

**“Ruthless Trust” – Genesis 22**  
**Pastor Jeremiah Ebeling – 5/23/2010**

***Video of Student in the Youth Ministry at GCC***

Moriah: A few months ago, it was around football season, school had gotten out and I was in the hallway. There was a group of four football players, a quarterback included, and they were all talking, minding their own business but a little freshman guy came up. He is Hindu and he is in band and probably one of the wimpiest kids in school - very, very physically ill – and he approached them. They all huddled around him and just started calling him names and forcing him to give them money and lots of racial slurs and just being rude and mean. It was really, really hard to watch.

Out of nowhere, I just got this courage but it came from the hurt and compassion that I felt for this kid. I looked at the four of them and said, “Guys, you are the leaders of this school. This is unacceptable the way that you are treating him.” They all kind of stared at me in disbelief, like “What is Moriah Gonzales telling us to do?” Then I continued to tell them, “The coach is right down the hallway and I can go tell him what you guys are doing. Or even better,” and I looked at the quarterback, “you live right up the street from me. I can go up and tell your dad.” I looked at the freshman guy and said, “You can go.” He left in silence. The five of us remained and they didn’t say anything to me. They didn’t even look at each other. I walked away and left.

What God really showed me through this experience was that I was able to eliminate any sense of pride and worry about what the social outcome would be for the sake of this guy. He gave me the courage and the love and the authority to speak truth. I was able to love as Christ had loved and I was able to speak truth. That was not my own power. There was a power that I have been blessed with through Christ.

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How about that story, huh? Goodness, could Hollywood write a better script than that? That is only a script that God could write and He did. I love that story. There is something deep in me that story touches. I think what I see in Moriah and what she did in that moment was that she had God’s compassion for that little underclassman. She loved him like God loves him and that is why she did what she did. In

the Grace student ministry, what we are trying to do is build into students and see students graduate our program who have a whole-hearted love for God, who have a firm commitment to His scriptures, and who have this deep compassion for people as you are seeing in this story that Moriah told. That is what we hope to see happen. I hope that God continues to grow hearts of compassion in all of our students like you just heard in that story of Moriah. Wasn't that fun? Gosh.

Well, my name is Jeremiah Ebeling and I am starting my second year here at Grace Covenant Church as youth pastor. You did not walk into the youth group accidentally. You are in the right place but being Youth Sunday, we have the youth who serve the congregation and lead the congregation in worship. In fact, this is a great time to hear it for the AV team and the students who led in worship, ushers and greeters. This is a lot of fun for us. Thanks for letting us do it.

### **Giant Killer Award Presentation**

One of the greatest joys that I have in this job as youth pastor is this team of volunteers who work with the youth group. We call them adult leaders.

This morning I would like to recognize one of the outstanding adult leaders who has worked with us this past year but for 10 years now he has been in the youth group volunteering. This is a gentleman with a huge heart for God. Whenever we have our weeklong missions trips, he is always the first to sign up even though every time he knows it entailed these 22-hour bus rides and really bad sleep and very hard work. He would always put his name down first.

These are some things that other adult leaders have said about him. "He is an unwavering defender of the faith who knows exactly what he believes and very humbly lives out that faith in his relationships with the students." Another adult leader said, "He is completely fueled and filled by the love of the Father." Still another, "He is a man of faith who digs into the Bible and lives what he learns." See this man has a faith that could slay a giant, just like David. That is why we are going to give him the Giant Killer Award. This man's name is Harold Pedersen. Harold, will you come up.

One of the things that I love about Harold so much is that the jobs that nobody else wants to do, Harold does them with joy and does them without complaining. I love you, Harold. Congratulations.

## ***Introduction to Sermon***

One of my favorite bands in all the world is U2. Any other U2 fans out there? I have got a few of them. This is an incredible band. When you think about it, four guys in one band for 34 years they have been together. They are still together. Who stays together for 34 years for any reason these days? But these four guys in this world renowned rock band have stuck it out and they are still together. Not only that but they have earned twenty-two Grammy Awards, more than any other band ever has. In their first year of eligibility, they were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame – their first year. They are a great band, aren't they?

