Unit 2, Session 2

God Foreshadows His Promise

Summary and Goal
After years of waiting, and sometimes doubting, Abraham and Sarah finally gave birth to a son, Isaac. This son of promise would carry on the family line and God’s promises. But then one day, God turned Abraham’s world upside down. Abraham was to take his beloved son and sacrifice him to God. In this session, we will encounter Abraham’s obedience to God’s command and explore the faith underneath that obedience—faith that God could do the impossible and bring life out of death. We will also see that this test concerning Abraham’s faith in God and His promises pointed toward the fulfillment of those very promises—fulfillment that came when God the Father sacrificed His only Son, Jesus.

Session Outline
1. God’s covenant comes at a cost (Gen. 22:1-6).
2. God provides a substitute sacrifice to pay the cost (Gen. 22:7-14).
3. God calls His people to trust in His provision (Heb. 11:17-19).

Session in a Sentence
God calls on His people to trust Him completely, no matter what.

Christ Connection
Isaac’s question “Where is the lamb for the sacrifice?” echoes through the pages of the Old Testament and is ultimately answered at the beginning of the New Testament when John the Baptist sees Jesus of Nazareth and declares, “Behold the Lamb!”

Missional Application
Because we are people who have realized the fullness of God’s promise and been saved by God’s sacrifice of His Son, we trust God with full confidence in His resurrection power, willing to sacrifice all for His mission.
Group Time

Introduction

SAY: Think about what you hold most dear in this world. Family. Career. Reputation. Health. Possessions. Now consider how you would respond if it were taken away from you. Your spouse left. Your boss called you into her office to tell you that you were no longer needed. Your home burnt to the ground. What would your response be?

INTERACT: Ask the group to respond to this opening question in the DDG (p. 75).

EXPLAIN that how we respond when what we value is taken from us, or even when it appears that it could be taken from us, reveals much about our relationship with God. (Refer to the paragraph in the DDG below.)

- All the good things we value are gifts from God (Jas. 1:17), and He has a purpose for everything (Prov. 16:4).
- But when something we hold dear is taken from us, we often struggle in those moments to make sense of what God is doing (consider Job’s experience of loss). We can know that what we are experiencing is within God’s control, but it is a different thing to believe that a loss is within God’s good control.

Times of loss or potential loss provide us with the opportunity to experience God deepening and refining our faith. It’s not just a matter of submitting to God; it’s a matter of submitting willfully. Faithfully. Joyfully. The pain of loss is very real, but the goodness of God is even more real. That is what must sustain us in times of loss: God is good and He can do the impossible.

SUMMARIZE: In this session, we will encounter Abraham’s obedience in the face of a loss. What’s more, that loss would come by God’s command, but Abraham obeyed, believing that God could do the impossible and bring life out of death. We will also see that this test concerning Abraham’s faith in God and His promises pointed toward the fulfillment of those very promises—fulfillment that came when God the Father sacrificed His only Son, Jesus.
**Point 1: God’s covenant comes at a cost (Gen. 22:1-6).**

**SAY:** In Abraham’s one-hundredth year, twenty-five years after God first spoke the promise of a great nation from him, he and Sarah finally had the son they named Isaac (Gen. 21:1-7). But several years later, God came to Abraham again. This time His message was different; He issued a command for Abraham to submit and sacrifice. God was about to put the patriarch to the test.

**READ** Genesis 22:1-6 (DDG p. 76).

1 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!”
   “Here I am,” he answered.
2 “Take your son,” he said, “your only son Isaac, whom you love, go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”
3 So Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took with him two of his young men and his son Isaac. He split wood for a burnt offering and set out to go to the place God had told him about.  
4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship; then we’ll come back to you.”
6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac. In his hand he took the fire and the knife, and the two of them walked on together.

**EXPLAIN:** Help your group understand the purpose of God’s tests for His people: to give them the opportunity to prove the quality of their faith. (Refer to the paragraph below in the DDG.)

