



FOCUS VERSE

Genesis 22:5

And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

LESSON TEXT

Genesis 22:1–14

1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

5 And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.

7 And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

8 And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

9 And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

14 And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.



FOCUS THOUGHT

Worship is both the believer's privilege and responsibility.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Leftovers

Adab of this. A spoonful of that. Not enough to make a meal but too much to throw away. Sometimes it's hard to make a meal of leftovers, and we don't usually offer them to a guest since leftovers fail to represent our best. While they can certainly satisfy hunger in a pinch, most of us would choose a full, freshly prepared meal over leftovers.

In her hymn "Jesus Paid It All," Elvina Hall wrote, "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe." How easily we sing those words, often with hands raised and hearts full. But how much more difficult it is to carry out when we try to comprehend the weight of that second phrase, "all

to Him I owe." No, when it comes to living a life of worship unto the Lord, leftovers won't do. Just as God asked Abraham for his best in the sacrifice of Isaac, He asks no less of us today. From an excellent and dedicated performance on the job, to caring for our families or other possessions gifted to us by God, to church on Sunday, every action and motivation of our hearts must be offered in complete surrender and worship unto the Lord who demands all—our best.

Let us offer to God the finest gourmet meal with all the trimmings, for "all to Him [we] owe." Our best for His best!

OUTLINE

I. WHAT IS WORSHIP?

- A. Sacrifice
- B. Obedience
- C. Activity

II. WHY WE WORSHIP

- A. Because of Who He Is
- B. Because of What He Does

III. HOW WE WORSHIP

- A. With Our Whole Person
- B. With Our Substance
- C. By Ourselves and in Community

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Worship is more than something we do to receive blessings from God. It involves sacrifice—often seemingly costly and that does not make sense. It requires obedience, demonstrating that worship is a whole-life process, one that touches every action and thought. Worship proclaims God's attributes and witness to His greatness, His goodness, and His steadfast love.

Abraham demonstrated that worship is an act of trust, often performed in obedience to God's seemingly unreasonable calling and demands. Abraham leaned upon God's

record of faithfulness and blessing, even in the face of His command to sacrifice Isaac. In his book *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, Allan Ross wrote: "The truth of who God was came to Abraham through divine revelation by God himself. Yahweh was the living God; he was sovereign; he was the righteous judge, gracious and faithful."

As we walk by faith in obedience to God, living our whole lives as acts of worship and serving God and others, we too will reap the promises given in His Word.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. WHAT IS WORSHIP?

A. Sacrifice

In the ancient world in which Abraham lived, sacrifice to pagan gods was a regular part of worship. Thus when Abraham worshiped Jehovah, it was natural for him to build an altar and offer sacrifices to the true and living God. (See Genesis 12:7–8; 13:18; 22:9.) Although pagans in the ancient world might have offered sacrifices out of duty and obligation or to escape the wrath and judgment of their gods, Abraham offered sacrifices out of his sincere desire to please God with the gifts he gave.

Abraham's sacrifice was symbolic of his need for God and His goodness as the source of life. In this way, his sacrifice differed from pagan sacrifices offered to gods out of fear or because these gods needed to be placated in some way. Allan Ross wrote: "When Abraham built his altar to Yahweh (Genesis 12:7), it was no perfunctory religious act. Not only was it the spontaneous response of a heart of faith to an amazing revelation from God, but it was also a sincere act of worship, proclaiming gratitude to the one who had called him, devotion to the one who was now his God, and submission to the plan of the one who would bring blessing to the world."

Abraham's consistency in building altars and offering sacrifices at every location is worthy of note. Deities in the ancient world often consisted of statues or objects found in nature and thus were confined to a particular location. Because of this, worshipers of these gods had to travel to the location where their gods were housed in order to offer sacrifices.

