



Joe Kaplan
Deaf Missions
Council Bluffs, Iowa

Series: Assembly Required!

Sermon: 3 of 5

Date: January 17, 2010

TRUST THE DESIGNER

Hello. Today we will talk about moving forward by faith. Let's start by reading Galatians 3:6-9 and 29. These verses say, *"Consider Abraham: 'He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."* Verse 29 adds, *"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* Today we will focus on trusting God with our lives. That is what faith is all about! Faith means believing in God and not having any doubts. No matter what struggles I have in my life, I hold on steadfastly to my Lord. It's like the instructions for this model toy. Sometimes the directions seem confusing and foreign to me as I try to figure out how to assemble the model. In the same way, sometimes our lives can be confusing. But faith is a process. We must be patient. We need time to become more like Him.

Today we will learn three things about Abraham. First, we see Abraham's background. Genesis 11 tells us that God called Abraham and told him to leave Ur, the land where he grew up and where his family lived. Abraham's family worshipped idols, not God. Still God knew that Abraham had faith and worshipped Him, so He called Abraham to leave his family, his country and his city. Second, Abraham left Ur, not knowing what he was supposed to do or how God would use him. He didn't know where God was leading him or what obstacles he would face. Third, Abraham was a man who was devoted to his family and cherished them. He remained committed to Sarah his wife, even though she couldn't become pregnant. In Hebrew culture, they took pride in having many children. If the wife couldn't conceive, then the husband often left her and found another wife. Abraham was very loyal to his wife and was patient with her, even when she made the mistake of asking Abraham to sleep with her servant. He could have easily left Sarah and searched for another woman who could have children, since God had told him that he would have children.

I would like to take a look at the value of a test. Sometimes we need to test ourselves. Testing ourselves can be good at times. First of all, testing can help you see whether or not you have learned something. At school, teachers will often surprise their students with a quiz to make sure the students have learned what they have been teaching. It is the same with studying the Bible. When a conflict arises with another Christian, I remind myself what the Bible says. This helps me not to become angry and say something against the person. When

this happens, I know I have passed the test. It is the same in college. If you study for a test, then you usually pass the test, because you know the material. But if you don't study, then you will fail the test. Second, a test shows me where and in whom I have placed my trust. When I feel unsure about something, do I trust the world or do I trust God? For example, Abraham and Sarah understood God's promise, but whom did they trust? Themselves. They both felt it was best to use their servant Hagar instead of trusting God's plan. That was their mistake. I do the same thing sometimes. I find myself questioning whether to trust the world or God.

Third, a test shows me what I love most. For example, if I struggle with something and still trust God, it means that I love God more. Here's another example. I am married. If I'm upset about something, whom do I turn to for advice? I depend on my wife, because I love and trust her more than any other person. It's the same with God and the world. Do I trust the world or God?

Fourth, a test will also help you to see your priorities. Whenever I struggle with something, I have to decide what is my top priority—God or the pleasures of the world. Sometimes God will withdraw from us instead of remaining near us. Why? He wants to test our hearts and make sure He is in them. Sometimes God will let us struggle alone, so we can realize that we cannot do things on our own and that we must trust Him. Then God will come near to us again. For example, I have four children. I can't protect all four children all the time. I need to allow them to learn and to make mistakes on their own. When they make mistakes, it's important that they know they can come to me for help. If I help them all the time, then they will take me for granted and will feel that they don't need my protection. Sometimes I allow my children to learn from their mistakes, but they know they can always come to me for help. It is the same with God. He wants us to learn from our mistakes, so we will realize that we need to depend on Him.

Sometimes God will test believers, that is Christians, to see who or what is important to us. Is a career or football or something else more important to us than God? We need to discipline ourselves to be devoted to God, instead of focusing on things in this world. We need to humble ourselves and prepare ourselves to be devoted to Him.

