



“The God of Abraham and Isaac”

*A Sermon delivered by Rev. Dr. Josh Hunt at Myers Park Baptist Church
On May 25, 2025, from Genesis 22:1-14.*

There’s a story told about the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, a brilliant and intense man who believed that language should only be used to express what can be said with clarity. Everything else, he contended, should be met with silence.¹

The story goes that one day, Wittgenstein removed the question mark key from his typewriter. When someone asked him why, he replied, “I do not deal in uncertainties.”² The anecdote fits. Wittgenstein wanted clarity, certainty, and absolute precision—no open-ended questions, no speculation, only speech grounded in what could be proven.

But life doesn’t work that way. Faith certainly doesn’t. We live with questions. We wrestle with mystery. And sometimes, the most honest thing we can do is leave the question mark right where it belongs.

The binding of Isaac is not, at least not initially, a story about faith rewarded. It is a story about terror. About silence. About what it means to keep walking when the voice of God has gone quiet. What it means to take the next step—not because we understand or agree—but because something within insists the journey must go on, even when the path ahead seems unbearable.

This morning, I want to resist the temptation to resolve this story too quickly. I want us to resist the urge to file it under “faith lessons” or flatten it into a moral takeaway. This story is not tidy. It is not safe. It is raw and unsettling. And that discomfort matters. The narrative demands that we feel it—the tension, the dissonance, the ache.

Genesis 22 opens with a crucial piece of information: “God tested Abraham.”³ That line offers readers a breath of perspective—we are given insight that Abraham is not. All he hears is the divine command: “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah... and offer him there as a burnt offering”⁴

And Abraham gets up early, saddles the donkey, splits the wood, and begins the journey.
No protest. No questions. No tears.

¹ Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 58.

² *Ibid.*, 59.

³ Genesis 22:1, New Revised Standard Version.

⁴ Genesis 22:2



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This is the same Abraham who earlier stood before God and pleaded for the lives of strangers in Sodom, asking, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”⁵ But here, with his own son’s life in question, Abraham offers nothing in reply. No argument. No resistance.

Just silence.

Silence from Abraham.

Silence from God.

And perhaps most hauntingly, silence from Isaac—who speaks only once: “Father... the fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the offering?”⁶ Then nothing more. Isaac fades into the narrative’s background as events press forward.

Some commentators exalt Abraham’s obedience here as exemplary—proof of a faith so deep that he was willing to relinquish even his beloved son.⁷ But others, particularly in a post-traumatic context, see a different Abraham: not faithful, but failed. A man who failed to question, to resist, to say no to what by any ethical standard appears monstrous.⁸

And maybe that’s part of the point.

Maybe this story was never meant to resolve neatly. Maybe it is meant to remain unfinished—a provocation rather than a parable. Perhaps Scripture leaves the moral tension hanging so that we are compelled to engage it ourselves—so that we are invited to look into the mirror it holds up, where questions are not enemies of faith but expressions of it.

As Walter Brueggemann writes, “The Bible is an invitation to struggle with the ambiguities of life and the hiddenness of God.”⁹ Scripture is not a textbook of answers. It is a living witness that draws us into mystery. Into contradiction. Into the kind of faith that dares to question and yet still persists. The kind of faith that can hold reverence and resistance in the same breath.

The central question that haunts Genesis 22 is this:

What kind of God would ask this?

Is this the same God who delivered the Israelites from slavery?

The same God who declared through the prophets, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice”?¹⁰

The same God revealed in Jesus Christ—the one who healed the broken, lifted up children, wept at death, and died with arms outstretched in radical love?

⁵ Genesis 18:25

⁶ Genesis 22:7

⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1985).

⁸ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 5.

¹⁰ Hosea 6:6



We are right to ask such questions. Indeed, we are called to. Wrestling with Scripture is not a betrayal of faith—it is a mark of it. Israel’s very name means “one who wrestles with God.”¹¹ Ours is a tradition unafraid of divine mystery, or even divine silence.

Faith is not passive submission. It is not blind obedience. It is courageous, creative, compassionate engagement with God—even when God seems distant.

Barbara Brown Taylor, in *When God Is Silent*, reflects on this very story. She imagines Abraham ascending the mountain, delaying at each step—arranging stones, adjusting wood, searching the horizon—hoping for God’s voice to return. But it does not. And Taylor writes, “Sometimes the silence of God is more frightening than any command.”¹²

And yet, I believe God was present in that silence. Life is full of such moments. We walk mountains we never wanted to climb. We face diagnoses, rejections, grief. We pray. We plead. And still—there is only silence. But we keep walking. We keep hoping. And sometimes, grace appears: a ram in the thicket. A phone call. A sunrise. A stranger’s kindness. Unexpected. Unearned. Yet unmistakably real. Sometimes God delivers us from the fire. Other times, God walks with us through it.

This is not a safe story. And discipleship is not a safe calling. If we say yes to God—truly say yes—we will be led into discomfort. We will be asked to surrender control, to trade comfort for compassion. To ask hard questions. To challenge injustice. To know when to remain silent—and when silence becomes complicity. We do not follow a God of convenience. We follow a God of presence. Of incarnation. Of costly love—a love that risks vulnerability, rejection, and the hope that God is still at work, even in silence.

Yes, in the end, the ram is provided. Isaac lives. But that moment of relief does not undo the trauma. According to Jewish midrash, Sarah dies from the shock of what nearly happened.¹³ The biblical text never records another word between Abraham and Isaac. Abraham walks down the mountain, it seems, alone. Provision comes—but not without cost.

And perhaps that is the deeper truth of the story. That faith in God does not spare us from pain, but it may open our eyes to grace within it. That grace does not erase wounds—but it helps us bear them. Live with them. Heal through them. For our God is the one who sees the sparrow fall (Matt. 10:29). Who hears even silence.

¹¹ Genesis 32:28

¹² Barbara Brown Taylor, *When God Is Silent* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1998), 37.

¹³ Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 58:5.



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So, what do we do with this story?

We remember: Faith is not passivity. Not the absence of doubt. Not blind obedience. Faith is trust—honest, questioning, wounded trust—in a God who still speaks. Even if the voice comes late. Even when the fire is lit. Even on the mountain we never asked to climb.

And we return to our call: “What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”¹⁴ What does God command of us? “To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength—and to love your neighbor as yourself.”¹⁵ God does not call us to safety. But to presence. To courage. To compassion.

As our closing hymn says, Let us worship God “with an open hand.”¹⁶ This God who trusts us with hard stories. Who abides with us in fire. Who remains with us—even in silence. Even in our questions. Even now.

¹⁴ Micah 6:8

¹⁵ Matthew 22:37–39

¹⁶ Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, “When Abraham Went Up,” hymn text, 2001, accessed May 22, 2025, https://www.carolynshymns.com/when_abraham_went_up.html.