

The LORD Will Provide Trust

Genesis 22:1-18 (NIV84)

¹ 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, 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." ³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled 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 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 all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Our Old Testament reading for today has got to be one of the most offensive accounts in the Bible. God commands Abraham to kill his son Isaac as a sacrifice to him. If that were your introduction to knowing God and his Word, would you continue learning about him? How could I possibly listen to or even try to love and serve a God who commands a father to kill his own son. It's revolting, reviling. How can anything good come out of this? But that's what we have before us today. God really 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." (verses 2)

It's hard enough to take this command at face value, but then think about what Isaac meant to Abraham. Isaac was the child of the promise. When God had told Abraham to leave his homeland some 30-40 years ago, God promised that a great nation would come from his offspring, of which, at the time, he had none. This promise was given to him when he was 75 years old. Undoubtedly he and Sarah had probably been trying to have kids for upwards of five decades before that promise. Even after the promise was given, they would have to wait another 25 years to have Isaac - well past their child-bearing years.

Waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled, Sarah succumbed to temptation and doubted that God would provide this child. To help God keep his promise, she insisted that Abraham father this child with her maidservant Hagar. Hagar and Abraham had a son and named him Ishmael. When Ishmael was fourteen, God provided Sarah and Abraham that son he had promised: Isaac. In a couple of years, as Ishmael continually mocked Isaac, Sarah again insisted Abraham to act, this time to cast Hagar and Ishmael away specifically so that Ishmael would not share in any of the promises that belonged to Isaac. God had told Abraham specifically that the promise to become a great nation, that all nations would be blessed through him, would be through the son that Sarah and Abraham had. God's promises rested on Isaac, and Isaac alone, Abraham's one and only son after sending Ishmael away.

Now he's supposed to kill Isaac, to offer him up as a sacrifice to God? Seriously, if any one of us were in that situation, would we not have questioned God? Why do you need me to kill Isaac and offer him up as a sacrifice? How can you ask me to do such a thing? I love him. He is my one and only son! How can you even keep the promises that you made, God, if I have to kill him? You said it would be from Isaac that I would become a great nation. Why do you even want a person sacrificed to you? You've never asked this before. Why now? What good does this atrocious act do for your plan? Answer me, God, because, honestly, I can't believe that you would ask this of me.

This was a test. Although Abraham wasn't told this, we were. Going into it, Abraham had nothing more to go on other than what God had promised him before, how God had provided in the past, and what God was asking him to do now. Where we would have asked questions upon questions still skeptical as to how we could ever complete God's command, we are told, "Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled 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." (verse 3) There's no hesitation on Abraham's part. He is doing exactly what God told him to do and promptly.

As the account goes on, we start to get glimpses into Abraham's mindset. On the third day of the travel, Abraham sees the place that God had told him about, the mountain in Moriah where he is to sacrifice Isaac. He tells his servants to stay with the donkeys while he and Isaac go on. He also says, "We will worship and then we will come back to you." (verse 5) We. We will come back to you. Is he lying? Is he just trying to ditch them here because he knows his servants would try to stop him if they knew what he was about to do to Isaac? The insight to answering these questions is still coming.

Abraham and Isaac head up the mountain – wood on Isaac's back, fire and knife in Abraham's hands. Isaac is old enough – probably an adolescent or teenager – to realize that there is a crucial component missing for this sacrifice. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (verse 7) Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." (verse 8) Abraham didn't say that God would provide something else for the burnt offering – an ambiguous truth. No, Abraham said that God himself will provide a lamb. No indication that it will be Isaac, even though Isaac is starting to piece together that something up. Nevertheless, Isaac trusts his Dad. He trusts, just like his father, that God will provide because he always had. He doesn't run away. He doesn't ask more questions. He doesn't pry or press. We're simply told, "And the two of them went on together." (verse 8)

They reach the place that God had told Abraham about. Abraham built the altar. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar. Remember, Isaac is by no means a small boy. He's maybe 12 or older. His dad is over 110, past his prime. We hear of no struggling. We hear of no overpowering. Abraham does what he has to do. Isaac allows himself to be bound and placed on the altar. They trust God to provide. Everything is ready. Abraham "reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son." (verse 10) It's about to happen. He's actually going to go through with it.

