



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, June 28, 2020

Tests, Sacrifices, and Provisions

by Garland F. Pierce

Genesis 22:1-14

22:1 After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

22:2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."

22:3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him.

22:4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away.

22:5 Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you."

22:6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together.

22:7 Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

22:8 Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

22:9 When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

22:10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

22:11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

22:12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

22:13 And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

22:14 So Abraham called that place "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

God said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." The next verse says, "So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him." No questions! No debate! No bargaining? No pleas? Abraham has been asked to sacrifice another son; Sarah demanded Ishmael's banishment, another potential sacrifice. Now God, who granted Isaac, the promise who brought laughter into the advanced years of Abraham and Sarah, is asking the impossible, the unthinkable. And Abraham rises early and starts preparing!

For millennia this story has been told, studied, analyzed, critiqued, and debated. How could God? How could Abraham? What of Sarah? What of Isaac? Just what kind of faith does God really demand? Why would the creator of life demand it back in this way? This passage does not preach easily to postmodern ears nor should it. It ought to cause some wrestling, some questions, some longing.

Life can be hard! Parents all over this world have to make sacrifices everyday—some are life or death decisions. Every day and everywhere, people must wrestle with and discern for which sacrifice God is calling. Right now, some parent wrestles with whether she should return to work now that the economy is opening back up. To do so may sacrifice the health and lives of loved ones—of her Isaacs—her future. Still in another place the question feels even more desperate—stay in and Isaac starves, go out and potentially live to see another day to find COVID-19 around the corner. Some Abraham somewhere knows that white supremacy is unable and unwilling to see the laughter and the promise in his Isaac, seeing only a suspect who fits the description, only danger and threat to be apprehended, subdued, detained, or worse neutralized, annihilated. How does he let him go out, grow up, and be independent; will "the talk" be enough?

Abraham rises early and prepares to do the unthinkable, the impossible, perhaps because somehow, somewhere he truly believes that God will provide.

Michael Eric Dyson in *The Good Book: Writers Reflect on Favorite Bible Passages* says of this text:

Above all, Abraham and Isaac, and Hagar and Ishmael, too, remind us that Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, and countless other black youth besides, are daily sacrificed on the altar of unmerited suspicion and fear of black identity, pushing them into early graves. We must be the angels our children seek. We must keep them from destructive discipline at our own hands. And we must shield our

children from death at the hands of those who think, bizarrely, often in veiled manner, though sometimes in fatally explicit terms, that they are doing God's will to kill them.

Life can be hard. Hard decisions have to be made and often hard actions taken. God provides, sometimes with the voice and hand of an angel, sometimes with a ram in the thicket. Sometimes death is kept at bay. When it is not; resurrection! This same God so loved the world that God gave God's only son that whosoever believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share/write down—What sacrifice have you been called to make or are being called to make?

PRAY:

Gracious Giver of Life, we thank you for your love and your provision. Please increase our capacity to discern your will and in equal measure our capacity to trust your plan. In the name of your only son, Jesus, we pray, AMEN.

ACT:

1. Write to your public official advocating for policies that will help struggling parents to better provide for or better parent their children. Give support to organizations with the mission to protect children and youth.
2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.
3. Revisit the Psalm 23 Challenge first issued as part of the March 22, 2020 set of resources.

Song:

I Am Thine, O Lord
AMEC Hymnal, #283

1. I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice,
And it told Thy love to me;
But I long to rise in the arms of faith,
And be clos-er drawn to Thee.

Refrain

*Draw me near-er, near-er, bless-ed Lord,
To the cross where Thou hast died;
Draw me near-er, near-er, near-er, bless-ed Lord,
To Thy pre-cious, bleed-ing side.*

2. Con-se-crate me now to Thy ser-vice, Lord,
By the power of grace di-vine;
Let my soul look up with a stead-fast hope,
And my will be lost in Thine.

Refrain

3. O the pure de-light of a sin-gle hour
That be-fore They throne I spend,
When I kneel in prayer, and with Thee, my God,
I com-mune as friend with friend!

Refrain

4. There are depths of love that I can-not know
Till I cross the nar-row sea;
There are heights of joy that I may not reach
Till I rest in peace with Thee.

Refrain

Alternate Song: *God Provides*: <https://youtu.be/d8BwydIR-r0>
Sung by Tamela Mann, written by Kirk Franklin

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department, AMEC Publishing House, and others will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.