

Challenged Faith

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, December 16, 2001
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.

by S. Michael Durham
© 2001 Real Truth Matters

Hebrews 11:17-19

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: 19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

Faith will be challenged. It must be challenged! Faith that lingers in the peaceful meadows where children play, babbling brooks wind and flowers with intriguing hues charm observers is not fit to survive the desert's harshness. It will not be able to endure the rigors that spiritual warfare demands. It will not stand the test of the challenge. Faith is the grit in a Christian that is like the warrior's resolve, the explorer's determination, or even the unrelenting questions of a small child. Faith is to be enduring. And faith must be tested and tested often for it to grow in patience. James chapter one and verse three teaches God-pleasing faith must be tried so that patience would be developed. "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." The word "patience" means perseverance or endurance. Faith cannot last to the finish without being first and frequently challenged.

Abraham is called the "Father of Faith." He did not receive that title without being challenged. Indeed he and his faith met great challenges. According to verse eight he was called by God to go to a place he did not know. In verse nine he lived as a stranger, a pilgrim dwelling in tents. But the greatest challenge was yet ahead of him. Oh, yes, it is not easy to move out of the comfortable and routine. It cannot be easy to uproot your family and embark to only the Lord knows where. Literally. It must be a big challenge to give up a fine home and live the rest of your life in a tent. But no test that Abraham had suffered was equal to the test of which our text speaks.

As far as I am concerned this was the greatest test of Abraham's life. And I think it to be the greatest trial of a man's faith found in the Bible with the exception of Jesus and the cross. How would you have responded if you heard the voice of God say—"Kill thy son, thine only son"? The same wonderful voice had always reassured you and made wonderful promises, but now when you hear it, it sends horrifying chills. How would you have responded? My father told me the story of a man he knew when he was a boy growing up on a Ozark farm. This man believed he had heard the voice of God speak to him as Abraham heard it. He was persuaded that God had

told him to sacrifice his son to God. And so he attempted to obey what he believed to be the voice of God. Fortunately, he was stopped before he could do the terrible act. The authorities placed this man in a mental institution. That's what the world thinks about a man who says he hears voices telling him to kill his son. If anyone knew what Abraham's intentions were that day as he and Isaac climbed Mt. Moriah, they too would have stopped him and considered him mentally insane. You wonder if at any time he thought himself to have lost his mind. But the truth is God did tell him to do it, kill his son, his son of promise.

Once again there is a reason why the writer of Hebrews records this act of faith in his epistle. He wanted to encourage those who were being challenged. He so desired to lift up their hearts and build up their faith to persevere. Therefore, he inserts this story about Abraham to remind them, as Peter does his hearers, that they shouldn't think it a strange thing that trials, and yes, fiery trials, should come upon them.

And as for you and me this text will serve no other purpose than what the author intended. It is to be an encouragement to our faith as well. My dear friend, does it seem your heart has been placed upon the rack and is being ripped apart? It is your faith that is the target of both Satan and the Lord. The enemy wishes to weaken your faith while Father of lights desires to strengthen it. Do your shoulders stoop because the burden lies too heavy upon your back? Does the load of the trial seem to go beyond even what God has promised to, "not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able"? Then I bid you to give me both your ear and your heart and let the word of Hebrews, an Epistle of Encouragement, strengthen you.

Now, before we proceed with the text, let me tell you what the core, the object, and the heart of faith is and what the theme is of this message. It is the integrity of God. There are trials that are no more than nuisances to us. They are not so difficult that we cannot go on. They challenge us ever so slightly, and we see by them what the Lord intends with us. We can clearly see what the Lord is doing and how he will do it. I remember in my earlier years as a Christian some of my tests being of this nature. But as we graduate from grade school the tests get a bit more difficult. There are trials and tests sent from God for which we have difficulty understanding their purposes. We cannot see the hand of God and where He is marking out a place for us to go. We cannot trace His hand. We cannot imagine His plan's course. It is then we have nothing to cling to but God's integrity. It is knowing that God's character will not allow Him to lie or be anything but good and wise that is our anchor. And although we see no goodness in the fire that afflicts us, nor any wisdom in it, we can trust the heart of God that the trial cannot be anything but good and wise. If this is not true, then this book is a great sham, and we have been duped by the greatest hoax of human history. Let us now proceed and see this from the text and from the life of Abraham the integrity of our Loving Father we call God.