When I was in college at A & M, they were going to have a concert down in Houston. So friends and I spent the night in line to get U2 tickets at 8:00 a.m. the next morning. We were passionate about our U2. We stayed in line all night and there were 100 people in line. I was number 7. When that ticket window opened at 8:00 a.m. the next morning, I had my ticket in my hand by 8:03 and as soon as I had my ticket in my hand, the window slammed shut because the concert had already sold out – in three minutes a concert of 25,000 people sold out! The other 93 people behind me did not get a ticket. If you want to know what greatness looks like in the music world, you could look at U2. They have been a wildly successful band.

In sports, John Wooden was the basketball coach at UCLA for 27 years. Do you know how many championships John Wooden won while a coach at UCLA? He won enough championships to wear a ring on all ten of his fingers. Ten championships in a span of 12 years this man won. Seven of them were in a row. Now only that, it is not just that he was an incredibly successful coach when it came to winning but it was that his players respected him. They loved him because he expected a lot from them. He was firm but he was kind and fair. His players loved him for it. If you want to know what greatness looks like in the sports world, you look at John Wooden. He had four undefeated seasons, three more than the next contender. He was an incredibly successful coach.

## ***Genesis 22***

If you want to know what greatness looks like in the Christian faith, you turn to the passage that we will be studying today. You would turn to Genesis 22 because in Genesis 22 what you and I find is one of the most extraordinary expressions of faith in all of the Bible, and in fact in the entire history of mankind. That man's name was Abraham who expressed that faith.

In Genesis 22 what we find is that God comes to Abraham and He asks Abraham to do the unthinkable because He says to Abraham – I want you to give Me your son, your only son, the son that you love and I want you to go now. – We will see in Abraham’s response to God’s command what great faith really looks like. We will see what a legendary faith really is, a faith that you and I could have.

We are going to read the first two verses of Genesis 22:1, 2:

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham.”

“Here I am,” he replied.

Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love and go to the region of Moriah. I want you to sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you.”

Now look, before we can go any further, let’s just talk about something for a second. God comes to Abraham and what the writer of Genesis tells us first before anything else is that God is testing Abraham. The writer of Genesis wants us to know that this is just a test. God is not going to ask Abraham to really go through with this. So, we know something that Abraham did not know. He did not know this was a test. All he knew was that God had told him to kill his son as an offering to God.

But the reason why the writer of Genesis wants you and I to know that is because He doesn’t want us to get all tied up in knots, trying to figure out who would ask something this cruel. Or wondering why it is that God must hate children or love killing them. That is not what it is about. We don’t have to wonder that because that is not true about God. He is not cruel. He loves children. It is just a test. The writer is trying to get us to focus on Abraham, to allow everything else to fade into the background and focus on what Abraham does when God asks him to sacrifice his son. That is what we are supposed to be listening for. That is why we are told this is just a test.

God is asking Abraham to give to Him what matters most to Abraham. This is not just a son; this is Abraham’s only son, the only son that God had promised to him, the son that Abraham had waited for 25 years, a quarter of a century – that was this son. This was the son that Abraham for 15 years now had hugged and kissed and said, ‘I love you’ every single day, the son that he wrestled on the floor with, the son that he taught how to be a man, the son that he taught the importance of faith to. This is the son that Abraham – you follow God no matter how difficult, son. That was the son that God was asking Abraham to sacrifice to Him.

Since I was a little boy, I always looked forward to having a son. I really did. Now I have got that. I have got three of them actually. I never knew that you could love somebody as much as I love all three of those boys. I would do anything for them. I would give my life for them. I wouldn’t even have to think

about it. But one thing I don't think I could ever do is to take one of their lives. I could never do that – at least not right now.

But that is exactly what God has asked Abraham to do. He says – I want your son, the son that I gave you. I want you to give him back.

We will see in Abraham's response to God what great faith looks like. We will see how you and I can have this kind of thriving faith in Abraham's response. That is who we are looking at right now. What does he do when God asks this of him?

### ***Great Faith – Immediate Response to God***

The first thing we discover about great faith in Abraham's response to God is that great faith is swift faith. It is immediate. When God asks something of you, you do it and you do it right then, on the spot. That is what we see Abraham do when God asks him for his son.

