

I think one of the reasons is that if we are holding back, if we do not allow ourselves to be the full conduit of God's grace and power, the things that He wants to do in us and through us He can't do because we aren't fully on the altar. We haven't placed ourselves in that place where we are willing to give God anything and everything.

In his book, "*All In*," Mark talks about the story of Joshua Chamberlain who was a Colonel of the 20th Maine Volunteers Infantry Regiment in the Union Army. Chamberlain and his three-hundred-soldier regiment all stood between the Confederates and certain defeat at a battlefield in Gettysburg. When the Confederates charged several times, Chamberlain and his men held their ground. As he was informed that no reinforcements were coming for his men, he made a defining decision. In full view of the enemy, Chamberlain climbed onto their barricade of stones and gave a command. He pointed his sword and yelled, "Charge!" This charge turned the tide of the war and saved the Union.

There are moments in our lives when we are tempted to give up on our dream or give up on our goal. Maybe you are tempted right now to give up on your marriage, your kids, or your school. Hang in there. This too shall pass. Even if there are no reinforcements, we need to charge the problem, charge the dream, and charge the goal. Quit making excuses! Look for opportunities. It is time to charge and it is time to go all in.

The early Methodists devoted themselves entirely to God with a covenant prayer. Let us pray it together:
I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, exalted for you, or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing: I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

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ALL IN (2)

All In: Charge

Geneses 22:1-5, 9-14

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Today's story is one of the most uncomfortable stories in all of Scripture. You might be wondering how could a loving God even suggest what He is commanding Abraham to do. But we need to know that in today's story God is trying to reveal something to us.

It is very important to notice that at the beginning of this story God tested Abraham. (Genesis 22:1) This is only a test. God never intended for Abraham to sacrifice his son. In fact, this was a culture in which pagan religions surrounding the Israelites practiced human sacrifice. But God never intended for Abraham to sacrifice his son. I don't believe God would have allowed it. But there are moments when God will test us. There are moments when God will determine whether or not our lives are truly submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

If we aren't careful, the gifts that God gives us can become idols. The blessings that God gives us can become more important than the God who gave them to us in the first place. God blesses us financially with resources and with money and wealth. I believe that's a blessing from God. But if we aren't careful, that blessing can displace God and become more important than God Himself. God blesses us with a job. He is the one who has given us the skills and the abilities. He is the one who has opened the door. Our job is a gift from God. But if we aren't careful, that gift can become an idol. It can become more important to us than God Himself. God is the end all and the be all. We exist to glorify God. But we aren't careful, our relationship with God can become selfish in nature.

As Christians we put our faith in Christ. But honestly speaking, many times it really isn't about us following Jesus. It is more about Jesus following us. We want Him to follow us everywhere we go. We ask

Jesus, 'Would You please follow me into court and bless me and help me get better grades and promote me to a better position?' It isn't about God's purposes. It is about God serving our purposes. It isn't about God's agenda for us. It is such a subtle selfishness. It is all about our agenda for God. We want the God of the universe to revolve everything around us.

I have a question for you: Are you following Jesus or is Jesus following you? I think that's the difference between being all in or holding something back from God. Going all in is saying to God, 'I'm willing to go wherever you want me to go and do whatever you want me to do.' God gives us the desires of our heart. In other words God begins to download those desires into our heart by the Spirit of God. He creates those desires and we've got to listen to those sanctified desires as we pursue God's will for our lives.

Let us go back to Abraham. He got up early, saddled the donkey and they headed off. According to Jewish tradition, the reason he got up early is he wanted to leave before Sarah woke up. The tradition says that Abraham and Sarah talked about God's command to sacrifice Isaac, and even though it was hard for them to accept it, they were both on the same page. But Abraham got up early before she woke up just in case she changed her mind!

What about Isaac? He is seen as a passive player in this. But most scholars believe he was 25 years old. Some suggest he was the age of 37. According to Jewish tradition, Isaac submitted to the sacrifice. It is believed that he said to his father, 'Father, bind my hands and my feet in case when I see the knife coming at me, I may defend myself. So I beg you, bind me.' This isn't just a story about Abraham going all in. It is about Sarah going all in and it is about Isaac going all in.

We come to the moment when Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. This is the moment when if you are seeing it in the movie theater, you don't want to see it. At any rate, as Abraham raised the knife, God stepped in. *'Do not lay a hand on*

the boy. 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.' (Genesis 22:12) Abraham looked up and there in the thicket, he saw a ram caught by its horn. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. Abraham called the place 'The Lord Will Provide.' Abraham knew that God was going to provide. He thought, 'I do not understand it but I am here believing that somehow, some way, You are going to provide.'

Sometimes we have to die to certain things. We have to put certain things on the altar and die to them for God to give them back. Is there something that you need to put on the altar before God? Is there something that you need to be willing to sacrifice to God? Here's what it says in verses 15-18: *The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 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, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."*

If our faith is in Christ, then we have been grafted into the family of Abraham and he is our father. The blessings that we enjoy as a child of God trace back to a moment, once again, where someone was willing to go all in. We never know how our step of faith is going to affect the people around us. It is not just about us, it is about how our lives can influence others around us for the redemptive purposes of God. God says we have not withheld. In other words, we are not holding out and we are not holding back. Is there something you are holding back? Is there something that has become more important to you than God? At the end of the day, we hold out on God because we think we are going to miss out if we don't have our little things that are important to us. But the truth is, if we are holding out, we are missing out. Only when we put everything on the altar, God blesses us.