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The Lord Will Provide
Genesis 22:1-14

It's not an easy story—not at all.

In fact, this may just be the story that has lead you to dislike the Old Testament, or maybe even dislike God.

In World magazine, interviewer Larry King said: I have a lot of respect for true people of faith.... I've done so many interviews on it. I've always searched. Faith is a wonderful thing. I envy people who have it. I just can't make the leap.

I remember as a kid, ***my father died*** when I was young, and that was unexplainable to me. The God of the Old Testament, I didn't like things he did. "Abraham, sacrifice your son." That always bothered me as a kid. I remember thinking, Why would he do that to Abraham? As a test? So I said to myself, I don't know. I just don't know. That's still true to this day.

Bob Jones, "It's Good to Be King," World (7-28-01), p. 22

It's not an easy story because we've all encountered those losses and hurts that make us ***question the goodness*** of God.

And we have ALL ***sacrificed and surrendered*** more than we ever imagined that we would. Each one of us has **dreams** that we've given up, **people** that we've lost, **sacrifices** that we've made for friends or family that lead us to very difficult times.

And yet, everything of ***value*** involves some kind of sacrifice.

As a parent you give up what you ***want***, for what your children ***need***.

As a worker, you submit to what needs to be done, regardless of the cost.

As a nation we've been protected by the sacrifices of those who serve.

Sacrifice is not a popular thing these days, but we always are finding evidence of it in our world.

Parents for kids, children for their parents, soldiers for the country.

Even kids sacrificing their own dreams for their faith.

Elliot Huck, a 14-year-old from Bloomington, Indiana, decided to skip a preliminary to the National Spelling Bee. Though he placed 45th ...and was a favored to go again, he felt convicted to stay home this time around. More precisely, he felt convicted to stay in church. The 2007 Bloomington Herald-Times championship was held on March 4, 2007—a Sunday. In Huck's eyes, the competition conflicted with his view of the biblical commandment to rest on the Sabbath.

"I always try to glorify God with what I do in the spelling bee because he is the one who gave me the talent for spelling," said Elliot. "Now I think I'm going to not spell and try to give glory to God in that." "I have just accepted that God knows what's best, and I'm just going to do what God says."

Robert King, "Sunday Contest Spells the End for Student," The Indianapolis Star (2-22-07)

The story makes us smile...but deep down inside we know about ***Hard sacrifices.***

We know about surrender, giving things up.

But this story of Isaac, it seems to be ***too much.***

How do you ask a parent to give up his only son?

And Isaac was more than just any son, ***more than an only son.***

Isaac was ***the answer*** to God's promise.

God had showed up in Abraham's life and told him he would be the father of many nations, that he would live in a promised land.

Abraham met his lovely wife, and they tried for children.

And at age 100, they finally had Isaac.

Isaac was more than precious to them, he was the ***ONLY way*** they could see that God's promises could be fulfilled in their lives.

And God asks Abraham to sacrifice this---this on an altar of worship.

And yet, this is ***not a story about child sacrifice.***

God does not demand child sacrifice, something strangely common in that time and culture. In fact, this story puts an end to any idea that our God requires that.

This is also ***not a commandment for us***—give up your children to death.

No this is a unique story in the life of Abraham, this was about him and his family and his faith.

So what are *we to take* from it?

How does this give us any direction, comfort, or encouragement?

The *tension* is thick throughout the story.

God doesn't yell for him to put down the knife til the very last moment.

God really does ask for the sacrifice, and Abraham really does believe that he'll have to do it. He binds his son upon the altar and raises the knife.

But *something else* is going on in the story as well.

When Abraham tells the servants to stay back, notice what he says.

We'll go and worship, and *we* will come back.

Not I—WE will come back.

And when Isaac says, 'hey, where's the lamb for the sacrifice?'

Abraham boldly says *the Lord will provide it*.

Somehow Abraham is following this crazy test, and yet he knows, he has faith that God will help them.

Isaac too has some measure of faith—he's old enough in the story to carry the wood, and to ask where the lamb will be found.

And he doesn't run away when Dad starts doing the unthinkable, and binding him upon the altar.

The *horror* of the story, a Father about to sacrifice his only son, is real.

But the story is not about the horrible details.

It's about the *faith*—the faith of Abraham, walking up that mountain thinking that the one thing he loves most in the world is the very thing that God desires.

It's about *faith to surrender* those things that are precious to us,

Those things that we THINK are the keys to all our dreams,

Those things that help us to rely upon ourselves,

Those things that we feel we could never live without.

It's NOT a story about a father about to kill his son.

God does not capriciously take children from their parents,

Or people from their loved ones.

We live in a broken and fallen world,

Terrible things happen, people suffer, and *God suffers with us*.

It's not a story about a father about to kill his son.
 It's a story about *faith, and sacrifice*,
 and *allowing God to be in charge* of our lives even when we have no idea
 how everything is going to turn out!

