

## The Love for a Son

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Kate Barker was like most mothers. She loved her children, but she had some issues. She had four sons and she would attend church where she lived - a small town in Oklahoma. Her love for her sons made her blind to the fact that they needed discipline. The four sons became wild and started to get into minor crimes. Her pastor warned her about her sons, but her love for her sons made her blind to the issue. The minor crimes then started to become major crimes. One of the sons shot a police officer during a robbery and killed himself before he could be arrested. The other boys went to prison and after they served their time, they came back home to Ma Barker (new name for Kate). Now, Ma and the boys became the Barker Gang and they started a ring of crimes all over the United States during the 1920's and 30's. Ma would do anything to keep her sons close at hand. They were engaged with bank robbers, payroll and post-office robbers, and kidnappings. The FBI had to get involved and caught one of the boys in Chicago. He would go to prison and would later be killed trying to escape. The FBI caught up with the rest in Florida and had a massive shootout with Ma Barker and with what sons she had left on January 16, 1935. Ma and one son would be killed. Ma Barker would die with a machine gun clutched in her hands. The last son would serve 25 years in prison and when he got out, his wife killed him. Ma Barker's love for her sons became a passion for her. Some say it drove her to madness. Ma Barker, a church member turned gang leader. It's amazing how easy it is to turn away from God and not even know it till it's too late. You see, Ma's love for her sons replaced the love she had for her Lord. As a Christian, we have to be careful we don't fall into the same trap. We can become consumed by something to the point where it destroys our relationship with the Lord. Let's take a look at a story in the Bible that may shine a light on this issue.

Let's turn to Genesis 22: 1 – 19 where we read this, “**22** After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” <sup>2</sup> He said, “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 of which I shall tell you.” <sup>3</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men

with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. <sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. <sup>5</sup> Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy<sup>a</sup> will go over there and worship and come again to you." <sup>6</sup> And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. <sup>7</sup> And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" <sup>8</sup> Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

<sup>9</sup> When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup> Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>12</sup> He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." <sup>13</sup> And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. <sup>14</sup> So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide";<sup>b</sup> as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."<sup>c</sup>

<sup>15</sup> And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven <sup>16</sup> and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his<sup>d</sup> enemies, <sup>18</sup> and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." <sup>19</sup> So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba. (Biblegateway – ESV)

Here we have Abraham, an old man who had to wait many years till he and Sarah could have a child. They were beyond child bearing years, but God supplied their need and Sarah gave birth to Isaac. We can say it was a miracle from God. Now, we come to a story where God tells Abraham to go to a mountain in Moriah (about 50 miles from his camp) and offer their only son as a sacrifice. Think about that for a moment. God is telling Abraham to take this child that both Abraham and Sarah had dreamed and hoped for years to go and offer him as a burnt offering on a mountain close to what would later become Jerusalem. This doesn't



seem fair. They had to wait so long for this son only to have him offered as a burnt offering. The other thing I find interesting here is that God told Abraham to offer his son as a burnt offering which was done by pagan nations who didn't worship the one and only true God. Why would God ask such a thing from Abraham? Then, we find in Scripture that Abraham doesn't question God on this. He just gets up and goes it. He even supplies the material for the burnt offering, including the fire that would destroy his only son. Abraham was a special person. He is described well in the New Testament where we find this about Abraham in Hebrews 11: 8 – 19. <sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. <sup>11</sup> By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

<sup>13</sup> These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

<sup>17</sup> By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, <sup>18</sup> of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." <sup>19</sup> He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Abraham had faith that God would do another miracle. The Hebrew writer tells us that Abraham has set an example to us on what faith in God really means. Abraham didn't question God out loud from what we read in Genesis. Abraham goes and does what God told him to do – Abraham was obedient. He believed God would work it out somehow because God had promised Abraham (Genesis 17), he would be the father to many nations and he couldn't be that without sons. When we read this story, we always label it as a faith and obedient story and it is. However, I believe there is something else that can be learned here.

