

The Lord will make you the head and not the tail. It's from The Blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 28. The Lord will make you the head, not the tail.

Before that, Moses said, you will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed in the crops of your land and the young of your livestock.

The calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks, your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. You will be the head and not the tail.

It's tempting as Christians, I think, to take those blessings and just run with it. Don't you agree? But there is nearly always a cost.

There's nearly always a cost to blessing. And that's our subject for today. We've looked at the plan of blessing.

It is God's nature to bless. He is preeminently disposed to bless. It is His desire to bless His people that they might be a conduit, a conduit of blessing, to pass it on.

And as Ben said last week, we're meant to be a river, not a reservoir. We're called to experience the blessing of God and pass it on. So we have the plan of blessing, the conduit of blessing, and then today, the cost of blessing.

In Genesis 12, God said to Abram, I will bless you. In Genesis 22, paraphrasing what God says, He says, are you willing to hold the blessing I give you lightly with open hands? Could you turn to Genesis 22?

That's our main text, if you have your Bible there. This, I would say, is the gold standard passage of scripture, for the cost of blessing. It's extraordinary.

I was so blessed to study it this week. I really was, and I do pray that I would get out of the way and let this passage speak, because it's just so incredible. Genesis 22.

Abraham has been blessed, that is, God has spoken good over his life. That is what it means to be blessed. He has spoken a preferred future.

He's declared truth over Abram. And then he now has experienced this blessing. He's blessed his family and some of the community around him.

Now, in Genesis 22, Abraham must treasure the giver more than the treasure he treasures the gift. That's a key line, I think, in today's sermon. Do you treasure the giver or do you treasure the gift?

We'll see today that there is a testing involved in blessing, a surrender, a provision and a multiplication.

## 1 — THE TESTING OF BLESSING

So firstly, the testing of blessing, Genesis 22, verses one to two. Sometime later, God tested Abraham. He said to him, Abraham, here I am, he replied.

Then God said, take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the region of Moriah, sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain, I will show you.

One might imagine the only normal human response would be something like, sorry, Lord, sorry, Lord. Could you say that again?

I didn't hear you right, because I thought I heard you say that I should take the teenage boy that you promised me, and I waited 25 years ago.

The son I love, Isaac, I thought you said, take him three days' journey and sacrifice him in a barbaric ancient way on an altar, taking his life and then burning him. Did I miss something? Isn't that a fair response?

But he does not clarify. He listens and receives the instruction. When do you reckon is the first time the Bible ever talks about love?

You can probably guess where we're heading here. I did not know this, but in my studies this week, I discovered that this mentioning of love is the first time love is talked about in the Bible.

Now, that makes me want to honestly believe Christianity purely because of this. This is an ancient text.

Can you believe how wonderful and extraordinary it is that the Bible waits 22 chapters to mention love, and it is in the context of a father who loves his son, Isaac, and must sacrifice him? Talk about Christ in scripture. God waits to reveal love.

He says, Abraham, take the son you love, Isaac, and do what I have to do. Give him up, the son that you love. Extraordinary.

God is in essence asking Abraham that question. Do you trust the giver more than the gift? Are you holding so tightly to the blessing you've stopped listening to the one who blessed you?

Have you ever heard of William Borden? Nobody. It doesn't look like.

William Borden was born in 1887, the heir to a huge fortune living in America. He looks like Matt Damon. But that's not Matt Damon, it's William Borden, and it was a dairy farming fortune.

He was a man who finished Yale. He had everything before him. The world at his feet.

But when he finished his high school education, he went on a world trip. And he saw the poverty in the world and the plight of the unreached for Christ, he was a Christian, and he felt a calling to world mission.

And he went back and he studied theology. And he had this sense of call to go to Muslims in China. And so he went and did his study, and he famously wrote in his Bible, no reserves, no retreats, no regrets.

