

Introduction

Are you guys ready? Alright... let's do it. If you have your Bible, I want to go ahead and invite you at this time to take it out; open it up with me to the Book of Genesis. We are going to be in chapter 22. Before I get to Genesis 22 though, I have some information that I need to share with you. It's going to take me a few minutes, so please bear with me. As you know, today we are starting a watershed moment in the life of this church. I truly believe we will look back in this season, our response to the hurricane, and how our church moved through this season of challenge and say, "That was a defining moment for Houston Northwest." Because of that, I'm going to ask you to do a few things:

1. Be here every single week. Shorthand version of saying it: If you're not sick and you're not out of town, you need to be here.
2. Bring this booklet with you every single week. As you came in today, you received one of these. If for some reason you got in and you snuck past those ninja-trained greeters and they were not able to give you one of these... I want to ask you to please pick one of these up on your way out. We worked really hard on this to make certain that every person would be able to follow along. We've got our sermon passages in here, places for you to take notes... lots of information about all the things you are going to hear today, and you're going to want to be able to have that with you and refer to that... so grab one of those.
3. Also, if you have someone in your life that you would like to share this emphasis with and they can't be with us physically... maybe they live in another part of the country or another part of the city... they can join in by heading over to hnwoverflow.com. So if you are watching right now online and you are not in Houston, Texas, or you're not in this part of Houston and you would like to follow along and participate... we have built a special website... hnwoverflow.com... where you can watch the video you just saw, you can share that link, and you can participate. We want to encourage you... share this on social media, share this with your friends, email them the link... whatever.
4. You can also then help us by getting the word out by using a hashtag... [#hnwoverflow](https://twitter.com/hnwoverflow). It's just a way to share about what God's doing or what's happening in your life, or a way to share that so we can sort through and keep track of all those social media posts. So please share all of that information.
5. Also, I want to ask you... please, join a Life Group, if you're not already in one. All of our Life Groups are going to be walking through this Overflow study together for the next five weeks. If you're not in a Life Group, you need to be in one because you are going to miss out on some of the important discussions. It's not enough to simply hear me talk about it, but you need to be with other believers. If you don't have a Life Group, there are two easy ways that you can do that. The easiest way is to just go straight to our Connection Center as soon as worship is over today. That team, our Connections team, will help you get tied into a Life Group. But another way that you can do that, if you don't have time to stick around today after we are done, then you can use the Info Tab and Response Tab and you can check on there, "I need to get connected to a Life Group." You can also do that on the

App. Turn that in and just drop it in one of the receptacles on your way and, and we will follow up with you and help you get connected to a group.

So that's what we are going to be doing. I'm excited as we start today. Let me pray over us and then we will begin.

"Father, before the foundations of the earth, You called us to fellowship with Jesus Christ. But before the foundations of the earth, You also knew that a hurricane would hit Houston, Texas, on August 25, 2017. You knew that I would be standing here before Your people. God, because of that, I stand with supreme confidence knowing that You want to do a mighty work. I don't know what that is entirely, but I have hints... I have glimpses of things that I have sensed in prayer and things that I have seen in the pattern of Your Word. So Lord, I pray and simply ask this... 'Do it again. Do what You have done in the past right here in this church.' I don't know how, Lord, but I believe in the name of Jesus You will. God, for anyone who is here today and needs to be encouraged or reminded of Your love for them, I pray Lord that they would sense that, even as I talk about how we are rebuilding and moving forward as a church. Lord, deliver today and move in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen... and amen."

The Lord can use a hurricane. Can I get an "Amen" on that? I've watched Him clarify our identity. We've had this statement... "Making Houston more like heaven by helping Houstonians become more like Jesus" ...but is that really true? The answer, as we saw in the video, was "Yes." It really, really is. And I believe that now the Lord is not only going to use this hurricane to help us understand how to serve our community, but He is also now going to clarify in our hearts... for each of us... what it is that He wants to do within us. I believe this because our church needs Houston Northwest. Our community needs Houston Northwest. It needs a Kingdom presence in this part of the city, and it needs every single one of us. So what are we supposed to do now that we have this flooded-out facility? Should we simply wave the white flag... fold our hands and say "Oh well"... or should we instead believe that this is the moment that the Lord is calling us to right now, to experience Him in a powerful, powerful way. After hours and hours of prayers and discussion, the elders of Houston Northwest believe that right now is the moment that we must move forward to rebuild our facilities in order to reclaim and build upon our position to be a Kingdom force in this part of the city. Long story short... we don't think that we are supposed to surrender but instead move forward in faith. If we are going to make Houston more like heaven, then we must continue to serve the Lord and represent Him faithfully in this part of the city. That doesn't mean that we wouldn't continue to do so with the current facilities that we have. But the truth of the matter is, if we are realistic, our ministry bandwidth has been radically reduced by Hurricane Harvey, and we must admit that and move forward. And we must therefore act on the need that we have to be able to minister to our community and to do so in a way that will best suit their needs. We are going to put up some slides right now. We are going to put up a slide that will show you what we would hope would be the future scenario of our facilities. As you take a look at these images, I want you to get an idea of what it is that God might be doing here. So take a look at the screen. [see page 49 of Overflow guide] You will see that the white buildings are the existing buildings, but there you see some orange buildings that are there on the slide as well. These are things that we envision would be best, if we were able to construct here at HNW.

