

## “Abraham - This is a Test”

*God takes our messes and turns them into masterpieces*

Genesis 22:1-19 NLT

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We've all had something that was precious to us get knocked off a shelf and get broken. It happens. Things break. *Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Dumpty!* Children's fairy tales and fables have a point to them, and oftentimes they are biblical points. All the kings horses and men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty back together after his great fall - but God can. The way God repairs, renews, redeems, and restores is that it's always better than before.

Once a branch is grafted onto a tree, the point of the graft becomes stronger than the branch itself. When God mends something *his way* - when he *touches* something - it's actually stronger than it was before. It may be scarred, have a knot, with tape dangling off of it, but it's by far stronger than the original branch. That's what God does when he fixes our broken lives. Don't ever hide your scars. Your story is so needed. People need to hear what you've been through, and they also need to hear the *“but God”* at the end of it. They need to know that there's *hope*.

There's an invisible sign on the wall at Bridge Church that says, *“No Perfect People Allowed.”* That's the name of the sermon series we're in, but it's also our *lives*. If we want to have a church full of perfect people, we'll *never have* a church, because God brings the broken - God brings the hurting. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall - well, so have we - and that might look different for everybody. It may be a loss, a divorce, loss of a loved one, loss of a job - whatever it is, we've all probably had more than one fall, *“but God...”*

Your story needs to be told. You need to be able to say to people, “Hey, I've been *through this* and not stayed there, but God has brought me out of it. I might *look* like Mr. Dumpty - I might be patched together - grafted together with green grafting tape - or put together with super glue, but at the end of the day, I'm stronger than I was before, and this is *not* the end of my story! *But God... No perfect people allowed.*

This week, we'll talk about Abraham from the Bible. In the book of Genesis, we find this amazing story, where Abraham, who had done very well for himself, was living in a place called *Haran*, and the Lord called him out from there.

We know little about Abraham before this. We don't know how he came to know God. The culture worshipped many gods, but Abraham worshipped the *One True God*. God called him to a place Abraham didn't know, but God said, "I'll show you when you go." We want to know where God's sending *us* before we take the first step, but in fact, we only need to know him. To know God is to *trust* him. When we know him - know his character, and how much he loves us - even on our *worst* day as much as he does on our best day - then we're not afraid of where he sends us, even if he doesn't tell us where that is.

When we follow his call, and when we trust him, we can know that he always has our best in mind. You take your broken self - the self that's stronger than it was before, because we've been developed - because he's crafting us - he's taking our mess and turning it into a masterpiece. He's taking every test and turning it into our testimony, and he's taking our mess and turning it into a message. So, never hide your scars. Don't hesitate to share your story.

One reason we *don't* is we feel like we're not living *up* to our story - that we're not *doing* it right or *good* enough - not reading the Bible enough - not praying enough - not praying *right* - not worshipping *enough*. We have a tendency to think that we're not good enough, and if we're not living up to the story, then we don't have anything to say because we've made a mistake or two... or *ten*.

But God wants us to know that we can tell our story on our *worst* day, and he will take the God-elements of our story and cause it to pierce the heart of the listener. The story's not about *us*, but it is about God's goodness. Left to ourselves, we're dangerous - but here's the deal - we should still not hesitate to share our story. *Somebody* needs hope. When your life is "gospelized" and you're saturated with the Gospel of Jesus, all you want to do is tell your story. Why? - because nobody can keep good news to themselves.

When you believe that the Gospel is Good News, and that it can't get any *gooder* than this, then you can't keep it to yourself. We should always look for ways to talk more about Jesus, and share our stories - and our failures - the swings and misses - and the hits, with all our broken pieces and our baling-wire-and-duct-tape selves. Share your story of God's goodness.

