Elisabeth Kubler-Ross “The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss . . . These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.” Elisabeth Kübler-Ross was a Swiss-American psychiatrist, a pioneer in near-death studies, and author of the internationally best-selling book, On Death and Dying, where she first discussed her theory of the five stages of grief, also known as the “Kübler-Ross model”. Wikipedia ‘On Death and Dying’

I believe there are times when we may, even should, say no to God. My examples of saying ‘no’ to God come from Moses and Abraham for both stood toe to toe with God challenging God’s plan. In Exodus 32:11-14 Moses dissuades God from destroying the disobedient Israelites after they built that golden calf. Moses was on Mt Sinai with God holding the stone tablets of the Covenant of behavior when God said to Moses: You better get back to camp quickly. “YOUR people, whom YOU brought out of Egypt have acted perversely . . . Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them, and I may consume them.”

Moses could have stepped aside, but did not, he appeals to God’s character turning God’s words back to God with corrections of emphasis: “YOUR people, whom YOU brought out of Egypt.” Moses appeals to the logic of protecting God’s reputation saying, “You know those Egyptians and others will say you are powerless in mercy and forgiving. That is not who you are. Remember your Covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants with whom you made a Covenant. These are those very people, those descendants.” God changed God’s mind.

Abraham also argued with God, asking God to withhold divine judgement on the community of Sodom that refused to practice respect and hospitality. Instead, they mistreated guests and threatened abuse. Abraham pleaded, while standing toe to toe with God: “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” 26 And the LORD said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.” You know the argument, Abraham continued to lessen the number again and again, arguing for God’s known mercy.

So why did Abraham not plead for the life of his son based on God’s own character? The man who stood toe to toe with God over a community’s safety seemed to whither when the plan involved his own son. I want to believe grief, disappointment in God’s directive, and simple shock was too much for old Abraham.
“There’s a popular story in Christian circles that’s literally too good to be true. According to legend, in the early 1900s, The Times of London sent an inquiry to a number of writers asking the question, “What’s wrong with the world today?” The Christian apologist G.K. Chesterton responded succinctly and profoundly: ‘Dear Sirs, I am.’”

The real story is Chesterton wrote saying “In one sense, and that the eternal sense. . . The answer to the question ‘What is Wrong?’ is, or should be, ‘I am wrong.’ Until a (person) can give that answer idealism is only a hobby.”

NYT, David French, “Who Truly Threatens the Church?”

The NYT opinion article by David French ends with “Who is wrong? I am wrong. We are wrong. Until the church can give that answer, its political idealism will meet a tragic and destructive end. The attempt to control others will not preserve our virtue, and it risks inflicting our own failures on the nation we seek to save.”


It is my unsubstantiated opinion that Abraham was wrong in this story. Wrong to commit attempted murder on his son. Human sacrifice was anathema to ancient Israel. It was practiced among other nations but was not to be practiced by Israel.

I have read and understand the book of Hebrews calling Abraham a pillar of faith for believing God whom no one else understood. I have read the theology of sacrifice, provision, and God’s presence. I still feel Abraham was wrong to attempt murder on his son, as Abraham was wrong to disguise Sarah as his sister. At least in that text Abraham got a tongue lashing from Pharaoh. I believe we can make mistakes, be wrong and still be people of God, even better people of God. I feel Abraham’s anguish of faith. I like to believe he wished he had handled that differently.

Perhaps grief at God’s request shocked and overwhelmed his faith, neutralizing his ability to argue. I think Abraham truly struggled with being wrong in obeying. Though, I wonder if his imperfection developed the power of empathy. How are we like Abraham?

I will end with yet another blessing from Kate Bowler:

A Blessing When You Realize Everyone Is Struggling @katebowler

Blessed are you who have realized that life is hard.
And it’s hard for everyone.
Your awareness came at a cost.
You lost something you can’t get back.
You were diagnosed with chronic pain or degenerative disease. Your family fell apart and things have never been the same.

Blessed are you who gave up the myth that the good life is one of happiness, success, perfection. The life that looks beautiful on Instagram, —but isn’t real. You who realize it is okay to not be okay. To not have a shiny life because no one does.

Blessed are you who see things clearly, where struggle is everyone’s normal. You walk among the fellowship of the afflicted, a club no one wants to join. And while this life isn’t shiny, it does come with superpowers. Superpowers of ever-widening empathy and existential courage that gets you back up after another fall and a deepened awe at the beauty and love that can be found amid life’s rubble. Like flowers that grow from the cracks in the sidewalk. These virtues blossom in you. And thank God for you.

Blessed are all of us who struggle, for we are in good company, and we’ll never walk alone.