William Borden died from meningitis less than a year after he finished his theological studies. He was in Cairo, he never made it to China. At first glance, his life is a bit of a waste.

But when you look into it, history will testify that God used his sacrifice to spark waves of missionary commitment across generations. Isn't it true that God's blessing to a thousand generations doesn't look the same for each generation?

Each iteration of the blessing carries its own tasks and responsibilities that are carried for that generation to truly be the conduit of blessing that God has called them to be. No reserves, no retreats, no regrets.

What blessing from God do you hold most tightly onto? That's a pretty challenging question, isn't it? You know, some blessings we wait a long time to receive.

Sometimes those blessings are like Isaac, they're living. And we hold onto them like we should. They are precious to us, but they can become an idol.

Is there any chance that you have put your faith in the gift more than the giver? It's been said, the kingdom of God flows most powerfully through open hands, not clenched fists.

## 2 — THE SURRENDER OF BLESSING

We are blessed to be a blessing. The cost of blessing involves testing, and it involves surrender. Verse three, early the next morning, Abraham got up and loaded his donkey.

He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.

He said to his servants, stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship, and then we will come back to you. Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son, Isaac.

And he himself carried the fire and the knife.

As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up again and said to his father, Abraham, father, yes, my son Abraham replied, the fire and the wood are here, Isaac said, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?

Abraham answered, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son. And two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it.

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. Now, verse 10 is a shocking verse.

It's a shocking verse, what Abraham was about to do. But I think verse three is sort of equally as shocking. Verse three says Abraham got up and loaded his donkey.

As Tristan mentioned, we've started a podcast. I sort of am a late inclusion in it and hang along for the ride. Ben and Jack sort of started it.

Jack is an amazing host and Tristan is part of it. So there's four of us from, I'm the old person in it, but the others are pretty similar age. But it's a great candid conversation.

I can only recommend it to you as something really worthwhile to unpack the sermon a little bit more on a Monday. Jack comes up with these interesting questions and he said, I'm interested how you guys experience being a conduit of blessing.

Like how do you do it? And what we discovered as we talked about it was to be a conduit of blessing is probably a lot to do with Nike. It's just, just do it.

It, to be a conduit of blessing is to know what you should do and sort of just do it, serve, give, support, encourage, protect, speak up, be that conduit of blessing God's blessed us, speak out, do what needs to be done.

Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He just got up, he had three days walk to Moriah to do and he doesn't question God. He, he just starts moving, moving towards obedience and he walks with his son and he has a heart full of questions, doesn't he?

Three days walk, does that remind you of anything? Three days in the belly of a fish. It's a threshold moment, three days walk to Moriah, which traditionally is seen as the spot where the Dome of the Rock is.

The temple was built on the point of Moriah where Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son. That's the Temple Mount. So very significant as far as sacrifice, but talk about a threshold moment, three days walk.

Jesus was in the grave for three days. It's a period of waiting in the Bible, isn't it? Three days.

Trusting, it's a period of surrender. Verse seven says, we will worship. Verse five, I mean.

Verse five says, we will worship. Isn't that a poignant reminder of Romans 12? One to two.

Paul writes, therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship. To offer your body, holy on the altar.

Don't conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. To offer our whole body is what we sing about when we say, bless the Lord, oh my soul. We don't have a soul, we are a soul.

The Old Testament calls it nephesh. It is me, I am a living, breathing soul. I am a soul.

So when we say, bless the Lord, oh my soul, we're saying, may I be a life offered to you, holy, in worship. And this is the picture of Abraham and Isaac. They're not going to Mariah to sing songs.

They're going to offer everything, to worship. And then verse six, Isaac says, well, he is given the wood to carry on his back. Isn't that another moment where you just stop and say, maybe the Bible is real.

You know, maybe the Bible is real. This is an acting out of what Jesus will do. Isaac didn't have to carry the wood on his back.

But in the wisdom of God, this story points us to Christ carrying the cross, amen. It's just phenomenal. And then Isaac says, where is the lamb?

