

### **Prayer of Approach**

In the name of the Three who are Love:  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Three who are over my head:

**The Three who are under my tread.**

The Three who are over me here:

**The Three who are over me there.**

The Three who in heaven do well:

**The Three in the great ocean swell.**

Pervading Three, O be with me.

**Pervading Three, O be with me.** <sup>1</sup>

### **Prayer of Confession**

The Father is always present.

**Forgive us for not reflecting your faithfulness.**

The Son is always self-giving.

**Forgive us for living for ourselves.**

The Spirit always leads us on.

**Forgive us for holding back.** <sup>2</sup>

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and keep you in life eternal. **Amen.**

### [Genesis 22:1-19](#)

I struggle with this story on several levels. Emotionally, as a father myself, the thought of being called to sacrifice your child and (almost) going through with it makes me shiver.

Ethically, I struggle with the story, because I ask what kind of God would issue such a command. Only later in the Old Testament narrative do we discover God's abhorrence of child sacrifice, and indeed it is one of the reasons that the Canaanite nations in the Promised Land are deemed to be under his judgment. But God hasn't revealed that yet. Abraham doesn't know that. We must be careful about what we might read back into the story.

I also struggle theologically because God had promised this son to Abraham and Sarah. He was the fulfilment of many promises and the result of a miracle. The command makes no sense.

But this extreme story makes an important point. Abraham learns that all he has, even the most precious gift of the son he and Sarah have had in their old age, belongs to God, not him.

And it is when Abraham offers his most precious possession back to God that he is reminded how the Lord uses what we offer back to him for his own purposes. That's why we read all the way to verse 19, rather than stopping at verse 14, which the Lectionary inexplicably does. We needed to hear where the angel relays God's reiteration of his promise that Abraham's descendants will bless the nations.

What it comes down to is that we are stewards, not owners. We manage things on God's behalf that belong to him.

So when King David calls for gifts to build the Jerusalem Temple and leads by example, he says in a prayer,

'Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.' (1 Chronicles 29:14b)

It's a sentiment our Anglican friends encapsulate in an offertory prayer:

All things come from you, and of your own do we give you.

Now that is the obvious, immediate application of such a principle. We give back to God in our regular giving.

But it isn't the totality of it. For this principle applies to the way we offer all things back in the service of God.

You don't have to know me for long to know that I enjoy photography as a hobby. I inherited that love from my father. He once said to me, 'I've bequeathed to you an expensive hobby.' And indeed he had. These days, to buy a good quality camera, you probably need to spend a four-figure sum. And that's without the lenses and accessories!

But what if – alongside the personal pleasure of creativity I gain from the hobby – I also offer it to the Lord in his service? Well, there have been times when I've been able to do that. Once, when I was volunteering for a charity, I shot photos of the area we served as a way of illustrating to people in the

charity from other centres what our work involved, including a contrast between poverty and affluence on our patch. There have been many other examples too, over the years.

So what do you have that is precious to you which you can offer to God in his service? It doesn't have to be something overtly religious. Neither does it have to be a direct contribution to Sunday life at church. But if it contributes to the life of Christian discipleship on any of the seven days of the week, then it is something you can dedicate in Christian service.

It goes without saying that this can be incredibly challenging teaching. It goes to the heart of things that are very precious to us. Is God out to make us penniless serfs in his kingdom?

No. The good news in our story is that before ever God makes this call on us, he has subjected himself to it first. Take those famous words in the story where Isaac asks where the lamb is for the burnt offering (verse 7).

Abraham replies,

'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.'  
(Verse 8)

In the narrative, God literally provides a lamb (verse 13). However, Christians have seen here a foreshadowing of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who would be an offering for the sins of the world.

If that's true, then what we have here is a pointer to the way that God himself gave up that which was most precious to him in the cause of his kingdom – namely, his only begotten Son, Jesus.

So God is only asking us to do what he himself has already done.

The Apostle Paul dwells on this and shows us the generosity of this God towards us. In a beautiful verse, Romans 8:32, he says,

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all –  
how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

God, who asks everything of us, also generously gives us everything. God is a generous giver, so generous that he gives his very self to us and for us. It's why Christina Rossetti wrote in a Christmas carol, 'Love came down at Christmas.' It's why Graham Kendrick in one of his early songs wrote that Jesus was 'Held to the Cross not by nails but by love.'

This is the God who calls us to offer all that we find most precious back to him in his service. It's the God who offered everything that our sins might be forgiven, we might find our way into his adoptive family, our fear of death might be dissolved, and that we might discover the greatest sense of purpose in life that anyone can have – the cause of his kingdom that seeks to bless and heal the world. For these reasons God offers himself.

How then might we respond?

If we've followed Jesus for many years, this could be a time to evaluate where we are with him.

Maybe we've been drifting away from Jesus and consequently drifting through life. Do we feel Jesus tugging gently at us to return?

Or it could be that we've never knowingly responded positively to Jesus. COVID-19 might have made us ask big questions about life. We might be one of those who has been googling spiritual themes in recent months. Do you sense yet that a God who gives so much out of love for you is drawing you to offer your life, gifts, and talents back to him?

If any of this resonates with you, I want to invite you to contact me. If you don't want to leave a public comment on social media, I suggest you get in touch with me through the contact pages on the websites for Byfleet Methodist Church or Knaphill Methodist Church. I'll put their links below the video in YouTube.

### **Prayers**

Power of all powers

**We worship you.**

Light of all lights

**We worship you.**

Life of all lives

**We worship you.**

Source of all life

**We turn to you.**

Saviour of all life

**We turn to you.**

Sustainer of all life

**We turn to you.**

Ground of all being

**We rest in you.**

Salt of all being

**We rest in you.**

Unity of all being

**We rest in you.**

Maker of all creatures

**We honour you.**

Friend of all creatures

**We honour you.**

Force of all creatures

**We honour you.**

Love before time

**We adore you.**

Love in dark time

**We adore you.**

Love in present time

**We adore you.**<sup>3</sup>

**The Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father ...**

**Blessing**

Into the Sacred Three I immerse you.

Into their power and peace I place you.

May their breath be yours to live.

May their love be yours to give.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Simpson, *Celtic Worship Throughout The Year*. P8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p11f.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p12.