

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Lay it Down

Father's Day 2011

Deering Dyer, Director of Small Groups

Weekend 06.18-19.11

Good morning, Crossroads! It's good to see all of you. Happy Father's Day to all you Dads out there! Thank you. Thank you very much. I am honored and pleased to have both my Dad and my father-in-law here for this service as well—so no pressure there.

We are going to just dive right in today. We are going to study Genesis, chapter 22 as our text this morning. If you do not have your Bible with you, there is one in the chair back in front of you. In case you don't know, my name is Deering Dyer. I'm the Small Group/House Church guy here on staff at Crossroads and it is my honor to be able to share with you here this morning. Now when you look at this, you are going to see immediately by the heading of the text and, it is a familiar story, the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. And you are probably thinking, wow, that is an interesting Father's Day message there. But it is not really a Father's Day message so to speak but more of a trans-applicational message for all of us that really...what we are going to talk about here is how we trust God during times when our faith is tested. And this is a text that I think leads through a prescription of just that.

But let me give you a little bit of context as we always do when we approach the Word of God—we need to look at it in context and its proper and where it is within the full counsel of the Word of God. So Abraham as we know, he is a man—one of the patriarchs of our faith. About four hundred years after the death of Noah, Abraham came on to the scene and God called him out of his homeland and gave him a promise. And he gave him the promise that he would be the father of a great nation. And from his offspring, he would have children that would rival the stars in the sky. This is quite a promise for Abraham.

And in chapter 15 of Genesis, we see that Abraham heard that promise and he believed it and that was counted as righteousness towards Abraham from God—the fact that he would believe that promise. Well, years came and went and this promised child never came for many years until finally God moved in Abraham's life and brought him his son, Isaac.

So fast forward—brings us to this point here. Isaac is now a young man, probably in his early twenties. In chapter 22 starting in verse 1, we see, “After these things God tested Abraham. Stop right there. Now we see what this is about. We see what we are going to be dealing with here in this twenty-second chapter of Genesis—that there is going to be a test. And one thing we can know immediately from this is, is that as Christians, as followers of Christ, we can expect to be tested. Why? Why the test? Why does God see fit to have to test us? I mean—He is Sovereign. He is Omniscient. He knows everything. Why test us because he is going to know what the outcome of the test is ahead of time. And that's true. You see, the test is not necessarily for that reason. The test is for another reason. We find those reasons in God's word. You do not have to turn there but you might want to make a note of it to refer to it later.

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In James, chapter 1, verses 2-4, James exhorts us to be joyful in the midst of trials because the testing of our faith produces steadfastness. The testing of our faith produces steadfastness. We are able to endure future tests. It strengthens our faith in God when we meet these tests. The apostle Peter also reminds us that when he is talking to the saints; when he is writing to the saints of the persecuted church in I Peter, chapters 1:6-7, Peter says: The testing of our faith results in the praise, glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. So there we see the second reason why we are tested. So that when others see us walking through life enduring these tests and we are able to do that through faith and people see that; Christ reveals Himself through us and how we persevere through those tests. So we see that through God's word we are tested so we can grow our faith and persevere through trials and we are tested so that Christ might be glorified so that others may see us going through the trials of life.

Now this is not Abraham's first test. He has had many tests up to this point. Some he passed; some not so much. Most notably, in chapter 12 and chapter 20 of Genesis, we see where Abraham actually lies to some kings and some rulers and tells them that Sarah is not his wife but his sister just to save his own hide. He failed that test. Surely God would have provided a way to protect Abraham because of the promise but Abraham lost sight of that and panicked. And probably most notably, after years of Sarah and Abraham not having this promised child that God had promised them, they decided they were going to manufacture an opportunity to have a child. They went and got one of Sarah's servant girls, Hagar, and they created an opportunity for Abraham to have a son through her and that just turned into a big, hot mess. Did I just say "hot mess"? Well, it was. It was a big mess. It was a big mess of soap opera proportions. I mean, it really was. Who needs Young and the Restless and General Hospital? You can just open up the book to Genesis here and be entertained and edified at the same time.

