**Laying Your Issac Down**

**Prodigal Message 18**

**Weekly Scripture memory verse:**

**Matthew 10:37-39 *Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.***

*Several years into our Prodigal journey, in frustration and anger, my son proclaimed that it would be better if he just killed himself. Honestly, it took me by surprise, as I never contemplated my response to such a statement.*

*Fortunately, by God’s grace, I had learned from mistakes and had seen how my enabling was harming my son, my family, my marriage, and myself. I had also seen God show up faithfully and comfort me and protect my family and me, totally because of His grace and unconditional love. In my pain and Prodigal hardships, my paradigms were slowly but steadily changing. I was beginning to see that despite years of believing in Him and serving Him, I was beginning to put him above all of my idols. The hardest idol to give up was my son. However, today, my son made me choose with his shocking proclamation.*

*The words coming from my mouth seemed shocking and strange to me on one hand, while at the same time, I was strangely confident and strong in my response. God says he will give you the words. That day He did. I stated, “Son, if you do decide to kill yourself, it will break my heart, sadden me, and I will never be the same. But I want you to know one thing. I will go on. I will see to it that your mother will go on.” I went on to let him know that I would not forget my purpose of bringing God glory. I told him that I had a race to run that God has marked out for me. I wanted him to know that I will not let anything he does get in the way of that. I will grieve, then I will go on. I will laugh again, because I know this is not my home and I live for eternity.*

*He had no response as we parted and I was startled at what transpired but knew I had spoken Truth. I had just “layed my Isaac down”.*

*In this weeks message we will explore what that means and its importance.*

**Abraham’s Life As A Model For Our Own**

 Abraham is a great role model for us in so many ways. He is a faithful man of God who was human and stumbled. He relationship with God grew more intimate and his faith strengthened as he learned from both his mistakes and victories

 He is noted prominently as a “man of faith” in Hebrews 11, the faith “hall of fame” chapter. Consider the words of Hebrews 11:6. *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

 Abraham’s life is chronicled in Genesis and is worth a detailed study on your own, but significant highlights are listed below.

* Introduced to Abram (who will later be known as Abraham Genesis 12:1. *The Lord said to Abram, Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. “ So Abram left, as the Lord had told him…*Abraham was 75 years old at the time, but had faith great enough to move everything he had and go where the Lord told him to go.
* Famine and hardship hit. On his own, he went to Egypt without God’s direction. Gripped with fear, he lied and manipulated. Despite Abram’s control issues, God was faithful and used this departure to grow Abram’s wealth.
* Genesis 13: Abram now showed faith and dependence on God by allowing Lot his choice to settle in the best land. God encouraged Abram by re-enforcing his covenant promises of land and descendants too numerous to count.
* Chapter 14 God is faithful in allowing Abram’s small force to overcome Kings armies to rescue Lot. God blesses him yet again by renewing his covenant and promising him a son.
* Chapters 15 and 16: Abram fall once again into humanness and sin. He and Sarai, grew impatient with God’s timing and once again take matters into their own hand by having a plan of their own. Abram sleeps with Hagar, Sarai’s maidservant. The consequences of that sin are the birth of Ishmael, disharmony in their marriage, and discord in their family. God predicts the hostility and trouble Ishmael and his descendants will cause in Gen. 16:12. We are impacted worldwide by that today.
* Chapters 17-19 God remains faithful despite Abram’s control issues and gives Abraham the covenant of circumcision and changes his name to Abraham. God changes Sarai’s name to Sarah and promises her a child well past the age of childbirth. Lot is spared from destruction due to Abraham’s prayers, as Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed.
* Despite God’s continued blessings, Abraham falls once again into sin and lied in Chapter 20 to Abimilech about Sarah once again. God shows his grace, forgiveness, and faithfulness.
* God’s faithfulness is again displayed with the birth of Isaac at the age of 100. God promises that through Isaac, a great nation will be delivered.
* Genesis 22 God finally asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. What? Such a request is incomprehensible by a loving God, much less a God whose promises were predicated on the life of Isaac, itself. How did Abraham respond?
* V3: he got up early the next morning, cut wood, and went up the mountain to the place God told him to go to make the sacrifice
* V5: he told his accompanying servants to stay with the donkeys and wait for he and the boy to come back
* V 10-12: Abraham attempted to sacrifice his son but the Lord halted the execution and provided an alternative sacrifice, a ram caught in a thicket

