

## ***Jesus Wept: The Bible and Human Emotions***

### ***Resilience***

Lesson #8 for February 19, 2011

Scriptures: Job 19:25; 42; James 5:10,11; Ruth 1; Esther 2; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28; Philippians 4:11-13.

1. This lesson is about resilience. Resilience is “the process of facing adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or extreme stress and ‘bouncing back’ successfully without becoming too negatively affected by the experience.” (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for February 12) Is resilience an evidence of emotional strength? Or, is resilience a manifestation of character?
2. In 1962, Victor and Mildred Goertzel wrote a book entitled *Cradles of Eminence* in which they described the childhood and youth of 700 famous people. In order to qualify for their list, one must have had at least two biographies written about him/her. The book was updated in 2004. The book describes children who went through broken homes, financial struggles, physical and/or psychological handicaps and still ended up being important people—people who offered something of great value to society. Apparently, those people had the capacity to bounce back.
3. Think of some people in the Scriptures who went through some very difficult times and bounced back. Consider Job, Joseph, Naomi/Ruth, Esther, Paul, and especially Jesus. What do we know about their experiences that might teach us something of importance? What did they have to say about their personal experiences especially in the midst of their times of deep distress? Think of Joseph in Egypt. And what about Naomi who apparently had lost everything—home, husband, and sons. And, perhaps more importantly, how did they have the strength of character to stand through those trials?
4. Yet, if we knew more about how they grew up—with their secrets as to how they developed such a character—it would be most helpful. For example, notice that Job was a “perfect and upright man” before the whole story recounted in the book of Job started! (Job 1:8) What I would like to know is: How did he become like that? Clearly, Job had a special relationship with God. That was at a time when there were no pastors, no churches, no other “Christians” to fellowship with except one’s immediate family and friends, and no Bible to study, nor any spirit of prophecy. Without any of those aids to assist him, how did he develop that relationship with God?
5. Job cried out to God and pleaded with God to speak to him! (Job 6:8; 13:3,19-28; 23:1-17) Job recalled what it was like when God was still communicating with him. (Job 29,30) What does that imply? And all of his friends even his family members were sure that he had committed some terrible sin! Read also Job 19:25. Job was so certain of his relationship with God and so certain about the final outcome of that relationship that even in the worst of times, he could speak with considerable hope. How many of us could or would be able to do that? Read Job 1 and Job 42:7,8. This book is about the great controversy between God and Satan over the character and government of God. It shows us that God can accurately judge character even when no one else seems to be able to! Not once did Job blame God. (Job 1:22) What will God say to Job’s first family when they get to heaven?
6. Have you ever had a Job-type of experience? Have you been given some very bad advice during a difficult time by people who claimed to be your friends? If so, what did you learn as a result? Did you find any counselors or friends who were helpful? Were there others who were definitely not helpful? Do you believe that you could stand through a Job-like experience now?

