

# DEEPER:

*A Return To Not Being Able To Touch Bottom*

October 31, 2010

As we continue this morning in the series DEEPER, I want you to understand, what we are doing. I have said to pastor's all around the country, that if they are going to develop an intentional Discipleship Pathway in their church that first they would have to develop a set of Core Principles that flowed out of their heart, so the congregation would know what the target on the wall was. In other words, what a fully committed follower looked like, so they could all begin the journey toward becoming that. I have been doing that consistently for about 12 years now. Just over 2 years ago in a hotel in Grand Rapids Mich. The Lord said to me, "So what are yours?" "What are your core principles? At that time I had no aspiration to become a Sr. Pastor again. But I began the work of praying and journaling. I did not know that God was preparing me for this church and this church for me. What we are discussing is what God and I have dealt with for over 2 years that will eventually affect every nuck and crany of this church. So with that let's look at principle #4 and the question is

*How does a fully committed follower of Christ live, so as to become an effective witness to those at **Stage FOUR?***

A Fully Committed Follower:

## **4. Pursues God's purposes *in spite of fear***

*A follower of Christ seeks to identify and live out God's purpose for him/her and accepts His direction and guidance as the final authority in determining a course of action. As a result, a follower chooses to move beyond fear and step out in obedient faith to expand God's kingdom.*

I was on a construction site the first time I remember hearing the phrase, "Your Baby". I was 11 years old and I was carrying mortar for a bricklayer. A sort of dispute was taking place between the foreman overseeing all the bricklayers and the general contractor of the entire job about the next job we were going to go to. All I heard was, "well, listen that job is going to be your baby, and you are going to be responsible for the outcome..."

That was all that was said, but from that, I figured out that the phrase 'your baby' meant something more than your child, but it still meant that it was important to you.

Since then, I have heard that slang phrase hundreds of times, describing 100's of different things but they all have meant basically the same thing. Whatever it is being described is important to someone and they have pretty much full ownership of it.

Stage 4 is where that internal agitation we feel that there must be more to life -- is met by the reality that God's future for us is about choosing to give up ownership of our babies and allowing God total control of that area of our life. It means we must be willing to:

## 1. Makes Extreme Choices

The story we are looking at today is in the 1<sup>st</sup> book of the bible and is about a fellow named Abraham.

*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." Genesis 22:2*

Abraham's baby was Isaac. But this baby was more than that. Isaac represented for Abraham's dream for the future as Abraham understood it. Through this baby Abraham was going to be the Father of many nations, through this baby Abraham's descendants were going to be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

Babies are precious aren't they. They are not only precious but they are ours. And babies are not always human. Our babies often don't take on human form, sometimes our babies are ideas, sometimes they are our careers, our majors, the person we are dating, our possessions, our babies are the way we think things should go, in fact our babies can take on all kinds of forms, but whatever form they take, **our babies always speak of a future, the way We see it** and we love them, notice, *Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love*

When God begins to make spiritual change and move us out of our comfort zones and toward Stage 4 He begins inside us, with those things that are our babies. Most often those near us can tell something is up but they are aware of the details.. God said to Abraham...*go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."* No one, else knew what was going on,, those in the caravan going with Abraham, only knew they were going on a 'road trip'. Least of all Isaac didn't know. Only Abraham.

The choice to spiritually grow, to give up your ownership of how things should go in life, is always an individual choice. We are going to be putting into place Discipleship pathways, mission trips, groups. But the choice to pursue God's purposes for your life will always mean that you personally will have to face and make extreme choices. The choice God put in front of Abraham was, "Are you willing to surrender your baby and trust God for the outcome." The fear of it all is, 'Will God's outcome be better than My outcome?'

In the midst of the extreme choice that a stage 4 follower makes will be:

## 2. Has Moments of Trust and Obedience

I love verse 9

*When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it.*

The moment of truth had arrived, an Abraham, built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Just before these moments of truth, it is like we go into slow motion, **like the calm before the storm.**

A man once told me that just before he poured all his bottles of liquor down the drain, **he spent a hour cleaning his house.** All during the hour he said that he experienced the most incredible clarity about the meaning of his life, then he walked over to the sink and one at a time he poured out every drop of alcohol that he had.