In the beginning of verse 3, right after God has asked him to do this, this is what Abraham does:

:3 Early the next morning, Abraham got up ...

God has asked Abraham to kill his son and he gets an early start. Doesn't that sound odd to you? It does to me. It is like – Abraham, are you in a hurry? – It is not that he is excited about it, of course, and he doesn't have a skip in his step. But Abraham's Lord has told him to do something and Abraham obeys. That is why he gets up early the next morning.

It was like Abraham's faith was completely natural to him. It was second nature almost. In the muscles of a professional athlete, they operate a lot like Abraham's faith was operating on that day. A professional athlete trains his body, trains his muscles so that they respond in the middle of a game or in a competition. They just know what to do – it is natural because they have trained their muscles to respond. They don't have to tell their muscles what to do. Their muscles already know.

Abraham has a faith like that, a faith that responds swiftly, immediately because he has trained his faith to be like that. So when God says – sacrifice your son – Abraham got up early the next morning.

The way this kind of faith could look for us, the way we could have swift faith, is when we are in an interaction with somebody else, we have said something that clearly hurts the other person's feelings. We have offended them or hurt them in some way and we sense God saying – Let's make that right. – The way swift faith responds is by saying – I am so sorry. – Right away, on the spot, immediately. We don't wait and hold off and say – Let me think about it a little because I don't know about you but what I do in that moment if I hold off on that apology is that it becomes harder. It is more awkward if you wait to apologize. I find that I will start negotiating in my mind why what I said really was not all that offensive

or why this person is just too sensitive so it is their fault, not mine. – God wants me to apologize right there on the spot, immediately. That is how you and I can have great faith.

## **Great Faith - Deliberate**

But it is not only immediate faith that we see in Abraham. The second thing we discover about great faith is that it is deliberate. Abraham's obedience was swift but it was not mindless. He knew what he was doing. He deliberated over what God had asked him to do. He was thoughtful about it. He was calculating and methodical. We discover that God gave him time to deliberate.

Let's pick it back up in the second part of verse 3:

Genesis 22:3b ... Abraham saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He had cut enough wood for the burnt offering. He set out for the place God had told him about. *On the third day* Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.

You see, this trip did not take three minutes – it did not take three hours; it took three days, three very long days. It almost seems kind of mean of God. Is He hazing Abraham? Weren't there mountains close to where Abraham and Isaac lived? A lot closer than three days where Abraham could have gone and built the altar and done what God asked him to do and be done with it. Sure, of course there were. But you see God is not just looking for Abraham to obey. He is not looking for just faith from Abraham but deliberate faith. So God gives him this three-day trip because He wants Abraham to spend some time on this. He wanted Abraham to reflect deeply about what God has asked him to do and to really consider deeply, truly – Am I going to follow through with this? He has got three days and nights to consider if he is really going to obey God. What we find is that Abraham takes God up on that. Over those three days, he is incredibly deliberate, he is incredibly thoughtful about what God has asked him to do and whether he is going to follow through with it.

We discover in Hebrews 11 that the writer of Hebrews tells us that in Abraham's deliberations – do you know what he figures out? He figures out that to get God out of this dilemma, God is going to have to raise Isaac from the dead. That is what he decides. He invents resurrection. He has never seen someone raised from the dead. He has never heard about a resurrection. He just comes up with this because he has had a lot of time to think about it. What he knows is that God on the one hand has promised him this son that is going to make him a father of a great nation. He knows that God has said that He would. On the other hand, he knows that God has said – I want you to take this son and I want you to kill him. The only way that Abraham can bring these two together, this promise God has made and

this command that God has given him is to say – God is going to have to let me kill him and then God will have to bring him back from the dead. That is the only way both of these can remain.

Do you see the thoughtfulness of Abraham? He is wondering: God, how are You going to get yourself out of this? And that is what he comes up with.

Have you ever played a game of checkers or chess where you did not do a lot of planning and thinking ahead? If you have ever played a game of checkers or chess and you are not thinking ahead, considering your moves and where you are going to go next in four or five moves, you are probably going to lose that game. Those types of games require a lot of thought and planning.

