

Signs of a Godly Man in the Face of Adversity

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Study Guide

One preacher told the story of his experience as a basketball player. He said, “The way I saw it, basketball gave you the opportunity to build character.” He explained that his coach had a different perspective. His coach explained, “Basketball doesn’t build character, it simply reveals it.”

Unless you are one who has been blessed with exceptional abilities, you are probably very familiar with adversity in anything you have endeavored to accomplish. This was certainly the case of those whose stories we find in the Bible. We tend to romanticize their experiences, not realizing that they were no different than we. How would you have felt facing down Goliath? What if you knew that praying to God would land you in the lion’s den? What about building a giant boat miles from a body of water? James tells us that these were men of a nature no different than ours (James 5:17). Because of this, we can learn much from their experience in adversity.

Discussion Question: Read Romans 5:3-4 and Psalm 139:23-24. Do adversities and trials do more to build character or reveal character? Tell of your own experience.

We can learn some important lessons about what is revealed and built by adversity by examining the life of the Old Testament character Joseph.

Point #1 – The First Sign of a Godly Man: Integrity in Adversity (Genesis 39:6-9)

Review the key points of Joseph’s life:

- He was the great-grandson of Abraham.
- Among his eleven brothers, he was the favorite son of his father Jacob.

- He was sold into slavery by his brothers, eventually coming to serve in the house of Potiphar, an Egyptian official.

Read Genesis 39:2-5 and Genesis 39:21-24 (Important: Make note of the context of this second passage, that Joseph had been wrongly imprisoned). What do you notice about Joseph in these two passages? Answer: In both adverse situations, Joseph did well. Adversity revealed him to be a man of integrity.

Teaching: In Matthew 25:14-30 we find the parable of the talents told by Jesus. In this parable, the master prepares for a long trip, first calling his three servants to him, entrusting to them the care of his estate. The first two servants do well with their trust and are commended by the master upon his return. The final servant, rather than working with what he had been given, buries the opportunity in the ground and is condemned by the master upon his return. The situation revealed what was in the heart of these servants. In what this third servant says when addressing his master, we find an important clue about the character of our own Master, Jesus:

“Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground.”

The point is this: Jesus may not be the one who has caused your adversity, but he expects some fruit out of it. He expects you to do well in adverse situations. It was not God, but Joseph’s brothers who sold him into slavery, yet God intended to reap something good out of the situation (see Genesis 50:20). He does not want you to bury the opportunity presented by adversity, but rather wants, with your cooperation, to redeem adversity for His glory. Remember: In Christ there are no wasted situations.

Discussion question: Can you recall a time when something good was produced in your life by adversity? What was the adversity and what was it that was produced?

Read Genesis 39:6-9. Do you think this situation did more to reveal the character of Joseph or to build character?

Point #2 – The Second Sign of a Godly Man: Lives first to please God (Gen 39:9)

Teaching: Take a look again at what we read in Genesis 39:9. If Joseph had responded to this woman’s advances he would have been sinning against Potiphar, the marriage agreement, himself and his future spouse. Why then does he look to God as the primary one against whom such a sin would be committed?

In the fifty-first Psalm we read the response of David after his affair with Bathsheba is revealed. In

the first three verses he confesses his sin and asks for cleansing. In the next verse we read this: “Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight.” Again, David’s sin was against himself, his own marriage covenant, and Uriah, not to mention Bathsheba and the child whom was born. Again, why did he suggest that the sin was primarily against God? The reason was because both Joseph and David lived first to please God. This is the mark of a godly man. But there is more.

The story is told of the employee of a factory who would daily walk past a clockmaker’s shop on his way to work. As he would walk past the window, he would look inside for the time and adjust his watch by the time in the window.

One day the clockmaker stepped out as the man stopped in front of his shop. He said, “Every morning at this time I notice that you stop outside my shop. Why is that?”

The factory worker responded, “Well, I work at the factory down the road and my job is to sound the shift bell. My watch does not keep time real well, so I adjust it every morning by the clock in your window.”

The clockmaker said, “I hate to tell you this, but the clock in my window does not keep time real well, so I adjust it daily by the sounding of the shift bell.”

What was going on? These men were setting their clocks by a sliding gauge. They lacked an immovable standard against which to set their clocks. The effect was that in every instance in which they made an adjustment, they were moving further from the correct time. In Matthew 15:14 Jesus says, “If the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.” The men in this story were heading in that direction because they were both blind as to the correct time.

