

Abraham: The Principle of Believing God Anyway

Hebrews 11:8, 11, 17-19. Background: Rom 4:16-24, Gen 12, 15, 17-18, 21-22

Good morning, men. Let's do a couple of shout outs. There are a couple of new groups to welcome this morning. There is "Men's Group of Marines" meeting on the base at Havelock, North Carolina and a chaplain approved this group to reach men on the base. Jeremy Mallory is the leader.

The second group is "Iron Man." You might want to think about your grammar since there are six of you, you might want to call it Iron Men. I'm just saying. Six guys who meet at 6:30 in the morning at University Christian Church, West Los Angeles, California. Scott Julian is the leader there.

We are so glad to have you men with us. Join me in welcoming these men to the Bible study. One, two, three, hoorah! Good to have you guys with us.

This morning we are starting a new series, "How God Makes Men." We will look at the lives of ten Bible men; ten epic stories; ten proven principles and one huge promise for your life. That huge promise is that you can become and will become the man that God created you to be, because God has a plan to make you into that man. We are going to explore that. We are going to unpack that.

The first talk in this series is on the life of Abraham. We are going to look at the principle of believing God anyway. I don't know what kind of impossible circumstances you are in this morning; what kind of seemingly impossible circumstances you might find yourself in. We are going to be looking at the life of Abraham. We are going to see that he faced three sets of seemingly impossible circumstances, like there is no way out, and it makes no sense whatsoever. God associated three different tests to Abraham in these circumstances.

In Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Faith is the foundation of the Christian life. Abraham is called the father of our faith. In Genesis 15:6 it says that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. R.C. Sproul said that is the second most important verse in the Bible because that is the foundation of the Christian faith that we are saved by believing. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. We call him the father of our faith. We are going to look at his life. We will see how God made Abraham and how God makes us. Here is the big idea for the day. **God makes men by showing us how we can believe Him anyway in the face of what seem like impossible circumstances.**

THE FIRST TEST: GOING NOT KNOWING

The series is "How God Makes Men." The first way that God makes men is by showing us how we can believe Him anyway, even in the face of what seems like impossible circumstances.

We will look at three of those impossible circumstances. First up is the first test. Abraham first shows up in the Bible when he is 75 years old. He lived to be 175. I figured out when he comes on the scene, relevant to our age he is about 40. He comes on the scene when he is 75 years old and he is living in a place called Ur. It's probably like Scottsdale, today. He is 75 years old, very affluent, kind of like one of the top ten cities to retire in back in the day. He has a very comfortable life going on. In Genesis 12:1-3 God calls him to leave his country and God says "go to the place I will show you and I will bless you. I will make you into a great nation. If you bless somebody I'll bless them." There is a great promise for an unseen future. Abram has a test. Does he leave the comfort of Scottsdale, and all of his affluence and go to this place that God hasn't even told him where it would be? God just said go to the place I will show you. That is the first test we see in Abraham. Will he believe God's great promise for an invisible future or will he cling to the visible present? That is his test. How did he do?

Let's look at Hebrews 11:8. "By faith Abraham, when 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. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign land."

How did he do? He passed the test. By faith he went and obeyed God and then his life really began to change. It is not that crazy or ancient for God to test you like this; to test you and make you by giving you a test to answer a call to some unknown invisible future. Every man in this room has had that happen. Every single one of us has had this happen. The question is what will you do? Will you answer the call? Will you pass the test? Will you take this big step that God is asking you to make? Will you believe God? Will you trust in the invisible future or will you cling to the present that you can see?

This takes many forms. It might be, do I change careers? I had to make that decision myself. God called me to be a real estate developer. I loved real estate development. It made me feel alive. It was my spiritual calling to develop real estate. I loved it.

Then, God organized a test for me. He put it to me when I changed my career. Would I leave the thing that made me feel alive, and pursue a new career? He put out a test in front of me. Here is the problem. I had no idea what I would be doing if I left real estate and went into ministry. For the first five years in ministry I had no idea what I was doing. I was afraid to say no to anybody. God called me to ministry but He didn't call me to a specific ministry. I did a racial reconciliation ministry in Mississippi. They are still doing it. I'm not. Then He called me to do family ministry, then marriage ministry, I got called to do men's conferences and speak at the cove, the Billy Graham training center. I basically said yes to everything. I was afraid to say no to anything because I was afraid I would miss God's way.

It was five full years before God made it clear that my calling was men's discipleship. I passed the test. I just kept moving forward. That's what He wants you to do. Keep moving forward in faith. Keep going, even though you are not knowing. Maybe it is about who you are supposed to marry. Maybe it is about whether or not you are going to adopt a foreign child. Or maybe it is to get additional education or to be reeducated for a new career.

I remember myself ten years ago. I was praying one day and said, Father, I can look at my ministry – I had a couple of decades of background already – and arithmetically project what

kind of impact You are going to get. You made an investment in me, and You want a return on that investment and I arithmetically can chart that out for the rest of my career.

