

## Even If

My scripture this morning is from Genesis 22, 1 through 13. Genesis 22, 1 through 13. Now it came to pass, after these things, that God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and he said, here I am.

Then he said, take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, of which I shall tell you. So Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son. And he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose, and went to the place of which God had told him.

Then on the third day, Abraham lifted his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, stay here with the donkey, the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you. So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, laid it on Isaac his son, and he took the fire in his hand, and the knife, and the two of them went together.

But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, and said, my father, and he said, here I am, my son. And he said, look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering? And Abraham said, my son, God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering. So the two of them went together.

Then they came to a place of which God had told them, and Abraham built an altar there, and placed the wood in order, and he bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand, and took his knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham.

And so he said, here I am. And he said, do not lay your hand on your lad, or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, and since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me. Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in the thicket by its horns.

So Abraham took, went and took the ram, and offered his burnt offering, offering it instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, the Lord will provide. As it is said to this day, in the mouth of the Lord will be provided.

Let us pray. Dearly Father, we pray, Lord, that as we talk about this scripture this morning, and other scripture, that it would be made real, that we may understand it and apply it to our lives, so that we may share with others for it. So guide us and help us this morning, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Jerry and I have enjoyed a group called Mercy Me. Recently they even came out with a movie called Even If, which is the name of my sermon.

This is lyrics from that song. It says, It's easy to sing when there's nothing to bring me down, but what will I say when I'm held to the flame like I am right now? They say it only takes a little faith to move a mountain. Good thing, a little faith is all I have right now.

I know you're able, and I know you can, save through the fire with your mighty hand. But even if you don't, my hope is in you alone. You've been faithful, you've been good all of my days.

Jesus, I will cling to you, come what may. Because I know you're able, and I know you can. But God, when you choose to make mountains unmovable, will give me the strength to be able to sing.

It is well with my soul. We've seen Mercy Me twice in concert, once in Kansas and once out here in Red Rocks, and we've enjoyed them both times. This particular song that they wrote was started by a musician named Tim Timmons.

He was also a singer himself. He was diagnosed with stage four cancer, and it affected his liver back in 2001. He was given five years to live.

It was inoperable. He started this song before it came out, before the song was actually published. He didn't know how to finish it, so he gave it to his friend Bart Millard.

Bart Millard's the lead singer of Mercy Me. Bart Millard was having his own trials, going through his own issues. Trials of being on the road as a Christian musician, being away from his family.

His son had type 1 diabetes, which took them by surprise. If anyone knows about type 1 diabetes, as we do with my grandson, it's a lot of work. There's a lot to it.

He finished this song in 2017, and that's when it was actually published. God was testing them both, both Tim and Bart, during this time of their lives. God tests us all.

All of us are tested. Why? Why are we being tested? We are reformed. So our standard answer for most of us is for God's glory and for our good.

But do we believe that? Do we understand that? Is it for God's glory? Is it for my good? Life for most Christians is pretty good. We have a pretty simple life. We're not being rounded up and being put in gas chambers.

Our churches and homes are not being burnt down like they are in other countries. We're not being rounded up to be killed. We're not being chased.

We're not being fed to the lions, like our pastor last week said. Persecution is not something we've really experienced. We do it in different ways, though. We do have persecution in different ways.

## **Faith Conditioning**

My first point is called faith conditioning. Conditioning refers to the process of shaping our thoughts, character, and actions in alignment with God's will.

That's what I mean when I say conditioning. In Genesis 22, verse 1, it says, Now came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham. Why would God choose to test Abraham? I don't know.

I don't know. It just says that's what he was going to do. God promised Abraham that he would have children just a few chapters back.

In Genesis 15, 1-6, we read, After these things the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision, saying, Do not be afraid, Abraham. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward. But Abraham said, Lord God, what will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eleazar of Damascus? And Abraham said, Look, you have given me no offspring, indeed no one born in my house.

