

# Abraham: The Life of Faith - Part 5

by Roy Hession

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*This sermon explores Abraham's ultimate test of faith in God through the command to sacrifice Isaac, emphasizing the themes of obedience, surrender, and divine provision.*

**Duration:** 52:07

**Scripture:** Genesis 22:1

**Topics:** "Abraham"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of surrendering to God and the importance of being open to His leading. The speaker shares their personal experience of feeling surprised by God's direction and emphasizes the need to listen to the Holy Spirit for individual application. The story of Abraham's test of faith is used as an example of surrendering to God's will. The speaker also mentions the natural and supernatural aspects of praising God in unknown tongues.

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## Transcript

Will you turn to the book of Genesis, this time to chapter 22. Quite obviously this is the high watermark in Abraham's spiritual experience. It comes as a culmination of so many of God's prior dealings with him, because this chapter begins with these words, and it came to pass after these things.

Here is the culminating point, I think it's right to say, of God's dealings with him. And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham. And the revised version substitutes rightly, I feel, the word prove for tempt.

Actually, there's always a difficulty with this word in our New Testament, because apparently in the New Testament the one Greek word is sometimes translated tempt, and the other in other occasions is translated test, or prove, or try. Well it's capable of both meanings, and we can discover which it is by the context, of course. And quite obviously God isn't tempting Abraham in the sense of soliciting him to Eden.

He never does that. But God does test. He does prove.

He puts on trial. Of course, if we break down under that trial, it may indeed prove to be a solicitation to Eden, but that's never God's first intention. God did prove 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. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and craved the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

The great step when God, when Abraham did as God told him, and left Ur of the Chaldeans. The same faith leads him to go to this mountain of which God has told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

And Abraham said unto his young men, abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son, and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, my father.

He said, here am I, my son. He said, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, my son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering. So they went both of them together, and they came to the place which God told him of.

And Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham.

And he said, here am I. And he said, lay not thine hand upon the lad. Neither do thou anything unto him. For now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horn. And Abraham went, and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-Jireh, as it is said to this day, in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen, or more accurately according to the revised version, in the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.

And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, by myself have I sworn, saith the Lord. For because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed, as the sand which is upon the seashore. And thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.

And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice. So Abraham returned unto his young men, and of course Isaac was a little new, the deep, transaction that both Abraham and Isaac had gone through. They came back as they said they would, and they rose up and went together to Beersheba, and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.

Well now it's very good always to find what the New Testament has to say about some of these Old Testament incidents, and there you have God's authentic comment so often upon an Old Testament incident. If you'll turn to Hebrews 11, you will see the Holy Spirit's comment on this all-important incident. Hebrews 11, verse 17, By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called, accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead, for whence also he received him, in a figure.

Once again one is very conscious that the themes to which God has led us apply to people in special circumstances, in special dealings of God with them. And I find myself, I find it difficult to know quite how to apply this wonderful lesson we have before us, because the circumstances of each of us may be so different that I can only suggest that you just get the real heart of it, and then the Spirit will show you his application for you. I've been very conscious that God has led in a way that's been a complete surprise to me every morning, and perhaps no more a surprise to me than this morning.

I had no idea at all that God wanted us to think about some of the things. He thought indeed the whole thing only came to me when I was repenting of something this morning, and making a surrender to him of something, and I saw why this was the whole message of this passage, and I was surprised. So I'm very conscious that this isn't mine, and yet in saying that I think there's a danger.

I don't want you to think that one claims to speak *ex cathedra*. You can say that as a speaker, and you really get people under bondage. God never wants you to lay aside your rational capability.

We receive the word of God in full possession of our rational ability, that you think it, you weigh it, and you don't take it merely from man, but you let God himself by the Spirit authenticate what he has for you in it. Well now here we have the story of Abraham's supreme test, and a test which he passed, if I may say so, with flying colours. It hadn't always been so with Abraham.

There'd been many failures along the very line of faith, and turning aside, resorting to his own expedience, walking off the seeing of the eyes rather than by faith in Jehovah. But over the years God has trained this man. He's brought him to a place where he can even dare to give him this test at all, and his faith has got to the place where it goes through.

It is the deepest and the most precious experience of Abraham, and it's the point at which his faith at long last reaches its height. Now this is a test which came directly from God. We read it came to pass after these things that God did prove Abraham, and thereby God was conferring a wonderful honour upon Abraham.

