



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Abraham: An All-In Life

Surrendering to God

Tim Badal | November 17, 2019

I invite you to turn with me to Genesis 22. Once again we're going to look at the life of Abraham to discover what it means to live an all-in life. So far we've seen that being all-in means following and trusting God. It involves prioritizing Him and serving Him. It also means we are to celebrate every day as we see how God is moving. how He's changing us from the inside and how we can enjoy His goodness in our lives.



Today we're going to be learning what it means to surrender to God. An all-in life means we surrender all we are and all we have back to the Lord. We'll see this modeled for us in one of the craziest stories in all of Scripture. When Abraham was willing to offer his only son Isaac, we see that he was willing to offer all he had back to God. We of course would question why God would ask him to do this in the first place, but we also know Isaac was kept in God's loving hands. So while we might never understand this story from a human perspective, we see in it the reality that God works all things out for the good of those He loves and who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

In this story we will see that Abraham had to choose between the two beings he most loved: the God he served and the promised son he was watching grow up. God called him to decide who was more important—God Himself or the son God gave him. And we also are given choices every day. Which will we love more: the gifts or the Giver of those gifts?

Let's read the first 19 verses of Genesis 22, in which we'll learn how Abraham chose to surrender to God:

¹ After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ² He 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. 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?" ⁸ Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

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. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² He 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." ¹³ And Abraham 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."

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.

When was the last time you faced a test or trial that stretched you beyond measure, that took you to the end of yourself? When did you encounter something so difficult that it caused you to wonder if you would survive it physically, mentally, emotionally, and yes, even spiritually? What has tried your faith to the extent that you might even have questioned why God would even allow this circumstance in your life?

If you’ve walked with God for any length of time, you’re aware that being a Christian does not exempt you from these challenges. In fact, you know that a loving Father still allows His children to be stretched beyond what we think we can handle. As we consider this call Abraham received from God to surrender his son Isaac, we see this as being far beyond what humans might be asked to do. Yet, it’s what God called him to do. Abraham had to decide whether he loved the gift more than the Giver. Or was he going to protect the gift, giving it a priority over his walk with the Giver?

This question applies to our church in a specific way this morning, as today is Commitment Sunday. This is the day when we choose to surrender some of the gifts we’ve been given so God’s Kingdom can be advanced in the years to come. While there’s not exactly a one-to-one correlation between our decision and Abraham’s, some of the principles are the same. Just as God called Abraham to surrender all he had, He also calls us to do the same. More than just our money, He asks us to surrender all of who we are, including our pursuits and pleasures. And just as Abraham needed to gain the confidence to make the right decision, we need that confidence as well. So I’m going to show you in our text six truths that can help us as we consider what it means to surrender to God.

In the opening verse of Genesis 22 it specifically says, “...*God tested Abraham...*” It might be easy for us to look at the test and think it was more like a temptation than a test. But the Bible is clear that God tested, not tempted, Abraham. In James 1:13 we read that we are never tempted by God. But of course, the devil tempts us all the time. His goal is that our relationship with God would be divided or even destroyed. So in our case, when we say no to temptation, we’re saying no to that which would harm our relationship with God. Jesus told His followers in John 10:10, “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*”

How does God give us that life of abundance? He does it by being a great provider and bestower of blessings. But He also tests us in our faith. Temptations are designed to destroy us, but God’s testing is designed to develop us. A lot of people in this church are teachers. As the good teachers they are, when they give students a test, their goal isn’t to have students fail the test. The goal is for them to pass the test with flying colors. God gives us tests in the same way—not so we will fail, but so that our Christ-like character might develop and mature. God brought Abraham into His school of faith, giving him a series of pop quizzes along the way. But this test was Abraham’s final exam—the hardest test he would ever face.

God also gives us certain tests, certain situations, where we must choose either to pursue Him and His purposes or pursue our own desires and preferences. But of course, our first desire in any testing is to get out of that test, and as quickly as possible. But Abraham obeyed without wavering what God was asking him to do, until the test was completed. Because of that, he harvested a great deal of glory for God and learned more about the greatness of God.

Surrendering to God challenges our comforts.

So what does it mean to surrender to God? First, it will always challenge our comforts. We’ve chronicled Abraham’s life over the last few weeks and now we see he has reached a place where God is going to give him his hardest test. But we might notice that this test in his life came at a time of great peace.