It's a story about walking up the mountains of life
 not knowing what the future holds,
 but believing as Abraham did, that the Lord will provide.

The Lord will provide. It's said more than once in the story.
 This is what the story is all about.
 Somehow the Lord will provide.

As one pastor put it: The God who gives us everything, asks for everything,
 is with us in everything, and heals everything"

Rev. Dr. Samuel Lloyd, "Give It Up" Day One, June 27, 1999.

I read a story about Pastor Craig Barnes and how this story rang true in a
 premarital counseling session he held for a young couple.

He says, "We were only a few weeks away from the wedding, and we had
 already put the finishing touches on the service. As we came to the end of
 this last meeting, the groom-to-be blurted out, "I just have to say that I am so
 scared of this!" He suddenly had the undivided attention of his fiancée. He
 quickly added, "Oh no, honey! It isn't that I'm afraid of being married to you.
 I'm afraid of losing you. When my mother died, the grief was just
 overwhelming, and I love you even more. I just don't know how I can ever
 survive if something happens to you." Then he looked at me.

I could tell from his pleading eyes that he wanted me to reassure him that
 they were both young and healthy, and that he needn't worry about such
 things. But I couldn't say that, because I have buried too many young people.
 So I said, "In my experience, 100 percent of all marriages come to an end—
 some tragically through divorce or early death; others last for over 60 years.
 If your marriage is long and filled with intimacy, then when death comes,
 you're going to be even more in love than you are now. Then it will hurt
 even more to say goodbye when the time finally comes. And that's the best
 scenario you've got! So why do you want to go through marriage wondering

if this is the day you'll lose your beloved? Give her up today. Get the grieving over with. Die to your right to have her, die to your fear of losing her, and die to the myth that you can keep her. Until you do, you'll be too afraid to enjoy her."

It wasn't what he wanted to hear, but on this side of Easter, it's the only thing a pastor can say. Because the terrifying truth of sacrifice, and the Cross, even speaks to something like marriage: it's only in dying that we can finally live. *M. Craig Barnes, "Easter in an Age of Terror," Christianity Today (April 1, 2002)*

We follow a God who knows all about surrender and sacrifice.
Jesus himself went willingly to the cross to save each one of us.

Surrender. Sacrifice. Letting Go. Knowing God will provide.

This Abraham kind of faith is not something that we can just muster up. I think we come to God seeking the faith to surrender.

I think the very faith that Abraham has to walk up the mountain is a gift from God.

The Lord provides the faith to say yes when asked to surrender.

Who of us can surrender and sacrifice the dreams of our own lives, without the help of faith?

Unfortunately sometimes ***tragedy happens and faith slips away....***

Jack Welch, former corporate chief at General Electric, grew up as a devoted Irish-Catholic. Early on he was an altar boy, and later, as an adult, his religion was so important to him that he was known to travel more than an hour to attend mass. However, his commitment to faith changed 34 years ago when his mother died of a heart attack. In his book *Jack: Straight From the Gut*, he writes, "I felt cheated, angry, and mad at God for taking my mother away." He claims still to believe in God, but says he lost his heart for religion and no longer attends church.

Del Jones, "Welch 'Angry at God' after Mom Died," USA Today (9-06-01)

Having faith when tragedy occurs does not always happen.

Knowing how much we need God in suffering is so important.

And when we do find faith in suffering, it is ***so powerful*** beyond anything we can imagine.

God can give us the *faith to walk up* a mountain fearing the worst,
 Not knowing what will happen in our lives,
 But still believing that God will provide.

One powerful story of just how God can provide is in the life of a contemporary Christian artist, Steven Curtis Chapman. He tragically lost his five year old Maria when his older son backed over her with the car in their driveway. God did not take her. A horrible accident occurred and she was lost.

But God provided for Steven and his family. Elizabeth Diffin, a freelance reporter, attended one of Chapman's concerts two months after the accident: Chapman opened the concert with "Blessed Be Your Name" . "Blessed Be Your Name" was also the first song Chapman sang May 21, the day of Maria's death, when he wasn't sure he'd ever be able to sing again. Chapman explained, "As I sang this song ... it wasn't a song, it was a cry, a scream, a prayer,". "I found an amazing comfort and peace that surpasses all understanding."

After her death, Chapman added a new verse to his song, "Yours":

I've walked the valley of death's shadow
 so deep and dark that I could barely breath.
 I've had to let go of more than I could bear and
 I've questioned everything that I believe.
 Still even here in this great darkness
 a comfort and a hope comes breaking through
 as I can say in life or death
 God we belong to you.

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God's provision is so often a *mystery*.

But it is *real*.

The Lord does provide, even when we are walking up the mountain with fear and doubt.

The Lord provides the *faith* to keep walking, the courage to *surrender*, the strength to make *sacrifices*.

May we all know that the Lord will provide. Amen.