

When God

When God asks the Unthinkable

Genesis 22:1-19

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HDBC

Heaven is going to be great! There is much more about Heaven that we don't know than what we do know. But what we know assures us that it is going to be a great place and that our existence there is going to be infinitely better than what we are experiencing in this life. When I think about Heaven I think about peace, contentment, joy, satisfaction. No more stress, no more anxiety, no more struggles, no more pain, no more uncertainty, no more fears. **Man, it's going to be great, don't you think?**

But we are not there yet. We still live in this bruised and broken world where Murphy's Law seems to rule the day. We experience some good times, for sure, but we also endure some deep heartache. We go through periods of uncertainty and confusion. Most of us are trying hard to navigate the tough roads that we are called to walk. Those of us who are Christians recognize that we are not walking these roads alone. The Lord is very near and dear to us. He is our constant companion. Don't ever doubt that Jesus is with you. He will never leave you.

However, there are times when He is silent. But He is there.

There are times when He says no to our prayers. But He is still there.

There are times when He is unresponsive for a season. But He is still there.

There are times when He delays. But He still comes.

There are times when He asks us to do a really hard thing.

So, what do you do when God asks you to do the unthinkable?

Elijah was called to confront King Ahab and his wife Jezebel.

Moses was called to confront the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt.

Peter was called to step out of the safety of the boat and walk in water.

Mary was called to be the virgin mother of the Messiah.

Each of these are examples of being asked to do dangerous, risky, scary things.

But there is one example in the Bible that **rises above them all**. It's found in Genesis 22. Abraham, who had been obedient in answering the call of God to do some pretty hard things, was instructed to take his beloved son, Isaac, and offer him to God in sacrifice. To Abraham it must have been unthinkable that God would ask such a thing of him. There were so many reasons for Abraham to refuse to do so. **Human sacrifice was abhorrent to God and immoral. God had given Isaac as a miracle son to Abraham and Sarah. God had promised Abraham would be the father of a great nation, through Isaac.** There were all kinds of reasons to say **no** to God.

But there was only one reason for him to obey God and do the unthinkable. **He trusted God!** He believed God was powerful enough to even bring Isaac back from the dead. He trusted God, even when asked to do the unthinkable.

Read Genesis 22:1-19

To understand the encounter we need to understand the sacrificial practices of ancient people. Killing an animal as offering to God for our sins. Even polytheistic people provided sacrifices to appease the gods whom they believed were real. Later in the Hebrew system, God commanded His people to bring animal sacrifices for the sins of the people. All were acts of faith in God, and were pictures of the one true sacrifice who was yet to come.

1. The Test (1-2)

The first thing to note is that this was not some random exercise that God was putting Abraham through. There was a purpose behind this request.

God Tested Abraham - God knows all about Abraham, so the test was not for God's benefit, but for Abraham's. Opportunity for Abraham to stretch His faith and to learn total dependence upon the Lord. Easy to trust God when He only asks us to do the easy things. That is not real dependence, just lip service.

The request was simple and straightforward. It was a scene that had already happened many times. He was asked to leave his home and live as a wanderer in a foreign land. He obeyed. Many other times he had sought the Lord's direction and received the Lord's favor in his obedience. His relationship with God had been wonderful.

But now he is stunned when he hears the familiar voice of God. All other requests from God pale into insignificance. Were we not so familiar with the story we too would be shocked. Especially those of us who are so adamantly pro-life. We believe that every life is precious and seek to preserve life, no matter the cost. And the foundation for that conviction is God's word.

And now we find the Bible's author commanding Abraham to commit murder, child sacrifice. We understand because we see the whole picture. We know how it ends. Abraham could not. All he saw was the end of his dream.

Test of Self-Denial - Your Son, Own flesh and blood.

Test of Faith - Only Son - Death of His Vision

Test of Loyalty - Who has first place in your life?

Test of Obedience - Follow me even when can't understand?

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. Jim Elliot

2. The Response (3-10)

Abraham did what God asked him to do. And in doing not only stretched his own faith, but painted a picture of another event that would take place centuries later. His willingness to sacrifice his son is a perfect picture of God's willingness to sacrifice His own son.