**Commentary:** God does not test His people to lead them toward failure. God’s intention is to test us—to place affliction in our lives—because these afflictions produce endurance, and endurance produces character, and character that is recognized and witnessed produces hope of growth in the faith (Rom. 5:3-4). It is difficult to see in the moment, but God’s tests are for our good. They grow us, strengthen us, and give us the confidence we need to persevere through future hardships.

God’s tests are not easy; that which grows us rarely is. And not knowing what God is doing only adds to that difficulty. God’s tests can leave us confused, distressed, and heartbroken. But it is in these moments of weakness that the strength God gives us can shine forth.
INTERACT: Ask your group the following question.

What have you learned about God and yourself through God’s past tests? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

EXPLAIN from the text the emotional and theological significance of God’s command to Abraham.

- “Take your son, your only son.” Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, but God focused Abraham’s attention on the one son of promise. This son, Isaac, was an embodiment of hope for Abraham and Sarah. He was proof of God’s favor and love on them. God had promised this son and had given him to them despite their advanced age and doubt. This couldn’t have made any sense to Abraham. What was God doing? The future was based on Isaac and the family he would have. How would God bring those promises to pass—including bringing blessing to all the people of the world—if he killed Isaac? There was no way for Abraham to reconcile God’s promises and this command.

- “Isaac, whom you love.” This was not an academic exercise for Abraham. Isaac was not merely a fulfillment of God’s promises, an abstract sign of God’s faithfulness. Isaac was the son whom Abraham loved.

- “Go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.” This forty-five-mile journey would take Abraham and Isaac three days (v. 4), not a quick journey. We know that the mountain God chose was not arbitrary. Moriah was the region around where Jerusalem would later be built, and this mountaintop may have been where the temple itself would later be built. But there may have been another reason. While each step of that journey may have been painful, each may have been gracious as well. This journey may have been a gift to Abraham, the opportunity for the patriarch to wrestle with God’s command and perhaps to develop the faith he would need as he raised a knife over his beloved son.

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 76).

God’s tests are for our good. They grow us, strengthen us, and give us the confidence we need to persevere through future hardships.
**Point 2: God provides a substitute sacrifice to pay the cost (Gen. 22:7-14).**

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 22:7-14 (DDG p. 77).

7 Then Isaac spoke to his father Abraham and said, “My father.”
   And he replied, “Here I am, my son.”
   Isaac said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”
8 Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” Then the two of them walked on together.
9 When they arrived at the place that God had told him about, Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood. He bound his son Isaac and placed him on the altar on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son.
11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!”
   He replied, “Here I am.”
12 Then he said, “Do not lay a hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your only son from me.”
13 Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son. 14 And Abraham named that place The Lord Will Provide, so today it is said: “It will be provided on the Lord’s mountain.”

**EXPLAIN:** Refer to the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 77), and explain how this test was for Abraham’s good and God’s glory. Also note that coming to Christ involves the willingness to sacrifice everything for Him.

Abraham held the knife above Isaac, but then the angel called out. Mercifully, the test was over. Abraham had proven his faithfulness. It was evident that Abraham feared God because he was willing to let go of his beloved son. And in not holding anything back from God, Abraham revealed who was most valuable to him—God.

**Commentary:** Faith and love are only theoretical until they are demonstrated. And when we do demonstrate faith and love, we provide them with real weightiness—to the One we love and to ourselves. God used this test to validate Abraham’s faith and to prove the authenticity of his love. It was not pleasant or easy for Abraham—tests never are—but in the end, it was for Abraham’s good and God’s glory.

Though undoubtedly in different terms, God’s command to us is the same as to Abraham. We are to be willing to sacrifice everything for Him, whether He calls on us to sacrifice it or not. Everything. This was the cost of God’s covenant with Abraham. Are we willing to give up everything for Jesus?
INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

What are some things we can tend to withhold from God? Why? (the course and direction of our lives; our “secret” sins; our stuff; our money; our time—why: because we want to have a measure of control over our own lives)

READ the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 77).

