

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!
"Come As You Are ... Leave Changed!"

Burning Question #22

What Does God Expect of Me?

James 1:18-27

June 18, 2017

Father's Day

Communion: Archie Miller

Care Calling: Archie Miller

Host: POTLUCK

Saturday 6/17 Clean Up: The Decker's

- 1 🎵 **How Majestic [DH 2238]**
- 2 🎵 730 - Stand up stand up for Jesus [All 4] 730
- 3 🎵 460 - Let us break bread together [All 3] 460
- 4 🎵 **Doxology [DH 1981]**
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- 6 🎵 426 - Blest be the tie that binds [All 3]
- 7 🎵 **Family of God [DH 2357]**

James 1:18-27 (NASB)

18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. 19 *This* you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at

his natural face in a mirror; 24 for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Here is a crazy question for you:

Have you ever been afraid of a bar of soap?

According to an article in the LA Times: Bathing and showering appear to be particularly dangerous.

Overall, about two-thirds of accidental injuries happen in the bathtub or shower — which makes sense, because each can become slippery.

Overall, mishaps near the bathtub, shower, toilet and sink caused an estimated 234,094 nonfatal injuries in the U.S.

In fact, every year more than 18,000 Americans die from accidental injuries that take place in the bathroom.

Political analyst, Tucker Carlson, says: "Guns don't kill people, bathtubs do."

But, to rephrase the question, "Can a bar of soap damage your relationships?"

I'll revisit that question in a few minutes.

How many times have you in frustration said: "OK, God, what do You expect of me?"

I was doing online research on cultural concepts of maturity last week. What was interesting is that a huge part of the world see Americans as self-centered and immature.

BUT, we do live in a world that is immature, and encourages immaturity.

We see the results of immature decisions all around us.

Without a doubt, probably the number one cause of problems in the world is immaturity.

The number one marriage problem is people just need to grow up. They are acting immature.

We get ourselves into all kinds of problems by saying immature things, making immature decisions, acting in immature ways.

We just need to grow up.

God's will for every person is that they grow.

Hebrews 6:1 (NASB)

1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works

"press on to maturity"

God says grow up.

That's one of the purposes of our church is to help everybody grow spiritually, emotionally, mentally, in every way -- balanced Christian living.

There are some things you ought to know about maturity.

Let's start with the negatives...

I. What maturity is not

A. Maturity has nothing to do with how much education you've gotten

it has nothing to do with academics, it has nothing to do with how many degrees you've gotten.

When I went to Cincinnati Bible Seminary, I was beginning to learn just how much I had to learn.

I remember my first day in Dr. George Mark Elliott's Biblical Theology class.

I was sitting next to Jim Smith, who is now Dr. James Smith, retired professor of Old Testament, and the author of a couple dozen deep commentaries on the OT.

Dr. Elliott began his lecture, yes, I still remember his opening words, with ... "In the Reubicon of life..." and I was hung up on what is a Reubicon.

I knew then I had a lot to learn.

I learned that education does not make you mature.

B. Maturity has nothing to do with achievement

It has nothing to do with what you accomplish.

You can accomplish a lot and still be very immature.

You don't have to be mature to make millions.

C. Maturity is not appearance.

Some people just look mature.

Some people just look more spiritual than the rest of us.

The fact is, you can look real spiritual and not be spiritual at all.

Maturity has nothing to do with your appearance.

1 Samuel 16:7 (MSG)

7 But GOD told Samuel, "Looks aren't everything. Don't be impressed with his looks and stature.

D. Maturity is not age.

It has nothing to do with how long you've lived or how long you've been a Christian.

You can be a Christian for eighty years and not be mature.

Bumper sticker: "I may be getting older, but I refuse to grow up."

I've seen some 50 and 60 year old kids.

Maturity has nothing to do with your age.

Granted, God's ideal is that as we grow older we get more mature, but that's not always the case.

II. A Hindrance to Maturity

What does God say maturity is?

1 Samuel 16:7 (MSG)

7 GOD judges persons differently than humans do. Men and women look at the face; GOD looks into the heart."

God says maturity is attitude.

Attitude is what makes the difference.

It's your character.

D. L. Moody said, "Character is what you are in the dark."

Recognition is what people say about you, character is what God says about you.

God says it's your attitude that determines whether you're mature or not. God wants you to grow up and have Christ-like attitudes.

What is a Biblical portrait of the mature person?

How do you measure spiritual maturity?

Not by comparing yourself to other people, not by comparing yourself with yourself, but by comparing yourself to the word of God.

In the book of James we have a manual on maturity.

The word "mature" in Greek is the word "τελειος", "**teleios**" -- it's translated **mature, complete, perfect**.

It's used 17 times in the New Testament, and most by James, who uses this word four times in five chapters.

James is a manual on how to be mature.

And, that word, perfect, is a big hindrance

How so?