1. The first one of those that we believe would be most important is a new kids' building that is right-sized to our worship center capacity. It has to be moved on our campus to a new spot because Harris County Flood Control has passed an ordinance that any new construction after January 1st must be two feet higher than the 500-year flood plain. I think we all know that our former kids' building is not two feet higher than the 500-year flood

plain. Because of the fact that we were already planning to expand it and adjust that footprint, that adjusted footprint would fall under the new ordinance... consequently, we will have to move it to a new higher spot. We will still be required to do some fill work to get it to the right grade, but the truth of the matter is that we think that this location will actually be better. It will give us a new front door to the community.

2. We also envision an expanded atrium/Connection Center. It will not only connect the two buildings and give us a covered walkway, but it will also be a place where we can have more fellowship space and more connection space, as we invite the community and new people who visit Houston Northwest into that spot.
3. We will have a green space where the kids' building currently sits and soon will no longer sit. We believe that this green space will be a place where not only we can fellowship with one another but also invite the community onto our campus.
4. Then finally, a chapel space for weddings, funerals, new church plants, our Spanish congregation, and smaller gatherings as well.

If we were able to do all of those things, we think it would be the best use of our space... allowing us to do the sorts of things that we would like to do... expand our kids' ministry, expand our Mothers' Day Out program, potentially start ESL classes, improve our front door to the community, have a better space for our church and our neighbors to enjoy, and create space for us to do the pastoral functions of the church.

But, as you might imagine... there are financial realities involved in all of this. While we don't have hard numbers just yet, we have ballpark numbers but not hard numbers. The reality is that a project of this scope will be millions of dollars. Not just millions of dollars but multi-millions of dollars... likely in excess of 12 million dollars. So while we work diligently to keep our costs down, anyone in commercial construction can tell you that projects like this are not inexpensive. So... we know that we need to expand our facilities, but we also know that we can't simply focus on those facilities. We have a job to do. We have a job to make disciples here in our community... to make Houston more like heaven... so we can't simply focus on that. We have to keep doing the ministry that we have been doing. We want to continue our rich legacy of missions.

Our staff has worked diligently to reduce our 2018 ministry budget so that we can use as many dollars as possible to be funneled toward this rebuilding process. In fact, if you compare the 2018 budget to the 2016 budget, it's almost a half a million dollar decrease. The staff knows that for every dollar that we are able to save on the ministry side, we are able to redirect those dollars to the rebuilding side. Yet, at the same time, we know we still have to do ministry. Even with the reduced budget, it will take about 4 million dollars per year for the next two years for us to do the sorts of ministry that we have been doing in the community. On top of that, we want to keep spreading the Gospel, keep serving in our community, and doing the sorts of missions work that we have been doing for years and years and years. Those things aren't free either.

So for those of you who are bottom-line kind of people... I know there are a few of you in the room... let me just cut to the chase. We think that we need to raise \$16 million over the next two years in order to be able to do the ministry that we have been doing... in order to get enough cash on hand to comfortably proceed with our facilities. So typically in two years, we would comfortably raise a little over \$8 million. That means that we are looking to raise an additional approximately \$8 million over the next two years.

Now, for those of you who are doing your back-of-the-napkin math, you're probably already recognizing that \$16 million over two years is not enough to both fund our budget and to pay for a \$12 million project. In fact, something like that would take closer to \$20 million or perhaps even in excess of \$20 million... so a lot of people have said, "Well, if that's the case, why are we shooting low for \$16 million?" Great question. Two responses to that: Number one, the truth of the matter is that the dollar goal is not the most important thing that we are focusing on here, and I'll get to that in a second... what the most important thing is. But instead, we set that initial goal because we realize that that amount would allow us to comfortably cover our ministry and to also get to a financial position where we would be able to move forward on these projects. In fact, those experts that are out there, they told me that \$16 million is kind of a crazy number anyway. But I will tell you right now... maybe they are right and maybe they are wrong. I have no idea. I do know this: Money is not an obstacle to my God. Money is not an obstacle to my God when He begins working in the hearts of His people. The Bible says that He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. The Bible says that He takes care of every need. That's a fancy way of saying that Jesus Christ owns everything in this world, and if that's the case, He can provide however and whenever He chooses to provide. So what happens if, by a miracle, we raise more than \$16 million? Well... we would apply it to the project. What happens if we raise less than \$16 million? Well... that means that we will need to increase the amount of debt that we are carrying as a congregation. I know... I know... We were this close... this close to being out of debt whenever Hurricane Harvey hit us. I can't dwell on that; you can't dwell on that. The truth of the matter is that the Lord knows, and I believe that He has put us in this position for this time. This is an opportunity for each of us to trust and see what it is that He is going to do.