I notice that many people tend to make excuses for the lack of direction in their lives. They make excuses like I did with this model toy, when I thought the directions were confusing and I did not want to assemble it myself. Instead I should have stayed focused, read the instructions and completed the project. The same goes for God's Word, the Bible. We come up with excuses not to read it and not to go to church. We trivialize our sins and excuse them. Let's take a look at 1 Samuel 15:20-22. This passage tells us, *"But I did obey the LORD," Saul said. 'I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal.'* But Samuel replied: *'Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.'* The king understood God's command and accepted it. Yet he still took animals to sacrifice, even though he knew this was not what God wanted. Sometimes we make excuses, just like King

Saul did when he spoke with the prophet. But God is more interested in our obedience. He wants us to do what He says and not make excuses.

The goal for us today is to remove the things that hold us back and to let them go. Genesis, chapters 37 and 39 to 45, talk about how Joseph's own brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt, and how Joseph was falsely accused by a woman and thrown into jail. But, in the end, God used Joseph to save his own Hebrew people from a famine. Joseph became second in command in Egypt. He was put in charge of food distribution, because he had interpreted the king's dreams. Joseph could have easily given up and stopped trusting God when he was in jail. But even though he was a slave in Egypt, Joseph never lost his faith. When Joseph's brothers saw him again, they were shocked and scared. They realized that Joseph had the authority to have them killed. But Joseph told them he wouldn't kill them, because he now knew why God had allowed him to suffer. Even though the brothers intended to hurt him, Joseph realized that it was all part of God's plan, and he thanked God for it. Joseph didn't hold a grudge against his brothers.

Genesis 19 talks about Lot's wife. God planned to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sin. God told two angels to take Lot's family away from the cities. The angels told them, "Don't look back. You can't look back." They all agreed and hurried to get ready. So they all left—the two daughters, the wife and the husband, Lot. But Lot's wife starting thinking about the friends, life and other things she had left behind, and she decided to look back. When she did, she turned into salt. Lot grieved for her, but he kept moving on, which showed his fortitude. Even though he was grieving for his wife, he moved forward and obeyed God. Sometimes in our lives, we need to keep moving forward, too.

I challenge you today to remain faithful. Let's read Genesis 22:1-2. These verses tell us, *"Some time later 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. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.'"* Imagine that! Abraham accepted this and did not challenge God or ask Him, "Why?" He did not question God. Although Abraham was heartbroken and he grieved, he did not question God or tell Him, "Why are You doing this? I thought You promised me that my family would spread everywhere. Your word is worthless!" This shows the character of Abraham that he was willing to accept God's decision, even though it was quite a challenge and caused him great pain to obey.

It is important to trust. Do you trust God fully? Or do you sometimes waver in your faith? We need to examine ourselves to see if we trust God completely or if we have questions and doubts. Look at how Abraham trusted God and took his son. His son wondered where the sheep was for the sacrifice. Abraham told his son that he was the sacrifice. His son accepted this also. He accepted it! Wow! Abraham told him that God had a purpose and that he must obey God no matter what. Just as Abraham raised the knife to kill his son, God stopped him and gave him a ram to sacrifice instead. He commended Abraham for his faith. Sometimes we get scared and back out of something. Sometimes we fail God. How can we not fail? We must trust God.

This makes me think about a story from the New Testament. The book of Acts talks about Saul and how he persecuted Christians. Saul worshipped God and followed the Old Testament Law. He thought that the Christians and their churches were teaching false beliefs about God. Saul did not realize God's prophecies were being fulfilled. Then one day, as he was on his way to kill more Christians, God stopped him with a blinding light. From that point on, Saul's life changed. God had a plan for him to stop killing Christians and preach instead. God knew his passion and his character and changed him from the inside out. No one else changed him; only God could do it. Saul became Paul. He was a strong Christian and went around preaching the same message as the people he had persecuted in the past. He told them he was sorry, accepted God's plan for him, and moved forward boldly.

Next time, we will focus on the word "contagious." This word means something that spreads, such as an illness that you must protect yourself from. But our faith is not like this. It is good when it spreads. We will be talking about contagious faith. Now back to assembling this model.



©2010 Deaf Missions

This printed manuscript is the English translation of a sermon presented in American Sign Language.
The sermon may be viewed at www.linkasl.com. LINK is a ministry of Deaf Missions.

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. The "NIV" and "New International Version" trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society.

Deaf Missions, 21199 Greenview Road, Council Bluffs, Iowa 51503 • www.deafmissions.com