

...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembly together...but encouraging one another.
Heb 10:24-25

Share the teaching
Guard the sharing

Male Call

March 5, 2010—The Jesus Way—Abraham

6:00 – 6:05	Coffee & Donuts—Opening Prayer
6:05 – 7:00	<p>"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." —Jesus (John 14:6)</p> <p>1) Abraham's Way of Jesus—A Faith Life The test that takes place on Mount Moriah can be understood only in the full context of Abraham's journey, the way of Abraham: all those years and hundreds of miles of travel west from Ur to Haran to Canaan and eventually as far south as Beersheba, the numerous alters built and worshiped at throughout Canaan, the faithless detour to Egypt, the generosity to nephew Lot, the tithe paid to Melchizedek, the covenant vision and sacrifice, the conception and birth of Ishmael, a second covenant vision and its commanded rite of circumcision, hospitality to the strangers at the Oaks of Mamre, intercession for and judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, negotiations with Abimelech, the Hagar and Ishmael drama—everything leads up to the <i>Akedah</i> [the narration of the binding of Isaac] on Mount Moriah. But always traveling, always on a journey. Then the purchase from Ephron the Hittite of a cemetery plot for Sarah at Machpelah and subsequent arrangements for Isaac's marriage to Rebekah bring the way to Abraham to quiet terminus. The Moriah test is imbedded in a life of obedience and disobedience, a life of faith and unbelief, a life of horizontal travel and vertical prayer. Visible and invisible are inextricably woven together in a fabric that we call faith, believing obediently the Voice, the Presence.¹</p> <p>2) Ongoing Testing The Moriah test in matters regarding God and the soul is this: Are we using God or are we letting God use us? The temptation is to think that God is there to serve us. The temptation is to come to God as a consumer shopping for the gospel as a commodity. The temptation is to reduce God to cozy domesticity. The test question is blunt: "Have I been kidding myself all along?" In all matters of faith, in this life lived in passionate inwardness and responsive obedience in the presence of God, we need repeated reality checks. Mount Moriah tests the possibility that he has, all along, been attempting to get God on his own terms. But God's will is to give himself to Abraham on God's terms and only on God's terms, terms that may far exceed our pitifully limited comprehension.</p>

¹ *The Jesus Way*. 52.

Religion and spirituality is a bottomless pit breeding illusion, deceit, and oppression. So—testing.²

3) The Way of Faith

Nothing in our Scriptures is a demanding on our faith as the *Akedah*, this Binding of Isaac, narrated in such bare but excruciating detail as to leave no doubt that the stakes are eternally high. We ask, “Why this quite unimaginable severity at Moriah?” Isn’t there another way? Søren Kierkegaard in his passionate search for an authentic life of faith probed the Moriah test relentlessly and left no room for easy detour, comfortable alternative. He warns against every attempt to trivialize faith into a vacation getaway in the mountains, or a place of influence in the city, or an entertainment park in the suburbs. The way of faith does not serve our fantasies, our illusions, or our ambitions. Faith is not the way to serve God on our terms, it is the way of God to us on his terms.

A three-day walk to Mount Moriah exposes the banality of all such bogus faith. At Mount Moriah we accept and worship a God beyond our understanding. At Mount Moriah we accept a mystery that is light filled, but no less a mystery for all that.

Abraham and the *Akedah*: the Christian way cannot be programmed, cannot be guaranteed: faith means that we put our trust in God—and we *don’t know* how he will work out our salvation, only that it is our salvation that he is working out. Which frees us for anything. We must be the ones tied down, so that we can be the ones set free.³

4) God of No Surprise

I am surprised that Abraham, Isaac bound and knife raised, is not surprised to hear the voice tell him that there is a ram in the thicket. And Isaac is not surprised to end up not sacrificed. Not a word in the narrative indicates anything like surprise. Not a word of surprise, not a single emotion of surprise in the story as written.

Why am I surprised and Abraham and Isaac are not?

Here is what I think...

The *Akedah* is not isolated, not a text without a context: it is the summing up and clarification of a long life of reorientation...God has tested Abraham’s faith at every turn. To live by faith—better, to live a faith life—means to be tested. Abraham’s faith did not always survive the test...Sometimes...the testing had exposed his so-called faith as no faith at all. But, incrementally, across those miles and through those years, his faith deepened and matured.

Each sacrifice left him with less of himself and more of God...In the command to leave Ur, Abraham had abandoned his past...[At Mount Moriah] he is asked to abandon his future. If we arrive at Mount Moriah without having prayerfully and imaginatively participated in the decades of Abraham’s testings, God seems to us to have behaved outrageously out of character. But, not to Abraham.⁴

5) How do you see the journey of your life?

- a) Series of isolated events or a life-long journey with God?
- b) Are you continuously surprised by God’s outrageous actions?
- c) What has God asked you to give up from your past? Your future?

² Ibid. 53.

³ Ibid. 55.

⁴ Ibid. 57, 58.

	Closing Prayer
7:00 – ??	If you would like prayer, please come up front and one or more of us will remain to pray with you.

Further reading:

- *The Bible*
- Au, Walkie and Noreen Cannon Au. (2006). *The Discerning Heart: Exploring the Christian Path*. Paulist Press.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. (1995). *The Cost of Discipleship*. Simon & Schuster.
- Ciardi, John & Williams, Miller. (1975). *How Does a Poem Mean?* Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Haase, Albert. *Coming Home to Your True Self: Leaving the Emptiness of False Attractions*. (2008). IVP Books.
- Martin, James. (2005). *Become Who You Are*. Hidden Spring.
- Nouwen, Henri. (1981). *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God Through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence*. Ballantine Books.
- Ortberg, John. (2010). *The Me I Want To Be*. Zondervan.
- Peterson, Eugene H. (2007). *The Jesus Way: A Conversation on the Ways that Jesus is the Way*. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Rohr, Richard. (2002). *Everything Belongs: the Gift of Contemplative Prayer*. Crossroad Publishing Company.
- Shelley, Bruce L. (1995). *Church History in Plain Language*. Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- Tozer, A.W. *Men Who Met God*. (1986). Christian Publications.
- Yancey, Phillip. (2002). *Reaching for the Invisible God*. Zondervan.