We don't read that God did prove Lot. God has simply got to leave that to Sodom. It was Sodom that proved Lot.

But here's a man who's refused the blandishments of Sodom, who's separated himself from so much. And the test that came to Abraham was one that came from God, and thereby he conferred a great honour on Abraham. And here's a test we're going to think about, that God sometimes, indeed very often, proposes to the one who's refused the attractions of the world, who's made many a costly surrender.

It's a test that comes from God himself, and thereby he confers such an honour upon him. And when you find that God is testing you, take it as a compliment, will you? I need to. It's a sort of test that the man of the world will never have.

He can't understand it. It's a sort of test perhaps one who's carnal and not really wanting the best won't have. But it's those that have gone through so much already, for Christ's sake, to whom a test like this comes.

In this incident here, Abraham comes to what I might call the acme of brokenness. He wasn't asked to give up Ishmael here, he'd done that. He was asked to surrender to God Isaac.

Isaac was to be offered, according to God's word, as a burnt offering. It wasn't merely he was to slay Isaac, that wasn't it. He was to offer unto the Lord Isaac as a burnt offering.

He'd offered many burnt offerings. And of all the various offerings in the Old Testament, the burnt offering was that which was peculiarly devoted to God. There are other offerings, sin offerings, and peace offerings, where the offering was divided between man and God, some on the altar, some eaten by the priest, but never the burnt offering.

The whole thing was there on the altar, and went up as a sweet savour to God. And so that was what God really asked. It did mean the death of Isaac, as Abraham understood it, but it was not merely killing his son, but offering him in death to God himself.

Was ever man asked for a more difficult thing to do? And in Abraham's case, as we shall see, there were peculiar difficulties. There couldn't have been asked anything more difficult for Abraham to do than this. It was hard enough for him to part with Ishmael, but after he knew that Ishmael's birth was all wrong.

But Isaac, not only did he love him, but what history, what divine promises were vested in Isaac. And he was asked to give up Isaac, the acme of brokenness. And you may find that God is going to bring you and me from time to time to places, and you say, well this really for me is the acme of brokenness.

And he's not going to avoid it. He's not necessarily going to spare it. And all I can say, when you find yourself facing a test, and the only way through is this brokenness at an utterly new level, shall we regard it as a peculiar honor he's conferring upon us.

Now Abraham could not have gone through this big test except by faith. This is still the thing that God is dealing with Abraham all the time, over faith. If you turn back to Hebrews 11, you'll see that that's what the whole thing was over.

Hebrews 11, you've heard me read it, so perhaps I can just refer it to you. By faith, by faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac. This great offering of his son to God was only possible to Abraham by faith.

Indeed, the whole thing was a test of Abraham's faith. It really wasn't a test of even Abraham's brokenness. Not firstly.

It wasn't a test of Abraham's love for God. It wasn't firstly a test of Abraham's obedience. I mean, the test, will you obey me or will you not? No.

If we read here, it was by faith. It was a test of his faith. And I believe that with us, if we want to rightly understand the workings and dealings of God with us, we've got to see that that's the thing he tests, because that's the thing he wants to grow, that the testing of your faith being much more precious of that gold that perishes.

The other things are all involved, but it's by faith. And you and I will never be able to go through some of the things God asks us to go through, say, by faith, in the promises and grace of God and the blessed outcomes that are all linked with it. Well now, just look at this story to see how it was his faith that was tested.

At first sight, I agree with you. It doesn't look to be a test of faith. It looks much more to be a test of obedience, or a test as to how much he loved God.

Who did he love most, his son or God? And it looks to be very obviously a test of love. But according to Hebrews, it's a test of faith. And if we look at the story a little more closely, we shall see it is.

Well here was this call. Take now thy son, my only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get into the Mount of Moriah and offer him there upon one of the mountains as a burnt offering. He wasn't asked to give up Ishmael, but he was asked to give up Isaac.

This was the son who was very specially given by God. This was the son who was the subject of all the promises. This was the son whose birth was a miracle.

He was a supernatural son. More than that, this was the son in whom all these great promises and purposes of God were vested. God has said, no, not in Ishmael is going to be your promise seen, but in Isaac.

And this great seed was to come, more numerous than the stars, for whom one day Messiah was to come, was vested in Isaac. And now God says, offer up Isaac. It was as if God was pulling down all that he'd built, as if he was taking away all that he'd given.