Now... I'll be completely honest. This is daunting. We need to expand our ministry at the same time that we have fewer facilities. We also are a very generous church, but we will be looking at requiring more financial resources than we have ever required in the past. Now let me be clear on this project. We have put some financial guard rails in place. In other words, we think that the idea of a chapel is awesome; we think it would be great for us to do that for our Spanish ministry, for weddings, for funerals, etc. But we also recognize that if we don't hit our financial goal, we are realistic and we recognize we may not be able to build that at this time. So this isn't a "We are jumping in, no matter what" sort of moment, but it is a moment where we believe that if the Lord provides, then we can do some things that would be exciting in this moment.

So to aid us in this journey during this two-year generosity challenge, we are going to do something that I mentioned in the video. We are going to do things a little different. We are going to do away with designated ministry funds. In the past, you would have your building fund and your ministry fund... separated out. But we are not going to do that. Instead, we are going to bring them all together into one big Kingdom fund. Our belief is that if we pool all of our resources together, then we will be able to fund the things that need to be funded. We won't have different designated lines. You won't be asked to parse up your dollars and say, "Well, I want to give this much to the project and this much to the ministry." Instead, we will all come together and put all of our dollars into the one Overflow Kingdom Fund, and in doing so, we will all come together. And us all coming together, we will see how the Lord will meet our needs during this time. So yes... the need is large. And if I'm completely honest, it is somewhat daunting. At the same time, and this may sound a little weird to you... I don't know... I'm completely energized right now by this... (Laughter) I'm energized because I believe that the Lord could have us as a church on the precipice of experiencing something great. Have you ever been part of a church where you say, "We just want to experience something awesome for God... we just want to experience something great for God." Well the truth of the matter is that to get to experience something great for God, you typically have to be

put in a really uncomfortable position first. Well... check box on that one! We've got that; now we get to see the Lord do something. What if right now the Lord has allowed Houston Northwest to have her facilities flooded to that she would be reminded of why she does what she does? What if the Lord has us backed up against Cypress Creek so that we might see His provision and give Him all the glory? What if this journey is about us learning to trust Him? What if this is our opportunity to jump in with the Lord and to see Him do something magnificent and miraculous that we never in a million years would have predicted? It is now that I want you to know why I said that the most important goal is not a dollar amount. Yes, we need dollars. We are going to need dollars to move the project forward, but I think that dollars are simply a vehicle that the Lord uses to get us to the place that He wants to get us. Dollars are a place where He gets us to do this: Get on our face and seek Him. If God needs to use flooded out buildings and our pocketbooks for us to come and to listen to Him first and foremost, then I say, "Bring it on." If every single person at Houston Northwest decides to seek the Lord, hear from the Lord, and obey the Lord, then we will see and experience something we have not experienced in the five years that I have been here. Hear me clearly. If every person in this room seeks the Lord in prayer, hears from the Lord, and then does what He tells them to do... I don't know what dollar amount He will bring into our church, but I do know this... it will be far more significant than any construction project could ever be. Buildings are a tool; the people are the work... the Lord is the object of our desire and affection. This is an opportunity for us to dive deeply into trusting Jesus... trusting that the Lord still speaks... trusting that He still provides... trusting that He still does miracles. If we trust that God still works and speaks and does these things, we can know that we can now trust also that He is not done with us yet.

So today I want us to spend a few minutes speaking about trust and someone who learned what it means to trust the Lord perhaps better than anyone. Genesis 22, starting in verse 1:

"After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here am I.' He 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 the mountains of which I shall tell you.' So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his 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. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.' And Abraham took the wood of 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 Abraham, '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, 'God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.' So they went both of them together.

"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. But 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. 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.'"

For those of you who aren't familiar with the story of Abraham, the Lord had commanded and told him that he would one day bless all other nations. But the problem was that Abraham and Sarah his wife weren't able to have any children. Finally, years later, Sarah was finally able to have a son, Isaac... the only son that she was able to have, and now the Lord was calling him to sacrifice his son. This had to baffle Abraham, I would assume, at least on some level. Hadn't the Lord made a promise? Didn't the Lord keep His promises, and wasn't Molech the Canaanite god, the one who required child sacrifice? Wasn't the Lord different than Molech? Wasn't the Lord different than Canaanite gods? So how did Abraham learn how to trust? Well, I think we see some ways that apply to us, as we go into this season as a church.