That was the kind of faith that Abraham had. There was this thoughtfulness, this deep planning and thinking about God. What are You doing here and how are You going to get yourself out of this? You see God wanted Abraham to do that, to spend a lot of time on this. God did not want him to just run to the top of this high dive and jump off before he had any time to think about it. He wanted him to stop and to slow down.

Something that John Wooden would tell his UCLA players, a famous line of his was: *Be quick but don't hurry.*

That is the kind of faith that Abraham had. It was this quick faith; he got up early the next morning and yet he did not hurry it. It was not unthinking. It was very deliberate faith.

So, for you and me, the way we can have this deliberate faith is when we have a dream that is not realized or something that we love a lot that is lost, when that happens to us -- and it is going to happen, and it probably even happens somewhat regularly -- God does not want us to just shrug our shoulders and say – *Oh well, I guess God just does not want me to be happy.* – He does not want that from us.

I think He wants us to take in the feeling of loss and disappointment. I think He wants us to sit in that for a little while. I think He wants us to take that to Him and say – *God, I don't understand what You are doing in this. I don't know and this is incredibly hard. Can You help me understand? Can You show me what you are up to here?*

But you know what, He may not show you what He is up to. He didn't with Abraham. I think God can handle those kinds of questions. I think what He wants us to do no matter what He says or does not say is to ask Him to give us peace to replace anxiety and stress and our burden. I think He would want us to say – *God, I don't want this right now but I want You to help me get to a point where I want what Your dreams are for me. I want You to replace this dream that I have lost with something that You have already dreamed for me. Would You give me a desire to want that because I am not there right now?* That is how

we can have deliberate faith, this kind of thoughtful faith that we see in Abraham. That is how we could begin to have a great faith by responding in that way.

What we discover about a thriving faith, this great faith, is that first it is swift, it is immediate in its response to God, it is quick. Yet it is also deliberate. There is this time that God wants us to take to deeply consider whatever that dream is that has not been realized or whatever He has asked us to do, He wants us to fully take that in.

### **Great Faith – Looks Back**

There is a third thing that God wants us to do. The third thing that will mean we have got great faith and we will see it in this story of Abraham but I want to tell more of the story before we get to that third thing.

At this point, Abraham and Isaac are almost at the end of their three-day trip. They are at the bottom of Mount Moriah and the top of the mountain is way up there. Abraham says to his servants, “You stay here. Isaac and I are going to the top and we are going to worship but we will both be back.” Remember, Abraham really believes that he is coming back down that mountain with Isaac.

Abraham takes the wood and puts it on Isaac’s shoulders. Abraham grabs the flint and the knife and together they start walking up this mountain in silence for most of the trip. Then Isaac breaks the silence with a question. “Hey dad, I see the wood and I see the knife and I see what we need to make a fire. But where is the sheep we are going to use for the burnt offering?” Abraham says to his son, “God is going to provide the sheep. We don’t need to worry about that. God will provide it.” And they keep walking and get to the place where God had instructed Abraham to be. They stopped and Abraham built an altar and laid the wood on top of this altar and then he took his son, because there was no sheep there – there was just Isaac – and he said to his son, “Isaac, I need you to put your arms out, like this.” As tears streamed down both of their faces, Abraham began to tie a rope around his son’s arms. He said, “Son, I need you to lay down now.” And Isaac laid down. Then he began to tie a rope around Isaac’s legs. This man picked up his son and put him on the altar. He grabbed his knife and he had his knife above his son, about to plunge it into his heart, when an angel of the Lord says, “Abraham, Abraham, stop! Don’t kill your son because the Lord knows now that you fear Him because you have not withheld your son from Him.” Then Abraham sees a ram caught in the bushes by its horns. Abraham gets that ram and he replaces his son, Isaac, with that ram and offers that ram as a sacrifice to God, as a burnt offering to the Lord in place of his son.

In verse 14 reads:

Genesis 22:14 So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide and to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.'

See, after everything that has happened to Abraham, he names the place where this happened *Jehovah-Jireh*, the Lord Will Provide. If it were me, I would have named it "God, that was a really close one" or "You really had me sweating it, God". But Abraham says The Lord Will Provide.