Well, have you not heard:

Matthew 5:48 (NASB)

48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Often, as parents give what they think is good advice to their child, they unwittingly instill what some psychologists call a "be perfect script."

For instance the Be perfect maxim is given by the parents when they are trying to teach the son or daughter that things need to be done very well and in a precise manner.

Of course there is nothing wrong with this and it is very good advice as there are some things that do need to be done perfectly.

If I am a passenger in a plane I hope the pilot has a be perfect.

If I am having an operation I hope the surgeon has a be perfect.

The list of maxims are

Be perfect

Try hard

Work hard

Be strong

Don't cry

Hurry up

Please others

They only become a problem when the person feels 'driven' to follow the directive.

All the maxims are good advice in different circumstances but for some they become more than that and they feel they have to follow them or something bad will happen to them.

They are driven by irrational fear to follow the maxim and that is when they become a problem.

The maxims not only become a problem to the person who holds, them but they hold these expectations on others, which does create some interpersonal problems, does it not?

In trying to live up to these maxims, the person pushes themselves into what we call "perfectionism."

Perfectionism is destructive to your life in several ways.

A. It defeats your initiative.

Have you ever had a project you haven't been able to get started on? You think, "One of these days I'm going to get around to it," but you just can't take that first step.

One possible reason is perfectionism.

You're waiting for the perfect circumstance or timing, until the kids get out of school, or until a certain amount of money comes in. When you set your standards so high, perfectionism causes paralysis, and you can't get anything done.

The Bible says

Ecclesiastes 11:4 (TLB)

4 If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done.

B. It damages your relationships.

Nobody likes being nagged or corrected all the time.

It's frustrating and irritating!

The Bible says,

Proverbs 17:9 (TLB)

9 Love forgets mistakes; nagging about them parts the best of friends.

Perfectionism — the desire to always correct — damages relationships, because it's rooted in insecurity.

Perfectionists who are harsh and demanding on other people are really harsh and demanding on themselves.

C. It destroys your happiness.

Ecclesiastes 7:16 (GW)

16 Don't be too virtuous, and don't be too wise. Why make yourself miserable?

Solomon is not talking about genuine righteousness or real wisdom. He's talking about perfectionism.

You can take any virtue and make a vice out of it by taking it to the extreme.

Your worst nag lives under your skin, because people are their own worst critic.

Since we tend to resent and even dislike people who nag us, if you're always nagging yourself, what does that say about you?

It says that you don't like you.

You think you're not good enough.

And you think reminding yourself what's wrong with you is going to motivate you into doing the right thing.

It's not!

That's called perfectionism, and it causes you to constantly put yourself down.

There's only one antidote to perfectionism.

It's not in a self-help book or a doctor's office.

You can only learn to relax when you fully experience the liberating grace of God.

The preacher decided he would preach on perfectionism.

He asked: "Is there anyone here who thinks they are perfect?"

Everyone was looking at the floor!

Slowly, one man stood up.

The preacher asked the man, "And why are you standing?"

The man said, "I am not perfect, but I am standing in memory of my wife's first husband who was."

Please read the context of **Matthew 5:48**.

In verses 38-39, Jesus contrasts His teaching with that of the Old Law.

In verses 40-44, Jesus teaches us to love our enemies.

In verses 45-47, Jesus says if we don't love our enemies we are no better than evil people who are capable of loving.

So you see the verse is set in the context of how to treat one's enemies.

So, in this context, "perfect" is probably best translated as "merciful."

Be merciful to others, just as God is merciful.

Perfection is not the name of our journey.

Love is.

Mercy is.

Progress is.

Growth is.

Of course we want to be the people God intends us to be that usually involves being stretched and growing and improving.

But progress is what we're after, not perfection.

III. Marks of Maturity

A. Mature People Are Sensitive to Other People

James 2:8 (NASB)

8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well.

A mature person is sensitive to people.

He doesn't just see his own needs, he sees other people's needs.

He understands their hurts.

He's not just interested in himself.

God says that love, being interested in others, is a mark of maturity.

James gets very specific.

James 2:1-7 (NASB)

1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? ... 14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?

Don't show favoritism, don't be a snob, don't look down on people, don't judge by appearance, don't insult people, don't exploit people. The second test of maturity is love: how do you treat other people?

Paul said,

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (Moffatt)

Love is very patient, very kind. 4 Love knows no jealousy; love makes no parade, gives itself no airs, is never rude, never selfish, 5 never irritated, never resentful; love is never glad when others go 6

wrong, love is gladdened by goodness, always slow to expose, always 7 eager to believe the best, always hopeful, always patient. Love 8 never disappears.

Jesus says,

Matthew 25:34-40 (NASB)

34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? 38 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.'

It's interesting to me that Jesus in the Matthew 25 judgment says the one thing we'll be judged for is how we treated other people.