And the obvious question that came to Abraham when he thought of it was this, well, how can all the promises be fulfilled? Let alone the pain and affection to my heart because of my deep affection for him, there's a bigger issue than that. Not the loss that I shall sustain, but it would seem the loss that God's going to sustain. And we read that by faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac.

It goes on to say, and he that had received the promises, quite definitely, offered him up, in whom God had said, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. However did he get himself to do it, the next phrase tells us, accounting that God would raise him up, even from the dead. Said Abraham, there's only one way, then if this is really God telling me, then God's going to do an extraordinary miracle.

This is the promise seen. If he wants me to offer him up, then it's up to him to raise him up from the dead. I can't be any other way, and I'm going to trust God.

I've seen such extraordinary things happen up till now, when there was no glimmer of possibility. I've been coming to see that God is the God that calleth those things that be not. And if this is his call, it can only be that God intends to raise him up, even from the dead.

And the writer to the Hebrews says, whence in a figure, he actually did. Virtually it was, receiving his son again from the dead, for the boy was right on the altar, the knife was poised, and then God gave him back. It was as if Isaac did indeed go down into death, and was raised up again.

And it was only because Abraham had got such a conception of his God by now, that he could go and do this extraordinary thing. If Abraham hadn't had such a faith, hadn't been educated to such a conception of Jehovah, when this voice came to him, he said, that can't be the voice of God, that's an hallucination. He said, I'm getting introspective, I am.

And you can get introspection, you can have hallucinations when it comes to spiritual things. Only God can educate us and help us, and little fellowship sometimes helps us, with others. But there are certain

propositions that God might put to you.

You say, no, no, no, it's impossible, it's crazy, that's throwing away all that God's given. That would cause the very purpose of God to fail. I can't surrender that.

Or you say, I'm getting introspective, I am. But the man who's been educated, I don't know that I've been altogether educated to this degree, none of us, maybe we're coming up, we're being dealt with, we're being taught, but the man who's beginning to see Jehovah to be the God of the impossible, the God of resurrection, who if he asks to death, knows how to give resurrection, that man will be willing to do what otherwise he never could. Well now, God asks us sometimes to time, perhaps more frequently than we realize, because we aren't always willing, for just such surrenders.

He doesn't only ask for our Ishmael, but he sometimes asks for our Isaac. That which has been given of God, that which is perhaps even supernaturally given to us, that which has an important place in the work of God, that which we think is essential to fulfillment of the promise of God and the purpose of God for our life and service, and God is not above asking you to surrender that. Oswald Chambers has a word that, I don't know where I read it, but it's been with me for years and it's helped my thinking a great deal.

He says, the natural, if surrendered at the call of God, becomes the spiritual. But if at the call of God we refuse to surrender the natural, it becomes carnal. The natural, therefore, can become either spiritual or carnal according to whether at the call of God we surrender it or not.

It's at the call of God, of course. As much as it is natural that God--it's natural, part of our natural life, part of our natural personalities. It's essential.

We can't get on without it. But there are times when God asks us to surrender the natural, the legitimate, even the God-given. If we say, no, I can't do that, that which was natural slips and becomes carnal, the vehicle of the fallen self, very often divisive, and it can slip even one further and become satanic.

But the natural, if you begin to know God has asked me to surrender that which is so natural, it becomes spiritual, and it becomes the vehicle of the Holy Spirit. Now, of course, we want to know what this means in practice, how it applies, and here, too, I'm at a difficulty because situations are so varied, but we must, to help ourselves see the principle, apply it alliterally. Now, we have natural gifts.

Some have a natural gift, we'll say, for singing. Some are able to speak. Some are able to do many things, all of which are very, very useful in God's purpose, indeed almost essential.

And more than that, these gifts have come from God. We call them gifts, don't we? And that's what we mean. If a man is a musician, no thanks to him, it was gifted.

Why some men have this gift and others don't, we don't know. The answer is that God gives these gifts and abilities to some and not to others, and so it goes through the whole gamut of gifts, not only in Christian service, but in the ordinary affairs of life. And we feel, if I've got a gift, I must use it.

That's what it's for. But sometimes, God may say, I want you to surrender that and be willing not to use it at all. It's an Isaac, it's not Ishmael.

Something that's true and something that's useful. Now, this may be, we may not ever come to this, but some of us have at certain levels, though I'm quite sure not at the highest or deepest level. I haven't, but

I've known something of it.

