

Reacting the Right Way

International Women's Day is this week and we're talking about reacting the right way to oppression and opposition.

Introduction

This week we celebrate International Women's Day around the world. It is a day to bring to the forefront women's issues and rights. Although this day is not celebrated in much of the western world because there are equal rights between men and women for the most part, there are several nations where women are treated as second-class citizens or where spousal abuse is a part of the culture. Today, we are not going to go into the political issues surrounding women's rights, but instead, focus on what our reaction should be anytime we face oppression or opposition.

Let's first take a few minutes and focus on how every Christian, not only women, should react when faced with oppression or opposition. We are going to look at three different people in the Bible who faced opposition or oppression and how they reacted and overcame the situation.

First, we want to define the difference between opposition and oppression. Opposition is a person or group of people resisting, criticizing, or protesting something, or someone. Oppression is prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or control. In other words, when experiencing opposition it is generally an event or series of events versus oppression which is the ongoing practice of mistreatment.

Joseph – Reacting in Uncertain Times

Let's start by looking at Joseph who faced oppression in a time of uncertainty.

Joseph was the youngest son of 11 whose father was Jacob. Joseph was his father's favorite and his older brothers knew it. God had given Joseph the ability to interpret dreams. He had shown Joseph in a dream that his brothers would kneel to him. When Joseph told his brothers of this dream, they were jealous of him and devised a plan to kill him but changed their minds and sold him to slave traders instead.

As a slave, Joseph worked with integrity doing his best to honor the Lord. When the lady of the house made advances toward him, Joseph fled the house to escape her grasp. She in turn, falsely accused him of making advances on her which landed him in prison.

Surely, this mistreatment first by his brothers, then by his slave owner's wife must have left him discouraged. Joseph's reaction to this oppression is key to his being delivered and finding victory. Let's read how he handled his time in prison in Genesis 39:20-23:

Genesis 39:20-23

(20) But while Joseph was there in the prison, (21) the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. (22) So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. (23) The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.



Joseph went to work. He kept busy and excelled at every task given to him. He did not give up on the promises God had given him as a young boy. For two years, Joseph sat in that prison until he was summoned to interpret the dreams of the king of Egypt. It was at that time, that he gained favor from the Lord and was placed second in command of all of Egypt to help the nation through a severe drought.

Thirteen years had passed from the time Joseph was sold into slavery and when he saw the fulfillment of his dreams. Genesis 45:4-5 reads:

Genesis 45:4-5

(4) Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! (5) And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.

Joseph did not give up when his life was tough and he faced uncertainty. Neither did Esther give up when faced with insurmountable fear.

Esther: Reacting in the midst of fear

Esther was a young Jewish woman who became queen of Persia after King Xerxes had his wife banished from the kingdom.

Her cousin Mordecai uncovered a plot devised by the king's second in command, Haman to destroy all the Jews in Persia. Knowing that she would risk her life she was faced with a choice; she must plead for her people's safety to the king or remain quiet and watch the slaughter of the Jews knowing she would be one of them.

Esther needed to face her fear despite the uncertainty of the outcome. She was only allowed to be in the king's presence when summoned, then she was only allowed to speak once spoken to. The idea of approaching the king could mean her life.

Mordecai responds to her as she battles her decision in Esther 4:13-14:

Esther 4:13-14

(13) "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. (14) For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Esther, when faced with potential opposition and upcoming oppression, had to put her fear aside and trust God. She was the Jew's only hope. She was made queen for this moment. She did the best thing she could do, she prayed and she fasted. She sought the Lord for guidance and favor.

God gave her favor and she was able to make her request known to the king at a banquet she threw in his honor. Let's read her request in Esther 7:1-4:



Esther 7:1-4

(1) So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet, (2) and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted." (3) Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. (4) For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.

The rest of the story reads that the king granted her request by rescuing the Jews from annihilation. Esther put aside her fear and focused on God through prayer and fasting to seek his will and guidance.

Sometimes our actions invoke criticism. The third example we are going to look at is the women who unashamedly followed Jesus.

Mary: Response to Criticism

We read in John 12 how Jesus, his disciples, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha had gathered to have dinner together. Martha was busy serving everyone when Mary takes an expensive jar of perfume and washes Jesus's feet. Some of those gathered began to criticize her because the cost of the perfume was a year's wages.

Mary, overcome with love for Jesus and who he was, was compelled to demonstrate her love for him by washing his feet with her hair and using the most expensive jar of perfume she owned.

Jesus responds in verses 7-8

John 12:7-8

(7) "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. (8) You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

Jesus recognized the sacrifice Mary was making and affirmed her actions despite those who did not agree. Mary chose to sit at Jesus' feet amongst the hustle of the Passover and display her love for her Savior despite what others said.

Up through Jesus' death and resurrection, when people doubted or feared, Mary continued to follow Jesus and show him honor.

At the death of Jesus, Matthew records in chapter 27:55-56

Matthew 27:55-56

(55) Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. (56) Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

Again, three days later at his burial site, we read in Matthew 28:1-7:



Matthew 28:1-7

(1) After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. (2) There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. (3) His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. (4) The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. (5) The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. (6) He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. (7) Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

These women who were faithful to Jesus when he was walking the earth, were faithful to him in his death and his resurrection. Despite the female role in society that treated them as second-class citizens, Jesus did not. He loved them and showed them honor. They were the first to be notified that Jesus had risen from the grave.

Conclusion

Women, as you look to celebrate the rights and liberties you have been granted and as you shine a light on the areas where oppression still exists, keep your eyes on Jesus. For every Christian who faces opposition or oppression; be like Joseph and hold onto the promises of God, be like Esther and trade fear for fasting and praying, and be like Mary and choose to sit at the feet of Jesus being completely devoted to him.

