

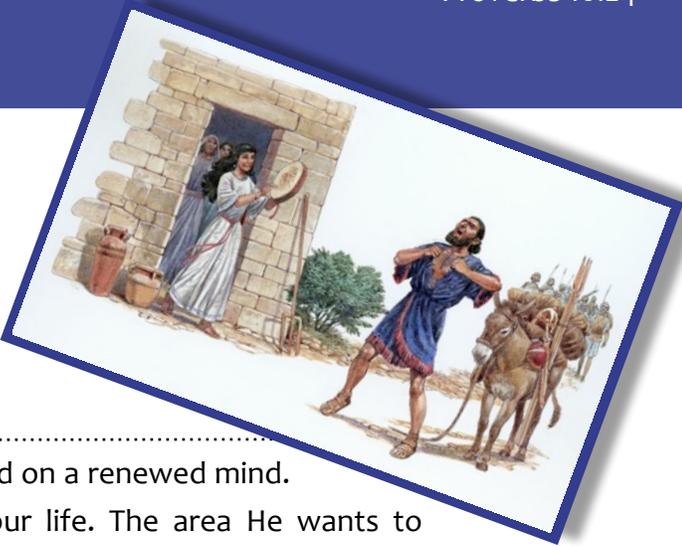
Being Misunderstood—Life Seems so Unfair (Part 1)

Theme: It is hurtful and frustrating to be misunderstood

Review of Lesson 13

Transformation means a complete change for the better based on a renewed mind.

After you are saved, God wants to continue working in your life. The area He wants to transform (renew) is our mind, so that you have a mind more like His. This transformation occurs as you cooperate with Him by studying the Word, praying, and following what you learn. Imagine what it means to have the Almighty God renew your conscience, character, value system, and will/desires. As your mind is renewed, it becomes part of your very nature to follow Him in a pleasing manner. Transformation is the only way a person can have an "inner person" that reflects the Lord's character and values. What the Lord accomplishes in your life cannot be taken away by others and it will give you peace and confidence during times of trial.



Bible Truth

Introduction

It is often said the teen years are the best years of a person's life. These years can be a time of great fun, exciting friendships, and adventure. However, most teens also experience another side of life with complications, misunderstandings, rejection, and hurtful events.

In the transition from childhood to adulthood, there is much that teens and the adults in their lives must learn about each other. During the teen years, misunderstandings are common between teenagers and their parents, teachers, or other teens. Adults are used to telling younger kids everything they can do and when to do it; but teens do not want that. It is

good to remember that just as you are maturing so are your parents. They are not sure how to best communicate with you or how much freedom to give you (freedom is usually based on your level of maturity). Actually, most parents are deeply afraid they may make a mistake with their son/daughter. They do not know if they are giving too much freedom or not enough. As you show maturity, your parents will then know they can slowly let go and give decision making and responsibility to you. If, however, a teen keeps acting like a child and cannot make wise decisions or won't take the responsibility expected for his/her age, then parental control is still required. It takes time to learn how to make wise decisions and how to handle situations that you do not fully

understand at this time in life. Until you are able to make wise decisions and act maturely, there will be constant friction and misunderstandings.

Sharing: What do you find frustrating or unfair in your life?

The teen years are a time when you feel like a young eagle; you want to try your wings and see what it is like to get airborne. You want to "flap your wings" and make decisions and express yourself in new ways. However, a bird that is just learning to fly is not ready to leave the nest; it first has to build strong wing muscles and learn how to fly. If a bird leaves the nest too soon, there are tragic results. Similarly, you have to learn how to fly (make wise decisions and act responsibly) and, at the same time, adults have to be willing to recognize your growth in maturity. Even though you are maturing, you are not ready to leave the nest or make all your own decisions in the teen years—this causes many misunderstandings.

This lesson will look at some examples to show that many people in the Bible were misunderstood teaching us:

- 1) life is not always fair,
- 2) being misunderstood is an age-old problem, and
- 3) being misunderstood is also true for adults.

As you mature, you will find what is most important is **how you react to upsetting events in your life**. Many godly men and women were treated in ways that were totally wrong (sound familiar?), and yet the final results were good.

Jephthah and Daughter

Chapter 11 of Hebrews gives a long list of godly men and women whose lives are an example to us all. These people are called "the heroes of the faith." All of these heroes, **"through faith,"** did many marvelous

things (Heb. 11:33). In Hebrews 11:32, brief mention is made of a man named Jephthah who is included with those whom the Bible says, **"...of whom the world was not worthy...And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise"** (Heb. 11:38-39). Because of his faith, the Bible says the **"world was not worthy"** of a guy like Jephthah. So maybe we have to learn more of this great man. It turns out his daughter is also very important in this story. The two of them are among the most misunderstood people in the Bible. They may not have been misunderstood in their lifetime; however, over the centuries it seems Bible believers have accused Jephthah of the most horrible of crimes.

