

The Courage of Surrender

By Katie Davis Majors

Bobby: Well our guest really needs no introduction. You've heard her in the interview already. She's a dynamic thinker, speaker, but is also doing an awesome work in Uganda.

Please welcome with me Katie Davis Majors.

Katie: Thank you. I thought I was courageous once. At 18 years old, I decided to move across the ocean to a little village in East Africa with a suitcase full of construction paper and crayons, and a heart determined to change the world for the gospel of Christ. I was bright-eyed and unwavering, full of a naïve optimism that I had called hope, and a bit of a silly boldness that I had labeled courage.

I laugh and shake my head a bit at this spirited young girl I once was, so determined. But I have to admit I admire that teenage girl's willingness to just go, just do, just love people. I didn't think about what other people thought. I wasn't paralyzed by what I could or should be doing. I just did. When the spirit nudged, I just went. And I have to admit that God used me, even in my naiveté.

That was ten years ago. Slowly, quietly Jesus has taken my optimism and He has replaced it with a true hope. Not a hope that looks

for a happy ending, not a hope that trusts in Him only when things go as planned, but a hope that clings only to Him regardless of the situation or the outcome. He has taken my willful determination and replaced it with something that I think more closely resembles true courage. A courage that can only be found in Him. I didn't know then when I packed my bags and boarded a plane full of answers and excitement, I didn't know just how many answers I really didn't have.

I showed up that first day to teach kindergarten having been told that I would be teaching around 20 students, having packed and prepared perfectly for those 20 students and 138 pairs of eyes looked back at me eager to learn, expectant. Our classroom was a barn and it smelled like a barn. And they had packed as many precious children into that barn as they possibly could for the privilege of an education.

None of them spoke a word of English. I would grab an object and hold it in front of me and say 'this is a ball.' And they would repeat it back - 'this is a ball.' And I'd say it again - 'this is a ball.' And they'd repeat it again - 'this is a ball.' Then later I'd grab a pencil and they'd all say - 'this is a ball.' Not quite what I expected.

As the days wore on, I became overwhelmed with the needs that I saw day after day. Children would come to school hungry. Their bellies distended from malnutrition, the life draining from their eyes. Children would come to school sick with high fevers, dirty from walking miles and miles for the privilege to learn. I would see the desperation, the

hopelessness of living day after day in immense poverty, and my heart cried out – we have to give these people hope. We must give them Jesus.

I ran hard and fast for Him, with Him. I made plans for how I would help, all I would do and He taught me something. He didn't need me. It was I who needed Him. I trusted that God was who He said He was. And I was ambitious, to say the least. Over the next year, God grew my ministry and He grew my family, but more than that, He grew in me surrender. The laying down of all my plans and my dreams and opening my hands to His.

I didn't know the beauty that would find me in a life poured out for Him. I didn't know the joy of calling a little one daughter, and pressing into Him to know what true courage really meant. I didn't know the exhilaration of worshipping in a room full of people crying out to one God in many different languages. I didn't know the thrill of witnessing a life changed due to basic simple provision like food, or medicine. I didn't know the pain that awaited me on the other side of the ocean; on the other side of humility where I realized just how little I had to offer.

I didn't know that I would call a little girl daughter for years, that she would call me mommy, and then she would be taken away from me. I didn't know that I would carry the responsibility of looking into a mother's face and telling her that her child was not going to live. I didn't know that I would forge deep friendships with people imprisoned by addictions that I could not help them fight no matter how I tried. I did

not know that I would care for people for months at a time living with HIV. That I would beg and plead for God to save them, and that I would end up holding their hands as they slipped into eternity with Him on the other side.

And I did not know that in the middle of such pain and grief and loss I would experience a joy and a peace that far surpassed human understanding. The Lord would take the darkest, most difficult places of my life, and He would make them the places where I knew Him more intimately than I ever fathomed possible. In the midst of a hurricane of pain that surrounded me, I would experience a true comfort so deep, so real that it simply could not be denied. It was Jesus. He was near. He was near to me. When God didn't give me what I wanted, He gave me something else. He gave me something better. He gave me Himself. And this gave me courage.

Your life is probably a little different than mine. I get to carry this title of ministry leader, but really I have an amazing staff of wonderful Jesus loving people who run the day to day of our ministry. I'm mostly just a stay at home mom, so I fold laundry as my profession. I make dinner, and help with homework, and mediate sibling rivalries and.. you know the drill.

I've asked myself a lot over the last ten years what is courage? And God has brought to mind the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mt. Moriah. I can hardly read the story without weeping. And I wanted to share a part

of it with you today. Genesis starts by saying that God tested Abraham. God said to him Abraham! Here I am, Abraham replied. Then God said, take your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac. Take him to the region of Moriah and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering to me in the place where I will show you.

Genesis says that early the next morning, Abraham got up and he loaded up his donkey. Can you imagine? There doesn't seem to be any argument here. He just loaded up his donkey? I don't know about you, but I am certainly not quick to respond like Abraham did. When God asks something of me, I especially wouldn't be, if He was asking me to surrender my kid. Can you imagine the pain, the confusion of Abraham as he loads his donkey with the firewood, as he treks up that mountain next to his beloved son? This is the son that God had promised him. This is the son that Abraham had waited for for years. God has promised to make Abraham the father of a great nation through this son, and now would He take him away? And faithfully, courageously Abraham loads up his donkey and he heads up that mountain. His courage is in his surrender.