The same is true of spiritual gifts, too. They, in a sense, are very specially given of God. I mean to say, here's a young convert, and he might be even a stammerer.

And as he goes on with the Lord, God does something for him. He's called to preach the gospel, the last person in the world that you would think were called to it, but he's gifted for the work to which God calls him. And as he goes on with God, gifts and abilities develop that were never there before.

More than that, gifts of mind. Oh well, God makes him Christ the man he ever was. How is the church to get on if God doesn't give to his dear church men whom he equips in various ways? Musicians, puppeteers, everything.

Organizers, everything. But to begin with, there wasn't much that you could see, but they were given. Of course, in many cases, there was a natural gift before, and it's very much taken up and increased in the Lord's service.

And how grateful we are. And please do realize that gifts are meant to serve the church. The person who might have some gifts must recognize it's only for the good of the others.

It isn't a plum given to him that he might feel pleased. It's something with which he serves, for the edification of the body. And when we're receiving that, we say, this is God ministering, thank God.

He has so many whom he can pick up and use to help us on, to build us up. And yet God may ask us to surrender a spiritual gift, to park it, to be willing not always to be you, not always to be the one out in the front, to be silent. I can tell you that very often happens in the team.

There are brethren here, all of whom, I'm thinking, those that pray together are gifted men, experienced men, years of it. God's put upon them the responsibility of leadership of a local church. They go up and down the country.

But you know, when we get together, we've got to be willing to die. I'm thinking of the team that got together to conduct the Grace Abounding Convention. One brother came from the other end of England, a gifted brother if ever there was one.

God is you. But he went back to his home at the end of that convention without hardly uttering his mouth, opening his mouth in public. He was natural.

It wasn't easy, but he knew how to get right, and he knew how to surrender. At that time at least, add Isaac. It isn't easy.

Isaac is quite obviously to be taken as a type of Christ. And it may not be gifts that we're to surrender, it may be an experience of Christ we're to surrender. At least the natural element in that experience of Christ.

Why my goodness, when Jesus comes in or moves in in a new way, does a new thing for you, what freedom, what joy, what's he going to express? And the Lord might ask you to surrender that eyes which has come from God. I never felt like this before. Please turn the cassette over now.

Do not fast wind it in either direction. And the Lord might ask you to surrender that eyes which has come from God. I never felt like this before.

Might ask you to surrender all that delight in all those luscious, glorious feelings. When you get to your room you always want it again. I did it last night.

He said, are you prepared to give it up sometime? He said more than, are you prepared to give it up forever? Would you be prepared to live entirely by faith, only on the promises, without all these lovely emotions that we love so much? Isaac, whom thou lovest. Is it possible I love the accoutrements of the Christian life more than Jesus the source of it? But you see, it's come from God. You're dead right, it did.

It came from God to begin with and after a little bit it's become natural. Well, emotions are natural, a part of our natural make-up and much else. Mrs. Penn Lewis has a great and helpful word of testimony in her biography.

I wish we had it on the bookstore. We've got some of her books but not her biography. And Mrs. Penn Lewis tells of how she was used of God in the Welsh Revival.

She tells how she was greatly baptized with the Holy Spirit and it meant for her what she calls a real glory experience. And she was lifted up to different heights, new freedom, lost her inhibitions, there was a new boldness about this woman and a new freedom and liberty in prayer. And then she tells us there came a day when God asked her, are you willing to surrender your glory experience? But you see, it has come from God, I know.

Will you give it back to me? Are you willing to do without your glory experience? Are you willing to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified and to walk surely and negatively by faith in Him, dying to everything else? I don't know, she doesn't tell very much in detail the occasion of how this question came to her. But the fact is, she who had been so baptized in the Spirit came to a point when she was willing to lay down her eyes on Him. And you know, that day she completely lost her glory experience.

No more, gracious ladies, but she got Christ. And when she ministered without feeling, things happened deeply in men's lives that never happened before. It was Jesus Himself dealing, standing in the midst.

All over this country this woman began to have minister's conferences. Ministers from all over the country would sit at the feet of this woman. She was a sick woman.

Only God helped her even to stand up. There was no glory experience making her feel, oh isn't it wonderful, I'm just feeling so elated. But she gave God the word.

And the real thing, the deep thing, conviction, the revelation of the cross. Now, I believe all this that we're thinking about has relevance to something that's very much contemporary at this particular moment about the Lord's people. There's been a strange phenomenon, and that's what it is, a phenomenon, that does happen from time to time in a special way in the history of the Church.

