What's In Your Hand? Trusting God With What You Can't Imagine Losing

Pastor Douglas Humphrey | Bridge Fellowship Church Text: Genesis 21:1–7; Genesis 22:1–19

It's really easy for us to say that nothing else can do other than Jesus. It's easy to sing those lyrics, but the question is: is that true in your own heart? Or is it Jesus plus something else? Because if it's just Jesus, it's just Jesus. When you think about your life, do you understand that Jesus is the most important thing to you? And with that comes the behavior that represents it. It's not "I love Jesus, and then I love to do what I want to do." It's "I love Jesus, and I'm going to follow what he wants me to do." And that's easier said than done.

I want to start this morning with a question, one I'm raising based on the stone you were given when you walked in. Here it is: What's the one thing in your life that you would have the hardest time losing? Not something you simply miss, but something you struggle to imagine living without. Maybe it's someone you love. Maybe it's your own personal health. It could be your marriage or an intimate relationship. Or maybe it's a future you've spent years praying for, cultivating, trusting God to provide — and now you're walking in it.

Now imagine that thing suddenly being threatened. You can't fix it. You can't control it. You can't guarantee it's going to turn out the way you hoped. What happens to your trust in God?

That's what the stone in your hand represents — not the stone itself, but the thing you named. The person. The diagnosis. The future. The thing you cannot imagine losing. I want you to feel the weight of that. Close your hand around it. Grip it, because you've been gripping it all along whether you realized it or not. Hold it with me, because we're going to stay with this question for the entirety of this morning.

For me, this stone represents my health — my physical health. I was recently diagnosed with coronary artery disease. Years ago I changed my diet. I've been exercising three or four times a week for years. I take medication now. But I'm having to face the reality that my health is something I cannot fully control. Honestly, I'm still processing it. I haven't figured it all out. I'm walking through this just like you're walking through the thing that's heavy on your heart this morning. I've had to ask myself: Douglas, what does it look like to trust God when something as precious as your health becomes uncertain? What does it look like to trust him even when I don't know how things are going to turn out?

It's one thing to say, "God, I trust you," when life is going the way we hoped it would go. It's another thing to trust him when the outcome we want is no longer guaranteed. There's a difference between loving what God has given us and placing our ultimate security in what he's given us.

Since September we've been in the book of Genesis, watching God build Abraham into a man who trusts him, who has faith in him, who is sold out for him and him alone. Today we find ourselves in chapter 21 and 22. Here's the question we have to wrestle with: What do you do when trusting God seems to put at risk the very thing God promised you? And what does your response reveal about where your trust truly rests?

I want to show you four certainties from the text this morning regarding where our trust truly lies.

Certainty One: You can be certain that God keeps his word — on his timetable.

Everybody loves the first part of that statement: God keeps his word. The second part — on his timetable — is where things get uncomfortable. We want God to move when we know God is going to move, but we want him

to move right now. We want the answer, the breakthrough, the open door, like yesterday. And when that doesn't happen when we think it should, we start to wonder: Lord, have you forgotten me? Is he ever going to come through?

Genesis 21:1 says, "The Lord came to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised" — and it happens at the appointed time. God had told them. Abraham was 75 years old when God first made this promise. Now he's 100. Twenty-five years of waiting for something God said he was going to do.

Here's what I want you to see: Abraham couldn't make God's promise happen any sooner. And despite his failures, those failures were not capable of making God unfaithful. Think about what happened during those 25 years. Abraham tried to take matters into his own hands multiple times — first with Pharaoh, lying about his wife being his sister; then taking Hagar as a wife and having an illegitimate child with her; then lying again, just one chapter earlier, about Sarah being his sister to Abimelech. But God kept his word anyway. The promise never rested on Abraham's perfection. It rested on the faithfulness of the God who made the promise in the first place.

We need to hear that, because when God doesn't move on our schedule, we're tempted to take control ourselves. We force things. We compromise. And in doing that, we take God's place instead of trusting him through whatever we're waiting for. Those 25 years weren't wasted — God was using them for Abraham's good, confronting his weakness and refining him. Sometimes while we're focused on what we're waiting for, God is exposing how much we've been relying on ourselves instead of him.

Look at Sarah's response in verses 6 and 7: "God has made me laugh." Remember her laughter back in chapter 18 — she laughed because she doubted God could possibly give her a child. Now she's laughing because she's filled with joy. The laughter of disbelief has become the laughter of joy.