And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, This one shall not be your heir, being Eleazar, but one who will come from your own body, and he shall be your heir. Then he brought him outside, and he said, Look to the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to number them. And he said to them, So shall your descendants be.

And he believed in the Lord, and it counted to him as righteousness. Right there it says it was counted to Abraham, righteousness. Abraham believed.

We go on in the next chapter. That was chapter 15. In chapter 16, we read, Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children.

She had an Egyptian maidservant, whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, Now see that the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please go to my handmaid.

Perhaps I shall obtain children by her. And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. And Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar, his maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband, Abram, to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt there ten years on the land of Canaan.

So he went to Hagar, and she conceived, and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. He has a son. He had a son.

Not in the most conventional way as we would see it today, but back then, that was a custom. That was how things could be done. By the way, Abraham means the father of many nations.

He had his name changed. In Genesis 17, verse 5, it says, No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name will be Abraham. I have made you the father of many nations.

Abram, meaning exalted father. Abraham, meaning father of many nations. We start reading in Genesis 17, And God said to Abram, Ask for Sarai your wife, and you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah.

And I will bless her and give her a son by her. Then I will bless her, and you shall be a mother of nations. King of peoples shall be with her.

Then Abram fell on his face, and he laughed. And he said in his heart, Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old and to Sarah who is ninety years old? They were too old. He lacked faith.

He laughed. God heard what he said in his heart. So he laughed out loud, and then he said in his heart, How can this be? And God said, No, your Sarah, your wife, shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac.

I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant and with his descendants after him. Sarai means my princess. Changed to Sarah, meaning princess or noble woman.

Abraham is our Christian patriarch. He's a patriarch of Christians. At the same time, Sarah's a matriarch.

God promised and said the lineage would come through Sarah also. Abraham laughed. God told him, even though he said it inside his heart, God answered his question.

God knew what Abraham was thinking in his heart when Abraham said, Shall a child be born unto me, a hundred years old. Abraham was concerned about his first son Ishmael, but God took care of it. We're not going to go into that today.

But God took care of Ishmael. Abraham is not the only one. Sarah was not the only one that laughed.

In the very next chapter, we read, And the Lord appeared to him, Abraham, by the terror of the trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him, and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the ground and said, My Lord, if you have found favor in your sight, do not pass on your servant. They went and made him a meal.

So Abraham went and hurried in to Sarah and said, Quickly, make these men a meal. And Abraham ran to the herd and took a tender gold calf and made it, hastened to prepare it, and prepared a meal for them. And they said, Where is Sarah, your wife? And he said, Here in the tent.

And he said, I will certainly return to you according to the time of life. Behold, Sarah, your wife, will bear a son. Sarah was listening in the tent door.

What did she do? She laughed. So both Abraham and Sarah laughed at God. They don't, weak faith? They didn't believe it.

How could this happen? They said, Why did Sarah laugh? Surely, shall I bear a child since I am old, she says. Is there anything too hard for the Lord, they said? At the appointed time, I will return according to the time of life. Sarah will have a son.

God knows our hearts and what we say in our hearts. We don't have to say it, and we know that. We've been taught that.

Abraham now has another son named Isaac, and it's with this son that God decides to test him. Abraham. Here I am.

Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains in which I shall tell you. He had promised Abraham that this son would be the covenant, the covenantal son. It's the lineage of Christ.

His only son by his wife Sarah. What would you do? What would you do if God came to you and said, go sacrifice your son or any one of your children? I'd be negotiating. I'd try to negotiate, but wait.

Wait. How about this? How about that? Why not negotiate it? Abraham negotiated with God. He's done it before.

In fact, right as God appeared to the reason the three men that appeared that was God was right before he went to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. In Genesis 18 it says, and the Lord said, because of the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, because their sin is very grave, I will go now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it has come to me, and if not, I will know. Abraham negotiated with them.

He said, so the Lord said, he said, if I find 50 righteous within the city, would you also destroy this place and not spare it for 50 righteous men? God said, I will not destroy it if I find 50 men. Abraham said, okay, how about 45? God said, I will not destroy it if we find 45. How about 40? I will not destroy it.

