

## I. Introduction

- A. Thanks for being here today. Thank you for worshipping with us at all our locations. Hello to all our friends at the Weaverville Outpost. You are never far from our thoughts and prayers. We are one church together with you, and we love you and we know you love us too.
- B. Today is week 3 in our series called CHARACTER TOUR. We are talking about the importance of character in our lives. We've talked about integrity and self control. Today we're going to talk about faith.
- C. Don't you think that character is important? So we're not just talking about character in our own lives, we're going beyond that, because this is Neighborhood Church! What's really cool about this series is that I'm coordinating these messages with our Six Flags Family Ministry.
- D. So the topic I preach on today will be not repeated, but reinforced this Thursday night with our kids and our families at Six Flags. I hope you can come back for dinner, teaching, great activities for kids, and dessert, every Thursday night.
- E. Because our job doesn't stop with developing character in our own lives, we have to transmit character to our kids too. That's what we'll talk about on Thursday night.

## II. Need

- A. Before I get into my message today, I want to touch on one more thing.
- B. God has blessed us and blessed our church in amazing ways. He has given us a dream of building a bigger building so that we can embrace every single person He sends our way, but we keep running out of space, so with God's help, we're going to build a new building.
- C. And I'm so excited to say that you have responded beautifully to that need. To date you have given over \$1.4 million to that need (if you're reading/listening online, please help us by giving at [ncredding.com](http://ncredding.com)).
- D. So overall our total giving is way up over last year.
- E. But at the same time our giving to the general fund has gone down, and we need to fix that. You should know that your church staff works super hard, and we squeeze every time you give to us five different ways to make the most of what we receive.
- F. Our reserves have fallen really low, and we need to get that back up. So I want to ask you to do three things:
  - 1. Would you stay super-faithful in giving to NCR over the summer? The best way to do that is to automate your giving—you can do that online at [ncredding.com](http://ncredding.com).
  - 2. If you're part of our church, and you are not yet supporting this ministry financially, then today would be a great time to get started.
  - 3. If you're able, can you give a special offering to get us back into the black?
- G. No pressure. No manipulation. No threats. Just a straight, honest request from your pastor. The Bible says,
  - 1. *7 You must each make up your own mind as to how much you should give. Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7, NLT).*
- H. And I think my message today might help with this because today I'm talking about the character quality called FAITH. Our case study in faith is a man named Abraham. Let's read:

## III. Sermon

- A. *Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." (Genesis 22:1, NKJV).*
  - 1. Let's pause on three words here: God tested Abraham.
  - 2. And notice when God tested Abraham: "after these things" After what things?
  - 3. After good things: Abraham was prospering. Making friends. Experiencing God. It was smooth sailing all the way. He was living a God-blessed life.
  - 4. And after these things, God tested him.
  - 5. Which I think is really important. It helps us understand the true nature of character.
    - a) Character is your ability to make God-filled choices, even on your bad days.
  - 6. That's character. What does it say about your character if you're all good with God, and decent to your spouse and loving to your kids and helpful to your neighbors—when everything is going well in your life? But as soon as life gets hard, you pull off your mask, and release your Inner Gollum?
  - 7. If you're having a good day, and you're nice, that isn't character. It's just having a good day.
  - 8. If you've got character, you don't change on your bad days. Character is who you are on your bad days, too. So God tests Abraham. And this will be the worst test in his whole life.
- B. *2 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" (Genesis 22:2, NKJV).*
  - 1. Point by point, He emphasizes how precious Isaac is. Your son. Your only son. Isaac. Whom you love.
  - 2. Isaac is no longer a child. He's a man, maybe in his early 20s.

