

# How We Choose to Respond -The Key to Mastering Trials

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Well, Good Afternoon everyone! It's nice to see everybody back together this Sabbath. And I'd like to give a warm welcome to all those who will be seeing this later on the DVD or hearing this on the website.

Well, Brethren, as we all know, in a very few short weeks here we're going to be entering into the Fall Holy Day Season. It's a time that as members of the Church of God that we all look forward to in great anticipation and, in fact, especially in regards to the Feast of Tabernacles. I think we all make a lot of preparations. You know months in advance and plan out where we're going and what activities we're going to do. We really look forward to this time of year.

But another thing I think we also tend to associate with this time of year, if we just look back at the observations of our years in the Church of God, another thing that tends to happen as we draw closer to the Fall Holy Day Season this time of year is trials and tests tend to increase. We tend to have more differing and difficult issues that come up. We'll have problems at work. We'll have problems with health sometimes or problems with relationships or just all various things can come about that tends to try to get us side-tracked this time of year. Because we all know, as being Christians, trials and tests are just something we're used to facing. That tends to happen throughout our Christian lives, but across the board there tends to be kind of a spike or an increase around this time of year. Well, since we're about to enter into this time of the year, I'd like to take a look at this subject of trials.

And first what we're going to do is look at why is it that trials tend to spike up or increase around this time of year. We're going to look at a common chain of logic, you might say, that's oftentimes been promoted in the Church of God. And I have to honestly say I've said myself over the years. And we're going to look at this logic and examine it by the Bible and see if it's really a valid reason why our trials increase this time of year.

But more importantly, what we're going to look at after that is the real key that determines whether we successfully make it through a trial. It's how we choose to respond to it, because oftentimes trials come about in our lives that we can't control. Circumstances happen to us that we have no control over, that we didn't choose. And we aren't able oftentimes to choose to make it go away. It's something we just have to deal with.

But there's one thing that we always have control over. And that's how we choose to respond to a trial, how we choose to deal with it. And what we're going to see today is that is the key to successfully making it through a trial. So if you'd like a title for today's sermon, it's:

## *How We Choose to Respond – The Key to Mastering Trials.*

Because that's really the key that determines how it turns out in the end.

Well, for starters let's look at this whole idea and ask: "Why is it that our trials tend to increase around this time of year? I think if we all just look back at our history in the Church of God, trials come at various times and we have other times it's intense and sometimes it's not. But just generally speaking, if you look at the Church of God across the board, what tends to happen? Before the Passover Season, there's tends to be—we even call it "Pre-Passover Trials" because we're so used to it happening, we've coined a term for it. You know other things tend to spike up more that time of year. And before the Holy Days and the Fall Holy Days, a similar phenomenon seems to happen.

Well, a common logic that's oftentimes talked about in the Church of God as to why this would be the case tends to kind of go like this: "Well, we know that Satan our Adversary is out there trying to get us. He's looking for the opportunity to make our lives miserable and destroy us." And in thinking about that a lot of times we tend to think, "Well, it must be because Satan's really mad. It must be because he's extra angry because he hates what these Holy Days stand for and he's lashing out at us because of that! And that's why these spike up."

Well, let's first of all ask: "Is that really why this happens? Is it really because Satan is extra mad this time of year that increases our trials?" Well, let's examine this logic from the Bible. And what we're going to do here—

If you've ever watched much of the—I'd like to say the criminal justice kind of shows on TV or the cop shows, I'm personally a big fan of "Law and Order." It's a series. I like to watch that on cable. But if you see those kinds of shows, they'll tend to talk about a criminal or a crime in the context of "Motive, Method, and Opportunity." In other words, what's the individual's motive? Why would they do this crime? What's their method? What's their ability to carry out that crime? And do they the opportunity? Do they have a window of opportunity in which to act upon those motives and to carry out that method?

Well, we're going to kind of look at this subject from a similar standpoint with these kinds of major points in mind. So let's, first of all, look at Satan then from the perspective of his motives. What are the motives of this individual?