Abraham gets sent out of Haran, and in his desire to be obedient to God, says, "Yes, Lord!" Things are good where they are. They have large herds, servants, workers, staff - they're "living the dream" - and Abraham goes to Sarah and says that God told him they need to leave there - but, that he didn't say where - no details - but he would show them when they go. The same is true with us. We walk by faith, not by sight. In the hardest test, we are called upon to trust God the most.

Romans 4:20 NKJV

*“He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God...”*

Abraham sounds like a rock star there in Romans - but all of the human side of him has been left out because God doesn't count our human side in the negative. Rather, it says that he was full of faith - he *didn't waiver or doubt* - but actually, in Genesis, both Abraham and Sarah had their “moments”. They were as divinely human as we are, and yet, God used them in an amazing way.

Sarah was barren - past child-bearing age, about sixty-five years old. God had told Abraham that he would be the father of many nations after making a covenant with him, and that he and Sarah would have a child. Abraham *laughed* when he heard that, and when he told Sarah, she laughed as well at God's promise. In their minds, that was ridiculous to even imagine. God then waited twenty-five more years to fulfill the promise, so at the age of ninety, Sarah conceived Isaac.

But, during that time, in their impatience with God, Sarah suggested to Abraham that he should go and lie with her servant, Hagar, to *help God along*. When we start to meddle into God's promises, we produce an “Ishmael”, the son produced from bypassing God's plan for them. Ishmael turned out to be a bad thing. Hagar became prideful and she disdained and despised Sarah, and was ultimately banished by Abraham at Sarah's urging. God - even though they had made a mistake - still said he would bless Ishmael, but there would be enmity between Ishmael and Isaac from that day forward.

Genesis 22:1-19 NLT

*“Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. ‘Abraham!’ God called. ‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘Here I am.’ ‘Take your son, your only son-yes, Isaac, whom you love so much-and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you.’ The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ‘Stay here with the donkey,’ Abraham told the servants. ‘The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back.’*

*"So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders [a type and shadow of Jesus carrying his cross] , while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together, Isaac turned to Abraham and said, 'Father?' 'Yes, my son?' Abraham replied. 'We have the fire and the wood,' the boy said, "but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?' 'God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son,' Abraham answered. And they both walked on together.*

*"When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice. At that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham!' 'Yes,' Abraham replied. 'Here I am!' 'Don't lay a hand on the boy!' the angel said. 'Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son.'*

*"Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son. Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (Jehovah-Jireh, which means "the LORD will provide"). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: 'On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.' Then the angel of the LORD called again to Abraham from heaven. 'This is what the LORD says: Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your son, your only son, I swear by my own name that I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants beyond number, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will conquer the cities of their enemies. And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed - all because you have obeyed me.' Then they returned to the servants and traveled back to Beersheba, where Abraham continued to live."*

These are not mere Bible *characters*, but they are real *people* - like us. Abraham was called "a man of faith", but, at the core of his faith was trust in the goodness of God towards him. The question to us is, have we stepped over the line to say, *"I trust the goodness of God towards me, even though right now I feel like Humpty Dumpty laying on the ground in shards - in a pile of cracked shells."*

Do we trust God's goodness when *things* break? - when we're broken? In the hardest test, we're called upon to trust God the most. Do you feel like you're in a test right now? - in a place where God has put something on you, or in front of you that seems impossible? We know that God is the God of the impossible. He is good all the time, and all the time God is good - even when we're on the ground in shards like Humpty Dumpty - even when we need a vacuum cleaner to sweep us up because we're so broken.

God's goodness remains in the darkest places. Abraham's test is now one of the greatest tests in Scripture. We can look to it to learn what trust looks like. He's also called the "father of faith" in Romans, chapter four. He's heralded because of what he did.