Not how many Bible verses we knew,
not how many times we were in church,
not what great a reputation we had as Christian leaders,
but how we treated other people.

B. A Mature Person Has Mastered Their Mouth

James 3:2-6 (NET)

2 For we all stumble in many ways. If someone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect individual, able to control the entire body as well. 3 And if we put bits into the mouths of horses to get them to obey us, then we guide their entire bodies. 4 Look at ships too: though they are so large and driven by harsh winds, they are steered by a tiny rudder wherever the pilot's impulse directs. 5 So too the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it has great pretensions. Think how small a flame sets a huge forest ablaze. 6 And the tongue is a fire! The tongue represents the world of wrongdoing among the parts of our bodies, that pollutes the entire body and sets fire to the course of human existence and is set on fire by hell.

Did you ever have a doctor say when you went for a check up is "Stick out your tongue?"

He uses your tongue to check your health.

God does that spiritually, too.

In the military during WWII and Korea there was a saying, "Loose lips, sink ships."

Well, loose lips destroy lives.

They hurt!

Vulgarity from Christians is disastrous.

Think of the effect it has on someone standing near!

Self control comes from tongue control.

We get ourselves into so much trouble at what we say and what we think and what we speak.

James 3:3-11 gives several illustrations.

He says our tongue is like a rudder, a bit in a horse's mouth, a spark, a snake, a spring.

He says, you put a little bit in a horse's mouth and that little bit can control the direction of the horse.

A little rudder on a boat can control the direction of the boat.

Your tongue, which, by size is very insignificant, controls your life.

What you say directs your life, what you say can destroy your life.

It can delight people's lives, it can discourage people's lives.

Your tongue is a powerful force for good or for evil.

Have you ever heard anyone say, "I just say what's on my mind!"

They're kind of proud of it.

Being frank, up front, they say what's on their mind.

The Bible says, that's not frankness, that's immaturity.

A lot of people just need a large dose of tactfulness.

Ephesians 4:29 (NASB)

29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Watch what you say.

When you talk you don't just say things to build yourself up.

You say things to build other people up.

If it doesn't build somebody else up, don't say it.

Even if it's the truth.

If it doesn't build up, don't say it.

That's a mark of maturity.

A mature person manages his mouth.

It doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian, if you can't master your mouth, you've missed the mark.

James 1:26 "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless."

If I've memorized a hundred thousand verses and been through every Bible study in the book and go to church and never miss a service, but if I don't watch my tongue, my religion is worthless.

If I spread rumors, it's worthless.

If I'm saying things that are not always accurate or exaggerate or speak impulsively, it's worthless.

If I'm saying crude, and vulgar things, it's worthless.

The test of maturity is to manage your mouth so that no corrupt communication, no negative talk comes out of your mouth.

Ephesians 4:15 (TEV)

15 Instead, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head.

"speaking the truth in a spirit of love" means the right attitude, the right timing, the right place, the right location, the right motive.

The Bible is very practical.

It doesn't matter how much you know about the Bible, if your attitude isn't like Christ's you've room for growth.

C. A Mature Person Is a Peacemaker Not a Troublemaker

James 4:1 (NET)

1 Where do the conflicts and where do the quarrels among you come from? Is it not from this, from your passions that battle inside you?

James says there are inner quarrels and fights and they come from our own inner desires.

You want something and you don't get it.

You kill and covet but you cannot have what you want.

You quarrel and fight and you do not have because you do not ask God.

Am I a peacemaker?

Am I a troublemaker?
Do I like to control?
Do I like to argue?
Am I a contentious person?
Do I get my feelings hurt?
Do I get defensive easily?
Do I hurt other people's feelings?

Am I a peacemaker?
Or, am I a troublemaker?

The mark of a mature person is the lack of conflict in his own life.

Paul told the Corinthian church, You guys are a bunch of babies.
They argued about everything.
They argued about the Lord's supper, gifts, leadership, everything.
That's a mark of immaturity.

Why is there so much conflict in the world?
Why is there conflict in marriage?
Why is there conflict where I work?
Why is there conflict between me and a former friend?
Why is there conflict between me and another Christian?
Why is there conflict between me and God?
Why is there conflict?

James says there are two reasons for conflict:

James 4:3 (GW)

3

When you pray for things, you don't get them because you want them for the wrong reason—for your own pleasure.

1) The first cause of conflict is selfishness.

When I want what I want then I'm going to have conflict with somebody.

The issue is pride.

How do you know if a person is immature?

Look at their prayers.

If their prayers are always self centered -- bless me, prosper me, protect me, use me, help me... if this is the only kind of prayer you pray, that's immature.

Do you pray for other people?

Bless me -- all I see is me.

An "I" problem.

Selfishness.

Forgiveness is as important for church bonds as it is for marriage bonds.

Les Parrott, III, Ph.D., is a professor of clinical psychology for Seattle Pacific University, author, and an ordained Nazarene minister.