Well, let's turn to a common Scripture we're all familiar with. It's 1 Peter chapter 5 and we're going to read verse 8. It says:

***1 Peter 5:8. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (NKJ)***

Now if you've ever studied into how a lion stalks their prey and how they will kill and consume their prey, devouring is a very good way to put it. Because when a lion kills its

prey, if it has the opportunity, it will consume just about the entire carcass. It will leave almost nothing behind. It literally will devour it.

Now it's making the analogy here that this is what Satan is like when he's coming after us! That he's like a hungry lion, stalking around, looking for prey that he wants to kill and devour, to completely consume. His object is to destroy us—not just physically but spiritually! If he had his way, from what this is telling us, he would attack and devour and destroy us.

Now notice it doesn't qualify this by saying, "Well, certain times of the year he gets really worked up and wants to devour you!" It describes this is his character all the time. This is just who he is as an individual.

Let's look at another Scripture that will also add some more light on this point. Turn with me to John chapter 8 and we're going to read verse 44. It says:

**John 8:44.** *"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, (NKJ)*

That's the point we're going to look at here.

**John 8:44b.** *and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. (NKJ)*

And notice it doesn't qualify any of this saying, "Well, certain times of the year, he's like this." It says, "He's a homicidal maniac. He stalks about just trying to go after God's people as if they're prey for a lion, looking for his opportunity to kill and to destroy." This is what he's like all the time! This is his normal method of operation, you might say. Or in our analogy of "Motive, Method, and Opportunity", these are his motives. This is what he would like to carry out.

So what's his ability to do this? You know, we kind of look at his methods or his ability as far as tools to carry this out. How does that rank up?

Well, let's turn over to the Book of Job and we can answer this question. Look over at Job chapter 41. We recently did a study on this book, a series of sermons. And we're going to look at a section of Scripture here we didn't directly address last time. It's Job chapter 41 and we're going to start reading in verse 8 here and we're breaking into a context. God is correcting Job for having questioned His judgment and really trying to get him to see how powerful and wise God is and how limited Job's understanding of things is and kind of getting this straight. But in illustrating this point, He's talking about Leviathan. Leviathan is the picture of Satan. He's describing our Adversary here is what's being discussed. Let's drop into the context here in verse 8. It says:

**Job 41:8.** Lay your hand on him; remember the battle—never do it again!

9) *Indeed, any hope of overcoming him is [vain]; shall one not be overwhelmed at the sight of him?*

10) *No one is so fierce that he would dare stir him up. (NKJ)*

In other words, this individual is way more powerful than we are! And if we take him on our own, we brought a knife to a gun fight and we should expect to lose. We have no shot against him of our own power.

Now let's jump over to verse 25 and kind of further expound upon this point. In verse 25, it says:

**Job 41:25.** *When he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid; because of his crashings they are beside themselves.*

26) *Though the sword reaches him, it cannot avail; nor does spear, dart, or javelin.*

27) *He regards iron as straw, and bronze as rotten wood.*

28) *The arrow cannot make him flee; Slingstones become like stubble to him.*

29) *Darts are regarded as straw; he laughs at the threat of javelins. (NKJ)*

Now notice what it's describing here. There are the instruments of war that were popular at the time that this was written. We can just as easily substitute modern day equivalents of it and say, "You could shoot at him with armor piercing bullets. They would bounce off. They would have no effect on him. You could try to blow him up with grenades or C-4 plastic explosives, he would laugh at you. You could come at him with a barrage of tanks or have the Air Force send in their fighter jets after him. It wouldn't make a difference. You could launch intercontinental ballistic missiles at him. Try to blow him up with nuclear bombs. He would just laugh at you." In other words, this is showing how powerful this individual is. And nothing we have in our physical ability stands a chance against this guy. It's only through God's power helping us to fight him that we have a chance against him.