THE ENORMITY OF THE CHALLENGE

The first thing I want you to see from our text is the enormity of this challenge. As I said a few moments ago, Abraham had never been tested like this. To wait until you are one hundred years

old and your wife is ninety for a son to be born is one big test, I agree, but it's not like the test to take that very seed and offspring of promise and offer it before God as a sacrifice.

Abraham's Affections Are Tested

Abraham's test is an enormous challenge for several reasons. First of all, Abraham's love for his son was being tested. Isaac is the very boy whom he had longed to see, whom God had promised to him. And with diligence and patience he had waited, perhaps even waiting when he thought it past time. But God gave him his son. Now I ask you, can you even begin to imagine yourself in his predicament? It's not a natural thing for a father to turn on his son or his daughter. I know we hear of it occasionally when a parent will kill his or her own child, but that's not a natural thing, it is contrary to even nature. Rather it's instinctive to preserve their life, to protect their life, to nurture them, to teach them, to love them, and to guard them well. But God spoke to this man called Abraham and said in essence, "I'm asking you to ignore everything your heart feels for your son and take his life." God was asking Abraham to do something very unnatural. He's a father, a man who had watched his boy play around his knees and who often would gather him upon his lap and caresses him and hold him even as I see you holding your children here this morning. Often he had stroked his hair and looked into the little gleam of his eye. Oh, how Abraham loved Isaac! This was Sarah's and his only son. By now Isaac is probably a teenager, therefore, for many years Abraham has lovingly watched over this child and protected his son from harm. And now God requires him to be the agent of the boy's death. I cannot imagine the enormous stress there had to be on hearing this command.

This weekend both of our boys have been away from us. Joseph is still away. I pray for his safety today coming back from a youth conference with one of his friends. I told Karen on Friday, "I think it would be better if we leave them here and we go rather than to have them gone." You can't deny it, there are anxious moments when they're not under your wings. You have to pray through those moments of anxiety when you're not there to protect them. It's not just physical either. There are the spiritual enemies you must guard them from. Oh, the wiles of Satan that they don't yet have the discernment to recognize. They need dad sometimes to be there spiritually to discern the enemy when they can't discern him. When you're not with them, your hope is that your prayers and faith are their constant companion. You pray God's keeping of them.

But God was asking Abraham to do that which is contrary to all of this parenting instinct. Abraham is to remove his protection from his son and be the one to bring harm. That's an enormous challenge.

Abraham's Allegiance Was Tested

It's enormous for another reason. It tested Abraham's allegiance. His allegiance to God is being challenged. Was Abraham to love the Lord his God with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength, and not love Isaac? God was asking Abraham, "Do you love me with everything you have, and am I the prize that outweighs all other prizes? Will you be obedient to me even if I ask you to give up the most precious thing in your life?"

There are some things in my life I could easily give up for God right now. I don't have to watch television, I don't have to go hunting, I don't have to plant a beautiful rose and try to nurture it. I can give up all of that. I can even give up my library. It would pain me much, but if He required that of me, I would give it. But to ask me to give up my children? Mom and dad, listen to me, God does ask this of you also. Of course not to kill them, but He asks you to give them over to Him and to trust Him with their lives. Will you and can you trust God with your children? Faith is not inherited. God's got to work in your children's lives; they can't live by your faith. Who will you trust them to if they do not seem to follow you as you follow God? The only thing you will have in those hours when they look like they're going the wrong way is the integrity of God and His grace. Can you commit them to His will? You must!

He also asks you to love Him more than you love your children. The Lord asks no less of you than He did of Abraham. He demands your allegiance be His before it is your children's. You can have no other gods before Him. How we so idolize our children and how guilty we are of idolatry. Jesus said, "he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). Where is your allegiance? Is it to family more than to God? Today your faith is being challenged by this question. May the Lord help our faith to respond as did Abraham.

Abraham's Doctrine Was Tested

God not only tested Abraham's allegiance and his affections, but the Lord also tested Abraham's doctrine. It is here where I get so puzzled over this test, I still don't understand it. It seems to me God was asking Abraham to do something that was contrary to the spoken word of God. God told his grandfather Noah that a man should not take the life of another man. That was the law of God. And now God comes and He contradicts His very word. I've told you from this very pulpit that God cannot contradict His word. But today I must tell you there was a time when God gave an order that was totally contrary to His word. How do you understand that? It seems unfathomable. When Abraham heard the voice of God say, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of;" he heard that which had to seem a contradiction of what He knew of God. I must confess, if it had been me, I would have had to reason this couldn't be the voice of God because it does not fit the written word of God. It does not jibe with my understanding of God and His Word. Now we, having the advantage of knowing how the story ended, can argue that God did not require Abraham to kill Isaac. Yes, but we have an vantage point that Abraham did not have. Abraham did not know that God was going to stay his hand as he wielded the knife above Isaac. Oh, how can we know the mind of God or His ways? God will not be put in a theological box and kept there. You cannot make God safe. He is not safe!

