

## 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.*

### **Introduction**

God wants us to place Him above all else in our lives. He sent His Son to die for us so that we might have eternal life (John 3:16) and also to have life here on earth in abundance. (John 10:10) He loves and cares for us and wants what is best for us. All he asks from us in return is *everything*. (John 3:30, Matt. 10:37-39) He wants our obedience and trust fully and completely. This includes trusting our children/ Prodigals with Him. We are misguided if we think we have the power to save our Prodigals. We must learn that it is in our Prodigal's best interest to give them to God, allowing them to reap what they sow. The key to trusting God in all things is knowing Him fully. Anything we place as a higher priority than God is an idol, including our children.

Our study this week focuses on "Laying Your Isaac Down". What does that actually mean? In very real terms, it means withdrawing all enabling behavior **totally**. It means that in total obedience to God you realize that God determines all outcomes and that you can't control them. You fully commit to focusing on your relationship with God alone and let go of trying to control your Prodigal's life. In doing that, you place responsibility of your Prodigal's life fully on the Prodigal, realizing that the outcome of each of our lives is determined by the will of God alone. You realize that the outcome of each individual life is a journey of that individual and God. That is easier said than done, but can only be accomplished by true uncompromising **Faith in the Father**.

### **Abraham As A Model For Our Own Journey**

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 learned from his mistakes and used those experiences to grow his faith in God and to trust more fully in Him.

Abraham is listed in Hebrews 11, highly regarded as the faith "hall of fame". He is noted as prominently a "man of faith" as anyone who ever lived. He is the father of the Jewish nation, just as God promised him in a covenant relationship. He is regarded as the spiritual father not only to the Jews, but to the Muslims (through Ishmael) and Christians as well (see Matthew Chapter 1).

It is paramount to reflect for a moment to 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.* In this lesson we see an act carried out by Abraham that is one of the most well known, inspiring, and exemplary acts of faith of all time. It is enlightening to look at Abraham's life to see how

events shaped and molded his life to the point where he could willingly, confidently, and with great faith lay Isaac on the altar.

We are introduced to Abram (who will later be known as Abraham) in 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. Along his journey, Abram built altars to the Lord in worship and remembrance (Ebenezers).

Interestingly, when things got tough and a famine hit, Abram showed his humanness and decided to put things in his control so he went to Egypt. Nowhere in Scripture do we find evidence that God directed him to take this course. From everything we are told, Abram departed from God's plan to go to Canaan. The results were that Abram feared for his life due to Sarah's beauty so he developed a scheme of lying and manipulation. He said that Sarah was his sister to gain favor in the eyes of the Egyptians. Despite Abram's plan, God was faithful and used this departure to grow Abram's wealth. We can only assume Abram grew in understanding of God's faithfulness and grace by his actions the very next time he was faced with a challenge.

That challenge is detailed in Genesis 13, as the land could not support the vast possessions and livestock that both he and his nephew Lot possessed. So Abram, the elder of the two, modeled love, humility, faith and dependence on a God he knew would provide by giving Lot the choice. Abram would take what Lot didn't want. Lot chose the fertile valley and Abram was left with seemingly inferior land. However God encouraged Abram quickly by re-enforcing his covenant promise of possession of *all* the land and that his descendants would be more numerous than could be counted.

In Chapter 14 of Genesis Lot gets captured as a result of a war in which Sodom and Gomorrah are defeated in battle. Abram takes the 318 able-bodied men that work for him and defeat the victorious Kings, saving Lot and his family in the process. Abram gives God the glory and God blesses him yet again by renewing his covenant [rpm[roand promising him a son.

In Chapters 15 and 16 we see Abram fall once again into his humanness. He and Sarai, faithful men and women, grow impatient with God's timing and take matters into their own hand by having Abram sleep 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 that we are seeing today

In Chapters 17-19 Abraham learns yet again firsthand of God's great mercy to both he and Lot. Despite Sarah and Abram taking childbirth into their own hands, God 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 working so mightily in Abraham's life and the undeserved favor he has received, Abraham goes back to lying about Sarah in Chapter 20 to Abimelech. He even explains that technically, Sarah is his stepsister through his father. He told a "little white lie", if you will. However, God still redeemed the day by His intervention to show Abraham His grace once again.

In chapter 21, God's faithfulness is once again displayed by the birth of Isaac, the child of promise when Abraham was 100 years old. God clearly tells Abraham in verse 12 that it is through Isaac alone that the great nation promised will be delivered.

Finally, we find ourselves in Genesis 22 where 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**

Abraham was a man who recognized God's voice. He also realized that everything he had, including his faith, was purely a gift from God. (Eph. 2:8). He responded in obedience and learned from his mistakes. He remembered God often in his journey, stopping to remember Him and worship Him. Abraham's life serves as a great model for us in general and as we journey with our Prodigals. 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. He started slowly. God used hardship, grace, and His own faithfulness to grow Abraham's faith.