Discussion Question: What will happen in our lives if we lack an immovable standard on which to base our morality?

Teaching: From time to time, we as men will need to make some adjustments in our lives. In Joseph’s example and the words of David, we find that God provides an immovable standard on which to base our decisions. The fact is God is the only immovable standard. In the past few years we have seen standards shift in entertainment, law and even in many churches.

Why did these men say that sin was first and foremost against God? Because God and nothing else was their standard. In violating the standard established by God, they were sinning against Him.

Discussion Question: What are some more moveable standards which some may follow?
Answer: Feelings, personal moral codes, etc.

Point #3 – The Third Sign of a Godly Man: Lives a Life of Purity

Read Romans 6:16. What is the importance of choosing to live a life of purity?

Teaching: In the first section, after reading of the temptation which Joseph faced, we asked this question: Do you think this situation (the temptation of Joseph) did more to reveal the character of Joseph or to build character? I would answer this question by stating, Joseph did not stay around long enough for character to be built. When she caught hold of him and tried to get him in bed with her, he ran for his life.

This is an important point. Temptation will never build character. It will only reveal character. Let's study this concept.

We understand that the human body has built into it an automatic response to danger known as "fight or flight." Listen to this description of this split-second reaction with our bodies:

When our fight or flight response is activated, sequences of nerve cell firing occur and chemicals like adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol are released into our bloodstream. These patterns of nerve cell firing and chemical release cause our body to undergo a series of very dramatic changes. Our respiratory rate increases. Blood is shunted away from our digestive tract and directed into our muscles and limbs, which require extra energy and fuel for running and fighting. Our pupils dilate. Our awareness intensifies. Our sight sharpens. Our impulses quicken. Our perception of pain diminishes. Our immune system mobilizes with increased activation. We become prepared—physically and psychologically—for fight or flight. We scan and search our environment, "looking for the enemy."¹

When we face spiritual danger the options are the same, it is either fight or flight. Read the following passages and complete the table:

	The Source of Danger	Appropriate Response
James 4:7	The Devil	
1 Corinthians 6:18 & 10:14	Temptation	

Teaching: Charles Spurgeon wrote: "The devil I am to resist and he will flee from me, but the lusts of the flesh, I must flee or they will surely overcome me." Our problem lies in that we often give Satan and ourselves more credit than is deserved.

One commentator wrote: "Satan makes his way, and secures his triumphs, rather by art, cunning, deception, and threatenings, than by true courage; and when opposed manfully, he flees." Rather than flee from Satan, the appropriate response is to face him down. He is not a lion. Peter says he only

acts like a lion. Let's follow the example of Nehemiah as he faced a number of adversaries in his attempt to lead in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem: "We prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat" (Nehemiah 4:9).

When responding to the threat posed by the lusts of the flesh (temptation), our response should be far different. It is seen in the example of Joseph: "He left his garment...and fled." The only appropriate response to temptation is to flee.

Temptation will never build character. It will only reveal character. Why? Because we should never remain in the proximity of temptation long enough for character to be built.

Discussion Question: What do you think will happen if rather than fleeing temptation, a man attempts to fight it?

Teaching: The answer is the equation for disaster: The desire of the flesh + an opportunity for compromise = Disaster

The flesh is always going to desire things contrary to the spirit. If I remain in the proximity of an opportunity for compromise, eventually the result will be disaster.

Discussion Question: What are some opportunities for compromise which we may regularly come across?

Too often our response to the onslaught of Satan is to run for cover when we should stand and fight. When we flee, we really allow the enemy of the soul more room to advance against us. Why do we flee when we should fight? We overestimate the power of Satan.

Too often our response to the threat from the flesh is to stand still when we should run for cover. In staying put we keep ourselves exposed to the equation for danger. Why do we stay put when we should flee? First, we overestimate our own power and second, the flesh wants us to remain in the proximity of compromise.

A final thought...

"All pleasure must be bought at the price of pain. For true pleasure the price is paid before you enjoy it. For false pleasure the price is paid after you enjoy it."

– Ravi Zacharias, author

Note on this final thought: The pleasure God endorses will require self-control of self-denial at the front end, but after you pay the price, he will add no sorrow to the pleasure you enjoy. For the pleasure

God has not endorsed, you may enjoy it right away, but you will pay the price on the back end. It is self-evident that the price of illegitimate pleasure is far higher than the price of legitimate pleasure.

¹ www.thebodysoulconnection.com/EducationCenter/fight.html