

Be a Man After God's Heart: Study Nine
Sacrifice

*"But King David replied to Araunah, 'No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the LORD what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing.'"*¹

In 1 Chronicles 21, David finds himself in the midst of a pain-filled situation after stumbling once again. David has decided to take a census of the fighting men. Although we don't find direct evidence of a command against counting the people in the Torah, the problem may have been "either David's motivation for the census or the manner in which it was carried out."² He might have wanted to know the number of fighting men he commanded to feed his pride and increase self-reliant confidence or he might have neglected the Torah's injunction to pay a half-shekel ransom for each enrolled male.³ Either way, we know that Joab, the commander, protested strongly, asking David, "Why does my lord want to do this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?"⁴ And later we read, "this command was also evil in the sight of God..."⁵

This time, however, a prophet did not need to come and call David to account. "David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O LORD, I beg

you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing."⁶ David recognized his own guilt and confesses it to the Lord, begging for mercy and repenting of the attitude of his heart. While repentance negates the necessary spiritual consequences of sin (rather than allowing us to remain separated we are reconciled to God), it does not often negate natural consequences. David faced an excruciating decision. Nonetheless, he chose wisely, knowing "[the Lord's] mercy is very great" and far better than leaving himself and his people to the judgment of men.⁷

The Lord then sent an angel to execute this judgment resulting in the deaths of 70,000 men. David is devastated by the horrible consequences of his disobedience and pleads with God, saying:

Was it not I who ordered the fighting men to be counted? I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? O LORD my God, let your hand fall upon me and my family, but do not let this plague remain on your people.

He humbly intercedes on behalf of the people and declares his willingness to sacrifice greatly on their behalf. He displays God's shepherd heart - brokenhearted by the suffering and peril his sheep are facing. The word of the Lord comes almost immediately to David through the prophet Gad, instructing

¹ 1 Chronicles 21:24

² The New American Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel p. 475

³ Exodus 30:12

⁴ 1 Chronicles 21:3

⁵ 1 Chronicles 21:7

⁶ 2 Samuel 24:10

⁷ 1 Chronicles 21:13

him to build an altar where the destroying angel stopped, at the threshing floor of Araunah. His love for God, his renewed desire to obey, and his love for the people prompted him to act quickly regardless of the cost, to do what could be done to spare the lives of his “sheep.”

The mount where Araunah’s threshing floor stood is significant in Israel’s sacrificial history. It was on this same mount that Abraham went to offer his son, Isaac, in obedience to the Lord’s command; it is here that David’s son, Solomon, will build the great temple to the Lord, where sacrifices will be made to atone for the sins of the people; and it is symbolic of that hill outside Jerusalem where our Savior was crucified as the ransom for us to become sons of God. But at this moment, David has been commanded to build an altar, so he immediately goes and seeks to purchase the designated land so that he may obey. Araunah offers him everything he needs, free of charge. But David recognizes the necessity of value in sacrifice. He realizes that if the altar and the offering aren’t worth something to him, they won’t be worth anything to God either. Sacrifice is defined as “an act of offering to a deity something precious, [or] destruction or surrender of something for the sake of something else.”⁸ David rejected the “easy way out,” understanding that a “free” offering is not a true sacrifice.

The most well beloved heroes always sacrifice something precious to accomplish their quest, to serve, and to protect those they love: their time, their comfort, their bodies, or even their lives. Nothing valuable can be gained without sacrifice.

⁸ “Sacrifice.” Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 17 January 2013.

Jesus, likewise, knew there was no “easy way out” to reconcile you to Himself and guarantee your adoption as a son, so he didn’t look for one. He voluntarily surrendered His heavenly wealth, the acknowledgement of His deity, and even His life to spare the lives of His sheep. Obedience to God is characterized by sacrifice; to be like Jesus it must be embraced rather than avoided. “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”⁹

The question, then, is what does sacrifice look like for you today? How can you be a man who is unwilling to offer God something which costs you nothing? Paul and the writer of Hebrews give us some direction in this. In Romans 12:1, Paul beseeches the brothers to present their bodies as living sacrifices to God – laying down their pride, their ambitions, and their rights to accomplish all that God had for them to do. He says this is our “spiritual act of worship.” The literal translation says this is our service to God – just as the priests performed service before God in the tabernacle and temple – it is God-ordained worship, or the service God desires. Likewise, in Hebrews 13:15-16, we are exhorted to “continually offer a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess His name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” Because of Christ’s sacrifice, our thankful hearts and renewed minds should rejoice in the opportunity to sacrifice our time, energy and resources to rescue the lost through making Him known.