I made this prayer. I said, Father is something You would like me to do differently that would give You a greater return of investment that you made in me? The answer was, I would like you to go get a PhD in management. I said, "What?!" I was thinking, this makes no sense but by faith, I did it. I obeyed. I was already one third of the way through a doctor of ministry program at Reformed Theological Seminary, and I have a master's in that. It is not like there is no context for this, but I did that, and finished six years ago. Just now, ten years later, it is beginning to become. It is just now coming into focus why he wanted me to do that, because we are trying to go from a staff of 15 people to a staff of 350 people. I needed some management skills to do that. I would have had to do this research anyway. Now I have a PhD. Pretty cool.

Whatever it is God is calling you to do, the question for you is whatever that thing He is prompting you to do, will you go? Will you believe in the reality of the unseen, what you can't see, or will you cling to the unreality of what you do see? Because what you do see is not necessarily the real thing. We get this by faith. That is why with Abraham, the operative principle here was by faith. He believed God. That is the big idea today. God makes men by showing us how we can believe Him anyway in the face of what seemed like impossible. In the face of what seems like it is just impossible. It is not. This is one of the main ways that God makes men. He shows us how to live by faith. This is showing us how to live by faith. He tests us. It is not an ancient idea. It is the normal Christian life. God will test us, because He loves us and He is trying to make us into the men that He wants us to be.

THE SECOND TEST: A TWENTY-FIVE YEAR WAIT

Now, the second test. At Abraham's roughly ten year mark, God comes to him and says, I am your mighty shield, and Abraham says, here we are and how can this promise that You made to me a decade ago, how can that be? I don't even have a son. I am supposed to be this great nation? I don't even have an heir. God reaffirmed His promise to him. Poor Abraham. He was a flawed man, just like you and I are flawed men. Instead of completely trusting and waiting on God to do the things God promised, he accepted his wife's offer to sleep with Hagar and have Ishmael.

God said no. It is not through Ishmael that this promise is going to be fulfilled. He ended up at 99 years of age, 24 years after the promise was made Abraham still has no heir. His wife at that is 99 and Abraham is not exactly a spring chicken. The test God puts to him is will you believe God for the impossible? Will you trust Him to do what seems impossible? How did he do?

Look at Hebrews 11:11. "And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore." He believed God by faith. That is how he did it.

Here is the application for you. Most men can point to something they are sure God called them to do. Now it is five, ten, fifteen or more years later and it still hasn't happened. Every single man in this room knows what I am talking about. It is a grief that you carry around. It is a pain that you carry around. It is a burden that you carry around. Now it has been so long you are

thinking, God I thought I had heard from you but I guess you were wrong. Don't do that because you need to think in Bible time. We think in temporal time, but God thinks in Bible time which should be obvious in this passage that God thinks different in an altogether different way about time than we do. The Scriptures say with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day. In one sense Jesus died two thousand years ago but in another sense it was the day before yesterday in Bible time.

God already told Abraham his people are going to be enslaved. He already set out a 500 year timeline for this promise of Abraham to occupy the Promised Land. God already set out on a 500 year process. It a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day, I am going to make my promise come true for you by noon. You are going to have to wait until noon. Because with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day. If God wants to give you a ten year wait, not a twenty five year wait, would you be willing to wait ten minutes for God to give you the thing you want the most in life? It is a test. Will you believe Him for ten minutes or twenty minutes?

I have a brother, Bill. I have asked you guys to pray for him many times. I have been praying for Bill for four decades to come to Christ. I remember so well the nineteenth year. I prayed the whole nineteenth year. I realized at the end of the nineteenth year that I stopped believing God can save him. I wasn't praying things, only rote words. I repented of that. I started thinking back to the idea that I can trust God to do that which seems impossible and that is your test too. The thing you want so much you feel like He has led you to do a long time ago, will you trust God to do this impossible thing? That is the test.

Some of you have children who have strayed from the faith. There is no pain like child pain. If your kids are doing well all of your other problems will fit into a thimble. Men compartmentalize and for women everything relates. But if you have a child who has gone astray you are mixed up too. You become a woman. If you have a child who is not walking with God you become a woman. You know if you have that kind of pain, you just don't know if you can hang on anymore. Yes, you can, because God has shown us how He wants to make you into the godly father that will not give up on that child. You probably are the only ones in the whole world who would be willing to pray and implore God to do something on a daily basis. You probably are the only ones in the whole world. You have to keep the faith.

The question is, will you do that? Will you give it a few more years? Will you give God a chance to bring Himself the glory? Yes, you will, because you understand that God makes men by showing us how we can believe him anyway. Even in the face of what seemed like impossible situations.

