

Heroes 4

They are at best a strange group of men. Yet one unique bond ties them to each other for as long as America records her history.

One was a poor Irish immigrant who died prematurely leaving a sister to raise his three young sons.

One was so Dutch that English was not spoken in the home.

Another Scot-Irish a farmer who never quite made it big except in children (he fathered nine).

Another was a trader... the best he could do for his wife and 11 children was a one room house for the entire family.

Two were pastors of small churches.

One was a self-appointed doctor. He never earned a legitimate medical degree but took a course by correspondence, and then went from farm to farm offering his questionable services.

Another was a tanner of hides.

Still another, a poor laborer who never lived to see the birth of his youngest son.

Missouri was the home of one... a mule trader.

Iowa was the state of another... a blacksmith.

Tavern-keeper, frontiersman, itinerant salesman, trolley-car conductor, none really made a mark in a grand and great way.

Mostly ordinary men, in what could be called at best, small professions. But all of these men made it big in one way, and it is this that binds these men of two centuries into one special class.

Each one had a son who became President of the United States.

Neither you nor I would likely identify any of the men listed above as great American heroes. They were ordinary men with ordinary vocations and quite ordinary lives but they all raised sons who became quite extraordinary men.

I urge each you fathers not to take lightly the responsibility and privilege you have to lead your sons and daughters to the ways of Christ, to come to know Him, and to live a life of positive impact for the kingdom of God. And it doesn't matter if our children are infants or grown adults, we should use every opportunity until the final breath leaves our bodies to persuade our children to follow Christ and achieve greatness for His kingdom. Do not neglect your responsibility by handing it off to someone else.

Without a doubt the most puzzling, confusing stories in all the bible for me to try to understand took place several generations before God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses in the Arabian desert during the Israelites journey from Egypt to the promised land. You see, the promised land was first promised to a man name Abram, better known as Abraham.

1 The LORD said to Abram: Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show

you. ² I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, I will curse those who treat you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you. **Gen 12:1-3 (HCSB)**

One problem- Abraham and his wife had no children and they were both in their 90's. They struggled to believe God's promise. In his impatience, Abraham even fathered an illegitimate son, Ishmael. Then came the miracle, Isaac was born of Sara. You can just imagine the joy and pride they felt and the massive growth of their faith in God as this miracle began to grow up before them. But then.....

1 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he answered. ² "Take your son," He said, "your only [son] Isaac, whom you love, go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

³ So early in the morning Abraham got up, saddled his donkey, and took with him two of his young men and his son Isaac. He split wood for a burnt offering and set out to go to the place God had told him about.

⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship; then we'll come back to you." ⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac. In his hand he took the fire and the sacrificial knife, and the two of them walked on together. ⁷ Then Isaac spoke to his father Abraham and said,

“My father.” And he replied, “Here I am, my son.” Isaac said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”⁸ Abraham answered, “God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” Then the two of them walked on together.

⁹ When they arrived at the place that God had told him about, Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood. He bound his son Isaac and placed him on the altar, on top of the wood.¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son.¹¹ But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” He replied, “Here I am.”¹² Then He said, “Do not lay a hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your only son from Me.”

¹³ Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son.¹⁴ And Abraham named that place The LORD Will Provide, so today it is said: “It will be provided on the LORD’s mountain.”¹⁵ Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven¹⁶ and said, “By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this thing and have not withheld your only son,¹⁷ I will indeed bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your offspring will possess the gates of their enemies.¹⁸ And all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring because you have obeyed My command.” **Gen 22:1-18 (HCSB)**

This is such a beautiful and powerful story full of symbolism of the sacrificial offering of Christ at Calvary. In fact, Moriah is the

mountain range in which Jerusalem and thus Calvary are located. But why, even though God had no intention of allowing Abraham to go through with the sacrifice, did God choose to test Abraham's faith in such a manner? I don't know. No one knows. Even though this was before the Ten Commandments were etched in stone, it had always been etched in men's hearts. Human sacrifice, murder was sin.

But I do know this, Abraham had walked with God for 50 years. And, even though I'm sure Abraham knew that human sacrifice was wrong and I'm quite sure that Abraham did not understand why God would require such a thing, he trusted and obeyed God. Even if God allowed him to go through with it, he must have believed that God could and would raise Isaac from the dead. Two clues:

5 Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship; then we'll come back to you." **Gen 22:5 (HCSB)**

7 Then Isaac spoke to his father Abraham and said, "My father." And he replied, "Here I am, my son." Isaac said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

8 Abraham answered, "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." Then the two of them walked on together. **Gen 22:7-8**

No doubt Abraham loved his son. God Himself even said so. But, he loved, feared and obeyed God even more. What a role model for all of us who are fathers.

Abraham- Hero (dad) of the faith

Loved his son- God Himself acknowledged that Abraham loved his son. Remember, this is the son born to Abraham and Sara in

their old age. Abraham was 99 when Isaac was conceived. Isaac was now old enough to converse with his father and carry the wood for the altar. I would guess he was 10+ years old.

Loved God first and most- Even though Isaac was his miracle child, even though he was the child born of the love of his life Sara, Even though Isaac was his own flesh and blood, the son of promise, he loved God more.

Obedied God Nowhere in the entire account do I find that Abraham even questioned God. As far as we know, his obedience was without hesitation. You can imagine what was going on in his head but as far as we know from scripture his obedience was unwavering even to the point of raising the knife to his son.... This was still several generations prior to any commands of God being recorded.

Trusted God Even when it didn't make sense. Surely it didn't make any sense at all. God had promised that Abraham would be the father of a great nation. Isaac was the miraculous fulfillment of God's promise. Abraham must have thought, "It just doesn't make sense, but God has proven Himself over and over again, so I will trust Him regardless of whether I understand right now or not." He may have gone to his grave not understanding, but he obeyed anyway.

Great Christian heroes: (you and me)

Obey God. I have personally come to the conclusion through my own journey of faith that every command of God, big and "small," Old Testament and New Testament, Ten Commandments, New Commandment, is for my good, is reasonable and just, makes sense, and should be obeyed without

hesitation or question. I may not always do it but I have concluded that I should.

You may not be there yet. Maybe you still question the validity and application of some of God's commands in the 21st century.

But there is no one in all the bible and human history who seemed to have a more reasonable right to question God's commands than Abraham. I imagine, even if God spoke out loud to me or you telling us to offer our only son as a sacrifice to Himself, that a million questions and doubts would be bouncing around in our heads. We would kick, scream, argue, and probably run away faster than Jonah ran from Nineveh, but Abraham chose to obey God. And look at the consequences.....

17 I will indeed bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your offspring will possess the gates of their enemies. **18** And all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring because you have obeyed My command.” **Gen 22:17-18** (HCSB)

Dads, moms, we must obey God!

Trust God Even when it's not convenient or doesn't make sense.

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; **Prov 3:5** (HCSB)

His thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways. Trust Him!

Love God first even more than your spouse or children. This is tough but wise, biblical counsel.

36 “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷ He said to him, **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”** ³⁸ This is the greatest and most important commandment. **Matt 22:36-38** (HCSB)

Love your children

If you truly love God, you will be able and ready to love your children as you should, like God loves you.

39 The second is like it: **Love your neighbor as yourself.** ^[15] **Matt 22:39** (HCSB)

And who is your closest neighbor? Your spouse and your children. This is a sequential command. You’ve got to love God first like Abraham did. Then you will know how to love your children more perfectly.