If we go back to Genesis 21, we’ll see that Abraham had made a treaty with Abimelech, the king of the Philistines who inhabited Canaan in that time. This treaty guaranteed that Abraham could live in that land in peace during the final years of his life. Abraham first came to Canaan when he was 75 years old, as we saw in Genesis 12. He was 100 years old when Isaac was born. Now, depending on how old Isaac was at this point—and there’s debate about that—Abraham was probably somewhere between 110 to 130 years old. But as Genesis 22:1 says, “*After these things...*” was when this test came. We also read in Genesis 21:33, “*Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.*” For all of his days in Canaan, Abraham had lived an “RV life.” That is, he went from place to place, setting up camp for a while, then when conditions changed, he would load everything up in the RV, and head to another place. This was the pattern of his life up until Genesis 21. But here for the first time, Abraham put down some roots, if you will.

Why would he change his lifestyle now? It was the birth of his child. Children motivate us to put down roots. They need stability, a place to call home. So we might see his planting this tree as being a sign of his intention to stay in one place. Maybe he thought that one day he would put up a tire swing for Isaac. Or maybe it would be home base when the old man and his son played tag. It was in this place that the word of the Lord came to Abraham.

When God calls us to surrender, it will always challenge our comforts. Some of us have grown comfortable, even lax, living off last year's steps of faith—or even the faith we had much earlier in our lives. God then comes in these moments of comfort to shake us up, to call us to things we've never done. Comfortable Christianity is not what makes us Christ-like.

So in the middle of Abraham's comfort, God comes to him saying, "I know I've blessed you with many comforts, but now I have something I want you to do." He says in Genesis 22:2, *"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."*

Surrendering to God means we must make a choice.

Abraham had faithfully followed and trusted God for many years. He had made God the priority and God had fulfilled His promise to give him a son. So now Abraham was living the good life, reaping the benefits of his earlier faithfulness. But now he had a new decision to make. Was he willing to give up that which he most loved on this earth? He had longed for Isaac for so many years. Isaac was everything his and Sarah's minds and hearts were filled with. I've had three boys born to me and the joy a little boy brings is wonderful. It must have given this old couple a new lease on life. Now he had to make a choice. Did he love the gift more than that Giver?

We run into this as well. As we enter into the Christmas season, we need to remember that it's the givers of the gifts we should be falling in love with, not what they give us. Gifts come and go, but it's the love of those who give us gifts that's most important. We especially forget this when it comes to the gifts we receive from God. He gives us everything we need, all the blessings under heaven. He showers us with mercies that are new every morning (Lamentations 3:23-25). His faithfulness itself is a gift to us. But even while we use and enjoy His gifts, we tend to forget from Whom they came.

So God was asking Abraham, and He's asking us as well, "Do you love My gifts more than you love Me?" Another way for us to look at this is to ask ourselves, "Who or what is our Isaac? What is most important to us?" Commentators believe one of the reasons why God chose to test Abraham this way might have been because He saw a bit of idolatry growing in Abraham's heart. After all, Abraham came from a family of idols worshipers. But this was different; Abraham wasn't just in love with a normal idol. We too can run into this problem. We think idols are things we build with gold or silver or stone, things we might literally bow down to. So it's easy for us to think we don't have idols. But Abraham was to learn that even God's good gifts could become idols. That would include people and even children.

As one writer put it, an idol could be anything good. Some of the things he listed were these:

- Our children or spouse
- Our home, money, cars
- Our fame, athletic ability or position at work
- The organizations we've managed, the buildings we've built or the songs we've written
- Our education, the people in high places we know or the classes we've taught
- The portfolios we've built, the fortunes we've amassed or the travels we've done

All of these are things that make us feel comfortable, important or safe, but any of them can become an idol. God wants us to surrender all these things back to Him. In one of her writings, Elisabeth Elliot said, "The process of Christian growth is one in which God breaks the idols of our lives one by one—and oh, how painful it is!" That's because, by definition, we love our idols.

So we have a choice: will we surrender to God all we have? Surrendering doesn't mean we have to put everything dear to us on a literal altar and burn it. Don't go home and set your house on fire—but if you do, don't leave your children inside. Don't throw away your car. That's not what God is asking you to do. Rather, God is asking us, through His Word, to live open-handed lives before Him. We need to be able to say, "Whatever You ask me to do, I will do. Wherever You call me to go, I will go. Whatever You ask me to give, I will give. Lord, I am open to whatever You may ask of me." That's what God was saying to Abraham. "Are you willing to obey and trust Me? Are you willing to prioritize Me above all else?"

