

What Are You Willing To Give (Up)?

Angela Pound

Identity, Purpose, Belonging / Give / John 3:16–21; 2 Corinthians 8:8–15; Genesis 22:1–19

Notes

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Pg. 140 Who Am I Lord? (Luke 11:11-13)

What is the best thing you have ever given someone you love?

You see, I asked myself this question recently and I struggled at first to think about my answer, not because I haven't given people I love something but I couldn't think of what was one of the best things.

I thought about one of the last baby showers I went to and how I spent time learning how to knit so that I could knit a blanket, slippers, and mittens for a close high school friend who was having her first baby. Yes, these were material items, but they represented hours that I spent thinking about her and her new baby and wanting to do something special for her, but I do not always have this kind of opportunity.

As my children have gotten older I have loved more the giving of my time. You see when they were little most of my days revolved around dropping them to day care or getting them ready for school, heading to work, picking them up

on the way home, getting supper together, some nights heading out to one of their activities, coming home and getting them to bed by 7, then being stationed at home I would often work on a course in the evening while doing dishes, laundry or whatever else the house needed and then repeating each day. But now as they've gotten older they can sometimes come with us when we volunteer our time.

A moment I remember fondly over the last number of years was one Christmas surprising Mark's dad by driving down to Maine after school our last day before Christmas break. Since he wasn't well enough to come to Nova Scotia then to see us for Christmas as he usually does. We arrived late in the evening, knocking on the door, yelling we were carolers at their door to sing some Christmas carols at which the door opened and there were huge smiles all around.

Some people give because they want to show of their gratitude towards someone or to say that they are thinking of them. Some give because they want to help others. Some give because it's their family or religious tradition. Some give because they want to make their community a better place. When you give, you give more than just the item that you've wrapped, or the money placed in a card, or your time - no there's so much more, you're giving a piece of you saying, that while this is something you could

use: time, item or money, you are instead giving it to them out of love and appreciation.

The passages for today come from Genesis 22:1-19 and 1 Samuel 3 and I want to do something slightly different this week by mainly focusing on a similarity between these two passages.

Genesis 22 is the story of Abraham's faith and obedience when God commands him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. The chapter highlights themes of testing, trust, and ultimate surrender to God's will, a powerful narrative to reflect on in the context of giving and sacrifice leading up to Christmas with the beginning of advent next week.

God says to Abraham, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." Here the Lord is requiring Abraham to let go of the future by offering Isaac as a sacrifice. And in this case, there is no offering of a reward. In the first commandment from the Lord Abraham is told that God will make a great nation of him, Here, there are no rewards listed on the condition of obedience, and the demand is even much more difficult.

And Abraham chooses the Giver over the gift. He relies on God to make good on his promise.

Hannah prays earnestly for a child to God in 1 Samuel

saying 1 Samuel 1:11 “O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.”” The Lord answers this prayer in the birth of a child, Samuel, who Hannah dedicates back to the Lord in 1 Samuel 1:24–28 “When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, “Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord.” She left him there for the Lord.”

Put yourself in the situation of Abraham or Hannah. You have been waiting so long to have a child. You may have even reached the point in your life where you’ve given up on having one as Abraham had with Sarah. You then finally have the child God has been promising and you’re willing to let them go. Abraham willing to follow God’s command to sacrifice his son Isaac and Hannah, giving Samuel back

to God.

I can only speak as a mom, but I'm assuming as most parents, that would be extremely difficult, if not near impossible, to let go of your own child. I would do anything to save my child's life, not to sacrifice them, like Abraham. No where else does God ask someone to sacrifice their own child. As a mom, I'm sure you would be honored, in Hannah's case, of the work your child is doing and that he would go on to become the spiritual leader of Israel, but you would still miss him, but at least God didn't ask you to sacrifice him in his death like he did to Abraham. I would struggle enough with what Hannah did, but to go a step further to what Abraham was asked of. I don't know.

But there are three words that are repeated in both stories, and in fact they are repeated three times in the story of Abraham and three times in the story of Samuel. Can anyone guess what they are?

In the story of Abraham he has a voluntary attitude. It is recorded of him saying, Here I Am, three times throughout this passage. First in verse 1, Genesis 22:1 "After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." Then in verse 7, Genesis 22:7 "Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" and lastly in verse 11, Genesis 22:11 "But the angel of the Lord

called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!”
And he said, “Here I am.””

Here I Am. The Hebrew word, (hin-nay'), which means, lo! behold! In response to a call, here it indicates the readiness of the person addressed to listen or obey, Here I am ! (literally Behold me!), which is interestingly also the word found in Samuel’s story, three times as well.

The number 3 in the Bible, recurrently marks divine intervention, completeness, and spiritual significance. Three, *shelosh*, *sheloshah* means harmony, new life, and completeness.

The number three appears in the Bible over 400 times, fewer than seven but more than most of the other symbolically important numbers. It is often used to describe the intensity of something. It’s not just holy. It’s holy, holy, holy.