God prevented Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, but then He provided a substitute sacrifice in his place. So Abraham named that place after a foundational truth he had witnessed there—“The Lord Will Provide.” And this foreshadows the promise of the gospel; this is what God did for us with His Son.

EXPLAIN the gospel, how Jesus is our substitute sacrifice.

• Because of our sin, we deserve death (Rom. 6:23). As a result, we were dead in our sin and under God’s wrath (Eph. 2:1-3), unable to do anything about our situation.

• But God, who is rich in mercy and love, made us alive with Christ (Eph. 2:4-5). God the Father provided His only Son, Jesus, to be the Lamb sacrificed in our place (Rom. 5:8; Gal. 1:3-4; Eph. 1:7). Jesus was nailed to a wooden cross as our substitute for sin, taking the payment of our sin upon Himself to provide us with forgiveness and His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 77).

Christ as Sacrifice: Unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently, “once and for all,” take away sins.

Essential Doctrine “Christ as Sacrifice”: There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently, “once and for all,” take away sins.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

How has remembering and dwelling on God’s provision of Jesus sustained you through adversity? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)
**Point 3: God calls His people to trust in His provision (Heb. 11:17-19).**

**SAY:** When Abraham and Isaac left the two servants behind, the patriarch made a curious statement about the two of them coming back after they had worshiped (Gen. 22:5). Curious because he knew what he was going there to do. Was Abraham being dishonest or was he saying something much more meaningful? The writer of Hebrews had this to say about what was going on in Abraham’s mind and heart.

**READ** Hebrews 11:17-19 (DDG p. 78).

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. He received the promises and yet he was offering his one and only son, 18 the one to whom it had been said, Your offspring will be called through Isaac. 19 He considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead; therefore, he received him back, figuratively speaking.

**EXPLAIN:** Referring to the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 78), explain Abraham’s faith that God could raise his son Isaac from the dead. And connect Abraham’s faith to our faith for salvation in Christ.

Why was Abraham able to tell the two servants that he and his son would return? Why was he able to tie his only son, his beloved son, and lay him on top of the altar? Why was he able to lift a knife, ready to spill Isaac’s blood? What made such surrender to God possible was Abraham’s faith that He can do the impossible: Abraham believed that God could raise his son from the dead.

**Commentary:** Isaac was the son of promise, the next in a single line leading to the One God promised in Eden (Gen. 3:15). Abraham believed this. And yet, God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac. The only way Abraham could reconcile God’s command with God’s promise was to believe that God would raise Isaac from the dead. Such was the depth of Abraham’s faith. He was expecting God to do the impossible in an impossible situation.

Like Abraham, those who have believed in Christ have believed God for the impossible—our salvation. We owe a righteous God our death on account of our sin, but paying that penalty would separate us from relationship with Him forever. It is an impossible situation—reconciling the unrighteous to the righteous. But God did the impossible and provided the way for us to experience forgiveness and relationship with Him. This is at the core of the gospel and it is what we trust in—the gift of Christ Jesus. And this is what we declare to others—that they too can trust in God to do the impossible and, through Christ, rescue them to be part of His kingdom forever.
INTERACT: Ask groups of 3-4 to read the “Voices from the Church” quote and come up with some answers to the following question. And then ask groups to share some of their responses.

**Voices from the Church**

“Real satisfaction comes not in understanding God’s motives, but in understanding his character, in trusting in his promises, and in leaning on him and resting in him as the Sovereign who knows what he is doing and does all things well.”