A probing question for dad. God will provide, he is told. God will provide.

As we consider giving to a thanksgiving offering, to a pledge over 18 months towards the ongoing ministry and health of this church. It includes mission, but it's the normal ministry as well.

As we consider that our God's heart is to bless to the thousandth generation, and we're one of those generations. And we think about being always ready. Let me remind you of this AI-produced version of our logo.

This church spanned the entirety of 20th century. Generation after generation. Do you think that these people that represent this church, Swansbury Baptist Church and then NorthernLife, know what it is to be a conduit of blessing?

Do you think they know what it is to sacrifice at their point where they have to step up? They do. They do.

We experience the past on blessing, don't we? Decades later. Every generation you see here in the 20s and the 40s and the 50s and 80s and 2000s, they all have to come to an understanding in their own context.

The same thing that Abraham's learning, the Lord will provide. Amen? The Lord will provide.

Have you found that often the pathway to blessing leads directly through the altar? Think about that. There is an altar that we go through.

We're talking about the cost of blessing.

### 3 – THE PROVISION OF BLESSING

Well, we read about the provision of blessing in verse 11. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven. That's to Abraham.

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. 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 and to this day, it is said on the mountain of the Lord, it will be provided.

Abraham raises a knife and he's ready to take the life of his beloved son. And in the nick of time, an angel yells out, don't do it. I know now that you fear God.

Reverence for God is shown through action. James says, faith without deeds is dead. For Abraham to experience the provision of blessing, he had to offer the sacrifice of blessing.

He had to offer back to God what God had graciously given him. At this moment, it's really important that we remember Romans 8.32. He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all.

God never called out with an angel and said, don't do it. His son did die for us on the cross. And for that, we say thank you, Father, amen.

Thank you that you did not spare your son, but you gave him up for us all. Let me read again. Abraham looked up and there in a thicket, he saw a ram caught by its horns.

So Abraham called that place the Lord will provide. Have you experienced the provision of God? Can I see a nod?

So many people. It is what it is to be a Christian, is to experience the goodness and the provision of God. Years ago, we had a good friend, a woman who was a missionary, and she adopted a child overseas.

She became a single mom, essentially, and she got herself in a position that she was in a tough place financially.

And we had just finished ministry at the church we were at, and we were starting up a not-for-profit ministry that we had a dream about. So we were trying to raise money, Leanne and I, mainly me.

And at the same time, I felt God challenging us that we should give \$1,000 to this friend. And we agreed on it. We said, yeah, let's give \$1,000 because she needs it, and this is a good thing.

And of course, we were in a bit of a predicament because we didn't have a steady income at that time ourselves. But it was my fault. I was dragging my feet, putting off this moment of giving \$1,000.

It was a lot of money, it seemed to me. And so we sent it. We sent the money.

And no word of a lie, within two hours, I walked to the front, opened up the letter box, and there was a letter, a physical letter, with \$10,000 notes in it.

It was \$1,000 and a gift and a letter from someone saying that they were giving to support us. And I was just like, oh. The Lord will provide Jehovah Jireh.

Now I don't say that to manipulate you or sort of suggest prosperity gospel that we give and God just provides back. Honestly, I don't say that. But I say that to honour God.

And to put myself in a less honourable position, I was slow to give. I was wondering whether God would provide. And he showed me that he is a God who wants to bless, that we might be a blessing.

And then he starts again and blesses us again, amen. We're blessed to be a blessing, a conduit of blessing so that we can be blessed again. So don't miss that picture.

Ben came up with that. I thought that was a wonderful picture as a metaphor for blessed to be a blessing. Sometimes we think about clenched fists on things that God has given us, this little treasure.

But it's probably more like that. There's Niagara Falls behind us and it's the blessing of God. And it's just coming.

There's always more of the goodness of God, when we step out in faith. Blessed to be a blessing, to be blessed again. There is testing involved in being part of the blessing plan of God for each generation.