A reoccurrence, again, of what was known in the Acts of the Apostles. We won't use the charismatic, because that sounds a bit too sort of intellectual. That's a Greek word, I don't quite know what it means anyway.

In the same way, I never know what this word ecumenical means. I'm not able to pronounce it. But there's been a recurrence of praising God in unknown towns.

It's a phenomenon that was known in the early Church, that disappears in the Church's history, and then at other times reoccurs. One cannot but deny that people tell me that this has been from God, all right. All these things, let's indeed believe this, but any great experience comes from God, all right initially.

But it doesn't belong to call it perhaps natural. I mean, I have a wonderful experience in prayer. It may not be along this line, it doesn't matter.

But the feelings and the joy of it, well they're natural. And I'm once again faced that sometimes God may ask for the surrender of the natural. If I'm not willing, the natural becomes carnal.

If I am, the natural becomes spiritual in a way it never, never was before. And we may be asked, if we've had a glory experience, am I willing to surrender my glory experience? But you say, it's made Jesus so real to me. Yes, granted.

Isaac was absolutely essential, it came from God. But God said, will you give him up? But I mean to say, it's part of the Christian life, it's given me power. Precisely, Isaac was every bit as essential to the purpose of God, it seemed, as any other gift we may have received.

But God said, are you willing to give it up? Are you willing? And you know, we find deep down we're not. There are motives. I'm not only mean this, anything.

I was thinking God might say, now look, God uses the singing here. And you'd like to lead it. And God seems to bless it.

But that's natural. God the Spirit uses the natural. Are you willing? It might become a rather dumb thing to do.

Maybe everybody thinks that singing ought to be led in that way. If you don't lead it that way, there's something wrong. Are you willing? The call of God comes so often to surrender the natural, which originally has come from God, and be blessed of God.

The same is true in speaking, or any other form of service. It isn't only one thing more than the other. But we see this is essential, it's huge, it's so useful.

I know, says the Lord, are you willing to surrender an Isaac? You see, it is natural. And I must admit, because it's only right to be relevant in everything we say, this, the praising of God in unknown tongues, is natural in itself, not necessarily supernatural. Two months ago, I was in Sunday night, and I turned on the ITV, and there was a program on the gift of tongues.

And a demonstration of gift of tongues was turned on at will. And I heard it and saw it. Well, it's natural.

Doesn't mean to say it's wrong, but it's natural. Maybe initially, God did something, but the continual exercise of that, or any other gift, is natural. Certainly so with anything else, singing, speaking, any other form of service.

Initially, the gift could come from God, but the continual exercise of it, in the nature of the case, must be natural. And it certainly is true with this, it's natural. Even non-Christians may know ecstatic utterance.

Spiritists are known to speak in tongues. Pagan tribes, in their terrifically worked-up dances, do. Doesn't mean to say that that of the actually apostles wasn't of God.

But it's simply God using a rather unusual, but natural faculty of man, that's all. It may, in doubtless very often, is the spirit of God, but basically it's natural, and God says, now what about this natural thing? Are you willing? To put it down at the foot of the cross. Are you willing, never again at all, to use that gift? Now that's death, that's Isaac going down.

It's the same with any other thing. If you've got an eye, oh I'll get it back again, that's not surrendering it. Abraham didn't, he believed that somehow God was going to do the miraculous, but it really was Isaac going right down to death.

And as I say sometimes, we're not willing. Whatever the thing may be, we find there are motives, if we're honest, that make us love it. Isaac whom thou lovest, he loved Isaac for himself.

And I must confess, I like trying to preach the gospel, and I can like it too much. I can like it for its own sake, and I find I get something out of it. Self and pride may come into it, gratification.

And so it is with every other. But you say, I can't give it up, how can God do without it? Well, Abraham might have said the same. And so it is, there may be some God-giver of the thing, perhaps I haven't mentioned it at all.

Something quite, quite different. Something that's come from heaven, a piece of service he's given you, abilities he's given you. It might be something material he's given you, or you needed it in that home, or that career.

You've got a story how it really came from God. He's not about asking for us to give those things back to him, whatever they may be, and to give them in death, whereby we take our hands off them. This is something very, very deep.

Now listen, we won't be able to go through such a surrender, except by faith. It'll only be possible by faith as it was to Abraham. You and I must have the same sort of faith.

