



Promises at the crossroads of history and hope

Isaac

Warm-up Question

What is an experience that you have had when you felt protected?



Photo by [Kirk Cameron](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What do you feel looking at this image?
3. What stories from your own life does this image bring to mind?
4. What stories of the world does this image bring to mind?

God Protects and Provides

Primary Reading: [Genesis 22:1-19](#);

Secondary Readings [Genesis 21:1-7](#); [Genesis 25:7-11](#)

Bible Story Reflection

**The story of the near-sacrifice of Isaac has confounded scholars for centuries and may bring to mind for readers experiences of child abuse. Any faithful contemplation of this story will bear that in mind and be pastorally proactive and responsive.*

The story of Isaac is a complicated one. This child of the promise becomes a demonstration of his father's commitment to God by his father's willingness to cause him harm at God's direction, harm that is ultimately not perpetrated only because God intervenes. Whew! It is a story that our contemporary understandings have a difficult time comprehending. Likewise, it is a story that seems to paint a picture of a God who actively tests a human being, at significant expense to others, especially Isaac.

Considering this story, however, can draw us into contemplation on what it means to proclaim that God is one who both protects and provides. God protects Isaac by providing the ram caught in the thicket for Abraham to offer in worship. Isaac is spared, and God continues to uphold the covenant.

In the living of our lives, we know from experience that God does not always intervene in this way. Our personal crossroads of history and hope are often crossroads that we come to because of real and lasting harm perpetrated by others and by us. Likewise, the crossroads of history and hope within the global story are often the same: it is often harm that brings the world to the brink and in need of hope.

To wrestle with the promises of protection and providence that the Isaac story uplifts, is to name the promises, name the paradoxes, and to seek God in the midst of it all, trusting that God is who God claims to be, and the God who makes promises will indeed keep them. It is also an invitation for us to ask ourselves about the role that we play in the protection and providence of God for others. It is an invitation to repent and change our actions when we fail to protect and provide, and it is an invitation to seek new and impactful ways that we can be God's protection and providence for those in need.

Discussion Questions

1. What strikes you most about Isaac's story?
2. What, if anything, is troubling to you about Isaac's story?
3. How might Isaac tell his own story?
4. Is the idea of God's protection and providence easy for you to understand and believe, or is it challenging? Discuss.
5. When have you received God's protection?
6. What does it mean to you to say that "God provides?"
7. Talk about circumstances when the words "God protects and provides" may seem like empty promises?
8. Share some examples of how individual people and the church can be God's presence of protection and providence for others.
9. The story of the near-sacrifice of Isaac is often included in children's Bible story books. What are some of the blessings and challenges of this inclusion?
10. To what are you being called through Isaac's story?

11. To what is your congregation or faith community being called through Isaac's story?

Activity Suggestions

Go on a trust walk. In pairs, one person is blindfolded, and the other leads the person on a walk. Take care to make sure that the walk is in a safe place and that the leaders know to avoid obstacles and to provide verbal cues to those who are blindfolded. After the exercise, discuss the experience. What was it like to trust the other person that you would be safe? What was it like to be entrusted with leading another safely? What feelings did people have about this experience? What are the "take-aways?"

Volunteer at a food bank. Reflect upon and discuss what it means that we are called to be a part of the way that God provides for others.

For young children: Psalm 91 provides a variety of images of God as protector – a fortress, wings, and a shield. Build a blanket fort. Inside the fort, read a children's version of Psalm 91. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Talk about ways that God protects us.

Prayer Concerns

People who are afraid, emergency responders, firefighters, police officers, and paramedics, children who are in harm's way

Closing Prayer

Protect me, O God, from all that would bring me harm, and provide for me according to your will. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

