

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.” (Genesis 22:1-12 NIV2011)

### **The Lord Provides**

When we meet Father Abraham in Genesis 22, he does not have many sons. He has the one legitimate son, Isaac. Boy, he loves this kid. He and his wife had been waiting and praying for so many years. Then God promises they would have a son! He will be a literal miracle in their old age! Then they have to wait. And wait. And wait some more. Finally, here he is. I’m sure there were annoyances along the way, as there is with raising children. Then there were those other times when he looks into Isaac’s eyes or sees Isaac across the way that I’m sure Abraham can’t believe: this is my son. As he watches Isaac grow into his teenage years as we meet him in this chapter, Abraham’s heart must have been bursting with love for this boy.

Then God comes and turns Abraham’s world upside down: “**Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac...sacrifice him as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.**” What are you asking, God? This is Abraham’s child. You know how much he loves him! This is the son born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age.

This is his one and only legitimate child! Then there's the promises connected to Isaac. All of Abraham's descendants that would number like the stars in the sky and grains of sand are supposed to come from Isaac. On top of that, the Savior is supposed to come from Isaac. God's promise to save mankind is tied to this boy. And now he is telling Abraham he must take his son, whom he loves, kill him, and sacrifice him as a burnt offering to the Lord. Is God torpedoing his own plan and promise?

If someone would have asked Abraham if he loved God, I'm sure he would have said, "Yes!" without a doubt in his mind. But, as you know, we can say a lot of things. Will Abraham follow through with that love? Will Abraham love God more than even his one and only son? Is Abraham's love for God greater than what makes sense to Him? Is his love for God above himself, what he thinks is best, what he wants, his plans, his personal goals? God is testing Abraham.

And whenever God tests our faith, the devil sees a prime opportunity to tempt. There's a big difference between the two. God uses tests to strengthen our faith in him; the devil tempts to try and rob us of our faith. It's not hard to imagine the temptations that Abraham felt when he woke up early the next morning. At the same time he knows God's command and Abraham follows God's will. So he takes two servants, his son Isaac, loads up his donkey with the wood, makes sure the knife is good and sharp, brings along the fire, and off they go. It's going to take three days to make it to the place that God shows them. Along the way I'm sure Abraham is doing a lot of struggling. I'm sure he's working hard to shut out the devil's whispers and suggestions, "Does God really mean...he didn't really say, did he...doesn't he also say..."

It's not hard to imagine because you've been there before as you travel through life. You come to somewhat of a crossroads and must decide, will you love God above all things? Will you fear God more than fear of not knowing what the future holds, this world and where it is headed becoming more hostile again against Christianity, fear for what other people say? Will you trust him more than your financial stability, your status in society, plans you make for your life, and your personal independence? Will you love him more than your popularity, more than that closest friend, more than a comfortable life, more than your children, grandchildren, peace in the family? Will you sacrifice and kill that sin, that addiction, let go of that sin that keeps pulling you back? Or, will you listen to the devil who insists God is asking too much from you? The devil who is the great Deceiver wonders aloud in your ear, shouldn't it need to make more sense if God wants you to do something? The devil who is the Liar assures you that you know what's better. He's the Tempter who promises that it doesn't have to be this hard and difficult. He reassures you that you can have it your own way. You know how it is.

We don't know what exactly was playing out in Abraham's mind. We do know when they arrive at the spot Abraham tells the 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."** Again, Abraham knows God's command. He knows what he must do. At the same time, he knows God's Word. He has God's promises. Instead of questioning God, he trusts. He reasons out that if God wants me to sacrifice my son whom God has tied all these promises to, that must mean that God will raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:19).

So he takes the wood and binds it to Isaac's back while he carries the knife and fire. As they climb Isaac decides to ask a very legitimate question. They brought the wood, knife, and fire from home but, **"Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"**

What could Abraham say? He spares Isaac the details. Instead, he shares what he believes, **"The Lord himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering."** The Lord will provide. The original Hebrew says, "The Lord will see to it." Abraham can't. He lives by faith not by sight. The future is murky and dark. But the Lord sees all things. The Lord sees it all and then sees to go into action for us, especially what we need. And the Lord sees to it that it is always for your good, whether you we can see it that way or not.

