

Abraham's Obedience

Abraham watched his wife, Sarah, and his beloved son, Isaac, as they played together outside. Even now, he could hardly believe that he had this beautiful son. God had given Isaac to Sarah and Abraham in their old age. Abraham remembered the whole thing as if it had happened only yesterday.

God had made a special promise to Abraham long ago. This promise was called a covenant. God told Abraham, "You shall be the father of not only one nation, but many nations!"

"But how?" Abraham had asked. "I am nearly 100 years old. My wife, Sarah, is old, too. And we still have no children."

God had said, "Abraham, look up into the heavens and count all of the stars in the sky if you can. Your descendants will be like that — too many to count!"

Abraham believed God. "What then must I do, Lord?" he asked.

"For your part, Abraham, you must obey me always."

"I will," Abraham had vowed to God.

As a sign of their sacred agreement, Abraham had made a special sacrifice, just as God had commanded. He had taken four different animals and offered them to God on the altar.

A short time later, three men had come to Abraham's tent, where he lived with Sarah. Sarah had invited them to eat supper and rest before continuing their journey. These men had told Abraham that in one year's time, he and Sarah would have the son God had promised.

When Sarah heard the news, she had laughed to herself and said, "A woman as old as me with a baby? Why, that's impossible!"

God told Abraham to name the baby Isaac, which means laughter. Sarah was wrong to laugh, because, with God, nothing is impossible.

Sure enough, a year later, Sarah had a beautiful baby boy, just as God had promised. And how Sarah and Abraham loved Isaac! He was such a joy to them in their old age. And he was growing up so quickly. Soon Isaac was nearly seven years old.

"And now," said Abraham sadly, "I must give up my son, Isaac."

How could he ever tell Sarah? The child they had waited for and prayed about for so long had to be sacrificed. Abraham had promised God that he would always obey Him. Now God had told Abraham, "Take your only son, Isaac, whom you love so much, up to the mountain. There you must sacrifice the boy as a burnt offering."

Why would God ask such a thing of him? Abraham's heart was very heavy. But he knew that he must obey whatever God had commanded him to do. Perhaps there would be a miracle.

Abraham was too sad to tell even Sarah. How could she ever understand? The next morning, Abraham took two of his servants and Isaac, and prepared to go up to the mountain. He took wood for the fire and started on the journey.

When they reached the foot of the mountain, Abraham told the servants, "Wait here. We will go up and worship the Lord and come back."



The Bible Corner

Cindy Cottone

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For discussion:

- 1) God made special promises to Abraham. What is another name for these promises?
- 2) What were the promises that God made to Abraham?
- 3) What did God expect Abraham to do in return?
- 4) The name Abraham means "father of nations." What does the name Isaac mean?
- 5) Did God really want Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac? What was God testing in Abraham?
- 6) God made us an even greater promise today by sending His Son, Jesus Christ. What promise did He make to us?

For Lent:

God expects us to try to obey Him always, too. Spend some time this week thinking about when this was especially hard and you failed. Ask God to forgive you.

For further reading:

The story of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac is found in the Old Testament in Genesis, Chapters 17-18 and Chapter 22.

Abraham took the wood and placed it on Isaac's shoulders, and together they continued up the mountain.

"Father," Isaac asked, "we have the wood for our sacrifice, but where is the lamb for our offering?"

"Don't worry, my son. God will provide a sacrifice for us," Abraham answered.

When they reached the altar, Abraham slowly arranged the wood on it for the fire. Then he hugged Isaac very tightly, because he loved the boy even more than himself. He started to lift him up to the altar. And then suddenly he heard his name.

"Abraham! Abraham!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

"Do not hurt Isaac in any way," God told him. "Now I know that you are an obedient servant. For you would even give up your son because I had commanded you to."

Abraham noticed a ram caught in some nearby bushes. Isaac helped his father offer this ram as a fitting sacrifice to the God they both loved.

God made Abraham an even greater promise after that.

"Because you obeyed me, Abraham, I will give you wonderful blessings. Your descendants will conquer their enemies and become a blessing to the whole world!"

Chaplain

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She's also had plenty of personal experience with bureaucracy. In 1967, she left the Division of Veterans' Affairs to work for an engineering firm. Eleven years later, she was injured in a car accident after hitting a deer.

For the next six years, doctors could find no reason for her failure to recover. Because she was steadily losing muscle strength, Mary Lou was forced to quit her job. Meanwhile, she was unable to collect Social Security benefits because she couldn't prove that she was disabled without a specific diagnosis.

Finally, her doctors diagnosed her illness as myasthenia gravis, which they speculate was aggravated by the trauma of the accident. She still isn't convinced that the diagnosis is accurate, but is determined to somehow remain active.

"You can't just sit and let your mind go," she said.

Nevertheless, sitting is the best therapy for what ails her. Curiously, exercise only increases the fatigue myasthenia gravis causes. As a result, Mary Lou has had to

severely limit trips outside her home and, for a long time, has feared that her ministry at the Skilled Nursing Facility would eventually cease.

When she began visiting the home, Mary Lou found little support from nearby parishes in gathering volunteers. "In the past, a lot of priests didn't like eucharistic ministers doing that kind of thing," she explained.

But when Father William Gordinier, pastor at St. Mary's Church in Geneseo, heard of the O'Briens' ministry, he published a request for volunteers to assist them. As a result, Rosemary Miller, a 22-year-old substitute teacher, Kevin O'Neil, a 32-year-old

storeowner, and four other parishioners have joined the team on Sundays.

"It's uplifting," Miller said. "These people are so appreciative of the little you do for them."

Mary Lou credits her prayers with bringing the additional volunteers. "I asked St. Theresa to keep me on my feet so I could keep doing this," she said. "Instead, she sent all these people to help."

Her fears have thus been eased, but not put to rest. "We still need more help," she explained. "Priests can't do it all, you know. They're too busy running these big parishes. It's time for lay people to step forward and give a little bit of themselves."

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