

Chapter 1: “Our Cloud Was Their Silver Lining”

How have you used the word *sacrifice* or heard it used recently?

Do you hear about sacrifice often in church?

How does it make you feel when people talk about sacrifice in its various senses—for example, ritual sacrifice, soldiers’ and athletes’ sacrifices, sacrifices parents make, and sacrifices we or others are forced to make?

Without looking ahead in the book, what do you imagine ancient ritual sacrifices were like? Describe them in as much detail as you can. (There’s no wrong answer.)

In your mind, what would sacrifices need to involve in order for them to be joyful—that is, something people are eager and excited to do?



Chapter 2: “Losing Our Way”

In reading this chapter, what surprised you most about the ancient practice of ritual sacrifice?

What explanations of sacrifice have you heard or read before reading this book?

How do those explanations compare with the details of the historic practice as described in this chapter?

Chapter 3: “Sacrifice as Food, Aroma, and Gift”

Think about some special guests you’ve invited to your home for dinner. What thoughts went through your head as you prepared? What did you do to make them feel welcome? How might those thoughts and actions be translated over into your relationship with God?

Why do you wear perfume or cologne? Why do you use candles, oils, or sprays to make your home, office, or car smell good? How might these thoughts translate over into your relationship with God?

On what kinds of occasions do you give people presents?

What is the most meaningful gift you have given or received?

What thoughts go through your mind when you are buying a present for a very special person and putting a lot of effort into it?

How might these thoughts about gift giving be translated over into your relationship with God?

Chapter 4: “A Primordial Practice in Need of Purification”

Some of the Church Fathers say that the impulse to make offerings to God was implanted in our nature by God. What do you think of this idea? Have you seen any reflections of this innate impulse in your own life or the lives of others?

What are some ways that selfishness like Cain’s undermines religion today? In what ways has it undermined your own religious life?

What are some ways we can make sure to give God our best?

Chapter 5: “The Basics of Mosaic Sacrifice”

Did you have a prior understanding of ritual impurity in the Old Testament? What was this understanding, and how does it compare to the explanation in this chapter?

Imagine offering a sacrifice as described in this chapter. What would that experience be like for you? How might an ancient person’s experience have been different?

In reading this chapter, which step in the sacrificial ritual was most unexpected for you? Which step was the most personally meaningful to you, and why? (The steps are listed on page 85.)

How does the author’s explanation of sacrificial blood (its use and meaning) compare with what you thought before reading this chapter?

Chapter 6: “Gifts for Every Occasion”

Think of some significant moments in your life recently. If you were an ancient Israelite, what sacrifice would have been appropriate in that moment? What would that offering have meant to you and your relationship with God?

Someone has suggested that a whole-burnt offering was like throwing a pile of cash into a fire. In what ways would it have been similar, and how would it have been different?

In chapter one, the peace offering was compared to a party. According to what you learned in this chapter, how would an ancient peace offering and a party have been similar, and how would they have been different?

The author says that sin offerings could not be used for reconciling with God after serious sins. Can you think of people in the Old Testament who did reconcile with God after major sins? What would one need to do in those cases when a mere gift offering was not up to the task?

Chapter 7: “The Failure and Fulfillment of Mosaic Sacrifice”

The author gives examples of gifts being undermined by hypocrisy or betrayal on the part of the giver. Has this ever happened to you? What was it like? How might those experiences better help us understand Israel’s failed sacrifices?

How is the Incarnation (the Son of God becoming man) key to the perfect sacrifice of Christ? (There are many right answers.)

Before reading this chapter, what kind(s) of sacrifice did you think Christ offered? How did this chapter change your understanding?

Chapter 8: “The Offered Son and the Delivering Lamb”

In Genesis 22, how are Abraham and Isaac like God the Father and Jesus Christ, respectively? How are they different?

How has this chapter helped you better understand God the Father’s role in Christ’s sacrifice?

How might this chapter’s explanation of the Old Testament Pascha (Passover) help us better understand and appreciate our Christian celebration of Pascha (Easter)?

What does it mean to be marked with the Blood of Christ?

What did you learn from this chapter that helps you better understand Holy Communion?

