

What God Wants From Me: Sacrifice

The season of Lent is a time in our spiritual lives in which we are to give up something for God.

When I first became a Christian, I wanted to do the right thing during Lent so I gave up something that was very near and dear to my heart: Code Red Mountain Dew.

I would drink two 20 ounce Code Reds a day coupled with a 12 ounce can here and there. I could drink that stuff cold or warm and felt like I had to have it to survive! Because of that kind of love and adoration, I decided to give up Code Red for lent. Just to make it so that I wouldn't cheat, I gave up all sodas. I figured if Jesus did all he did for me, I could certainly give up sodas and, <gulp>, Code Red!?

I felt the withdrawal immediately and I would be sluggish and grouchier than normal in the mornings. I would go in the convenience stores and see that delicious clear red drink calling my name. But I denied it's beckoning and continued on my fast.

Something happened though during my fast from Code Red: I started to feel funny when I would have something sweet. Like if I had some cake or candy bar, I would feel all gloomy.

As I was trying to figure out what was going on with me, I one day went to Chincoteague and had a triple scoop banana split from the Island Creamery just to really see if the sweet stuff was making me feel bad.

I thought that I would die! I have never felt so bad in my life after I ate that! I soon figured out that I had hypoglycemia, which is when the body processes sugar too fast. And I learned that I couldn't eat anything with sugar in it or any processed foods because they would make me feel gloomy.

I thought, God, I gave up Code Red for you and you take away everything sweet?! And so it has been over the last four years: no sweets for Todd.

I figured that God didn't see sweets as a part of what He wanted for me.

And that is the question that we are asking today: what does God want from me?

And what does God want from you?

I mean we know that God has sacrificed his son for me and for you. He did it because he loved us so much that he wanted to make a better way for you and I to have a relationship with him.

God sacrificed a lot for you and I.

So I ask: what have you sacrificed for God recently?

Before you answer that, let's take a look at Genesis 22. This is the story of Abraham sacrificing something very precious to him: his son Isaac.

But let's do a little back story here so that we can fully appreciate the magnitude of what Abraham did.

We find in Genesis 17 that God came and spoke to Abraham **17:1** When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. **2** Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

He also told Abraham to circumcise all the males in his household.

But how was God going to increase Abraham's numbers? He was 99 years old?

15 God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. **16** I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

17 Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?"

Abraham laughed at the impossibility of God's promise. He didn't laugh at God, but how unbelievably great it would be if this were to happen.

Abraham went home and was faithful and blameless by circumcising himself and his entire household.

One day, Sarah overheard Abraham's conversation with some men from God who said out loud that Sarah would bear a child.

What did she do? She laughed! This is a ninety year old woman who was thinking how absurd it would be physically for her to give birth at her age.

Fast forward to Genesis 21 and we find Sarah giving birth to Isaac at an old age. God keeps reminding Abraham of his promise that through Isaac, a great nation will be raised and the number of people will be great.

So, think about this: Isaac was a special boy. He was born to Abraham and Sarah while they were very old. Isaac was born because God made an unbreakable agreement with Abraham that this child would be the father of a great nation and that many people would come from him. This child was the instrument to fulfill God's covenant with Abraham.

All of this plus the fact that this was a son; a precious child born to Abraham and Sarah. A son that they loved just as any parent loves their own child.

We pick up the story in Genesis 22:1-10.

For three days, I cannot imagine what was going through the mind of Abraham. I am sure he was questioning whether he was doing the right thing or not. I can imagine that he was turning over and over in his head what it would be like to sacrifice Isaac. Surely Abraham was wondering how God was gonna pull through this one?!

Or was Abraham remembering what God told him before Isaac was even born: walk before me faithfully.

Abraham walked before God faithfully on his three day trek to Moriah. Abraham walked before God faithfully as he and his son walked alone up to the place where the sacrifice was to take place. Abraham walked before God faithfully as he bound

his son over the wood, pulled out the knife, and raised it above his head to deliver the final step in the ultimate test of someone's faith in God Almighty!

And I was making a big deal over Code Red Mountain Dew.

What have you sacrificed for God recently?

Why does it take the season of Lent for us to even think about giving up something...for 40 days...then we can go back to doing whatever it was we loved so much.

What have you sacrificed for God recently?