Have you ever been there? Looking at your own plans and things that you thought God had promised you, and just wondering why. Why this way, Lord. How? How can you ask this of me? I don't know about you but I'm slow to respond like Abraham. I reason, and I plead, and I argue with God, telling Him about my way and my plan, and all that I am

going to accomplish if He just gives me what I want. Do you wish that you had Abraham's blind and crazy trust? This resolute courage? Me, too. I can envision Isaac plodding along next to his father. It says the firewood was on his back. Genesis says that Abraham carried the knife and the fire, and I wondered if he trembled with the unknown, with the weight of all that God had asked him to do.

Isaac spoke up and said to his father, father? Yes, my son, Abraham replied. Father, the fire and the wood are here, said Isaac. But where is the lamb for the burnt offering? My son, Abraham answered, God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering. And I can't get over Abraham's certainty. It's a bold claim to make when you can't see it yet. He's so sure God will provide the lamb. And I wonder, do I believe this? That whatever the mountain is, no matter how steep or seemingly hopeless, though the pebbles slip under our feet as we trudge onward, God will provide. That no matter what I've been asked to sacrifice, no matter what dreams He's calling me to lay down, what plans I need to set aside, God will provide? God will provide the strength. God will provide the grace. God will provide the way. That's courage, isn't it? To look up at our mountains, whatever they are, and to trust Him. To know that whatever He is asking us to lay down or set aside, we can because He will be enough. He will provide Himself. There is great courage in surrender.

You know how the rest of the story goes, right? Abraham builds the altar. He piles it with wood, and he ties his son Isaac there. He reaches out his hand to slay his own son and at that very moment a voice from heaven calls out to him, instructing him to lay aside his knife. Genesis reads “and Abraham looked and there in the thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns.” A ram. And we know something that Abraham didn’t know yet. Not only did God provide a ram, but He provided the lamb. Not only did God spare Abraham’s son, but He sent His Son. He spared us, too. And if He would indeed give His very own Son, our lamb in the thicket, hung on the cross as an offering in place of you and me, then certainly we can trust Him to give us what we need here now. Certainly we can surrender our wills, our plans, our dreams to His. In place of our certain death He gave His Son, and so we can trust Him to give us what we need here, too.

You know Jesus, He set aside all my original plans for how I was going to change lives and communities in Uganda. He’s used that place to change and to shape me. I share with them so little and they share with me wisdom, and joy, and laughter. They let me sit with them and listen to their stories and their wisdom. They let me experience His goodness to them, and His redemption in their painful circumstances. They embody genuine hospitality, even at the price of sacrifice. And they teach me what true gratitude looks like, even in the face of poverty. I

have known God's goodness in new ways because I could lay down my own plans.

You know earlier in Genesis, long before Isaac came along, God had sent Abraham from his homeland and he said to Abraham, I'm sending you with a promise. I will make your name great, and I will bless you, and you will be a blessing. I am your shield, God said. I am your very great reward. And I think that's the secret that Abraham knew as he climbed that mountain with his son. That is the secret that God has taught me in the darkest, most difficult places of my life. It wasn't making his name great that was Abraham's great reward. It wasn't the many descendants He would give Abraham, or the vast amounts of land, or even the son that He gave him in his old age. It was God Himself - his very great reward.

Do we believe this? That it isn't our fame or recognition. It isn't our success or our failure. No matter what great blessing God pours out on our lives, it isn't the greatest thing that He could give us because the greatest thing that He can give you and me? It's Himself. Our very great reward. And sometimes we feel like the one carrying the knife, climbing the mountain with our faces set against the wind, wondering all the long way why God would ask this of us, or what He might possibly be doing. And we need to remember God isn't promising us ease. He isn't promising us that life will go as planned. He isn't promising a world

without trouble, without heartache along the way. He is promising us Himself. Emmanuel. God with us. Our only hope, our only courage.

Do you remember how the story started? Genesis reads “God said to Abraham, ‘Abraham.’” He called his name. And I want you to insert your name there for a minute. God has called each one of us to something. Some days it’ll be big and some days it’ll be small. But it will always take courage. And maybe courage isn’t boldness or optimism. Maybe courage isn’t the absence of fear, but looking at our fears and taking the next step anyway.

The simplicity of Abraham’s answer is so beautiful. “Here I am,” he said. He didn’t recount his own plans to God. He didn’t remind God of what God had previously promised to him. He didn’t tell God that God was asking too much or that it was too hard. “Here I am,” he said.

I want to ask you today what is your Mt. Moriah? Maybe it’s your job or your ministry or your family, and you feel like you’ve hit a wall, a climb so steep and you’re just tired and you can’t do it anymore. Or maybe your Mt. Moriah is a relationship, a spouse or a child, a co-worker, or even a stranger that you’ve been called to love but they’re hard to love, and it feels lonely on this mountain road, trying to be faithful to what God has asked of you. What is God asking you to lay on the altar? Could it be that what He wants most is just your hearts surrender? You laying down your life and your plans and the opening of your hands to

His. Could it be that He doesn't want your big plans or all that you can do for Him, but what He really wants is you. Just you.

Maybe the greatest courage is to lay it all down. To look up our mountains and to tremble with fear but to know that God's way is better. And ultimately He will provide the very best – His Son, the lamb.

Let me pray for you guys. Father God, I just thank you. I thank you for your provision. I thank you for your Son, Jesus, for His sacrifice in the place of each one of us. And Father, I thank you for each person in this room, and I just ask and I pray, Lord, that they would feel your great love for them, Father. That they would feel that you are their very great reward, Father, and I ask for each one of us, that we would have a spirit of courageous surrender, Father. That we would hear your call to love you and to love others, Father, and that we would set aside anything that could get in the way of that, Lord and just surrender to you. I thank you that you love us. We love you, and it's in your Son's name we pray, amen.