

READ

Genesis 22

REFLECT

It's often quoted as evidence of the "injustice" of God – why would a good and loving God ever demand, even as a test, Abraham to murder his own child? We can't know the mind of God, but there are some helpful clues within the text. The first is that Abraham didn't question God at all; recall God's promise to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah to which Abraham fought tooth and nail for their salvation if only ten righteous people were found. Why would he put argue with God for the lives of strangers and not for his son? The second clue is that when Isaac asked where the ram was for the offering, Abraham replied that God would see to it. These things combined show that there was total trust that God would not demand the blood of Isaac, so much so that Abraham didn't even feel the need to question God's motives, something Abraham had done in the past. The test wasn't to see if Abraham would kill his son in devotion to God, the test was to see if Abraham trusted that God would stop at nothing to protect his family, that there was nothing standing in the way between God and God's fulfilment of the promise. Abraham trusted and he knew that God would stay faithful to him. The place was named, "The Lord sees" in affirmation of God seeing us in all times, knowing of our struggles, and working for the fulfillment of the promise for us, too.

Christians know the fulfillment of this promise in God's own willingness to send Jesus to walk among us, teach us, and then die for us. What God never intended for Abraham to do was done by God, not as a way to test us, but to prove to us that nothing will ever stand in the way of God's love for us either. The binding of Isaac isn't some kind of proof of an unjust God, it's proof of a loving God who refuses to give us up. All we have to do is trust in that kind of a God.

REACT

- Have you ever been promised something only to have it snatched away later? How did you respond? Were you able to trust that person again? Often the binding of Isaac is looked at in a similar fashion – God promised Abraham children, he finally had one, then God demanded his life as some kind of cruel joke. But it's a negative, and frankly unhelpful, way to look at not only the story, but God and God's motives. People may have unjust motives and take away what was promised, but God only knows justice and will never renege on that justice. What can help you trust in God so completely?
- There are times when people do horrible things in the name of God, even killing others and claiming that God told them to do it. Would God ever really demand we hurt, maim, or kill in God's name? Is that the same God who stopped at nothing to give us Jesus? I can't imagine that it is; any kind of violence or hurt done in God's name is an affront to the God of justice and love we know to be real. How can you respond to people who use God's name in vain in such a way?

RESPOND

Trusting God: Sometimes people engage in team-building exercises to build trust and group cohesion. But we can't do trust falls with God. Trusting God takes practice and humility, willing ourselves to let go of a need for control and allow the Spirit to move through us. Augustine of Hippo was prolific in his writing and is regarded as one of the greatest fathers of the early church. Below is a prayer attributed to Augustine that can help us as we seek to be more trusting of God and God's promises:

O Lord, you command me to ask; grant that I may receive what you give. You have told me to seek; let me be happy in finding. You have bidden me to knock; I pray, open for me. Graciously direct and govern all my thoughts and actions, that, for the future, I may serve you and entirely devote myself to obeying you. Accept me and draw me to yourself, that I may henceforth be yours by obedience and love, since I am already yours as your creature. I am yours, O Lord, and you live and reign forever and ever. Amen.