Answers to the forced sabbath questions

1. A**. What caused the Israelites to lose sight of God?** There is a pattern where because we cannot see God, we build our lives on what is seen. We all look for what is rewarding, what gives us security, and significance. Plus, almost everyone struggles with "If God is good and loving, why is there so much evil and suffering if He is so powerful?" The transition from being alienated from God by blaming Him or doubting Him because of our hardship and others suffering is a difficult transition into our Biblical belief systems. To really believe that God is a good God, who sent His son to die for our sins so we could be reconciled to the one who gives us life-a good life is hard to believe. So, we wander into autonomous living that continues to separate us from God.

   "All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to our own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him" -Jesus. Isaiah 53:6

   This is a normal pattern of humanity, seeking independence and autonomy, but we all depend on something. That maybe our health, wealth, job, education, family or drugs, but it is all fragile and periodically that gets exposed in our world. It then demonstrates our need for God, someone who loves us and cannot be shaken.

   b. **How did they get back to God?** When Israel disconnected from God and went their separate way they suffered under oppression. That oppression in Judges was human oppression, but in many narratives, it was famine-economic oppression, disease-plagues, and other oppressive experiences that made Israel miserable. So, they would pray and ask God for deliverance and he would answer their prayers. This was not always a quick fix and sometimes it took years for deliverance to come about. Since God is the author and finisher of our faith, as Israel sought God, He developed their faith so they could believe and receive-like Abraham, Joseph and Moses! When these deliverers showed up and did their jobs, faith and peace accompanied them. God is ultimately the deliverer, the protector and provider who answers our prayers.

   2. a. **How did Gideon as a "mighty hero"- spiritual leader turn Israel back to God?** In the Biblical story Gideon listens to God and does what God asks of him. Spiritual leaders lead through following God. Spiritual leadership is not about hierarchy or authority but about following God through trust and obedience. Gideon is afraid but pulls down the false idols, that symbolize sexuality-Baal and the Asherah pole. He becomes vulnerable in that his primary loyalty is to God rather than his family or sexuality. This does not mean he does not value his family or his own sexuality, but that God has the highest value in his life.

   b. **How does God deliver His people through judges-spiritual leaders =deliverers?** The judges were the hands and feet of God demonstrating His love for His people. In the New Testament God desires to show His loves to the whole world and so Jesus is the main deliverer. He defeated the devil and all the evil the devil brings to this world. These judges were empowered by God to demonstrate that God had power over all oppressors. In the New Testament believers are called to demonstrate His power. The problem is we feel powerless and have a hard time believing God will use us as deliverers.

"We have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves." 2 Corinthians 4:7

The Judges demonstrated this power that came from God and defeated every form of evil!

c. **How did the Judges demonstrate God's heart to deliver His people when they were suffering?** The Judges were the answer to their prayers, they delivered them from evil oppressors. They granted them God's peace-shalom. Just like Jesus when He healed the sick, the Judges had the power to deliver those who called out for help.

3.

a. **How did Abraham surrender his son to God? What do you think Abraham went through emotionally in struggling with this potential loss?** I believe God had been preparing Abraham for many years for this test. He had learned to surrender and found that even when things look hopeless and he is powerless, God is faithful and does protect and provide. He had learned to suffer well and expect new life on the other side of suffering. Many times, when we are withholding from God, He is also withholding His blessings from us! In a test we have to surrender, but without the assurance that God is good we really have a hard time letting go.

I do not think Abraham emotionally struggled that much because his faith gave him the confidence that God wanted Abraham's dream and God's promise to come true. For sure he would face some anxiety, maybe even dread, but his soul was anchored in God's promises.

b. **Why did God ask this of Abraham? Does He ask us to let go of important good things that He gives us? Give us an example in your own life?** Isaac occupied a large part of Abraham's heart. Isaac was a gift of grace from God, but could become an idol, something given a higher priority or place than God. So, for health and godliness Abraham's heart had to be right and only through trust and obedience could that be true.

One of the first examples of the good gifts of God, being made into an idol, is when the gold given to the Israelites by the Egyptians is made into the golden calf. God is not happy that He is replaced by a golden cow! Today those idols are more subtle, but occupy our hearts in the same way. In every generation tests of faith challenge our dependencies and invite us to choose what we will look to and rely upon. It is God who does the heart surgery and we cannot do our own surgery, but can yield to Him in times of testing.

What test have you passed and what test have you failed?

c. **How was God a protector and provider in the midst of this trial and imminent loss of what was most dear to him?** Abraham could not see how God would provide a sacrifice. Uncertainty rules when we are stepping into the unknown. When Isaac asks where is the sheep-sacrifice Abraham's faith is challenged. Abraham knows that his God is a protector of the things he loves and will provide for him. That does not mean that uncertainty had no teeth and the moment looks painful. However, God does provide a ram and protects Abraham's son.

d. **How is Abraham's proclamation a sign of a strong faith?** People who lack faith complain rather than proclaim. They are focused on the threat and fearful rather than the promise and optimistic. Abraham demonstrates his faith by proclaiming that God will be faithful.