

JOSEPH'S STORY

- A. Introduction: We've begun a series dealing with how to respond rather than react to the challenges of life.
1. It is possible to learn to respond to life's difficulties in a way that glorifies God and brings good to you.
 - a. To react means to act in opposition to something, to move in a reverse direction. When you react to something, that "thing" is in control because that "thing" is determining how you act.
 - b. To respond means to make an answer, to say something in return. When you respond, you answer your situation with words and actions based on knowledge of God's word.
 2. James 1:2 tells us how to respond to difficulties that arises in our lives. We are to consider them or think of them as an occasion to rejoice. To rejoice means to respond with praise.
 - a. To praise means to list the virtues and accomplishments of someone or something. To praise God means to acknowledge God by listing His virtues and accomplishments.
 - b. This is not an emotional response to your situation (II Cor 6:10). It is making an answer to your situation based on the word of God because you know some things from His word (James 1:3).
 1. Praising God means acknowledging God. It's hard to praise or acknowledge God in the face of trouble if you don't know what He is like and how He works.
 2. Since to praise means to list the virtues and accomplishments of someone, the first things we need to know about God is what He is like and how He works. Ps 107:8,15,21,31
 - c. The Bible says that praising God, or acknowledging God, stops the enemy and prepares the way for God to show you His salvation. Ps 8:2; Matt 21:14-16; Ps 50:23
 3. Because of lack of knowledge of what God is like and how He works, people react rather than respond to troubles. A common reaction: People try to figure out what God is doing by looking at the circumstances and then they ask "Why is this happening?".
 - a. You cannot tell what God is doing by looking at circumstances. God commands us to walk by faith and not by sight (II Cor 5:7). That means He does not speak to us, instruct us, or guide us through circumstances. He does it through His Spirit and His word, the Bible.
 - b. Why do bad things happen? That's life in a sin-cursed earth, an earth that has been adversely affected by sin, beginning with Adam's sin in the garden. Gen 3:17,18; Rom 5:12; etc.
 4. Just because circumstances don't tell you what God is doing doesn't mean you can't know exactly what is happening in your situation. God's word tells us what He is doing.
 - a. God's word may not give you specific details about what He is doing, but it gives you general facts which you can use to encourage yourself until the specifics become obvious. Rom 15:4
 1. God recorded things in the Old Testament to give us an expectation of coming good (hope).
 2. It is filled with examples of God working in the hard times to bring tremendous results.
 - b. As we study these accounts we can see principles by which God works in every circumstance.
 1. Much of God's work is out of sight or invisible until we finally see visible results.
 2. God does things at the right time.
 3. The Lord often puts off short-term blessing for long-term eternal results.
 4. God uses human choice and causes it to serve His purposes.
 5. God will get you through until He gets you out.
 5. The story of Joseph is an example of God working in a difficult circumstance to bring tremendous results. In this lesson we want to look at his story to help us learn how to respond rather than react.
- B. In Joseph's story we see how God brought maximum results -- maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to as many people as possible -- as He worked according to the principles mentioned above.
1. Let's summarize the story (Gen 37-50). Jacob (son of Isaac) had twelve sons. Joseph was his favorite.
 - a. God promised Joseph greatness. This, combined with his father's favor, made his brothers hate him. When he was 17, they decided to kill him, changed their minds, and sold him into slavery.
 - b. Joseph was taken to Egypt and bought by Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. Joseph was in charge of

Potiphar's household. However, he was falsely accused of rape by Potiphar's wife and put in prison where he accurately interpreted some dreams had by two men who worked for Pharaoh.

1. One of them, a baker, got out of prison and promised to speak to Pharaoh about Joseph. The man forgot Joseph for two years until Pharaoh had dreams no one could interpret.
2. Joseph correctly interpreted Pharaoh's dream as a warning of a coming famine. Joseph was put in charge of storing food before the famine began and then distributing the food during seven years of famine. Joseph was 30 years old at this point.
- c. Joseph was reunited with his family when they came to Egypt for food during the famine. Because of his position, Joseph was able to feed his own family as well as thousands of others.

