



Dear Friends who, like me, need to learn a more child-like trust in the Lord!

I believe that only a fence post or a stone could read or hear this Bible account about Abraham and remain unmoved. Remember that Abraham was the man who waited to the ripe old age of 100, before the LORD kept his promise to send Abraham a son born to Sarah! And now what do we read? God demanded that son back! This was the supreme test of faith, one that proves **The Lord Is Willing To Break Our Heart To Build Our Faith. I. We Learn This From Abraham's Nightmarish Test. II. We Learn This From Abraham's Unbelievable Obedience. III. We Learn This From the LORD's Gracious Intervention!**

I. We Learn This From Abraham's Nightmarish Test.

It must have seemed like a nightmare when *"Some time later God tested Abraham. He called to him, 'Abraham!' Abraham answered, 'I am here.' God said, 'Now take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah. Offer him there as a whole burnt offering on one of the mountains, the one to which I direct you."* How shocked Abraham must have been to hear what God was asking him to do! But not because child sacrifice was unheard of in those days. Tragically, it was all too common among the Canaanites and those who worshipped Moloch and Baal. But never, never had the LORD God made such a request. In fact, years later the LORD would specifically condemn the abomination of child sacrifice when He gave his law to his people at Mount Sinai.

But now the LORD was asking Abraham to offer up his son, his *"only son,"* the son he loved, the son whose very name *"Isaac"* meant *"Laughter,"* the son who was precious also in his mother, Sarah's eyes! Abraham's heart must have broken in two at the thought! How could he do this? How could he convince Sarah to let her son be sacrificed? And how could he ever look her in the eye again if he did? And how could he convince Isaac to allow himself to be sacrificed! Remember, by this time Isaac was at least a teenager if not already in his early twenties. (See 21:34, *"a long time,"* and then add 22:1, *"some time later."*) How could the LORD ask this, of all things!

Yet Abraham's heart may have been broken by something even more than a father's love. What do I mean? Isaac was supposed to be the son from whom would spring that special Descendant through whom *"all the families of the earth will be blessed."* (Genesis 12:3) Was the LORD having second thoughts about his plan to save lost sinners? Was He toying with Abraham and his emotions? It's no wonder that Martin Luther once observed that Abraham, according to his human reason, must have thought God had either lost his mind or--more likely--this command came from the devil and not God!

I would weep as I have never wept if the LORD woke me up in the middle of the night and said, *"Sacrifice to me your child, the child you love, your only child."* Here is a test so nightmarish, that all of us would say, *"Not this, Lord! Anything but this! Take me instead!"* Yet this was Abraham's test. On a mountain-top somewhere in the land of Moriah, God gave a test far tougher than any a pastor has ever given in a confirmation class. This was a test on the 1st commandment. *"Thou shalt have no other Gods before me,"* a commandment which Jesus explained with these words, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."* *This is the first and greatest commandment.* (Matthew 22:37-38) Did Abraham have that kind of love?

Do you and I? I think this is the toughest question any parent will ever wrestle with. That little bundle of joy pops into our lives and suddenly our entire life revolves around them. 2 AM feedings. Yucky diapers to change. Then running after them during the terrible 2s. Then shuttling them to hockey, basketball practice, track, swimming, tennis or dance class. Concerts to attend. Birthday parties to celebrate. Sometimes, can it happen that our love for a child starts to shove aside love for the Lord? Have parents ever been heard to say, *"I just can't get to church anymore. We're too tired by the time Sunday rolls around."* Or, *"I can't come. Junior has a game. Priscilla has ballet."* Do we ever get so wrapped up in our children, our family that the Lord no longer comes first?

That's why the Lord tested Abraham so severely. But how could our Father be so mean to Abraham? He wasn't. Instead, this test merely proves **The Lord Is Willing To Break Our Heart To Build our Faith!**

II. We Learn This From Abraham's Unquestioning Obedience.

The Lord's command came to Abraham at night, very likely in a vision. The rest of that night must have been a nightmare for Abraham. I doubt he slept very much. Did he worry about how to break the news to Sarah, or about how he'd convince Isaac to go with him? Then came morning. But faithful Abraham did not ignore the Lord's command.



Instead, he prepared **immediately** for the journey to the land of Moriah. He saddled the donkey. He chopped the wood for the sacrifice! Don't you think that every swing of the axe broke his heart? And then, after tearing Isaac away from what was likely a wailing mother overcome by grief, Abraham "*set out to go to the place that God had told him about.*" The 50-mile trip took 3 days. Were those the longest 3 days of Abraham's life? Finally, Abraham, Isaac, and the servants arrived in the vicinity of Mount Moriah. From there, Abraham and Isaac went on alone.

