

Remember what God said to Abraham? *“Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”* The moment Abraham was willing to give up his son, his only son, there could be no doubt he loved God more than everything else. So what does that say about God’s love for you? God gave up his Son, his only Son. Finish this verse for me, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). Now you know that God loves you more than everything else in the world, because he did not withhold from you his Son, his only Son.

I’ve asked what your kids think of you. But here’s an even more important question: When you think of God your Father, what do you think? Here’s what God wants you to think: “He loves me!” God is not an angry God. God is not looking for opportunities to punish you. God loves you! Our lesson from Romans said, *“If God is for us, who can be against us? 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?”* (Romans 8:31-32). When I see God give his one and only Son for me and my sins, I never, ever have to doubt God’s love. When you think of God, think “He loves me!”

So what do we want our kids to see as most important to us? Jesus! Isn’t our greatest goal as parents for our kids to see Jesus through us? To say, “My dad loves Jesus.” “Mom loves Jesus—maybe popcorn and candy too, but she loves Jesus most!” That’s the reason for our Christian school. Because Jesus is that important. We want our school to do something no public school can do: Show our children that Jesus comes first—in everything. In science. In math... But most importantly in their hearts. We want their first thought when they think of God to be, “Jesus loves me!” And we want their first thought when they think of us to be, “My parents love Jesus!”

But as we emphasize our Lutheran school today, you know what’s a little ironic? Isaac didn’t have a Christian school. He had something even better. Do you know what he had? Christian parents. Parents who showed in their lives God’s great love. Parents who showed that God came first. Parents who were willing to sacrifice everything for God. Who taught Isaac about God? His parents—starting with his dad. For every family here today, whether you use our school or not, whether you are members of our church or not, I want you to rejoice in the high calling that God has given you to teach your children about Jesus. Christian parents put Jesus first!

It’s just that you can only do that if you realize that parenting isn’t your highest calling. There’s something even more important. The highest calling of every person here is to love Christ, who loves us so much. May you be convinced that *“neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 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”* (Romans 8:38-39). You can’t beat that! Christian education—for every one of us—is about showing others every day that there is nothing better in life than being loved by Jesus!

Genesis 22:1-14
Pastor Nathan Nass

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Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. ² Then God 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.” ³ 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. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.” ⁶ 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, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” ⁸ Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. ¹² “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.” ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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.”

Christian Parents Love God First

One of my wife’s sisters celebrated her 40th birthday last fall. (I’ve got old relatives!) At her party, her husband did something cool. He asked each of their six kids questions about their mom and videotaped their answers. “What do you think of when you think of mom?” Their youngest daughter said, “She is really good at laundry.” Their next son said, “My mom drinks Mountain Dew and eats popcorn and candy after we go to bed.” The older kids talked about her love and teaching them about Jesus. How about you? What would your kids say about you? What would they identify as the most important thing in your life? It makes you a little nervous, doesn’t it?

I know what Abraham’s son Isaac would say. He saw firsthand the most important thing in his dad’s life. To understand his story, you have to remember how long God made Abraham wait to have a child. Some of you know how hard that is. How painful it is when your plans for children don’t work out. It’s hard to wait for a year. How about waiting until you’re 100? That’s how long Abraham had to wait. God first promised Abraham a son when he was 75, but I’m sure he and Sarah started trying long before then. If you’ve ever struggled to have children, you know how that pain consumes you. God’s plans are not always our plans. How Abraham wanted a son!

Then one finally came! When Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90, Isaac was finally born. How precious do you think Isaac was? A child is always a blessing, but when God makes you wait, it means even more. Do you remember what the name “Isaac” means? Laughter! How true! Can you imagine the joy this old mother and old father found in their one son? He was their life! Can you picture that 100-year-old dad leading a toddler around with his finger? In Hebrew, the word for father is *ab*. It’s the first part of Abraham’s name. Can you picture their smiles when this little toddler started saying “*abab*”—“dada”? Abraham finally had all he ever wanted!