C. Joseph's story brings up the question we all deal with: "Why? Why did God let this bad happen to him?"

1. At the root of the "why" question is often an accusation against God, that He is unfair. To respond rather than react to your difficulty, you must close the door to that thought.
 - a. Accusations against God ultimately come from Satan. They don't change your situation, they undermine your confidence in God, and they discourage you (Gen 3:1-6). God has not been unfair to anyone. The Judge of all the earth does right (Gen 18:25).
 - b. Difficult circumstances are not the work of God. They are part of life in a sin-cursed earth, an earth that has been adversely affected by sin, beginning with Adam's sin in the garden.
 - c. In this sin cursed earth, moths and rust corrupt (Gen 3:17,18; Matt 6:19). We must interact with sinners who are influenced by Satan and with carnal Christians (Eph 2:1-3; I Cor 3:3). We have an adversary, the devil, whom we must resist steadfast in the faith (I Pet 5:8,9).
2. "Yes, but why doesn't God stop all the pain and heartache that is in the earth?" Consider these points.
 - a. He is going to stop it all when Jesus returns to this earth and brings heaven to earth. In terms of eternity, present life on earth as it is, is only a small part of our existence.
 - b. God's purpose right now is not to make life easy for all people. His purpose is to bring all men to salvation from their sins and make them His sons through faith in Jesus Christ.
 1. That doesn't mean there is no provision for help, happiness, and provision in this life. There is. But, life on this earth will not be pain-free or problem-free until Jesus returns.
 2. God is able to use the choices men make and cause them to serve His purposes as He gathers His family -- maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to as many people as possible.
3. Many people erroneously believe that God sets up circumstances to test us or teach us, and use Joseph's story as an example. But, God was not the source of Joseph's troubles.
 - a. What happened to Joseph has the finger prints of Satan inspired men all over it. His brothers planned to kill him and lie about it. They stole years of his life by selling him into slavery. Potiphar's wife did likewise. John 8:44; John 10:10; I Pet 5:8,9
 - b. God did not "use the devil" or "allow the devil" to afflict Joseph. God and the devil are not working together. Satan means adversary.
 1. The Bible never calls Satan God's teaching tool. God does not "have the devil on a leash". The Holy Spirit is the Teacher and His teaching tool is the Bible. John 14:26; Eph 6:17
 2. God does not afflict people directly or indirectly only to set them free. That would be a house or a kingdom divided against itself. Matt 12:24-26; Acts 7:9,10; Ps 34:19; Matt 12:24-26
 - c. God did not set up or allow these circumstances to test Joseph. God's test was His word. Would Joseph continue to believe God's plan for greatness in his life despite the hardships he faced? Would he continue to obey God despite the hardships he faced? Ps 105:17-19

D. Why doesn't God stop all tragedy and trouble in the earth. You must understand that that is not His ultimately goal right now. Consider this point in connection with Joseph's story.

1. Couldn't God have stopped Joseph's brothers from selling him into slavery? Men really do have free will and with their choices come all the consequences of those choices.