Abraham's Destiny Was Tested

Fourthly, this was an enormous challenge to Abraham because it tested his own destiny. Wasn't Isaac the seed of promise? Didn't God say through Isaac all of the nations of the world will be

blessed? Abraham's whole future and posterity and lineage was dependent upon this one life of Isaac. God asks him to snuff out that life and with it, his destiny and all the promises of God. Abraham's trust in God's promised destiny was being tested. Surely the greatest skeptic here must admit the enormity of this challenge.

Isn't it true that whatever the challenge is, at the moment it always seems like it's the biggest challenge you have ever faced? It feels like there's never been one greater and there'll never be another like it? But, listen to me, yes there will be. I want to encourage you this morning, but I've got to give you the bad news first. The bad news is, there will be other tests after the one you now face which will be even more enormous than this present challenge. Abraham's life is an example. First test, would he get up out of his homeland and follow God not knowing where God was leading him? He passed that test, and God brings another one. He promised Abraham that He would give him a son, a son of promise. And for twenty-five years he waited. Past biological possibility he waited. When he could not have children, nor could Sarah, Abraham yet believed God, and Sarah conceived and a baby was born. That was a very big test. But now the test is even bigger—would Abraham kill the son of promise?

You do know that God does that—He graduates us. Well, maybe that's not encouraging, right now, but it is true. If there's something bigger than the test you are now facing coming your way, then perhaps you will want to close your bags and go home and just hide. Ah, dear friend, wait a minute, it is when there are no odds for your success that God shows up and does things that, well, you and I only dream about. We pray that God would show up and manifest Himself, but sometimes such calls for difficulty. The truth is people really don't want miracles. No, you really don't want a miracle. You don't want a miracle, because to have a miracle, you've got to be between a rock and a hard place and nowhere else to go. To have to have a miracle, you've got to be beyond human ability to solve the problem. Really friends, we don't want miracles, do we? But, oh thank God, when we need one, we've got a God who's big enough to perform them.

HOW TO ENDURE THE CHALLENGE

Abraham Rejected the Flesh's Input

Let's move on to the second heading of our text. The question we want to explore is how did Abraham endure the challenge that God presented him? Well, I think first of all Abraham rejected his flesh and placed his confidence in God. If you are to endure the challenges of your faith you too must reject the flesh. I am amazed at the cleverness of my flesh and how much like God it can sound. The flesh can come up with what you would think are spiritual ideas. But if your faith is going to endure the challenge, you've got to discern this and reject the flesh's pseudo-spirituality.

In Proverbs chapter twenty-eight and verse twenty-five Solomon says, "He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat." You may not at first see the point of this verse, but it is quite simple. There are two things Solomon is contrasting—pride and faith. Pride is the opposite of faith in God; it is having faith in one's self. If you

want to be faithful to God and endure the test, you're going to have to reject your flesh. You're going to have to reject any notion that you can do anything for God. This is why some people who are in this room are not saved today. You may want to be saved, but you have set the terms and conditions for your salvation. You have set an expectation on what God should do in saving you from sin. You do not want to experience the uprooting of sin in your heart. You desire to be forgiven and yet continue in your sin.

Others of you have an expectation of a certain feeling or experience to accompany salvation, but I assure you, you who will never know Christ until you quit leaning on your own understanding. You've got to reject human wisdom like Abraham did. As I said a few moments ago what God commanded Abraham was so against human nature and the law of God, that we can be sure that there was no way in which Abraham could have understood. He didn't have the luxury of our hindsight, all he knew was God had said, "Go and I'll show you where you're to sacrifice your son." Having no way to understand the purpose of this test, he refused to lean unto his own understanding, but in all of his ways he acknowledged God and God directed his paths.

Oh, how precious are the words of Proverbs chapter three and verses five and six, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." But another text is just as sweet to the questioning heart and without it Proverbs three, five and six is a little more difficult. The text to which I am referring is Isaiah chapter fifty-five and verse eight, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." Often our Lord's ways will not coincide with our logic or plans; therefore, we can reject our human understanding and rely on His goodness. We know and trust that He is "too good to be unkind and too wise to be mistaken."

