

The Family Man  
Genesis 22:1-12

## **Slide 1** - The Great Divorce

*The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis is a book that examines the question as to why people choose to give their lives in full commitment to God or not.

In this book, Lewis shows that we're basically standing at the very gate of heaven, making a choice between the eternal glory of God and the empty promises of earth.

He refers to this choice as "*the great divorce*" between heaven and earth.

In this book, Lewis talks about getting onto a bus with a group of fellow ghosts who have recently passed away.

Shortly, they're dropped off at a depot where they make their decisions and choices regarding eternity.

Obviously, salvation doesn't work this way, but the book serves as an extended metaphor.

For each person that steps off of the bus, a bright, shining figure steps out of heaven. This individual has a direct connection to a person on the bus.

These shining figures encourage each person to make the journey into heaven, choosing the glory of God over the emptiness of earthly desires.

They're not angels, but rather people from their life who've been saved. So, as each person steps off the bus, a person from their life comes out to talk to them.

Then it's Pam's turn. As she steps off the bus, she's filled with disappointment when she realizes who was to greet her.

The person's name was Reginald, her younger brother. Pam was hoping and praying it would be her son Michael, whom she outlived.

She had devoted her life to him and wanted to see him so badly, but Reginald explained that she wasn't ready to see Michael.

Instead, she must first be eager to be with God Himself, then the rest of the blessings of heaven will come.

I love this part of the illustration, because Lewis makes a metaphor for saying that: God isn't just a way to get into heaven; heaven is the way that we're to be with God.

Now, we know that Jesus is the only way to the Father, but you get the point.

Reginald tells her, *"I'm afraid the first step is a hard one. But after that, you'll go on like a house on fire when you learn to want someone else besides Michael."*

Pam rebuked him, *"What're you talking about? You know what, fine. I'll do whatever you say or whatever's necessary. The sooner I do that, the sooner I'll get to see Michael."*

Reginald goes on, *"You're using God as a means to an end, instead of wanting God for His own sake. He doesn't come in second; nor can he even be tied for first."*

Throughout the story, it becomes clear that Pam's love for Michael was an obsession in her life.

After he died, she sacrificed her relationships with her other children, her husband, and her parents all on the altar of adoration of her son.

She even said at one point, *"No one has a right to come between me and my son. Not even God."*

The sad part is that the story makes it very clear that Pam's so set on her views and so unwavering in her ways that she ultimately chooses her own destination.

C.S. Lewis is trying to get across to his audience that our first love should be to love the Lord our God, then we're to love one another.

Jesus outlined this love when He responded to the lawyer's question in Luke 10.

Luke 10:27, *"And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."*

## **Slide 2**

Kyle Idleman, a Christian author and pastor, says to picture our life like a bicycle wheel. Every spoke in the wheel represents different and significant relationships that make up our lives.

One spoke - your mother. Another - your father. One spoke might be a sibling, grandparent, or spouse. Another maybe a child, grandchild, and so forth.

It's so easy to make God just another spoke on the wheel, but God's not interested in being a spoke.

God is to be the center hub from which all the spokes radiate. He's to be the center of our ever turning and spinning world.

Relationships that we build are good things, but the danger of idols is that they're usually good things, too. Things we've elevated to a higher position in our lives than God.

Yes, we're supposed to love our children, our parents, our siblings, grandparents, and spouses wholeheartedly, but we're always supposed to love them in the context of our primary love for God.

He must be the center of the wheel and our deepest love. Our relationship with God should serve as the foundation for our relationships with everyone else.

Kyle calls this a "top button" truth. Have you ever been in a hurry, or running late getting ready, that you just throw on your shirt or a blouse, and start buttoning.

One button, another button, and another, but when you get to the end, there's a button left over. Now you have to unbutton everything and start over.

Likewise, our lives should be ordered in such a way that God is the top button. Devotion to Him, our relationship with Him, is the top button.

You get that one right, you get that in order, and every other relationship - family or friend - will be more satisfying. Get that top button wrong and things fall apart.

Pam's love for Michael, in *"The Great Divorce,"* as beautiful, powerful, and important as a mother's love for her child is, got elevated to her identity.

She put that love on the throne of her heart. Her primary love was her adoration for Michael. God was just a means to an end for her to see him again.

This good thing, a mother's love for her child, got twisted into a hideous idol that in turn resulted in her other relationships not aligning either. Augustine called these surface idols, "*disordered loves.*"

What he meant was... because a parent should love a child, and a child should love and honor their parent, that these relationships can so easily be elevated to that "top button" position.

Like I said last week, these surface and root idols are sneaky. Satan uses them to slither onto the throne of our hearts. We can easily place our love in the wrong order without even realizing it.