There's surrender, we see that. There's certainly provision, the lamb was provided. And then there's multiplication.

#### 4 — THE MULTIPLICATION OF BLESSING

Verse 15, the angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, 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.

Does anyone find that odd? I find that odd because that's a condition. That's explaining a conditionality to blessing.

I thought in Genesis, remember, God had the animal pulled apart in Genesis 15 and he went through a smoking fire pot. You remember that the covenant that God made with humanity, with Abraham, was all God.

God's like, by my name, I swear I will bless you. It's not about you, but I'm gonna bless you because I'm a good God. But here, there's this conditionality.

Look at what it says. Because you have obeyed me, therefore I will bless you. And through your offspring, the hourglass picture, through the one, all nations will be blessed because you have obeyed me.

Is anyone with me? It's odd. It's just like the partnership God is inviting with humanity is astonishing.

It's just astonishing. God doesn't need, let's think about what, the nations will be blessed. Why does God need Abraham to be obeying?

He doesn't need anything. He can do it, but he chooses to partner with humanity through the perfect human, Jesus Christ, his son.

God's heart is to bless the nations, but do you see, we have a role to play, because we're the church, the body of the one, Jesus Christ, who has flesh and blood now on earth. We are filled, Pentecost tells us, we're filled with his spirit.

We are Jesus, the light of the world, to the world. So if this is not the offering you give to, that's absolutely fine, it really is, but don't let every offering pass you by, because that would be sad. We are meant to be conduits of blessing.

When everyone plays their part, the end result is astonishing.

Of course, Jesus carried that wood on his back, like Isaac did, but it was a cross, and he made the ultimate sacrifice, dying for the sin of the world, that the world, the nations might be blessed through him, through the forgiveness of sins found in

faith, through faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible talks about lots of different aspects of blessing. Hundred-fold blessing is a thing in the Bible. The steward with the talents who was faithful, he received a hundred-fold blessing.

Jesus takes a small boy's lunch. He is willing and obedient. Five loaves and two fish.

He multiplies it to feed 5,000. The blessing of God is meant to pass through us on our watch. If you've been a Christian for a while, you've watched churches around your local area come and go in their sense of flourishing, haven't you?

Why they do that is a bit of a mystery, but I reckon one part is surely there is over time a tiredness that sets in around the gospel.

There is a stepping back from prayer, a stepping back from generosity, a stepping back from expectation that God will do something. It honestly breaks my heart.

I've been in Sydney all my life, grew up in a family that were Christian, and so many churches that I have known were thriving churches, and I'm thinking mainly Baptist churches.

I look at now, and some used to be 500 strong, doing work all over the world. There are a couple of dozen people. Now, can they be used by God?

100%. But is their impact the same as 500? Often not, often not.

And so then you look back and go, what happened over 30 years? How did you get from thriving and flourishing and baptising people who are new converts and giving faithfully to not much at all?

Well, I think there is a slow lack of engagement in what the Spirit leads people to do.

Honestly, there's something incredibly important about churches like us who continue to believe, who continue to step out in faith and say, let's raise a new batch of financial resource that is part of what we do, because it's prayer and it's

volunteering and it's all sorts of other aspects of how we serve at church. But it is offerings like this that we engage in that are part of the building blocks to a church being healthy for another 100 years. Amen?

They are, I'm telling you, they are. You have to have people believe, our generation's up, let's go. Gird up the loins for action.

And Mike Richardson is someone with the gift of giving. And it's interesting talking to him about how it works for him. And confidence is a really important part.

Have you noticed that whatever spiritual gifts you have, you grow in confidence as you use it?  
Has anyone found that?

If you have a prophetic gift, it's pretty awkward to say something that you had a dream, you share it, but when you do and then the Spirit confirms that's actually true, you do it a bit more.