He took the first step (3-6)

Incredible. No hesitation. Just obedience. But let's read between the lines. Remember, Abraham is great man of faith, but still a man. Imagine his agony that night. Questions must have been endless. Did I really hear from God? I think so. I think he heard **TRUST ME!** over and over that night.

So many other questions. Did he tell Sarah? If so, how did she respond? If not, what would he tell her when he returned without their son? And what did he and Isaac talk about? What do you say to the son you are about to kill?

I'm sure Abraham felt almost hopeless as he traveled. **But even when hope seemed to be gone, he obeyed!**

He trusted God along the way (7-8)

Just before arriving at the spot Isaac asked question that pierced the heart of Abraham. *Where is the lamb?* Ask anything, Isaac, but not that!

Simple straight-forward answer. God will provide. Abraham had no idea how God would provide, probably did not expect God to intervene. Simple statement of faith that father was passing to the son. **Note end of verse 5!**

He went the distance (9-10)

Abraham went through with it, probably wondering if God might intervene. When God did not, Abraham proceeded. Built altar, bound Isaac. Was it at that point that Isaac understood? Was it then that Abraham's heart broke. What did he say to Isaac? We see the faith of two men that day! He not only said he would obey, but he did obey.

3. The Intervention (11-19)

I have no way of knowing all that was going through Abraham's mind as he raised the knife to take the life of his son. Nor can I imagine what must have been going through Isaac's mind. Were they each hoping God would step in? Did they expect an **intervention** that would interrupt the process? Maybe, maybe not. In either case that is what they got.

God intervened, stopping Abraham's action! Note four things that are true because of this intervention.

First, Abraham got his son back. Untied him, hugged him and probably hugged him to death. His son who was already dead, in his mind was now restored.

Second, God provided a substitute sacrifice. Abraham was still able to offer a sacrifice to God, a substitute. Beautiful picture of God's substitute in Jesus.

Third, (14) the place changed from being a place of horror to being a place of worship. The place of sacrifice and self-denial now because of place of sanctuary. God had proven Himself.

Fourth (15-19), God blessed Abraham because of His obedience. Blessing came on the other side of His obedience.

The journey that Abraham and Isaac took is a picture of the journey that God the Father and God the Son would take centuries later. As Abraham and Isaac journeyed alone to the place of sacrifice, so our Heavenly father and his son walked toward Calvary in perfect unity.

As Isaac carried the wood for the altar on his back, so our Lord carried his cross on his back. And he ultimately carried our sins on his back.

As Isaac willingly yielded himself to his father, so the Lord Jesus voluntarily yielded his life as a sacrifice for us. Isaac could have overpowered his father and been free. Jesus could have called ten thousand angels.

As Isaac was brought back to life, in a sense, Jesus was brought back to life literally.

What do we learn from this event? How can it help us when we, too, are ***asked to do the unthinkable?***

I want to encourage you to remember three things:

1. God deserves first place in our lives.

No doubt that Abraham honored and focused upon Isaac.

2. Blessings follow obedience.

When the request from God is tough, look beyond to the blessings you know will be there. The look is a look of faith, not of sight. The blessings are seldom seen with our eyes before our obedience. We must see them through eyes of faith. Hebrews 11 makes this abundantly clear through examples of faith.

3. Our dreams belong to God, not us.

Your plans for the future need to be willingly sacrificed on the altar of obedience. God asked Abraham not simply to kill his son, which was unthinkable in and of itself. But in his case it was more. It was a call to kill his dream. And not just any dream. It was a dream given by God. God was calling Abraham to love Him more than his dream. To trust Him for the future more than for the past.

Martin Luther taught the story of Abraham and Isaac to his family, and then said this. *See how divine majesty is at hand in the hour of death. **We say, "In the midst of life we die." God answers, "No, in the midst of death we live."***

When he had finished, His wife said, *'I do not believe it. God would not have treated his son like that.*

But, Katie,' answered Luther, 'he did.'