Listen carefully to God’s response in verses 16-18 *“ I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me. “*

**Abraham’s Life Summary**

Don’t overlook how God worked in Abraham’s life from start to finish. God didn’t ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as his first test of obedience and faith. ***God used every event in Abraham’s life to grow their intimate relationship, just like he is trying to do with us.*** *Somewhere in*Abraham’s journey, he realized fully that God truly loved him, was faithful, and trustworthy to keep His promises. ***God knows we might be obedient for a moment out of loyalty or reason, but unswerving faith can only be born and maintained out of a loving relationship based on an accurate, full knowledge of God.***

We learn important principles from Abraham’s life.

* God works all things for good despite Abraham’s sin. (Romans 8:28).
* God teaches about substitutionary atonement by providing a ram in the thicket as a substitute for Isaac. This event clearly points forward to the ultimate substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins on this *very same mountain,* where the Temple would someday be built. It is worthy of note that it is prophesied that this is the same place where Jesus will rule in the final temple in Jerusalem. Luke 21:24 also states, *“Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”.*

What can we learn from Abraham in his sacrifice of Isaac specifically? As a man of faith, what could he have been thinking? How hard was it for him? He never faltered and was obedient without delay. The writer of Hebrews helps us with the answer as he relays God’s word to us.

Hebrews 11:17-20 *By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.*

**How Do We Lay Our Isaac Down?**

The answer is simple. ***Faith***. However, the application of our faith is one of the hardest things we can do at times. *We can say things, our actions reflect what we truly believe.* We must fully trust Him. Trust is built through relationship. In this ministry, we continue to repeat that relationship is built on an **accurate knowledge of God**. Such knowledge is built by knowledge of His Word, processed in community, and prayerful two way communication with God Himself. *Only when we come to an accurate knowledge of God will we be able to lay our idols and our Isaac down.*

***We can trust an unknown future to a known God.***

Ironically, we give control to the only One who has ever been in control anyway! All we can do by holding on and doing it “our way” is interfere with God’s plan.

Prov. 3:5,6 *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.*

Jeremiah 17:7*.” Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him.”*

 If our concept of God is not 100% certain that He is God of all and in total control then we must be God in the areas we are not giving to God. The more we assume God’s role, the more it leads to stress and worry. A famous passage in Philippians 4:6 urges us to not be anxious about anything but with thanksgiving bring all of our worries, cares and troubles to Him.

*“Worry implies that we don’t quite trust that God is big enough, powerful enough, or loving enough to take care of what is happening in our lives. Both worry and stress reek of arrogance. They declare our tendency to forget that we’ve been forgiven, that our lives here are brief, that we are headed to a place where we won’t be lonely, afraid, or hurt ever again. In the context of God’s strength, our problems are small indeed.”*

 Francis Chan *Crazy Love pg. 41,42*

**Why is “Laying Your Isaac down” so important in the Prodigal journey?**

Laying your Isaac down is simply “giving God total responsibility for your Prodigal.”

* It is the most difficult thing to do in your prodigal journey
* It is the single most important factor in growing your relationship with God.
* It is God’s model of dealing with adult prodigal rebellion
* It is placing God back in his proper place, above your prodigal
* It is a loving thing, even though it doesn't’ feel like it at times

*If you are paralyzed by fear of the outcome of your prodigal’s life, then you will never be able to stop enabling and truly allow God to work in the life of your Prodigal to mold them and shape them into the person God intended.*

 Consider John the Baptists words in John 3:30 *He must increase, but I must decrease*.

Oswald Chambers expands upon this verse below to make a very important point.

