

## 25. What is your breaking point?

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Medical doctors often put their patients through various tests. One of the tests that they'd like to use for a patient with a heart issue is the exercise stress test.

The exercise stress test – a.k.a. a stress test, exercise electrocardiogram, treadmill test, graded exercise test, or stress ECG – is used to provide information about how the heart responds to exertion. It usually involves walking on a treadmill or pedaling a stationary bike at increasing levels of difficulty, while your electrocardiogram, heart rate, and blood pressure are monitored.

I don't like any of those physical tests. So if my doctor tells me that I have to go take an exercise stress test, I will send my friend in my place. They won't be able to tell the difference, because we all look alike.

OK, grant that your doctor will not push you to your body's breaking point during the test since they don't want to be sued by your family. According to Dictionary.com, 'breaking point' means "the point at which a person, object, structure, etc., collapses under stress." Our Lord knows our breaking points and He wants us to know where they are and what they are. He doesn't do this because He is a sadistic God who'd like to see us squirming, rather He wants us to know the weakness of our faith and to strengthen it. A side product of this faith strengthening stress test makes our priorities right in our spiritual hearts.

This morning we are going to meet Israel's patriarch Abraham. The Lord scheduled him the ultimate stress test. Let's see how Abraham handled it. We are going to observe him with two different camera lenses – a macro lens to give us an up-close look of Abraham as well as a wide angle lens that gives us the overall picture.

### A. MACRO UP-CLOSE LOOK

*Genesis 22:1-2 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 Then He said, "Take now 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."*

If a person takes the Scriptures from this portion out of context, he will absolutely have nothing to do with Christianity. Because he would wonder, "What kind of a god would demand the life of a man's precious son?"

Does our Lord know what or whom you love? It might be your hobby, your vehicle, your pet, your job, your children, or your spouse. You may say, "Oh, I love my Lord more than anyone and anything in the world." If so, how would you like to hear this commandment from the Lord?

Before I became a Christian, I practically worshiped my guns. It didn't matter what kind of conversation my wife Karen started, it always ended up with me talking about guns. I almost ruined our relationship, because she got fed up with my stupidity. After the Lord Jesus came into my life, one day, He told me to sell my most prized and tricked out hand gun, Colt 45 so that I could buy a guitar to lead worship at the prison ministry. And I sold it without any resistance. Some of you are wondering, "You actually led worship with that horrible voice?" Yes, I did. I had a totally captive

audience. Where could they go? I am not saying that I was so spiritual, rather the Lord was preparing me for the future ministry that I am doing now.

By the way, please note what the Lord said in v2. He wanted Abraham not only to kill his own son Isaac, but also to burn him completely as a burnt offering.

Interestingly, the first time the word 'love' was mentioned in the Bible is here in Genesis 22:2. This love was not between husband and wife, nor was it for mother and child, but it was the love between father and son. But what about the NT? You will find the word love again for the first time in the NT from the Gospel of Matthew in chapter 3. When Jesus was baptized, the voice of God the Father was heard, "This is My beloved Son." Again, the first words of 'love' in the Gospels of Mark and Luke were, "You are My beloved Son," when Jesus was baptized. You are thinking, "Ah, but what about the Book of John?" You might have guessed it – John 3:16. God the Father is extending His love for His children – born-again Christians.

*Genesis 22:3-10 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. 5 And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you." 6 So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. 7 But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. 9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. 10 And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.*

I don't know if Abraham stayed up throughout the night. I really doubt that he did. I believe that he put his care upon the Lord who cared for him all of his life and slept like a baby.

His response to this test is nothing short of remarkable. We must get 4 lessons from Abraham's response:

**1) Abraham obeyed the Lord IMMEDIATELY.**

There was no delay, no fuss, no negotiation, no begging. Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey. When we don't obey the Lord immediately, it is the same as refusing to obey Him.

**2) Abraham's obedience was characterized by the confidence in GOD'S FAITHFULNESS.**

Did you catch the pronoun Abraham used in v5? He didn't say, "I will come back to you alone." He said, "we." He believed that the Lord would raise up Isaac from the dead since He promised the descendants through Isaac.

To Abraham, this trip was not an act of teeth-gritting obedience, but an opportunity of worship. The definition of worship is "bow down". It means that when we worship the Lord, we bow down our will to His.

### 3) Abraham's reply was based on GOD'S CHARACTER.

By the way, please don't think that Isaac was a helpless little boy who went along with his daddy. According to v6, it is almost certain that Isaac had to be an older teenager or much older, and not a small boy, when he was to be offered. This is because Abraham not only placed on his back the wood needed for the sacrifice, he also made him carry it both to and up Mount Moriah. The strength and stamina required to carry this sacrificial load of wood would be something a small boy could not do.

