

Building on Biblical Foundations

“Obedience, Not Sacrifice”

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Genesis 22:1-19

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Genesis 22:1 Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”
“Here I am,” he replied.

2 Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.

4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. **5** He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, **7** Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

8 Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. **11** But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

12 “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram[a] caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”

15 The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time 16 and said, “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, 18 and through your offspring[b] all nations on earth will be blessed,[c] because you have obeyed me.”

19 Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

What does the Lord require? What pleases Him?

Is it our money? Our giving of tithes and offerings? Is it our time? Our labor? The sweat of our brow? Does he delight in us wearing ourselves out for duty sake? Or from religious obligation?

What can we provide to him that he has not already given us? What can we give the Lord that doesn't already belong to him?

This passage illustrates the heart of Abraham. He loved his son – his long awaited miracle child – but he knew that his son was a gift from God and as such his son belonged to God. To sacrifice his son on an altar was not so much about giving something back to God who already owned it. . . no this was a test of obedience. Obedience more than sacrifice, Obedience more than faith.

God said so, and Abraham did it. He did not argue. He did not reason through it. He did not find a clever way out of it. He submitted, he surrendered and he obeyed.

I will read to you a story... please pay attention to the details. Details matter to the Lord.

1 Samuel 15 read the whole chapter . . .

1Then Samuel said to Saul, “The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people Israel. Now therefore, listen to the words of the LORD. 2This is what the LORD of Hosts says: ‘I witnessed what the Amalekites did to the Israelites when they ambushed them on their way up from Egypt. 3Now go and attack the Amalekites and devote to destruction all that belongs to them. Do not spare them, but put to death men and women, children and infants, oxen and sheep, camels and donkeys.’ ”

4So Saul summoned the troops and numbered them at Telaim—200,000 foot soldiers and 10,000 men of Judah. **5**Saul came to the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the valley. **6**And he warned the Kenites, “Since you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt, go on and get away from the Amalekites. Otherwise I will sweep you away with them.”

So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites.

7 Then Saul struck down the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, which is east of Egypt. **8** He captured Agag king of Amalek alive, but devoted all the others to destruction with the sword.

9Saul and his troops spared Agag, along with the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs, and the best of everything else. They were unwilling to destroy them, but they devoted to destruction all that was despised and worthless.

Samuel Denounces Saul

10Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, **11**“I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned away from following Me and has not carried out My instructions.”

And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the LORD all that night.

12Early in the morning Samuel got up to confront Saul, but he was told, “Saul has gone to Carmel, and behold, he has set up a monument for himself and has turned and gone down to Gilgal.”

13When Samuel reached him, Saul said to him, “May the LORD bless you. I have carried out the LORD’s instructions.”

14But Samuel replied, “Then what is this bleating of sheep and lowing of cattle that I hear?”

15Saul answered, “The troops brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but the rest we devoted to destruction.”

16“Stop!” exclaimed Samuel. “Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night.”

“Tell me,” Saul replied.

17And Samuel said, “Although you were once small in your own eyes, have you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel **18**and sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and devote to destruction the sinful Amalekites. Fight against them

until you have wiped them out.’ 19So why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you rush upon the plunder and do evil in the sight of the LORD?”

20“**But I did obey the LORD,**” Saul replied. **“I went on the mission that the LORD gave me. I brought back Agag king of Amalek and devoted the Amalekites to destruction. 21The troops took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of the things devoted to destruction, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal.”**

22**But Samuel declared:**

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obedience to His voice?

Behold, obedience is better than sacrifice, and attentiveness is better than the fat of rams.

23**For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance is like the wickedness of idolatry.**

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has rejected you as king.”

We are told in 1 SAMUEL 15:22 that the Lord desires obedience over sacrifice.

Some might say the Lord was harsh in his treatment of Saul. But Saul was being made into a mighty King – a King of God’s people and so the Lord required absolute obedience from him. Not kind of, not sort of. Absolute. The Lord required someone who would serve him and his chosen people with complete devotion. 100%

Fast forward. . . Saul is demoted and replaced. Replaced by whom? A mighty warrior? A prince? No. . .

READ 1 Samuel 16

Now the LORD said to Samuel, “How long are you going to mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have selected from his sons a king for Myself.”

2**“How can I go?” Samuel asked. “Saul will hear of it and kill me!”**

The LORD answered, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’ 3Then invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you are to do. You are to anoint for Me the one I indicate.”

4So Samuel did what the LORD had said and went to Bethlehem. When the elders of the town met him, they trembled and asked, “Do you come in peace?”

5“In peace,” he replied. “I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.”

Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. 6When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and said, “Surely here before the LORD is His anointed.”

7But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or height, for I have rejected him; the LORD does not see as man does. For man sees the outward appearance, but the LORD sees the heart.”

8Then Jesse called Abinadab and presented him to Samuel, who said, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.”

9Next Jesse presented Shammah, but Samuel said, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.”

10Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel told him, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.”

11And Samuel asked him, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” Jesse replied, “but he is tending the sheep.”