1. Trust His Voice. (v. 1)

He trusted His voice. *"After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here am I.'* This entire episode begins because the Lord calls out to Abraham and gives him some very specific directions. Now, as a reader, we know that these words were a test but Abraham doesn't. Regardless, Abraham was attuned to the voice of the Lord. He was listening to Him. This is the principle I want you to hear today: You can't trust the Lord if you don't trust His voice. Abraham trusted His voice. And you can't trust the voice of the Lord if you aren't listening to Him in the first place. In John chapter 10, we read that the sheep know the voice of the Good Shepherd. We read over and over that the Holy Spirit began to speak to His believers. God is a God who is not quiet. He does speak to His people.

This, of course, begs the question: "How do you hear from the Lord?" "Steve, if you're telling me I need to hear from Him, what am I supposed to do?" First, we need to read the Scripture. The Bible is known as the Word of God because Christians believe that it was inspired by the very Spirit of God. When I'm reading the Bible, I am literally hearing from God. Are there parts that are confusing? Absolutely. Are there parts that are difficult to know how to obey? You betcha. At the same time, are they still the very words of God? Absolutely. So many Christians miss out on this. They miss out on this because they simply choose not to read their Bibles.

Now this is a soapbox that I would love to hop up on and talk to you about for a long time today. This is tragic because men and women across the centuries have given their lives so that you might be able to hear from God through the pages of Scripture. You may not know this, but for years, the Bible was not translated into the language of the congregation. Why? ...Because those who were in charge of the church wanted to have a spiritual power over them in order to force rituals and rules and regulations on top of people, preventing them from entering into true relationship. So those who were educated used it as a barrier to manipulate and to have power over those who sat in the pews. People gave their lives so that you might be freed from that manipulative system and instead would have direct access to God so that you could read the Word of God yourself. That has been done so that way, whenever I stand up and teach, you can read and see what I am teaching... that it is in line the Scripture or not. I bring this up because I want you to understand that this is an opportunity for you to hear from the living God. He wants to speak to you. How do you hear from Him? Open your Bible. Even more than that, the Bible is the very Word of God. If you want to know what the Lord thinks, if you want to know what He would teach you, if you want to know what He would have you do... guess what? It's all been written down right here in the Bible. All you have to do is read it. And when you do, you'll have the opportunity to hear from Him.

Second, you also can hear from the Lord in prayer. Now there are those who will tell you that God only speaks through the Bible. I'll go ahead and tell you right now, that hasn't been my experience, and I don't think that that is what the Scripture teaches anyway. I've had plenty of moments where the Lord has given

me direction in prayer. I will say, however, that my sensitivity to the Spirit's leading has always been tied back to the Bible. What I mean is this: It's that if the Holy Spirit tells you to do something that is in contradiction to the Bible, that ain't the Holy Spirit. ...Because God will not contradict Himself. But He will prompt you from time to time in prayer to do things that are in line with His Word... to serve, to love, to talk to someone, to encourage someone, to give to something. This is what the Lord does in line with His Scripture. So if God does it, I would tell you that it is absolutely... if it's in line with the Bible... it is absolutely from Him and you ought to act on it. Sometimes I talk to people who do not act on those Spirit promptings because they are afraid that they will be perceived as crazy. Guys... let me tell you something. We believe that a Middle Eastern man died for our sins, God raised Him from the dead, He currently sits at the right hand of God and is ruling the universe. That's about as crazy as it gets... Right? (Clapping)... So if we believe in that kind of crazy stuff, I don't think it is crazy to think that God will continue to speak to us, and then we ought to obey whenever He does that. I can't tell you the number of Holy Spirit promptings I have received in my life... and I have been blessed as I have learned over my life to act on them and to see what God does.

My sons have these all-consuming headphones... "over-the-ear phones" I believe is what they are technically called. I have the earbuds and that sort of thing, but these suckers... when they put them on... they lock out the outside world. When I put these things on, I have no idea what's happening out there. What's pretty incredible is that whenever my guys put these things on, they are completely immersed in their music. They are also completely immune to my voice. (Laughter) So whenever I'm saying, "Hey guys... could you do ____ (whatever)" and they are in the back seat... man... they have no idea that I have just been talking to them. Or they are in their room and we will be screaming... afraid that they are dead... but no... they are simply listening to music. "We had no idea." What does that mean? Sometimes I have to physically go over and touch them before they understand that we have been calling out to them. What's the point? The point is that you can't hear the voices around you if you have on headphones. I think in the same way many of us cannot hear the voice of the Lord because we have on "spiritual headphones." What are our spiritual headphones? I'll give them to you pretty simply: We don't open our Bible, and we don't bow the knee in prayer. If you do that, you're keeping your spiritual headphones on, and you can't hear from the Lord. During this season, can I give you a simple challenge? Make it a regular practice to stop, take off your spiritual headphones, and hear from the Lord. Get into the Word. Get on your knees and pray and hear from Him. And then do whatever it is that He tells you to do. So trust His voice.