We see that in what the writer of Hebrews tells us about this idea that God will bring my son back from the dead. We see it as they are walking up the mountain and Abraham says to his son, "Son, don't worry about it. The Lord will provide."

The reason that Abraham is able to say that confidently is because he knows the Lord will provide. Abraham is 115 years old right now. He had been walking with God for 40 years. He looks behind him at his past and what he sees is 40 years of God providing for him. The only way he is able to move forward into the future, the only way he is able to stand where he is now is based on God's provision in the past for him. He had seen this over and over again how God has been good to him. God has taken care of him.

So when Abraham decides back in Genesis 12 that he is going to obey God and leave his family's house, to leave his homeland, to leave the inheritance he would have gotten from his father, do you know what God does? God gives him a new family and He gives him wealth and riches, way beyond what he would have earned from his dad's inheritance. He has seen the Lord provide.

Even in Egypt, when Abraham lies about his wife and says that Sarah is actually his sister, God still blesses Abraham and protects him because God has promised that He would. He provides just like he always has for Abraham. So, God protects Sarah from the Pharaoh's harem and then blesses Abraham by giving him servants and animals that Abraham leaves Egypt with. When Abraham looks back, what he sees is a God who provides. That is how Abraham is able to say to his son, "The Lord will provide." That is why he names that place The Lord shall provide.

Abraham's faith is a lot like Olympic rowing. Have you ever watched those guys? They literally row backwards and they are looking in the past. They are looking at where they have already come from in order to see where they are going. They are looking at boundary markers along the way. They are watching these boundary markers to make sure they are going in the right direction.

That is what we see in Abraham's faith. He is looking back at these markers of God's grace and care for him to know it is going to happen just like that in the future and right now. God is going to provide for me because He already has. He has continued to provide for me whenever I have needed it.

Like Abraham, you and I, in order to have this great faith, it can't just be immediate. It can't just be deliberate. We have to have a faith that looks back, to always be looking over our shoulder – not on the lookout for danger but to look and to see and to notice and to remember how God has worked in our lives before this moment. We have to be able to do that, you and I.

A couple of years ago, Dayna and I took a step back from where we were standing in our marriage. We had been married for about a year and a half or so. We took a step back because we were almost appalled at how gracious God had been with us in our first 1 ½ year of marriage. It was incredible the blessings He threw at us and we didn't deserve it; it was not our fault. That is the kind of God He is. But we were so astounded by it that we decided that we needed to write this stuff down. We want details and be specific about how God has provided for us because we know that in our future, going forward, there is going to be a crises that continue to get harder, that continue to get bigger and we are not going to be able to withstand them with faith in God when we get to those crises if we don't remember specifically what He has already done for us.

So we created this document and called it "How God Has Provided". I would like to share a few entries with you from that journal we keep.

In February, 2008, we wrote: "We were quite poor and in the middle of seminary when we had our first son, Luke. We were not able to pay for some of the hospital delivery bills at the time. So we wrote a letter to the hospital asking them to forgive or to at least allow us to pay off two of those bills in installments. Not only did the hospital forgive both of those bills in full, but they also took a third bill that we hadn't even asked for help with and they tore it up. They forgave it. God has provided."

Another entry in August, 2008, in our first year of marriage, we were working through a very hard relationship with someone else in our lives that we needed help with. We needed help knowing how to deal with this relationship. We were in California at the time and began attending First Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton and we joined an adult fellowship (basically a Sunday school). One of the mentors of that group also happened to be a professional Christian counselor named Jan. Jan became a trusted friend of Dayna. God used Jan to help us find peace even with this relationship very broken. God has provided.

He has provided in our lives and He has provided in your lives. He wants us to take note of those provisions. He wants us to be looking back to see those markers of His grace in our lives in His provision so that we can move forward in faith that He is going to continue to provide for us.

You see, we need a faith that is swift, that is immediate in its response to God. We need a faith that is deliberate, that is thoughtful, methodical, deeply reflective about what God has asked from us and

whether or not we are going to follow Him. We also need a faith that is always looking backward to see what is behind us.