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He and his wife, Dr. Leslie Parrott, write a column for the Christian Standard, and he shared an interesting story he read in a book titled **Love in the Time of Cholera**, by Nobel laureate, **Gabriel Garcia Marquez**.

It's a story of how a marriage disintegrated over a bar of soap.

It was the wife's job to keep the house in order, including the towels, toilet paper and soap in the bathroom.

One day she forgot to replace the soap.

Her husband exaggerated the oversight: "I've been bathing for almost a week without any soap."

She vigorously denied forgetting to replace the soap.

Although she had indeed forgotten, her pride was at stake, and she wouldn't back down.

For the next seven months, they slept in separate rooms and ate in silence.

Their marriage had suffered a heart attack.

"Even when they were old and placid," writes Marquez, "they were very careful about bringing it up, for the barely healed wounds could begin to bleed again as if they'd been inflicted only yesterday."

How can a bar of soap ruin a marriage?
The answer is actually, simply, yes.
Because neither partner would say, "Forgive me."

Solomon must have been sharing a life experience when he wrote:

Proverbs 13:10 (TLB)

10 Pride leads to arguments; be humble, take advice, and become wise.

All conflict is ego, pride.
Pride guarantees conflict at work, church, home, school, wherever.

Selfishness -- we want things for ourselves.

2) The second cause of conflict is judging others

James 4:11-12 (TLB)

11 Don't criticize and speak evil about each other, dear brothers. If you do, you will be fighting against God's law of loving one another, declaring it is wrong. But your job is not to decide whether this law is right or wrong, but to obey it. 12 Only he who made the law can rightly judge among us. He alone decides to save us or destroy. So what right do you have to judge or criticize others?

The Washington Times columnist, Cal Thomas, says: "We walk a fine line between judgment (holding people accountable to a standard we did not create) and judgmentalism (thinking ourselves morally superior because we haven't committed the acts of others)."

But, I suspect all of us are guilty of judgmentalism at some time.
If you do this you're asking for a fight.
Are you're always finding fault, always stirring up strife, always spreading rumors?

God says,

Matthew 7:1-2 (GW)

1 Stop judging so that you will not be judged. 2 Otherwise, you will be judged by the same standard you use to judge others. The standards you use for others will be applied to you.

I recall asking Dr. Foster about this passage, and he quoted:

Matthew 7:17-20 (NASB)

17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ... 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits.

So only God has the right to judge.

He has all the facts, He knows everything, He knows all the motives, He sees into our heart.

He's got the truth so He can judge.

But we are limited in our insight.

God says

James 5:9 (TLB)

9 Don't grumble about each other, brothers. Are you yourselves above criticism? For see! The great Judge is coming. He is almost here. Let him do whatever criticizing must be done.

But the fourth characteristic of a mature person is that person is a peacemaker not a troublemaker.

D. A Mature Person Is Patient and Prayerful

James 5:10-11 (TLB)

10 For examples of patience in suffering, look at the Lord's prophets. 11 We know how happy they are now because they stayed true to him then, even though they suffered greatly for it. Job is an example of a man who continued to trust the Lord in

sorrow; from his experiences we can see how the Lord's plan finally ended in good, for he is full of tenderness and mercy.

James 5:16 (TLB)

16 Admit your faults to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous man has great power and wonderful results.

God says the mark of a mature person is, he is patient and prayerful.

Those are the two key words in chapter five.

"Patient" is used four times.

"Prayer" is used seven times.

The mark of a mature person is they are patient and they are prayerful.

Those two go together.

They express an attitude of dependence upon God.

James 5:7-9 (CEV)

7 My friends, be patient until the Lord returns. Think of farmers who wait patiently for the spring and summer rains to make their valuable crops grow. 8 Be patient like those farmers and don't give up. The Lord will soon be here! 9 Don't grumble about each other or you will be judged, and the judge is right outside the door.

My grandfather didn't irrigate his crops.

He had to be patient and wait for the rain.

If anybody has to have patience it's a farmer.

He does a lot of waiting.

He plants a seed, waits, prays, hopes, expects ... he waits.

There are no overnight crops.

Just like a farmer has to wait, sometimes we have to wait.

We have to wait on God in answer to prayer.

We have to wait on God for a miracle.

We have to wait on God to work in our lives.

We have to wait.

Patience is a mark of maturity.

The only way you learn patience is by waiting.

Sometimes God says "NO!"

Many times God will say to you, "Not yet."

He doesn't mean "No".

He doesn't mean He's not going to answer your prayer.

He just saying, you've got to wait, I want you to develop, to grow.

James 5:17-18 (TLB)

17 Elijah was as completely human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for the next three and a half years! **18** Then he prayed again, this time that it *would* rain, and down it poured, and the grass turned green and the gardens began to grow again.

Elijah was patient and prayerful.

That's a mark of maturity.

