FLEXIBILITY vs. RESISTANCE

FLEXIBILITY MEANS NOT SETTING MY AFFECTIONS ON PLANS OR PLACES THAT COULD BE CHANGED BY THOSE WHOM I AM SERVING

"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee" (Gen. 12:1).

DEFINITION

Although the word flexibility is not found in the Bible, the concept of flexibility is prevalent, and this quality is demonstrated in the lives of many people in Scripture. One must understand that in order to be flexible, change must occur, and that change produces tension. According to studies, one of the most stressful events in life is uprooting the family and moving it to a new location—especially one that is unknown.

With this in mind, we discover that flexibility is one of the first qualities that God teaches His followers. He called Abraham to leave his country and kindred and move to a land that God would show him. He called the nation of Israel out of Egypt and throughout their wilderness journey had them watch the cloud over the Tabernacle. When the cloud moved, they were to move. Therefore, they had to be in a constant state of flexibility.

When Jesus called His disciples, He asked them to leave their homes and vocations and follow after Him. Peter described the essence of flexibility when he wrote, "I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims…," (I Peter 2:11). A stranger is a visitor from another country who is just passing through, and a pilgrim is one who is traveling to a sacred destination. The necessity for such an outlook is underscored by our need to be in the world but not of the world.

God begs us to "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world, And the world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (I John 2:15-17).

Additionally, in I Peter 2:11, a flexible attitude is related to conquering the lusts that war against the soul. "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF FLEXIBILITY

Abraham is the father of faith (see Galatians 3:6-9). In the very call of God upon Abraham's life, he was required to have flexibility. "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee" (Gen. 12:1). "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going," (Hebrews 11:8, New International Version). In the Scriptures, the land of Egypt is a type of the world, and the nation of Israel is a type of all believers whom God wants to lead out the bondage of worldly lusts into a land of promise.

During their travels from Egypt to the Promised Land, the people were to watch the cloud of God. If it moved, they were to move with it. "In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out--until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels." (Exodus 40:36-38, New International Version)**.**

David was a man after God's own heart. (See Acts 13:22). God taught him flexibility by stirring up the heart of King Saul to be jealous of David and to try to kill him. David had to flee from place to place for his life.

Flexibility training was an important part of his preparation for national leadership. It forced him to focus on God and His ways rather than his own earthly surroundings.

Jesus taught all His disciples the same quality when He told them to forsake all and follow Him. “Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27).

On one occasion, three disciples wanted to “settle in.” “Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles.” It is significant that “while he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them.”(See Matthew 17:4-5).

WHO FAILED THE TEST OF FLEXIBILITY?

While Lot was with Abraham, he moved from place in a tent, but then he “pitched his tent” toward the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and soon was in the city of Sodom with all its sin and wickedness. When two angels came to bring Lot and his family out of the city, before its destruction, Lot’s wife resisted. When she left, she disobeyed God’s instruction by looking back at the burning city and was immediately turned into a pillar of salt. (See Genesis 19). This account is important because when Jesus taught His disciples not to grasp after their own lives and goals, He said, “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32).

Both Mary and Martha followed the Lord and ministered to His needs. When Martha needed Mary’s help in preparing a meal, she accused Mary of being inflexible. However, Jesus explained to Martha that true flexibility is waiting on the Lord rather than worrying about the details of serving Him. “Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42 New American Standard Version).

HOW DOES FLEXIBILITY RELATE TO SERVING?

The ultimate example of flexibility in serving is referred to in the following passage: “Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their master, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God” (Ps. 123:2).

In Biblical times, the heads of household would have hand signals for different instructions, which their servants understood and quickly carried out. In order to know what to do, the servants had to keep their eyes on the hands of their masters at all times. Their own plans and agendas were always subject to the hand signals of their masters.

Flexibility is the willingness to change plans or ideas according to the direction of our authorities. The less we become emotionally involved in plans or ideas, the easier it will be to change them. Therefore, we are to guard our “heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23).

Martha was attentive to the details of serving, but Mary was attentive to the personal teaching and direction of the Lord. Ultimately, flexibility is based on the desire and delight to do the will of God, and an inflexible attitude reveals a persistence to do our own will. David was flexible because he delighted to do the will of God (see Ps. 40:8).

HOW FLEXIBLE ARE YOU?

1. When plans are changed, do you get discouraged, or do you immediately look for reasons why the new plans are better?
2. Do you quickly adjust to a change of direction, or does it require time for you to mentally and emotionally adjust?
3. When you learn that you must move, does it cause anxiety in you, or do you rejoice in it as a further reminder that you are a stranger and a pilgrim?
4. Do your parents or employers have to explain instructions twice, or do you understand what they mean the first time?
5. When God calls you to a ministry or work, do you resist and make yourself busy with other activities?
6. When others suggest a better way to do something, do you try it or do you keep doing it the way you had been doing it?
7. Do you misuse flexibility by having no daily plans or life goals?
8. Is your life so encumbered with possessions and debt that it would be impractical or impossible to exercise flexibility at the leading of the Lord?
9. Are the thoughts of your heart in harmony with the will of God so that changes are easy transitions?