2. Trust His Commands. (v. 3)

But that's not it... verse 3... *"So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar."* The Lord tells Abraham to do something, and Abraham is listening for His voice so he is able to trust His voice. But then also the Lord tells him to take his son and to sacrifice him. And that's the thing that I notice about Abraham. Despite the fact that I'm certain that Abraham did not understand the "Why" behind these things, Abraham decided to do what the Lord told him anyway. He didn't just trust His voice; he trusted His commands. Another principle is at play here: The Lord often asks us to do things we do not understand in order to develop our trust. The response to the command of the Lord is to obey the Lord. But for many of us, we want to understand before we choose to obey. We hear the commands. We hear them from the pulpit, we read them in the Word, but we want to understand them before we actually do anything about them. So here's something counter-intuitive that we need to grasp. Understanding often does not come until after we have obeyed the Lord. At the very least, we will not have a deep understanding of those

commands until we choose to obey them in the first place. I know this seems crazy, but the truth of the matter is that you can't understand the command of God until you choose first to obey God.

Look at Abraham's obedience. I think it's pretty amazing.

1. **Abraham's obedience was immediate.** He got up first thing the next morning and started his journey. He did it immediately. He didn't say, "Well, you know... I'll wait a couple of weeks" or "I'll wait until next year." He heard from the Lord and he acted on it. Here is a question: How many of us have gone into church on a Sunday morning, heard a sermon, been convicted, felt "I need to do something about that; I need to act on that"... and then gone home and done zip, zilch, nada? I mean, I have... okay... thank you for the two people who are honest in this room. That's good. Alright... the rest of you... we're going to have to work on you. Alright... so here's the point. The point is this: It's easy for us to hear and do nothing. This is something we need to learn from Abraham: Delayed obedience is disobedience. When we don't do what the Lord tells us to do, we say, "We'll get to it eventually..." What we are really saying is, "Nah... I don't think so."
2. **Abraham's obedience was inconvenient.** Did you notice this? He had to go out and chop wood. Not only that, he had to take a three-day journey with his crew. Our churches today, I think, are filled with people who would say with their lips that they had a deep desire to hear from the Lord and to be used by the Lord. At the same time, they refuse to do the things that are necessary to experience God's presence. They say, "Steve... I want to experience this; I want to know Him. What would I need to do?" What if the answer is that you can't experience a built up trust in the Lord until you flex the muscle of obedience? In the same way, you can't build muscle mass without resistance training. You can't build up trust muscle without obedience training.
3. **Abraham's obedience was not only immediate and inconvenient, it was also difficult...** we might say kind of crazy. He was taking his son... that makes absolutely zero sense, and yet that is the sort of thing that the Lord often asks us to do... to do things that seem absolutely insane. If you have ever been betrayed or abused, the command of forgiveness that Jesus gives seems backwards. If you have ever been oppressed, loving your enemy seems absolutely crazy. Yet, at the same time, these are the kinds of commands that Jesus gives us.

I spent all day Monday and Tuesday with Muslim imams and Jewish rabbis. Lots of people in my profession in my city have said, "You should not do that; that's crazy." They might be right. At the same time, my Saviour commands me to love my neighbor. He doesn't say "Love your neighbor except for these religions." He just says, "Love your neighbor." And since He said that, that's what I did. And here's the crazy thing... I found myself on Monday night sitting around a fire, laughing hysterically about Muslim imams not being able to purchase rifles in Walmart. It was one of the craziest conversations I've ever been a part of... I can tell you that right now. (Laughter) They were laughing... the rabbis were laughing... the pastors were laughing... And this was the thing: It was that we were all laughing together as they were describing some of these crazy instances that they have been placed in. I say all this to tell you that there is one simple truth that all of us can walk away from in this. Believing in Jesus is easy. Having the head knowledge... "Yeah, I believe." Believing in Jesus is easy. Following Jesus... that's the tough part. I don't know about you guys, but I'm at a point in my life where I don't want to just have people who say, "Oh

yah... I love Jesus." I want to have people that will join me in the crazy hard work of actually following Jesus. You can't say, "I want to see God do a miracle" and then not do the crazy stuff ...Because that's how God does it. I think that we have too many people in too many churches across our country... maybe even around our world... who are happy to believe with their heads, but they refuse to trust with their obedience. If you want to experience the fruitfulness of a Spirit-filled life, I would say, "Start obeying the Lord in the areas where it seems crazy and watch Him work." For many of us, the notion that the Lord would call us to be generous, for instance, fits into this crazy section. But what if trusting the Lord's plan with our dollars would actually allow Him to do something that we could never predict? What if us being generous right now allows Him to teach us not only about obedience but about the things that He does? What could He teach us? Well maybe that would point to the third thing.