Chapter 9: “How Christ’s Sacrifice Saves Us”

What ideas about atonement had you heard prior to reading this book? How do they compare with what you learned in this chapter?

How was the ancient idea of conscience different from our modern idea, and how does this affect our understanding of the Epistle to the Hebrews?

In the words of the Epistle to the Romans, Christ saves us by condemning sin. What does this mean?

How does Christ purify our consciences, as we read in Hebrews?

Keeping in mind that we are all still works in progress, in what ways has Christ helped you escape the power of sin? What has this done for your relationship with God?

Chapter 10: “From His Sacrifice to Ours”

Before reading this book, did you think of Christian life as involving sacrifice? If so, what did this mean to you, and how did it make you feel?

We learned in this chapter that Christ sacrificed Himself in order to make us into acceptable sacrifices. How does this change the way you think about the Cross and Christian life?

Before reading this book, what did you think was the significance of doing good works? How does this chapter put good works in a new light?

Chapter 11: “The Living Sacrifice of Obedience”

Has this chapter changed the way you think about the martyrs? How so?

Why does God care about how we live our lives? Has this chapter led you to see this differently?

Before reading this book, how would you motivate yourself to live ascetically—fasting, keeping a regular discipline of prayer and Bible reading, striving to avoid and overcome temptation, and the like? How helpful were those motivational strategies?

After reading this chapter, what are some new, joyful ways you might try to motivate yourself (and encourage your family) to keep these disciplines?

Chapter 12: “Sacrificial Giving”

When we give to those in need we often focus on helping them—that is, fixing their situation. But if we see these works of charity as a sacrifice in the ancient sense, how might this change our perspective?

In the quote on pages 225–26, St. John Chrysostom teaches us to reverence the poor like a holy altar. What are some ways we can put this into practice?

Giving to the church is often described as stewardship, and this a good way to think about it. However, seeing giving as a sacrifice (in the ancient sense) adds a different, complimentary perspective. How are these two perspectives similar, and how are they different?

How might you change your habits of giving to the church if you start thinking of it as a sacrifice in the ancient sense?

The author points out that sharing our Faith with others is a way to offer sacrifice to God. How might this perspective change the way you and your parish approach outreach and evangelism?

Chapter 13: “Christian Sacrificial Worship”

In your thinking before reading this chapter, what were the reasons for going to church? Did this chapter give you a new perspective?

On pages 240–41 there are three quotes from St. John Chrysostom, in which he uses sacrificial images to encourage us to pray with intensity. In your own words, what would such sacrificial prayer look like? Practically speaking, how might one put this teaching into practice today?

Before reading this book, how did you understand the use of incense and candles in worship services? How do you see them now?

Before reading this book, did you think of the Eucharist (Divine Liturgy) as a sacrifice? What did that mean to you then?

Have you ever made holy bread for the Eucharist? What did it mean to you? If you do it after reading this book, how might your perspective be different?

Chapter 14: “The Bloodless Sacrifice”

What do you remember about the experience of attending the Divine Liturgy as a child or (if you didn’t grow up in the Orthodox Church) as a newcomer? What were the most meaningful parts, and what impressions did they make on you?

Do you prepare before coming to church for the Eucharist (Divine Liturgy)? What kinds of things do you do to prepare? How might that change as a result of what you’ve read?

Had you ever heard of the Proskomedia service or seen it performed before reading this book? Since most people aren’t able to witness the preparation of the Gifts, what do they miss out on, in light of what we’ve learned? How would mindfulness of what happens in Proskomedia make the experience of the Divine Liturgy more meaningful?

Have you ever read the Anaphora (either St. John Chrysostom’s or St. Basil the Great’s) all the way through? Would it be helpful to read it in the service book as the priest reads it inaudibly? Or are there other ways to participate more fully and thoughtfully in the offering of the Gifts at that time?

Did this chapter change how you view Holy Communion? How so?

Epilogue: “What’s to Be Done with This Word?”

When you hear people use the word *sacrifice* now in everyday conversation, how does it strike you?

What are some situations in which you can be more mindful about how you use this word?

Appendix: “Sacrifice and Penal-Substitution Atonement”

Have you ever heard of Penal-Substitution Atonement before reading this book? What did you think of it then?

What do you think of it now?