But we can all expect tests. Some that we are going to fail; some we are going to pass. But if we are going to have a fighting chance to pass this test, we have to be available to respond to God. We see that as we finish verse 1: After these things, God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." See that—here am I. Abraham had no idea what God was going to talk to him about yet here am I. He was available. He was available to hear what God had for him. That's a good lesson for all of us—that we should daily, constantly be going to the Lord. Here am I; make ourselves available to him in prayer, in the study of his Word, fellowship with the saints. Make yourselves available to him every day prepares us to meet the trials of life...prepares us to meet those tests. Because if we are not going to him and those tests blow into our lives, we are called off guard and our response is usually, "Help, get me out of this!" And we are reacting to the test instead of having a proactive position towards it. When we do that, the storms of the trial may block our view of what God's greater purpose of the test might be.

So in verse two, we see the test. God said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of

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those mountains of which I shall tell you.” There it is—the test. How in the world do we meet that test? Remember, Abraham, this was not his first test. All of his previous testing to this point, his availability to God prepared him for this moment. What did it prepare him for? It prepared him to be obedient through the test. And I believe as we look through the next eleven verses, we are going to see a road map. We are going to see a descriptive road map on how we can take from this and learn how to be obedient in the midst of the test.

Let's look at verses three and four. So how did Abraham respond? So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, took his two young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Verse four: On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Here we see Abraham's response. He is going to be obedient—and that he was to begin the journey to trust in God. It really has all been a journey for Abraham ever since God first called him out of Ur, it has been a journey of faith for Abraham. And now he was on a two-day journey to Mount Moriah where he was going to do the unthinkable for most of us—for all of us. But how is he able to do it? Abraham was a normal guy; he was a regular guy just like us. But he listened to God's call and he believed God's promise and that started his journey to trust in God. So that brings us to this point.

He is going on a two-day journey to Mount Moriah—the most difficult test that he has had to this point. For some reason, God wanted him to give back the son that he had been waiting so long for. When we look in verse three and four, we see that Abraham is preparing; he is working diligently. He is working out the plan; he is moving. What is he not doing? What would you do if God asked you to do this? You would ask why. We do not see Abraham asking why through any of this. Isn't that amazing! What we see in this test...that if we are to be completely obedient through a test, sometimes we should not expect to have reasons why. If I was Abraham, I would want to ask that. “God, don't you know that I love this son, this boy that you have given me?” Of course, God knew that; you see that right in the text. God issues the test and points out: This son, whom you love. He commanded it anyway and Abraham's response was amazing. Without questioning God, he got up early the next morning and prepared the journey—a two-day walk...two-day walk to think; two days to pray. Two days to decide to be obedient.

Let's continue on, verse five: Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and...what's the next word? ...worship. It just really struck me. That Abraham would say that. Here he is; he is about ready to go up on Mount Moriah and sacrifice his son by God's command and he tells his servants to wait here while my son and I go up and worship. If Abraham was angry; if he was really questioning what was going on through here, don't you think he would have said something different? Maybe he would have said, the boy and I are going to go up and make a sacrifice, something that would kind of detach from the situation. No! We are going to go up and worship the God that we love—the God that we trust. So Abraham

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viewed his obedience as worship and that is the next key to being obedient in the midst of a trial—view your obedience as worship.

Now I said that this wasn't really a Father's Day message but here's a Father's Day application—that Abraham was doing exactly what every father should do and teach his son to worship—to lead his son, to teach him to walk in faith. But still, how is it possible? How is it possible? I am still grappling with this. How is it possible that he could go through these steps and I think the text answers it in the next few verses at the end of chapter five through eight. And I will start back here again. ...“I and the boy will go there and worship and come to you again.” See there...come to you again. Abraham is confident that he is going to come back with Isaac. You see that further here in verse six: And Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand, the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father, “My father!” And he said, “Here am I, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham said...catch this... “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

You see it. Abraham was relying on God's provision through this test. And he was able to do that because he understood God's character. He knew who God was; he believed God; he trusted God; he believed the promise. He believed that no matter what happened, God was going to keep his promise and that promise was not going to happen without a son. He believed that God was going to preserve Isaac in some way, somehow. God was going to make it right that he could trust him through it.