THE THIRD TEST: MAKING THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

The third test is making the ultimate sacrifice. Keep your finger in Hebrews. I was disturbed and distraught yesterday doing this particular test. Because it is the word of God I want you to see with your own eyes. Turn to Genesis 22. Note that this is the area of the Bible where the Abraham story is told. It begins at the end of Genesis 11 and runs through Genesis 23. If you wanted to read this story it would take a few minutes, half hour, it took me an hour to really read it carefully yesterday.

Let's take a look at Genesis 22:1. Just so you know I am not making this test line up, it is God's language. "Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied. Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.'"

Abraham must be thinking, God, I don't understand this. This makes no sense. This makes absolutely no sense. To us, by the way, it is strange, and it is bizarre in any world, but more so in our world. Back then children were routinely sacrificed to other gods. This would not have been some totally foreign crazy idea. It would be like if God said go ahead and have an abortion. That would sound pretty bizarre and not very like God to you, but it is not like anyone never had an abortion and you didn't know what it was. It is like you were told go and abort your son. That is an analogy of what is going on. God, I don't understand. Lord, the promise...all the nights my wife Sarah wept herself to sleep because she couldn't have children. The ache I carried around all these years because I thought you were going to abandon me, and I thought you weren't going to give me the promise and I kept on believing, and now you want me to do what?

The practice when they would sacrifice an animal is they would slit the throat. The image we probably get when you think about Abraham sacrificing my son it says he is about to take the knife and sacrifice his son. We picture him getting ready to plunge the dagger into the chest of his son. His son would be lying on the alter of wood where he would be burned, and he would slit his throat and the blood would drain out of his own son.

I had to draw the line here yesterday. I could not do this. I don't have that much faith. Abraham was getting ready to do this, and God said stop. Now I know that you truly trust Me. The test was never really that God wanted Abraham to sacrifice his son. That was never the test. The test was whether or not Abraham was willing to do it. God was never going to do it. He just wanted to know who Abraham would put first. The test is, are you willing to give up the one thing you most want to keep? That is the greatest test of all. Men, it is the same test that Jesus puts to each one of us. Are you willing to give up the one thing you most want to keep? For most of us it is our own lives. We want to be in control of our lives. We want to be able to call our own shots, make our own decisions; achieve our own goals. Jesus is saying, but I am among you as one who serves. If you want to be the greatest, be the least. The greatest among you will be like the least among you. If anyone wants to follow me, he has to deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. If you don't love everyone and everything else less by comparison you are not worthy to be my disciple.

The test is not whether or not you are willing to sell your big home or not drive a luxury car, but would you be willing to do that? In other words, would you give those things to God to do with as He wants you to do for His glory?

In most cases God gives you your son back. You give up the thing you most want to keep and He lets you keep it anyway. He just wants to know if you would be willing to truly trust Him by faith.

How did Abraham do? Let's look at Hebrews 11:17-18. "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death."

I remember when I was a brand-new Christian. I didn't know anything about myself, much less God. I had this business deal – one of my first major business deals. We lost a major tenant that was an office building. We lost a major tenant and couldn't find a replacement. One investor had way too much capital tied up in that one project, and he was coming unglued. He was spreading rumors, threatening a lawsuit. I was a young, wet-behind-the-ears young business man and I didn't know what to do. I was terrified. I just knew that the newspaper was going to get a hold of this and that would be the end of my real estate career. That's what I thought.

Now I realize you can have an affair and three years later you get reelected to congress. At the time, I didn't know all that. I was pleading with God. I said to God, I don't know what to do. Please, it is an impossible set of circumstances. There is no way out. Then one morning I was reading Proverbs 3:25-26. "Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the LORD will be at your side and will keep your foot from being snared."

God spoke to my heart and peace came flooding in. It was one of my early counters with the living God, and the living Word, because He spoke to me. I felt like I had just been hit with a taser – a nice taser. It changed my life right there on the spot it changed my life. It released faith. That is what the word of God does. He releases faith. It is because He wants to make us by showing us that we can believe even in the face of what seemed like impossible circumstances. He gives us His word, and sends His word to our hearts. You have to be in the Word to have this happen. He changed my life with that verse. That is what He wants to do with each of us. He has given us Abraham as a type, a model and example of how God makes men by testing us and we respond to this test of faith. The big idea today: **God makes men by showing us how we can believe Him anyway in the face of what seem like impossible circumstances.** The next time God asks you to strike out and go someplace, or the next time God asks you to wait longer than seems normal; the next time God asks you to make a sacrifice of something and you wonder if it is worth the cost, pull an Abraham. Let's pray.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our dearest Father, this is so relevant to us today. This ancient story with these odd circumstances is so absolutely relevant to us today. Father, these epic stories, these proven principles, this is how you make men. Lord, help each of us to be able to grasp this principle, this big idea of how You are making us by showing us how we can believe You anyway in the face of what seems like impossible circumstances. Tutor to our hearts. Help us to flesh this out at our table discussions. We ask this in the Name of Jesus. Amen.