If this thing is something you feel is so essential to the purpose of God, it may be your career, it may be all sorts of things, I cannot begin to apply it. I say, well Lord, if you're really asking for it, it's up to you to do what I can't do. It's up to you to do the miraculous.

It's up to you to bring it again from the dead. Because some things are almost, as you see, part of the very purpose of God for your life. Years you've been taught to discover that blueprint, and you've got it.

Now I say, is he willing to put it to death? When you say, Lord, if that's got to be, then you've got to raise it up in somewhere or other. That's what Abraham's faith was. He'd been educated, he'd seen such wonderful things done by his God, that his faith could even believe that.

He looked beyond the sacrifice to, he couldn't be quite sure, but a glorious outcome, it couldn't fail. And he knew that though the cost was going to be costly, he was not going to be the loser, and God's purpose was not going to fail. He accounted that God would raise him from the dead, which in a figure, God in fact did.

Yes, you and I may be asked to lay in God's life's glory, dead. But you and I can only do it as we just know that our God is the God of the resurrection. That somewhere, somehow, we don't know, but we're quite sure, from the ground, there'll blossom red, life that shall endless be.

How true that was in the case of Mrs. Penn Lewis, I mention that because it sort of crystallizes things. God isn't unkind, God isn't cruel, God all the designs to do two things, to develop confidence in himself that nothing dismays us. And he all the time designed some better, better, better thing.

He wanted to disenchant Abraham's heart from Isaac. Abraham loved Isaac for Isaac's sake, not merely because he was the promised seed and part of God's purpose. And some of these things that God's given us, we may have come to love too much, to delight in too much.

They minister to gratification of self, they minister to pride, though we don't see it because it comes so obviously from God. This is in the pages of the book. No one would ever have thought this up had it not been here.

This is the same God who deals with us. We've got to say, I will rise again. I will rise.

Last week we had a great resurrection hymn sung by the choir, I will rise, hallelujah, I will rise. And here too, this prince was all the time at work, dying to live, dying to live. All the time laying down something of the natural, even the God-given natural, to receive, as we shall see in a moment, something a thousand times better.

Well now, it must have been a very hard thing that Abraham was asked to do, and sometimes it's very, very hard for us. I think of even now as I speak of another application of this great principle, and I've mentioned it, and I think perhaps God's guiding us too. It's natural to long for affection.

It's natural to long for someone that you love, who loves you, to be your life partner. God gave it, it's designed. Sometimes God asks you to surrender the natural at his call, at least for the time being, and nobody knows how long the time being is going to last.

If you refuse to surrender the natural at the call of God, it becomes karma, the vehicle of self-centered interest, and the spirit of God isn't in it. Oh, but happy the fellow of a girl who's prepared to surrender the natural at the call of God for just as long as God asks him to, knowing he never fails. He won't be the loser.

There's witches and wolf. It may be that God has got that coveted thing round the corner, but you've parked it. If it comes, it's all of grace, and if otherwise it's only because he's got something much, much better for us in his plan.

Oh, we could go on and on, trying to apply this to all the situations of life. The natural, if surrendered at the call of God, says Oswald Chambers, becomes the spiritual. But if we refuse to surrender the natural at the call of God, it becomes karma.

It applies to everything, everything we've mentioned. The spiritual gift can become karma if we're not willing for it to taste the cross, that we might have Christ himself rather than Mary the gift. Well, as I say, this was a hard thing for Abraham, and I like to think that when the proposal was made to Abraham, and God saw Abraham draw back with horror at the thought, he said to Abraham, Abraham, I know it's hard, but Abraham, I'm not asking you to do anything which I'm not willing one day to do myself.

And we all know that one day God did exactly the same himself, and a man walked up a hill, dragging the wood over his shoulder, and the Father in heaven followed his course, the course of the sun on earth, to this great place of surrender, and death, and even disgrace. And the crowd gather round to watch, and we perhaps, we can imagine that we gather round too, and we say, oh God, please don't do it. Oh God, spare thy son.

Do thy son no harm. It's enough, he's gone far enough, for now we know thou lovest sinners, in that thou hast not withheld thy only son from us. And then we remember the story with, oh God, a substitute was found for Isaac.

Find thou a substitute for Jesus. And if we did say that, do you know what God would have said? A substitute was indeed found for Isaac, but there's none for Jesus. He is the substitute, bearing shame and scoffing rude, in thy place condemned he stood, and the little tiny deaths that God may ask us to die, he's done the same himself, but at a level that none of us can enter into and understand.