7. Paul is another person who had some incredible experiences. Read 2 Corinthians 11:16-28. Was Paul really saying something that God did not want him to say? We need to remember that those experiences all happened fairly early in Paul's ministry. These things all happened before the first record we have of him going to prison—except for the Philippian jail experience which was only for one night. Did Paul have the ability to bounce back? Imagine yourself experiencing shipwrecks and being in the water for 24 hours, being beaten multiple times under different circumstances, etc. Forty lashes was supposed to kill a man! How many of us could survive? Was Paul able to survive all of that because he was born with a very strong body and constitution? Or, did he survive because he had prepared himself in some way? Having been trained as a Pharisee for years and then after the Damascus road experience, spending three years in the Arabian desert must have had some impact on him! God must have seen something in Saul/Paul before the Damascus road experience! Did Paul have the ability to bounce back? Did he have a very close personal relationship with God? And yet, we need to remember that we have been warned that the final adversities in history will be worse than anything which has preceded them. What do we need to do to prepare?
8. With all those experiences behind him, how could Paul say what he did in Philippians 4:12 (GNB): "I have learned this secret, so that anywhere, at any time, I am content, whether I am full or hungry, whether I have too much or too little. I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me"? After surviving several of those life-threatening experiences, did Paul have a different attitude toward life and death? After a while, was it just like putting another notch in his belt? Would we dare to venture out as Paul did? Or, are we afraid even to mention that we are Christians to the people we associate with day by day?
9. A young man went to an older Christian and asked him to pray to God for him to have more patience. So the older Christian said, "Ok, I will pray for you to have more tribulation!" The younger man responded, "It is not tribulation that I need but patience!" Read Romans 5:3. How does tribulation or trial lead us to have patience? Is it that we develop a "been there, done that" approach to life? Or, is it that we do not find anything surprising anymore—even persecution?
10. Are trials really a necessary part of the Christian life? Isn't God supposed to be preparing us for heaven? Will there be any trials in heaven? If not, why do we need to go through trials now to prepare for heaven? Is it that we need to learn to trust in God? Are we going to experience surprises in heaven which will necessitate our trusting God? Will we ever be tempted to doubt God's unfailing goodness while in heaven?
11. Read Genesis 37:19-28 and Genesis 39:11-20. Review the entire story of Joseph. Try to imagine the emotional roller coaster that Joseph went through from the point when he left his father on foot to find his brothers and then was thrown into a pit, then taken out and sold to the Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt where he became a slave. We know virtually nothing about Potiphar's wife, but Joseph must have felt very unfortunate after his experience with her. It is very likely that if Potiphar had believed his wife's story, Joseph would have been killed immediately! How could he be thrown into prison for doing what was right? But, God had a plan, and we know how it all worked out.
12. Did Joseph's privileged childhood prepare him for that? Read *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 213 and 214. Joseph must have learned from his father to trust God in all circumstances. Did Joseph learn a lot from his father just by associating with him and watching him deal with different problems? What else did he have to rely on at that point in history. What was he thinking as he probably walked, maybe in chains, past the place where his father was living in what became southern Judah? Wasn't Joseph fully aware

of Jacob's fight from home?

13. Do you think Joseph was completely shocked when his brothers appeared in Egypt? Didn't he know that the drought was affecting Palestine as well? Had he suspected that they might come? Had he prepared in his mind what he might do if they did appear? How could he be so generous to them? What had his brothers gone through watching their father grieve all of those years?
14. In his book *The Case for Faith*, Lee Strobel tells of his visit to an early associate of Billy Graham. That man had given up his faith in God. When asked why, he said it was because of a picture that stuck in his mind. It was a picture of an African woman holding her dead baby during a drought. In his mind it was logical that God is the One who controls the rains. If God could allow that baby to die, He could not be a loving God—unless there was some larger issue involved. We know that there is a larger issue involved—a great controversy between God and Satan over the very nature of God and how He runs His government. God must allow sin to run its course to show what the ultimate consequences of sin are before He can bring this sin experiment to an end. The death of innocent victims is part of that demonstration. The great controversy is mentioned frequently in Scripture. (Revelation 12:1-12; Genesis 3:1-5; Job 1&2; Zechariah 3:1-5; Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19,20; etc.) God runs His universe on the basis of a law of love. (Matthew 22:34-46) Satan said that if given the chance, everyone will act selfishly, i.e., like Satan. So, who is right? The Devil does not care about African babies! Our trials are not just for our benefit. But, compare James 1:13-15 which suggests that we sin because of our own evil desires.
15. Paul had a lot of things to say about suffering and the results which might come from it. Read Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 1:3,4; 2 Corinthians 1:8,9; 2 Timothy 1:11,12. Clearly, Paul depended upon God whenever trouble came his way. And he recognized that by doing so, he was able to experience spiritual growth. Finally, as he knew that he was approaching the end of his life and awaiting his execution in a Roman prison, he had absolute confidence in the One he trusted because he knew that God was able to care for him no matter what happened.
16. Does God ever want us to suffer needlessly? The answer might seem obviously to be “no.” But, what about the story of Job? Did Paul, Job, and Joseph learn lessons from their pain and suffering? What kind of lessons are we supposed to learn from our suffering—if we have any—and from their experiences?
17. Are there lessons we can learn from the behavior of animals and birds? Why is it necessary for the monarch butterflies to travel thousands of miles just to complete their lifecycle every three or four generations? Why do hummingbirds have to fly all the way across the Caribbean Sea every year? Why do whales eat in Alaska and give birth in Hawaii and go for months without eating in order to travel the long distance between those locations? Does God ever map out difficult courses for us to travel so that we can learn patience and endurance?
18. Read Ruth 1. Naomi and her husband decided to leave Bethlehem because the famine was so severe. Presumably, they took their young sons with them. In the country of Moab, they apparently did okay until Elimelech died. Sometime later, the two sons married Moabite women. Then, the two sons died. There are some hints in the story that the family might have had tuberculosis. The two sons names mean *sickness* and *wasting*. Finally, Naomi decided that her only hope for the future was to return to Bethlehem to see if she could reclaim some of her husband's birthright property. Fortunately, Ruth decided to stick with her, and her fortunes changed. After all of that, Ruth married and gave birth to the grandfather of King David! (Ruth 4)