3. Trust His Character. (v. 5)

Verse 5... *"Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.'"* Abraham not only trusts His voice and trusts His commands, he also trusts God's character. Would you believe that the Lord would have us obey so that we might learn more about His character? Abraham apparently thinks so... because he has an interesting conviction. He says, "The boy and I will go and worship, and then we are going to come back." Abraham says, "We're going; we are coming back." But didn't the Lord tell him that he was supposed to kill his son? Why would Abraham say that? ...Because Abraham had a belief about the character of the Lord... that God would not allow harm to come to his child... that the Lord would not command such a thing. He believed in the character of the Lord. Here is the truth: Many of us will not obey the Lord because we, unlike Abraham, do not trust the Lord's character. I'll say that again... many of us will not obey because we don't trust the character of the Lord. We are afraid; we think that He is like Molech, the god of the Canaanites that required sacrifice of children. Because we think that, then we assume that the Lord is actually evil and vindictive. But what if instead the Lord truly is, as Abraham said, different? What if the Lord is now asking us to do difficult things, because those difficult things will show us His character more and more? What is it that drives our trust? What's the thing that allows us to trust people or not trust people? At the end of the day, do you know what causes us to trust people? ...Whether or not we believe in their character. If our heart is in tune with their character, we will trust them. If we do not see a character we admire or believe in, then guess what? We will not trust them. So we oftentimes, I think, take bad experiences that we have had with people out there in the world and we project those onto the Lord. Please hear me... the Scripture is clear about the character of the Lord. Are you ready? This is what the Bible says about who God is: He is good. Period. Full stop. End of story. He is good. He is good and He does good. Psalm 119:68... *"You are good and You do good. Teach me Your statutes."* The Lord is good; the Lord does good. Period. Now... does the Lord allow difficult circumstances into our lives? Absolutely... absolutely. But at the same time, when the Lord allows difficult circumstances in, we have an opportunity: Do we trust that our God is a good God with good character who does good, consequently hoping to build us and grow us to be more in fellowship with Him? Or do we choose to interpret those circumstances to believe that He is an evil, vindictive God out to get us? That's the thing that we have to decide. So here in this moment of worship and trust, we have a chance to step into the Lord's goodness. Why don't we obey? ...Because we don't trust God. But if we do obey, we can see that His character truly is good.

3. Trust His Provision. (v. 8)

Finally, trusting His provision. Verse 8... *"Abraham said, 'God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.' So they went both of them together."* Abraham believed that the Lord would show up

and provide the ram, even though He had commanded Abraham to kill Isaac. And we know that actually the Lord did. Verse 13... *"And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns."* You see, the Lord is in the business of showing up and providing when we think that can't happen. That's what He does. And Abraham apparently knew this.

The New Testament gives us a little peek into the mind of Abraham. He considered that God was able to raise him from the dead... from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. Translation: Abraham believed that the Lord would raise Isaac from the dead. In fact, after the Lord provided the ram, Abraham named God... gave Him a new name... called Him "The Lord will provide." Jehovah Jireh... verse 14. That's the name. The Lord is named "He will provide." He provides. Even when it seems that He can't provide... He will provide. As we have walked into Overflow, over and over I have been reminded of this truth... and I want you to hear me. This is the thing that I think for most of us in the West is the craziest thing... and isn't it weird that in the country in the world that is the wealthiest, we are the people with the lowest quotient of trust when it comes to God providing for us from a financial perspective. So weird... but so true.

God has been teaching me this lesson over and over through the hurricane. We would see people pull up and say, "Hey... I need a truckload of this." And we would say, "We don't have any of that," and (whistles) another truck would pull up and say, "We have a truckload of this; do you know anybody who needs it?" "Uhh... yeah, right here. You should talk to that person." We saw that happen dozens of times throughout the hurricane. Literally we had some moments where we were talking to people on the phone that had a semi-truck full of this, and people in another town near us that needed a semi-truck of that. We were like, "Don't come to us... go to them." "Okay... they're coming to you." It was the weirdest thing. We saw that happen over and over. We came to say that Jesus Christ is the greatest logistics manager that the world would ever have. (Laughter) We just happened to be the middle manager in that moment. (Clapping) He was sending them to us, and we were sending them out. We became, in that moment, like a ministry hub; it was super cool.

