

“YOU WANT ME TO DO WHAT NOW?”

(Levitical Offerings pt 1)

For The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta

By Sally Ulrey

Key verses: Leviticus ch 1-5

“When anyone among you brings an offering to the Lord...” (Lev 1:2)

Objective:

- **To learn about one of the Levitical offerings (burnt offering)**
- **To understand the main point of this offering was to offer to God all that is most dear, our whole selves, acknowledging that God is worthy of our complete devotion**
- **To make our own offerings of oblation based on the principles for offerings from Leviticus**

The Set up: Moderate

The Plan:

- **Hook:** From What God Has Given (15 mins)
 - On a notecard, students will list what is most loved/dear/valued in their lives
 - Students will receive, individually or in “family” groups, a stuffed animal pet that they will make “their own” by giving it a name, backstory, and family memories, etc.
- **Book:** The Burnt Offering (10 mins)
 - Explain principles of Levitical Offerings and the whole burnt offering (The offerer did not get any of this offering; the whole thing was burned; Symbolized complete devotion to God; This was a regularly required sacrifice, which served as a reminder)
- **Look:** Our Offerings (15 mins)
 - Offering their beloved stuffed animals (things most dear) to God
 - Small Discussion evaluating all the things on their list from the beginning, discussing which things they need to work on being able to give up freely to God
- **Took:** Whose? (5 mins)
 - Close in prayer, reading from the offertory sentences in the prayer book

The Supplies:

- Copy of lesson
- Bibles (or Scripture printed)
- Notecards and Pens
- Stuffed Animals
- Bonfire stuff: wood, lighter fluid, lighter
- WATER (hose, big bucket), fire extinguisher, safety supplies just in case

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From What God has Given (Hook, 15 mins)

The point of the whole burnt offering in Leviticus was to remind the worshippers that God's place is to be the most dear thing in life. Worshipping God meant offering all you had, your whole self, completely dedicating yourself to God (oblation).

In this section, youth will first be asked to list all the things they hold most dear, all the things they love most in their lives... people, activities, etc. They'll hold onto this list for later.

Next, youth will be given a stuffed animal to love and cherish and hold dear. Later, this animal will be burned, but don't tell them that yet. In the Old Testament, worshippers often brought with them one of their own animals that they had loved and raised and cared for to be offered, so this will help drive that experience home, and the point that even the things they hold most dear are offered to God without reservation. So giving the stuffed animal, and giving it a name and background and family memories will help them think of this object as something they love.

Set-up: You'll need some volunteers to help set up a bonfire and get it going in advance. Obviously, take safety precautions and have water/hose/fire extinguishers/buckets full of water on hand.

Clean up: BEFORE YOU GO INSIDE, make sure the fire is safe to leave (or have someone stay while it burns out). Later, they are going to do something with the ashes, so you'll want to make sure the fire is out. It's ok if you have to pour some water on it; wet ashes will still work.

- Pass out note cards, and ask youth as individuals to list all the things they love most in life and hold most dear. These can be people, things, activities, etc. Give them about 3-4 mins to complete their lists
- Next, put youth into groups of about 3-4, and give each group a small stuffed animal.
- Instruct the groups that these are their new family animals. Have the groups come up with a name for their animal, a backstory of how it came to be in the family, and some fun (made-up) memories with this animal and what that animal means to each family member.
- Give them up to 7 mins to come up with backstories for their animals, and 3 mins to quickly share with the larger group some names and things about their animals.

Transition: Your animals are playing an important role in your made-up family, but in the Old Testament, animals played a very important role in the lives of families.

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The Burnt Offering (Book, 10 mins)

In this section, we'll briefly tell about some of the Levitical Offerings, and then explore what set the "Burnt Offering" apart. The main point of the burnt offering is oblation, offering our whole selves completely to God, acknowledging that God is worthy of complete devotion. With some offerings, the either the worshipper or priest or both get to eat part of the offering, but not the whole burnt offering. That was completely dedicated to God. Some offerings are required, some are voluntary, some were only required under special circumstances, but the burnt offering was a regularly required offering. It's just part of what you did and how you worshipped God.... It is the basis of worship...giving of our whole selves to God, complete dedication, undivided devotion.

- Give an overview of some of the principles we learn from the Levitical Offerings (below)
- You won't be reading the Scripture in its entirety, but be sure to reference Leviticus 1-5
- Call attention to main points (below).
- This is kind of heavy on the teaching and theological concepts, so you will want to familiarize yourself with the main points. You may want to use a white board to write down some of the main points as you talk.

Mini-Lecture (10 mins)

Animals were used in worship in the Old Testament, which seems weird, but let's delve into WHY, because even though we're not offering animals in the New Testament, the WHY is still similar:

1. **God is worthy of worship.** Worship is acknowledging that God is "worth" it. He is worthy of EVERYTHING we have, our whole selves, the things we hold most dear. God is awesome and amazing and wonderful and generous, and God is WORTHY of our stuff, our time, our attention, our very selves.
2. **Worship requires sacrifice,** giving something up. It costs us something. In the Old Testament, worshippers were expected to give something...an animal. Even the poor could give a cheaper animal, or even just grain, but they had to give something up.
3. **Worship is expected in our relationships with God.** What we learn from these weird ways of offering animals in Leviticus, one of the main principles, is that worship (acknowledging and acting on the fact that God is WORTHY/WORTH IT) is a regular part of our relationship with God. Just like you can't have a healthy relationship with another human without communication, part of our communication with God is offering worship, saying to God by our words and deeds that God is worthy of all we have to offer. There are a few regular ways OT worshippers offered things to God (you can find this in Leviticus ch 1-5...just briefly flip through the headings, and you can see some of the types of offerings there):
 - **When they sinned.** There were two types of offerings when they messed up: sin offering and guilt offering...one had to do with when they could make restitution, and the other had to do with when they couldn't. Either way, if they messed up, they made an offering (and made it right if they could). The offerer didn't get any of this offering back, but the priests did get to eat some of it.
 - **When they just wanted to enjoy God's presence.** This was called a fellowship offering. It was completely voluntary and done out of the thankfulness of their hearts for God's goodness. This is one of the only offerings where the person making offering got to partake in eating the meal together. Pretty much every other offering, the worshipper gave it all to God, but this one, they got share the meal. In that way, it resembles communion.

