

Greg Laurie: Have You Fallen Victim to These Seemingly Positive Idols?

As the result of a diving accident which left her a quadriplegic at age 17, my friend Joni Eareckson Tada has spent the last five decades in a wheelchair. Yet she wrote these amazing words about her tragedy:

“My wheelchair was the key to seeing all this happen—especially since God’s power always shows up best in weakness. So here I sit ... glad that I have not been healed on the outside, but glad that I have been healed on the inside. Healed from my own self-centered wants and wishes.”

She has turned a disability into an ability, traveling around the world and inspiring countless people. She has turned a seeming setback into stepping stones.

In the book of Hebrews, the Bible lists a group of men and women whose faith grew stronger through experience. Like my friend Joni, they turned their setbacks into stepping stones. I call these great heroes of the faith “world-changers.”

Describing the kind of hardships they faced, Hebrews 11:36–39 says this:

“Still others had trials of mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered around in sheepskins and goatskins, while destitute, afflicted, and tormented. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. These all have obtained a good report through faith, but they did not receive the promise.”

One of these heroes, Abraham, carried out one of the greatest acts of faith in human history when God came to him and asked him to offer up his son Isaac.

This was an epic test.

In many ways, you would have to say that to be tested on this level was quite an honor because the Lord knew that Abraham could handle it. He knew Abraham would pass this test. He knew Abraham would take this setback and turn it into an opportunity.

God asked him to make the greatest sacrifice imaginable. Finally his son, Isaac, had been born. Sarah actually did bring forth that promised child in her old age, and he became the light of Abraham's life. Abraham doted on the boy. In fact, his very name says it all. "Isaac" means laughter. They loved him.

But could it be that Isaac had actually become the most important thing in Abraham's life? To put it another way: Could it be that Isaac, the son for whom Abraham and Sarah had waited for so long, actually became the idol of their lives?

A lot of things can become idols in our lives, not just bad things. Sometimes even good things, out of their proper place, can become that. For example, people will say, "For me, family is No. 1. It's all about family. Nothing is more important than family." Actually, that is not true. God should be No. 1 in our lives.

Let me say at the outset that it was never God's intention to have Abraham kill Isaac. Rather, it was a test God knew Abraham would pass. This is why Abraham was effectively a superhero of the faith. He believed that even if Isaac died, God would raise him from the dead. Hebrews 11:19 tells us, "He reasoned that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he indeed received him in a figurative sense."

In other words, no matter what happened, Abraham knew God was in control.

So Abraham basically said to Isaac, "Son, come on. We're going to take a little walk together." And as they made their way up the mountain, it was beginning to dawn on Isaac what was about to take place.

Here we have a beautiful picture of what happened at the cross of Calvary. I think this is one of the reasons this story is in the Bible. It shows us a father who was willing to sacrifice his son and a son who was willing to be sacrificed.

As Isaac was lying on the altar and his father raised up the knife, preparing to sacrifice his son, a voice came from heaven: "Abraham, Abraham! Do not lay your hands on the boy or do anything to him, because now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your only son from Me." (Gen. 22:11-12).

World-changers like Abraham give everything back to God because everything is from God. Our children are a gift from God. We don't own them; they belong to Him. Everything we have acquired in life, every possession, has been given to us by God. Every talent, every skill and every ability we have is a gift to us from God. And it's always a good thing to present them to God and say, "Lord, you gave these to me, and I give them back to you."

Are you willing to do that? Abraham was.

We all have an Isaac in life, so to speak, something or someone we love so dearly. It is a good thing to present that something or someone to the Lord. And there is no safer place to be than in the hands of God.

World-changers say to God, "Not my will, but Yours, be done."

If you want to be a world-changer and live by faith, then know that your faith will be tested. We can't control what will

happen in our lives. All we get to do is decide how we will react to whatever comes our way. God is in control. We are not. But we can determine what we will do with what comes our way. World-changers turn setbacks into stepping-stones.