

IS GOD IN CONTROL?

For God sent me before you to preserve life.... And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. No now it was not you who sent me here, but God. —(Genesis 45:5, 7-8)

Read the remainder of chapter 3, beginning with the subheading "God in control!"

JOSEPH PROBABLY NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT BUENOS AIRES, EGYPT, WINING JACOBING IN PRISON. But through all the circumstances of his life, Joseph was being prepared by God for His plan. God has a plan for the life of every believer. He is in control. The bottom line for Joseph was his responses to his brothers, to Potiphar, and to his circumstances. He could have blamed his brothers or God for his suffering. It is easy to blame everyone else in life for your problems and imagine how much better off you would be if it were not for all the people around us. No one but God holds your destiny. No man, woman, child, or devil can ever get you out of the will of God!

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Joseph's brothers thought they had killed the dream God had for him, but they couldn't do it. When Joseph was reunited with his brothers, he reminded them not of their wrong, but of what God had done for him.

Read Genesis 45:5-8 and Psalm 105:16-17. For down all the reasons why God sent Joseph through his trials.

God sent Joseph to God sent him to
Gen. 45:5)

God sent him and the brothers alive and to preserve many.
(Gen. 45:7)

God sent Joseph to become an advisor to the
Pharaoh of Egypt.
(Gen. 45:8)

God sent Joseph to Egypt sold as a
slave because of the famine.
(Ps. 105:16-17)

Think of the greatest problem you have faced in the last year. Describe it in one sentence.

The greatest problem has been my marriage. We've got divided due to spiritual doctrine and it's been a struggle.

Now complete these sentences:

My response to my problem was I run to God!

God's plan was to draw me closer to him!

What I learned about myself was I can be impatient and I need to trust God with my problems.

If you stay free from offense, you will stay in the will of God. If you become offended, you will be taken captive by the enemy to fulfill his own purpose and will. So take your pick: *Which will it be?*
 Stay submitted to God. Resist the devil by not becoming offended. The dream or vision for your life will probably happen differently than you think it will, but His Word and His promises will not fail. Disobedience is the only thing that can abort God's plan.

WRITE A PRAYER...

Thanking God for having a good plan for your life and for working for good all the circumstances of your life.

Lord, thank you! I know you have a plan for my life. Father you are working all things together for the good. I trust in you and I know you have everything under control. I place my everything in your loving hands! I love you!

DAY 7

WHEN REJECTED BY A FATHER

And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

—MALACHI 4:6

Read chapter 4, stopping at the heading "Who Will Avenge Me?"

IT IS ONE THING TO EXPERIENCE REJECTION AND MALICE FROM A brother, but it is entirely different to experience rejection and malice from a father. When I speak of fathers, I am not just referring to a biological father, but to any leader God puts over us. These are the people we trusted to love, train, nurture, and care for us. Think of the "fathers" in the past from whom you have experienced rejection.

Circle any who have rejected or hurt you.

- Biological father
- Church staff
- Boss
- Close friend who fathered me
- Other: _____

- Stepfather
- Elder
- Teacher
- Pastor
- Deacon
- Leader

One biblical example of a father's rejection was Saul's rejection of David. Carefully read the material under the heading "A Love-Hate Relationship."

As you read, jot down all the ways David could have been tempted to take up an offense against Saul. Saul despised David because David danced and sang that meant David was for Hannah. The women tried to kill David. The women tried to kill David.

Now complete these sentences:

David treated Saul like a father.

Instead of revenge, David owed to his grand and cried out after him.

When rejected by his king, mentor, and father figure, David chose not to take up an offense. But Saul became jealous and suspicious of his servant David. Today many leaders have become suspicious of individuals under their authority. Like Saul, they are insecure in their calling, and that breeds jealousy and pride. They recognize godly qualities in other people, but they are willing to use such people in ministry only as long as it benefits them. Saul enjoyed the success of David until he saw David's success as a threat to him. Then he demoted David and watched for a reason to destroy him.

If your father figure or leader is doing something sinful and wrong, instead of being offended, pray for that person.

Is there a father in your life who is suspicious of you? If so, what response does God require of you?

Read 1 Samuel 24:11 and then complete these sentences:

When someone attacks me, God wants me to not harm them.

When someone rejects me, God wants me to be at peace and allow God to take revenge.

If your father figure or leader is doing something sinful and wrong, instead of being offended, pray for that person. God will correct him—that's His job, not yours. Refuse to take up an offense.

WRITE A PRAYER...

Ask God to work in the lives of your father figures and to enable you to pray for them and forgive their faults.

Lord help me be quick to forgive any offense! I pray that you bless all that hurt attacked me in any way!
I give you all offense in Jesus name Amen!

WHO WILL AVENGE ME?

Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.
—ROMANS 12:19

[Read the remainder of chapter 4, beginning with the heading "Who Will Avenge Me?"]

SAUL ACKNOWLEDGED DAVID'S GOODNESS WHEN HE REALIZED that David could have killed him and did not. But one of David's men, Abishai, did not possess the grace that David possessed. When David and Abishai slipped into Saul's camp while he was sleeping, Abishai pleaded with David, "God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please, let me strike him at once with the spear right to the earth; and I will not have to strike him a second time!" Abishai had very good reasons for thinking that David should allow him to kill Saul.

Look over the following list. Check ✓ whether or not you believe that Saul should have received the death penalty for such a crime.

1. Saul had murdered eighty-five innocent priests and their families (multiple counts of first-degree murder).
 Deserving of death Allowed to live
2. Saul, along with three thousand men, attempted in every possible way to kill David and his men (multiple counts of attempted murder).
 Deserving of death Allowed to live
3. Saul continued to function as king even when the anointing to rule had been taken from him and given to David.