*If you become a necessity to someone else’s life you are out of God’s will. As a servant, your primary responsibility is to be a “friend of the bridegroom”(John 3:29) When you see a person who is close to grasping the claims of Jesus Christ, you know that your influence has been used in the right direction. And when you begin to see that person in the middle of a difficult and painful struggle, don’t try to prevent it, but pray that his difficulty will grow even ten times stronger, until no power on earth or in hell could hold him away from Jesus Christ. Over and over again, we try to be amateur providences (God’s) in someone’s life. We are indeed amateurs, coming in and actually preventing God’s will and saying, “This person should not have to experience this difficulty.” Instead of being friends of the Bridegroom, our sympathy gets in the way. One day that person will say to us, “You are a thief; you stole my desire to follow Jesus, and because of you I lost sight of Him. Listen intently with your entire being until you hear the Bridegroom’s voice in the life of another person. And never give any thought to what devastation, difficulties, or sickness it will bring. Just rejoice with godly excitement that His voice has been heard. You may often have to watch Jesus Christ wreck a life before He saves it. (Matthew 10:34)*

 *…Excerpt from March 24, 2014*

*His Utmost For His Highest*

**What Do We Gain From Laying Our Isaac Down?**

* Greater relationship and **intimacy** with God
	+ Every time you place greater faith and trust in someone, including God, the relationship is strengthened. This requires action, not words. Saying you are letting go is the first step, but actually letting go is what matters.
* **Witness** is strengthened
	+ You become a leader people will follow when you follow truth and not emotions.
* Greater **Trust** means greater **Peace.**
	+ You let God be God so that you can concentrate purely on the only thing that you can control, yourself.
	+ Isaiah 26:*3 you will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in YOU*
* **Eternal reward** –
	+ The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 states that those who are faithful with what they are given will hear ***“Well done****, good and faithful servant”.* We are given our children and Prodigals. If we are faithful in leading them, raising them, then giving them back to God to mold and shape in His way, then we will hear these encouraging words from God himself.
* Provide the **optimal recovery environment**
	+ Evidence and experience from a recovery perspective indicates that an addict or Prodigal who returns to a recovery environment, defined by distinct boundaries and enforced consequences, will have a greater chance of staying sober and becoming a responsible functioning adult.
* **Glorify God**
	+ You live out your Personal Mission Statement by being obedient. You become less and God to becomes more as he has encouraged us to do. (John 3:30)
* **You prepare yourself for the rest of you life**
	+ If your prodigal journey allows you to know him better and trust Him fully then there is no trouble that can wreck your life. You may be sad, but you will not be in despair, as you have learned to trust God in every circumstance. (II Cor. 4)

**Why Did God Ask Abraham to Sacrifice Isaac?**

As we address this question, let’s first start with a reminder of how God views idols. Deuteronomy 5:8,9 *You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You should not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God…*

An idol is anything you worship or prioritize above God. God wants us to prioritize Him above all else. Most of us don’t often stop to think that our children and loved ones are on this list. If we love our family more than God, then our loved ones become idols and this is a sinful priority if it conflicts with our worship of God.

* In Abraham’s case, Isaac was his promised son, whom he loved dearly. God forced him to choose so that Abraham, himself, could be sure that God came first and there were no hindrances or idols in his life, the life of a man that would father and lead God’s chosen people. Likewise, we can learn that we can trust God fully even when it doesn’t make sense. *This is the accurate and full knowledge of God that leads to faith in action.*

*“God’s extremely rough treatment of Abraham was actually merciful. Isaac was a wonderful gift to Abraham, but he was not safe to have and hold until Abraham was willing to put God first. As long as Abraham never had to choose between his son and obedience to God, he could not see that his love was becoming idolatrous. Abraham took that journey, and only after that could Abraham love Isaac well and wisely. If Isaac had become the main hope and joy of Abraham’s life, his father would have either over disciplined him (because he needed his son to be perfect) or under disciplined him (because he couldn’t bear his son’s displeasure) or both. He would have overindulged him but also become overly angry and cruel, perhaps even violent when his son disappointed him. Why? Idols enslave. Isaac’s love and success would have become Abraham’s only identity and joy. He would have become inordinately angry, anxious, and depressed if Isaac ever failed to obey and love him. And fail he would have, since no child can bear the full weight of godhood.”*

 *Tim Keller: Counterfeit Gods*

***Why Does God Ask Us to Lay Our Isaac Down?***

Could it be that God asks us to lay our “Isaacs” or idols down for the very same reason He asked Abraham? Could it be that God has a purpose and a plan for your life that can only be accomplished when you know Him fully and trust Him in every detail.