But I'm kind of dumb, so I don't get that in my own life. I'm like, "Yeah, if God wants to provide in a hurricane, He can do that; but in my own life, He doesn't." The Lord is like, "Oh, sorry; you're going to have to get an individual tutorial now." So, what happened? We lost two cars in eight days. I shared this a few weeks back. We had one that was lost in an accident and another one that was lost because it broke down... the transmission went out. We were able to cobble together a little bit of finances to be able to replace one of those with a used truck. But the truth of the matter is, I have four people in my house that need to be in four different places at the same time... two vehicles, three drivers... it was kind of crazy; it wasn't working out real well. It was kind of inconvenient. One morning I was leaving the house and Joy looked at me and she said, "Hey, I just want you to know that this morning I prayed that God would provide a vehicle." I was like, "Awesome... let me know how that works out for you. I appreciate that. Alright... I've got to go." Isn't that great? (Laughter) This is your pastor. I'm confessing. (Laughter). That day... that very day... this is the worst part of the story... that very day... three hours after that conversation, a guy came up to me and said, "Hey, I just want you to know something... the Lord just put it on our heart that we are supposed to give you an old vehicle. We don't need it anymore. We bought a new one, and we just feel that the Lord has impressed in our heart that we are supposed to give that to you." That was a fun phone call to make to my wife. I just want you to know that. (Laughter) She didn't say, "I'm right." She certainly could have but she didn't. Guys... that's just one story. In my personal testimony, I have a hundred stories like that where I say, "I don't see a way," and the Lord goes, "Oh... I've got a way."

I want you to hear me right now. I think that that's what God wants to do right now with our church. He wants to say, "Get all that you can and guess what? I'm going to show up and provide in ways that you can't predict. This is how I think that God is going to do that. I think that for some of us, do you know what's going to happen? It's that some of us who have never given are going to choose to give in ways that we have never given before. We've been coming to the church... maybe we've thrown some dollars into the basket, but God is going to move in their hearts... people in this room... and say, "I feel that now is the time that I need to step up and do something and be part of this seriously, from a financial perspective." I think that God will work in the hearts of other people in this room who have been committed givers for a long time and will move them to do things that they never thought that they would do. I've heard crazy stories about this already. I have a man in the church... he came to me and he said, "Hey, I just want you to know that I was supposed to retire this year. I'm going to work two more years so that I can give to the rebuilding of the church." Who does that? Jesus moves in people's hearts. I had a person who came to me and said, "I just want you to know that we've got some assets that are stored assets. We are going to liquidate those assets and just donate them to the rebuilding." Other people say, "We're going to use specific business opportunities, and we are going to redirect some of the profits to the rebuilding of the church." I had a woman in our church on a very fixed income and couldn't adjust that. She said, "You know, we've been praying about this... how we could give over the next two years to this. Do you know what I've decided?" I said, "Okay, tell me what." She said, "This is what I am going to do. I'm not going to color my hair for two years." Seriously... that's what she said. She said, "I wrote on the front of my book... my motto is 'Pray and go gray.'" (Laughter) Literally... that's what she wrote. (Clapping) Who does that kind of stuff? I'll tell you who does that kind of stuff... people who are on their face before the Lord and listening and obeying. So how is He going to provide? ...through stuff like that. I also think, though, that the Lord is going to surprise us and bring together paths of provision I can't even predict. Why do I say that?

Houston's First Baptist Church heard about what happened to us. They wrote us a check for \$10,000 and sent it to us. They said, "Hey, put this toward rebuilding." The Houston Church Planting Network heard about what we were doing and said, "Hey... we know that you guys need to rebuild. Here is \$50,000. Put that toward rebuilding." I didn't call them and say, "Would you guys consider giving to our Overflow fund?" The Lord just moved in their hearts. They saw Kingdom ministry and they know that Kingdom ministry needs to happen in this part of the city, and the Lord put it on them. Wouldn't it be a shame if outside organizations participated in this, but the people in the seats of this church chose not to join in, in a moment that God wants to move? That would be tragic. Shouldn't we all right now get on our faces and ask the Lord to do what He wants to do?

You've probably already seen this as you came in. You got a commitment card. Listen... I want to be clear. This isn't a pledge card... this isn't an oath signed in blood. What is this? This is a planning tool for us to kind of understand how it is that we are going to be moving forward as a church. So on March 4th, we are going to ask everybody to show up here with this card filled out, and it's sort of a consecration. We are just going to turn them in. It explains how this whole fund works; you can look at that later. I want to ask you to use this as a prayer tool... to take this and to use it and to pray over it... say, "Lord... what would You have us do?" I believe that if this entire church gets on her face and prays and says, "God, what would You have us do?" I don't know what the dollar amount is that will come in... but whatever it is, God will move in these people. And if God moves in His people, moves in my heart, moves in your heart... guys... hearing from God as a church family... could we ever ask for anything greater than that? I don't think so. That is beautiful.

In Exodus chapter 14, the Israelites had their backs against the wall. Actually it's not against a wall... it's against the Red Sea. They had been led there by the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. The Lord has led them to the worst military strategic position that He could possibly lead them to. They have no weapons, they have no way of escape, and God says, "This is exactly where I have you." Then in Exodus 14:14, Moses says, "What are we supposed to do?" and the Lord says, "Be still; the Lord will fight for you." And what happens? God then does what only God can do. He splits the Red Sea, and the Israelites are rescued. Can I be honest? We've got our backs against the wall right now... more against Cypress Creek but you understand. We have a flooded-out facility. We have seemingly insurmountable financial odds, yet at the same time, it feels like God has led us right to this moment. Wouldn't it be just like the Lord to do again what He did in Exodus 14 and to figuratively part the waters? How would we do that? To do the same thing that Exodus 14:14 says... "*Lord, fight for us.*" How will He fight? He will fight in our hearts and tell us how to obey. And then I think that He will go out into the world and into the hearts of people, perhaps watching on video, perhaps other churches, perhaps other organizations... I have no idea. But God will begin working in venues and in places that I cannot predict, and altogether I believe God will provide because His name is "He Will Provide." It's His name.