### **Great Faith – Grows Over Time**

But I don't want us to miss something that is really important here too, something that might even be easy to miss. That is, when we look at Abraham, we look at him as this man with a faith that is from another planet, that he is so far above us that we will never be able to be like that, so why even try. That is not the case. There was not this overnight success that took place in Abraham's faith. Abraham, in Genesis 22, is 115 years old and he has been walking with God for 40 years now. Over the course of that 40 years what has happened with Abraham is that God has given him opportunities, He has given him these little tests, these little challenges because God is giving Abraham these opportunities to grow his faith, for his faith to begin to thrive and to flourish. He starts him early and young and small because it is going to grow. Those tests are going to get bigger. Those challenges are going to get harder. Again at the very beginning in Genesis 12 in God's relationship with Abraham, God tells him to go. I says – I am not going to tell you where you are going; just go and I will show you when you get there. – The next sentence – Abraham went.

Later, God would tell Abraham – I am going to provide you with a son. I promise I will do that. – Abraham was an old man, old and weary already when God makes that promise. Twenty-five years is how long it took for that promise to be realized but Abraham believed God, Genesis tells us. He believed God.

You know what – Abraham failed too. He wasn't perfect. He mis-stepped often in his faith but he learned from those failures. He learned from those mistakes. What he discovered was that the consequences of weak faith are too great to pay. – I am going to obey. See, he has learned back here. Because when we get to Genesis 22, Abraham has to have been practicing his faith, starting here, and learning from his failures if he is going to have this great faith, that when God asks him to do something like kill his son, he is up early the next morning. There wasn't this overnight success that took place in Abraham's life.

Even with U2 and John Wooden, there is not this overnight success in their lives either. They are incredible in music and in sports as a coach but it didn't happen overnight. Before U2 was playing in Madison Square Garden, do you know where they started playing? In their drummer's kitchen. They spent a long time in that kitchen, a lot of very long hours with a lot of work and a lot of practice. It took

them five years of playing in Irish pubs before they really got noticed. They were not an overnight success – lots of practice and lots of hard work and lots of time. That is what it took before U2 became great.

With John Wooden the same thing, he was not an overnight success either. In fact we find that in his first year of coaching, and he was a high school coach at the time, he goes 6 and 11; six wins and eleven losses. Then he was a high school coach for 11 years before he even gets to college basketball. When he got to UCLA, he didn't even like it for the first few years. He wanted to leave most of those days. The reason he stayed was because he is a man of his word. But he did not like it there. See, John Wooden was not an overnight success either. He had lots of practice in time. It took work before he became great.

It will be the same for you and me. Great faith won't happen overnight. We are not going to be an overnight success either. What God did with Abraham is what He is going to do with us. He is going to start us small. He will bring these little tests, these little challenges into our lives because He is teaching us faith. He is helping us to begin to practice our faith because this is the way our lives are going to go as well. These tests, these challenges are going to increase, to get larger, to get harder. God wants us to start practicing now. Again, see His provisions now so that we can trust Him when we get here, so that our faith is well built. It is strong. That is what God is doing in our lives. So when we get to this day, God is going to bring us to a day much like Abraham experienced in Genesis 22. I don't know exactly what that will look like but what I do know is that day will start like this --- "After these things, God tested Jeremiah." On that day, you will get a phone call or a knock at the door or a son or daughter who says "Mom and dad, we need to talk." When we get to that day, we have got to have a great faith. We have to have a faith that is immediate, that is deliberate, and that looks back. We have to have a faith like Abraham's and we have got to start these little tests and challenges that God gives us. We have got to start practicing faith, learning from our failures so that when we get here we are ready. We have a God that we absolutely are sure is bigger than anything we are facing. God will get us to that moment. He will help us along the way. He will teach us. He will give us opportunities to practice our faith.

Let's pray and ask God to prepare us for that day.

Heavenly Father,

We are humbled by your provision in our lives and by this example of faith in Abraham that you have shown us, this remarkable man that you have used as an example for us. Lord, I think you want each of us to be like Abraham in the way that we respond to you in faith. Would You give us this quick faith that is not hurried though, that takes its time in conversation with you in considering what you are up to

and then still obeys. This faith that is always looking back at what you have done in our lives and in your provisions. Would you begin building the faith in us that we are going to need for that day when it comes. We trust that only you can do that, Father. In Jesus' name. Amen.