As we approach these moments of surrender in our lives, it is important to understand what is happening, so that when we take the step, it is nothing short of full surrender. That we know that it is our baby that we are giving up is important, because it is linked to the level of our commitment to the new thing God is about to do in us and through us.

Then comes the moment of trust and obedience, it says:

*He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. Genesis 22: 9-10*

It is an interesting and terrifying day when life brings you to a dead end. When everything you thought was going to be, suddenly isn't anymore. Suddenly there is no map, no GPS, only the knife, to slay the life you thought was going to be. The only question on the table is 'What do you trust? Who do you trust? The temptation to cut and run back to the comfort zone is massive. A fully committed follower however, doesn't. They stay in the moment and they Trust God and obey the instructions that defy logic.

God dreams never can be born until we give our dreams, (the babies we own) and trust God with a trust that plays itself out in real practical obedience.

On registration day at West Virginia University I got into a line where everyone had pink slips. I did not have a pink slip. As I moved closer to the desk I began thinking well maybe they won't ask me for a pink slip, but sure enough as that had been the first question of everyone else, so it was of me. Not having a pink slip they sent me to another building where I got in another line. When that desk person also did not have my name in the books I began to panic. I got in my truck and headed back to Washington DC where I had come from. I was ready to cut and run. I got about 10 miles outside of Morgantown WVa and I pulled over into the median strip. The choice was clearly in front of me. West bound lane, East bound lane. One lead back to the place I was comfortable with, the place I knew, the other lead to a place that no one even knew my name

### 3. Listens for and Responds to God's voice

*But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Genesis 22: 11-12*

At a superficial glance this story could leave a person thinking God is a very strange supreme being. Demanding that a Father stab his only child to death, but this story is really not about that. This is a story of a man being taken to the brink of loyalty and commitment and at that place still fully being able to hear and respond to God's voice.

The question is are you willing to let God take you to the point of giving up your dreams (your baby)

Once you are willing to let go of the thing that you so desperately are hanging onto, then God's voice can and will come to you and speak with a sense of clarity and release. A stage 4 follower has walked through some sort of invisible testing ground, then their eyes are opened to God's answer, not their own as they:

So there I sat, in the middle of the east and west bound lanes. Everything in me was saying go home, go east and in that moment of choice I turned my wheels west and went back. I went back to that same desk that only minutes before did not have my name anywhere. When I approached the desk, the person behind it recognized me, and said Hey, Dan where have you been, we found your name, you are a day early, that's why we could find your name, but you can register now, here is your room key and can move in anytime. I went to my truck, unloaded my stuff, locked the door of my room and laid down on the bed and cried like a baby.

#### 4. Receives God's Substitute Sacrifice

The next verses say: *Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place "the Lord will provide." Genesis 22:13-14a*

Abraham had come to that place that every true stage 4 follower experiences when they have laid themselves out in some incredible way and God comes through with an answer that simply was not there moments before.

Rams don't just get caught by their horns in a thicket. The neck, shoulders and head of a ram are the most powerful part of a ram. Rams tear thickets to shreds. When God has the trust and obedience of one of his children then God will act in illogical and amazing ways to show us his answer.

In my very first church that I served, for 21/2 years, there were 2 young ladies who came to me to talk, both had been raped. One by a gang of men and one had been date raped. The one who had been raped by the gang, was able to come to a place in her life where she let go of the life she thought she would have, forgive her attackers and receive God's new life for her. It was an incredible thing to watch as God fully restored this young woman's heart and soul.

The other woman who had been raped on a date, never was able to forgive, she hung onto the fact that her life as she had thought it was going to be, was gone and she resisted any kind of substitute for that life that she expected that was torn from her. It was as if she was re-experiencing the rape every Friday night.

Our last act of obedience is to receive that substitute sacrifice as God's personal gift to us. This last act teaches us how to receive God's new plans and purposes that are not ours and thus builds humility into our lives. A necessary ingredient for stage 5.

These are the ways that a fully committed follower lives so as to be a witness to people who are themselves at stage 4.

Let's pray