

**How can it be wrong when it feels so right?
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Abraham stood over his son's body, the knife he clinched in both hands raised high above his head, like some horror movie. Isaac lay impounded by rope and fear on the makeshift altar beneath Abraham, looking up at his father, pleading with his eyes, confused that the one person he trusted most in this world, was going to kill him. The man who had carried him on his shoulders when he was a boy, taught him to hunt when he was a teenager, prayed for his safety, daily prayed for his safety. This man, with his hands raised.

For the crime he was about to commit, Abraham absolved himself. God told me to do this; God will provide the real sacrifice ...

But what does this ironic statement of faith really mean? Was Abraham referring to the fact that God is the one who gave Isaac to him in the first place? God provided that way, giving him a baby in his old age, so he could offer sacrifice to God? God will provide the sacrifice.

Or was Abraham hoping for a miracle that would shortly come – the ram in the thicket?

Abraham trusted God, so much so that two millennia later, Christians called him, the Friend of God.

God liked Abraham, enjoyed his company, even dropped-in on Abraham from time to time. If Abraham had played golf, God would have gone a round or two with him.

Yet, one has to ask, was Abraham crazy? Horribly holy and confusingly dysfunctional? Simultaneously saint and sinner?

God will provide, but how dare you tempt God by offering your own son?

Abraham and Sarah had no offspring, even into their eighties. In those days, people thought their eternity was located in their offspring – no children: no life beyond the grave. That is why God's promise to Abraham and Sarah meant so much: not only will you have children, they will number the stars of the heavens, the sand on the shore.

When Abraham finally had his son, Isaac, he – Abraham - knew he would rest in peace. All his hopes and dreams deposited in that one person. Frankly, the hopes and dreams of parents are too much for one child to bear. Invisible burdens, and don't we burden our children with our own hopes and dreams?

Despite placing his future in Isaac, Abraham was still willing to sacrifice Isaac.

Abraham believed in the absolute goodness of God. If God was testing Abraham, it looks like he passed.

But hold on.

Maybe the test isn't what it appears to have been – whether Abraham could trust God completely. What if God wanted to know what Abraham was made of? Whether he was a wet rag or full of vim and vigor?

Faith, after all, consists not of mere passive non-resistance, but engagement. Sometimes, you have to engage the Lord your God.

I want to know why didn't Abraham engage God on behalf of his son? You want me to do what? I will not destroy this beautiful creature you have made.

Actually, Abraham had passed just such a test only a few Scriptural pages before. God told Abraham about his plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham was appalled, and challenged God. You would destroy cities where even righteous people live?

Abraham is complex, for in another instance, he failed a second, similar test.

Perhaps you remember, Abraham had a bastard son, Ishmael, born of a servant girl. Sarah became jealous of the servant girl and demanded Abraham send her with the boy into the desert without means of support. To die.

Instead of telling Sarah, no, that he had a duty to protect the boy, Abraham acted as milquetoast and did what Sarah demanded.

Test failed.

Like I said, God's friend, Abraham, is complex.

No doubt, Abraham considered himself to be a good father. I think of myself as a good father. You probably think of yourself as a good parent.

But there Abraham was, sacrificing his children. I have to ask, do we sacrifice our children, and if so, how?

What do we do in the name of good parenting that actually hurts our children?

Three areas of parenting come to mind.

First. We give our children too much.

Did you know that Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes built their daughter, Suri Cruise, a tree house that cost \$100,000? It has running water and electricity. Sounds extravagant, but I think most of our kids live pretty extravagant lives.

Even little children have cell phones these days – many have several iPods, and multiple video game systems. Wii and x-Box and Playstation. Big screen televisions, often in their bedrooms.

It's not just the things the kids have. They have an abundance of opportunities: ballet lessons, basketball lessons, swim lessons. Baseball, horseback-riding, piano, and soccer. Drama and Spanish and tutoring in Math.

But wait: there's more.

Our children enjoy transportation on demand – in minivans, or more likely, SUVs. Moms and dads have been reduced to chauffeurs and sports fans.

Children drive the family agenda – which sounds good but is not altogether healthy.

Parents regularly tell me that they don't come to church often because their kids don't want to.

Why is church the children's choice?

Even we as adults know that the things of life can choke the life, yet we say we want our kids to have more than we had. Sometimes receiving more means they get less.

Second, we lie to our children. We tell them they can become anything they want to become.

They can't.

One of my favorite days as a parent was the day my son, Tate, quit basketball.

From the age of five, he played league basketball. For years, I watched him race up and down the court trailing the other kids, trying desperately and hopelessly to snatch the ball from somebody, and when he got the ball, shooting and missing basket after basket.

Tate just wasn't good at league basketball. He finally figured that out about himself, and asked if he could sit the next season out. I pumped my fist and cheered.

Children need failure to define themselves, to teach them what they are not good at. You can't figure out what you are good at until you find out what you are not good at.

We have to let our children fail.

Third, children need to dream. Most of them can't dream because we keep them so busy they have no time for it. With all the lessons, the driving and sports – and the homework

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and our schools require our children to do way too much homework, leaving them without time to dream.

In his poem, A Mother Who Read to Me, Strickland Gillam spoke of children who dream

of “sagas of pirates who scoured the seas,”

of “ancient and gallant and golden days.”

Do you remember your dreams as a child, of pirates and adventure, of treasure and excitement?

When do our children dream?

Dreams sharpen the imagination, and imagination spurs invention and innovation.

What will come of tomorrow if children don't learn to dream today?

We think we're doing right by our kids, and so did Abraham. He truly did, and he was truly wrong.

Knife clinched, hands high in the air, tempting God and fate. His own faith was on the line – he thought God had spoken, and he must act.

That was the good, but it was good at the expense of his son. You remember the line of the sultry song, How can this be wrong when it feels so right?

Sometimes – wrong feels so right.