Let's go back to Genesis 22. I wonder why the Lord tested Abraham in this way? In Genesis 15: 6 we read, "And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (ESV). So, Abraham was righteous and we know he had faith because he left his land and traveled till the Lord told him to stop which required great faith. So, I think there is more to this. God makes an interesting statement to Abraham when God tells him to offer up his son as a burnt offering. In verse 2 of Genesis 22, we read, "God said, '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 of which I shall tell you. (ESV)'" We usually focus on the second half of this verse, but we need to look at the first half. God tells Abraham to take his son, "whom you love" and offer him as a burnt offering. The KJV has the term "lovest". God made it a point here about the love Abraham had for his son. The Hebrew term for lovest is "ahab" which means love, friendly love, covenant loyalty (Strong's Concordance). This is a strong term because of "covenant loyalty". God had made a covenant with Abraham in chapter 15 and in 17. God had charged Abraham in verse 1 of chapter 17 that Abraham was to walk before God and be blameless. Abraham's son was part of the covenant God had made with Abraham which would give birth to the nation Israel. This is important because Jesus' human father, Joseph, came from the line of Abraham (Matthew 1). God was loyal to the covenant to Abraham out of love. Now, God makes it a point to say how Abraham loved his son to the point of covenant loyalty (lovest). In other words, had Abraham started to love his son as much as God? This was Abraham's only son and Isaac was a miracle. Could Abraham love for his son have started to hurt his relationship with his God? How God uses this term "lovest" makes you wonder. We had talked about Ma Barker at the beginning on how her love for her sons consumed her to the point where God was less than secondary. We have to understand that Abraham was to love God more than anything including his son Isaac. This is hard for us to understand at times. However, when we love God with everything we have, His love flows through us and we can love people in a healthy way through His love (through Holy Spirit), not human love. When we put God down the list of who we should love first, we start to depend on human love instead of Godly love. I believe God may have been testing Abraham's love portion of faith. Remember, faith is believing, trusting, and loving the Lord.



Why would God do this type of test on Abraham? In Exodus 34: 14, we read, "for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (EVS). Also, we read this in Deuteronomy 4: 23 – 24, "Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which He made for you and make a carved image, the form of anything that the Lord your God has forbidden you. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. (ESV)" We read it twice here and it's important for us to know our God is a jealous God. God was jealous for Abraham and He put him on a test to help Abraham to stay focused on his love for God. Now, we have a problem with this term "jealous". We have to understand that the Hebrew term used both times is not the same type of word we are used to. The definition for the jealous we are used to is feeling or showing suspicion of someone's unfaithfulness in a relationship or fiercely protective or vigilant of one's rights or possessions (Oxford). The Hebrew term of the English term of "jealous" is "qanna". This Hebrew term is special because it is only used for God. His "jealous" is different from our human "jealous". In Hebrew, it means focusing on His desire for exclusive relationship (Strong's Concordance). In other words, God does not want anything to get in the way of a total loving relationship with Him. That means there is to be no idols in our life and those idols can come in any shape and size. In fact, an only son can become an idol for a parent. I'm not saying you don't love your children; you should love them. However, they can't take away the love we should have with God. Jesus makes it very plain to us in Matthew 22: 37, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the Prophets. (ESV)" The Greek term for "neighbor" means for someone close by (Strong's Concordance). You see, God wanted an exclusive or undivided relationship with Abraham. We were created to have this kind of relationship with our Lord. Isn't it great to read how Abraham loved God. Abraham loved his son and we know this because God tells us that in Scripture. However, that love didn't consume Abraham to the point where it took away or replaced loving God. Abraham obeyed God and was willing to set his son on fire for God. God was number one in Abraham's life and his example of faith proves it.

Now, we have to ask ourselves this thorny question. Do we love our Lord the same way as Abraham did? Have we allowed something to become an idol that has allowed our love for Jesus to cool or to the point of being replaced by that idol. This can be anything. Our love for money, children (like for Ma Barker), our job, our retirement, a spouse, our hobbies, and the list can go on and on. God's desire is for an exclusive / undivided relationship with us. However, we are like Abraham, we have a choice to make. What is number one in your life today. For Ma Barker, it was her four sons. For Abraham, God was number one and God considered him righteous. If the Lord is not one number in your life, ask for His Spirit to unhardened your heart to allow His love to fully flow through so you can love God in the right way and then you'll be able to love people the right way. That is God's desire for you. That is what you were made for.

*ESV – The Holy Bible. Crossway: Wheaton, 2016.*