Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study of Awake: The Call to a Renewed Life, these sermon outlines will use the same Scripture passages as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

The Point: Trust God to meet our needs.

Introduction: Some years ago, James Dobson wrote a book titled When God Doesn’t Make Sense. He talked about things in life that put our faith in God to the test. If your faith has never been tested, chances are you haven’t been a Christian for very long. We still live in a fallen world, and as believers we’re not immune to its unfairness. When tragedy strikes – such as the death of a loved one, or a financial setback, or some other type of injustice – we’re often tempted to ask God, “Why?” If God truly loves us, why does He allow us to experience such heartache?

We can only imagine what went through Abraham’s mind when God commanded him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Hadn’t God promised to bless Isaac's descendants? How could God bless his descendants if Isaac was going to die so young? This command did not make a bit of sense, but Abraham obeyed it anyway. This episode gives us some important lessons about trusting God in all circumstances.

I. An unsettling command.

A. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac.
   1. “Thine only son, whom thou lovest” – This does not mean Abraham loved Ishmael any less.
      a. Abraham had previously prayed for God to bless Ishmael, and God promised He would do so (Gen. 17:18, 20).
      b. God said He would establish His covenant with Isaac and his descendants (Gen. 18:19, 21).
   2. The King James Version says God did this to “tempt” Abraham.
      a. We think of tempting as enticement to do wrong. God does not tempt us in this way (James 1:13-14).
      b. The word in the Hebrew language carries the idea of testing or proving. God was testing the level of Abraham’s faith.
      c. Genuine faith is connected with obedience (James 2:21-24).
   B. Abraham did what God told him to do.
      1. “On the third day” – Evidently it was a long journey to the place where God commanded Abraham to make the sacrifice.
         • I don’t know, but I suspect the suspense of this trip really wore on Abraham. One of the most frustrating things I’ve ever had to do is wait on God. Yet I’ve often had my greatest spiritual growth during those times of waiting (Isaiah 40:31).
2. Abraham told his servants, “We will...come again to you.”
   a. He knew God could bring Isaac back from the dead if He so chose (Hebrews 11:17-19).
   b. One thing is certain: Abraham knew God was in control.

II. An uneasy conversation.

A. As they made their way up the mountain, they had what must have been a very awkward conversation.
   1. Isaac asked why they didn’t have a lamb for the sacrifice.
      a. Abraham did not give a direct answer, but assured his son that God would provide the lamb.
      b. Evidently Isaac was satisfied with this reply.
   2. It is noteworthy that Isaac carried the firewood, not Abraham.
      a. Abraham was an old man when Isaac was born, and Isaac was probably in his teens by this time.
      b. Since Abraham could not have put Isaac on the altar by force, Isaac must have really trusted him.

B. Do you trust God in all circumstances?
   1. Do your children know that you trust God in all things?
      a. During times of financial stress.
      b. When tragedy strikes the family.
   2. Pastors, do your church members know that you trust God?
      a. When things aren’t going well in your ministry.
      b. When your church lacks resources.
      c. During times of spiritual warfare.

III. An unexpected conclusion.

A. Abraham was about to go through with it, but God stopped him.
   1. God explained that the sacrifice was only a test.
      a. His willingness to sacrifice Isaac proved that he wanted to honor God above all things – even his own son.
      b. God renewed His promise to Abraham.
   2. Abraham saw a ram caught in a nearby thicket.
      a. God had provided a lamb for the sacrifice, just as Abraham had said He would.
      b. Abraham offered the ram in Isaac's place.

• Many people see this sacrifice as a “type” of Jesus. While we must be careful not to read things into Scripture that aren’t there, we can definitely see some parallels!

B. Abraham named the place “Jehovah-jireh”, which means, “the Lord will provide”.
   1. Do you trust God to provide for all your needs?
      a. This does not mean Christians shouldn’t work to provide for their families (2 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:8).
      b. When we seek God first, we can trust Him to take care of all our other needs (Matthew 6:25-34).
      c. He also provides emotional strength to face life’s trials.
   2. Do you trust Him enough to obey Him in all things, even when you don’t understand?

Conclusion: In 2000 and 2001, I went through a long series of trials that I found difficult to understand. I was sorting through some difficult issues in the church where I was pastor, and in the midst of it all, my sister was diagnosed with a brain tumor. This sister was always the “good child” in our family. If there was anyone in my family who I didn’t
think deserved to be afflicted with this ailment, it was her. Things in the church calmed down, but my sister’s condition continued to deteriorate, and on January 3, 2001, she went home to be with the Lord. Three months later, before we’d really had time to recover from this tragedy, my Dad joined her in heaven. I didn’t understand that, either. Shortly after that, another of my sisters went through a divorce. Other family members went through some personal struggles of their own. Of course, none of us will forget the national tragedies that happened on September 11 that year.

All these years later, I wish I could say I understand why God allowed those things to happen, but I can’t. I probably won’t understand until I get to heaven. I do know this: God’s grace is sufficient for even the most difficult of trials. There was a gospel song that became very special to me in those days: “He’s Still on the Throne”. I don’t know what you’re facing right now, but I can assure you of this: God is still in control, He is with you, and He will give you whatever strength you need to face the trials ahead. Put your trust in Jehovah-jireh: the Lord who provides!

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