3. Go sacrifice your precious, beloved, only-begotten son, your miracle child—the very child God promised you.
4. Call this immaturity, but I hate this story. I put myself in Abraham's shoes, and I can't do it. No way, God. I can't. I won't. I refuse. I'm just being honest.
5. But let me make two observations:
  - a) Scholars aren't sure how old Isaac is here, but there's a general consensus that he's a young man, maybe around 20—though we can't be sure. But don't picture a little boy—picture a healthy, strong, 20-something.
  - b) True character cuts across every compartment of your life. If you have character in one area of life, but don't have character in another area, then it's not character, it's convenience. You can't compartmentalize your life and let God into parts of you.
  - c) Your life is financial, relational, spiritual, sexual, educational, missional, physical, emotional, psychological, marital and PARENTAL. Are there any areas in which it's okay to elbow out God?
  - d) Character opens all the doors and invites God into the deepest, hardest corners of your life.
- C. *3 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. 4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. 5 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." 6 So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together (Genesis 22:3-6, NKJV).*
  1. I don't know how to fill in the blanks of this story. There is nothing here about Abraham wrestling with God. No hesitation. No silent agony. No doubt.
  2. He just listened to God and did it.
  3. There's a really important line in v. 5. Abraham and Isaac travel with some helpers, called "young men." Abraham tells them: "stay here with the donkey; the land and I will go yonder and worship...and \_\_\_\_ [who] will come back to you?"
  4. **WE WILL COME BACK TO YOU.**
  5. What was he thinking? The next paragraph tells us:
- D. *7 But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. 9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him. 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. 10 And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son (Genesis 22:7-10, NKJV).*
  1. Who would you rather be in this story, Abraham or Isaac? Or neither?
  2. Abraham states his faith in one concise sentence: **MY SON, GOD WILL PROVIDE FOR HIMSELF THE LAMB.**
  3. That is the heart and soul of the character of faith. Faith is you counting on God to be God.
  4. But it goes deeper here—look at what's going on. You have a father. You have a son. You have the most intense experience of a long life. And in that experience, you have a father transmitting faith to his son—the inter-generational display of the character of true, deep faith.
  5. Moms and dads, no matter how much teaching we give your kids at our church, the biggest factor in their spiritual development is whether or not you live out your faith before your kids, especially in the dark days of your life.
  6. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, but he still counted on God for two things:
    - a) One, that God would provide the sacrificial lamb, and
    - b) Two, that one way or another Isaac would return with him to his servants.
  7. Here's how the New Testament decodes Abraham's heart:
    - a) *17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense (Hebrews 11:17-19, NKJV).*
  8. Abraham believed that God would raise him from the dead. He received Isaac as a miracle child in the first place, so it was not such a stretch that he would receive him back from the dead in the second place.
  9. The logic of faith says this: **GOD**, you **PROMISED** that Isaac would be the father of many nations, so if you slay him, you'll have to raise him. That's faith.

10. God you promised so even if it doesn't make sense...
  - a) You have to keep Your word.
  - b) You have to stay true to me.
  - c) You have to honor Your own character.
  - d) God, You have to provide the Lamb.
  - e) God, Your whole plan has never been about what I give you, it's about what You give me and there I will rest my faith once for all.
11. FAITH SEES LIFE WHEN EVERYONE ELSE SEES DEATH.
  - a) Faith sees success when everyone else sees failure.
  - b) Faith sees resources when everyone else sees poverty.
  - c) Faith sees gain when everyone else sees loss.
  - d) Faith sees possibilities when everyone else sees impossibilities.
  - e) Faith sees the positive when everyone else is captivated by the negative.
  - f) When everyone else says IT'S OVER, faith says, IT'S JUST BEGINNING.
12. Because faith is confidence in the character of God during the darkest, most confusing days of my life.
13. Even when the economy goes south and the market dries up, faith looks to that call of God in the heart and says, "Here am I."
14. That's when faith goes deeper than choice; that's when faith becomes part of your character.
- E. *11 But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." 12 And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." 13 Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of The LORD it shall be provided" (Genesis 22:11-14, NKJV).*
  1. Now I know that you fear God, the strongest expression for faith, for trust, for a whole-hearted respect for the goodness of God. Fearing God means respecting the goodness of God.
  2. If you ever think for a moment that spirituality is about what you give God, read this chapter.
  3. God provides the lamb.
  4. In Hebrew, verse 14 calls the name of the place JEHOVAH-JIREH. The Lord will see to it. The Lord who provides.
  5. Here is one commentary on the faith of Abraham, 2000 years after Abraham lived and died:
    - a) *20 He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform (Romans 4:20, 21, NKJV).*
  6. Fully convinced that what God has promised He is able also to perform.
  7. Fully convinced.
  8. That is a deep faith. Not spasms of faith on good days, but deep down abiding convictions. A character of faith.
  9. Do you think that Isaac would ever forget this day?
  10. Do your kids see this in you?
  11. We live in the New Testament era. We live after Jesus. We have the benefits of the full, written word of God. We have written on our hearts the full story of the grace of God. We have seen the rich salvation of the Cross. We have met Jesus in the gospels. Had Him explained in the epistles.
  12. We have a kind of clarity that Abraham never had.
  13. Yet, he clung to the promises of God to a degree that many of us have never imagined.
  14. It's time for God's people to live up to the faith of Abraham.
  15. You have a neighbor who desperately needs to see somebody's radical faith.
  16. You have a family member, a friend at school or at work—somebody is looking for one man or one woman with a radical faith in a great God.
  17. So, how do you do that?
  18. How do you make faith happen?
  19. How to you embed faith into your package of character qualities?
  20. It's one thing for me to stand here and preach to you about a life of faith. But it's another thing for me to equip you to actually develop it.
  21. So let's turn a corner, just like last time and ask, where does faith come from? How do we deepen our faith?

