Bend with God

How Flexible Are You?

When God called me into Christian work, I wasn't prepared for it. I had not spent a minute of my life thinking about preaching or teaching or leading a church. I was in college and I was not sure what I would do after I graduated but I had no interest in being a pastor and never gave it any thought. But then He called me to ministry and I was not prepared. Could I make the change psychologically? Was I able spiritually to adapt to this major change in the direction of my life? How would I respond to God telling me what to do when it was not in my plans? Who hasn't been caught off guard by a change of circumstances? Some are dramatic like a grandmother who hears her granddaughter has leukemia or a grandpa who loses his license because his eyesight suddenly leaves him. A mother gets let go from work and must move out of state for a new job. A high school student was set to go to his dream college, but his dad tells him he can't afford to pay the tuition. A track star pulls a hamstring just before the end of the year regional track meet. A dad gets a promotion, but the whole family would need to move across the country and start over in a new community. A teen age girl reads a Bible passage that makes it clear that she cannot any longer have sex with her boyfriend if she is going to walk with God. How do you respond when God redirects your life, and He makes changes to it that are unexpected and perhaps even undesirable to you? Flexibility is not just a problem for senior adults who cannot bend down and touch their toes. It is something all of us need to address if we are to live with God as our Lord and grow into spiritual maturity. Here is our big idea. Bend with God.

It is tough for us to make big changes, and even so-called small changes can be painful for us. Fortunately the Bible helps us with that and gives us a strategy for bending with God. The Bible has a term for those who do not bend with God. It is stiff-necked. Who wants to be called stiff-necked? And most likely those who actually are do not see themselves as stiff-necked. They would think of themselves as reasonable, thoughtful, consistent, rational. But when God wants to change the direction of your life and you refuse or get angry about the change or become depressed about the new course He wants you to take, He calls it stiff-necked. When we don't understand God and His ways and we think He should do one thing and not another, we can be frustrated or even mad at God or just decide He doesn't know what He is doing. Jesus' brothers thought He should go to Judea where there were far more influential and important people and do miracles in front of them. Then, His fame would spread like wildfire. Jesus rejected their plan. **Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right.** (John 7: 6 NIV) We don't know what their reaction was to Jesus' unwillingness to do what they wanted Him to do but the text makes it clear they did not believe in Him as Savior or Messiah. That is a common reaction when people realize God is not going to do what they want Him to do. Rather than bending with God, they reject Him.

The Aramean general, Naaman, having contracted leprosy, went to Israel because he heard that the prophet Elisha had the ability to cure such diseases. He was prepared to pay Elisha handsomely if he could do it. Naaman had an idea how prophets like Elisha would perform miraculous healings. He thought Elisha would come out of his house and with great empathy call upon his God and wave his hand over the leprous places and heal him. But Elisha did nothing of the sort. He did not even come out to meet Naaman. He told him to go to the dirty Jordan river and wash himself seven times. That was far from what Naaman expected and he left in a rage, with no intention of following the Lord's instructions. Many become furious with God because He does not act as they think He should. They write scathing books about Him because their idea of how a God should be is not what the Bible says He actually is so they reject outright the idea of God existing. They miss out on all the blessings and goodness God has for them because of their unwillingness to bend with God.

Two of Jesus' favorite disciples, James and John made the same mistake. They had not learned to bend with God. When James and John found out that a Samaritan village did not want to welcome Jesus and the disciples into their town because they were on the way to Jerusalem, the brothers knew what to do. **When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"** (Luke 9: 54 NIV) This seemed reasonable to them. But Jesus rebuked them harshly and made it clear that was not God's plan or way of doing things. He led them on to another village to stay. James and John wisely did not press the matter, and it may have been due to the intense way Jesus reacted. We cannot know if they came around to God's way of seeing things at that point, but they followed Jesus, regardless of how they felt about Him rejecting their idea. Sometimes, when it comes to bending with God, the best you can do is change your behavior, even if your heart isn't in it.

One of the nobler and more faithful kings in the history of Israel and Judah was Hezekiah. After his father had led the people of Judah into idolatry and paganism, Hezekiah was the exact opposite spiritually of his dad. He led a great spiritual revival among the people and restored the nation to faithfulness and godly living. He was a true spiritual giant. **This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God. In everything that he undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered.** (2 Chronicles 31: 20-21 NIV) Everything was going wonderfully. Hezekiah was walking with God, and the Lord was giving him a prosperous life. But then without warning, Hezekiah was blindsided by God's plan for him. The most ferocious, vicious, cruel and powerful army in the world invaded Judah and was just outside the walls of Jerusalem. You are healthy, enjoying your vacation and you have a heart attack. You like your job, enjoy your co-workers and you get let go. You love your daughter, she is bubbly, smart and vivacious and she drowns. What do you do when God's plan for you changes? How would you have responded if you were Hezekiah, enjoying a good life, full of God and great times, and then the Assyrians arrive and all your plans for the future seem to have been shattered? Can you at those times bend with God? Hezekiah was certainly confused. He was happy and successful, and he had led his country to one of its greatest times of fervor for God. But now, the ways of God seemed to have changed. What was God doing? Had God abandoned him? Had he done something wrong?

Jesus and His mom and the disciples attended a wedding feast and Mary discovered that the groom had run out of wine for the guests. This would have been terribly humiliating for the groom and bride, and Mary, who apparently was related to one of them somehow, felt the gravity of the situation. What was to be a joyous time had fallen apart so Mary turned to Jesus. She told Him there wasn't any wine and Jesus response seemed callous. "What does this have to do with you or me?" There are times when it appears that God does not care, is not concerned about the pain you are feeling, the troubles you face or the pressure you are under. You have no idea what God is doing with your life or where He will take you. But it does not seem fair whatever it is. Mary's response to the seeming indifference of Jesus shows us how to bend with God. She told the servants at the wedding to do whatever Jesus commanded. That is how you bend with God. Whatever the Lord does with you, tells you to do, however He changes course or makes life much different, trust Him.

A statement made of God, by God is typically misquoted and consequently leads to much confusion. It is so often repeated this way we assume it comes straight from the Bible, yet it doesn't "His ways are not our ways". We quote it as if it is indicating that God does things we wouldn't do and often do not think should be done. He is weirdly different from us and that is not meant as a compliment. The actual words from the Bible which quote what God says of Himself are these. **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.** (Isaiah 55: 8-9 NIV) The context of it is a declaration of God's extreme mercy and care for us. The point is this. God is far kinder and more caring than you can ever be. What you think is unfair or unjust is in fact the opposite when it comes to what God does. You do not bend with God because He has something worse in store for you than before and you are just putting up with the changes you face. You bend with God because He always has something better ahead. You may not understand it. You may not agree with it. But it is always better and always developed out of His love for you and for those you love. Bend with God. Not because what He is doing with you makes sense to you or seems right to you but because He loves you and what is ahead will always turn out for your good. There would be so much less worry and fretting and anger if we could just get out this message. Bend with God. Trust Him and you will see that He will make your life right in the end. Our Big Idea. Bend with God.