

The God Who Provides

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[0 : 00] Good morning everyone. So I guess where have you been tested this week? This is the question. And what happens when God makes some big asks of us?

Do you trust? This is the question, especially when trust is tested. Trust, slide one, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. It says, we know the verse, we know the reading, but do we trust? Do we trust in God or do we rather tend to lean more often on our own understanding? Abraham, who has this foundational relationship with God, a very, very close relationship with him, has to face a test. He faces a test of his trust, loyalty, something here so far we think has been Abraham's strong point, but maybe it wasn't, as we will find out, because we will come to his doubts and failings in a minute. But this test of trust in our reading this morning goes far beyond any of us could imagine. It seems so countercultural as to where we are. I mean, you know, did God not do a safeguarding course? You know, where was the DBS?

And you know, he's asking this of his son. It is the big ask. This is the son that was long awaited for, if you remember. This is the son that was promised. This is the son that didn't come for so long. And yet God is asking this of them. Sarah and Abraham had waited so long, so much, much later in life. So why is God asking for this sacrifice? Why is God pushing Abraham to this point of his long-standing and faithful servant? Sacrifice your son? Place on the altar the most precious thing you have, and give me an offering. I confess that I was reading this again and again, and I kept going back to the commentary that's there in the Hebrew. Now, don't get the misapprehension that I am in any way, a Hebrew scholar. You know, I know my place. But commentaries are great. And in the commentary, it said, in here, if there is another way of translating verse two, there isn't. The text is surprisingly unambiguous. It says, take your son, the only son whom you love, that is Isaac, and go. And it says, lek, lekha to the land, offer him up. I don't know which is worse here, that God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, or that Isaac, or that Abraham complies.

I don't know what your tussle with God is like, where you actually have this interaction with God to say, are you really asking this of me? How far do you want me to go with this, Lord?

[3 : 15] This is the ultimate test. Compounding the ethical problem is the practical one. Isaac is the long awaited child for the promise. He is the succession. What is God asking of this? Is he asking to end the succession? What is he asking? There must have been such a turmoil going on with Abraham in this conversation with God. Maybe you have experienced that the same as I have at times. Lord, what is this all about? What are you asking of me? What does this mean? And the final hope here, these thousand thoughts must have been going through Abraham's mind. And here it is, the final hope that Abraham and Sarah have for this great name in their son Isaac is about to be taken away from them at God's command.

And as readers, we were relieved when Sarah gives birth to Isaac and God confirms that his promises are true. Yet Abraham's trust in God is complemented but complicated by his wavering faith.

Now, I don't know whether that's your experience as well of wavering faith. I often say that faith is sometimes a bit like a roller coaster. You know, we have the mountaintop experiences and then suddenly we have these dips. Does anybody feel like that with me? For those listening on the podcast, people are nodding their heads. And let's not walk away with the impression that Abraham was the pillar of faith and obedience and obedience and trust. Abraham is human, just like us. It's just that he had an important job to do and God wanted to make sure he was there to do it. Trust in God is not always at the foremost point of Abraham's life. And if you read through, Abraham has responded to God in several places without hesitation, packing up and going to the land that God would give him. Yet at other times, Abraham acts in ways that suggest doubt, like many of us. You know, twice out of fear, he passes off his wife as his sister and Sarah ends up in the bedroom with a

local ruler. Shock horror. And shock horror is so worried about producing an error, Abraham then sleeps with a woman other than his wife, albeit at Sarah's bidding. On top of this, he even laughs at God when actually God promises that his wife in later years would actually give birth. He actually doesn't even believe God in his promises. Throughout, there are indications that Abraham still doesn't quite trust God to accomplish that which he has asked him to do.

And so maybe in the context of this, we understand the ultimate test today. Do you trust me? Do you ever hear that? Do you trust me?

Maybe God's saying that to you in something that you're dealing with at the moment. Do you trust me with this? You know, God has signaled to us that God had no intention of going through with this.

[6 : 47] You know, that is the grace of God. There is no intention, but there is a point that comes to God says, so will you do this for me? The messenger of the Lord stays Abraham's hand, preventing him from killing his son. God wanted Abraham to face his own conflicted and divided loyalties.

Does that resonate with you sometimes? Does that resonate with you sometimes in the culture in which we live? What is our conflicted and divided loyalties in life?