God's command to "have no other gods before me" was unique to the ancient Near Eastern culture since it was assumed that as one moved from region to region, one would come under the authority of the deity or group of deities in that location. (See, for example, II Kings 18:33–35.) Abraham's decision to build altars as he traveled from location to location by God's command was symbolic of God's omnipresence. That God was to be worshiped wherever Abraham traveled was a bold proclamation that Jehovah was the true and living God of all the land and was not confined to one location.

B. Obedience

God's command to Abraham to sacrificially offer his son Isaac must have come as a shock to Abraham. God had promised Abraham a son in his old age and had followed through on that promise in the gift of Isaac. God's sudden request for Abraham to offer the son he loved as a burnt offering must have sent a wave of panic through Abraham. Surely his mind raced back to God's promises to him in Genesis 17:1–2: "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly."

Then, after Abram fell on his face, God continued in verses 4–6: "As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham: for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee."

Consider what might have transpired between verses two and three of Genesis 22. The text indicates Abraham "rose up early in the morning," meaning he must have endured a long night beforehand as he considered what God had commanded him to do. How would he tell Sarah? What would he tell his friends and neighbors who knew of the miraculous gift of Isaac to aging parents? How could he offer the gift that had filled his life with so much joy and hope?

Many questions must have swirled through Abraham's mind, yet the text indicates in verse 3 he "rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son." This remarkable level of trust in God was something Abraham had built based on God's revelation of Himself. That obedience to God would flow out of this revelation was natural and was demonstrated in Abraham's consistent acts of worship and sacrifice. Nothing less than total surrender and submission to God was required in Abraham's unprecedented act of obedience. Allan Ross wrote: "This sacrifice symbolized God's ownership of all things in Abraham's life—including Isaac."

As we read this story today, we have the privilege of knowing the ending, which tells us God would provide a substitute—a ram—in honor of Abraham's obedience. But apart from his choice to trust God's faithfulness, Abraham had no way of knowing the outcome. The writer of Hebrews captures this tension, writing in 11:17–19: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

What confusion Abraham must have felt as he obeyed the command to give back that which God had promised! Abraham's faith demonstrated he trusted that God would fulfill His promises even in the face of Isaac's death. Allan Ross continued: "Although Abraham never actually sacrificed Isaac, his obedience and willingness to do so—his offering of his own desires and wishes—became the sacrifice. The ram became the symbolic expression of Abraham's obedience and submission to God's command." (See Psalm 40:6–8.)

C. Activity

The story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac demonstrates a whole-life concept of worship, one that encompasses all of one's being. Although Abraham's obedience grew out of his faith and willingness of heart, his actions also demonstrated a life wholly devoted to the worship of God. When referencing worship, the Old Testament most frequently uses the Hebrew word *histahawa*, which means to prostrate oneself before a superior. Although most English translations render this word simply as *worship*, the Old Testament writers understood the idea of physically prostrating oneself before God. In Genesis 22:5 when Abraham told his servants, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you," the word *histahawa*, translated as "worship," was used to signify his prostration before the Lord. Given it was not uncommon to bow before pagan deities, which he had formerly worshiped, this act of prostration would not have been foreign to Abraham and was a natural part of his worship of Jehovah.

The Old Testament frequently references systems of religious worship such as building altars or other rituals practiced by various groups. Closely connected with these ritual activities is the idea of service, which is represented by the Hebrew word *abad*, meaning "to serve." The idea connected to this kind of service is that the person works to advance the agenda of a superior by doing certain acts or by living according to another's will.

Here we see the connection between Abraham's obedience of heart and its expression in his worshipful actions of building an altar, stacking it with wood, binding Isaac, and laying him on the altar. His ultimate act was

taking the knife to slay his son in obedience to Jehovah. However, when God saw that Abraham fully intended to slay Isaac, He intervened. An angel called to Abraham and told him not to kill his son. When Abraham looked behind him, he saw a ram that God had provided. Abraham sacrificed the ram in place of Isaac.

By dedicating the actions of sacrificial offerings and prostration to the worship of the one true God, Abraham directed worship to its rightful recipient. The outward manifestation of Abraham's obedience proclaimed his loyalty to the worship of God alone.