The wood for the sacrifice Abraham placed on his son. The fire and the knife he carried himself. He may as well have plunged that knife into his own heart rather than endure what happened next. "*Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 'My father?' He said, 'I am here, my son.' He said, 'Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' Where is the lamb?*" The question must have cut like a knife into Abraham's heart. "*God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.*"

Now when you hear Abraham's answer, you might think, "*Aha! I knew it. Abraham knew all along that God was only bluffing. He knew he wouldn't have to go through with this sacrifice. He is saying as much with these words.*" No, I don't think so. Instead, I believe that Abraham was only trying to spare the feelings of his dear son. Why do I think that way? Because I accept the interpretation of this story my Heavenly Father himself gives in the book of Hebrews 11:17-19: "*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered Isaac. This man, who received the promises, was ready to offer his only son, about whom it was said, 'Through Isaac your offspring will be traced.' He reasoned that God also had the ability to raise him from the dead, and in a figurative sense, Abraham did receive him back from the dead.*"

Do you see what this test did for Abraham? Because he was really going to do it! He built the altar; arranged the wood; tied up Isaac, and by the way, Isaac let him! Isaac didn't struggle, or even protest. Is not this supreme trust! Then "*Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.*" Abraham surrendered his will to God's will. He did everything necessary to carry out God's command, and when he raised his hand to slay his son, he might as well have been saying, "*Not my will, but thine be done.*" Seven of the hardest words for a tired, terrified, hurting sinner to say.

Would we have raised the knife? I see my daughter's smile, the dancing light in her eyes, and I cry out, "*No, Father! Not this. Anything but this! Lord God, please have mercy on me, a sinner!*" Would most parents need to make the same confession?

Yet this Bible story is not shared to shame us, but to teach us a little something about our priorities. God didn't hesitate to take Abraham's heart and break it in two, because the Lord knew this was exactly the test that Abraham needed at that very point in his life to strengthen his faith, to draw Abraham closer to his Lord! Abraham's soul is what concerned the Lord the most. And Abraham's eternity.

What about you and me? I don't know when, or how, or even if the Lord will find it necessary to break your heart to build your faith. But this I do know. "*God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability, but when he tests you, he will also bring about the outcome that you are able to bear it.*" (1 Corinthians 10:13) Your heart may break, like Abraham's when he looked down at Isaac on that altar. You may be driven to your knees, your life crushed out of you, but the LORD will not forsake you, forget you, or finish you. Rather, God sends you and me tests so that "*so that the proven character of your faith-which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire-may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed*" on the Last Day! (1 Peter 1:7)

I will say it again! **The Lord Is Willing to Break Our Heart To Build our Faith!**

III. We Learn This From the LORD's Gracious Intervention!

Just as Abraham was poised to kill Isaac, "*The Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, 'Abraham, Abraham!'*" Abraham said, "*I am here.*" He said, "*Do not lay your hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.*" Was there ever any doubt? Well, maybe in our hearts or maybe for a second or two in Abraham's. Maybe in our fears. Maybe when we allow our feelings to drive our decisions and not our faith. But this much is certain: God, who is not willing that any should perish, was not lusting for the blood of Isaac. Rather, "*The Angel of the Lord*" intervened.

That title "*the Angel of the Lord*" is a special title for Jesus, the second person of the Trinity! This is the Messiah! The Christ! We know this to be true, because the Angel says, "*You have not withheld your son, your only*



February 18-19, 2024
TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

Genesis 22:1-19 **Lent Sunday 1**
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son, from me." We know this is the Christ, because of the consistent use of this title in the Old Testament. (See Genesis 16:7; 21:17; Exodus 3:1ff, and so forth.)

God graciously intervened to save life, and God graciously provided a substitute for sacrifice. It was no lucky coincidence that when Abraham looked up there was a ram in a thicket, caught by its horns. God provided the ram. And Abraham knew it! After he sacrificed the ram in place of his son, Abraham renamed the mountaintop to "*The LORD Will Provide.*"

And he still will provide, for all of us. The ram in the thicket teaches us that! For that ram is what's called "*a type*" of Christ! A picture, a shadow, a promise of the One who would come! Just as God provided a ram to die in Isaac's place, so also our Heavenly Father has provided the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world. (John 1:29) God substituted Christ for you and me. The Christ would suffer for our sins. The Christ would pay for them in full. The Christ would die, and the Christ would live again--all for you and all for me.

This, too, Abraham learned when the Lord broke his heart on the mountain. Because when this nightmarish test was finished, the LORD repeated the promise of the Savior with this solemn oath: "*I have sworn by myself, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will bless you greatly, and I will multiply your descendants greatly, like the stars of the sky and like the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the city gates of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.*" Abraham learned to trust not only in what God had done to provide that day, but what God would do to provide centuries later on another mountain, Mount Calvary.

Some tests in life are hard. They drive us to our knees or they knock us flat on our backs. **Sometimes the Lord is willing to break our hearts to build our faith.** But his goal is always gracious. He wants us all to believe and confess, "*The LORD Will Provide!*" And he has—my friends, he has! Not with a ram in a thicket, but a Lamb on a Cross. Amen.

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