Abraham rejected human wisdom and he responded by faith. The writer of Hebrews begins the seventeenth verse with two words, "By faith." Abraham survived the test by faith, and so must you; indeed, there is no other way. He did not lean unto his own understanding, he trusted in God, and he immediately obeyed God. There was no argument. In Genesis chapter twenty-two verses one through three we see no arguing or resisting but quick obedience. In the Genesis account, a time sequence is put forth for our edification. When God told Abraham to kill his son Isaac, there was no lapse of time. There were no days of wrestling with God and then final resignation to God's will. In verse one Moses records, "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham." Tempt Abraham? Yes, tempt Abraham. But the Bible says in James that God tempts no man, neither can He be tempted. Yes, that is correct. The word tempt there is the same word for test or trial. So when God tests a man, it is not enticing him to sin, it is testing his faith, and that's exactly what God did to Abraham. God tested Abraham, "and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

Once again, the Lord God does not entrust Abraham with all the information, just as He called Abraham out of his homeland to go to a country Abraham did not know. More often than not

neither does the Lord give you and me all of the details, but says to us, “Follow me and I will lead you where you are to go.”

And now verse three, “And Abraham rose up early in the morning.” Moses gives us some insight to the time sequence. When did Abraham hear the voice of God? It was during night. Maybe in a dream, maybe in a vision, maybe while in prayer, but, friends, it was while the sun had doused its light and darkness replaced the light of day. It was in the night when God spoke, and when the sun came up that next morning, Abraham got up immediately and he obeyed God. Now that’s faith, and that’s how faith responds, by immediate obedience. Don’t argue with God, you might as well gargle with gasoline and spit in a fire, you’re not going to win. Don’t argue. Do it! And when you respond by faith and obey immediately, you will have God’s promised provision. Why do you think we argue and tarry in doing what God tells us to do? Because we think we know better than God. But Abraham the very next morning obeyed.

The Integrity Issue

Notice secondly, as Abraham responds by faith, not only do you see immediate obedience, but Abraham accepts it. I have appreciated Abraham a lot more this week. This man did what he could not understand. One more time I’m going to tell you that this command from God was against nature and against God’s laws. There was no way which Abraham could have understood what all this meant. And yet he accepts it. And why does he? The question must be asked. Why would a man get up and do that which he cannot understand, which seems contrary to his understanding of God, and that goes against his affections for his son? Why? Because it was the only thing he had, the character of God. He believed that God could never make a mistake. It was the confidence that Abraham had in God’s integrity that motivated him.

So many of us will not do what God wants us to do until God explains it to us in fine detail. And then we want an attorney to read the fine print for us, because we don’t want to step out in faith where we cannot feel or see. We do not want to do things without the total and complete picture. We demand a final analysis before we commit. But dear friend, God will never ever show you the complete picture and all the details, for if He did, it would not require faith. He wants you to trust in His nature. You know I believe in the promises of God, but those promises mean nothing, absolutely nothing, if there’s not integrity standing behind them. And so I’m telling you this—there will come tests that may make even the promises of God seem shallow and weak. Why, there might not even be a promise for them in all of God’s word. I cannot imagine this happening but should it, you have enough to trust in the Lord. You have one thing that is as good as a promise, and it is God’s integrity. God may not promise to heal your body, He may not promise to heal your marriage, He may not promise to save your child, and He may not promise a worldwide ministry. But will you believe in His character anyway?

Abraham Acts Contrary to the Promise

And then thirdly, Abraham acted contrary to the promise. Again, this astonishes me. But then I shouldn't be amazed because he did it by faith, and faith is being able to see reality as God sees it and comes by the word of God. This man had learned that when God spoke, it meant to do it and God would see him through.

LESSONS FROM THE CHALLENGE OF FAITH

What are the lessons that we can see from this challenged faith? There are four lessons. Let them minister to your heart. The first is that a test reveals to us what is in our own hearts. In Genesis chapter twenty-two and verse twelve, we see Abraham with his knife in hand raised above the boy, Isaac. The knife has been honed razor sharp. Abraham loved his son. But He loved God also, and so with the sharpened instrument of death, raised above his son's body, he begins its descent and all of a sudden God speaks again. That same voice spoke that He had heard often. "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" (Genesis 22:12).