What does God want from us? He wants to be first in our lives at all times.

That requires us to sacrifice things that we may place more important than God Almighty.

Think for a moment and ask yourself this question and answer yourself honestly: what in your life do you place above spending time with God?

Think for yourself how much may have sacrificed to get where you are today.

Maybe you sacrificed extra time so that you could climb up the ladder at your job.

Perhaps you sacrificed personal time so that you could get really good at something you enjoyed. You might even have sacrificed buying coffee for a while so that you could save up to buy something you really wanted.

If we can sacrifice things in our lives for our jobs, our hobbies, our pleasures, our families, friends and loved ones, how come we find it so hard to sacrifice things for God?

Forgive me if I am stepping on your toes this morning but I am glad that I am if it helps to make you realize what you place your faith in.

Abraham did what he did because he walked before God faithfully.

We do what we do because we walk before ourselves faithfully.

It is time to walk before God faithfully.

Consider the things in your life that you place before God and decide to do two things with it.

Give it up. Abraham did what God told him to do because he walked faithfully before Him. But before Abraham could ever take that three day walk with his only son by his side unknowingly living his final days on Earth, Abraham had to give Isaac up in his heart and mind before he could take the first step out of his home. We have to do the same thing today. We have to think about what we place before God and make up our mind that it will no longer get in the way of our walking before God faithfully.

Whoever has ears to hear, I know that you have this thing blazing in your mind now that you know you place above God. The Holy Spirit is burning inside of your heart as I am speaking affirming that this thing is an idol to you in your life and you need to offer it up as a sacrifice to God right now.

You have got to give it up and the thought of doing so is making you uncomfortable. Maybe just a taste of how uncomfortable Abraham must have felt when he decided to give up his son for God.

Whatever that thing is, give it up for God.

Give it up for God, not for me and not for anyone else. Not even for yourself.

Yeah, sugar is not that good for me anyhow.

NO! Give it up for God.

Once you have done that, you have to give it over to God.

Take that thing and hand it over to God as a sacrifice to Him.

Say, "Here God, I don't want this thing anymore. I have allowed it and placed it above you in my life." Ask for forgiveness. And let him have it.

That is what God wants from us: he wants us to sacrifice anything that prevents us from having a close, personal relationship with him and anything that would get in the way of us walking before God faithfully and blameless.

Give it up and give it over.

Abraham gave up Isaac and gave Isaac over to God.

But that is not the end to the way God works in our sacrifices. When we willingly do whatever it takes to walk before God faithfully and be blameless, God blesses us in ways we never could imagine.

Genesis 22:11-18

God took Abraham's faithfulness and blessed him because of it.

God knows our hearts and God knows whether or not we are truly giving something up and giving something over to Him. God also knows if we are just giving something up for forty days just because it is Lent and it sounds like the right thing to do.

God knows our intent and God know whether we are walking before Him faithfully and God knows when we are blameless.

God takes our genuine giving up and giving over and blesses it.

While we have just focused on one story of some person walking before God faithfully by sacrificing something they deemed more important than God, there are many, many more examples.

Plus many examples living among us today.

I am one of them.

I don't know why God took sugar from me for many years or why I was diagnosed with hypoglycemia but I do know that I realized that Code Red was an idol and I gave it up and gave it over to God.

A drink. How insignificant is that compared to what God has done for me through his own sacrifice of his own son, Jesus Christ?

I am almost ashamed that I thought it was a big deal to give up a drink for God.

But I did, and God blessed it.

Now today, for some reason, God has allowed me to eat sugar again. I don't get all gloomy like I did and I've checked my sugar and it is level and normal.

But, I still have things that get in the way of my relationship with God as I am sure you do.

Today, let us all take a moment to take that thing and give it up for God.

Mentally, make up your mind to get rid of that thing that you place a higher value on than your relationship with God.

Give it up for God.

And then give it over.

That takes a physical action on our part.

Maybe it means to throw something away that has taken the place of an idol in your life. Maybe it means to change your schedule so that there is more time for you and God. Maybe it means for you to go somewhere different to avoid that thing or so somewhere where God is that you have been avoiding.

Whatever that thing is, you have to give it over physically once you have given it up for God.

Once you have done that, watch and wait for the blessings to come as you and I as we walk before God faithfully and without blame.