

Aim of lesson

To show how God helps people to develop through testing their faith.

Bible background

Genesis 22; Hebrews 11:17-19; James 2:21-23; John 1:29,36.

Outline of lesson

What a test of faith

Ask the class if they think Abraham trusted God. Remind them of Abraham's faith in leaving Ur. Point out that the incentive of blessing was given with this test of faith. Ask if they only do what they are told at home when a reward is promised. Would they trust enough to do something they could see no benefit from.

Take the class to read Genesis 22:1,2. Try to help them feel for Abraham. He had seen God's promise fulfilled in the birth of Isaac, then had seen the boy develop; now the son of promise was to be put to death in sacrifice. What a test of faith!

A journal of a journey

Turn to the workbooks. Note that the days are arbitrary, and are simply intended to clarify the narrative. See if the class can write up Abraham's diary for Tuesday, expressing how he felt at hearing God's instruction. Help them to see the special relationship which existed between Abraham and Isaac and which God saw when he said 'take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love'.

Some children, especially boys, find this sort of exercise difficult, but it is useful to try to understand how it must have been for Abraham. You might find one of the alternative activities, particularly the last, more effective.

Read together verse 3. Discuss the atmosphere of Wednesday and Thursday; the night of preparation and the drama in the simple statement 'early in the morning.' Let the class 'travel' on that journey and imagine the conversations, what the servants thought, the talk at the evening meals, Abraham's feelings about the promises related to Isaac. Have the class complete the space for Wednesday and Thursday in the diary.

Read together verses 4-14. Discuss with the class Abraham's feelings on that third day as he, with Isaac, left the servants with the statement that they would go and worship and then would return. Encourage the class to consider Abraham's thoughts when Isaac asked the question and when Isaac lay bound on the wood at the moment of sacrifice. The young man accepted his fate without a struggle and the elderly Abraham, in an agony of mind, raised the knife. How could he go through with this act? Look at his faith in the resurrection in the light of Hebrews 11:17-19. Enter into his feelings as God's voice is heard and life is spared. Faith has been tested to the uttermost and has withstood the pressure. Fill in the diary for Friday.

I will surely bless you

Read together verses 15-18 and fill in the diary for Saturday. Convey the sense of relief and joy he must have felt and how he had developed through this experience in his understanding of God.

Digging deeper

Mount Moriah

The study of Mount Moriah links Isaac to David, Solomon's temple, and to the Lord Jesus. It is good for the children to understand how this very human story looks forward to the sacrifice of Jesus, and teaches us something of how God must have felt the pain of his Son as 'they went, both of them, together'.

Relevance to our lives

Ask the class how their own faith is tested, maybe when things go wrong, when there is illness or death, when they see disasters in the world and wonder how a God of love can allow such things to happen. Encourage them to talk about their feelings in such situations, and accept that we do not know all the answers. Point out that Abraham did not understand while he was going through this experience. On this topic Job's thoughts in chapter 42:1-6 may be a useful passage for the class to think about during the week.

Prayer

Father, help us to see that your ways are not our ways. Teach us to see your hands at work even on the darkest days.

Other suggestions for activities

- An extra activity which really should be included is to look at the parallel between this incident and God offering his only Son. Make a list together of all the things which are similar and consider how much the suffering of Abraham reflects what God felt when seeing his Son suffer.
- Continue this study by looking at the faith and attitude of Isaac throughout.
- The class could relate the incident through the eyes of a servant or Isaac or Sarah.
- If the class has managed to 'get under the skin' of the characters, great benefit could be gained by producing a play on the incident, using the class' own words and interpretation of the people's feelings.