But even as he went to it, what was the motive by which Jesus, by the Spirit, offered himself without spot to God? He did it by faith. Again and again he said, I'm going to Jerusalem, I'm going to be scourged and ill-treated by the Pharisees and the rulers, and be crucified, but every time he added, and shall rise again. His was exactly the same sort of faith as Abraham.

He says, I am the promised seed. If I'm extinguished, it would seem that the purpose of God is finished, but I'm going to account that God is able to raise me from the dead. I shall rise.

And dear one, you've got to lay hold of that when you're in the crux of a dilemma. You can dare to say, I shall rise. Then we push the keys of the piano down.

Lovely music comes, but they're not kept out. They come up. And Jesus causes us to bow, to die, to see where self has got in, and even if self hasn't, if he's asking, if he's asking you for that surrender, you're willing, you're willing to be a cipher.

Oh, that's a hard thing. You know sometimes when I've been on the team and I long to express myself, and you know self-expression is very good. What happens to a child that has no self-expression? It gets stunted.

It must have self-expression, and we all need it. It's natural, and God knows it is. He wants you to have it, but there are times he says, are you prepared to surrender that? The opportunity for self-expression.

I've had such battles. Lord, am I meant to be a cipher? Be willing to be a cipher, but understand you will rise. You will rise.

It was so with Jesus. It was so with Isaac. But don't you think when God gave him back Isaac, it was something different? No longer was that selfishness entwining itself on the part of Abraham around Isaac.

This man was God's. This man was God's, and oh God knows how to give us our Isaacs back, but he's not quite the same Isaac. Something got out of it that needed to go out of it, and you go on your way a broken man, having learnt something.

And what now is there is from heaven. I've been thinking of the old parable of the vine and the branches in this connection. Jesus says in John 15, every branch in me that beareth fruit, God purges it, that it may

bring forth more fruit.

He purges it. And I've seen vines cut back. In California, a friend of mine has a great vine farm, and at certain times of the year they're cut back, cut back so much that there's hardly any branch left.

But only so does the fruit come. If he doesn't cut it back, there won't be any fruit. Now what is it that he cuts back? He cuts back that which is produced by fruit bearing.

It's fruit bearing that gives it branches and foliage. That's got to be cut back, but it's going to go on bearing fruit. And I've seen that when God gives fruit in our lives and uses us in some measure or another, that's growth.

You really feel something. You really feel you've got confidence. You can really make it.

You can really do it. Unless that's cut back, there won't be any fruit the next time. So that's what God cuts back.

It's the Isaacs, that which is associated with fruit bearing. And we have to begin all the time in the bottom form of Jesus. A poor sinner's nothing at all.

Jesus, our all in all. But my friend, there's fruit. As I am prepared to stay down there, going back to the cross, die, willing to say yes, Lord, to anything he touches, even the legitimate, knowing I will rise.

And oh, God, we're so touched. He said, the cross now has done these things. I want to tell you, Abraham, whenever I'm doing any blessing, when there's any blessing going around, you're going to have it.

If I'm doing any multiplying, you're going to be one of those that's going to be multiplied. You're going to be the special object of my favor. Why? Because thou hast done this thing.

And who knows what lovely things he has in store for us, because thou hast done this thing. If there's any blessing around, it'll always hit you. Any multiplying around, you'll be in the good list, because thou hast done and art still doing this thing.

Well, now we're in this together. I know I shall be challenged on this by the Lord. Am I really willing to surrender at his call, the natural, even the God-used natural, even the God-given natural, to have a new life, a resurrection like that which isn't merely of me, but of him all the time.

And each one of us, it's the same for us. And so, this, what may look upon as the acme of brokenness, it wasn't so difficult, because he saw the blessed outcome. By faith, in the Jehovah he'd come to know, he offered up Isaac, knowing there he would rise.

And so it is with us. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we want to thank thee that thou'st the first to go this way, who can tell the depths into which thou didst go, the complete abnegation of everything of natural, everything that would naturally be precious, even to thee as the Son of God.

But Lord, you rose, and we are part of the blessed fruitage of thy rising. And thou dost call us to walk the same way. All we can ask thee, dear Lord, is to interpret to us, personally, each to our different situations, this that we've read together from thy holy word this morning.

We ask it in thy dear name. Amen.

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