In the 1100's BC, Jephthah was a judge over the nation of Israel. Israel was having conflicts with another country (Ammon), and Jephthah tried very hard to resolve these problems in a peaceful way. They were fighting over who owned the land (just like today in the Mid east, 3000 years later). When the Ammonites would not listen to him, it was time for battle. Before he went into battle, Jephthah vowed (made a solemn promise) to the Lord that if the Lord would allow him to win the battle **" 'then it will be, that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return... shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering' "** (Judges 11:31). Well, this all sounds pretty good, so far.

Applying: How do you think this simple story could result in a misunderstanding?

The battle took place and the Lord enabled Jephthah to win. Then he went home. **"When Jephthah came to his house... there was his daughter, coming out to meet him... and she was his only child"** (Judges 11:34). The worst thing possible happened; his daughter was the first one out the door to greet him (she was probably a teenager). When he saw her, he tore his

cloths in sorrow and said his daughter had made him feel terrible because he had made a vow to the Lord and could not take it back. Then this young girl of faith said the most remarkable thing, **"My father, if you have given your word to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth..."** (Judges 11:36). But, before he kept his vow, the daughter asked that she be allowed to go to the mountains for two months to bewail her virginity (to mourn over the fact she would not be able to get married and have children). After the two months, **"... she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed"** (Judges 11:39). What? Did he offer her as a burnt sacrifice?

Sharing: How could Jephthah be a hero of the faith if he did this?

Some people believe he did offer her as a sacrifice, but that is very unlikely. He was a man of great faith and so was his daughter. Leviticus 18:21 clearly prevented him from doing this. God would have been most displeased if he had tried, and Jephthah knew this. It seems likely there is a different interpretation of this story. It is clear from the text that Jephthah thought some animal would come out of the house—he refers to "whatever" came out not "whomever." So he did not expect a person to come out first, especially his only child whom he loved dearly. In addition, the word "house" can mean a place where animals dwell. It was not uncommon to have a house where animals stayed in the floor below and people in the floor above (Noah's ark may have been like this). Jephthah made a vow that turned out much differently than he expected, but they both wanted to keep it (it was important to keep a vow to the Lord).

Jephthah had the option of going to the priest and redeeming his daughter (buying her back) for 10

shekels (Lev. 27:2, 5). The Jewish people were very familiar with redeeming a person for that had been a common practice since God gave them instructions on this in Ex. 13:13, 15. In Exodus, the firstborn male was the Lord's, so the firstborn male animal was to be sacrificed to the Lord and the firstborn male human was to be redeemed. The Lord always made allowances for a vow that could not be kept for reasons beyond the person's control. In our case, Jephthah could have redeemed his daughter. This was acceptable, but both Jephthah and the daughter knew there was another way that was even truer to the original intent of the vow.

Thought: Redemption is the main theme of the Bible. The believer is bought back from the penalty of sin (death) by faith in Jesus Christ. He is our Redeemer.

Let's look more closely to what is written to see what really happened. Judges 11:31b, says, **"... shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering."** The word "and" can be translated "or" which makes it read that Jephthah would offer whatever came out first as a burnt offering (if an animal), OR if it were not an acceptable animal or if it were a person, he would offer it to the Lord in a different way. An unacceptable animal would be an unclean animal (like a donkey); it could not be offered. So he could give the value of the donkey in money to the priest. In this case, the daughter was very acceptable not as a burnt sacrifice, but as a girl working in the Temple. The term "shall surely be the LORD'S" includes the thought she could be the LORD'S special, unmarried, female worker in the Temple for her entire life.

She was not sacrificed. God would have been repulsed by this. Instead, she became a girl that served her whole life in the Temple. That is why she bewailed her

virginity; she knew she could never get married and have children (she was her father's only child, so he could never have an extended family). If you were going to be sacrificed, the last thing on your mind would be the fact you were a virgin. But if you loved your father and one day hoped to have grandchildren for him, then that could not happen if you served as an unmarried woman in the Temple.

What an outstanding example of two people of great faith. A faith so strong they were willing to give up

probably the most important thing in their lives for the Lord. This story should speak to our hearts about the value of faith and how misunderstandings happen. For centuries, maybe thousands of years, this great man and his daughter have been terribly misunderstood. It seems Satan creates these misunderstandings to undermine the truth of the Bible and to create problems between people. People and Satan try to do this in your life also. Yes, life is unfair, but your faith in Christ will get you through the hard times.

Life Applications

People can intentionally or accidentally misunderstand us. We will also misunderstand others and not even be aware of it. Sometimes, when we try our best and have the purest motives, someone will accuse us of just the opposite. Misunderstandings will happen to us all. They are terrible, and unfair treatment really hurts, but it is part of life. Jephthah and his daughter were good, honest, sincere, and godly—yet misunderstood. They reacted to their situation in a mature, honorable manner. So what do we learn from the biblical story? One thing we learn is **the way we react to a problem is really important.**

Listed below are three things a teen should consider. (Note: you are not being told what to do; "consider" implies advice to a mature person.) The lessons in this series, dealing with "Being Misunderstood," will each give biblical advice on this topic. The items below will help prevent misunderstandings, reduce their negative impacts, and help you react in a godly manner.