- A. Listen very carefully: there is no goodness in your spiritual life that you can work up by your own strength.
  - B. Every character quality in this series is the Fruit of the Spirit. That is bible-speak for saying that it is a byproduct of the supernatural work of Christ-in-you. It is not your effort, but His effort that produces lasting character in your life.
  - C. Jesus is the vine.
  - D. We are the branches.
  - E. When we abide in Him—what happens?
  - F. **FRUIT HAPPENS!**
  - G. And the character quality of faith is one more part of that fruit.
  - H. But there is a specific key to developing **FAITH** as a character quality, and here it is:
    - 1. When you abide in Christ, **FRUIT HAPPENS!**
      - a) And...
    - 2. When you enlarge your God, **FAITH HAPPENS!**
  - I. Wanna know why your faith is wimpy? Because in your mind, God is wimpy.
  - J. Let me say this in another way: **IF YOU FALL SHORT OF FAITH IT MEANS...**
- V. Your God is too small.
- A. Your God is too small.
    - 1. He is too weak to handle your problems.
    - 2. He is too distant to sympathize with your weaknesses.
    - 3. He is too busy to see to the details of your life.
    - 4. He is too broke to provide all your needs.
    - 5. He is too judgmental to overlook your sins.
    - 6. He is too little to whip your giants.
    - 7. He is too indifferent to care.
  - B. Every time you see a lack of faith in life or in Scripture, you can trace it to a deficient view of God.
  - C. That's why a famous pastor/author named A.W. Tozer wrote:
    - 1. What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. . . . For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God... [The Knowledge of the Holy, p. 1]
  - D. At the end of our services, we say that we have a **GREAT GOD**. And at the end of his experience with Isaac, **ABRAHAM KNEW HE HAD A GREAT GOD IN HIS DEEPEST HEART OF HEARTS**. And for the rest of his life, he would call him **JEHOVAH JIREH**, the Lord provides. That's his experience. That's his reality. That's what came to his mind when he thought about God.
  - E. I can stand up here and preach a sermon on character, or integrity, or faith and tell you go out and have faith.
  - F. But you will fail.
  - G. Every time we separate the duties of the Christian life from the only power that can achieve them, we become legalists. And legalism has no power.
  - H. What good is it for me to tell you, be good, be honest, be holy; if I don't point you again and again to the only power that can make you good, make you honest, make you holy, and build you up in faith and that power is Christ in you.
  - I. Every good quality in the Christ-followers life is a **BY-PRODUCT** of proximity to Christ.
  - J. Stay close to Jesus, and fruit happens.
  - K. Enlarge your conception of God, and faith happens.
- VI. How?
- A. How do you enlarge your conception of God?
  - B. I'm going to save that for next time.