- Deserving of punishment Allowed to live
- 4. Saul lied about David, sought to turn everyone against David, and broke his promises to David.
 Deserving of punishment Allowed to live

If these were not good enough reasons for Saul's death, they were at least good enough for punishing Saul and exacting vengeance upon him. Now read David's response to Abishai in 1 Samuel 26:9-11. David would not kill Saul or even seek to punish him, although he had every right in the natural to do so. How many people today would have had a heart like David's?

Any sowing of discord or separation among brethren is an abomination to God.

Churches split, families divide, marriages shatter, and love dies, crushed by an onslaught of words launched in hurt and frustration. Friends, family, and leaders offend us using words sharpened by bitterness and anger that aim a deadly blow. Even though the information may be factual and accurate, often our motives are impure. Any sowing of discord or separation among brethren is an abomination to God (Prov. 6:16-19).

WRITE A PRAYER...

Asking God to teach you to humble yourself before those who offend you and to ask for forgiveness.

God, please help me remain humble before those who offend me. Forgive me!
 Help me not hold on to grudges or resentment. Help me love those that are difficult to love! In Jesus' name!
 Amen!

HOW SPIRITUAL VAGABONDS ARE BORN

"The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD." So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul.
—1 SAMUEL 24:6-7

[Read chapter 5, stopping at the heading "The Planted Flourish."]

IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SAUL AND DAVID, GOD WAS testing David's heart (1 Sam. 24:6-7). God wanted to see whether David would kill to establish his kingdom after the order of Saul, or whether he would allow God to establish His throne forever. Only God has the right to judge and avenge. In Romans 12:19 we read, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." We must not take the prerogatives of God into our own hands. It is wrong to do a right thing in the wrong way. Yes, Saul deserved to be judged and punished—but by God, not by David.

Think of a time when you took vengeance into your own hands and did not wait upon God. Describe the situation and its outcome or consequences.

My ex husband cheated on me, mistreated me, physically abused me. I got to the point where I was so angry I wanted him to pay for everything we did to me. 214 I took vengeance and our marriage ended in divorce.

Many people ask, "Why does God put people under leaders who make serious mistakes and even some who are wicked?" (See 1 Samuel 14 as an example.) As an innocent child, God put Samuel under the corrupt priesthood of Israel. There Samuel learned to lean upon, trust, and hear directly from God—not man. And God Himself dealt with corrupt leaders.

God often places us in uncomfortable places and under increasing pressure so that we may be shaped by His love and refining fire. If we fail to receive what God has for us, we take offense and leave, we fail to receive what God has for us; we begin to add offense to offense. Offended people react to the offending situation and do things that appear right even though they are not inspired by God. We are not called to react to people or situations but to act obediently in response to God.

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Often when we feel pressure, we look for a word from God to bring relief. But God puts us in these very uncomfortable crucibles to mature, refine, and strengthen us—not destroy us!

Give yourself the following test.

1. Do I run from God's refining pressure?
 Yes No
2. Do I complain when under pressure?
 Yes No
3. Do I justify my sin and condemn sin in others?
 Yes No
4. Do I expect spiritual leaders to be perfect when I am not?
 Yes No
5. Am I willing to listen to God and wait on His leading?
 Yes No

6. Read Isaiah 55:12. Am I willing to leave in peace?
 Yes No

WRITE A PRAYER...

Asking Jesus to be your perfect Shepherd and to fill you with His love for the human shepherds He has placed in your life.

Lord, please me if I have ^{ever} spoken
wrote of a pastor or leader. Filling
heart with love for those you have
placed over us! I will let patient
and at peace. In Jesus name
Amen!

DAY 10

THE PLANTED FLOURISH

Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing to declare that the LORD is upright.
—Psalm 92:13-15

Read the remainder of chapter 5, beginning with the heading "The Planted Flourish."

MANY PEOPLE GO FROM CHURCH TO CHURCH, MINISTRY TEAM to ministry team, trying to develop their ministry. If God puts them in a place where they are not recognized and encouraged, they are easily offended. If they don't agree with the way something is done, they are offended and go somewhere else. Offended people uproot themselves, complain, blame the leadership, and never realize their own flaws.

God continues to refine and mature us by increasing pressure in the areas where we need to grow. If we keep changing the place where we are planted, we will never grow spiritually the way God intends.

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List all the churches to which you have belonged in the last ten years:

Never attended and the way
I visited Gateway for 6 months
but I never belonged there.

If you have changed churches, why? Check all the reasons you moved.

- Moved to another town
- Changed denominations
- Offended at pastor
- Offended at a staff person
- Offended by lay leader(s)
- Offended by doctrine
- Offended by style of worship
- Offended by the lack of love
- Other reasons: _____

If offense was the reason for changing churches, then you are carrying the bait of Satan from one place to the next, sowing negative seeds and spiritual barrenness wherever you go.

Read the following scriptures, and then jot down what they have to say about the relationship between God's law, offense, spiritual growth, and bearing fruit.

Psalm 1:1-3

Blessed is the one who does what is right.
who longs to read the word, and finds

on the word day and night. That person
is like a tree planted by water and produces
fruit.

Psalm 119:165

I will have peace if I love the
word of God and I will not
fall.

ask this- If I received the word with joy
and it is not planted it will quickly
but when difficulties come,
it will when difficulties come.

List five benefits that come to you when you refuse to take up an offense and are planted in a church fellowship.

1. blessed
2. peace
3. joy
4. produce fruit
5. prosper

WRITE A PRAYER...

Thanking God for the church He has planted you in and asking Him to mature and prosper you there.

Lord, thank you for the way!
I want to flourish where
you have placed me!