

Under Pressure Pt. 1

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, September 27, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today! Whether you are here IN PERSON or watching via the LIVESTREAM, you are most WELCOME. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes. We have MUCH to cover in a relatively SHORT amount of time.

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

There is an old ADAGE that “character is forged on the anvil of adversity.” i.e., It is through trial, testing and affliction that our moral quality is FASHIONED and FORMED. It turns out that both the shaping of metal AND the shaping of the human heart require heat and pressure.

1) This Sentiment is Evidenced in the Natural World

QUOTE – “Diamonds are formed under great pressure and heat. If these conditions do not exist, they are simply not formed. It is not that they will be low quality, or smaller in size, but they will not form [at all]. God brings His refining fire into our lives to create in us what He sees fit. When He sees our lack of character, He will bring into our lives what we need. So next time a fiery trial comes, thank God. He is producing exactly what He knows you need in your life. The only difference between a diamond and a piece of coal is pressure.”

2) This Sentiment is Evidenced in the Word

Romans 5:1–5a (NIV, Emphasis Mine)

1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, **character**; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame . . .

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

Yet there is another adage worthy of consideration: “Character is EXPOSED by adversity.” As one author states: “Character is revealed UNDER PRESSURE.” There is something about affliction, adversity and opposition that brings EXPOSURE to that which is present within us (i.e., our inward moral quality).

NOTE 1 – This Sentiment is Evidenced in the Natural World

QUOTE – “If you want to know what is inside of a jelly donut, all you have to do is squeeze” (P. Dan Condon).

NOTE 2 – I maintain that this adage—much like the one we have already noted—also has biblical MERIT. You see, there is Bible that speaks to character being FORMED in trial AND there is Bible that speaks to character being EXPOSED by trial (i.e., good, bad and ugly). We do well to understand BOTH of these realities...

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 3

FYI – Thus said, I want to spend several weeks analyzing the principle that “character is exposed UNDER PRESSURE.” It is my intention to put forth several scriptural accounts that EVIDENCE this reality, seeing what the Lord would have for us re: personal APPLICATION by the close of each meeting. Let us delve in...

ABRAHAM (CONTEXT)

FYI – The FIRST character that I want to consider this morning is the OT figure of ABRAHAM.

Q. Who is this man named Abraham?

A1. Abraham is a figure from the Book of GENESIS to whom the Lord unconditionally promised land, descendants and blessing (i.e., the families of the earth would come to be blessed through him and his seed). It is nearly IMPOSSIBLE to exaggerate his importance, as he is literally the progenitor of the nation of Israel and the person who forms the first link in the chain of God’s plan to save humanity.

A2. It must be noted, for the sake of the story we are about to consider, that Abraham and his wife (Sarah) could NOT have children. It was only in their advanced years that God promised them a son—i.e., a promise that they came to believe despite its seemingly LUDICROUS nature. That child of promise would come to be called ISAAC. This is where our story picks up—as Abraham is put UNDER PRESSURE...

ABRAHAM (TO THE WORD)

Genesis 22:1–18

1 Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

2 Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, 7 Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."

15 The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time 16 and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, 18 and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

ABRAHAM (ANALYSIS)

Q. What did this moment of testing reveal concerning the character of Abraham?

Q. What did this command of God/circumstance expose about this man's quality?

A1. It Exposed the Reality of Abraham's FAITH in God

NOTE – Consider what this account reveals in vs. 3–5...

Genesis 22:3–5 (Emphasis Mine)

3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then **we will come back to you.**"

cf. Hebrews 11:17–19a

17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 19 Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead . . .

KEY – Under pressure, the MATURITY of Abraham's faith was exposed!

A2. It Exposed the Reality of Abraham's REVERENCE for God

NOTE – This situation was NOT used of God to forge reverence within his servant and friend. Rather, it was used to expose his already-present reverence. CONSIDER what the account reveals concerning the awe, esteem and fear that Abraham had for the Lord...

Genesis 22:9–12 (Emphasis Mine)

9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. **Now I know that you fear God**, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

A3. It Exposed the Reality of Abraham's OBEDIENCE to God

NOTE – Consider Abraham's RESPONSE to God's command...

Genesis 22:1–3 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.

2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

3 **Early the next morning Abraham got up** and loaded his donkey [and went].

FYI – There was an IMMEDIACY to the obedience of Abraham. God spoke and he diligently obeyed. And let there be NO question that Abraham was willing to follow through with this command of God. Take NOTE that God had to intervene in order to stop him...

Genesis 22:10–12 (Emphasis Mine)

10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.

12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

A4. It Exposed the Reality of Abraham's LOVE for God.

NOTE – It was a blessed love that Abraham had for his son, Isaac. However, that love was NOT to rival or surpass his love for God—and it did not! Consider that Abraham was WILLING to obey the Lord even if it COST him what he loved most on this earth. Such obedience demonstrated the DEPTH of his love (cf. John 14:15).

Q. How did Abraham do under pressure? Exceedingly well...

PAUL AND SILAS (CONTEXT)

FYI – Moving on, I want to consider the figures of the apostle PAUL and SILAS.

Q. Who were Paul and Silas?

A. Paul and Silas were a missionary TEAM noted in the Book of Acts. I want to focus upon one scene from what is commonly referred to as the Second Missionary Journey of Paul (c. A.D. 49–52 and recorded in Acts 16–18). In context they had been BEATEN and IMPRISONED in the city of Philippi (i.e., for serving Christ and exorcising a demon-possessed slave girl). This is where our story picks up—as they are both UNDER PRESSURE...