So here's the challenge... Pray, Listen, and Obey. That's it. For the next five weeks, I just want to ask you to pray and to listen. Whatever the Lord tells you... listen to it and then do it. If you pray, you listen, and you obey... if we all do that... I can't imagine anything better. Do you want to know how revival comes to a church? People get on their face, they pray, they listen, and then they do what God tells them to do. We can experience God's work. So here's what I want to ask you to do. Before you leave today, I want to ask you to take one of these pieces of wood. You look on the Lord's Supper tables that are all around. I want everybody to take one of these. This is what these are: These pieces of wood are part of the original worship center stage. It's going to have to be knocked down. This piece of wood represents where a sermon was preached, where a kid was baptized, where a couple was married, where someone surrendered their life to Christ or someone rededicated their life to Christ. Every portion of that stage has been run on, loved on, played on, preached on, served on... I want us to take these, and I want us to use it as our prayer reminder. Take one of these pieces of wood, put it where you'll see it, and every single day use it as a prayer reminder. On March 4th when we come together and we turn in our cards together, we are also going to bring our piece of wood, and we are going to all turn them in. I don't know what we are going to do with them just yet, but we are going to build something really cool. We are going to put it in our new facility, and we are going to use it and say, "That was the moment... that was the time when God did something awesome in Houston Northwest Church." Church... Do you guys believe that God is about to do something cool? I do... (Clapping) Yah... So here is the thing... I don't want anybody to miss out. The number one goal: everybody pray, everybody listen, everybody obey. And if we do that together, God will be with us. Let's not miss out. Let's get on our face. Let's seek the Lord and let's see how He would have us Overflow. Amen and Amen. Would you bow with me in prayer?

"Father... You are speaking to us right now... so many of us... we need to hear from You. Lord, we commit in our hearts right now to seek You. Lord, meet us... that's what we are going to ask. As we seek You, Lord, speak to us. Father, for couples that are married, I pray that they would seek You separately and then come together and pray. Lord, unify their hearts, unify their household... bring their children into that God. Bring households unified, saying 'We want to participate... we want to be part of what God is doing here in this place, in this season.' Father, for people in this room who are guests... I'm sure they are like, 'Man... I visited this church on a weird day!' Lord, I pray that You would do something crazy and just move in their hearts and say... 'You know what? This is our first time to visit... We are in. We want to be

part of a Church that wants to have a Kingdom presence.' ...That they would say, 'We're there.' Lord for the people that are in this room who feel like they can't trust You... I pray, Lord, that through the story of Abraham they have heard that they can trust You. Lord, I was just thinking about how the ram that You provided at the end of that story points to the Lamb that You provided for each of us... Jesus Christ. There may be people in this room who don't know that You provided a relationship way for them to have fellowship with You by providing the Lamb, Jesus... the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. God, if there is someone here who has yet to surrender to Him, I pray that today they would do so... that they would surrender. Lord, do what You need to do in this place. Bind us together. Let us be unified. Let us work it out. Let us walk it out. God, we commit all these things to You, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen and amen."

I'm really glad that you have been here today. Can we give the Lord a round of applause and just thank Him for all the things that He is going to do? (Clapping) So let me tell you what... we are about to be dismissed. If you have spiritual questions... if you want to talk about baptism... or you want say, "You know what... I need to surrender to the Lord... I need to learn how to trust the Lord." Right over here... these two gentlemen who are standing over here at these tables... they would love to visit with you. Just step right over to this area. They would love to just answer those questions for you. If you need help getting connected at Houston Northwest... finding a Life Group, taking next steps, finding out more information about the church... right up this aisle and out these doors, go to the Connection Center and our Connections team will take care of you. Thanks for being here today, Church. This is going to be a great journey together. Would you stand with me at this time, I will pray over us, and then we will be dismissed.

"And now may the Lord bless you and keep you... the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and give you His peace... peace which comes through this great truth... that whenever we don't see a way, He still provides. He provided a ram for Abraham, and He provided a Lamb of God for us that takes away the sins of the world. Our God... He provides. That's the Gospel. We grow in our knowledge of the Gospel and then we go, declaring that there is one name under heaven and on earth by which men and women might be saved... the beautiful name of the spotless Lamb of God... Jesus Christ. Amen and amen.

[Doxology sung]