–Joni Eareckson Tada

What are some “impossible” situations that we can trust God with? (in times of financial insecurity, God will provide what we need; the need for forgiveness when we have stepped once again into that same sin; the opportunity to share the gospel with someone and not knowing what to say; the sudden and untimely death of a loved one)

SAY: Abraham trusted in God’s promises and in His provision, and though he considered Isaac as good as dead, even at his own hand, he received him back. For our sin, God sacrificed His own Son. He provided the perfect Lamb that we needed, and what’s more, we have received Him back because He was raised from the dead.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 78).

Figuratively speaking, Isaac was raised from the dead, but historically speaking, Jesus was raised from the dead. Abraham believed God and received his son back, having passed his test. Christians believe God and receive the blessings, benefits, and righteousness of the resurrected Son of God, whose resurrection will one day be ours as well. Therefore, every day, every breath, every good gift from our good Father becomes an opportunity to live on mission for the God who has given us everything in Christ (Eph. 1:3).

INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

What has God provided you to use for the kingdom mission He has given you? How can you steward that well this week? (be prepared to give answers of your own to jump-start the conversation)
**EXPLAIN:** Isaac’s question “Where is the lamb?” reverberates throughout the pages of the Old Testament with every repeated sin and sacrifice, but his question is answered ultimately in the New Testament with Jesus, the Lamb of God.

**Commentary:** With the dawning of the New Testament, John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Jesus was the Lamb, the perfect sacrifice for sin, whom the Father provided to lay down His life so that we may live.

The apostle John also recorded the vision God gave him of Jesus being the risen Lamb—“one like a slaughtered lamb standing” (Rev. 5:6). Jesus was the Lamb who was not only sacrificed but also who was raised from the dead, having conquered sin and death.

**READ** the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 79), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we are people who have realized the fullness of God’s promise and been saved by God’s sacrifice of His Son, we trust God with full confidence in His resurrection power, willing to sacrifice all for His mission.

- How will you respond in faith to the sacrifice of the Son of God to take away the sin of the world?
- How can we walk together and support and encourage one another as we experience loss or potential loss in our lives?
- Whom do you know who has experienced a painful loss? How can you share God’s provision of Jesus with this person?

**CLOSE IN PRAYER:** Father, You have provided us with everything: our lives, our breath, and even our salvation in Jesus Christ. May we trust in You completely for our righteousness, in our tests, and in our mission to make known the crucifixion and resurrection of Your Son to take away the sin of the world. Amen.

**PACK ITEM 9: TRUE FAITH:** Cut out these cards and pass them out to group members to remind them that faith is trusting in the God who can do the impossible.

**INSTRUCT:** As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 80-82), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 83) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 80-82) help group members get into God’s Word for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 83) helps group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 80-82) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

• Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.

• Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 5 as a part of point 1 in the session: When we read this chapter, we have to be careful not to sterilize it. We can do that at times as we read the Scriptures. We sometimes forget that these were real people with real feelings.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

• Day 2: “God was working in and through Abraham by grace. And God does the same for us—we are saved and used by God through grace alone.”

• Day 4: “God has a way of taking our moments of doubt and our failings and turning them around.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the DDG (p. 83) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

• Encourage group members to hold one another up through the trials and tests of life, knowing that God is good and He never breaks His promises.

• See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

**Point 1:** God’s covenant comes at a cost (Gen. 22:1-6).

“The land of Moriah is a region or range of mountains located just north of the ancient city of David (2 Chron. 3:1-2), in the territory where the temple would later be built. Abraham referred to the site, not as Moriah (which some translate as ‘the place of the appearance of Yahweh’), but as “The Lord Will Provide” (Hebrew, *Yahweh yir’eh*, v. 14). The emphasis that God was asking for the ultimate sacrifice—*your son, ... your only son Isaac, whom you love*—a spiritual test. The emphasis is not that he was the covenant son but that he was the only beloved son, the reminder of another only beloved Son who was sacrificed on our behalf. Isaac was not literally his ‘only son,’ but ‘the heir,’ the only son of the covenant marriage. Abraham was called to offer not only the person dearest to his heart but the one through whom all the covenant promises were to be fulfilled (17:19,21).”  

