

## Providing a Test to Provide Trust

### Genesis 22:1-18 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. <sup>5</sup> 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." <sup>6</sup> 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, <sup>7</sup> 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?" <sup>8</sup> Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. <sup>12</sup> "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." <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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." <sup>15</sup> The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time <sup>16</sup> and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> 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, <sup>18</sup> and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

The conversation that Jesus had with his disciples before showing three of them his divine glory on the Mount of Transfiguration was one that promised dark days ahead - days of rejection, of suffering, of death. It was a hard teaching and a hard future to accept.

Our first Bible reading today from Genesis is another hard story and teaching to accept. For some, this event is a deal breaker. They won't believe in a God who would command a father to sacrifice his son. That's just plain wrong. It's offensive. For those who are familiar with the book of Genesis, it's even more problematic because Isaac is Abraham's and Sarah's son of promise. Through Isaac, the Lord was supposed to produce a nation from Abraham's seed, have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sands on the seashore. More importantly, though, through Isaac, all nations on the earth would be blessed because the Savior would come through his family line. How many of us would call it quits on our faith if God had asked us to do something similar?

Abraham didn't call it quits, though. He trusted God. Why? Because God had taken him through a series of trust exercises to provide that trust. He did what God said when he called him to leave his family, his homeland, and go to a place that the Lord would show him and God came through. Going to this foreign land away from his support systems and family, he trusted that God would bless him, and he was blessed with an exorbitant amount of wealth. He trusted that God would protect him, and he did as Abraham won battles against enemies and was protected from those who wanted to harm him and his family. He trusted God to give him a biological son between him and Sarah, and the Lord made good on that promise with the birth of Isaac. The Lord had led Abraham through a series of trust exercises to provide him the trust needed for this test.

Do you trust God? Of course, you do. You wouldn't be here if you didn't. But what events have happened in your life to make you trust God similarly to how Abraham did? For me, it started simply with the faith he created in through his Word. That led to trusting him when things got scary because of the unknown future. One of my trust exercises from God was early in my marriage. Wendy had two more years of schooling and I had four more before we would be done and start earning a full-time income. So, the goal was to make it two years on what we could make with our part time jobs. Even with my wife's thriftiness and saving up the money we received at our wedding, we weren't going to make it the full two years financially, no matter how we crunched the numbers. We would run out of money to pay our rent. But we trusted that the Lord would provide without really seeing how. Through a combination of unexpected sources, we were able to make it to that two-year mark with money still in the bank. Another time was when we were deep into the remodeling of the church here. I remember wrestling many days in prayer asking God for "a win," something to know that we were going to be okay and that he would bless our plans and provide. Soon after I received an unexpected email from a grant foundation telling us that we had been approved. The Lord used these tests to build my trust in him, just as I know that he has used moments in your life to build your trust in him.

Now, you trust God, but how much do you trust him? Do you trust him with all your heart? Do you trust him only as long as you can see a safety net, the emergency funds in the bank, a lifeline to keep you from drowning? Many trust exercises involve blindness, not seeing something. Maybe the most famous exercise is the trust fall. I'm going to show you a video that illustrates the kind of trust fall that God was providing for Abraham in our Bible reading today. (Show video: <https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/20471/trust-fall>)

The woman of the video represents any believer who doesn't fully trust God all the time. Let's be honest. We might be a little better than where she starts because we at least say that we do trust God. We might have a little bit of a hard time committing to that first trust fall, the one where we know God is standing right behind us, ready to catch us. Like the woman, we're thrilled when we trust God and he comes through for us, just as he promised. The trust exercise did its work, and we trust God a little more.

Then God tells you to fall back when you can't see him behind you, ready to catch you. There's no one over there. That's an offensive trust exercise. It's offensive to tell me to fall back when there is no support, no fail safe. Offensive like God telling Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Getting to the heart of it all, it's offensive to us to trust God only on his Word to do something that we see no way of him accomplishing.

What kind of trust exercise is God putting in your life right now that you're having a hard time putting into action? Is it a job change? A move? A college pick? Declaration of a major? Is it working on a God-pleasing relationship – marriage, dating, or family? Is it planning for retirement? For your funeral? Are you struggling with trusting God while making these decisions because you can't see the end result or a safety net while you do them, that you don't know how all these things could ever work out for your good? Does it offend you that God is placing a trust exercise in your life that you can't see the full outcome of? Does him putting such an exercise in your life make it okay not to trust God?

Can you admit that God is not the one with the problem, but that we are? We have trust issues. We have demands that need met, unspoken criteria, before we give God our trust. And so we are tempted not to trust him, especially when he puts a trust exercise in our lives.

In the New Testament book of Hebrews, we're told: "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death." (Hebrews 11:17-19) When Abraham exercised his trust in God and trusted him on the basis of who he is and figured that God would come up with a way of making this work, the Lord came through for him and provided.

Without Abraham knowing that this is what he would do, God stopped him before he sacrificed Isaac. Then, "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. 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.'" (verses 13-14)

The Lord provided a test to provide Abraham with trust. Really, this trust exercise from God was not for God's benefit. He already knew what Abraham would do. He knew that Abraham trusted him and would not withhold his son Isaac when asked. This test, this trust exercise, was an opportunity for Abraham to exercise his trust in God and to grow stronger in it.

When God brings us trust exercises, they're for us to examine and evaluate our hearts. Are there places where we are holding back trust from God? Am I trusting him with my whole heart? Regardless of where our trust level is at with God, no matter how many trust exercises we have failed, the Lord still does for us what he always said he would do. He kept his promises to Abraham, as he said, "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." (verses 17-18) Isaac lived and fathered Jacob. Jacob fathered Judah. Generations later, this family line produced David. Years after that, this family line brought the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, into the world. God the Father kept his promise and sacrificed his Son in place of us, in place of Isaac. The Lord provided a substitute to save us from our sins and give us life everlasting with him, regardless of whether or not you would trust him.

God gave up his one and only Son of us without hesitation. How will he not graciously give us everything else we need, even when we can see how? He is a man of his word. You can count on him to come through when he says that he will do something.

So we trust him. We trust him even when we're offended when he asks us to trust him and we can't see how he will provide for us nor how he will make it work out for our good. We take these trust exercise opportunities to grow in our trust of God. He will provide the tests in order to provide us with trust in him. Amen.