Clearly, moral perfection in an absolute sense is not possible for you and I.

The word "mature" in Greek is the word "**teleios**", "**teleios**" -- it's translated **mature, complete, perfect**.

It's used 17 times in the New Testament, and most by James, who uses this word four times in five chapters.

The basic meaning of **teleios** in the New Testament is always that the thing or person so described fully carries out the purpose for which designed.

It means not so much to make perfect as to make fully adequate for the task for which designed.

The meaning is clear: God has a creative intention for us, and to the extent that we live in harmony with that intention, we can be the Perfect Person God desires us to be.

But let's not call it perfection!

Let's call it maturity!

So, let's recap, and see where we need to become more mature.

Sensitive to others?

Careful with my speech?

Peacemaker?

Prayerful?

Prayer and Invitation

June 18 Lesson 3 Jephthah

Devotional Reading: Acts 15:6-21

Background Scripture: Judges 11

JUDGES 11:4-11, 29-31

4 Some time later, when the Ammonites were fighting against Israel, **5** the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. **6** “Come,” they said, “be our commander, so we can fight the Ammonites.” **7** Jephthah said to them, “Didn’t you hate me and drive me from my father’s house? Why do you come to me now, when you’re in trouble?” **8** The elders of Gilead said to him, “Nevertheless, we are turning to you now; come with us to fight the Ammonites, and you will be head over all of us who live in Gilead.” **9** Jephthah answered, “Suppose you take me back to fight the Ammonites and the LORD gives them to me—will I really be your head?” **10** The elders of Gilead replied, “The LORD is our witness; we will certainly do as you say.” **11** So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them. And he repeated all his words before the LORD in Mizpah. ... **29** Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites. **30** And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: “If you give the Ammonites into my hands, **31** whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD’s, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.”

KEY VERSE

Jephthah answered, “Suppose you take me back to fight the Ammonites and the LORD gives them to me—will I really be your head?”—Judges 11:9

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the conditions of the agreements made between Jephthah and the elders of Gilead.
2. Compare and contrast the vow of the elders of Gilead with the vow of Jephthah.
3. Dramatize a situation in which participants work to overcome suspicion of one another.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

A. Imperfect Leaders

B. Lesson Background

I. Reluctant Ally (Judges 11:4-7)

A. Present Need (vv. 4-6)

How Do We Respond?

B. Past Abuse (v. 7)

II. Leadership Contract (Judges 11:8-11, 29)

A. Position Promised (vv. 8-10)

B. Commitment Confirmed (v. 11)

C. Spirit Strengthens (v. 29)

III. Rash Vow (Judges 11:30, 31)

A. The “If ...” Clause (v. 30)

B. The “Then ...” Clause (v. 31)

Rash Promises

Conclusion

A. On the Lookout for Leadership

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Imperfect Leaders

Who are the greatest leaders you can name? Chances are, even though those on your list accomplished great things, some parts of their lives were far from virtuous.

Abraham Lincoln is known as the Great Emancipator. Nevertheless, he once wrote, “If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it.” Mahatma Gandhi led India to independence. Yet, he opposed the adoption of modern technology that would have helped his nation become more prosperous, freeing them from decades of poverty. Henry Ford was a pioneer in automotive engineering. But Ford also sponsored a weekly newspaper that published anti-Semitic views. Steve Jobs was undoubtedly a tech genius responsible for many innovations that changed the way we receive, store, and interact with information. But he was known for eccentricities such as odd diets and a refusal to bathe!

It is obvious that no human leader is perfect. Even the most popular and most effective leaders have flaws. Today we will look at a judge in Israel who was used by God in spite of the man’s huge imperfections.

B. Lesson Background

The land of Israel was undisturbed for 40 years after Gideon defeated the Midianites (Judges 8:28). That is the last period of peace mentioned in the book of Judges.

Peace came to an end after Gideon died when Abimelech, one of Gideon's 70 sons, attempted to kill all of his brothers (Judges 9). He had a three-year reign, but it was more as a ruler of a city-state, not as a ruler over all Israel. At the conclusion of a rebellion, Abimelech captured a nearby city where people had taken refuge in a fortified tower. But he ventured too close to the tower and died after being hit in the head by a millstone (Judges 9:50-55; compare 2 Samuel 11:21).

The judges Tola and Jair came next, with their services lasting 23 and 22 years, respectively (Judges 10:1-3). It is generally concluded that the two men were judges at about the same time, but in different parts of Israel. The axiom "The only thing learned from history is that no one learns from history" was verified in Israel time after time. Israel's sin-cycle repeated itself anew as the Israelites again embraced idolatry (Judges 10:6).

Consequently, the Lord sold them into the hands of the Ammonites and the Philistines for 18 years (10:7, 8). This is estimated as having been on both sides of 1100 BC. When the Israelites cried out for deliverance, the Lord challenged them to cry out to the gods that they had chosen (10:14). The people eventually repented and appealed to God again (10:15, 16).

