

Do We Really Understand Sacrifice?

Imagine that you and your spouse are a “power couple” who have everything. You’re wealthy and powerful- “King & Queen” of the campus types from influential families, though the families are somewhat problematic. So, you decide to strike out on your own and move away, far away from both families. It will be difficult moving to a new country, but together, you know you can make it. You’re going to make a name for yourselves and be your own couple, and do things your own way rather than following in the footsteps of your respective families. And so you do. Everything is working out perfectly. You are entirely successful in everything thing you do, despite having to move several times. She is gorgeous, and seems to really have it all together. She marshals the house and its affairs like a Harvard business major.

Everything seems idyllic except for one thing- though well into the marriage and all that goes with it, there are no children. So, being the “power couple” that you are, adoption seems to be the best option. But, despite all the excitement and planning, it falls through at the last possible minute. After a few more years of the yearnings of parenthood, and dreaming how a child would make your “perfect” life complete, surrogacy seems to be the answer. An appropriate woman is vetted and selected, and there is a successful conception. Now finally, as “perfect power couple,” you will truly “have it all.” All the planning and effort is finally going to pay off and you can truly be a family! A beautiful baby boy arrives, but then the problems begin as jealousy rears its ugly head. The surrogate mother tries to use her position to take over the “madam of the house” position. Tensions rise and build until finally erupting into such a volcanic explosion that she, and the son with her, has to go! There is just no way around it, and you send them away on their own (amply provided for, of course, since such was the right thing to do).

As time passes, the realization of the dream of a “family” seems impossible. Neither of you is “young” anymore, and surely the potential for having children of your own is past. A well-meaning friend assures you both that it’s not too late, but all you can do is laugh skeptically. Then, almost miraculously, it happens- pregnancy! You can hardly believe that all your dreams are finally going to come true... but they do! The son you’ve always dreamed of is born! Now, everything has finally come into place- you’re wealthy, powerful, and deliriously happy with the family you’ve always wanted. Things just couldn’t be any better than they are....

This story is (probably obviously) real. It is recorded in **Genesis 12 – 21**. It is the story of Abraham and Sarah. But the story is about to take a dramatic turn...

Genesis 22:1-19

Specific Points of Interest:

- *Moriah* would later become the place where Solomon would build the Temple, the Lord’s House, where *sacrifices* for the nation of Israel that would develop from Isaac would be made for hundreds of years, 2Chron.3:1.
- Abraham was well-familiar with the concept of *sacrifice*, as had left his family, land, and country behind to travel around the Arabian Dessert to the unseen land God had promised, Gen.12:1-8.
- Abraham was also well-familiar with the practice of *burnt offerings*- they had been offered by those serving God since the time of Adam, Gen.8:20-21. Abraham had himself built *altars*, presumably for making these sacrifices, multiple times, Gen.12:7-8; 13:18. And, God had remarkably demonstrated a *sacrifice* of sorts in assuring him of the promises given him, Gen.15:1-17.
- Note also the *specific* requirements:
 1. “*your only son*”- The son for which he and Sarah had hoped and dreamed of for 25 years, v.2a; cf.17:17; 21:5;
 2. “*whom you love*” – After the failed adoption of Eliezer, 15:1-6, and the failed surrogacy of Ishmael, 16:1-16, the gravity of Abraham (and Sarah’s) love for Isaac surely could not be questioned, v.2b.
 3. “*go to the land of Moriah*”- Aside from the future significance of *Moriah*, Abraham was currently dwelling “*in the land of Philistines*,” cf. 21:34, which was *three days’ walk* from *Moriah*, v.4, which gave him **three days to think about what he was expected to do when he got to Moriah!** *Beersheba* is approximately 45-50 miles from *Moriah*.
 4. “*rose early in the morning*,” v.3a- He rose from what was surely a sleepless night- or at least it would have been for anyone else. Imagine explaining to your wife such a command from God!
 5. “*saddled his donkey...he split wood for the burnt offering*,” v.3b- Imagine the *frustration* (or faith!) required to prepare for such a task.

6. "arose and went... On the third day," vv.4-5;
7. "stay here... I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you," v.5- Now we see clearly the tremendous faith of Abraham in the promises of God, cf. 15:4-6.
8. "Abraham took the wood and laid it on Isaac his son," v.6a- The *offering* would have to carry the *implement* of his own sacrifice.
9. "he took in his hand the fire and the knife," v.6b- Isaac carried the *implement* of offering, but Abraham would have to make the *sacrifice* himself.
10. "So the two of them walked on together," v.6c- Imagine the emotion in Abraham as he and Isaac walked the last bit of the journey alone together.
11. "where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" v.7- Imagine having to answer **that** question in this circumstance!
12. "God will provide," v.8- This is not a *dodge* or evasion of the question, it is a statement of unquestioning faith despite not knowing how, cp.13:14-18.
13. "built the altar...arranged the wood...bound his son...laid him on the altar on top of the wood," v.9- Remember that Isaac was old enough to carry the wood, and ask perceptive questions. Imagine the scene!
14. "stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son," v.10- His faith in God and His promises yielded not to temptation; he was willing and able to sacrifice, cp. Matt.26:41.
15. "But..." vv.11-19- This is the rest of the story.

Now, take a deep breath and consider a couple of related questions:

- Do you love your child/children?
- Would it be easier to sacrifice *yourself*, or *your child*?
- Why did God require such a thing of Abraham?
 1. One answer is given in v.12.
 2. The second, and *bigger picture* answer is given in the sacrifice of God's *only Son*- the Son *whom He loved*, but was willing to sacrifice for us!
 3. Abraham's *willingness* to sacrifice Isaac was a *foreshadowing* of God's sacrifice of Jesus. It would have been much easier to sacrifice Himself, but His love was even greater than that, John 3:16!

This lesson is not about the *specifics* of God's sacrificial love, or of Jesus' *offering* of Himself, though both of these can be and should be seen through this story.

This lesson is about our:

1. Our *understanding* and *appreciation* of God's sacrifice of His Son for us, Acts 2:22-23; and,
2. The *proper response* to that sacrifice in our lives, Eph.1:3-4.
3. The *proper response* to that sacrifice in our lives, Eph.1:3-4.

Now, with hopefully a better understanding for, and appreciation of, God's sacrifice (by endeavoring to put yourself in Abraham's place), what are you willing to *sacrifice* to God?

- Your will for His, Matt.6:10?
- Your way for His, John 14:6?
- Your *time, talents, resources, and efforts* for His cause rather than your own, Rom.12:1-2?

Here's the point in a nutshell: When I contemplate what God *sacrificed* to buy my pardon from sin, I am ashamed of what I refuse to *sacrifice* in His service of my heart, my time, my devotion, and my dedication to His purpose of saving others.

While we can never *repay* God's sacrifice of His Son, we ought to be ashamed of our paltry so-called "sacrifices" of:

- Time to gather to sing, pray, communion, and worship Him, John 4:23; and
- Dedication to *study, practice, and teach* God's saving gospel to others, Ezra 7:10.

God's great love and sacrifice surely deserves our utmost love, appreciation, and sacrifice for Him!