In v8, Abraham knew the Lord enough to trust His character – always keeping His promises.

Two basic promises of God that we Christians often forget or choose to forget are:

*Hebrews 13:5b For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

*Philippians 4:19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

In the midst of our deepest trials and tests, many of us tend to panic and cry out to the Lord and demanding His presence and His help all the while He is right there with us. When the Lord says, "I will," He absolutely and positively will.

### 4) Abraham's faith was THOROUGH, NOT HALFHEARTED.

In reality, Abraham had already slain his only begotten son in his heart when he woke up in the morning to prepare to go to the Mount Moriah. On their journey, he was just carrying out his decision thoroughly. He didn't take a lamb as a backup.

One of my favorite Bible teachers Warren Wiersbe said, "A crisis doesn't make a person; a crisis reveals what a person is made of." Abraham was in total faith in God that he laid his son down on the altar and raised his knife to slay him.

## B. WIDE ANGLE OVERALL SHOT

*Hebrews 11:17-19 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.*

How was Abraham able to come through this horrendous test with such flying colors? Can you imagine the shock and disillusionment Abraham had when he heard God's command the first time? He knew that God couldn't lie or back down from His promise to Abraham about the future generations through Isaac.

Listen, the problem we have when we face difficulties, we often leave our faithful God out of the equation. It is no wonder the odds are against us without our God and our spiritual condition and emotion are going into a downward spiral. We see the secret of Abraham's unwavering faith in v19. The Greek word for 'concluding' is "logizomai." It means "count, compute, calculate, count over." In other words, Abraham brought God into his response to this terrible test that God could bring his son Isaac back alive even if he had slain him.

## C. MOUNT MORIAH

Mount Moriah where Abraham almost sacrificed Isaac is a very interesting and important place for mankind. On this mount, the Lord prophesied through Abraham that He would provide for Himself the lamb for the sacrifice.

Let's push a fast forward button of the timeline to king David. One of his several boo-boos was doing a census of his soldiers. The Lord told the kings of Israel not to count their soldiers so that their pride would not rise. But David ignored what the Lord told him and ordered a census. As a consequence, the Lord started to reduce the king's people by killing them. When David cried out to the Lord, he was told to make a sacrifice at the threshing floor of Ornan on the Mount Moriah.

*1 Chronicles 21:22-24 Then David said to Ornan, "Grant me the place of this threshing floor, that I may build an altar on it to the Lord. You shall grant it to me at the full price, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people." 23 And Ornan said to David, "Take it to yourself, and let my lord the king do what is good in his eyes. Look, I also give you the oxen for burnt offerings, the threshing implements for wood, and the wheat for the grain offering; I give it all." 24 Then King David said to Ornan, "No, but I will surely buy it for the full price, for I will not take what is yours for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing."*

David prepared all the materials for his son Solomon to build a temple for the Lord on that mount.

*2 Chronicles 3:1 Now Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.*

When you see this photo from the south side of Jerusalem, the actual location of the peak of the Mount Moriah is not located at the current Temple Mount, rather a little further northwest of it. The peak area has one strange look – a skull. That is where it got the name "Golgotha" which means "the Place of the Skull"; in Latin, "Calvary". True to His prophecy, the Lord provided Himself as the Lamb of God for the mankind on that mount 2000 years ago.

### **D. 3 LESSONS TO LEARN**

The Lord will bring you to the breaking point through your own ultimate stress test, if He hasn't already. We can learn three lessons from this study:

#### **1) The Lord's will always demands our obedience immediately.**

If your test was like mine, you probably don't understand what He is trying to do, but He expects you to do what the Bible tells us, not how you feel. Please keep in mind, you can kick, scream, moan, and resist all you want, but in the end, He will get His way no matter what. If you resist, the trial period will be extended according to your resistance.

#### **2) The Lord's will cannot be second-guessed.**

Don't even go there. He will take us one step at a time, one move at a time. He never explains the entire procedure from the beginning and expects you to give Him an approval. Not gonna happen, so forget vetoing or voting.

#### **3) The Lord's breaking point test reveals our true theology.**

All of us, regardless of spiritual maturity or Bible knowledge, have our own personal theology which means "belief about God," whether it is right or wrong. When the bottom falls out, when the chips are down, your personal theology will become either a life preserver that is connected to God so that it keeps you alive or a lead weight around your spiritual ankles to drag you to the bottom. Remember, a crisis doesn't make a person; a crisis reveals what a person is made of.