And that’s where God’s message to us today gets hard. No one wanted a son more than Abraham did. So now that he had a son, what do you think was his greatest temptation? To love his son more than God! Before Isaac came along, Abraham’s whole confidence rested in God and his promises. What else did he have? But now that he had the son he always wanted, the truth was going to come out. Had Abraham been hoping and trusting in God or in the boy? Was God just a means to an end—the way to get a child, or was God the one to whom Abraham had really given his heart? Did his joy come from God or from his son Isaac? Can you see the temptation?

God could. So God gave Abraham a terrifying command. “*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.*” This is hard for us to understand. God never approves of human sacrifice. God always condemns it! So why command Abraham to sacrifice his son? The Bible explains, “*God tested Abraham.*” It was a test! Who was more important, God or Isaac? Jesus later said, “*Anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me*” (Matthew 10:37). To God, what comes first in your life really matters. God doesn’t say you can’t love your children. You just can’t love them more than God! Whom did Abraham love most?

Sound hard? Absolutely! How long would it have taken you to get out of bed the next day? But here’s what Abraham did: “*Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey.*” Early the next morning! There was no delay. Abraham took his one and only son Isaac and set off for Mount Moriah. It took them three days to get there. What an awful three days! There is nothing quick or painless about God’s tests. About 70 miles of heartache. “*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.*” He was going to do it!

How? What was driving this man? Listen to his words. As they walked up the mountain, Isaac asked, “*Father, the fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?*” Can you feel Abraham’s pain? Yet, here’s what he said, “*God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.*” Later on, the Bible explains: “*By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice.... Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead*” (Hebrews 11:17, 19). I’d say that’s faith! Abraham didn’t trust in God when times were good. He didn’t trust in God when he got his way. He trusted in God. Period. The God who could raise the dead!

So “*he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.*” But God stopped him. Of course God stopped him! God called out, “*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.*” When tested, Abraham was willing to give up his own son, because God was his greatest treasure. But God already knew that. God doesn’t test us for his sake. He can see right into our hearts. He tests us for our benefit. He wanted show Abraham his own love for God. He wanted Abraham to realize that his greatest joy came from his God. Because the more he loved God, the more he was able to love his son.

As they walked back down the mountain, what do you think Isaac was thinking about his dad? I don’t think he was angry. I think he was thinking one thing: “Wow! My dad really loves God.” Maybe Isaac didn’t remember his dad’s favorite food or dream job or favorite sports team, but there was one thing Isaac knew for sure: “My dad loves God more than anything else!” Imagine what a powerful lesson that was for this young boy. Jesus said, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind*” (Luke 10:27). Isaac got to see what that looks like, and I bet he never forgot it. “My dad loves God!”

So what about you? If I were to ask your kids what’s most important in mom or dad’s life, what would they say? I bet they know you love football. Or you love country music. Or you love popcorn or Diet Coke. Do they know you love Jesus most? Not just with words, but with the priorities of your life? God knows what’s in your heart. Your kids can only see what you do. Do your kids know that God comes first? Maybe we should back up. Does God come first? Here’s God’s test for you: Whatever you’re not willing to sacrifice is your god! Whatever you are not willing to give up, whether it’s a sin, a possession, a child, a dream... That is your god!

For those of us with kids, it seems to make sense to love our kids more than anything else, right? It feels like the right thing to do. But it’s sin. God comes first. When you love your kids more than God, do you know what that does to your kids? You crush them. No child can live up to the pressure of being the most important thing in your life. No child can take the place of God! And when you love your kids more than God, do you know what that does to you? It will break your heart. Every emptiness and disappointment in life is a result of looking to some earthly thing to give us the peace and joy that only God can give. So how do we often feel? Sad. Empty!

What should we do when we’re empty? After his big test, Abraham gave that mountain a special name. He called that place, “*The LORD Will Provide.*” And it was said, “*On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.*” Abraham didn’t realize how true that really was. 1000 years later, the temple was built on that very spot in Jerusalem. Now if the temple was built on this same mountain, then 2000 years later, who walked and preached in that very same place? Jesus did! And right next to that mountain in Jerusalem, Jesus was crucified—sacrificed—to take away all of our sins. “*On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.*” God did provide. Our Savior!