This doesn't mean God has promised to give us everything we want if we wait long enough. Abraham received Isaac because God specifically promised him a son through Sarah. Our hope should rest in what God has actually spoken. Don't hope in the wrong thing — don't trust God for something you really want that he hasn't actually promised. If you're waiting today, please don't assume that delay means God has forgotten you. You may not understand his timing or see what he's doing. Some of you, like me, have been holding that stone for years. Feel the weight in your hand. You can't hurry God's timetable, but you can trust the God who holds it.

Certainty Two: God tests what we treasure most to reveal our hearts and deepen our trust in him.

The human heart is an amazing organ — it pumps life-giving blood through the entire body. But when Scripture talks about the heart, it's talking about the center of our loves, our emotions, and our trust. We have medical technology that can look deep within the physical heart, but when it comes to seeing what's truly in our own heart, we're often completely blind. We need God to show us — and sometimes he uses a test to expose what's actually there.

Genesis 22:1 (jumping ahead for continuity's sake): "After these things, God tested Abraham." Focus on that word tested. A test is not the same as temptation — James tells us God does not tempt people toward evil. A test brings a person to a moment where their trust in God is finally revealed. If you're wondering why God would test Abraham when he already knows his heart, hear this: the test isn't for God to discover something he doesn't know. The test is for Abraham. He needs to see, in his own heart, whether he truly trusts the Lord.

In verse 2, God gives the command: "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and offer him there as a burnt offering." Hold tight to that stone — Abraham was holding something far heavier. Isaac, the son of the promise. The son Abraham waited 25 years to receive. His only son — the only one the promise runs through. That's the son God commands him to offer up.

This is a disturbing passage, isn't it? What kind of God would tell a father to sacrifice his son? Here's what we know: this is not a command for us to imitate. Scripture condemns child sacrifice in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, and God stops Abraham before he actually kills Isaac. We also shouldn't pretend we know every reason God chose this particular test. What it comes down to is this: will Abraham trust God with the very son God promised him?

Verse 3: "So Abraham got up early in the morning." No argument, no negotiating — he heard the command and he obeyed. In verse 5 he tells his servants, "The boy and I will go over there to worship, then we'll come back to you." Notice that — "we'll come back." Hebrews 11 helps us understand what Abraham was thinking: he believed God could even raise Isaac from the dead if he so chose. Think about how far this man has come — the one who once lied out of fear is now walking toward a mountain carrying a command he didn't fully understand, trusting God to remain faithful.

Isaac notices something missing — they have wood, fire, a knife, but no sacrifice. "Where's the lamb for the burnt offering?" he asks. Abraham answers, "God himself will provide the lamb." He doesn't know how. He doesn't know what will happen at the top of that mountain. But he has chosen to trust God all the way up.

Here's a question for all of us: can you trust God's character when you can't make sense of his circumstances — what he's allowing, or what he's taking you through? That's where trust comes in. It's more than a statement we make; it's a surrender we live. So circle back: whatever came to your mind when we started — what would you struggle most to give up if God asked you to surrender it? That might be precisely where God is inviting you to examine the foundation of your trust.

I've been asking myself that question as I face my own heart disease. It runs in our family — my father had it, both my grandfathers had it, my great-grandfather had it too. Now I do. I want more years with my wife and our children. I believe God still has work for me to do, but I don't know how my story is going to unfold. So I'm learning to trust God with more of the outcome — not just the outcome I want. That's what it means to be gripped by trust: not that we stop loving what God has given us, not that we never worry about the outcome, but that we learn to trust God even when we cannot control it.

Certainty Three: God's test reveals whether we trust the giver more than the gift.

This one stings. Verse 9 — Abraham builds an altar, arranges the wood, binds his son, and places him on top of the altar. Verse 10 — he reaches for the knife to slaughter his own son. Everything Abraham had waited for is lying bound on that altar, and now he's ready to give it back to the Lord.

Then the angel of the Lord calls out from heaven: "Abraham, Abraham." He responds, "Here I am." And God says, "Do not lay a hand on the boy." Then, crucially, in verse 12: "For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your only son from me." The test brought Abraham's trust into the open. Even Isaac — the son he loved, the son of the promise he'd waited all those years for — was not more important than God himself.