Well, if we then look at this logic—we've looked now at what his motives are. His motives are to destroy us. That's what he'd like to do and he roams about looking for the opportunity to do that. And if we look at what we might call his methods, his ability to carry it out, he's far more powerful than we are! He's a far more powerful individual, has great power to do that. So what keeps him from doing it? What keeps him from carrying that out and acting upon his motives and using his methods to just destroy us and wipe us out of existence? Well, let's answer that question from the Bible as well.

Let's turn back over to Job chapter 1. As you all know, we recently covered this book in detail. As we covered last time, the book starts off with God establishing what a righteous man Job is. It describes he's the most righteous man on the planet at the time this was written. And then God directly challenges Satan on the subject of Job's character. And with that in mind, let's pick up in verse 6 and read the exchange they have here.

**Job 1:6.** Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.

7) And the Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."

8) Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"

9) So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

10) "Have You not made a hedge around him, around [all] his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

11) "But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"

12) So the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person." [Then] Satan went out from the presence of the Lord. (NKJ)

Now if you notice what happened here, God had to grant Satan permission to do this. God established; He said, "I'll give you permission to do this. And here's the stop sign." In other words, "You can go after everything, but you can't touch his health at this point."

What did Satan do? Well, as we covered in detail last time all the trials he brought upon Job, he immediately went out and went as far as he could go. He went out and attacked all of his flocks, destroyed basically all of his wealth, killed all of his animals which destroyed his ranch, his farms, killed all the servants and all of his friends that he had, killed all of his children! Immediately went as far as God would allow him to go is what he did.

Now with that in mind, let's also jump down to chapter 2 and verse 1. As we're going to see again, there's another negotiation that takes place here.

**Job 2:1.** Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord.

2) And the Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."

3) Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause."

4) So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.

5) "But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"

6) And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life." (NKJ)

Now notice God just moved the stop sign. In other words, before God had said, "You can do anything but you can't touch his health. You're going to have to stop before you can do that." Well, the next thing now God says, "You can go after his health too, just don't kill him!" That's the stop sign.

And what does Satan do? Well, as we covered last time, he immediately goes out and strikes him with boils. He immediately attacks his health. He uses all the rope that he has to go after Job. But again, Satan had to have permission from God to do that! He had to have God—he has the motives and the methods all the time. God has to grant him the opportunity by giving him permission.

Let's notice a New Testament example that illustrates this same point. Turn with me over to Luke chapter 22. We're going to see a New Testament reference here that really gets at the same point. It's going to be Luke chapter 22. We're going to start reading in verse 31 and this is Christ speaking to the apostle Peter. It says:

**Luke 22:31.** *And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, (NKJ)*

He's asking permission.

**Luke 22:31b.** *that he may sift you as wheat.*

*32) "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." (NKJ)*

Here once again we have Satan asking permission to go after God's people to try them because that's how it works. He has to have permission from God to do that. God has to grant him the ability to do it. And God sets the limitations of how far He's going to let him go.

You see God has taken Satan as a servant. Don't get me wrong. He's an evil maniacal being. He's our enemy. He's out to destroy us and we definitely need to be relying on God's protection and God's power to fight him off. But God uses him for His purposes and manipulates him as a servant, utilizes his evil intentions for God's positive purposes.

Let's turn back over to Job chapter 41 and we'll see this explained in more detail. We're going to cover a few verses here we didn't; we skipped over last time. In Job chapter 41 and this time we're going to start in verse 1. He says:

**Job 41:1.** *"Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook, (NKJ)*

As I mentioned, Leviathan is Satan.

**Job 41:1b.** *or snare his tongue with a line which you lower?*

*2) Can you put a reed through his nose, or pierce his jaw with a hook?*

*3) Will he make many supplications to you? (NKJ)*

In other words, will he come and ask permission from you? Because the point God's illustrating here is Satan does come and ask permission from Him.

**Job 41: 3b.** *Will he speak softly to you?*

4) *Will he make a covenant with you? Will you take him as a servant forever? (NKJ)*

He's asking the question because God has taken him as a servant.