**WHAT IF THIS PRODIGAL JOURNEY IS ABOUT YOU?**

For most people who come to the Prodigal ministry, the focus is naturally on the Prodigal and the chaotic circumstances. Almost all newcomers are praying and coming to Prodigal to *change their circumstances*. We have pointed out in other lessons (see Prayer) that Paul’s example for us in praying for his struggling disciples(Ephesians1:16-19) was not to change their circumstances, but for them to simply *know God better* and for their *eyes to be enlightened* by their struggles*.*. Paul realized, as we should, that if you know God fully, you can have joy and glorify God in ALL circumstances.

Every person participating experiencing Prodigal chaotic circumstances have the opportunity to use the situation to know God better. What if God was using this time to try to reach you and deepen His relationship with you in order to bless you with the knowledge of Him, to feel His love and sufficiency in your life? This possibility is very difficult to grasp and even offensive to hear early on, but eventually the people who successfully navigate the Prodigal chaos come to this realization.

Consider these scriptural truths as you ponder this possibility.

* Psalms 119:71 *It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees*
* Hebrews 12:1 *Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance* ***the race marked out for us.***
* Ephesians 2:10 *For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which* ***God prepared in advance for us to do.***

These verses clearly state that God has a plan for your life. There are specific tasks he has for us, and a road that he has made specifically for us to travel. If we don’t know him well enough for us to accomplish the tasks he has prepared for us, then how will we get there? What if these Prodigal *circumstances* are the answer?

**You must take actions. God is not impressed with our words.**

* James 2:22-24 *You see his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.*
* I John 3:18 *Dear children,Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth*
* Matt. 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of heaven but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven.

**Tough But Important Questions**

* What if you lay your Isaac down and God doesn’t give them back?
* What if you do not see change or transformation in your prodigal?
* What if your prodigal dies?
* Can I control another person?/Can I control God?
* Who does your Prodigal ultimately belong to?
* If you don’t understand, does that change His character ?
* At His core, is God still good
* Is God’s love for you and your Prodigal unconditional and unchanging?

 Do you come to God primarily to get you out of trouble, to ease the pain, or for the blessings He can give you, or or do you come to God solely for God.

God tells us he doesn't need our sacrifices, he just wants us.(Hosea 6:6) So in the final analysis, is God alone enough? If you give your Prodigal child, spouse, parent, or friend to God and He doesn’t do what you want, do you still love and trust him?

The Gospel truth would suggest that no matter what happens, God is good and He is enough. If you can ever come to trust that truth with all your heart, then you may grieve passionately but no hardship or struggle will defeat you and you will never be in despair. (II Cor 4) You will experience the abundant life Jesus came to give us. (John 10:10)

Laying your Isaac Down is the last obstacle in the Prodigal path. It is a place many turn back as it seems too hard and too much to ask. It is a wall that can only be climbed with the ladder of Faith and Trust. Faith gained by the knowledge of God and relationship with Him.

Let’s close this weeks lesson by looking at the summary of people who had such faith and were enshrined in Hebrews 11 in the “Faith Hall of Fame”

 *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.* *People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.* *If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.* **Hebrews 11:13-16**

GOD LOVES YOU, HE IS IN CONTROL, HIS WILL IS PERFECT, **AND HE IS ENOUGH!**

*Not often, but every once in a while, God brings us to a major turning point- a great crossroads in our life. From that point, we either go toward a more and more slow, lazy, useless Christian life, or we become more and more on fire, giving our utmost for His highest- our best for His glory.*