***God used every event in Abraham's life to grow their 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.*****

We learn from watching God provide for Abraham in his journey. We see God work all things for good despite Abraham's sin. (Romans 8:28). We see God teaching 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 what we think, but we only do what we truly believe.* We must fully trust Him. Trust is built through relationship. Relationship is built by the study of His Word, processed in community, and bathed in prayer. We remember His goodness in our lives and we remember and learn from our hardships to the point that we love him, realizing He loves us. Only then we will be able to lay our Isaac down.

We must realize that in the end, we are not in control and have no power over outcomes. If we can grasp the truth of these facts then we must give up the false illusion of control and walk away, obediently trusting God with our child. We walk away prayerfully, but hopefully realizing we are not really giving up anything. 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.

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

One of the greatest passages for us to remember as we strive to walk fully in obedience to Him is 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 also supports this paradigm of faith. *“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him.”*

If we lack faith, it leads to stress and worry; for if we don’t trust God with the problem then we must assume His role. 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?**

Being able to lay your Isaac down is the single most important factor in both restoring and growing your relationship with God and your Prodigal. It is also critical in being able to parent with the freedom you need to make the difficult decisions, which allow your child to suffer pain. Allowing your child to reap what they sow can only occur if you know God's character and what He is up to. Faith in Him allows you to provide an environment where there is love, but no enabling. This environment is a safe place for other and is called a "recovery environment" which provides the optimal chance of recovery for your prodigal. The problem is it is both the last step and the hardest step along the Prodigal path.

*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 Jesus command 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?**

It should be apparent at this point that laying our Isaac down is simply letting go and giving control to God. What do we gain from placing total trust in God? We gain the following:

- 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.
- More **Trust** gains you More **Peace**.
  - You let God be God so that you can concentrate purely on the only thing that you can control, yourself. If you set proper boundaries on your own life then you gain more control of the chaos that surrounds prodigal situations.
  - 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 and raising them and allowing them to reap what they sow, 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 the life of a man that would father and lead God's chosen people. This test strengthened Abraham's faith in God by solidifying the wisdom of trusting God above all else. Abraham learned that God will provide and nothing was more important than following God. We can learn from our observation that if you trust God above all else, even when it doesn't make sense, we can trust Him to provide and care for us. *Knowing fully what you truly believe and who you are, is critical to living the abundant life, leading well, and glorifying God.*

*"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. We share the hope that your prodigal comes home. However, successful grasp

of the Prodigal principles will uncover the truth that the Prodigal journey has as much or more to do with you than your prodigal. This is almost impossible to grasp early on, but eventually most people who successfully navigate the Prodigal chaos come to this realization.

Consider these scriptural truths as you ponder this possibility.

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 and have not given our lives to him by accepting His Son's sacrifice, then maybe God is loving us enough to get our attention. What if that journey requires greater faith than we currently have and He is using our Prodigals to grow us. If we have walked with Him for a while and are believers, but have not been fully committed, then maybe He looked down from heaven and loved us enough to allow something to get our attention in a way that would cause us to get our priorities straight. Maybe he would allow something to affect us so deeply that we would be moved to rid ourselves of every idol, including His most precious gifts to us, our Prodigals. Those idols hinder us from having the full relationship with Him that He desires and that we need more than we can imagine. In the journey we are walking with our Prodigals, we have an opportunity to be trained by our experience. The pain we experience is real. We cannot control how our prodigal handles their pain and their journey. We can only control our own. If we do that by learning all of the lessons God intends for us, it will have been worth it. (Psalms 119:71)

### **Are you ready to lay your Prodigal down and walk with Jesus in true faithful obedience?**

*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.*

James 2:22-24

### **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?

The answers are found along the Prodigal path God has put before you. The answer starts by asking other questions.

- Who does your Prodigal ultimately belong to?
- If you can't understand God or see Him work, does His character change?



- At His core, is God still good
- Does He still love you? ...and does He still love your prodigal?
- Do you see obedience for what it is?

As you ponder these questions every person should think about and answer at some point in their lives, you must come to the realization of why you truly come to the Father. Do you come to God for the gifts he can give you 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?

God's Word and His action of sending His son to die for our sins 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)

Finally, do you ask yourself, "Is this too much to ask?" You realize it is so hard to trust God when bad things happen. You pray for your prodigals and give them to God and yet you do not see the outcome you desire. Is it too much to accept that and proclaim that God alone is good and totally enough? Can anyone ever truly do that? Fortunately those that have done that are chronicled in that great chapter of faith, Hebrews 11. Let's close this weeks lesson by looking at the summary of people who came to God for God alone. Let's look at how God describes such faithful followers.

*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!**

#### **Main Principles:**

- **Knowing fully what you truly believe and who you are, is critical to living the abundant life, leading well, and glorifying God**
- **We can learn from our observation of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac that if we place our faith in God above all else, even when it doesn't make sense, we can trust Him to provide and care for us.**
- **We can say what we think, but we only do what we truly believe.**
- **We can trust an unknown future to a known God.**

- **Being able to lay your Isaac down is the single most important factor in both restoring and growing your relationship with God and your Prodigal.**
- **Successfully navigating your prodigal journey by finally being able to give your prodigal to God (laying your Isaac down) you will prepare yourself to face all subsequent challenges in life by faith in God.**