**Job 41:5.** *Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you leash him for your maidens? (NKJ)*

Now notice that God's asking a number of questions here but you can see by the way He's asking the stuff, the points He's trying to make. He's illustrating how powerful He is and how much more powerful He is than Job. But in the process what He's saying here is: "Does Satan come ask permission from you? He does from Me. Have you taken him as a servant? Because I have! Do you have him on a leash? Because I do!" That's basically what He's saying here.

Now we all know what a leash is. A leash is something we use to walk our dog with. And especially have you seen one of those higher tech leashes that where it can roll up inside the big plastic container? And you can let your dog go a long distance away from you or you can pull it up close and keep him right next to you. And you have the ability to control how much extra slack you give him.

That's exactly how God utilizes Satan! He has him on a leash and He can allow him more rope, you might say, to work with or He can pull it real tight and keep him under great restraint. And He does it at His will to accomplish His purposes.

But again, Satan looks at trials that he brings upon us very differently than God us. You see what plays out here is in the exact same event, there's very counter purposes trying to be carried out. They have very opposite objectives in what they're trying to do. And, as we're going to look at later, how we choose to respond really determines which of these goals wins.

Because Satan has an objective to destroy us! When he comes to attack us, it's very clear what he's trying to accomplish. He wants to destroy us. He wants us to get discouraged. So you get into get in a bad attitude, to turn against God and ultimately wind up losing our eternal life.

God, on the other hand, has a very opposite purpose for the exact same event that He's allowing to happen. And let's look at what that is. Let's turn over to James chapter 1 and we're going to start reading in verse 2. He says:

**James 1:2.** *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,*

3) *knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*

*4) But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (NKJ)*

And, as we talked about when we did the series on Job, the Greek word here for patience is *hupomone*, the quality of character of that keeps us from being overwhelmed by a trial. Basically, it helps us to endure and it takes us on to perfection. As it says, "the testing of our faith, the development of this character in us, ultimately perfects us."

God has, again, a very different purpose in the exact same event. Where Satan is trying to destroy us, trying not only physically and spiritually to destroy us, God's trying to perfect us, make us into His character, give us eternal life in the long run. And it's carrying out in the exact same events!

Let's notice this as well over in 1 Peter. Let's go back to 1 Peter 5. We read last time. We're going to cover a couple extra verses we didn't read last time again. 1 Peter 5 and verse 8, it says:

**1 Peter 5:8.** *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (NKJ)*

Again, what's Satan intention in this? To try to kill and to devour, to destroy. Well, let's keep reading in verse 9.

**1 Peter 5:9.** *Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*

*10) But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, (NKJ)*

In other words: after you've endured the trial.

**1 Peter 5:10b.** *perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. (NKJ)*

Again, we see the very opposite objective's being carried out in the exact same event. Where God is looking to try to perfect and build us into His character and make us God-beings as part of the Bride of Christ, in that same trial Satan is doing everything he can to destroy us, to wipe us out and have the exact opposite effect come about from this very same event!

So what I'd like to do now, let's look at the key in determining which of these two objectives gets accomplished because we really hold that key. It's how we choose to respond to a trial because, again, oftentimes the trials that come upon us are situations outside of our control. There are events that happen to us. There are actions by other people or other things that we really couldn't bring anything about. Yeah, a lot of times of our own bad decisions we can bring trials upon ourselves. But a lot of times it happens through no fault of our own, there are things that we couldn't control and we

can't undo. We can't make choices to make it go away. We just have to deal with what's happening, but how we choose to deal with that really determines whose objectives get accomplished. Whether it's Satan's objective to destroy us and turn us against God or it's God's objective to purify us, to build character in us and ultimately have us reign in His Kingdom, we really determine which happens by how we choose to deal with it.

So, what we're going to do with the rest of the time today is look at a couple of Biblical stories that give us some good examples of people. So we're going to look at two opposite examples. One, of an individual who was in some very difficult trials and did a phenomenally good job—just kind of a textbook, you might say, answer of being able to deal with it very positively, setting a great example of making good choices in difficult situations. Then we're going to look at another individual in the Bible who did the exact opposite, who God used in a powerful way, was using him as a very positive tool, but he didn't respond very well. He made a series of bad choices from the trials that he faced and it ultimately wound up destroying him.