Continuing on through verse nine: When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. When I look at those verses, I am...how...how can this happen? We are at the climax of the test here and Abraham was ready to go through it. But we see here that as he was prepared to sacrifice his son, Isaac, the next step in this is to depend on God for strength in order to be obedient. It is only through God's strength that Abraham was able to last as long because that strength must have been rooted in the very faith that God would keep his promise.

And then we see in the next two verses that God intervenes. ...the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

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The final key to being obedient to God in the time of testing is to withhold nothing from God. It does not matter how obedient Abraham would have been at this point. If he decided to choose his son over God, he would have been disobedient. Partial obedience is still disobedience. But he was obedient throughout because he knew that God was not asking him to kill his son. What he knew was that God was really asking him to trust him.

Let's make this real. What does this mean in our lives? During one of the songs, Dan was asking as you sing this song, think of something that you need to surrender in your life. What came to your mind? What is it that you need to lay down on the altar? What do you have to lay down? Maybe it is a failing, a failed marriage. Maybe an illness—family illness. Death of a loved one. Maybe you are struggling with a job, unemployment. Each of us has something we have to lay down; sometimes we have to lay it down every day.

My wife and I will be married seventeen years in October. And when we got married, we never pictured a life without children. But it wasn't long after our marriage that we found out our test. Our test was infertility. It is hard to describe but many of you know what it is like—the pain, the frustration, the constant disappointment, the devastation of loss through miscarriage. It was a test. It was not our only test. It will not be our only test but it was probably the largest test, not only of our marriage, relationships but the largest test of our faith.

But through all of it, we started to come to grapple with the fact that maybe this was not what God had for us. But the desire to be parents never left; it was our hearts desire. We believed that God wanted to give that to us. But after it became apparent that this was not going to happen au natural, the way of natural means baring a miracle. Through prayer and counsel, we decided that perhaps adoption is what God has for us. And after all, how could it not be? We should all consider that. Adoption is something that is after the very heart of God. Isn't that what He has done for us after all? Adopted us as his children? So we began to go down that road. Oh my goodness, the research, the paperwork, filling out the profile. It was a lot of work but it gave us new hope. And we filled out profiles, we were letting people know. We were passing them out like candy—heck, we even sent it in our Christmas card. Telling everybody we knew, if you know someone that would like to make an adoption plan, let us know. And you know what? Shortly after we made this decision, people started coming to us—friends, relatives. “Hey, I've got this person; I know this co-worker: I've got this cousin.” A young lady has found herself in a situation that might be willing to do this; would you be willing to help? Absolutely! The door would always close.

But we would remain hopeful in the midst of that because we saw that as a sign that God was moving. But through the whole process, one of the things was the cost of adoption. I don't know if some of you know this, but if you adopt through a private agency or facility, it can be thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars. And then you have

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to decide whether you are going to go international or what have you. We decided that, you know, what, Lord, if this is what...of course, we were limited financially, if this is what you have for us, we are going to just trust you, trust you to provide. We'll do the due diligence in making sure we have an attorney, we'll get the home study done, but, Lord, it is up to you to provide the young lady to make the adoption plan and we'll just trust you to bring her to us.

But then the weeks turned into months and the months turned into years and the waiting game was on. About two years into it and, they say for adoption, the waiting is the labor. And Deering was getting impatient. Deering started feeling like Abraham. And I started to try to manufacture situations. There was no Hagar or anything like that. I want to be clear about that. But I started thinking well maybe we made a mistake, we need to go through an agency. I started to thinking maybe we had made a mistake; we need to go through an agency but we don't have the money. Well, we'll find the money. Maybe if I sell some retirement stuff and we refinance the house, we can get the money to be able to do this because every time we would get these things, we would see the fees and it is extraordinary. And God being the good God that he is shut all those doors. Because I would have immediately put our family, had that worked, in a very precarious financial situation. But none the less, I was still getting very impatient.

