

Lesson 6

Your Family Needs Your Sacrifice

Cultivating sacrificial love

Before you begin:

Read the Following Passages:

- Matthew 7.12
- Deuteronomy 6.4-9
- 2 Corinthians 12.14
- Isaiah 49.15
- 1 Timothy 5.8
- Mark 10.45
- Matthew 18.14
- Psalm 127.3
- Proverbs 6.20-23
- John 15.13

Pray For:

1. The desire to develop a sacrificial heart like Jesus, who gave His life for you.
2. Help in understanding the depths of sacrificial love so that you might be inspired to sacrifice your own desires willingly for the needs and well-being of your children.
3. Help in embracing the sacrifices involved with parenting with joy and gratitude, remembering that God's love is made known through your sacrifices.
4. Strength when you feel weary or discouraged, and the reminder of the eternal value of investing in your children's lives.
5. Wisdom in discerning their needs and the willingness to put their needs above your own.
6. More trust in knowing that God is with you every step of the way.

For children ought not save up for their parents, but parents for their children, 2 Corinthians 12.14b.

The last few decades have seen American culture dominated by individualism and self-centeredness. The last few generations seem to have prioritized personal fulfillment, career advancement, and personal interests over sacrificial parenting. While some individuals within our culture exhibit parental sacrifice consistently, others may struggle to prioritize it due to various

factors such as societal pressures, financial constraints, personal challenges, or lack of awareness. Teaching on this matter becomes even more crucial in reminding parents to embrace sacrificial love for the well-being of their children and the betterment of their families.

One example of how the emphasis on personal fulfillment is playing out is to see what surveys are revealing about why young people do not want kids. Most say:

- They want more leisure time and personal freedom.
- They fear bringing a child into a world threatened by climate change.
- They can find life fulfillment outside of having children.
- They need to prioritize their education and career.
- They feel child care is too expensive.

One young person interviewed said she:

has a long list of things she'd rather spend time doing than raising children: being with her family and her fiancé; traveling; focusing on her job as a nurse; getting a master's degree; playing with her cats.

“My parents got married right out of high school and had me and they were miserable.” “But now we know we have a choice.”

She said she had such high expectations for parents that she wasn't sure she could meet them: “I would have the responsibility to raise this person into a functional and productive citizen, and some days I'm not even responsible.”²⁹

How can we turn things around?

The concept of parental sacrifice is deeply rooted in the teachings of Scripture and is an integral part of Christian parenting. It reflects the selfless love and sacrificial nature of Jesus, who gave His life for us. Understanding the crucial aspects of parental sacrifice and how to develop a heart of sacrifice can greatly impact the dynamics and growth of the family. Let us delve into these aspects and explore practical insights from the example of Jesus.

Learning from the Example of Jesus

Jesus serves as the ultimate example of sacrificial love. He willingly sacrificed His life on the cross for the redemption of humanity, demonstrating the depth of His love and commitment. Parents can learn from His example in several ways:

Lay Down Personal Ambitions

Just as Jesus surrendered His own will to fulfill God's plan, parents can lay down their personal ambitions and desires for the sake of their children's well-being and growth. *For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me,* John 6.38.

Serve with Humility

Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, exemplifying humility and service, John 13.1-15. Parents can follow His example by serving their children with a humble heart, taking on tasks and

responsibilities that benefit their children's development.

Give Unconditionally

Jesus gave without expecting anything in return. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exhibited this principle when speaking of God's blessings on all humans. *He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust, Matthew 5.45.* Parents can emulate this by sacrificially giving to their children, whether it be time, resources, attention, or guidance, without expecting reciprocation or gratitude. Parenting equals sacrifice.

As parents embrace the need for sacrifice within the home and family, they align themselves with God's design for parenting and create an environment where children can thrive, grow, and experience the love of Christ through their sacrificial love and selfless service.

The Nature of Sacrifice

As we think about parental sacrifice, a good way to define it is a willingness to let go of one's immediate self-interest to promote the wellbeing of one's children. Sacrifice is so common in family life that we often fail to notice it. A new mother sacrifices much-needed sleep in order to feed her hungry infant. Parents sacrifice time by working extra hours to help pay college tuition. Fortunately, sacrifice is easier for families who feel united. If there is a strong family identity, where the husband and wife are more interested in the wellbeing of the family unit than their rights, acts of sacrifice become a blessing rather than a burden. Children also benefit from the sacrificial examples of their parents. As the recipients of their parents' sacrifices, they also learn how to sacrifice. In this way, sacrifice makes it more likely for family members to act out good behaviors. The result often leads to a more generous, hospitable home atmosphere.