So let's start with the positive example here. Let's turn over to the Book of Genesis, to Genesis chapter 39. We're going to look at the story of Joseph. It's Genesis chapter 39. Now we'll kind of be breaking into a context here in the middle of the story of Joseph. And it's something I'm sure we've all read and heard preached on in the past, but I'm just going to summarize some details here.

As I think we're probably all aware, God began working with Joseph at a very early age in his life. Even as a teenager, approximately around the age of seventeen, God revealed to him in some dreams that he would ultimately wind up having his brothers and even his father bowing down to him, which obviously would mean he would be in a position of prominence at some point.

Well, typical of being a seventeen-year-old boy and not having great wisdom in dealing with that, he immediately goes out and brags about it to his brothers. Being the younger sibling, that really doesn't go over very well. So it's no surprise his brothers didn't respond to this real well. They get mad at him and they toss him in a well. They're originally intending to kill him, but then they wind up selling him into slavery.

And he gets toted off to Egypt. He becomes a slave in Potiphar's house. Then over the next thirteen years, from approximately the age of seventeen to around the age of thirty, he's either a slave or he's in prison. Basically, from the standpoint that we would look at it, he loses his late teenage years and his twenties in terms of how he would like to have been living those years. If you'd ask him, "Hey! Would you like to be a slave and a prisoner for the next thirteen years?" He wouldn't say, "Pick me! Pick me! I'd like to that!" He would say, "No, thanks. I think I'll pass (laughter)! I don't think I want to have that life."

So he gets into some very adverse circumstances, again, he did not choose and he could not control and he could not make go away. He gets into a very difficult series of circumstances that happened to him.

But now let's also look at another factor. Let me back up here a little bit. Just take a little bit of a tangent. I was recently discussing the subject of trials and being attacks that come from Satan with a close friend of mine. And this friend of mine looked back at me and he said, "You know," he goes, "I can already where it's going to come from." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "It's going to come at whatever is your most vulnerable area." He said, "That's where Satan going to come at you and attack. Whatever for you is your most vulnerable spot is what he's come after," he said. "Because you see Satan's like a good general," he said, "in an army fighting a war." He said, "And if you're a good general leading an army into war," he goes, "you don't come after your adversary where they're the strongest." He said, "You come after them in whatever their weak, vulnerable area because that gives you the greatest probability of success in overcoming and defeating your enemy." He said, "So that's what Satan's going to do."

And again, if you look at thing of logic, because I mentioned in the same event very opposite objectives are playing out here, God oftentimes lets him come after our most vulnerable areas because those are the areas God wants us to grow! That He wants to perfect us and wants to build more character in us and develop those parts of us. So He'll let Satan poke at those areas and attack us because, again, it's a tool to perfect us over time. Now it's painful and unpleasant when we're going through it, but ultimately, it's what causes us to grow and to develop.

Now with that in mind, let's look back at Joseph's story and let's just think about some very common everyday logic here in his situation. Now the story that we're about to read played out when he was a slave in Potipher's house. Now he was thrown in the well and sold into slavery at around the age of seventeen. Now we don't know exactly the time frame of how far this was into the trial, but it's pretty easy to speculate this had to either be in his late teenage years or his early twenties.

Now what's typically on the mind of a young guy in his late teenage years and early twenties? Girls! That's oftentimes what a young guy with lots of testosterone running through his blood. I'd say one of the things that's on his mind is girls. This is the age that young men are typically dating, getting to know girls and figuring out who they might want to select as a wife and that whole normal part of development is what's going on in life at that point.