A year ago, we went on a ministry conference in Orlando in June and I was in one of the swimming pools at the hotel during one of the breaks and, across at the other end of the pool, I saw this man about my age and his wife and their brand-new infant son playing in the pool having a great time. To be very honest with you, I am very glad my face was wet. "God, why can't I have that?" You know it's rough. That's what we want. I'd be a good dad. But God is good.

Shortly after that, through a lot of prayer, working through this test, God's grace, I was able to lay it down. I had said that I had laid it down a number of times in the past, but this time, I really felt relief with God's grace. Because when it comes down to it, we know that God is good; He is perfect. So his will for us, his plans for us must be equally good, perfect. So I fell into that. Know what worked? Take this desire for Jean and I to be parents, give us opportunities to pour into other children that are in our lives, to love even more our nephews and our niece. To give us ways to pour out love to those in children in that orphanage in Cambodia. Let us be father figures and mother figures to them. Give us ways to fulfill this heart's desire that you've given us to be parents. If it's not to be actual parents, then so be it; it will be done. I laid it down.

Then on December 24, Christmas Eve, in 2010, God moved. My wife is a speech therapist at Med-Central Health Systems and, part of her job is that she works in the maternity ward and does hearing screenings on newborn infants. And on Christmas Eve, because we do not have children, she volunteered to cover the Christmas shift so that others could spend time with their families. And a young woman came in, and on Christmas Eve morning, delivered a baby boy and she told the nursing staff that she could

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not take care of this child and that she needed somebody to adopt him. Well, they told Jean about it; Jean came home and we were getting ready for Christmas Eve services. Jean was actually on a praise team that night and she kind of casually said, oh, by the way, a woman came in the hospital and had a baby. There might be an opportunity here. You see, you've got to understand, we've had these opportunities before, dozens of them. So it's almost, OK, well, we might want to update the profile tonight in case we need to provide her some information. OK, we'll do that. Christmas morning, I'm in my pajamas, I'm wrapping Christmas presents and I get a phone call from Jean. She goes, if you've got that profile ready, can you run it over to the hospital. If the hospital staff gets a chance to talk to her, they are going to tell her about us. OK, sure I'll do that. And as she is on the phone with me, her cell phone rings so she has two phones up. She says, she does?? Deering, she wants to meet me. Well, let's meet her. Well, let's pray first. We prayed and she goes to meet her and we go and spend Christmas with our families. What's happening here, God? She wanted to meet me too. The next day, December 26, she meets me. And after about fifteen minutes, Jean and I in the room with this young woman and this new baby, she takes this baby, she lays him on the bed in front of me. She says, I want you guys to adopt my baby. So on December 27<sup>th</sup>, we bring Matthew Deering Dyer home and he has been in our home every since.

And you know what I'm the most grateful for? I am so grateful that it did not happen my way. God's way was better; it's always better. (Picture) And that one gets me every time too. God's way is always better, you know why? Because I can't tell people about Matthew without telling people how good God is. I can't share Matthew's story with anyone without sharing Christ. It is a built in testimony. When we were going through this whole thing, when obstacles might come up during the whole process, Jean and I were not worried because we could almost here the audible voice of God in our ears say, "Don't worry, I've got this. Watch me work and be amazed." And we were; and we still are.

And that brings us to verse 14. You will see that you have one more fill-in. Verse 14: So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided." When we pass the test or if we fail the test, we should always remember God's faithfulness because he is faithful through all of it. Abraham, full of love for his God, dedicated that place to God, named it "the Lord will provide". Remember that story that I told you about in Orlando where I was in the pool? Well, almost exactly one year later, this picture was taken. As I was playing with Matthew in the pool, I remembered how faithful God was. The memories of that day in Orlando came pouring back. Now Scott and Connie, whose pool we were in, they don't know but I've named their pool, "the Lord will provide". But even his name, we decided to name him Matthew which means "gift from God". Every time we say his name, we remember that the Lord will provide. So when your faith is tested and you are going through trials, learn from Abraham, be available to respond to God. Be obedient by just stepping out and taking that journey. See your obedience as worship. Rely on God's

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provision. Depend on his strength. Do not withhold anything from him. And throughout the test, even if you fail it, when you pass it, remember God's faithfulness.

Let's pray.