The Ammonites had come from the east and oppressed the Israelites on both sides of the Jordan River (Judges 10:7-9). The people had repented, but they needed someone to organize them and lead in the effort to expel the Ammonites. That man was Jephthah, and he is the delivering judge in this lesson.

The opening verses of Judges 11 provide background information about Jephthah himself. His father, Gilead, had sons by his wife, but Jephthah had a different mother. This factor caused his brothers to drive him from home. Jephthah went north to the land of Tob. He had the ability to lead, and soon other men came to him. They are called "scoundrels" in Judges 11:3, which may speak to their being of low character. It is usually assumed that Jephthah's guerilla force raided nearby areas, even in Ammon itself.

I. Reluctant Ally

(Judges 11:4-7)

A. Present Need (vv. 4-6)

4. Some time later, when the Ammonites were fighting against Israel, The historical review was a reminder about what was given early in Judges 10:7-9—that idolatry in Israel has consequences. Israel is attacked by people immediately to the east. These raiders are intent on looting, and they often commit atrocities against anyone who resists.

5. the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. Gilead, located east of the Jordan River, is territory allocated to tribes Reuben and Gad plus the half-tribe of Manasseh of Israel's 12 tribes (Deuteronomy 3:12-17). *The elders of Gilead* apparently can find no one locally who is willing and able to lead a military resistance. So in desperation and shame, they travel northeast as a group to *the land of Tob* to ask Jephthah to return. Conjectures have been made that he knows some of these men personally. He may have looked up to them in his youth. But in figurative terms, they are crawling to him for help.

What Do You Think?

How should we deal with people who come to us only because they need our help?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding fellow believers

Regarding unbelievers

6. "Come," they said, "be our commander, so we can fight the Ammonites."

The elders of Gilead make their offer to Jephthah, and the task that they have for him is very specific. They do not ask him to become a fellow elder, etc. The request to *be our commander* is that Jephthah serve as a military leader.

As that leader against the Ammonites, Jephthah is aware that he and his men will have the spoils of war if they are the victors (compare Numbers 31:9-12, 25-47). Jephthah, however, has no assurance of victory. His situation is different from that of Gideon in the previous lesson. Gideon was called by the Lord. Jephthah is being called by men who need help.

HOW DO WE RESPOND?

The war in Vietnam was one of the more troublesome military ventures in American history. It was a proxy war: North Vietnam supported by Communist China and the Soviet Union vs. South Vietnam backed by America and its allies. American involvement was significant by the mid-1960s, and the country became deeply divided over the war. Protests sprang up all over the country. Many believed the government had lied to them about the reason for the war, the need to escalate it, the number of casualties, and the chances for victory. The military draft became increasingly unpopular, and many thousands were accused of draft dodging.

Providentially for Israel, Jephthah was willing to serve! (Apparently Israel had men willing to fight as soldiers, but no one qualified to lead them.)

Most of us never have had to face the danger of armed warfare. But we are called to demonstrate spiritual courage now, as our country struggles through another wrenching time of cultural decline. This applies to both spiritual leader and “foot soldier.” When the challenge comes to engage in spiritual battle, do you respond “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8)? —C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

Under what circumstances, if any, would you refuse to serve in your country’s armed forces? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering cases of armed intervention on behalf of another country (rescue)

Considering cases of self-defense after being attacked

Considering service as a noncombatant

B. Past Abuse (v. 7)

7. Jephthah said to them, “Didn’t you hate me and drive me from my father’s house? Why do you come to me now, when you’re in trouble?”

Jephthah responds to the invitation with two rhetorical questions. The first one confirms that at least some of these leaders were involved in his being sent into personal exile. Jephthah makes the accusation that they had hated him, and that they had at least concurred with the decision of his brothers when they drove him from home. He rebukes the elders of Gilead for their part in his expulsion from the area many years before.

Jephthah’s second question serves as a reprimand. Since they are congenial toward him only in their hour of need, their hypocrisy is clear.

Comparisons have been made with the occasion in Egypt centuries prior to this event when Joseph’s brothers appeared before him. That family situation also involved more than one mother, but that factor was not as important as it is here (see the Lesson Background).

What Do You Think?

In what circumstances, if any, should past mistreatment be considered in making decisions?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In issues involving only family members

In issues involving governmental power structures

In issues involving only unbelievers

Other

II. Leadership Contract

(Judges 11:8-11, 29)

A. Position Promised (vv. 8-10)

8. The elders of Gilead said to him, “Nevertheless, we are turning to you now; come with us to fight the Ammonites, and you will be head over all of us who live in Gilead.”