Well, here's an individual who gets a lot of that robbed from him. Let's face it. He's not a free man to get to kind of live the life that he would want to. He's now a slave. He's been purchased as someone else's property and they can decide what they allow him to do and what they don't. And if you think about that, that puts him in a vulnerable spot in this regard. Now with all that in mind, let's start reading in verse 1 and see the trial that's thrown at him that's really coming at, you might say, is one of his more vulnerable areas.

Genesis 39 and verse 1:

**Genesis 39:1.** Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. (NKJ)

Notice Potiphar bought him basically as his property. He's now his slave.

**Genesis 39:2.** The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

3) And his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand.

4) So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his hand.

5) So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field.

6) So he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. And Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

7) And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." (NKJ)

This woman's throwing herself at him!

**Genesis 39:8.** But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand.

9) "There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

10) So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her. (NKJ)

Notice, she didn't give up. She's trying to wear him down. She's constantly bombarding him with temptation here. In verse 11:

**Genesis 39:11.** But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside,

12) that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.

13) And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, (NKJ)

Now notice how phenomenally positive Joseph has dealt with this whole situation in this whole trial!

Again, this guy was seventeen years old; he's thrown into a well; he's sold into slavery; now his life is not his own. Everything he's thinking about his future's been derailed because when he was starting out, God revealed to him in dream, "You're going to be in

a position of prominence. Your family's going to bow down to you." I mean for a young seventeen-year-old, boy that had to sound great! "I'm going to be big and bad and powerful." And the next thing he knows the exact opposite's happening! He's experiencing he's now a slave and being sold and no one's bowing down to him. They're tossing him in a well and getting rid of him.

Imagine how he could have responded to this! He could have copped an attitude and thought, "Hhh! God set me up!" Joseph didn't think this, but just follow the chain of logic here. He could have easily copped an attitude and thought, "God promised me I would be prominent. I'm a slave now! I've been double-crossed!" He could have been angry and copped a victim attitude.

He could have easily seen his master, who purchased him as his slave, very resentful and seen him as his enemy and look for ways to get even. You know as is commonly referred to in modern slang in our world, "Gettin' back at the man because the man's holding me down!" as you kind of hear in culture today. Well as a slave, he could have looked at you know, "This is the man who owns me." He could have very easily looked at this and said, "I'll get back at the man! I'll have his wife!" He could have easily allowed himself to do that.

Or even you might say a lesser severe version of this, not being angry or spiteful like that, he could have just allowed himself to give into temptation. Because again, here he is a young testosterone filled guy. He's a slave. He doesn't even get the freedom to live his own life as he would have chosen to. You know the freedom to date and do the things that he would normally like to at that age. And here's probably an attractive woman. It doesn't specifically say that, but I think in all probability she was probably an attractive woman throwing herself at him continually. He could have easily started allowing himself to justify this in his mind, thinking about how he was lonely or frustrated. And then allowed himself to kind of toy with the idea and thought, "Well, there's only me and her here in the house. Who's going to know? She's not going to tell anybody. She doesn't want her husband to know what she's doing! She's going to keep her mouth shut. And if I don't tell anybody, we could get away with this! I could go have some fun." He could have easily allowed himself to do all that, but he does the exact opposite.

And regardless of all the situations he's gone through, the first thing that comes into his mind when all this is presented before him is thinking about others and thinking about how God would respond to this! "How can I double-cross my master through this?" and "How can I sin against God to do this? Because that's what I would be doing if I gave in and did this." A phenomenally positive attitude! He's continually thinking about how his actions affect others and thinking about God's will and putting that above his own desires. Phenomenally positive way of dealing with this!

Not only that, when she relentlessly keeps coming after him, notice how when she really turns up the volume and she's grabbing him, he leaves his coat there and flees. He doesn't play with fire. He doesn't stand around and allow himself to get as close to the

fire and see "How close I can get without getting burned?" He sees it and runs the other direction. He says, "This is bad news and I want nothing to do with it!" And he flees out of it.

