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June 9, 2013

The widow's only son dies. She now has nobody; she has no husband,
no son. She will live out the rest of her life begging on the streets. She has
no value, no worth. Her life is now an empty void. And then Elijah says to
her, "Give me your son." Give me the most important thing in your life,
which is now dead. Elijah take the breathless, lifeless boy and brings him
back to life. All he said was, "Give me your son," and with terrified,
trembling arms, she handed her son over to the Elijah.

Can you imagine? Hard would it be to trust this man, prophet or no
prophet? To ask a grieving mother to hand over the dead son she still cradles
in her arms takes some nerve...and to hand over a child who has just died,
who is still warm in her arms, take some guts, and some trust! What

terrifying trust—but a trust that is rewarded, because her dead son is brought back to life! O happy day...

But wait. We've heard these words before, "Give me your son." Just back in Genesis 22, God says those very same words to Abraham, "Give me your son." And that wasn't such a happy day for Abraham. Or for Isaac. "Yes, that's right, you heard me," says the Lord, "your son...your only son...the one you've waited your whole lifetime for...the son that is supposed to give you more descendents than there are stars in the sky or pebbles on the beach...yes, that's the one, Isaac, give him to me..." But this time the goal is not to *save* the boy's life, but to *take* it—brutally—up high on a howling mountaintop, tied to a bunch of wood so that the boy's body might burn after his father has stabbed him to death. Give me your son, God commands, and a trusting Abraham obeys and leads his son up the mountain

with only a knife in his hand. The boy is not sacrificed, as we know, but neither Abraham nor his son knew his life would be spared by an angel of the Lord at the very last second.

Four words, only four simple words...give me your son...but utterly life-changing!

In one instance, the widow's dead son is given to Elijah so that he might be brought back to life. But in the other instance, the terrified Isaac is given so that his father Abraham might prove he is a faithful servant of God's.

So, which is it, God, life or death? What exactly is it that you desire? Do you require we prove our loyalty by restoring life, or by destroying it?

Let me offer a real life example from our backyard. It is a story about a bird, and this happened only two weeks ago, and the bird was appropriately named Jesus. This bird, Jesus, had apparently fallen from his nest during one of our windy thunderstorms and was clearly dying under the tree, on the ground next to our sandbox. Well, one of my sons decided to put the squawking bird out of its inevitable misery and threw a fastball right at it, knocking it over and killing it immediately. Or so it seemed. The other boys came sprinting to the scene when they saw what had happened. They did what good little Lutheran boys do...they sat in a circle around the bird and prayed for it, and wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles, the little chap rallied himself. He started to flap his wings and chirp and those boys flew into the house to shout at me about this amazing story of the resurrected bird named Jesus. So they dragged me outside so that I might see with my own eyes this miracle bird. And see it, I did...right as it flapped its wings and

flip-flopped himself right out into the street where he immediately got squashed by a Budweiser truck headed up to Steffen's. There would be no resurrecting him this time, of that I was certain.

So the boys all asked this profound question, "What's the point in fighting to live, if you're just gonna die anyway?" I gave them this answer, "Don't be afraid of death, since you're just gonna live after death anyway." They looked at me and blinked and jumped back on their bikes, and I went to finish making my rhubarb pie.

This chicken-and-egg question is easily answered...God clearly desires life, so much in fact that he gives us endless life, after the grave. The challenge in the meantime is to have the trust that the widow had or that Abraham had—the trust to hand over to God that which is most valuable to me....whatever that might be...what is it you hold dearest in your life? Your

child? Your spouse? Your home? Your wallet, your title, your position, your car?

God doesn't ask us to hand over to him what we treasure most so that he can take it away from us, like the Hamburglar. God asks us to hand over to him what we love most because he is stronger than we are and can carry these treasures better than we can, because we are tired and weak and worn...

I learned about this trust on Christmas Eve, as service at Our Savior's ended and it was almost midnight and I was exhausted and my youngest son had fallen asleep during church, and he was almost six at the time. And with my bags and purses and packages and silly but cute high heels, it was all I could do to hoist this zonked out child over my shoulder and totter to the door, when a lovely, dear friend spotted me and said, with amusement,

“Give me your son.” “Don’t be silly,” I replied, “I can carry him, I am his mother, after all, and besides, you are going home.”

“Give me your son,” he repeated, “and I will carry him safely to your car and follow you home and carry him safely up to his bed. Now give me your son.”

And I began to cry. Because I knew the child was too heavy for me to carry, but my pride was in the way, and I wanted to prove I could do it all alone, even though it was evident I could not, and so I had no choice and handed over my son, who was carried safely to my car, was followed home, and was carried safely up to bed...the handed over son was not stolen from me, just carried for me, because I was not strong enough. My most valuable thing in the world to me—my child—borne on the shoulders of one stronger than me. Even preachers need lessons in trust and grace, from time to time.

May God grant us the trust to give you our sons and our daughters and
our wallets and our diaries and our mortgages and our keys and our
cellphones and our arrogance and our self-absorption and our insecurities
and our night-terrors...take them, please, we give them to you, because only
you can take these dead things and breathe life and hope into them; take
them, because you know what it's like to give up your Son, the very thing
you love most in this world. Take these things and carry them on your strong
shoulders, walk alongside us, through the grave and gate of death, and into
everlasting life.