PAUL [AND SILAS] (TO THE WORD)

Acts 16:25–34

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

31 They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

PAUL [AND SILAS] (ANALYSIS)

Q. What did this moment of testing reveal concerning the character of Paul and Silas?

Q. What did this challenging circumstance and trial expose regarding their moral quality?

A1. It Exposed their Commitment to PRAY and PRAISE God

NOTE – Notice what these men did while subsequent to being “severely beaten” and imprisoned. They did NOT move to a place of complaint, murmuring or grumbling against God and man. Rather, the text notes that they were moved to a place of PRAISE...

Acts 16:25a (Emphasis Mine)

25 Around midnight Paul and Silas were **praying** and **singing hymns** to God . . .

KEY – In many ways, this is the MOST remarkable aspect or element in the ENTIRE account in my opinion! It is EASY for God to release us from the chains that bind us. It is DIFFICULT for us to find it in ourselves—i.e., in Christ—to celebrate, thank and revere the Lord! That is a lonely road.

A2. It Exposed their Commitment to Serve as Christian EXAMPLES

NOTE – People tend to WATCH you and your lifestyle most in moments of difficulty. Knowingly or unknowingly, people inspect how you act (i.e., particularly in challenging seasons). It might NOT be fair, but it is true: “you always have an AUDIENCE!” Note that Paul and Silas HAD an audience in this darkened hour...

Acts 16:25 (Emphasis Mine)

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, **and the other prisoners were listening to them.**

KEY – Take note of the example they provided to the prisoners. What are folks seeing in or hearing from YOU?

A3. It Exposed their Commitment to Serve as Christian WITNESSES

NOTE – Being beaten and imprisoned did NOT diminish the obligation these men felt to PREACH the gospel. The moment that an opportunity presented itself to witness concerning Jesus Christ, consider what Paul and Silas DID (i.e., and the CORRESPONDING result)...

Acts 16:25–34

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

31 They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

KEY – We see in this moment the reality of Paul’s CLAIM (i.e., certainly shared by Silas)...

Colossians 1:28–29

28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

Q. How did Paul and Silas do under pressure? Quite well!

TRANSITIONS

FYI – As I recount these stories of Abraham, Paul and Silas, my mind races to so many other places in Scripture wherein adversity EXPOSED truly GODLY character. I would love to talk to you about **a)** Joseph (Joseph and Potiphar’s wife); **b)** Daniel (Daniel in the Lion’s Den); **c)** Shadrach, Meschech and Abednego (the Fiery Furnace of Nebuchadnezzar) and beyond—but time will NOT permit me.

KEY – However, in each case GODLY character and moral quality was revealed UNDER PRESSURE...

APPLICATIONS PT. 1

NOTE – You may be saying to yourself, “Pastor, thanks for sharing these stories and touching upon the principle that adversity reveals character, but WHAT does this have to do with me? WHAT are you getting at that I can take home with me today and into the remainder of 2020?”

Great question—I am SO glad that you asked...

KEY 1 – 2020 has NOT been an easy year for anyone. Do I really have to spell out why 2020 has been particularly afflicting (e.g., pandemic, death, governmental regulation, political divides, racial tensions, economic collapse and uncertainty, etc.)! We have ALL been UNDER PRESSURE...

Q. What has 2020 revealed about your character?

Q. What has 2020 exposed re: your moral quality?

Q. What has come out of you in this spiritual vice?

KEY 2 – We have noted that the adversity of beloved biblical figures served to EXPOSE the condition of their **a)** faith; **b)** reverence; **c)** commitment; **d)** love; **e)** worshipful and prayerful devotion; **f)** Christian example and witness. In each case these figures EXCELLED, and the quality of their character was beautifully REVEALED!

Q. What about you?

Q. What has 2020 revealed about the condition of your FAITH?

Q. What has 2020 revealed about the condition of your REVERENCE?

Q. What has 2020 revealed about the condition of your COMMITMENT?

Q. What has 2020 revealed about the depths of your LOVE for the Lord?

Q. What has this year revealed concerning your WORSHIPFUL devotion?

Q. What has this year revealed concerning your spiritual EXAMPLE?

Q. What has 2020 revealed about your DEVOTION to the G.C.?

Q. What (precisely) has come out of you under pressure?

APPLICATIONS PT. 2

NOTE 1 – I BEGAN this sermon by positing two adages and/or principles...

- 1) Character is **FORGED** in Adversity
- 2) Character is **EXPOSED** by Adversity

NOTE 2 – I END by noting that these statements are NOT contradictory (i.e., they are closely related)! In fact, it is only as your character is REVEALED (i.e., as you come face-to-face with your true condition) that you can move forward UNTO transformation and renewal (by the power of Christ).

NOTE 3 – If you see that 2020 has exposed a POSITIVE degree of faith, reverence, commitment, etc., build and strengthen. If you see that 2020 has revealed a LACK of such things, I call you to hearken to the message last Sunday morning: REPENT...

CONCLUSION 1

KEY – Before we dismiss allow me to make one or two brief ANNOUNCEMENTS.

1) NURSERY – We are working to reopen the NURSERY shortly. In fact, Katie Barry (Nursery Coordinator) and I believe that we will be able to REOPEN on Sunday, October 4, with some modifications. We have prepared packets to hand out to the parents and volunteers. Please see Katie immediately upon dismissal!

2) CHILDREN’S CHURCH – We are also looking to reopen the CHILDREN’S CHURCH as early as mid-late October (i.e., once again with some modification). As plans are finalized in that arena, we will RELAY the necessary details. Ultimately, THANK YOU for your prayers and patience!

CONCLUSION 2

KEY – Thank you for taking the time to join us today. Should those of you who have joined us online wish to give, please do so through the giving portal of our church WEBSITE (www.NewLifeBarre.org). For those who are present, you may place your donation in the OFFERING BOXES in this Sanctuary.

Numbers 6:24–26

- 24 The Lord bless you
and keep you;
- 25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
- 26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.