And as we know, just to summarize some of the rest of the story we won't specifically read today, he gets thrown in prison. She cries, "Rape!" when he runs away. He winds up getting thrown into prison and spends many more years in very adverse circumstances. But, again, has a phenomenal example of dealing with it very positively in how he deals with all of this because he chose to do so. As we've kind of gone through the scenario, it would have been very easy for him to allow his human nature to look at this whole situation very differently. And he could have copped an attitude. He could have started justifying sinning as a result of it and had a very different outcome to his life.

But instead, he relied on God's power. He relied on turning to God and thinking of God first. And he's a shining example in how he dealt with the whole trial and how his whole life turned out! Because, as we know, when this whole trial ended, he winds up being number two man in Egypt! He does wind up with his family bowing down to him and his brothers bowing down to him and his father bowing down to him. But more importantly than that, he wound up as a firstfruit who's going to be in God's Kingdom. He obtained eternal life ultimately because he made very positive choices. And he allowed the trial that he was going through to develop him and to perfect him and not to destroy him because he could have very easily made the bad choices and allowed that same event to destroy him and to ruin his life rather than ultimately making his life a textbook example of being a hero.

Let's look at an opposite example in the Bible of an individual who made very poor choices and it wound up destroying him. The individual we're going to look at, his name is Ahithophel. You might not be as familiar with him. He's not quite as popular as Joseph. But Ahithophel was an advisor to King David.

Let's turn over to the Book of 2 Samuel. The Book of 2 Samuel chapter 16 is where we'll start. And what we're going to start first of all is seeing from what the Bible tells us how God had utilized this man because we're going to see he was used as a powerful tool by God, but then his life takes a very negative turn. And if we start in 2 Samuel chapter 16 verse 23, it says:

**2 Samuel 16:23.** *Now the [counsel] of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, was as if one had inquired at the oracle of God. (KJV)*

In other words, it was as if you asked God himself.

**2 Samuel 16:23b.** *So was all the [counsel] of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom. (NKJ)*

Now think about that. This guy is known for his wisdom, for the great counsel he gave. And it's even described in the Bible that asking him for advice and counsel was as if you had gone directly to God. God obviously was inspiring this man and working through him in giving this counsel. How else could he give counsel as wise as if he got it straight from God? So he was obviously someone that God had utilized in a powerful way.

But, as we're going to see here, he faces some trials that we're about to cover here that ultimately wind up destroying him because of his choices. In some of this, we'll have to speculate a little bit on some of the details here but I think as we'll see from what the Bible tells us, it's not hard to put some of the pieces of the puzzle together.

Let's first of all understand some extra details about who Ahithophel was in terms of his family relations because that's going to give us some insight into why he made the choices that he did.

Now turn with me over to 2 Samuel 23 and verse 34. Now these verses around this are going through listing out who David's guard was. But in verse 34 cutting in halfway through the verse here, it says:

**2 Samuel 23:34b.** *Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite, (NKJ)*

Now notice, Ahithophel had a son named Eliam. That's important because we're going to put a little puzzle together here and it's going to reveal some interesting things here. So just notice that Eliam is Ahithophel's son.

Now flip over to 2 Samuel chapter 11 and we're going to read verse 3. Now this is cutting into the context of the story of David and Bathsheba.

**2 Samuel 11:3.** *So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" (NKJ)*

See Ahithophel was Eliam's father. Eliam was Bathsheba's father. Ahithophel is Bathsheba's grandfather.

Now, if you think about this, we all know the story of David and Bathsheba of what happened here. David sees her taking a bath one day; has his servants bring her to him. He lusts after her. Then he uses his position to basically sexually take advantage of her. She becomes pregnant and then David tries to cover this up because her husband is one of his soldiers who's off fighting the war. So obviously, with a husband gone, how does she get pregnant? He's got issues here to deal with.

He also doesn't want the husband to find out that his wife's pregnant. He hadn't been home in a while. So ultimately what winds up happening is David sets him up. He sends Uriah the Hittite out to the front of the battle on the front lines with instructions to the rest of the guys around him to retreat back and let him get killed. He basically orchestrated his murder.