Could any of us ever have gotten to this point - arm raised, knife in hand, ready to strike the fatal blow and sacrifice your one and only son to God? How could we trust God enough to go through with such a thing? How could we trust God to provide in such a situation that makes no logical sense for this to be something that God wants, something that is going to be good for me?

Thankfully, God has not asked us to sacrifice a one and only child of our own. But we have other moments in life when we can't see how God will come through for us, how he will provide. Yet he tells us to trust him. My mother died. How will you work this for my good? How will you provide and fill that empty void left behind in my life? My son, my daughter doesn't go to church anymore. You said train a child in the way they should go and when they are old they will not depart from it. How are you going to provide that now, keep them on the path, when they don't even go to church anymore? You said, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse... Test me in this, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." (Malachi 3:10) But the ledger is red. You want me to trust you to provide, but when are you going to provide? I'm not seeing it, and that makes it hard for me to trust that you will actually provide.

Arm raised in the air, knife in hand, and the LORD provides. "The angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham! 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.'" (verses 11-12) Abraham passed the test. He trusted God to provide, and God came through – as he always had for Abraham. "Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son." (verse 13) The LORD provided. Abraham's trust in God to provide was well placed, and through this experience, it was strengthened more than ever before.

Yes, Abraham passed the test. Yes, his trust in God to provide was strengthened. But couldn't God have used a less extreme way to accomplish the same goal? Maybe. But God knew what he was doing. He tested Abraham knowing that Abraham could pass. He had given Abraham every reason to believe that God would provide for him, that he would keep his promises, that indeed from Isaac would still come descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. God had promised this to Abraham, and God had never failed to keep any of his promises in the past. So, he would not fail to provide for Abraham now.

God has given us promises upon promises. God tests us in life to strengthen our trust in him to provide as he did with Abraham. These tests are not easy. Some tests stretch us beyond what we think we can handle or bear. They stretch our trust in God farther than it has ever gone before. As it was with Abraham, we don't know the outcome ahead of time, but we do know what God has done for us in the past, what he has done to prove that our trust in him to provide is well placed. We may not see it right away, as it happened in Abraham's life, but as he provided for Abraham, so he will provide for us in his time.

God's providence for us even goes even further. What God commanded Abraham to do that day, he himself actually did. He had promised that all nations on the earth will be blessed through the offspring of Isaac. Although Abraham did not see that during his lifetime, God provided that blessing, he made good on his promise as he always had. Through Isaac eventually came Jesus Christ, God's one and only Son. The LORD gave Jesus to provide that promised blessing to all nations – the God Man who went out in the desert for forty days and was tempted by Satan. Jesus struggled and came out victorious. Jesus was the one who was sacrificed on the altar of a wooden cross to pay for the sins of the whole world – yours and mine. God provided his one and only Son so that we would be justified – declared not guilty of our sins.

As Paul wrote in our second lesson today: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32) God provided for Abraham in this test of faith. God provided his one and only Son so that we would reap the benefits of his sacrifice, of his righteousness. Since that is true, how will God not keep those promises that he gives us in his Word, to work all things for our good, to provide for us even when it goes completely against what we think God should be doing?

We trust God to provide because he has more than proven himself trustworthy. He never fails to provide. Yes, he still does test us, like he did with Abraham. I may not like the test. I may deem that the test makes no sense or even offends me that he would ask me to trust in him to provide through terrible losses. But the fact remains that when he does test us he also provides his proven track record of keeping promises to give us that trust in him going forward that he will always provide for you and me. Amen.

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