II. WHY WE WORSHIP

A. Because of Who He Is

Abraham demonstrated that worship was a response to God, who commanded him to separate himself and move into the land He had promised. At every stop along the way, Abraham was careful to build an altar and worship God through sacrifice and obedience. Having been called out from the pagan society in which he lived, Abraham separated himself, following God wherever He commanded, choosing to believe God's promise of provision and blessing. Time and again as God revealed himself in covenant relationship, Abraham obeyed, building altars and sacrificing to God. (See Genesis 12:8; 15:7–21.) God was a God of covenant relationship, keeping seemingly impossible promises to Abraham. As he continued to worship and obey God, Abraham came to know Him as the covenant-keeping God, provider, sustainer, deliverer, and friend.

Abraham came to know God in real time, not having the treasure of Scripture we know and cherish today. We find in His Word a God who is faithful. "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

Jeremiah wrote: "Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: if those ordinances depart from before

me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever” (Jeremiah 31:35–36). God’s covenant devotion would cease to exist only if the moon and stars disappeared. The God who made these ultimate promises to Israel is the God whom we serve today!

In addition to His faithfulness, God is King of kings and Lord of lords, sovereign over all the earth. His supreme authority, control, and power over all the earth is demonstrated over and over in His Word. II Chronicles 20:6 states, “O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?” In a beautiful hymn of praise, David testified to God’s greatness and authority: “As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all” (Psalm 103:15–19).

In addition to His faithfulness and sovereignty, perhaps the most beautiful attribute of all is God’s unfailing love to us, His people. As we read the history of Israel, Scripture bears witness to God’s unfailing mercy rooted in His great love for His people despite the many times they broke His covenant. Yet even in the middle of their unfaithfulness and subsequent judgment, God made promises to restore His people, to return them to their lands and cities, to give them crops, herds, healthy children, and prosperity.

“For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. . . . For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be

removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee” (Isaiah 54:7–8, 10).

As we read these passages, we understand they were written for God’s people at a specific time and under specific circumstances. And yet as we bring the brokenness and failures of our lives before God today, we can look back to these writings and know this same God is our God! The faithfulness, sovereignty, and unfailing love with which He cared for His people so long ago is available and freely offered to us today. This is who He is and will always be!

B. Because of What He Does

God’s faithfulness to Israel resulted in His saving acts. Time and again He delivered them from their oppressors (Exodus 14); provided food, shelter, and clothing (Exodus 15–16); and led them into the Land of Promise. Psalms 105 and 106 document in song the journeys of Israel and God’s faithful acts of deliverance and provision. In Psalm 103:1–5, David captured God’s faithful actions:

“Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”

God, who does not change, is still the God who heals, redeems, shows mercy, provides, and renews.

God is also a God of justice, pledging Himself on behalf of the needy and afflicted. “I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor” (Psalm 140:12). In the Book of Isaiah, after chastising Israel for simply going through the motions of sacrifice and service in His Temple, God commanded them to wash their hands in repentance, put away evil, and “learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:17).

That God was a God of the needy, oppressed, and lowly was perhaps one of the most striking differences in comparison to pagan gods of the day. In the ancient Near East, the help of these false gods was promised only to the upper class and those who were wealthy enough to bring generous offerings in order to appease the gods and be worthy of blessing. That Jehovah was a God of the downtrodden, the afflicted, and the outcast further set Him apart, making Him unique from all other deities of the day.