Jephthah’s rhetorical questions result in the conditional promise we see here. We notice that *the elders of Gilead* are using a negotiating tactic that is still used today. These leaders had decided beforehand that whoever leads the fight against the Ammonites will be *head over all of us who live in Gilead* (see Judges 10:18). But the initial offer in Judges 11:6 is only the position of “commander.” Getting resistance to that, the elders now make their best and final offer, an offer decided in advance.

9. Jephthah answered, “Suppose you take me back to fight the Ammonites and the LORD gives them to me—will I really be your head?”

The new offer to be *head* gets Jephthah’s attention! If the Lord enables him to be victorious, are they definitely saying that that will happen? The last phrase in this verse is given as a question, but can also be taken as an affirmation: I will be your head.

A subtle change has taken place. In the previous verse it was the elders who gave the conditions for Jephthah’s becoming their head. In this verse the same conditions are repeated and become Jephthah’s conditions to them.

10. The elders of Gilead replied, “The LORD is our witness; we will certainly do as you say.”

In verses 9-11, Jephthah seems to take a little revenge against his own people as they swear an oath to make him their head as well as commander over the fighting forces. It is either all or nothing! The sting of illegitimacy now becomes tolerable as Jephthah contemplates his change in circumstances.

It is a serious thing to incorporate the name of *the Lord* into a vow, and that is what *the elders of Gilead* do when they say that *the Lord is* their witness. The leaders of Gilead understand that Jephthah may not believe them, so they say that with the Lord as their witness, they will keep their word.

This type of oath is done in special situations. When Ruth made her pledge to Naomi, she incorporated the name of the Lord into her statement (Ruth 1:17). The high priest put Christ under oath when he commanded Jesus to say whether or not he was the Christ (Matthew 26:63, 64). Normally, however, the Christian is not to swear oaths in the name of the Lord (Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12), although Paul takes a vow on at least one

occasion (Acts 18:18). Christians are to be seen as trustworthy when they speak.

What Do You Think?

How should we respond when faced with the opportunity to take an oath or vow that is expected by culture?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding legal, courtroom situations

Regarding oaths of office

Regarding wedding vows

Other

B. Commitment Confirmed (v. 11)

11. So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them. And he repeated all his words before the LORD in Mizpah.

The scene changes as Jephthah accompanies *the elders of Gilead* to a place named *Mizpah*, also spelled Mizpeh. There is more than one town of this name; one view identifies the location as being on the east side of the Jordan River. Another Mizpah is situated about six miles due north of Jerusalem (Joshua 18:26; also known as Jebus per Judges 19:11), between Ramah and Bethel (see Judges 4:5, lesson 1).

It was the elders who gave the original invitation to Jephthah, but now it is *the people* who have the final confirmation on his being their *head and commander*. The same two words that were used in verses 6 and 8 are used in reverse order. It is logical that Jephthah wants immediate authority to organize the people for the pending military campaign.

But first, Jephthah tries diplomacy. Judges 11:12-28 (not in today's lesson text) informs us that he sends messengers to the king of Ammon to discover the nature of that man's grievance against Israel. The king responds with the charge that the Israelites had taken his land when they came out of Egypt. Jephthah's reply shows that he knows the facts of history better than does the king of Ammon! Ultimately, however, that king reveals that he is not interested in the facts of history, as he refuses a peaceful solution that is based on those facts.

C. Spirit Strengthens (v. 29)

29a. Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jephthah.

Verse 6 of our text indicates that it is men who call Jephthah to serve, not the Lord. In the verse before us, God sanctifies that decision, given that *the Spirit of the Lord* comes on Jephthah.

In Old Testament times, the Spirit of the Lord comes on select individuals to empower them for specific tasks. An example is Bezalel, who received the Spirit of God to lead in the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 35:30, 31). In the book of Judges, there are four judges who receive this special gift: Othniel (Judges 3:9, 10), Gideon (6:34, lesson 2), Jephthah, and Samson (14:6, 19; 15:14). The fact that the Spirit comes three times on Samson indicates that the gift is not permanent.

What Do You Think?

How can we make sure we are not hindering the Holy Spirit in helping us meet life's challenges?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In everyday living

On special occasions

In emergencies

29b. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites.

Jephthah needs more men in his fighting force. (Contrast the Lord's systematic reduction of Gideon's army from 32,000 to a mere 300 in Judges 7:2-8.) It may be that the Spirit leads Jephthah to go on a recruiting tour throughout Gilead, and then north into the tribal territory of Manasseh. He would be well-known to the people of that area, for it is not far from Tob, where he lives. He returns to his starting point, organizes his forces, and begins his advance to the east to make contact with the foe.

III. Rash Vow

(Judges 11:30, 31)

A. The "If ..." Clause (v. 30)

30. And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands,

Previously a vow was made by the men of Gilead, who asked Jephthah to return. This time it is Jephthah who makes *a vow*. He is doing something that he has not done before. He is ready to lead an army into battle, and he may feel insecure. He might have made raids on these people in the past, but this was an entirely different type of operation. This was not Jephthah's method—until now.