19. None of Naomi's family seemed to be too concerned about the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 23:3. Was David considered to be okay because his *male* ancestors were Jewish? And Jesus came from the same line!
20. Consider the story of Esther. Read Esther 2:6,7,10,21,22; 4:4-17; 7:3,4; 8:3. The portions of the life of Hadassah/Esther which we know began after both of her parents had died. As an orphan she was taken in by her cousin, Mordecai. Apparently, she was a beautiful young woman, and either her parents or her cousin advised her to take the Persian name Esther. Apparently, she was also advised even from the time of her childhood to hide her Jewish identity. When she was taken with other beautiful young women to be considered for the position as the new queen, she entered a whole new world.
21. Not only did she have to learn the whole new culture and customs of the royal court, but also before long she began receiving messages from her cousin. Two of the king's close associates were planning to assassinate him. Esther was expected to pass along that very unpleasant message.
22. But, that was just the beginning. Because of the animosity between Haman and Mordecai, the decree was signed by the king to eliminate all the Jews in his kingdom. Then, Esther was left with the responsibility of seeing if she could get the decree reversed. Remember that the laws of the Medes and Persians were supposed to be final. Esther had to risk her life in approaching the king and then succeed in a clever way to point out the perpetrator, Haman. She did a marvelous job. It was not her fault; she probably could have kept quiet, and nobody would have known.
23. This brings us to a summary question: Why were so many of the heroes of the Bible forced to go through those very difficult situations. Only occasionally do we get hints about what was going on behind the scenes. One example is in Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-6. How often do our troubles today happen as a direct result of issues in the great controversy? (James 1:13-15) While none of us would argue with the fact that sin is the cause of all of our problems, is there ever a time when God specifically allows us to suffer—even travel through dark valleys—to make a point against Satan? (Psalm 23)
24. Like Paul, could we be content no matter what happens? In the time of trouble at the end, are God's faithful people to be content? One of the definitions of intelligence is the ability to adapt to new situations. Are God's true people particularly intelligent? Or, does God just make them wise? Will it be more difficult for young people in the time of trouble because they have not had as much opportunity to develop maturity?
25. Do our churches and our Sabbath school classes teach resilience? Do our young people look to the church and to other church members for help in times of stress? Or, are we like others in the world—easily stressed out, discouraged, depressed, and out of resilience? Could we possibly be glad and rejoice even in times of difficulty? (1 Peter 4:12,13)
26. On His last night with them, Jesus told His disciples that what He wanted most of all was to treat them as friends. (John 15:15) Could we be God's friends today? Would it help in times of trouble to know that the King of the universe is your Friend?

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