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- **Just because God is God, and we are God's people.** This is the burnt offering, and is the basis for all worship. It was the regular acknowledgement that God is worthy of worship and our love and devotion. They OT people did this through the "Burnt Offering". The animal was completely burned, given completely over to God. Neither the offerer or the priests got to eat any. Often the animal that was offered was one the person had raised themselves from a baby. They gave it completely to God, though, even though it was probably dear. But that's the lesson. God is worthy of all we have and all we are. God is the most dear thing in our lives (or we work to give God that place), and everything else is secondary.
- 4. **Worship today.** All of those principles still apply. We worship God because God is worthy and amazing and so good to us. In our Baptismal Vows, we promise to make worship a regular part of our lives as Christians and a routine part of our relationship with God. We say we will turn to God when we sin, that we will enjoy God's presence, and that God is our God, and so we will put God first...that God is first and foremost in our lives, our top priority, with everything else as secondary. We strive to give God our complete dedication and undivided devotion. We talk about counting the cost and taking up our cross and following, knowing that it means giving up things. Sacrifice was a part of worship then, and it's still a part of worship now.

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Our Offerings (Look, 15 mins)

In this part, we're going to burn the stuffed animals. They will react to this, because they have come to love that stuffed animal in the 15 mins they have spent with it, but that makes all the more clear the point about worshippers offering their own animals out of their own things they loved and held dear. And in a second, when they review their lists, it's going to put that into perspective about what worship may look like in the other areas of their lives.

Every time I've taught this, I just tell them what's going to happen with the burning, and they have just done it; and they might have been a little sad, but they have never been traumatized. But I would say that if they really push back against burning their stuffed animal, I am of the mind that you shouldn't make them. "Challenge by choice" is always my motto: encourage them to challenge themselves, get out of their comfort zones, but always assure them this is a safe space where they get to choose and will not be forced to do something that they are truly uncomfortable with. While worship was required in a very certain and prescribed way in the OT, the NT makes clear that we are supposed to give cheerfully and willingly. So if you think they will be really traumatized by burning a stuffed animal, there's a way to unpack that in the next part, too.

Another option that doesn't use fire (easier set up, but not as dramatic) would be to leave the animals at the altar of the church. Later, you can donate them.

- Remind them that the whole burnt offering was the offering that reminded them to offer their whole selves to God in complete devotion.
- Explain that we are going to make an offering symbolizing our devotion to God, recognizing that God is worthy, that worship means sacrifice, and that it means we put God first
- Ask them to think about all the things they hold most dear in life (think back to the list from earlier), and let the animal symbolize for them the thing that they know they need to let go of, trust God with, and let God be first in that area.
- When they're ready, put the animal in the fire
- Once all the groups have gone, go back inside
- Don't forget to have someone in charge of closing down the open flame

Discussion Questions (10 mins)

You can do these as a whole group as you facilitate, or break into small groups

1. What was it like to burn that stuffed animal in the fire?
2. What do you think it was like for OT worshippers to offer animals they raised and loved? Why did God ask them to do that?
3. God wants our whole selves, even the things we love and want to keep the most for ourselves. These can be good things, but nothing should be more important than God. Take a look back at your list. Is there anything that is competing with God for first in your heart?
4. Which of those principles from the Levitical Offerings resonated most with you?
 - a. God is worthy of worship
 - b. Worship requires sacrifice
 - c. Worship is expected in our relationship with God (when we sin, to enjoy God's presence, just because God is God and comes first)

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Whose? (Took, 5 mins)

This is the take-home reminder that everything we have and all that we are is really all God's anyway when we offer it to God when we become Christians and decide to follow Him. On their notecards, have them write GOD'S over their list. Then as a closing prayer, offer several offertory sentences (which they will probably recognize, and now will hit them in a new way) and/or the prayer of Self-Dedication from BCP 832.

- Tell them that everything we have and all we are we offer to God when we become Christians and decide to follow God
- Instruct them to write GOD'S over their list on their notecard; encourage them to take it home as a reminder.
- Tell them you'll be closing in prayer using Offertory Sentences, which are said by the priest when the elements for the Eucharist are brought up from the congregation. Those words apply to us as well...our whole selves, like a burnt offering, is offered to God

Close in prayer, using the Prayer of Self-Dedication (BCP 832) and/or several Offertory Sentences. You can also have different people read each one:

All things come of Thee, O God, and of Thine own have we given Thee (1 Chr 29:14b)

Freely you have received; freely give (Matt 10:8)

Ascribe to the Lord the honor due his Name; bring offerings and come into his courts (Ps 96:8)

Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God (Eph 5:2)

I appeal to you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (Rom 12:1)

Through Christ let us continually offer to God the sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his Name. But do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (Heb 13:15-16)

O Lord our God, you are worthy to receive glory and honor and power; because you have created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being (Rev 4:11)

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. For everything in heaven and on earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom, and you are exalted as head over all (1 Chr 29:11)

Let us with gladness present the offerings and oblations of our life and labor to the Lord. (BCP 377)

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