

## **“Love and Loss”**

**Genesis 21:1-14; 22:1-19; 23:1-4**

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It was a cloudless fall day. I was sitting in my sixth grade math class around ten in the morning when the teacher tapped me on the shoulder. “Your brother needs to see you,” she said.

I went to the door and he told me that I needed to get my books because we were going home. “Why?” I asked. “Our grandfather just died,” he responded.

This was the day I realized that love and loss sometimes go together. Prior to this, love had always added to my life. Love brought good things to the table, the best. For the first time, my heart broke because someone I loved was gone.

This lesson learned many years ago as a child helps me understand one of the most difficult passages in scripture. It is the story of Abraham offering to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on an altar. Walter Brueggemann calls it the most theologically challenging story in the Old Testament. I agree.

In studying this passage, I find its strategic placement in scripture significant. It is sandwiched between the stories of Abraham sending Hagar and Ishmael away and the death of Sarah. This is not coincidental or unimportant. There is a message here for us today.

**Life is a process of loving and losing what you love. It is a combination of holding on and letting go.**

Who among us has not lost someone or something dear and precious? We all have. Abraham sure did.

He and Sarah could not have children and this disturbed both of them. Abraham wanted a son that would fulfill God’s promise to provide a nation that would be God’s spokesmen and servants in this world. How could this be done without a son?

Sarah suggested that Abraham have a child through her maidservant, Hagar. When Ishmael was born, so were many family problems. A rivalry emerged between Sarah and Hagar and jealousy reared its ugly head.

As a result, Sarah told Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away, which he did. “Early the next morning, Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulder and sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba” Genesis 21:14. Abraham’s heart was broken.

This story is followed by the account of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac, the son born to him and Sarah. Abraham took Isaac to Mount Moriah with the intention of sacrificing him to God as an act of loyalty and unquestioning obedience. God stopped him before he harmed the child.

Can you imagine how heavy Abraham’s heart was on that three-day journey to Mount Moriah? The first time love is mentioned in the Bible is in this story. “Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.’ ” His heart had to be broken over what he thought would be the loss of another son.

Turn your attention now to Genesis 23:1-4. Abraham's beautiful and beloved wife Sarah died and he had to bury her. She had been his faithful traveling companion as he followed God's lead through the Holy Land. Again, his heart was broken.

**Love and loss.** This is one message that emerges from these three stories and the link that unites them. They are placed in consecutive chapters to teach us a valuable lesson. We will not always hold on to what we love and letting go hurts. A broken relationship, whatever the cause, is painful.

**This raises two questions. Why love if you are going to be hurt and is there any relationship that will never be severed?**

“ 'Tis better to have loved and lost than not to have loved at all,” Tennyson wrote. He's right. I've lost some very dear people in my life but my life is richer and fuller because they came my way. I would not be who and where I am if not for them. I miss them but deeply appreciate their contributions and cherish their memories.

Recently, I read an article about Katie Couric, one of the hosts of NBC's *Today* Show and the most powerful woman on the networks. While she lives a life of fame and fortune that many envy, she quietly carries the burden of grief and loss in her heart. In 1998, her husband, Jay Monahan died and four years later her sister, Emily, passed away. She feels their loss everyday and is still processing her grief. “It creeps up on you at strange times,” she says, “I have a feeling I am not through with the process.” I'm sure you can identify with this part of her life.

If the wealthiest and most powerful among us are not immune to loss, is anyone? No, life is a process of love and loss for all of us.

Is there anything or anyone that we'll not lose? I know of only one and this is God. He will never leave nor forsake us and nothing can separate us from His everlasting love.

This is why it is so important to develop a close relationship with Him. When all else goes, He remains, but this is all we need. He will come and provide the comfort we need to sustain us in our grief, the strength we need to continue in our sorrow and the hope we need to believe that, as a wise minister once said, “In Christ, we never lose a relationship of love.” How grateful I am for His goodness and faithfulness.

As Danish philosopher Kierkegaard noted, “If at every moment, both present and future, I were certain that nothing has happened or can ever happen that would separate me from the infinite love of the Infinite, that would be the clearest reason there is for joy.”

This morning, you may be struggling with grief and loss and find no joy in life. Relationships once dear and secure have been permanently severed through death, divorce or relocation. You feel abandoned, alone, confused and hurt. Is there a word from the Lord for you? I think so.

God is here and will never abandon you. He understands the magnitude of your loss and will help you cherish precious memories while enabling you to rebuild your life. He will comfort and strengthen you as He leads you through the turbulent waters of grief to the still waters of peace.

This is what He did for Abraham. It is what he did for me when I was eleven and has done many times since. It is what He wants to do for you and I hope you will invite Him into your life and develop a relationship with Him through faith in Christ that will never be severed.

