

Adventuring with God

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The Walk of Faith

The walk of faith. This sums up the Christian life in a nutshell. It's a walk . . . not a dead run or a destination where we can sit down and relax. It's progressive and ongoing, slow and steady. It's a special kind of walk, however. It involves faith, which, as we all know, is the hardest concept to grasp and put into practice known to man. Faith doesn't know what lies ahead; it can't control what's coming. It's wild and unpredictable, costly and humbling. It's not our cup of tea, and that's why we find it so hard at times.

But God delights in our faith. He's pleased when He sees us taking the tiniest steps towards Him. He nods with approval when we trust Him for some impossible goal or entrust the outcome of a scary situation into His hands. He loves it when we continue to walk in spite of bad circumstances, discouragement, or persecution. Why does He take delight in such things? I think it's because He can see that our hearts are set on Him above anything else. This was the point of Abraham's testing recorded in Genesis 22. God was not interested in taking the life of Isaac. He took no pleasure in bringing trepidation and bone-chilling fear into Abraham's heart. He had something else in mind and fortunately Scripture tells us clearly why He allowed this whole episode to unfold.

In Genesis 17 God reaffirms the covenant He had made with Abraham earlier. Note the words He uses to describe Abraham's part of the bargain. "I am God Almighty; *walk* before me, and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers" (vs. 1-2). It was in the context of this kind of covenantal relationship that the testing on Mount Moriah happened. God had blessed Abraham and Sarah in a remarkable way – He had given them a promised son so late in life that the boy's conception was truly a miracle. And what a delight he was for an old man and woman. Few would blame them for pinning all their hopes and dreams on Isaac and savoring every moment they enjoyed with him.

But God had some questions for Abraham that needed to be answered. Was God still in the place of highest preeminence in his life? Would Abraham obey Him no matter what He asked to do? Would He trust God's goodness and faithfulness even in the worst possible situation? These questions were vital, not only to Abraham personally but also to all those (including us) who would seek to follow God in the years to come. For "He [Abraham] is the father of us all" with regard to faith (Romans 4:16).

Before Bob Dylan's born-again experience he wrote a song entitled "Highway 61 Revisited." In it he expresses the sentiment of many of us who have struggled to understand God's intentions with Abraham that awful day. Here's some of their conversation in the song: "God said to Abraham, kill me a son. Abe said, man you must be putting me on. . . God said no, Abe said what? God said, you can do what you wanna but the next time you see me comin you better run. . . Well, Abe said, where do you want this killin done? God said out on highway 61."

Dylan, like many of us, couldn't imagine a *good* reason for such an unreasonable request. But here is what God says He had in mind. "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" (Genesis 22:12). Abraham's faith in God's character was proved by this act of obedience. In the New Testament we learn why Abraham could even attempt such a horrendous act. "*By faith* Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. . . Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death" (Hebrews 11:17, 19). Even though the angel stopped the sacrificial act, Abraham did not know this would happen when he lifted the knife over Isaac. What he *did* know was that God had promised to bless Isaac as the anointed offspring, the one through whom the Messiah would come. Because Abraham believed God's promise, he could trust that even if Isaac was killed he would be raised from the dead. Why?

Because God's promises are so sure that even death cannot nullify them. He will find a way to fulfill them *no matter what*.

This kind of confidence in the surety of God's word to us is what the walk of faith is all about. Our covenant relationship with our Father God is so strong, so unshakable, that we obey Him at any cost, believing that He will take care of the outcome. We esteem Him as worth far more than any other relationship on earth. And like Abraham, if brought to the test, our loyalty to Him will outweigh any other consideration.

This is the kind of attitude that enables us to keep walking through the drudgery and tedium of life, through the heart-

stopping challenges that come to shake us up, and through the temptations that pull us toward the delights of this world. As much as we would like to turn in our "Christian cards" some days and go back to the familiar world of leeks and onions we had in Egypt, something keeps us tied to our covenant. We cannot deny the new life within us and the new voice that whispers, "This is the way; walk ye in it" (Isaiah 30:21). God delights in our walk of faith. If I need a reason to keep pressing on, fellowship with Him is worth anything I might experience along the way. Will I take Him at His word, no matter what? If so, I follow the example of Abraham, who "against all hope" believed "and so became the father of many nations" (Romans 4:18). Walking in obedience to His Spirit is the only way to go.

*"The God of Abraham praise, who reigns enthroned above;
Ancient of everlasting days, and God of love.
Jehovah, great I AM, by earth and heaven confessed;
I bow and bless the sacred name, forever blest.*

*The God of Abraham praise, at whose supreme command
From earth I rise, and seek the joys at His right hand.
I all on earth forsake, its wisdom, fame, and power;
And Him my only portion make, my shield and tower.*

*He by himself hath sworn, I on His oath depend,
I shall on eagle's wings upborne, to heaven ascend;
I shall behold His face, I shall His power adore,
And sing the wonders of His grace forevermore."*

Thomas Olivers (1725-1799)