Parental sacrifice can be active (doing something against your own inclination in order to help or serve your child) or passive (not doing something that you'd like to do in order to help or serve your child). Making parental sacrifices willingly is far more beneficial than giving grudgingly. At the time, sacrifice may feel costly, but it is a gift that brings many rewards. It often leads to happier, more stable relationships. Rather than leaving us empty, sacrifice actually makes us full.

Learning to Sacrifice

Learning to sacrifice is more than a to-do list. Since motivation matters, sacrifice must be delivered with an attitude of love and appreciation. It is less of an action than it is a process of becoming. For it to be truly effective, parental sacrifice requires a change of heart, and not just a change in behavior. Here are some suggestions on how to do it more effectively.

Watch Your Speech

Sometimes sacrifice means biting your tongue. When your child makes a negative remark, you do not have to respond unkindly. Instead choose a calm and caring reply.

A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath. The tongue of the wise makes

knowledge attractive, but the mouth of fools blurts out foolishness, Proverbs 15.1-2.

Look for Ways to Bless

Instead of primarily focusing on how our children need to change, we can shift our attention to how we can bless them. It is not so much about "what my child can do for me" as it is "what can I do for my child?" "How can I help the become who they need to be?"

A generous person will be prosperous, And one who gives others plenty of water will himself be given plenty, Proverbs 11.25 NASB.

Change Your Perspective

Change your heart by changing your perspective. Focus on things that you would like to create in your relationship with your children, rather than things you want to avoid. See their needs and interests as more important than your own, and notice their strengths rather than their weaknesses.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others, Philippians 2.3-4.

Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, 1 Corinthians 13.4-7.

Act with Grace and Tact

Sometimes this requires sacrifice. Choose your battles wisely and be willing to set aside personal interests when they conflict with your child's wellbeing.

Remember, *agape* love is a love that gives, a love that does not demand or hold onto rights, but has the good of the other at heart. This is the love that we need to work on in our family for it to function in the way God intended.

A ruler can be persuaded through patience, and a gentle tongue can break a bone, Proverbs 25.15.

But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ, Ephesians 4.15.

Wrapping Up

Parental sacrifice is an integral aspect of Christian parenting, reflecting the selfless love and sacrificial nature of Jesus. By embracing sacrificial love, parents create an environment where children can thrive, grow, and experience the love of Christ. Through the examples and teachings of Jesus, we learn to lay down our personal ambitions, serve with humility, and give unconditionally. As we commit to sacrificial parenting, we align ourselves with God's design for the family and contribute to building stronger families, churches, and communities.

Let us prayerfully reflect on our role as parents and ask God to help us grow in sacrificial love.

May we strive to become parents who embody the selfless love of Jesus and create a nurturing environment where our children can flourish and experience God's grace. Remember that sacrificial love is a journey, requiring a change of heart and a reliance on God's strength. May we be led by the Spirit as we embrace the call to parental sacrifice, knowing that our sacrifices have eternal significance and impact. Let us support and encourage one another in this noble endeavor, trusting in God's faithfulness and grace as we strive to reflect His sacrificial love in our families and churches.

For Discussion

1. How would you define parental sacrifice, and why is it crucial in the context of Christian parenting?
2. In what ways have you personally experienced or witnessed parental sacrifice in your own family or the families around you?
3. How has the cultural emphasis on personal fulfillment and self-centeredness impacted the concept of parental sacrifice in our society? Discuss any challenges you see parents facing in prioritizing sacrificial love.
4. Reflecting on the examples and teachings of Jesus, what can we learn about sacrificial love and its significance in the context of parenting? How can we apply these insights to our own lives?
5. Share a time when you witnessed or practiced sacrificial speech in your interactions with your child or family member. What impact did it have on the relationship?
6. How can parents shift their focus from changing their family members to blessing them? Discuss practical ways in which parents can demonstrate a sacrificial stance in their family

dynamics.

7. Share an example where you intentionally chose to focus on the needs and strengths of your child or family member. How did it contribute to a more positive and nurturing environment?
8. In what areas of your parenting journey do you find it most challenging to sacrificially give without expecting reciprocation? How can you cultivate a heart of unconditional giving?
9. Discuss the concept of motives in sacrifice. How does approaching sacrifice with a desire for positive outcomes differ from avoidance motives? Share personal experiences or reflections on the impact of motive on sacrificial acts.
10. Reflect on the lesson's core message of learning to sacrifice as a process of becoming, rather than just a change in behavior. How can you intentionally grow in developing a heart of sacrifice in your role as a parent? Share practical steps you can take to nurture sacrificial love in your family relationships.

²⁹ By The New York Times | Source: Morning Consult survey of 1,858 men and women ages 20 to 45. Miller, Claire. "Americans Are Having Fewer Babies. They Told Us Why." New York Times, July 5, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/05/upshot/americans-are-having-fewer-babies-they-told-us-why.html>