

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2025
SERMON SERIES PART 4: BACK TO THE BASICS
SERMON: TWO THINGS ARE TRUE
SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 22:1-19
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GENESIS 22:1-19

22 Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. **4** On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. **5** He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, **7** Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. **10** Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. **11** But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram^[a] caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. **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.”

15 The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time **16** and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, **17** I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, **18** and through your offspring^[b] all nations on earth will be blessed,^[c] because you have obeyed me.”

19 Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

Sermon: Two Things Are True

Welcome to Week 4 of our series, “*Back to the Basics: A Walk Through Genesis.*” Our overall theme for this series is to brush aside all the layers of tradition, history, and meaning we’ve placed on faith and instead look at it through the lens of God’s original intentions. We started with God creating the world, full of beauty and order and promise. In the stories from Eden and Noah’s Ark, we saw how God keeps looking for us when we are lost and forgiving us when we sin – He doesn’t give up on us! From the beginning of time, God created something good for us and doesn’t walk away from us when we repeatedly try to ruin it.

This week, we’re knee deep into the multi-chapter story of the Father of Nations, Abraham. I decided to use the story of Abraham’s near sacrifice of his son, Isaac, in conversation with the stories from the last couple of weeks in Genesis. Yes, God keeps forgiving us and inviting us back into His original plan of creating a beautiful place for us to thrive in His image. But what about the reverse – what about when we need to forgive God?

I ask the question because it’s often cited when observing the story of Isaac’s near sacrifice. If a human father asked his son to sacrifice his grandson as a demonstration of family loyalty and obedience, we would consider that child abuse punishable by life imprisonment. Obviously God isn’t the same as a human father, but the shock of this story and the apparent flippancy of God’s willingness to traumatize Abraham and Isaac for a simple loyalty test is nonetheless questionable, and has been questioned many times.

The topic of God’s involvement in suffering whether purposeful or passive is called “theodicy,” which is a concept I’ve brought up before because it’s a major, if not *the* major, question of the Bible, beginning with Abraham. Theodicy is the question of whether an all good and all powerful God can exist at the same time, given suffering in the world. Genesis 22 highlights this question because it seems God has power over Abraham, but He doesn’t seem very *good* in this story. And, if God hadn’t

purposefully orchestrated this event and instead passively watched as Abraham nearly killed his own son intentionally, then God wouldn't seem very powerful.

In any case, a lot of people have left faith over the question of theodicy. Many people don't want to follow a God who is either unwilling or unable to stop suffering, or worse, purposefully causes it over something as seemingly petty as a loyalty test.

The reason theodicy – again, the Ultimate Question of where God is in our suffering – is so important is because it can really make or break faith. The most powerful way that people arrive at faith is finding Jesus holding them in the midst of their suffering. On the other hand, a very common way that people leave faith is by feeling abandoned by God or the church through their suffering. Suffering and God's place in it is a really, really central question for us to consider as Christians.

The paradox of theodicy brings to mind, for me, a parenting psychologist popular with people my age, Dr. Becky Kennedy, who often uses the phrase “two things are true.” In her books and lectures, she explains that children frequently struggle with the tension of two truths existing at once, because what they really want is a simple, clear answer. For example, a child might really want a toy, and at the same time, that toy doesn't belong to them. Dr. Kennedy's approach is to validate both realities: she acknowledges the child's intense desire while also making clear that they won't get the toy just because they want it. This practice helps children—and really all of us—learn to live in the gray, where multiple things can be true at the same time, without collapsing when life isn't as simple or neat as we wish it were.

Two things are true. In the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac, we see a faithful servant willing to give up everything in obedience to God; we also see the shocking brutality of such a request. Two things are true. Suffering can bring us close to God, and suffering can make us feel painfully far from Him. Both of those truths live side by side in the life of faith. On one hand, we hear story after story of people who discovered Jesus most clearly in the midst of their deepest struggles. On the other, we know people—and maybe we have been those people—who felt abandoned and cut off from God when the pain was too heavy to bear. Both are true.

Abraham's story shows us that faith does not mean everything is neat or easy to explain. Genesis 22 leaves us with hard questions about God's character and His purposes. But maybe the point isn't to decide whether God needs our forgiveness, or to solve the mystery of suffering once and for all. Maybe the point is to remain in the tension—to lean into the not knowing, and to trust that God is the one who knows.

What we do know is this: Abraham and Isaac walked back down that mountain together. God did not let the knife fall. And from that moment, Abraham became not only the father of Isaac, but the father

of nations—the one through whom God’s promise would continue. That promise is what carries us forward too.

Here is the paradox of faith: God’s ways can be confusing, even painful, and yet His love remains steady and unshakable. The opening chapters of Genesis remind us of this. Humanity stumbles again and again—turning from God, grasping for control, wounding one another—and still God refuses to give up on us. His presence persists, His covenant endures, His love refuses to let go. We may never fully comprehend why suffering is woven into our story, but Scripture assures us of this: the world is God’s gift, He has not abandoned it, and His redeeming love continues to move within it. That love is not a contradiction; it is the anchor that steadies us when nothing else makes sense.

So when we wrestle with the weight of suffering—when our questions feel louder than the answers—we can choose to stand in that tension with hope. Just as God provided a ram in place of Isaac, He has provided Jesus as the Lamb for us all. In Him we see the clearest proof that God has not walked away, but has drawn even nearer in our pain. Two things are true: we may not know the answer to every “why,” but we can know the One who holds the answers—and we can trust that His love will carry us through. That is the ground of our faith, the source of our courage, and the reason we can say, even in the hardest moments: Amen.