



STEP 13: SURRENDER IT ALL

Question: what was the hardest test you've ever had to sit?

For some of us, it might be an academic test (for years I had a recurring dream that I was still in high school and making excuses for not handing in an essay!). For others, it might be the driving test, and however many attempts it took to pass it. For the mums, it might be giving birth (I get the impression it's not called 'labour' for nothing!). For others, it might be a relational issue. Or a medical one.

In this passage, Abraham faces the greatest test of them all.

And one that has repercussions, for all of us.

Genesis 22:1-19

Abraham had probably assumed the most difficult thing God would ever ask of him was DIY surgery. How wrong he was!

The story kicks off with God issuing this command:

"Take your son, your one-of-a-kind son, Isaac ('Laughter'), whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

And that's it. We're not told anything about what is going on in Abraham's mind – perhaps to put ourselves in Abraham's sandals? One director who did so was John Huston, who was responsible for a certain biblical epic: *The*

Bible: In The Beginning. Now be warned, it's a l-o-n-g movie, but this scene is one of the standouts. God calls Abraham (George C. Scott) out of his tent, early in the morning, and speaks these words. And Abraham stares up at the sky in disbelief and says, "You would have me do as the Canaanites do? You would not ask this thing of me. Is this truly the voice of the LORD my God?" And all he gets is silence. Then Abraham shakes his head, growls "No, no," and heads for the hills.

Next scene: he and Isaac are saying goodbye to Sarah.

So why does God do this? As a test (vs1). But God already knows the strength of Abraham's faith, doesn't He? Yep. So, why do it? To prove it to Abraham. And us. And for the same reasons, God has to test us (though not in the same way, take note!).

He tests us, in these 4 areas:

1) He tests our obedience. For 40 years, Abraham has done whatever God has asked of him. Leave your family and everything you've ever known. Check. Keep walking 'til I tell you to stop. Check. Live as a nomad in a tent rather than in a city. Check. Keep promising your wife that she will have a son. Check. Circumcise yourself at 99 years of age. Check. Learn to be truthful, in spite of the risks. Check. Be willing to lose out rather than rob your neighbours. Check. Give up your son Ishmael for the sake of your son, Isaac. Check. But this? *This* is the greatest step of obedience of all. This is *true* faith (James 2:21-22).

2) He tests our endurance. Every step that Abraham makes here would have been one of emotional agony. Chopping the wood; packing the knife; making a 3-day journey, knowing what he's got to do. Placing the wood on the back of his son. Answering the question, "Dad, where's the lamb?" The building of that altar. And then the look on his son's face as the reality of the situation begins to dawn; as Abraham takes the rope to bind him. Most parents would be willing to die for their kids. To ask Abraham to do this would have been enough to kill the man a million times over. And to test his endurance (Revelation 2:7, etc).

3) He tests our reliance. All the way through, Abraham must have been reminding himself of God's promises: "To you and your descendants I will give this land ... I will bless you with a son, through Sarah ... through Isaac all the nations of the world will be blessed." And Abraham's thinking, "God must have a plan ... must have a plan." You can see it in his words to his servants: "We will worship and then return to you." To his son: "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering." That's why the writer to the Hebrews makes this point: "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead" (11:19). And He can, can't He?

4) He tests our love. Saying "I love you" is easy; doing it is the real test. And in this command – and Abraham's response – we see a declaration of love that goes beyond almost anything else in Scripture. Because Abraham's heart is wrapped up in his son – this one-of-a-kind son he has waited for, his entire life. And now, God is calling him to hand that son over. To hand over

all those hopes. All those dreams. All those years of waiting. All of his love, for his wife Sarah, for their boy. As psychologist Alfred Adler said, "If you want to know what matters most to a person, ask them what they'd be most afraid of losing."

That is what God is doing here. *That's* the test.

The LORD Will Provide ...

So Abraham picks up his 14-year-old son, places him on the wood, raises the knife, and is about to perform this most terrible of deeds when the voice of the LORD shouts "Abraham!" And Abraham stops, God tells him that his reverence has been proven, and then he spots a ram, caught in a nearby thicket. And Abraham understands: God has provided this ram in place of his son, and sacrifices that instead.

For that reason, he calls the place *Yahveh Yireh*, or '*Yahveh Will Provide.*' And God promises to bless him and his descendants because of his faith.

But here's the twist.

None of this makes Abraham right before God. Yes, it proves his faith, to Abraham, and to those of us reading the story. But it doesn't justify him on any kind of spiritual level. In the same way, none of what you do, or I do, makes us right before God. What makes us right is what God Himself does for us. It's the substitute that *God* provides. Hence the name: *Yahveh Yireh*, '*Yahveh Will Provide.*'

This is why, 1000 years after this, King Solomon built a temple. Where? In the region of Moriah, or *Yahveh Yireh*, also known as Mount Zion (2 Chronicles 3:1). And over the next 1000 years, huge numbers of sacrificial animals were offered in that temple. But that ram, those lambs, were just a picture.

What was needed was another kind of lamb.

And 1000 years after that, God provided it, in the form of His *own* Son, His own, one-of-a-kind, Son. In place of Abraham. Isaac. All of us (John 3:16). And He provided Him in exactly the same place – on the slopes of Mount Zion. Because this isn't so much about what we are willing to do for *God*. It's about what God is willing to do for *us*.

For *all* of us.

You might be thinking, "I don't know if I could love God this much." But that's not the point. The point of the story is: He loves *you* this much.

And without that, we would never be able to love Him at all.