1. Grow in Maturity. Growing up in your mind doesn't happen automatically; you have to choose to do it.

You may grow physically and be a head taller than your parents, but if you act like a child and can't make good decisions, you will be treated as a child. If you are always late, dash out of the house without your books, make yourself the center of every conversation, neglect to do your jobs at home, or scream/pout when you can't have your way, then adults will think you are only slowly maturing. Jephthah's daughter was mature beyond her years because she was more concerned for others than herself—she made wise decisions.

Wise decisions come from wisdom which is gained slowly through life by honoring biblical instruction (Eph. 1:17-18; Col. 1:9). Yes, there is a time to be silly and act like a goofball, but in general, be serious and think things through before acting or opening your mouth. **"... And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths"** (Prov. 3:5b-6). As you start making more responsible and mature decisions, rather than just reacting, people will begin to see you as a teen that is maturing well.

Discussion: Why is delayed gratification an important thing to learn? (Delayed gratification is not getting what you want when you want it.) It is a sign of maturity and acceptance of God's will in your life—it separates kids from grown ups.

2. Practice Good Communications. Do not allow corrupt communications to come out of our mouth (cursing, screaming, complaining, threatening) (Eph 4:29-31). You must be honest and thoughtful in what you say. Work hard at avoiding negative ways of speaking, picking on others, or blaming others. Think of others first and be kind. Yes, express your point of view, but in a calm voice and do not keep doing it over and over and over (a sign of immaturity). **"Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, Sweetness to the soul and health to the bones"** (Prov. 16:24).

Good communications include your prayer life. The Apostle Paul prayed for others many times (Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-12). He prayed for their spiritual growth, but he did not ask God to change them to be what he wanted. Consider the people in your life. Should you pray that God would change you so you would know how to communicate in a mature manner with them? Or pray and ask God to change them to fit your desires?

3. Control Your Emotions. Make sure the events in your life do not lead to bitterness or out-of-control emotions (Eph. 4:26, 31). None of the godly people we have learned about expressed vengeance, anger, or

bitterness (examples of negative emotions). Besides destroying relationships, you will find that uncontrolled negative emotions lead to long-term health problems. Positive qualities and emotions, like forgiveness and kindness, lead to good health.

Get over any upsetting incident quickly. **"'Be angry, and do not sin'; do not let the sun go down on your wrath"** (Eph. 4:26). This verse is saying that if you get upset, do not sin by doing something in revenge, saying something nasty back, or holding a grudge. Then we are specifically told to get such incidences behind us, to let them go, and to move on in life. We are not to let the problem linger in our minds for long (do not let the sun go down on your wrath). Letting something go means you do not have to prove you were right, make it clear someone else was wrong, or that you were misunderstood. If you do not practice this and you "fume" over this event, it will only hurt you more. A soft and gentle answer is the biblical way. **"He who is slow to wrath has great understanding"** (Prov. 14:29a). **"A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger"** (Prov. 15:1). **"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you"** (Eph. 4:32).

Discussion: You want to go to a party with your friends, but your parents say you can't go (and give you the reasons why). How should you handle this situation with respect to your emotions, communications, and showing maturity?

Take 2 Heart

Summary

People and Satan often create misunderstandings of the good actions or motives of others. This was the case with Jephthah and his daughter. You can be sure that you will be treated the same way many times in your life. These are the trials in life that create great sorrow, but God can use these negative events to make you a better person—one more like Christ. God may not remove negative events, but He does assure us He will get us through them and help us grow spiritually in the process. Biblical advice on how to help prevent misunderstandings and how a person can gain respect in his/her life are: grow in maturity, practice good communications, and control your emotions. If a teen follows these simple lessons, they will generally experience more freedom and will be treated more like a mature person.

Gospel

Being misunderstood is very common; Christ was the most misunderstood person of all times. He was treated unfairly by being crucified for sins He never committed—our sins. Life is not fair, but it certainly is not fair that an innocent person would die for a guilty person. That is exactly what Christ did—He died to pay the penalty of our sin. **"For He (God) made Him (Christ) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we**

might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21, parentheses added). However, He did it out of love for us and by His grace we are saved through faith in Him. So when it comes to salvation, this unfairness works to our advantage because we get something good that we do not deserve. That is what God's grace is about. Through faith in Christ as your Savior you can be bought back (redeemed). In a spiritual way, faith in Christ will instantly make you a full-grown adult in His eyes, and any unfair treatment in this life will be rewarded in Heaven.

Encouragement

The teen years can be difficult yet they can also be very rewarding. The teen years can be some of the best in your life in spite of painful experiences and problems. Remember, other teenagers are having the same sort of problems you are, so cherish and appreciate the transition into adulthood—it is a time when God can direct you and help you mature in a godly manner. Adults respect and appreciate a teen that calmly presents their view, but can also accept not getting their own way. Growing in maturity takes time, and there are many difficulties in life. Thank you for being a person who loves the Lord and wants to do things His way. He will mature you in a way you never dreamed possible.