That's negotiation. That's pushing it in my book. How about 40? How about 35? And he said, I won't destroy it for 35.

And then he got bold. He's been dropping this number by 5. He drops it by 15. How about 25? How about 25? God said, I will not destroy it.

How about 20? How about 10? We know the story. He didn't find 10. He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

The thing is, Abraham did negotiate with God, trying to save the cities for 10 people. And yet in this story, we don't see him negotiating with God about his son Isaac. So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey and took two of the young men with him and Isaac, his son, and he split the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place which God had told him.

On the third day, Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to the young men, you stay here with the donkey. The lad and I will go yonder.

Abraham did as he was told. No discussion, no negotiation. We see examples of that a little bit different with other people in the Bible.

David. David. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, killed her husband.

David was a sinner. We're all sinners. Abraham was a sinner.

His sins are really pointed out here. Nathan came to him and told him a story relating to David and his son. And David repented.

He saw his sin and he repented of his sin to God. But there were consequences. There were consequences to David's sin.

His child was going to die. That would have been born. In Samuel 12, it says, and the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David.

I find that interesting. It wasn't his wife. It was Uriah's wife.

David had him killed. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill. David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.

And so the elders of his house arose and went to him to raise him up from the ground, but he would not, nor did he eat food. On the seventh day it came to pass, the child dies for seven days. David fasted, David prayed, David pleaded with God, don't do this.

And we know the rest of the story. Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and he laid it on his son Isaac. Who does that remind us? And he took the fire in his hand and the knife and the two of them together.

But Isaac spoke up and said, my father, and he said, here I am. Where is the burnt offering? The Lord will provide. He didn't lie.

He didn't lie to his son. He didn't scare him. He wasn't out to scare him or anything like that, but he didn't lie to him either. He said the Lord will provide.

## **Faith Strengthening**

My second point, faith strengthening. We all have faith.

We all have faith at different levels. We all believe that God has a perfect plan. We may not understand his perfect plan because he didn't ask us.

He didn't come to us and say, what are your thoughts about me doing this? Perfect. He's perfect in all that he does. God tests us with trials to strengthen our faith, to make it better.

Sometimes daily, sometimes weekly. Sometimes monthly. I preached on Job for a couple of Sundays last year.

In Job 1 we read that he was blameless and upright man. And one feared God and shunned him. Job, still a sinner, didn't commit adultery, didn't commit murder.

He was blameless. He was upright. He did everything that God wanted him to do.

And yet, God's the one that told Satan, check out my servant Job. I don't even know if Satan was looking for Job or not. All we know is that God said, look at my servant.

Go try him, but don't take his life. Job lost all his property. All his children were killed.

But because he had faith, and such faith, we all know this because sometimes we say this to ourselves. It says, Job rose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and he fell on the ground and worshipped and said, naked I came from my mother's womb. Naked shall I return.

The Lord gave and the Lord took away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. What faith.

I mean, that's incredible. The Lord helped me the day I needed to do that. 1 Peter 1, 6-7, it says, In this you greatly rejoice, now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith be much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

We just saw, it was part of a video this morning, saying we should be preaching the culmination towards Christ, to his glory, to the praise of Christ in everything. Glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Our faith is more precious than gold.

We've all heard about 14-karat gold, 24-karat gold. 24-karat gold is the most pure gold. It's 99.999 to 100% pure gold.

14-karat gold, I have to read this because it's 58.3% gold and 41.7% other metals. It's not pure. It's not pure.

Pure gold is worth much more than that regular gold. Our faith is worth more than gold. This example is what 1 Peter here is trying to tell us in these verses.

In Romans 12, too, it says, "...and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Our faith is to be transformed, constantly getting better, working on it, daily process, like I said. 1 Timothy 4, 8-9 says, "...my brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." Lord knows I need patience.