⁹ 1 John 3:16, John 15:13

Scripture Reading: NIV

1 Chronicles 21:1-28

Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. 2 So David said to Joab and the commanders of the troops, "Go and count the Israelites from Beersheba to Dan. Then report back to me so that I may know how many there are." 3 But Joab replied, "May the Lord multiply his troops a hundred times over. My lord the king, are they not all my lord's subjects? Why does my lord want to do this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?" 4 The king's word, however, overruled Joab; so Joab left and went throughout Israel and then came back to Jerusalem. 5 Joab reported the number of the fighting men to David: In all Israel there were one million one hundred thousand men who could handle a sword, including four hundred and seventy thousand in Judah. 6 But Joab did not include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering, because the king's command was repulsive to him. 7 This command was also evil in the sight of God; so he punished Israel. 8 Then David said to God, "I have sinned greatly by doing this. Now, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing." 9 The Lord said to Gad, David's seer, 10 "Go and tell David, 'This is what the Lord says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.'" 11 So Gad went to David and said to him, "This is what the Lord says: 'Take your choice: 12 three years of famine, three months of being swept away before your enemies, with their swords overtaking you, or three days of the sword of the Lord – days of plague in the land, with the angel of the Lord ravaging every part of Israel.' Now then, decide how I should answer the one who sent me."

13 David said to Gad, "I am in deep distress. Let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is very great; but do not let me fall into human hands." 14 So the Lord sent a plague on Israel, and seventy thousand men of Israel fell dead. 15 And God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. But as the angel was doing so, the Lord saw it and relented concerning the disaster and said to the angel who was destroying the people, "Enough! Withdraw your hand." The angel of the Lord was then standing at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. 16 David looked up and saw the angel of the Lord standing between heaven and earth, with a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell facedown. 17 David said to God, "Was it not I who ordered the fighting men to be counted? I, the shepherd,[c] have sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Lord my God, let your hand fall on me and my family, but do not let this plague remain on your people."

18 Then the angel of the Lord ordered Gad to tell David to go up and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. 19 So David went up in obedience to the word that Gad had spoken in the name of the Lord. 20 While Araunah was threshing wheat, he turned and saw the angel; his four sons who were with him hid themselves. 21 Then David approached, and when Araunah looked and saw him, he left the threshing floor and bowed down before David with his face to the ground. 22 David said to him, "Let me have the site of your threshing floor so I can build an altar to the Lord, that the plague on the people may be stopped. Sell it to me at the full price." 23 Araunah said to David, "Take it! Let my lord the king do whatever pleases him. Look, I will give the oxen for the burnt offerings, the threshing sledges for the wood, and

the wheat for the grain offering. I will give all this.” 24 But King David replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the Lord what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing.” 25 So David paid Araunah six hundred shekels[d] of gold for the site. 26 David built an altar to the Lord there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. He called on the Lord, and the Lord answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering. 27 Then the Lord spoke to the angel, and he put his sword back into its sheath. 28 At that time, when David saw that the Lord had answered him on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, he offered sacrifices there.

Isaiah 53:3-12

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. 4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit

in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. 11 After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Partner Assignment:

1. Memory Verse: 1 John 3:16, *“This is how we know what love is: Jesus laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”*
2. This week read 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21.
3. Please meet with your prayer partner from this week to discuss the following questions on 2 Sam. 24 and 1 Chron. 21.
 - A. How could David have averted this crisis in the first place? Read Proverbs 15:22.
 - B. Look at the contrast between David’s distress in 1 Chronicles 21 and Jesus’ suffering in Isaiah 53. What was the result of each?
 - C. Where have you been called to sacrifice for the sake of others? Are you willing to sacrifice something that is valuable to you or have you been looking for the “easy way out?”

Sample Discussion Questions

Pre-Article Questions:

1. What was one of the big-takeaways last week for you in our study?
2. When you think of the word, “sacrifice,” what comes to mind? Who has made the greatest sacrifices for you and why do you think they have made them?

Text Questions:

1. Identify at least two places in the first five verses of 1 Chronicles 1 where the crisis about to occur could have been averted. What leadership qualities that we have discussed did David not exercise in this instance?
2. Why do you think God was displeased with what David did?
3. What does Araunah offer David when the king comes to purchase his land? Why did David respond the way he did?
4. List some of the ways Isaiah describes Christ in chapter 53. How is He pictured as the suffering servant? What does this mean?

Application Questions:

1. Have you ever done something that you didn’t see as wrong with the wrong motive behind it? Were you conscience-stricken, or did someone have to call you out? How did you respond to the correction?
2. Sin always demands a sacrifice. The Israelites knew this and it was always in their mind because of their culture. Since God paid for your rebellion by sacrificing

His Son, how might bearing that fact in mind affect your decisions?

3. Have you ever made a mistake or deliberately disobeyed the Lord, resulting in suffering for someone you love? How did that make you feel? Was there anything you could do to reverse or lessen the pain?
4. Being a man of God means a calling to be like Christ. What attitudes or actions are required by that call?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. In what ways are love and sacrifice related? How is Christ calling you to sacrifice on behalf of others?
6. Both David’s and Christ’s sacrifices cost them dearly, but they counted the cost and considered it worth it for the people they loved. Have you been looking for an “easy way out” or are you willing to do the hard thing and give up what is precious to you? i.e. time, comfort, dreams, etc. How will your approach to loving others change after this study? How can we, as a small group, help you stay accountable to your commitment?