

Offering

[Genesis 22:1-14](#). [Romans 6: 12-23](#)

In the days of the silent movie, there were many films which offered variations on this scene: picture the evil kidnapper, with wild eyes and great delight, tying his helpless victim to the railway tracks as the train hurtles towards them. The cinema pianist heightens the tension with pulsating music as the camera focuses on the victim's silent cries for help.



The hero arrives, and, after winning a fight with the villain, releases the captive from the railway tracks just in the nick of time. The train might either come to a screeching halt inches from them as they embrace, with the driver emerging furiously only to witness this happy ending, or continue on its way, saved from causing a terrible accident without even realising it.

The audience are both thrilled by the excitement and delighted that the hero has won the day, the villain has been defeated and all is well.

This account of the near-sacrifice of Isaac doesn't work in the same way. Abraham, who goes so far as to tie his son up and raises a knife ready to kill him as a human sacrifice to God, is not a heartless villain. He is following God's instruction to take his son to a mountain top and "sacrifice him there as a burnt offering."

This offering would be hugely costly to Abraham. God describes Isaac as "your only son, whom you love", the promise of a future line of inheritance as well as his beloved son in the here and now. The death of Isaac would ruin all of this.



We don't hear whether Isaac cries out to his father as he is tied up and put onto the altar, ready to be burned. Abraham's knife is ready to carry out the killing blow. Did he do so through tears? How did he avoid the gaze of his son, who he loved? Did he trust, even at the moment when the knife was in the air and poised to sink into his son's flesh that God would provide a different way?

What is God up to? The first verse of the reading tells us that "God tested Abraham." Why would God put him to a test at all, and why in such a way as this? Why would God demand a human sacrifice like the pagan gods?

At the start of this unique covenant relationship between God and Abraham, God is examining the depths of trust which he desires from Abraham. This is the ultimate in stress-testing. God asks Abraham to offer him his most treasured possessions, to put before him all his hopes and expectations.

We are left in no doubt about the costliness of that sacrifice which Abraham was about to make. Yet despite the cost to himself, his son and the future of their family line, he was willing to make it. His offering is whole-hearted. His life, and that of his son, rest in faith in God alone.

As we read this story as twenty-first century Christians, we cannot avoid the echoes of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac with the full, final sacrifice of God's own Son, Jesus. "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love" are God's words for the special relationship between Abraham

and Isaac. As we read John 3:16, we see described a more profound Father-Son relationship: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son”. There was no sudden intervention, just in the nick of time, for the sacrifice of God’s only beloved Son Jesus for the whole of the world.

Or, as Paul puts it in Romans 8: 32: “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.”

In the testing of Abraham, God was not being cruel or capricious. It marks a step on a journey of love, in which despite the failings and falling away of human beings, God’s sacrificial love never wavers. He gave his one and only Son for us. He loves wholeheartedly.

This account of Abraham’s offering is full of challenges for us. Are there any parts of my life which I attempt to keep “off-limits” to God? Has my faith become bound up in routine and half-heartedness? In our reading from Romans 6, Paul writes: “but thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.” (v. 17)

You may find it helpful to reflect on these readings by simply sitting quietly with your hands resting on your lap, with your palms facing upwards. This gesture speaks both of giving and receiving. What would you like to offer to God today?

You might like to say or sing these verses from a familiar hymn:

Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord to thee;
take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my will, and make it thine:
it shall be no longer mine;
take my heart: it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord I pour
at thy feet its treasure-store;
take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879)

Hymn: [Take my life and let it be](#)

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ⁱ Image information

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The near sacrifice of Isaac: Die Bibel in Bildern von Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld. Leipzig: Georg Wigands, 1860.

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