seem evil, we don't charge God with wrong. Abraham believes God is good. And not only that, Abraham clearly believed God was going to provide the sacrifice that was essential. He trusted the Lord's provision. Now, let's read verses 10-14: ⁹When 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. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter 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, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” ¹³And Abraham

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 22:7–8.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 11:19.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 50:20.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Job 1:21–22.

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, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.” ¹¹

Amazingly, Isaac consents to the sacrifice. A young man who could carry all that wood could have clearly fought off his aged father. He doesn’t. But again, the emphasis here is on Abraham. As a father, he could have been amazed at Isaac’s submission to the Lord at such a young age. Why would God want him dead? Abraham’s heart is torn. He lifts the knife to bring it down into Isaac, and then the angel of the Lord calls out to Abraham. Abraham stops and listens. Then the angel of the Lord – who is the Lord – says, ¹² . . . 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.” He tells him not to do this. This affirms the later Israelite law that says God will never call for the slaughter of children in a sacrifice. But there’s a greater reality here. The Hebrew phrase “now I know” signifies so much more. Do you think God, the all-knowing, didn’t know Abraham’s faith? No. This phrase is actually found elsewhere in psalms, Exodus 18:11, 1 Kings 17; and in each instances it is more an expression of joy a person experiences when they’ve received the effects of God’s grace towards them. But here, it’s an expression of God’s joy in Abraham’s complete surrendered submission and trust and worship and fear of God. This isn’t a statement of God’s knowledge. This is a statement of God’s satisfaction and joy in Abraham.

How amazing that God delights in his children. God has been the one purifying Abraham, and yet God takes joy in Abraham in this moment. God’s done all the work, and yet God is pleased in his child. And so, the angel of the Lord delights in the reality that Abraham genuinely fears the Lord. As a result, we read verses 15-19: ¹⁵ And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” ¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba. ¹²

God restates the covenant, but there’s an expansion here, nestled in verse 17: and your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies. . . . That means that Abraham’s seed will conquer their enemies. As Israel reads this, wandering in the wilderness, they ought to not be afraid to go into the Promised Land. God promises to be with Abraham’s seed. Will they trust him?

But there are fuller and more complete ramifications for us. The first I want to emphasize is that God provides and God is good. Now, I want you to think about the trials in your life. Do you believe God provides and is good? I want you to take a few moments to write out your “yeah, but” statements. The “I know God is good, but. . .” statements. So, for me, “I know God is good, but my oldest son, whose name means the Lord is salvation, currently rejects God’s salvation.” Is God good? Does he really provide if salvation isn’t received? Or, “I know God provides, but he also took one of our children in the womb.” He seems good to others, but what about me? Take some time to write out your “yeah, but.”

Now, every “yeah, but” statement seeks to deny God himself. To say “I know God is good and God provides, but,” will lead you to deny who God is. Meaning that the “yeah, but” will actually chip away at

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 22:9–14.

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 22:15–19.

your fear of God and lead you away to live for other things. Is God good? Yes, period! Does God provide? Yes, period! No ifs, ands, or buts! **If you fear God, you will worship him through sacrificial surrender because you trust in his goodness and provision.**

And notice here that Abraham's worship here isn't coming in times of ease. It's coming right at the moment of his most painful point of life. I think many of us in our culture might worship ease more than God. When life is smooth, people are all nice, Sunday morning didn't have any problems in it, all the songs were my favorites, the preaching was on time, I'm not struggling financially, there are no medical problems – in those moments we rise up and say, "Oh, God is so good!!!" And we worship the Lord and thank him. But what about if your child dies of leukemia? What about my 43 year-old friend who is a wife and mother of four and was just diagnosed with stage 4 liver cancer? What about Abraham who is about to lose all hope of a future?

In the darkness, the light shines brightly because it's in the darkness that we can see when people truly fear and love and value God above all. So, where are you? Maybe you say, "But that's not fair! Why would God just call us to suffer?" Oh, please hear this. God doesn't simply call people to suffer. As we've learned from the beginning of Genesis, the world is under the curse of sin and death – hence suffering comes in this world. But God has promised the seed of the woman, one serpent-crusher to come. And that serpent-crusher would come to this world and obediently surrender his life on the cross as a sacrifice to end all sacrifices. At Jerusalem, Jesus was raised up on the cross, and God the Father did not stop himself from this act. Instead, our Triune God planned this for the salvation and rescue of people and the redemption of all creation! God is not aloof to our pain. He entered into it. And just as the Lord took delight in Abraham's obedience, we're told that the Lord was pleased in the sacrifice of Jesus. And so, Jesus conquered death and rose from the grave!

Jesus' death was the darkest moment of human history, and yet shines the brightest to reveal the worth and glory of God! Jesus' life and death and resurrection was one of fearing God, worshipping the Lord, obediently surrendering to the Lord and trusting him always. Now, if you are a follower of Jesus, you're set free in the fear of God. And you're set free to worship God even and especially in the suffering and trials. Jesus himself says in Matthew 16 that the gates of hell will not prevail over his keys. Hell and sin and death are the true enemies. Sin doesn't win. Brokenness doesn't win. Jesus wins! And, if you are united with Jesus, you win, too! Do you believe him? Will you trust and fear him? The apostle Paul will borrow words from this story and then say in Romans 8:32, **"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"**¹³ If you are a follower of Jesus, you don't need to live in fear of death, or being persecuted. We don't need to fear what the government could do to us. We do need to fear famine, poverty, or nakedness. Those fears will bind us. If you don't follow Christ, you ought to fear. You are blind and without Christ's sacrifice on your behalf. Oh, fear God not this world! But if you know Jesus, you are set free to fear God who graciously gives us all things for all eternity! The Lord is good. The Lord provides. I pray we'd believe this. I pray we'd live like it. **The one who fears God worships the Lord, obediently surrendering to God and trusting in God's provision and goodness. Do you see how God has, and is, purifying your faith and increasing your healthy fear, worship and trust in him?**

¹³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:32.