Jephthah's vow is more than a wish, and it goes beyond a simple prayer. This is a vow made to the Lord with the condition of what he wants to accomplish in the impending battle. His desire is to have victory, and he uses a figure of speech to express it—that he wants the oppressors delivered into his hands.

B. The “Then ...” Clause (v. 31)

31. “whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD’s, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.”

This verse is the famous vow of Jephthah. There are different opinions on what he actually intended to say, and what he did as a result.

The verses that follow reveal that Jephthah’s army was successful. When he comes home, it is his daughter who comes out to meet him with tambourines and dancing—his only daughter. Jephthah is grief stricken. The middle part of Judges 11:39 reads this way in literalistic Hebrew: “he did to her his vow that he vowed.” Therefore it is certain that he kept his promise. It is also certain that the Spirit of the Lord had come on him earlier (v. 9), and it is certain that he is listed in Hebrews 11:32 as a person of faith.

The older view about Jephthah is that he actually sacrificed his daughter when she returned from bewailing her virginity. The rationale for this interpretation includes these major considerations: (1) actual sacrifice is the natural sense of the text; (2) actual sacrifice was the interpretation for 2,000 years; (3) the old Greek translation of the Old Testament has “whoever” comes from his house, not “whatever”; and (4) neighboring people groups regularly sacrificed their children to their gods. The list could continue, but these are the major points.

In about AD 1200, Rabbi Kimchi proposed a different interpretation: Jephthah gave his daughter to the Lord to serve at the tabernacle (see 1 Samuel 1:23-28). Support for this theory is based on (1) translating the final phrase of the verse at hand as “or I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering”; (2) the fact that the Hebrews are not to imitate their neighbors’ practices, including human sacrifice (Deuteronomy 12:30, 31; 18:10); (3) the daughter bewailed her virginity, not her death; and (4) Jephthah’s inclusion in Hebrews 11 argues against his actually sacrificing his daughter.

Jephthah was faithful. He knew the history of his people. He was not crushed by rejection or adversity, but rose above it. He could overlook the bad behavior of his brothers in order to help people in need. He received a special gift of the Holy Spirit, and he kept his word—especially to God.

RASH PROMISES

Remember as a youngster when you made a hasty promise “not to tell,” but you ended up doing so anyway? Perhaps it involved a pledge to keep a secret, but you couldn’t resist gossiping about such juicy information.

Perhaps someone told you not to tell anyone of a prank he or she committed, but you violated trust and did so anyway. There are all kinds of rash promises people make; the promise “not to tell” is just one of them. There’s a lot of overlap in meaning of the words *promises*, *oaths*, and *vows*. All involve the making of a commitment, and God takes such commitments seriously (see Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12; etc.). Jephthah, Saul (1 Samuel 14:24, 43-45), and others did so as well. The ungodly King Herod found himself trapped in a rash promise he had made (Matthew 14:6-11).

Before committing ourselves too quickly to certain paths in our service for Jesus, it’s important to count the cost of doing so (Luke 14:28-33). The more significant the opportunity seems to be, the greater should be the depth of prayer about it (Colossians 4:3-5; etc.). The godly counsel of the spiritually mature can also keep us from making rash commitments (Proverbs 15:22). —C. R. B.

How to Say It

Abimelech Uh-*bim*-eh-lek.

Ammon *Am*-mun.

Ammonites *Am*-un-ites.

Bezaleel Bih-*zal*-ih-el.

Gad Gad (*a* as in *bad*).

Gilead *Gil*-ee-ud (*G* as in *get*).

Jephthah *Jef*-thuh (*th* as in *thin*).

Mahatma Gandhi Muh-*hot*-muh *Gon*-dee.

Manasseh Muh-*nass*-uh.

Midianites *Mid*-ee-un-ites.

Mizpah *Miz*-pah.

Philistines Fuh-*liss*-teenz or *Fill*-us-teenz.

Reuben *Roo*-ben.

Conclusion

A. On the Lookout for Leadership

There is no such thing as a perfect leader. And if the elders of Gilead were looking for one, they certainly did not find him in Jephthah! Yet God used that man for his purposes in his time.

There is a fine line to walk here when it comes to looking for church leaders. If the leadership values in 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9; etc., are taken as absolute qualifications, then the church may end up with no elders and deacons! There are no perfect church leaders. On the other hand, to

view these characteristics as *qualities* rather than *qualifications* may put one on the path to “explaining away” a potential leader’s shortcomings—with disaster looming.

The solution is to be on the lookout for diamonds in the rough, potential leaders who are open to mentoring. Paul trained Timothy and Titus for years to assume leadership roles; tomorrow’s leaders need today’s training.

B. Prayer

We ask, O God, that you help us find, train, and follow leaders who will accomplish your will among us. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The God who makes a lump of coal a diamond can create faithful leaders
from imperfect people.

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