Romans 4:16-22 NLT

*"So the promise is received by faith. It is given as a free gift. And we are all certain to receive it, whether or not we live according to the law of Moses, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the father of all who believe. That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, 'I have made you the father of many nations.' This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing. Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping-believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, 'That's how many descendants you will have!' And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead-and so was Sarah's womb. Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises. And because of Abraham's faith, God counted him as righteous."*

Abraham was very human in his moments. If God can bring back the dead to life and create new things out of nothing, what can he do with *our* broken pieces if we will simply present them to him? We think we can't present ourselves unless we're perfect - unless we've got it all together. We'll never have our stuff all together - but God... Even in light of the fact that Abraham and Sarah made a bad decision with Hagar and Ishmael, Abraham is still considered one who believed - the father of nations - the father of faith.

This is the way that God now sees through history. He doesn't count all of Abraham's *faults*. God doesn't see his past failures and mistakes. *We* see them - God doesn't. He has removed them as far as the east is from the west, the Bible says. He's removed our iniquities - our sin. We keep bringing it up in our prayer time, and keep repenting for the same thing over and over from twenty or thirty years ago, but God says, *"I don't even know what you're talking about."* That's how good he is.

If we really believed that truth, our prayer time would be mostly worship and gratitude. We would say, *"Thank You, God, for faith, hope, love, grace, and mercy! God, You don't see my past. Even though I still have a bead on it, You don't see it!"*

There is no rear-view mirror in the Kingdom of God, there is just moving *forward*. So, today, can you let it go? God already let it go - *can you?* Maybe the greatest forgiveness that needs to happen today is for you to forgive yourself, and *let it go* - and move on. People that don't have the ability, or the capacity to say, *"I'm a child of the Most High God. I'm a son of God. I'm a daughter of the King - I'm royalty."* - they're the ones who have not been able to let go, because they're constantly reminded of the mistakes they've made in the past.

It's like a bungee cord that's attached to your body, that every time you start getting a little traction, it snaps you back. It's time to cut the cord to your past. *Amen?* Cut the cord from the past and release the hold that it has on your life. It starts with a statement of faith: *"God, by faith, according to Your Word and according to Grace, I release my past. I break any and every agreement I have with my mistakes of the past, and any echos - any tapes that are running, and voices that continue to try to call me back and try to tell me that I'm really that, when I know what I am in Christ - I know who I am."*

We may have to do that every stinking day! Say, *"I want to cut the cord!"* It's not a long drawn-out thing - it's a statement of faith - an act of faith - but you have to take the first step. The Bible says if you'll draw near to *God*, he'll take the step and draw near to you. It's literally that simple. When you take a step, he *meets* you there!

If you feel like you're at a place where you keep hearing the echos of the past, when you've already prayed to be set free, then you are free, but there's residue sometimes that you can't see but you can feel. You may think, *"Oh, no, it didn't take."* - but that's not true. You are free indeed - the Truth has already *set you free* - but pray again and say, *"I'm going to quiet those voices and break any agreements I've made with that."*

Just know that even after being set free, sometimes you'll hear those voices that'll try to come back, and that's where you stand in your authority and say, *"No! No way, devil - not today - not on my watch!"* ...and just stand strong in that.



## **Prayer**

*Father, in Jesus' name right now, we cut the tie from the past. We let it go. We forgive anyone who has offended or wronged us, and we forgive ourselves. We let You, God, put us back together again so we can begin moving forward. Father, we thank You for Your work in our lives. Set us ablaze with the fire of Your Presence - the fire of the Gospel - the fire of freedom - and the fire of Your Life in and through us.*

*Work in and through these cracked leaky vessels. Thank You for flowing through us - for filling us, and by faith right now, we receive the filling of Your Holy Spirit, and we say, Overflow us and leak through any and every crack. Overflow the brim, so that when we go out of this place, we'll make beautiful messes everywhere we go, that others may come to know the Truth that sets us free. Thank You for what You are teaching us. We give You this today, in Jesus' name. Amen*

## **Resource:**

Pastor Jimmy also mentioned his and Annette's podcast, called [Living up in a down world](#). There's a link to it - [Podcast](#) - on Bridgefbg.com or go direct to [livingupinadownworld.com](http://livingupinadownworld.com)