Did God not know something about Abraham that He had to test him in order to find out? Did God not know what Abraham would or would not do? Was God puzzled, and so He said I better test this man to see if he really loves me with all of his heart? Absolutely not. God knew. In fact, not only did He know what Abraham would do, He knew every thought that Abraham would think about it. He not only knew every thought that Abraham would think about it, He knew every contingency that could have happened that Abraham didn't think about. No, He knew completely. The person who needed to know was not God, it was Abraham. And the reason sometimes that God tests you and me as He does is not that He needs to know how we'll perform, or how much we love Him, or how much we will trust Him, He already knows. He's wanting us to know how much we love Him, how much we'll trust Him, how much we'll obey Him. Sometimes we love Him a whole lot, sometimes we don't. Sometimes we obey, sometimes we don't. Sometimes we trust, sometimes we don't. And it's these tests that show us our own heart.

Therefore, I say to you that the test comes. Whatever you're enduring right now is because God wants to show you something about yourself. For those of you who are introspective, this ought to be a happy moment for you, because often God thinks much better of you than you do of yourself. He thought a whole lot more of Abraham than even Abraham realized of himself. And Abraham knew at this moment in his life that God was preeminent above all things. Dear friend, I long to know beyond any doubt that God's preeminent in my life. And the only way that I can know that is when my devotion to God is tested. It was the only way in which Abraham himself could know how much God meant to him, and it is no different for you and me.

But not only did Abraham learn something about himself, Isaac also learned a great deal. Isaac was not an innocent bystander; God was building this young man for a life of faith also. Isaac did not learn that his father did not love him or that his father was some type of psychopath. He learned that his father loves God more than he does anything else or anybody else. He learned a very first hand and dramatic lesson on how you obey God when God speaks. Some of us need to

learn that lesson. I pray not so drastically shall you learn it, but you need to learn it. Isaac learned more that day about obedience and faith than any preacher's sermons could have taught him. And he saw it demonstrated in his father. I am sure that Abraham afterwards explained to him all that had happened. My, how vivid the lesson of how God always provides and how that God provides for the greatest need of all, a divine substitute for our sins.

A second lesson is that faith is not the ability to see the future. I think sometimes we misunderstand faith. We think people of great faith can almost predict what's going to happen next, that they have some kind of prophetic ability to look into the future. Look at verse nineteen of Hebrews chapter eleven. Abraham could not tell how this test was going to end. Even though Abraham operated by faith, he was wrong on how he thought God would turn the test around. Verse nineteen says,

Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure (Hebrews 11:19).

In Abraham's mind he accounted that God was able to raise Isaac up from the dead. In other words, what that means was this, Abraham had full intentions of killing Isaac, and lighting the wood, and setting his son's lifeless body on fire, all the while thinking that God was going to miraculously raise Isaac up from the dead. Abraham is a man of faith, and yet he is doing the same thing you and I do, calculating how God's going to bring the answer. And like you and me, he was wrong. Most often we are so discouraged with our faith because we believed God for a certain conclusion to the test of our faith, but God responded differently. We think we do not know how to walk by faith. Was Abraham any different than we? He thought he knew the outcome of this test, but he too was wrong. Was his faith any less as a result? No, of course not. God records of Abraham in our text that it was by faith he offered Isaac. Because God may not respond as we anticipate does not mean our faith is weak or that we are not walking by faith. Faith often has nothing to do with knowing how God's going to win the day, it's believing that He will.

You can have great faith and not know the means or methods God will use to serve His purposes. Do you remember the three young men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? You talk about having faith. What was their answer to the king? "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter" (Daniel 3:16). They didn't get in a holy huddle and decide how they would rehearse their speech. What was said was straight from their heart. "We will not be careful how we answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Daniel 3:16-18). They didn't know if God was going to be the fourth man in the fire and spare them. All they knew was God was preeminent and He is to be obeyed. Thus faith may not always know the conclusion but it rests in God no matter the end.

A story is told of a farmer who had gone through some very difficult times. He had lost his farm. A would-be comforter thought he would try to comfort the farmer. He said to him, "I've heard you lost your farm, that's too bad."

But the farmer replied and said, “No, that’s good.”

Well, the man was dismayed by such a response and he inquired further why this was not bad.

The farmer said, “Well you see, my son broke his ankle and was not able to work, and since I could not do all of the work, we lost our crops this year.”

And again the man was disturbed and felt even more sympathy for the old man, so he said, “Oh I’m so sorry, that’s so bad.”

“Oh no,” the farmer said, “that’s good.”

To which the man was even more puzzled, and so he finally asked him, “What do you mean this is good? He broke his ankle, you lost your farm.”