I wouldn't blame you at this point if you're sitting here thinking, "*Well, this is all well and good, but it's impossible for me to love my children less.*"

I would reply, "*Good!*" because I'm not asking you to, but we can love our children or people differently.

We can love them in the context of our love for God and doing that is the most loving thing that we can do for any of our relationships, family or friends.

### **Slide 3**

Here's a question: What if you were asked to prove that God was on the throne of your heart? That your love for Him exceeds anything and anyone? What would you do?

There's a story in scripture that parallels "*The Great Divorce*" except with a better ending. It's a story of divine intervention.

In fact, I'd call it one of the most heart-wrenching stories in the Bible. It's found in Genesis 22; the story of Abraham and Isaac.

Prior to this, God promised Abraham and Sarah that they'd have a child in their extreme old age.

Because they weren't able to have one in their youth, God asks them to trust His promise. Then, nothing... for a long, long time. Eventually, Isaac, their son, was born.

Then Genesis 22:1-2 shows up: *“Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” Here I am,” he replied. Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”*

If I were Abraham, my first response would've been along the lines of, *“Excuse me?”*

*“You mean the Isaac that you promised for years? That Isaac? That only son Isaac whom I love? I don't think I should be doing that with a human child.”*

But that's not Abraham's response, is it? This passage is fascinating because the second verse, Genesis 22:2, is the first time the word 'love' is used in the Bible.

It's even more fascinating that this first-time love is used in the context of sacrificing a beloved, only son. Sound familiar?

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* John 3:16

We feel for Abraham here, but on the other side, it's almost as if God had some sort of divine knowledge and knew that He Himself would make this exact sacrifice of His one and only Son whom He loved.

Genesis 22:1a, "*After these thing God tested Abraham...*" Did you notice the fifth word here?

It says, "*After these things God tested Abraham...*" When we read this story, we get tipped off from just the first few words that this is only a test.

We know, having a complete Bible at our fingertips, that God never requires anyone to make a human sacrifice.

In fact, we learn in several places like Deuteronomy 12; 18; and 2 Kings 21, to name a few, that human sacrifice is detestable to Him.

But at this point in time, none of those books had been written. Genesis hadn't even been written, so Abraham didn't know it was a test.

Now I know these scenes aren't described in the Bible, but I can imagine things like Abraham and Sarah holding hands as their beloved son, their miracle child fell asleep at night.

I picture them pouring out prayers and caring for him at times when he gets sick. Their joy when he learned to walk, his first words, and when he got old enough to start going out to help Abraham.

I can imagine those moments of joy and caring.

#### **Slide 4**

But with that command, "*lay that special and wonderful son on the altar.*" I can't imagine how Abraham must have felt.

As I've read through the Bible, there're a lot of characters I think it would've been awesome to be, but Abraham is a Bible hero that I don't envy at this moment.

I wouldn't want to be him at this time because every child is special; a miracle knitted together in the womb by God.

I'd wager that no parent would want to be Abraham at this point in time. But even if you're not a parent, let's extend the scope of this story beyond children.

Who do you love so fiercely, so protectively, so desperately? For whom would you lay down your life? A younger brother or sister?

Maybe a parent you've always been close to? Your husband or wife? It could be they're not even family; let's say it's a best friend.

Here's what I'm getting at: God's greatest gifts are also His greatest tests. The goal is to love the gift in such a way that it makes you love the Giver all the more.

Let's continue... Genesis 22:3-5, *“Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”*”

I don't want you to miss that word “*worship*” in that last sentence. They're at the moment of truth. The moment Abraham was to lead Isaac up the mountain to be sacrificed.



This moment tells us so much about Abraham because he's choosing God over anything and anyone else. If this is not the definition of worship, I don't know what is.

The story continues, verses 6-8, *“Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.”*

After they arrived, Abraham built an altar, piled the wood up just so and then bound Isaac, placing him where an animal should be, then reached for the knife, never faltering.

At that time, a voice stops him in his tracks. Genesis 22:11-12, *“But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”*

Here we see a vivid illustration of the first two commandments:

We will have no other gods before God.

We will make no idols in the form of anything, not even in the form of a beloved child.

In the moment that push came to shove, Abraham showed the depth of his commitment to God. Through that commitment and love for God, he loved his son in the way God created him, with God first.

Do you think Abraham loved Isaac any less for nearly losing him? I don't think so. I'd argue that Isaac became even more precious to him. Was Isaac an idol for his father? Not at all.

## Slide 5

A survey of adults was conducted in July 2007, by the Barna Group. The subjects were asked to identify the most important relationship in their life.