“On the third day. It requires about two days to travel on foot from Beersheba to Jerusalem, a distance of about 45 miles (72 km) ‘as the crow flies.’ Elsewhere, two days also represents the time set aside to prepare for a special encounter with God on the third day (see Ex. 19:11). Perhaps this sets the pattern for the significant ‘third day’ (cf. Matt. 16:21; 1 Cor. 15:4).”

**Point 2:** God provides a substitute sacrifice to pay the cost (Gen. 22:7-14).

“When they had reached the place that God had chosen, Abraham had to demonstrate his faith in his actions. The narrator slows the camera, as it were, so that we can picture the scene in all its terrifying detail. When Abraham had *built an altar* and *arranged the wood* on it, he tied Isaac up and placed him on the altar (22:9). Considering the difference in age between Abraham and Isaac and consequently their relative strength, it seems probable that Isaac collaborated with his father and did not resist him. This too would foreshadow the crucifixion and Jesus, God’s only begotten Son, being willing to submit to the horror of the cross so that humanity would be blessed with salvation through him (Luke 22:42-44). Then too, Father and Son worked together.”

“now I know that you fear God. Abraham’s action confirms his faithful obedience to God. While Abraham’s faith was earlier the means by which God counted him as righteous (15:6), that faith is now ‘active along with his works,’ and the faith is ‘completed by his works’ (Jas. 2:21-23), so that his faith resulted in obedience, which is its expected outcome.”
“When they reached the place for the offering, Abraham built an altar, on top of the wood and then bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood (22:9).

What faith! In this act of obedience, Abraham was confessing that the Lord was his God even if this meant that he would be deprived of the son he had waited so long for. Though Isaac is described as ‘your son’ throughout the account, Abraham knew that this was not the whole story. Isaac was his son from God. Were it not for God, he would not have had him. God wants us to have this perspective on everything we have. It is ours, but is on loan to us from God. When we deny him anything he asks for, we are acting as if it is ours and achieved by our own efforts.”

**Point 3: God calls His people to trust in His provision (Heb. 11:17-19).**

“Some see a contradiction in this verse because they argue it says that Abraham had only one son, Isaac, when it is known from other passages (Gen. 16:15; Gal. 4:22) that he also had a son named Ishmael. This verse can be explained by remembering that Isaac was the promised son on whom the fulfillment of God’s pledge of numerous descendants to Abraham depended (Gen. 15:1-6; 22:15-18). Thus, in this sense, Ishmael did not count. This conclusion is further borne out by Hebrews 11:18: ‘In Isaac your seed will be called’ (see Gen. 21:12).”

“In a sense, Isaac did die. This is what the second half of Hebrews 11:19 points out. He didn’t die physically, but he did die in a figurative sense. He was taken right up to the point of death and then brought back to life. So in a sense we can say that Isaac died and was resurrected. In this way, this story and Isaac’s role in particular anticipate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our great high priest.”

**References**

For a story to be great, it must include a great beginning. The story of the Bible, which tells the true story of our world, is no exception.

In the Book of Genesis, we see God the Creator in all His majesty and goodness as He spins the world into motion and lavishes His image bearers with love. We have an “inciting incident” that introduces conflict into this good world, as the first humans raise their fists in defiance toward their loving Father and bring havoc into this peaceful paradise. But even here, we have a promise—God will make things right again. God will cover His people’s sins and crush their adversary. The rest of Genesis shows how even though sin spread throughout the world, God remained faithful to His promise to Eve, His promise to Noah, and His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Book of Genesis is a glorious and earthy tale of rebellion and redemption, of sin and salvation, of failings and faith. Here is a book that shows us who we are in our sin and who God is in His grace. May this study lead you to express gratitude for God’s love toward you and then extend His love to everyone who inhabits this world He has promised to restore.