And it's something you grow into giving, I think, in trusting the Lord, praying about it, and giving and then seeing if he turns up, if he provides what you need.

That's a massive part of why we said, yes, let's do this special pledge giving offering, because it's an opportunity for us all to step out in faith and learn about the goodness of God.

So when we give to a long-term pledge giving offering, like we're talking about, know that you are investing in ministry that is going to play group parents and grandparents and kids.

Just like Stephen shared, people who are at a vulnerable stage of questioning, often people do their own things in their 20s, come to 30s, often their hearts open up a bit when they're having kids in their 30s. Because what's life about?

We're investing in that. We're investing, as Leanne said, in children understanding what the Bible is all about. We're investing in youth ministry, young people who have all sorts of inputs coming into their heart and mind.

We're paying for people like Tristan to lead groups of leaders so that week in, week out, we say, there's a gospel, a good news available for you. I know you don't know anything about this.

You grew up so far away from the church, what you might even call like pagan lifestyle, but God loves you in Jesus. We put money into a pot, a resource so that we can keep doing this in a thriving, flourishing, growing manner.

We give money towards this offering so that church services like this can go on. That's why. Did you know this beautiful big building is super expensive to run?

When we built it, I thought, goodie, we don't have an asbestos laden, old, falling down, dilapidated building that costs so much money. It's nothing like the money that it costs to run this place. We're linked to the division apartments.

There's money that goes out that's just not that exciting to know about, but it's just part of being the church on the corner and keeping our lights on.

When you put money into the pledge offering, it pays for pastors like me and Ben and others to preach most weeks.

Now, I know that's not the best thing we ever heard in the world, me preaching, but what I've found is if you're consistent and you keep on saying from a pulpit, the Bible's real, Jesus is real, God loves us, and he wants you to do something with

your life that honours Christ, good things happen. And it's just called keeping the lights open and the pulpit open to preach the gospel.

That's what we do, whether it's me or the next person, but that's where money goes and midweek gatherings and fellowship and prayer and all the stuff that is here locally and done all over the world.

I don't apologise for making that spiel, because you have to decide, do I believe in the local church or not? And the local church is God's plan.

It's not Parachurch, it's not the best organisation you found the charity down the road, that's not his absolute plan, it's us, the local church. Being faithful and fruitful in our iteration of the thousand generations that he wants to bless.

I think this is a cracking passage that speaks to our predicament here. It really does. God wants to bless, he does bless, but you don't get to hold on to Isaac and go, no, this is mine, this is my precious.

He says, no, no, no, it's not that, mate, let it go. Trust the giver. I got more gifts for you.

Trust the giver and every time you do, you're gonna grow in a confidence that will come from that faith step. And then maybe you'll be able to share that faith step with someone else. And again, pay it forward.

So you know, God provides, He provided for us in our family. He provided for us in our church. We stepped out and we trusted Him.

There's a testing, there's a required surrender, but there is a provision and there is a glorious multiplication that's part of blessing. In Jesus' name, let's continue to be the conduit that we might be blessed to be a blessing.

Father, it's a holy moment really to come to this portion of scripture. Genesis 22 seems like such a big ask. You asked Abraham to do, to be ready to give up the son that you promised him.

The heir, the son of promise that would see the generations come to be your people. We can only imagine Abraham would have been confused.

And yet from this glorious story we see, he had no reason to be confused because he was listening to the living God. The creator of heaven and earth. The one who had promised to fix the problem of sin.

Who had made a way and designed a way for human beings to live forever. Through the son who would be offered on a cross for the sin of the world. Father, we give you all the glory for your extraordinary story.

We thank you that you have invited us by your grace to be active participants in your story. What a privilege for us. Lord, Holy Spirit, I pray, Lord, that you would help us process how we've been blessed and how we can be a blessing as a church.

Open our eyes up to opportunities that we have not even seen, but that you have prepared in advance for us to do. For Jesus' sake, I pray, amen.