

Explore the Bible Adult Leader Guide Teaching Plans

Session 12: The Faith Test

Genesis 22:1-14

Memory Verse: Genesis 22:8

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

READ Genesis 22:1–23:20, First Thoughts, and Understand the Context.

STUDY Genesis 22:1-14, using the commentary from Explore the Text. As you study, take notes on all the steps, small and large, that Abraham took in this test of his faith for a clear understanding of what faith looks like.

PLAN a teaching outline that incorporates suggestions from Lead Group Bible Study, as well as additional helps in More Ideas. For the opening activity, create a test of things studied over the past sessions for distribution. Check out more ideas in *QuickSource* and at blog.lifeway.com/explorethebible.

DEVELOP yourself using the free helps found at ministrygrid.com/web/explorethebible.

GATHER THE FOLLOWING ITEMS:

Personal Study Guides. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*); **PACK ITEM 14** (*Poster: Genesis 22:8*).

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS):

ENGAGE: As the group arrives, distribute the test you created of things studied over the past sessions. Allow time for the group to complete the test and review answers. (Take care to not embarrass those who didn't answer correctly.) Then lead the group in discussing their view of taking tests. Conclude the discussion with a reminder of the value of a test being for the learner. For example, it gives him or her a barometer of his or her progress.

INTRODUCE: Tell the group that you just gave them an informal exam, a test of their confidence in you as a leader. Explain that because your instructions did not appear to have any practical purpose, those who followed them probably complied because they trust you. Take a humorous approach with any who ignored your directions.

TRANSITION: *The little exam we just conducted was a mild and inconsequential test of the group's faith in me as a leader, but in today's session passage, you will see a test of Abraham's faith that was so radical it demanded a complete and utter dependence on the Lord.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT:

READ: Call on a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 22:1-2.

HIGHLIGHT: Point out Abraham's immediate and obedient response to God's call: "Here I am" (v. 1).

CLARIFY: Call on a volunteer to paraphrase what God demanded from Abraham.

HIGHLIGHT: Lead the group to identify the various phrases that God used to indicate the enormity of what He was asking of Abraham.

ASK: *On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate the difficulty of this test of Abraham's faith? List other faith tests a person could face and rate them in comparison.* (PSG, p. 125)

READ: Call on a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 22:3-8.

SHARE: Invite volunteers to point to key phrases that struck them as noteworthy as they studied prior to arriving. Be prepared to point out the following:

- HCSB: “early in the morning” (v. 3), “we’ll come back to you” (v. 5, emphasis on *we*), and “God Himself will provide” (v. 8)
- KJV: “early in the morning” (v. 3), “I and the lad will . . . come again to you” (v. 5, emphasis on *and the lad*), and “God will provide” (v. 8)
- ESV: “early in the morning” (v. 3), “I and the boy will . . . come again to you” (v. 5, emphasis on *and the boy*), and “God will provide” (v. 8)
- NIV: “early the next morning” (v. 3), “we will come back to you” (v. 5, emphasis on *we*), and “God himself will provide” (v. 8)

ASK: *What did Abraham's immediate action reveal about his faith? How does the speed of obedience reveal a person's level of faith?* (PSG, p. 126)

MEMORIZE: Reference Genesis 22:8 as the session memory verse, drawing attention to **Pack Item 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) and **Pack Item 14** (*Poster: Genesis 22:8*). Suggest that the group learn the verse by repeating it to the person sitting beside them.

TRANSITION: Recall the times that Abraham built an altar to God, highlighted in previous sessions. Point out that this passage marks yet another time, illustrating Abraham's faith-building pattern of behavior.

READ: Call on a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 22:9-12.

GUIDE: Discuss Abraham's possible demeanor as he went about preparing the altar. *Was he resigned? Heartbroken? Confident? Joyful?* Note that the PSG writer refers to the high drama and tension in this passage (p. 128).

ASK: *What is the connection between Abraham's faith and his willingness to obey the Lord in his actions? How important is the connection between faith and works for believers today?* (PSG, p. 128)

EMPHASIZE: Discuss how Isaac may have been feeling, being careful to mention that the Bible does not reveal much about Isaac's state of mind.

REFLECT: *Is it possible that Isaac's trust in his father may have been as strong as Abraham's faith in God?*

CLARIFY: Note that what God demanded of Abraham may challenge our understanding of God. Encourage the group to complete the Bible Skills activity on burnt offerings (PSG, p. 125) for further enlightenment.

ASK: *What does it mean to fear God, and why is having that fear important? What does this test reveal to us about the nature of Abraham's faith?* (PSG, p. 129) *Has there been a time in your life when you have been asked by God to sacrifice something of value, only to discover it wasn't a sacrifice at all?*

READ: Call on a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 22:13-14.

ASK: *How does this passage in Genesis relate to what Christ did for us on the cross? Why is it important for believers to understand the nature of His sacrifice in our place?* (PSG, p. 130)

EXPLAIN: Note that God provided a ram as a substitute for Isaac. Draw a correlation between Jesus' substitutionary death for us on the cross, pointing out that Jesus was the spotless Lamb of God who took our place.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT):

STATE: *As believers, we should expect that God will test our faith, and we should pray that we will respond correctly. A test of our faith is not really for God's benefit, as He already knows our hearts, but for our own, so that we evaluate our own spiritual maturity and grow from the experience.*

GUIDE: Lead the group in a discussion of the first question set under In My Context on page 130 of the PSG. (*List ways in which the members of your Bible study group have had their faith tested. What events or periods in their lives have most tested their faith? Discuss what lessons could be learned during those times of testing.*) Then brainstorm ideas for dealing with those faith-testing times—especially if we realize that our faith is weak. Read and discuss what we can learn from Mark 9:14-24.

PRAY: Lead the group in prayer by asking God to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of each person's faith in God. Ask for courage to follow Him wherever He leads.

PRACTICE

After the session, contact the group and suggest that each person try to look at every opportunity to grow in faith that week as a test by God. Invite the group to share the challenges they face during the week.

As the group leader, decide to journal your faith challenges for at least a month. Keep a record of whether these challenges instigated a crisis of faith or helped you to grow.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS):

As the group arrives, verbalize and discuss these scenarios that could test one's faith:

- You receive the job offer you've been praying about, but you have to take a hefty pay cut.
- You have never been able to conceive, but after adopting two children you/your spouse gets pregnant—with twins.
- You accept a missionary assignment to a Third World country where your children are exposed to a disease that is killing thousands.

EXPLORE THE TEXT:

To more fully grasp the significance of why God tested Abraham, facilitate a discussion about why evaluation is important, who it benefits, and what it tells us.

To better understand why God chose this way to test Abraham's faith, direct the group to read Matthew 19:16-22 and draw parallels.

To drive home our understanding of how God provides for His people, invite the group to share times when God provided in unexpected ways. Read the paragraph on God's provision on page 129 in the PSG to reinforce this characteristic of God.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT):

A test of faith can lead us to spiritual growth, even if we come to understand that we failed the test. Suggest that the group spend some time in silent prayer, asking God to reveal times when their faith has been weak. Challenge the group to seek His direction on how to utilize that experience for faith in the future.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Invite a volunteer to recite the words to "I Am Thine, O Lord" by Fanny J. Crosby as though they are proudly speaking of their trust in God.