And it worked. The test serves its purpose in that it strengthens Abraham's trust and relationship with God because God will provide. God provides. God provides. God provides the way out.

Generously, bountifully, wondrously provides. Maybe at that point, Abraham realised that God has been there all along, guiding his steps, directing his path and making a future for him. Maybe that has been your experience as well when you have tested and been in a testing time that you look back and reflect and say, actually, I saw that God was there. Didn't seem like it at the time. In fact, I was screaming out and we were having a real conversation, a real conversation, but I knew that God was there. It's all about trust.

And in that relationship, in that experience, God not only experiences, but it works the other way because God knows that Abraham now has respect or, and in some ways for many of us, a healthy dose of fear.

God is God and we are not. God is our best interests at heart, appropriate to a divine human relationship. Sometimes changes between Abraham and God that day has made a difference. Abraham learns to totally trust in God and God proves that he can be trusted. Have you had an experience like that in your life?

[9 : 10] Many of us have. So what can we take from this today? Slide two. In the Hebrew, God is often referred to by the name. We're talking about the names of God and he's taught, used by the name in the Hebrew as emet. And emet is translated into our language with words like faithful, reliable, sure, trustworthy, and amen. Is that your experience of God? I pray that it is because that is God.

Reliable, sure, trustworthy, and amen. God is emet. Next slide, please. And here, the shocking test of this relationship is that God has asked Abraham to make the sacrifice.

And although God clearly had no intention of allowing this to happen, Abraham is about to be tested and to show that trust. And it comes that close. Sometimes we have to get to that point to know that God is God and that God is with us. Next slide, please. Yet our God is compassionate and God provides the escape, the sacrifice, if you like. Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him, for I know that you fear God. You see, and they're presumably out of the blue, yet provided by God is the ram or lamb, depending on which version you read from. And the required sacrifice was made, a substitution.

Now, if you've been a Christian for some time, you may know where this is going. Next slide.

Because it is about the cross. Because God, for those of us who know Christianity, and you will find out even if you are new to Christianity, even if you are new in deepening that relationship that you have with Jesus, you will know what this sacrifice actually means in your life, because it's about the cross. For while Abraham's son is spared, God would know the cost himself through his own son Jesus. He would know the cost because he was prepared the pain, the anguish, that he would make the substitution. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. God takes the cost, and Jesus is sacrificed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned each, every one of us to his own way, and God has laid on him the iniquity of us all. The prophecy in Isaiah 53. This prophecy, long before the cross, Isaiah is telling us, yet God and Jesus went through it. Because Christ died, our relationship with God has forever been changed. That was the changing moment. The cross is the changing

moment. God went through with it for us, for you, for me, for every one of us. The lamb that was slain, Jesus, the lamb of God. We use the term, the lamb of God. God provides.

God provides. What more could God do? What more does he want to do in showing his love and his promise for us? Emmett, the God who is faithful, reliable, sure, and trustworthy in all things. This story invites us then to a posture not only of relationship, but a posture of healthy recognition, and dare I say it, holy understanding of what God did for us and does for us day by day. Faithful to his covenant promises and the redemption we have through him, the God who provides. The son died, yet as he promised, gloriously beats death, rises again. The sacrifice was made. Jesus rises from the dead and reigns victorious. We have been set free. That is the cost. That was the sacrifice for us.

[13:52] Free to worship, free to serve. We've shared in communion, everything about communion today is about if whatever term you use for this, whether it's an altar or a table, that is what we remember as we have come this morning. Everything that Jesus and God has done for us and in us and through us to actually permit this for me, to go through it for me. The next slide, please. And in the light of this proof, his love for you and me, in view of this amazing faithful Emmett, the Lord, I need to ask us this if God to ask us this morning, if God is prepared to give it all, what are we withholding from God?

What do we actually withhold? What don't we place at the foremost of our life for him? In the light of his great love. Next slide, please.

You see, if you trust him, what would you withhold? Because he's not withholding anything from us. After all, we sing hymns and songs about it all, don't we? We're all very happy to sing the songs, all for Jesus, I surrender, all to him I gladly give. And then maybe there should be a paraphrase where we say accept. Yeah? Because there will always be, maybe, the accept that's in the back of our mind.

Next one, please. You see, as we sing and we often say to match our actions, you know, in Christians, maybe in this teaching today, knowing that God provides, what would you withhold if he asked of you?