And that's the struggle. Because, like Abraham, we can't see it. We aren't sure how something is going to work out, and so we choose to listen to and trust what we can see and what makes the most sense instead of what God says. We aren't sure that the Lord will provide what we are looking for, the release that we think that we need, the relief we so desperately want, the answers we crave, the working according to what I expect. So we go looking for it in the things we love, the people we love, the things we do that we love. And the devil is right there adding fuel to the fire encouraging and promising that you have every right to do this.

Sometimes we put up a good fight. More often than not, we don't even step into the ring. When God calls us to love him above all things, he doesn't say to try your best or just have the good intentions. He's not satisfied with intentions or fooled by pretense. So, why should he forgive you? Why should he provide? Why should God love me when so often I do not love him?

Abraham was no different. There are plenty of examples in Genesis. But this time, he passes the test. Finally, they reach the spot. Abraham stacks the stones and builds the altar. He takes the wood off his son's back and arranges it on top of the altar. He binds up his own son whom he loves and lays him on top of the wood. Abraham reaches out, takes hold of the knife, raises it up, and is ready to kill his son. But before the knife drops, the angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, stops him. God knows what is in Abraham's heart. And now Abraham knows better too. He doesn't love his only son any less. He does love God even more. That's why God tests: it's not for his own benefit; it's to strengthen faith in him and his promises. And the Lord

sees to it that a sacrifice is made in Isaac's place. Abraham looks and there in the trees is the substitute. Once again the Lord provides: the promise never changes. Abraham's descendants will come through Isaac and be as numerous as the stars and grains of sand. They will be prosperous and grow. And through Abraham's offspring all nations will be blessed.

That's because, on this same mount that Abraham calls "The Lord will see to it" the Lord will see to it there will be another sacrifice. Instead of a ram, it will be the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world. God will give up his Son, his one and only Son, the Son he loves for sinners who do not love him. The Son will struggle along the way. Still dripping with his own baptismal water Jesus battles Satan's temptations. It was a brutal one; after it is done God sends angels to attend him. But he won as he will every time that he faces temptation. Jesus willingly walks to the same mountain where Abraham once stood and the city of Jerusalem is built. He's the willing sacrifice that will show God's love for the world. Jesus carries the wood for his own altar of the cross where his hands and feet will be pierced for our open and secret rebellions against God. Where we should have been sacrificed, he provides a substitute in His Son. Where God stops Abraham's hand, he swings with all of his might to crush Jesus under his judgment. For us who love too much more than God, Jesus endures the fires of hell and the flames of God's hatred for sin. While we were still sinners, Christ dies for us.

And in his Son, the Lord provides. Through his son's perfect life, he sees to it that you have Jesus' cloak of righteousness so all is well between you and God. He wraps you in it at baptism. Through his son's innocent death, he forgives your sins. You receive it again and again with Jesus' really present body and blood in the Lord's Supper. Through his son's rising from the grave, the Lord sees to it that you have new life in him. He provides you with the gift of his Son, so now, today, how will not also see to it to give you every good thing? The Lord saw to it that you might his love, why would he let anything separate you from it? The devil can try all he wants. He can scream and rave as loud as he can. The devil and his demons can fill up this world all eager to devour us. But he's already been defeated. One little word can fell him. The Lord provides us with a warrior who fights on our side with His Word and promises to defend and assure us.

As it was a struggle for Jesus, so we too continue that struggle that started for you still wet with baptismal water. It's a battle against sin and the Liar devil. And so often we fail in this struggle. Do not ignore it. Repent. Turn from that sin and get ready to struggle again. You have been given a new life with God, don't go back to the old. You've been set free from sin, fight to not chain yourself again. The devil's been defeated; why give him any power? You have God's love. For Jesus' sake, he always will forgive. So confess your sin and turn from it. Live the new life that God has given you. Love him above all things because he loved you first. Repent and believe: the Lord will provide. Amen.