Jesus puts this same challenge to us in Matthew 6:33 when He says, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* As we put God first, all the things we worry about will be taken care of by Him. But the choice is ours. Will we choose God or will we choose the gifts He’s given us?

Surrendering to God means we will look crazy to the world.

We need to realize that if we choose to surrender to God, it will look crazy to the world. We might have wondered if Sarah asked Abraham, “Where are you going?” “I’m taking our son on a trip.” “What are you going to do?” “I’m going to make a sacrifice.” “I don’t see you taking any sacrifice with you.” “Yeah, God says we’ve got to kill our son.” “Um, I don’t think so.”

Or think about the servants who went with them. They had seen Abraham build altars and give sacrifices before. But for the first time, they saw him leave without any animal to sacrifice. “Abraham, what are you going to do?” It doesn’t say he told them anything, but imagine if he had told them how the son he had waited for for so long would be the sacrifice, that he was going to give Isaac back to God. “What are you thinking? That’s crazy!”

Likewise, we too live in a world of craziness. Bear with me as I walk through your day today. You’re leaving for church and your neighbor sees you. Then later he sees you return and asks, “Where were you?” “I was at church.” “What do you do there?” “Well, we gather together with other people.” “What kind of people?” “All different kinds. We built a place where we can gather because God wants us to.” “What God?” “The God of the Bible.” “Hmm. Tell me about Him.” “Well, He’s invisible.” “You mean you’ve never seen Him before?” “Nope. But He talks to me.” “He does? An invisible God talks to you? Well, what do you do at church?” “We sing songs to Him.” “The invisible God?” “Yep.” “What do you sing about?” “How great He is.” “The invisible God?” “Yep. And then we pray to Him.” “What does that mean?” “We talk to Him. Then we hear a guy talk about Him for a while.” “How long?” “Oh, 45 minutes.” “45 minutes about an invisible God?” “Yep. We love it—amen? Thank you.”

“What else do you do?” “We give money to that God.” “The invisible God?” “Unh huh.” “Why?” “Because that invisible God sent His only Son, born of a virgin—that’s what we celebrate at Christmas, a day you get off, by the way. We celebrate the fact that He came 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem, died on a cross for sins He did not commit, then by His blood being shed, it has cleansed me of all unrighteousness and now gives me an eternity in heaven.”

“Where’s heaven?” “I don’t know.” “Well, what’s it like?” “Better than anything in this world.” “Have you seen it?” “No.” “Have you seen ads for it?” “No, but I believe it with all my heart. I love to worship this God.” “You’ve got to be kidding me.” Your neighbor was just getting ready for the football game and you had this whole crazy conversation. Do you see how crazy our world thinks we are?

Any time we start surrendering to God, it will seem crazy. If you take big steps to serve God, it will be crazy. If you give your tithes and offerings to God, people will tell you, “That’s crazy.” If you share the good news of Jesus Christ with people, they’ll tell you you’re crazy. You’ll serve with the gifts and strengths God has given you and people will say, “Why are you wasting time doing that? This seems crazy.”

Surrendering to God is a crazy thought, but thankfully the wisdom of God is foolishness to men. What God was calling Abraham to do—and what God is calling us as a people to do—is crazy in the eyes of the world. But it is the power of God that will change lives, including our own. It will look crazy to the world.

Surrendering to God demands courage to obey.

So far we’ve read that Abraham was tested by God, along with the details of the test. Then the next verse, Genesis 22:3, starts with the simple word “So...” In light of what God just said, *“Abraham rose early.”* That would have been the day to sleep in. God told him, “I want you to kill your kid,” and that would be the day to get up late and have brunch, hoping God would change His mind.

But Abraham moved quickly to obey. It was almost as if he was excited. He did not delay. Was it hard to trust God? Abraham had gotten to the point where he knew it was better to do the crazy thing with God than to do the sane thing without Him. If you truly want God’s blessing in your life, you will buy into that principle. It’s better for us to do the crazy things for God than to do the things that make sense to men. That’s because it’s in those places where God works and where faith works.

Abraham got up early, cut the wood and prepared to start his journey. It would take them three days to walk to Mount Moriah. Abraham took Isaac up the mountain, bound him with ropes and was about to kill him—then God intervened. What gave Abraham the courage to obey? It was only possible because he had great conviction. Abraham knew something about God’s character.