I personally need patience. I preach on sermons, when I do this, I think about things in my own life that I need to work on. Patience is something I need to work on, probably until the day I die.

There is a purpose for our faith to be tested. Here Timothy says, "...be perfect, complete, lacking nothing." So why Abraham? I don't know. Why Job? We're not told why. We're just given them as examples.

## Faith Focused

My third point, faith focused. "...having our faith conditioned and strengthened, our faith is now ready for more testing that comes our way.

Then they came to the place which God had told them, and Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order, and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham reached out his son and took the knife to slay his son. God took Abraham to the edge." To the edge.

I can only imagine this knife being held up above his son. He's ready to kill his son, as God commanded him. Burnt offering.

Not just an offering, but a burnt offering. We have another story in Daniel, where we read the story of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who overthrew Jerusalem, and now how God used Nebuchadnezzar to test his people. In Daniel 3, we read the story about Nebuchadnezzar making a gold image that was 60 cubits high and 5 cubits wide.

It's about 90 feet high and 9 feet wide. That's a huge idol. That's a big idol.

And he set it up in a place where people could see it. When they dedicated the image that the king had made, Nebuchadnezzar had ordered all the satraps, administrators, governors, counselors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the officials of the province there, that when they hear all kinds of music, to bow down. Doesn't say he ordered all the regular people.

He ordered all the officials, all the people who were ruling, all the people who were in charge of something within Babylon. There were three Jews, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, whose real names were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were changed to Babylonian names when King Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem.

In Daniel 2, we talk about how they were promoted because Daniel was able to interpret some dreams. They were promoted. They were promoted to the affairs of the province of Babylon.

They are now part of this group of people. These three men are part of the group of people who are commanded to bow down. So in Daniel 3, we read, Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, because they wouldn't bow down, and they brought these men before the king.

Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you did not serve my gods of worship, the god image of which I set up? Now if you're ready, at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery in symphony with the kings of music, and you shall fall down and worship the image of which I have made good. But if you do not, you shall be cast immediately in the midst of the fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands then? Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

If that is the case, our god whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning of the fiery furnace, and he will deliver us. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods. We will not worship the gold image of which you set up.

They knew God could deliver them, but they said, even if he does not, we will still serve him as God. Even if God decides not to move a mountain, we will not bow down. We will not do this evil thing.

It's like the verse I just read of that song. If you are able, and I know you can, save through the fire with your mighty hand. But even if you don't, my hope is in you alone.

Abraham's getting ready to sacrifice his son, and the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham, stop. Right to the last minute, he said, stop. And he said, do not lay your hand on the lad and do anything, or do anything to him, for I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, not your only son, from me.

And Abraham lifted his eyes and he said, looked up, and behold, there was a ram caught in the thicket by the horns. God had provided another sacrifice. So Abraham went and took the ram and he offered it as a burnt offering.

Why Abraham? I think it's so that we can see Abraham's faith in God. So that we know how others have walked through trials and not taken their eyes off Christ, off God. Same with Job.

Same with these other men. Other stories that we see in the Bible, they're examples to us on how we are to live. How many of you have ever heard of Horatio Gates Spafford? How many of you have ever heard of the song? I'm trying to remember the song.

It is well with my soul. Now you know. Now you know him.

Spafford invested in real estate in Chicago in the spring of 1871. However, in October of 1871, they had the great fire of Chicago. He lost almost everything.

Millions today. Millions what he spent back then. Two years after the great fire in Chicago, the Spaffords planned a trip to Europe.

Business demands, he had to deal with zoning issues because of the fire, new zoning issues, and he was still working with real estate. Kept Spafford from joining his wife and four daughters on their family vacation to England where they were going to meet up with D.L. Moody. Most of us, a few of us have heard of D.L. Moody as an evangelist.

In November 22nd, 1873, while crossing the Atlantic, the steam ship Villa de Havre, the ship was struck by a sailing vessel, killing 226 people, including all four of his daughters. His wife, Anna, survived the tragedy upon arriving in Wales. She sent a telegram to Spafford that read saved alone.

