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**<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?”**

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**<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!”**

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**<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.”**

**<sup>13</sup> Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. <sup>14</sup> So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”**

**<sup>15</sup> The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time <sup>16</sup> and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, <sup>18</sup> and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”**



Are you someone who enjoys taking tests? You are confident that your studies have prepared you to get a good grade and show what you know. You have no doubt that your time practicing will get you on the team or in the performance. You are sure that your efforts to take care of your body will lead to a clean bill of health. You welcome tests as a way to validate your efforts.

Or do you dread the very idea of a test? Did you study the right things? Will the coaches or director be impressed? Will the doctors discover something you don't expect? Just thinking about it makes your heart race, your blood pressure rise, and your palms sweat.

Now imagine that the one administering the test is not a teacher, a doctor, or a coach, but God himself. And here's the test you have to take: You have to prove that God and his promises mean more to you than anything or anyone else—more than the people that you care the most about, more than the things that

you've worked the hardest to get, more than anything else that defines who you are and how you live your life. You can't just say that God is most important. You have to show it. And you don't get to choose how you show it. God is going to make that decision for you.

That's where Abraham found himself one day. But Abraham didn't know it was a test. The Lord simply spoke to Abraham and said, "**Take your son, your only son, Isaac, 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**" (v. 2). Nothing in this world meant more to Abraham than his son Isaac. By the time Abraham and Sarah were blessed with a son, they were already past the age of having children. That the Lord even granted them a son was a miracle. On top of that, the Lord promised that one of Isaac's descendants would be the Savior who would deliver the world from sin and death.

But now God wanted Abraham to give up the son he had waited his whole life for. And not just give him up, but kill him and burn his body as a sacrifice to the Lord. It just didn't make sense. There must be some mistake, some misunderstanding. Imagine the questions the devil must have planted in Abraham's mind. But, if Abraham had doubts, he didn't show it. "**Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled 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**" (v. 3). The time he had to think while he was cutting wood or packing up to go didn't make him change his mind. He went as soon as he could in trusting obedience.

It took three days for Abraham and Isaac and his two servants to get to the region of Moriah. Three days was a long time to think, a lot of time for doubts and second-guessing what he was doing. Did the Lord really say that he should kill another human being—especially his son Isaac, the miraculous child of the promise, the one whose descendant would save the world? Wouldn't killing him mess up God's plan of salvation?

It's hard to imagine that Abraham didn't struggle with some of these thoughts. But if he did, he didn't let them stop him from obeying the Lord. The band of four men traveled until Abraham saw the location in the distance. Then he left his servants behind and traveled the rest of the way alone with his son.

As they walked along, Isaac realized that something was missing: "**The fire and wood are here,' Isaac said, 'but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'**" (v. 7). Obviously, Abraham hadn't told him the whole story yet. At this point, Abraham simply taught his son to trust God: "**God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son**" (v. 8). Isaac heard his father confess his faith, and, with his father, he trusted the Lord.

Now we don't know what the conversation sounded like when they got there. I imagine that Abraham had tears in his eyes, as he told his son what the Lord had told him to do. No doubt, he continued to express his trust in the Lord; he reminded Isaac about the Lord's promise to send the Savior through his descendants and assured him that the Lord does not change his mind. Isaac may have had questions for which Abraham had no answers, but in the end he trusted his father, whose love for him was clear. And he trusted the Lord, whose love for him was even greater.

The Lord's perfect love and faithfulness to his promises became clear when Abraham had the knife in his hand to kill his son. At that moment, the Lord stopped him from following through on what he was commanded to do. Abraham had passed the test. He loved the Lord even more than the son that he cherished so much. He trusted the Lord with all his heart. The book of Hebrews says that "**Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from the dead**" (11:19). Isaac's life was spared, and the Lord provided for Abraham, just as Abraham trusted he would. When Abraham looked up, there was a ram caught by its horns in a nearby thicket, and Abraham offered the ram as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord.

None of us has been commanded to sacrifice our children on an altar to show our trust in the Lord. And yet, the Lord commands us to put all of our trust in him, to put him first in everything we do, in every decision we make, in every priority we set. Are we willing to trust him that much? Are we willing to live our faith, even if it means we might have to give up everything we hold dear? Are we willing to say no to the opportunities our

world presents to our children, if those opportunities threaten to interfere with their faith or their worship of the Lord? What if it comes down to a choice between work and worship? Or a situation where confessing our faith could jeopardize our reputation or our friendships? Are we willing to live our faith, even when it seems like we are all alone on a mountain and no one else understands? Perhaps it's easy to *say* we would put the Lord first, but when those times of testing come, what do our *actions* say?

We've failed, haven't we? In various ways, we have trusted ourselves more than God. We've put limits on what we are willing to sacrifice to serve and honor him. Abraham was commended for his faith, but would we be? Who of us can claim a faith like Abraham's? I know I can't.

Where can we find hope in this account? We can find it in the same place where Abraham found it. You see, Abraham hadn't passed every test. He was a sinner, just like you and I. There were many times when he had put his trust in himself instead of in the Lord.

But Abraham found hope in the promise that the Lord repeated to him on Mount Moriah that day: ***"I will surely bless you ...and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed"*** (v. 17-18). Just as God provided a ram to take Isaac's place that day on the mountain, one day God would provide the offspring of Abraham to take our place. As our substitute, he would be punished for our lack of trust in the Lord and our putting people and things ahead of God. Just as Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, so God himself did not spare his own Son, but offered him up as the Lamb of God, the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. Through him, all nations on earth are blessed with the forgiveness of their sins and the promise of eternal life. That was Abraham's hope, and that is our hope.

We stand today on the other end of history from Abraham. When Abraham confessed, "The Lord will provide," he was clinging to promises that God would not bring to fulfillment for another 2000 years. We are blessed to look back 2000 years to see the Savior that God provided for Abraham, for Isaac, and for us—Jesus, the Lamb of God who gave his own life for us. The cross upon which God sacrificed his own Son proves his faithfulness to all of his promises. And that faithfulness gives us faith to follow him and trust him boldly.

Today, we confess and serve the same Lord, who provides for us in every time of need, but even better who has provided for us a Savior and hope that extends far beyond this life and this world. He invites us to follow him in trust and to serve him without fear. As we hear his promises and witness his faithfulness, he strengthens our faith and reinforces our defenses against the devil's doubts and fears. He prepares us for the tests our faith will undergo and comforts us with the promise of his mercy in Jesus our Savior every time we fail. So, as we face tests of our faith every day, we are not afraid. For we don't face those tests alone. The Lord provides a sure defense and a final deliverance. On that we can depend. With that, we will always be more than conquerors. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Lessons for February 14

### Genesis 22:1-18

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### Romans 8:31-39

<sup>31</sup> What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Mark 1:12-15**

<sup>12</sup> At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, <sup>13</sup> and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

<sup>14</sup> After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”