

## God Works in Strange Ways

### *Have You Had to Make Adjustments in Your Life?*

Years ago when I was in elementary school, I was prescribed glasses. I wore them for a short while, but I didn't like how they looked so I stopped. As I grew older, I refused to accept my need for glasses and began to suffer headaches after I read for extended periods which was tough on me because I read all the time. My eyes became bloodshot because of the strain on them but I continued to reject any suggestion I needed to wear glasses. I remember playing softball for my church team and our games were at night. My astigmatism was so bad that at times the ball coming out of the black sky was out of focus and it looked like there were three balls coming toward me. I continued to refuse to wear glasses in college despite all the reading I had to do but by the time I was in graduate school the headaches were too much for me and I finally made the adjustment to glasses. I didn't want to do it, I had to do it. There are times when God's ways are strange to us and we reject them because we don't understand them or agree with them. The disciples were surprised often by the actions of Jesus and sometimes they argued with Him about them and other times, as in the case of the passage we are looking at today, they accepted His strange ways. Here is the big idea. If you are to thrive spiritually and psychologically, you must adjust to how God wants to do things in your life.

Last week we took a close look at the interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. The disciples had gone off to try to scrounge up food for them all and when they returned to Jesus at the well, they were shocked. **Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"** (John 4: 27 NIV) Culturally, it was not respectable for a Jewish man to talk to a woman in public unless it was someone in his immediate family. What was Jesus doing? It had to have astounded them but to their credit, they did not say anything. Critics are everywhere but on this day, the disciples were not numbered among them. They were privileged to witness the great working of God in that place. If you are to see the marvelous works of God in your life, you have to become spiritually flexible, able to shift your life according to the working of God. Notice what happened next.

**Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him.** (John 4: 28-30 NIV) This woman did what so many so-called mature Christians choose not to do. She told everyone she could find that they needed to meet Jesus. Did you see how this disaster of a woman bent her will to the will of God and was flexible enough spiritually and psychologically to change her view of Jesus when new facts were shared with her? Look what happened as a result of this woman's flexibility. **Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.** (John 4: 39-41 NIV) Who would have thought God would work in this way? Not the disciples and probably not the woman herself! And yet God does not consult you or I when He decides to do something. Jesus made it clear what His mission is, and it is to be yours also. It is not to impress others, get your way or make something of your life. Here is what Jesus said His purpose is in life. **"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."** (John 4: 34 NIV) The purpose of your life is nothing more exotic than this. Do the will of God. Like the Samaritan woman, become aligned with God, listen to Him, watch what He is doing around you and join Christ in His work. To do this you must stay flexible.

One of the most fascinating personalities described in the Bible is Saul who became the first king of Israel. After he was anointed by the prophet Samuel to be king, he balked at the divine calling. Just as he was to be introduced by Samuel to the Israelites as their new king, Saul disappeared. **Finally Saul son of Kish was chosen. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found. So they inquired further of the Lord, "Has the man come here yet?" And the Lord said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the baggage."** (1 Samuel 10:21b-22 NIV) Imagine that. Your big debut as leader of the great nation of Israel and you have hidden behind the baggage! That almost feels like a cartoon plotline. Saul clearly did not want to be king. It wasn't long though before Saul fell in love with his career and its perks. But then God announced to Saul through the prophet Samuel that he no longer was His choice to be king because Saul had rebelled against God's command. **But Samuel said to him, "I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel!"** (1 Samuel 15: 26 NIV) When it became clear to King Saul that the former shepherd boy, David was God's choice to replace him as king, Saul began to bitterly hate David and wanted to kill him. Saul was so riled up by the thought that he would lose the

kingdom to David, the son of Jesse, he even tried to get Jonathan his son, who was also David's best friend, to help him kill David. **As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!"** (1 Samuel 20:3-1 NIV) When Jonathan refused, Saul hurled his spear at him. **But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.** (1 Samuel 20: 33 NIV) Whereas Saul had once dreaded the prospect of being king, he grew comfortable in his new wealth, prestige and power and could not bear walking away from it all when God told him it was time to move on from ruling Israel.

Like Saul, it is easy to become inflexible when you grow comfortable with your life and your routines. You can become set in your ways and not welcome a change in circumstances, even if it is God who is pushing for it to happen. Someone like Abraham reacted quite differently to God's change of plans. After waiting decades for God to give him and his wife Sarah children together, finally at the age of 100, they had a son. This was not an ordinary son either! He came with a promise. **I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you...The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.**" (Genesis 17: 6, 8 NIV) After the birth of Isaac, Abraham and Sarah settled into the joy of parenthood, raising their son Isaac in the ways of God and training him to fulfill his calling to be the head of God's holy people. It was a time of tremendous bliss for them knowing experientially long before the Scriptures documented it that children are a gift from God. And so they settled into their roles as mom and dad with Isaac. But then it all collapsed for Abraham. **Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."** (Genesis 22: 2 NIV)

The Bible gives no hint as to the psychological anguish Abraham went through upon hearing this order. Did he weep? Did he toss and turn all night? Did he argue with God? The Bible doesn't say. It does tell us that Abraham immediately did as he was told. **Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.** (Genesis 22: 3-4 NIV) If you are familiar with the historical account, you know that just as Abraham lifted his knife to kill Isaac and make him a burnt offering, God intervened. **When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.** (Genesis 22: 9-13 NIV)

Notice the spiritual and psychological flexibility of Abraham. First, when God told him to sacrifice his son Isaac on the mountain, he accepted the command. Second, when God told him not to sacrifice Isaac, he stopped. It can be just as hard to stop doing something you thought God wanted you to do as it is to start doing something you don't want to do but you realize God has commanded it. In Abraham's case, it took just as much spiritual flexibility to drop the knife when he saw the ram as it did to pick it up and leave for Mt. Moriah. King Saul was a spiritual statue. He refused to give up the kingdom, and it made him psychologically sick and spiritually dead. Abraham, however, was a thriving soul who was alive with God which gave him the flexibility to follow God one hundred percent and gain the psychological and emotional health only God can provide when you remain aligned with Him and His will. One of the greatest gifts you can give to the world, to your family and to yourself is being flexible so that God can lead you. The Samaritan woman was spiritually flexible and led nearly everyone in her village to salvation. What could you make of your life if you became available to God to do with you as He wishes? Here is the big idea. If you are to thrive spiritually and psychologically, you must adjust to how God wants to do things in your life. The Bible describes a great benefit to being spiritually flexible. **You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.** (Isaiah 26: 3 NIV) That seems worth trying.