“Well you see,” the farmer said, “my son was drafted into the militia, and while he was training for battle he broke his ankle. That was good.”

“I don’t understand, why would that be good?”

“Well, you see, the troop my son was with was all killed in one strategic battle, nobody survived. And so you see, if my son had not broken his ankle, he would have gone to battle and been killed. I would have still lost the farm, but this way I still have my son.”

Friends, I know you don’t know why you are afflicted. We do not know why we go through the things we go through. As a pastor it is often a very painful thing to see your flock hurting. You cannot explain the reason for the suffering. I feel so often helpless having no profound words, no words of wisdom that would turn the heart glad. The only thing that we can do is pray. Pray. And when we pray there must be a quiet faith, a deep settled confidence that God, the judge of all the earth, will do right. A.W. Pink said, “This is the very nature and character of a spiritual faith that it persuades the soul of God’s absolute supremacy, unerring wisdom, unchanging righteousness, infinite love, almighty power. In other words, it rests upon the character of the living God and trusts Him in the face of every obstacle.”

The third lesson for us is that faith in God relinquishes all for God. Don’t tell me you’ve got great faith if you’re holding on to something that keeps your heart from being totally yielding to God, one hundred percent. Abraham offered to God something that was very close to his heart and was a part of his life. But the greatest of prizes to Abraham was God, even more than his son. Why is it that a man can offer his son to God and we cannot relinquish the things much less important than our children? Why can we not release the things which keep us away from God? What is it that you’re not wanting to turn loose of today because you cherish it too much?

The fourth and last lesson is that God challenges our faith to bring us to desperate dependency. All Abraham had that morning as he held the knife above Isaac's beating chest was God. And He was all Abraham needed, and He is all you need. If you have God, you have enough. Sounds so nice, doesn't it? But it is your only anchor when your whole life is being uprooted and shaken.

You say if you only knew what God was ultimately up to you could endure. I believe our text today can answer that for you. I think it gets to the very heart of what God is after. And this is what you and I need today.

Let me explain by using one of God's servants, John G. Payton. Payton, born in Scotland in 1824, was a missionary to what was called at that time the New Hebrides, today called Vanuatu. It was a place where little missionary effort had occurred. He took his wife and small child with him to serve God by telling others about Christ. After a few short months he had to bury both his wife and child because of an epidemic disease that was spreading across that small island.

One of the most powerful paragraphs in his autobiography describes an experience when hundreds of angry natives were trying to kill him and on advice of an unreliable chief to whom Payton had been witnessing he hid in a tree. This is what Payton says of that night.

Being entirely at the mercy of such doubtful and vacillating friends. I though perplexed, felt it best to obey. He told me to get into the tops of this tree and there stay until he came for me. I climbed into the tree and was left there alone in the bush. The hours I spent there live all before me as if it were but of yesterday. I heard the frequent discharging of muskets and the yells of the savages, yet I sat there among the branches as safe in the arms of Jesus. Never, never in all of my sorrows did my Lord draw nearer to me and speak more soothingly in my soul than when the moonlight flickered among these chestnut leaves and the night air played on my throbbing brow as I told all of my heart to Jesus. Alone, yet not alone. If it be to glorify my God, I will not grudge to spend many nights alone in such a tree to feel again my Savior's spiritual presence, to enjoy His consoling fellowship. If thus thrown back upon your own soul alone, all alone in the midnight, in the bush, in the very embrace of death itself, have you a friend that will not fail you then?

That's what God is after; this is God's pursuit in your life. It is to get you and me to the resting place of faith, so that we can enjoy the consoling fellowship of Christ's presence as being enough. Let me say it again, what God is after is to get you to the place that you can rest that Jesus and Jesus alone is enough for you. That's it. Now some of us are not willing to pass the test today, we're not there yet. But God is not going to quit until you are. For some of you this will happen when you have been stripped of everything you own. It might be as you are at a graveside burying your soul mate. It might be a few hours before you leave this world for another, all alone in a hospital room. But, hear me, God is enough. Turn to Him, and rest in faith, and you will find the sweetest presence and fellowship you have ever experienced all the natural days of your life. Some of you will come by another means, but that's what God is after, that your spirit will be so in tune with His spirit that God and God alone is enough. It doesn't mean you have to go to death's door, but it does mean you do have to die that Christ might live within you. And as "by faith Abraham," so "by faith" will you glorify God demonstrating He is sufficient. He is enough. Amen.