Bill Hybels once said, you know, Bill Hybels talked about ministry and about the big asks. So what would be, where would your line be? Would it be your house? You know, if the Lord asked you, you know, need you to sell your house and move on. Big ask.

[16:06] Maybe it would be your second house, maybe, or your caravan or your camper van. What's the big ask? Maybe your car, cherished and loved. You know, it's stuff, but what is God asking of you?

Maybe your jewelry, lounging in a drawer for your, to hand on to your relatives who don't really want it. But, you know?

And then it gets personal. It says, what about your children? You know? There is something that says about you've come to church with your children. The majority, statistically, it says, if a father and a family come to church with their children, they will stay the course.

Something about coming as a family. Something about coming together, about bringing your children, coming as one, is an important part. What are you prepared to do?

And then, of course, then there's, we talk about income. You know? Then, percentage, what would you get? What do you want to lay on there? What is, what is mine and what is yours, Lord?

[17:23] Because I'm saying it's all yours, but what am I actually withholding? And then, and then it says, your time. Now, here's the really precious one, isn't it?

The Lord says, actually, I want some of your time here. I want this. Where do we divide that up and say, when he asks of us to do something, where is our time?

You know, Bill Hybels really spoke deeply on this. We make big asks of God, don't we? And we do make big asks of him, don't we? It's, you know, maybe your prayer looks, you know, Lord, give us world peace.

Lord, heal for my loved one. The list is long. Yet, what happens when God makes the big ask of us? As we've heard this morning.

What happens when that's reversed? You know, in our time maybe, you know, I want you to, I think time is the big thing, personally.

[18:23] What if God is actually prompting you at the moment and saying, actually, I want you to give up your pub night or your craft evening to help on an offer course? What happens?

What happens? I want you to give up your Sunday lie-in or a Monday evening to help lead youth and children's work. I want that slice of your time. I want you to get up 20 minutes earlier on a Sunday morning or during the week and give somebody a lift to church in the transport team. You know, sometimes there is a cost to the ask. I can think of loads of things that the Lord asks of me and has asked of me to place on that altar for him.

We place bread and wine on the table to remind us of that sacrifice. And here this morning there is Abraham, Abraham. Yes, Lord? What do you want of me?

Music team, do you want to come back out? 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 own very dear son.

[19 : 43] Let's go. I'm going to end with a really personal story which reflected this in my life. And I think sometimes as we all know, this is where the rubber hits the road.

We have scripture, we hear the story, but when it hits in our own lives and we realise the big asks that God sometimes asks of us in testing.

I think it was about five, six years ago. And I felt extremely flattered that a rather large and very prominent church in Bristol had asked me to join them as an associate minister.

I went along and had a look at this. It was very flattering. I felt my ego was being well and truly stroked. But coming back to God and saying, so what are you asking?

And the last thing, to be honest, at the time I didn't want to leave you. I said to God, it's not real, it doesn't feel, I love these people.

[20 : 51] I still love you greatly. And all of you listening on the podcast as well. But I knew that I had to go and test it.

And we went and we tested it. It wasn't, it didn't feel, it didn't. But why, Lord, why are you asking this of me? Why are you asking it this time? And a very, very wise, wise, retired bishop who you might know.

He said to me, the thing is, Clive, is watch your prayer every day. My prayer is to say, Lord, if you want me to go, I'll go.

He said, I think you just wanted to really know that that was right. That you would do what I was going to ask you. Not asking that of you. But I just wanted to know that we were authentic in our relationship.

That actually, if you were authentic, if you do say you're going to do it, that you would do it. I was just, I sensed that God wanted to know that you're obedient.

[22 : 06] And that you trust in me. Is that our experience this morning? Of trusting in God and being obedient? I pray that it is.

So should we just pray together and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to us through this scripture this morning? We're talking about the names of God.

Is God for you, Emmett? Is he trustworthy? Do you trust him? Do you trust him with every part of your life? Holy Spirit, would you come?

Lord, King of Kings, Saviour, Emmett, you are faithful. You are reliable. You are sure. You are trustworthy. You are a man. Come now, we pray, in the power of your Holy Spirit.

Amen. And grow faith in us and trust in you. Lord, and to the point of responding to your promptings, knowing that the plans you have for us in that calling, in your asks of us, is good.

[23 : 20] And that you will be there for us in the joys and the challenges in doing life with you. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.