“Send for him,” Samuel replied. “For we will not sit down to eat until he arrives.”

12So Jesse sent for his youngest son and brought him in. He was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, “Rise and anoint him, for he is the one.”

13 So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. Then Samuel set out and went to Ramah.

And so we see here that the Lord replaced Saul with David. . .one who was small in stature. He was a shepherd boy, tending sheep.

But concealed within his chest was a heart after God’s own heart. He would show himself to be a fearless warrior. He was obedient and full of faith. He trusted the Lord time and time again. His

fear of the Lord was evident, and no he did not always choose wisely. There was that time – he committed adultery, and murder, and suffered the consequences that sin brings. . . remember the wages of sin are death. But he returned to the Lord in humility and brokenness. He was contrite and repentant. The Lord forgave him and restored him. He knew David’s heart.

What can we learn from Abraham, Saul and David?

Does he want our sacrifice? Or our obedience? Does he need our sword, or our heart? Does he delight in our self-made reliance? Or in our utter dependence on him?

We read the story of Abraham and it is easy to miss the point. God did not need Isaac to be sacrificed. He did not need Abraham to release his most precious son. This was not a test of Abraham’s giving. All that Abraham possessed was given to him by the Lord and Abraham knew this.

This was a test of Abraham’s trust. Do you trust me Abraham? Will you obey me Abraham even when it does not make sense? Even when you cannot see how it will resolve? Even if it hurts? And Abraham’s answer was YES. He did not hesitate to do ALL the Lord commanded. He did not hold back. He did not try to explain it to his servants or his son. He just did as he was instructed.

God does not need what we have. He does not require gifts and offerings. We bring our gifts as tokens of our great love for him. But what he desires is our obedience.

In a battle, in a war, the best soldiers are the ones who follow orders. I’m sure our soldiers in the room will agree.

The purpose of basic training is to transform civilians into soldiers; equipping them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and physical fitness to perform their duties as members of the military.

The Key Objectives of Boot Camp are:

- Physical Conditioning / Fitness
- Military and Combat Skills:
- Learning Discipline and Teamwork:
- Preparing Mental Toughness / Resilience
- Building Leadership and Communication skills

All of this training is critical for preparing recruits for the battles they will face, however, the single most important skill is ***following orders***. Without following orders, the rest falls apart.

You can have the most well equipped, best trained, most physically fit soldiers but if they do not obey, they are useless to the mission.

How does that relate back to us? How does this relate back to our relationship with God?

As you draw near to God, He will reveal more and more to you. He will instruct you. He will correct you. As you submit to him, he will show you even more. If you resist, there you will stay. Stuck in your resistance.

Obedience is the key that unlocks our growth in the Lord. As we obey, he leads us further. With each step, he meets us with more. More of what? More of him.

More revelation. More grace. More patience. More mercy. More forgiveness. More hope. More courage. More faith. More assurance. More endurance. More power. More strength. More persistence. More wisdom. More love.

If you want more, obey more. How??? Ask. Jesus said in:

Matthew 7:7-9

7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

9“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

The gifts our heavenly father wants to give us are so much more than food, or clothes or homes.

He knows we have need of those, and he will supply our need. Abraham recognized on that hill that the Lord is the God who provides. And indeed He does.

But what he desires from us is that we should seek to build his kingdom here on earth. How do we do that? We make His agenda, our agenda. What is His agenda? ***Ah. . . now we are asking the right questions.***

We must know Him, to know what pleases Him. We must seek Him to know Him.

We seek Him when we:

1. **PRAY:** Come to him in prayer time – alone and focused on Him. In the secret place. Praise him, thank him, just spend time with him. Don’t rush at him with all of your needs, your requests. Just visit.
2. **READ THE BIBLE:** Read his word. His words are LIFE and they are infused with him. Know his words and you will begin to know him.

3. FAST: Fasting from food denies the physical body (literally shuts off the noise of feed me, feed me) and fosters spiritual growth and intimacy as the spirit in you communes with God.
4. WORSHIP: When we sing and praise the Lord, our spirits tune into His Spirit. Our hearts align with his heart. The Bible says the Lord inhabits the praises of His people – so when we praise him, he is in our midst.

To obey is better than sacrifice. . . for some of us this is a hard word. For others this is easy. Every one of us is a work in progress and we are all in different stages of our sanctification. We are being made holy as we submit to him. We are being conformed into the image of Jesus. That is how the Lord has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind – through his redeemed children.

Obeying is not about being slaves, it is about being of service. Just like an army has little use for disobedient soldiers, the kingdom of God cannot be built by disobedient disciples.

When God called upon Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, he was asking Abraham, “Can I still count on you? Can I still trust you to obey me?” The answer was yes. When the Lord calls upon you, what will the answer be? Can he trust you to obey?

Long before David took down Goliath as a warrior, he killed a lion and a bear as a shepherd - while protecting his sheep. His courage, his faith and his obedience grew in increments. It was a process. Do not despise small beginnings – we are all in process.