Notice the order: Abraham obeys, and then he sees the ram. He doesn't know how God is going to resolve the conflict. Trust obeys before the provision.

Verses 13–14: Abraham looks up, sees a ram caught in a thicket by its horns, and offers it as a burnt offering in place of his son. Isaac is spared. A substitute is provided. Abraham names that place "The Lord Will Provide." God provides — but hear this carefully: that doesn't mean he will always prevent the painful loss we fear. Abraham's ram is not a promise that every loss will be reversed in this life. Some losses, some pains, some things we go through won't be fully resolved until we get to glory.

What this passage shows us is that our trust cannot rest in the gifts God gives — it must rest in the Giver. We can love God's gifts so much that we lose sight of the one who gave them, and we begin trusting the gift more than the Giver. That doesn't mean we stop loving the gift. Abraham loved Isaac. But no gift can carry the weight of our ultimate security — only the Giver can do that.

Faith is not knowing that God will preserve everything we love. Faith is trusting God even when we don't know what will happen to the thing we love most. So here's the question this passage places before us: if God did not give you the outcome you've been praying for, would he still be worthy of your trust?

Certainty Four: God's promise stands sworn on his own name.

The story doesn't end with the ram. In verses 15–18, God speaks to Abraham again and reaffirms his promise. Verse 15: "Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, 'By myself I have sworn, this is the Lord's declaration, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your only son.'"

Why the second call? The first stopped the knife. The second reaffirmed the promise with an oath. God swears by himself, because there is no greater power by which he could swear. Verse 17: "I will indeed bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand of the seashore. Your offspring will possess the city gates of their enemies, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring, because you have obeyed my command."

Remember the stars God pointed Abraham to back in chapter 15? Now he adds the grains of sand on the seashore. This isn't a new promise — it's the same covenant, reaffirmed on this side of Abraham's test. And notice the scope: all nations of the earth will be blessed through Abraham's offspring. God's purposes reach well beyond Abraham's lifetime. His obedience is part of a much larger story still unfolding.

Verse 19: "Abraham went back to his young men, and they got up and went together to Beersheba, and Abraham settled in Beersheba." He said he would come back — and he did, with his son. The test is over. Isaac is alive. God provided the substitute. God's purposes don't rest on the strength of our grip. They rest on the faithfulness of the God who makes them.

Where This Leaves Us

Your fingers around that stone are attempting to hold a future that God alone is capable of holding. What happens when the thing you can't imagine losing is placed in God's hands? Abraham found out where his trust rested, and he found out who God is.

I'm not going to stand here and tell you God always hands it back to you. Sometimes the diagnosis stays. Sometimes the child you've been praying for keeps chasing the world. Sometimes the future looks nothing like what you've been praying for. Sometimes things don't get better. But the fact that you cannot see what God is doing doesn't mean he has abandoned you.

Philippians 1:6 — "He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ." Since the day of your salvation, Jesus has been working for your good, and he will finish that work, either when he returns or when he calls you home. He's not leaving you. He's not forsaking you. He's shaping you — forming us into trusting disciples. Not people who are never afraid, but people who learn to put their confidence in him alone.

John 10:28–29: "I give them eternal life. They will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand." The diagnosis cannot snatch you out of God's hand. Neither can a layoff, your worst failure, or the future you dread not having. Will those things hurt, discourage, be bothersome? Sure. But they can't snatch you out of the

safety of God's hand. You may not know what tomorrow holds, but you can know the one who holds your tomorrow.

What is your stone? What is the one thing you've gripped so tightly that, if the Lord took it and showed you who he really is, you would trust him all the more? I want to invite you to place that stone on the altar — not throwing it away, but leaving it as a reminder that you've left that thing with the Lord, so you won't be tempted to pick it back up under your own control. If coming forward is hard today, put it under your seat instead. And if you don't know Jesus Christ, this stone can represent putting your faith in him for the first time: "God, I choose to trust you with ___."

God cannot be your God if he's not God over every area of your life. The only reason Abraham could get to that mountain in surrender was because God had been working in him since his calling. That same God is working inside each of us today. What would the church look like if all of us could trust him wholeheartedly — placing our issues, our concerns, our struggles at his feet consistently, instead of trying to be our own bosses? It starts issue by issue, stone by stone. And as sure as God deals with one, there will be another, because we are a work in progress, and he who began a good work in us is faithful to complete it.