Shortly afterwards, as Spafford traveled to meet with his grieving wife, he was inspired to write, as well as my soul, as his ship passed near where that accident happened, where the two ships went struck each other. Following the sinking of the Villa de Havre, Anna, his wife gave birth to three more children. On February 11th, 1880, their son Horatio died of scarlet fever.

God's not done testing him. I don't know why. If you do know, they wrote one of the most beautiful hymns we have out there.

The tune to this song was written in 1876. So he wrote this in 1873. The tune that we know it by was written by a man named Philip Bliss in 1876.

He named it after the ship Villa de Havre that was struck and killed. 226 people. Bliss also wrote the music and words to songs like Let the Lower Lights Be Burning, Hallelujah, What a Savior, Wonderful Words of Life, I Am So Glad that Our Father in Heaven, Standing by a Purpose True.

Some of us know most if not all those songs. Wonderful Words of Life, he also wrote. He wrote the tunes.

On December 29th in 1876 when he wrote that one, the same year he wrote the tune to this, He and his wife Lucy were traveling by train. Approaching Ohio, they were going over a bridge and it collapsed with a train on it. All the carriages went down, started a fire.

He escaped, but his wife didn't. He went back to save her. They both perished.

Why? Why would God allow this to happen? When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul. One more story. How many of you heard Corrie Ten Boom? Most of us.

A few of us. I met her in high school. She came to our high school and spoke.

And I was, I remember meeting her, listening to her story. It was incredible. This was back in 75, 76.

Corrie Ten Boom was a Christian, a watchmaker, and was involved with the Dutch resistance in World War II. We met her in high school. She talked about tiding Jews and resistance workers and fighters from the Nazis.

A Dutch informant and a collaborator found them out and told the German authorities what they were doing and where to find them. Everyone in the house was arrested, except for six Jews. Six Jews that they had.

They had a special system set up so that they could ring a bell so that they would alarm to the house and let people know there was something going on for Jews to go hide. Her and her sister Betsy were eventually sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp. Their father died from illness about ten days after they were all picked up by the Gestapo.

Her and her sister held Bible studies in the concentration camp using a Bible that they smuggled in. In her book, *The Hiding Place*, she talked about her sister Betsy always talking about the good in everything. The good in people, the good in so on.

Her sister Betsy in the book commended God with not allowing the guards, the Nazi guards, to come into their barracks because the barracks was full of fleas and lice. I mean, horrible conditions but that allowed them to have Bible studies. They had worship service and they'd sit and sing in the barracks because they didn't want to come with lice and so on.

Her sister died in Ravensbrück on December 16th, 1944. Twelve days later, Corey was released from the camp due to a clerical error. We know it's not just a clerical error.

We know it's all God's will. She found out later that one week after she had been released, all the women in her age group were sent to gas chambers. Her sister Betsy kept telling her that even if, even if they were to die at this place, die in this camp, at the hands of these people, even if that happens, they must and will serve God with all their heart, soul, and mind.

Even if these things happen, we will still serve the Lord. James 1 says, My brother encountered all joy when you followed the various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. Well, let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives us liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. Our faith is in God and what keeps us our heads above water sometimes. Sometimes that's all we're doing, it's just treading water.

We are here today that our faith may grow. O Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight and the clouds be rolled back as a scroll, the trump shall resound, and the Lord will descend. Even so, it is well with my soul.

I looked up on Google, bad things happen to good people. Google came back and said, bad things happen to good people because life involves randomness, situational factors, and human cognitive biases, not as a reflection of personal worth and morality. That's what it actually came back with.

The Bible says, and we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. Everything has a purpose. Paul says, I know how to be abased and I know how to abound everywhere and in all things I have learned to be both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Our faith is in Christ and in Christ alone. Let us pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, Lord. We thank you for the faith that you have given to us so that we ask that you would help us that our faith would grow and

that we may use it for your glory. We thank you, Lord, for being our Lord and Savior in all things.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.