In the hall of faith in Hebrews 11, Abraham is given the most coverage. He was the all-star of the group, the MVP. This is because Abraham believed in things that were not as though they were. In Hebrews 11, we're told that Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac. It wasn't to be a pleasant kind of killing; it was slaughter, an offering made to Yahweh. But as we read in Hebrews 11:19, *"He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead."* In Abraham's mind, he knew he would experience great pain and sorrow for a brief time, but he also believed he would see God's miracle. He was sure God would keep the promise of offspring from this son Isaac.

Let's go back to Genesis 22:5, where we read, *"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.'"* It's clear that he believed Isaac would somehow be coming back down the mountain.

Continuing in verse six, we read, *"And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son."* We don't know how old Isaac was, but however old he was, we also see his faith in this moment. After all, what 30-year-old would let his aged father put him on a bed of sticks and lift of a knife to kill him?

Others think because the text mentions he was a "lad" or "boy," he might simply be old enough to carry sticks, but young enough that Abraham would still be stronger than him. Or perhaps he was too young to understand what was going on. But he was old enough to ask his father a question, as we read in verse seven: "Ah, Dad?" Or the Tim Badal translation, "Yo, Dad? We've got the wood; we've got the fire; we don't have the offering. Something's missing, Dad. Where's the offering coming from?"

Notice how Abraham responded: *"God will provide..."* Those three words will be found three more times in this story and Mount Moriah would become a place where God was known for providing for His people. Abraham had no idea how God would provide in that situation, but he knew that somehow He would.

It is these three words that will also revolutionize our own ability to surrender to God. When we are convinced that as we serve and honor God, as we give to Him and share His goodness with others, we can be assured that God will provide. And if God is willing to provide, then we should be willing to offer everything we have and everything we are with open hands. We should be able to tell God, "Lord, if You need this, You can have it. What is mine is Yours. Just as I received it from You in the first place—whether it's money or a relationship or anything else—I'm now willing to give it back to You. I know if I do, You will continue to provide everything You deem necessary for me to have."

Let me say something about our own situation. As a church, we're committing to give to the Lord. That means we have to choose to do something that may seem crazy to the world. It will challenge our comfort and will demand courage to obey. These things are true of any commitment we make. The only way we'll be able to make the hard choice is if we believe with all our hearts that God will provide. This is why I love the Bible, because it testifies to the faithfulness of God in the lives of His people.

We're about to enter the Advent season, where we will see how at just the right time, God provided His Son. Remember, God has spoken of that provision from the very beginning, back in Genesis 3. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God told them He would provide One Who would crush the serpent's head. Do you have, as a core conviction in your life, the assurance that if you follow God and trust and prioritize Him, that God will provide? If you do, then faith is easier.

Abraham knew God would make a way. Even if the knife was plunged into Isaac's chest, God would be able to raise him again up. Little did Abraham know, as he bound his son on that altar and lifted up the knife, that God would tell him to stop. He had no idea that God had another sacrifice already waiting. A ram was in the thicket nearby. What an awesome moment! Abraham thought God would raise Isaac from the dead, but instead God had another plan. The bottom line was that Abraham's faith was vindicated and Isaac was able to go back down the mountain with his father. God returned to Abraham the joy of his life, but Abraham also could now say, "I loved God more than the gift He gave me."

Surrendering to God gives us an opportunity to celebrate God's provision.

When we surrender to God, we are given the privilege of celebrating His provision and can know the end of the story. Isaac not only came down that mountain, but he went on to live a full life. We'll read in Genesis 24 that he married and had children. For the rest of Abraham's life, every time he looked at Isaac, he would remember how God had provided, but the only way he could see the hand of God was when he was willing to open his closed hands to the God Who promises to provide.

That's where we are today. Do we believe God will provide as we serve Him? Do we believe God will provide if we risk sharing about Him with others? Do we believe God will provide as we give our tithes and offerings? With that conviction, we will be able to look

back and see what our service, proclamation of the gospel and gifts have produced. We will have seen God provide—and we get to celebrate that.

Imagine what was going through Abraham's mind and heart as this 100-year-old man ran down that mountain. Imagine what Isaac was feeling. "That ram came just at the right time. I'm alive!" Isaac had seen God test his dad. He saw his father's faith and saw God's faithfulness in response.

What a testimony it is to our own children that when we surrender to God, they see how God provides. Genesis 22 is an incredible story about giving back to the Lord what is most important and allowing God to take that which seems crazy in the world's eyes and use it for our good and His glory.

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