The survey was titled, *"God's Relationship Is Not Most Important to Americans."*

Here is part of the findings:

Seven out of 10 American adults said their earthly family or family members were the most important relationship in their life. This is broken down as follows:

- 30% said their immediate family was most important,
- 22% named their spouse as their most significant relationship,
- 17% identified their children,
- 3% said their parents.

Only 19% said their relationship with God, Jesus, the Trinity, or Allah was the most important. That's overwhelming.

When we look at our lives and examine ourselves to see if surface idols are starting to pop up like weeds, one of the first things that we should look at is on what shelf do we place those around us.

If you had to choose between the gift and the Giver, who would win? I heard a story from a pastor in which he shared a conversation he had with a woman about false gods.

She told him that she believed her children had become false gods. Not because she made them a priority over everything else, but rather, and this is important, it was more about letting them control her.

What was going on with them determined if she had a good day or a bad day.

If there were no tantrums, if there were no issues, she felt great about life in general. Otherwise, she didn't. If they were happy, so was she, and vice versa.

Do you see what she's saying here? Her children had the power to fill her with anger or peace. Happiness or sadness.

She said that as time passed it felt like she was being changed as a person. This is exactly what a false god does. 2 Peter 2:19, "*People are slaves to whatever has mastered them.*"

When a friend or family member is placed so high, or put in a position where they consistently have control of our emotions, maybe that's an indication that God's starting to lose His spot on the throne of our heart.

Maybe that root idol of approval is an issue. You just want to be liked to the point that your mood, emotions, and mindset can shift with those around you.

We often look for things like satisfaction, meaning, and significance in the wrong places. Let God be the one to provide those things.

What happens when someone occupies the throne of our heart? We hurt ourselves. Like Pam with Michael in "*The Great Divorce*" or the woman who let her kids determine her emotions and state of mind.

The old cliché rings true: "*Hurt people hurt people.*" Therefore, we love others best when we love God most.

What if you were to go to lunch with your friends or family, and you say to them, "*Hey, I decided that I'm going to just go ahead and place all of my happiness, well-being, and mental state in your hands.*"

No one in their right mind is going to agree to that! If you ask me that question, the answer would be no, because only God can provide that.

Ask God that question and the answer is, yes! Right now, yes!  
Tomorrow, yes! The next day, yes!

While no one's going to ask someone that question, we have a tendency to do this with others without asking them.

When we hold our children up as trophies of our lives, they feel the burden of living up to the goals we've set for them and the bar is too high.

We shouldn't expect money, success, comfort, approval, control, or people to fill a God-shaped void. So, what do we do? Love people less? Cut them out? Of course not. That's not Biblical.

But we should love people differently. That doesn't mean less. That doesn't mean to go home and tell your spouse, *"You know, church really means a lot to me. In fact, I've decided you're no longer the most important thing to me."*

Instead, move those relationships off-center and put Jesus in His rightful place. Because, ironically, that's the most loving thing you could do for anyone.

The supreme act of love for your spouse, family, friends, or anyone else is to set your heart on Christ. Look to Him to fulfill the things that only He can provide.

My prayer and desire are to love my family enough to lay those relationships on the altar before God with everything else that I have and everything else that I am.

When I sing words like, "*My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness,*" I don't want those words just sung and then forgotten but applied in my home.

My hope in life is to be found solely in the sacrifice of a Father's one and only Son, not in the successes, failures, expectations, approval, or achievements of anyone else.

## **Slide 6**

### Conclusion

When we zoom out and look at the story of Abraham and Isaac in the context of history and the rest of the Bible, something amazing unfolds for us.

Besides Abraham, later God sent Moses specifically to Mount Moriah. A three-day hike. Why?

Then, after Moses, a thousand years pass and we find ourselves in 2 Chronicles.

It's here, in 2 Chronicles 3, that we learn that King David bought some land to build an altar to worship God. This was the same place where Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac.

On that same spot where Abraham offered up his son, Solomon would eventually build the great temple of Jerusalem, where priests offered sacrifices throughout Israelite history.

If you were to look carefully today at the geography of Mount Moriah, the Temple Mount is on a gentle slope on the side, not at the top.

On the north side of Jerusalem, is where commentators say is the spot where they quarried the stones for Solomon's temple, and later for the building of the wall.

As a result of all that quarrying, the north side of Mount Moriah has this chunk missing out of it and, interestingly enough, it kind of resembles a skull.

Thus, the name of the place became *Golgatha*, or in Latin, *Calvary*, the place of the skull. When the Romans crucified Jesus, they led Him out of the city to a place called Calvary, "*the place of the skull.*"

What God asked of Abraham, but did not require, He did Himself for the love of you and me.

In today's message, you've been asked to choose God, to place Him on the throne in your heart, but I want you to know this: He has already chosen you.

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* John 3:16