- a. Why didn't God clearly warn Joseph what His brothers intended to do to him so he could have avoided the whole ordeal?
 1. The brothers would still have had murder and hatred in their hearts toward Joseph.
 2. What would have happened to all of them (including Joseph) during the famine?
- b. Why didn't God stop Potiphar's wife from lying about Joseph and expose her right then and there?
 1. God owes nobody anything -- including Joseph or you or me. And, God did not abandon Joseph, but prospered him in the midst of very difficult circumstances. Gen 39:21-23
 3. God, in His all knowingness, could see where Potiphar's wife's choices would ultimately lead. Joseph went to prison because of her choice, but it was in prison that he met Pharaoh's butler who was his link to Pharaoh.
2. Once Joseph met the butler, it was two years before the butler remembered to tell Pharaoh about Joseph. Couldn't God have reminded the butler about Joseph?
 - a. If Joseph's case had come before Pharaoh at that point, Joseph may have been released, but there would have been nothing about him to cause Pharaoh to promote him. He would have gone into obscurity in Egypt or Canaan and possibly died in the famine. Either way he would not have been placed in charge of a food distribution program.
 - b. We can see clearly from Joseph's story how God is able to use human choice to serve His purposes -- maximum glory and maximum good. However, timing is involved
 1. In your hard times, God is using choices to bring the best results and that may mean waiting. That may mean the trouble won't leave today.
 2. There may be someone who is going to make a choice five months from now which will greatly affect your life for good. And, if God gave you what you want right now, the results of that choice five months away would never benefit you.
3. Great good came out of Joseph's ordeal. It resulted in maximum glory to God and maximum good to as many people as possible. What good did God bring out of Joseph's trials?
 - a. The most obvious good is the fact that Joseph ended up in a position to feed his family and many thousands of others during a time of great famine. In addition to that, all kinds of heathens heard about God Almighty.
 1. In Potiphar's home, God was with Joseph in a way that Potiphar could see. Gen 39:2-5
 2. When Joseph was in prison, he had favor with the jailer and was promoted. Gen 39:21-23
 3. When Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's baker and butler, he acknowledged God. Idol worshipping heathens heard about God Almighty. Gen 40:5-8,12
 4. Two years later, when Pharaoh had his dreams and Joseph was called on to interpret them, he immediately gave God the credit. Gen 41:16
 - a. When he interpreted the dream, Joseph told Pharaoh -- God is speaking to you. God cared about Pharaoh and was showing Himself to him as God Almighty. Gen 41:25,28,32
 - b. Pharaoh acknowledged the wisdom of God in Joseph. Gen 41:38-45
 5. All countries came to Egypt for food during the famine. How many pagans do you think heard about Joseph's story and God Almighty who provided food for them? Gen 41:57
 - b. Joseph's brothers came to repentance over what they had done to him.
 1. When the brothers first came to Joseph and he accused them of being spies, they felt they were reaping what they sowed. Gen 42:21-23
 2. When Joseph ordered Benjamin to stay with him, Judah begged Joseph to keep him instead, saying we can't hurt our father this way. Gen 37:26,27,32,33; 44:18-34
4. At the end of his ordeal Joseph was able to declare to brothers that God is so great that He can take even things He is not responsible for and cause them to serve His purposes.
 - a. Gen 50:20 is the Rom 8:28 of the Old Testament: As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people. (New Living Translation)

- b. In Gen 45:5-7 Joseph told his brothers: You didn't send me here. God sent me.
 - 1. This does not mean that God caused Joseph's troubles. It can't mean that. Joseph's brothers had murder in their heart toward him, stole years of his life from him, and lied about it. Those are all traits of the devil. God and the devil are not working together.
 - 2. Joseph was expressing how "in control" God is of His universe and of human choice. We don't have time to discuss it in this lesson, but Joseph's attitude gives us insight into his respond in his trials.

E. Conclusion: Joseph's story is a spectacular example of how God works in our lives. It was recorded to give us hope. We can use that knowledge to help us respond rather than react to our difficulties.

- 1. In the hard times many of us react like Joseph's father, Jacob, did while all of this was going on.
 - a. When Jacob's surviving sons went down to Egypt to buy food during the famine, they left Benjamin, the youngest son, at home.
 - 1. In Egypt, Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. He put them through a series of tests to see if their characters had changed since he last saw them.
 - 2. Joseph demanded that they bring Benjamin to him, holding Simeon in prison until then.
 - b. Gen 42:36--When Jacob was told all of this, his reaction was -- everything is against me.
 - 1. According to sight, that was so. But, behind the scenes, everything was going exactly his way and things were headed toward bringing him tremendous blessing.
 - 2. In the midst of the hardship, Jacob made it worse by discouraging himself when he could have been encouraging himself.
- 2. We need to learn to respond to challenges by praising or acknowledging God. Based on what God has shown us in His word, here is how you can answer your trial:
 - a. God is working behind the scenes in my situation to bring maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to me.
 - b. God does things at the right time, and at the right time, I'll see results.
 - c. If short term blessing has to be put off for long term good, that's alright with me. I trust the Lord to do what's best in this situation.
 - d. God is causing all this to serve His purposes. He'll bring genuine good out of genuine bad. He's using the human choices in this situation and causing them to serve His purposes.
 - e. God will get me through until He gets me out. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. God is prospering me even in the midst of this trial.
- 3. When trouble strikes, we spend too much time talking about what we don't understand in our situation rather than focusing on what we know about it from God's word. In the hard times, instead of focusing on what you can see but don't like or understand, focus on what you can't see, but can understand because God has told you about it.