III. HOW WE WORSHIP

A. With Our Whole Person

That worship was a whole-life orientation is demonstrated over and over in the life of ancient Israel. Every ritual, the food they ate, the clothing they wore, even the very arrangement of their tents around the centrally placed Tabernacle, demonstrated that God was at the center of all of life. Deuteronomy 6:4–5 captures this call to dedication: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”

In Luke 10:27, Jesus repeated the command in Deuteronomy: “And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.” Jesus’ words call us to a holistic life of worship: with our emotions, our very lives, our physical bodies in service to God and others, and our intellect as we study and grow in order to better serve. Later, Paul picked up on this command in Romans 12:1 where he called his readers to present themselves as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

B. With Our Substance

A part of living a life of holistic worship is to honor God with our substance. Proverbs 3:9 states, “Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase.” That God has blessed us with our possessions is found throughout Scripture, along with the command to honor God by giving back a portion of them to the Lord. In Malachi 3:8–10, God reprimanded the people for

essentially “robbing” God by not bringing their tithes and offerings “into the storehouse.” To give tithes and offerings is a symbolic gesture of gratitude that declares to others our total dependence on God, not only for our money and possessions, but for the ability He has given us to work and to prosper.

Perhaps one of the greatest misconceptions related to paying tithes and offerings is that we will automatically become wealthy and want for nothing. Malachi 3:11–12 corrects this misconception when God stated: “And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.” Though we have to work for our possessions, God has promised provision and blessing in these labors as well as favor with our superiors and those who surround us.

C. By Ourselves and in Community

As Christians, we are called to worship God both individually and corporately. Individual worship is found throughout Scripture, but especially in many of the psalms, which function as prayers sung to God. These songs were deposited in the Temple and were used repeatedly as worshipers came to bring their offerings to the Lord. Whether songs of praise, confession, lament, or thanksgiving, these individual acts of worship repeatedly demonstrated the need to honor God in all of life, regardless of circumstances. These times of individual worship were a natural outgrowth of times of corporate worship and instruction in which the people learned the history of God’s faithfulness and submitted themselves to memorizing His laws and principles for living.

Both the Old and New Testaments reinforce the idea of worshiping God in community. This can be seen in the Psalms of Ascents (Psalms 120–135) that were sung in community as the people journeyed to Jerusalem. In the New Testament, the metaphors of the “body” (Romans 12:5) and the “building” (Ephesians 2:21) indicate a sense of unity among many parts, all coming together to perform one function of worship and service to God and each other. As we come together in worship,

we are reminded of our mission to be salt and light to the world, together as the body of Christ. We also fulfill Paul's command to submit ourselves to one another, being accountable and supportive of our brothers and sisters in Christ. (See Ephesians 5:21.)

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

As seen in the life of Abraham, worship encompasses all of life. God calls us to lives of obedience, often requiring sacrifice, as we center our lives around who He is and what He has done and will do. Giving of our emotions, our physical strength, our intellect, and our lives, we serve as witnesses to the world

of God's great love and sacrifice for mankind. As we offer ourselves, we can recall from Scripture God's faithful, covenant love for Israel, a love and faithfulness also promised to us.

Offering ourselves as "living sacrifices" might place us in difficult situations as we obediently follow God's calling in our lives. But the God of covenant love who made seemingly impossible promises to Abraham will also keep His promises to us, faithfully providing and keeping His promise never to leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). May we continue to follow faithfully after God, living lives of worship to Him and being witnesses of Him that we, as Abraham, may one day be called friends of God.

REFLECTIONS

- Today's lesson on worship in the life of Abraham demonstrates that even though God sometimes asks of us things that seem impossible, He will provide the means to accomplish the task and bring blessings in the process. Has this proven to be true in your life? If so, share an instance when this has happened.

- Is trust in God a choice? How is trusting God an act of worship? Share a time when you chose to trust God even though it might not have made sense at the time.

- Our acts of service, both directly to God and to others, are received by God as worship. Does viewing acts of service as worship change the way you feel about the concept?

- We worship God because He has proven Himself to be faithful. Read Jeremiah 31:35–36. How can God's record of loving faithfulness to His people in the Old Testament strengthen our faith in Him in our own circumstances?

- Read Psalm 103:1–5 and discuss how God has been faithful to forgive, heal, redeem, show unconditional love, and give peace. Can you share a specific time when any of these were true in your life?

- How has worshipping with your brothers and sisters in community strengthened your times of private worship at home?