The number 3 frequently appears in contexts of testing and affirmation in the Bible. For example, Peter denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed, yet later affirmed his love for Jesus three times. Jesus was tempted by Satan three times in the wilderness, each time rebuffing the temptation, which emphasizes his spiritual fortitude and readiness for his ministry.

So, are you ready? Are you ready? Are you ready?

Today is the last Sunday of our Fall Series on our Identity, Purpose, and Belonging in Christ. I remember when God initially asked me to apply for the position here and I was so nervous because I didn't think I could do it. How on earth could I write a message every week, it takes me long enough to sit down and write a paper for a class and I don't have to do that every week, and then God pointed me towards the younger children's book series they are reading this fall to follow along with loosely. I still didn't know how things were going to go, and often every week when I sit down to see what God is asking me to say, things go in a different direction than I initially believed they would, but it's incredible. I try to keep saying, Here I Am Lord.

If we reflect on these last 13 weeks, we've looked at how with Jesus we don't give up, we have talents, we share, we tell the truth, we are thankful, we are wise, we are kind, we love, we are brave, we are calm, and today we give.

God asks for a giving spirit, to say, Here I Am....and you know you may think, but I don't always have that, but God will work with what you're willing to let go of, he wants more, but if you let go, it's incredible to see what he can do. I don't say this so that you are off the hook from giving of yourself too much, but if you're really struggling with giving the importance is to start. I remember listening to someone preach one time where they said, God wants

more than just your 5 minutes, or whatever you can give him, and while, yes I agree, if that's where you can start, the important thing is to start, and it's incredible what God can do.

A few cases in point: Mark and I were both called scrooges by our families when we were younger. We were often the ones who would hang onto our money, not using it for anything, but instead saving it up. I continued this into adulthood, but it became almost idolistic. How much could I hang onto? How much could I make? For me, I could give away my time, more than my money, so I had to force myself to give money. Was it with a giving spirit? No, not initially. But the more I forced myself, yes at the beginning I would say I forced myself, the more I developed a giving spirit and saw the blessing that came through it and how God always provided. You see, don't beat yourself up when you think you might not have exactly the attitude God wants you to have at the very beginning, if you're not as willing to give or say Here I Am, as Abraham or Samuel, God would rather you start than do nothing at all.

And while giving of money is important, as I've found over the years, money comes and goes, but one thing you can't ever get back is time. I would argue that giving of our time is the most important thing. Yes, God wants us to give our money to further His kingdom, but giving of our time can see even greater results. Our kids don't often talk about

what people have given them in terms of monetary or material things, but they will often talk about the time they have spent with someone. They enjoy our more family oriented, camping trips where we, together as a family, spend time together, electronic free, sometimes electricity free, with not always a schedule to be had, but just to be in existence with each other.

I got post partum depression after the birth of Madi, and struggled to sleep, which if you're one who struggles to sleep, you know how important sleep is for your entire system. It was years of being awake for hours every night, to then go to work in the morning, exhausted. Things were getting worse and I didn't know what to do. There was a point in my life when I decided to give this time to God. This was going to be my prayer time, my reading Scripture time, listening to other sermons and Christian podcasts, and I would do this for hours in the middle of the night until I would finally be tired enough that I could get a couple more hours sleep before heading to work. My outlook on the days started to change when I gave this time to God every single night. I didn't dread the sleepless hours anymore, but wondered what I would hear from God. And eventually, years later, it got to the point that I was back sleeping through the nights and missed this time, that I then would set an alarm to wake up earlier than I needed to so that I could still have this opportunity with

God.

Or the year God asked me to help with VBS and I didn't want to. It was the only week I had in the whole year where I had a break from my kids at home and a break from my school kids, that I didn't want to give that up. But I had no idea of the blessings God had in store for me through that small sacrifice of my time, and where He would lead me from that.

Or, the amount of people who thought I was crazy giving up a full time teaching career with all the benefits last March to go back to school full time, not knowing how we were going to provide for ourselves as a family. Some days, I thought I was crazy too. But, once again, I had no idea of what God had in store, that had I not made the decision to leave my teaching career before anything else was on the radar, I wouldn't necessarily be where I am today. I had to take the leap of faith first.

So, what is the best thing I ever gave someone I love? I realized the best thing I ever gave was Jesus my heart, my life and when I actually recognized what that meant my life changed.

Jesus gave the ultimate sacrifice....his life. He was a blessing to us on Earth, and showed us what we were to be as humans, and then died for our sins so that we could have eternal life with God....time that never ends.

It is through this that I have been so blessed and have come to see my worth as a child of God, that I am His. His chosen child, just like each one of you, and it is through this that I have come to recognize more the blessings he has placed throughout my life, when I give it all to him, and to share it with those around me. He has great dreams for each one of you, sometimes you need to let go of whatever it is you're holding onto and give it all to Him to really see. To say, Here I Am!

So, at the end of this series, seek God, know who you are, where you belong and the purpose God has placed on your life. God doesn't need anything from you, but He wants You. What are you willing to give God as in Hannah's story, what are you willing to give up to God as in Abraham's story. What are you willing to give to say Here I Am, Lord.