Now if you think about this, now let's also think about how grandparents tend to look at their grandchildren. Generally speaking, they tend to have a very fond place in their heart how they view their grandchildren. As one friend of mine jokingly put it, he said, "Having a grandchild in your lap basically reverses the aging process!" He was joking about how much it warmed his heart to be able to play with his grandchildren.

Now again, we're speculating here a bit. Well, let's just imagine here's a grandfather who has dealt with Bathsheba, his granddaughter, since she was a little girl. He probably played with her. He probably developed a relationship with her. She was likely to have been the apple of his eye as grandfathers tend to look at their granddaughters.

And then one day the king that he works with just basically decimates her family and causes untold pain and suffering to them. He sexually takes advantage of her. He murders her husband. He just creates all forms of upheaval. It's not hard to speculate that Ahithophel probably had some very negative feelings about this, probably harbored some resentment about this.

Well, as we all know, later in the story Nathan the prophet comes to David and confronts him on this. David realizes how much he sinned, how badly he messed up, and he repents. And we're all familiar with Psalm 51 where he repents of the sins that he's done very, very fervently and asks for God's forgiveness and God lets it go.

I think Ahithophel, on the other hand, didn't let it go. Now realize the events that we're about to read here in a moment played out multiple years after Nathan the prophet had come to David and confronted him and David had repented. And Ahithophel's had plenty of opportunity over the years to let negative feelings go. He's had plenty of opportunities to deal with that, to forgive, and work through because realize Ahithophel had very legitimate reasons to be upset at David. For the offense and the harm that David did to his family, he had every right to be mad about it. But he didn't choose to deal with that anger very well. And it left him basically a sitting duck to be tempted with a trial as we're about to see happened.

Now let's turn over to 2 Samuel chapter 15. Now to summarize some history, I think we're all aware there was a time later on here where Absalom, David's son, basically starts leading a rebellion, starts trying to depolarize Israel and get a lot of people behind him and basically trying to usurp his father's position, to take over control of the country. Now with that in mind, let's read verse 12 here in 2 Samuel 15:

**2 Samuel 15:12.** *Then Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city—[namely] from Giloh—[where] he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy grew strong, for the people with Absalom continually increased in number. (NKJ)*

So basically, what Absalom was doing here is "Send some guys over and let's solicit Ahithophel to join with us, get him to join our conspiracy." Now again we're speculating here, but it's probably not hard to fill in some details here that Absalom had to be aware of what happened with his father and with Bathsheba and that Ahithophel's family

relations. He was probably aware that Ahithophel had some negative feelings about this, probably why he said, "Hey, let's get him on our side. He's got a reason to have a beef with my father."

Well, Ahithophel could have made some positive choices along the way here. "You know I need to let all this go and I'm not going to join a rebellion against David. He's already repented and I've just got to walk away from this." That's not what he does.

So let's turn over now to 2 Samuel 16 and verse 15.

**2 Samuel 16:15.** *Meanwhile Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem; and Ahithophel was with him. (NKJ)*

And notice what happened here. Absalom had sent people out to basically try to get Ahithophel on their side and now he's joined forces with them. So now he's basically signed up with a rebellion against David because this is his opportunity to try to get even and to act upon his negative feelings towards David. Now let's notice the counsel that he gives Absalom because it becomes very obvious what he's trying to accomplish.

Look down in verse 20.

**2 Samuel 16:20.** *Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give counsel as to what we should do."*

*21) And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house; and all Israel will hear that you are abhorred by your father. Then the hands of all who are with you will be strong."*

*22) So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the top of the house, and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. (NKJ)*

Now notice what he's advised him to do here. And you have to think about this in the context of what happened to Ahithophel's family. What did David do? David used his position to sexually take advantage of Ahithophel's granddaughter. He basically went after Bathsheba. Well, what is Ahithophel advising Absalom to do? "David's women are over there. Why don't you go have sex with them? You go take what's not yours and you hurt him the way he hurt my granddaughter's family." He's getting even. He's trying to dish right back to David what David did to his family.

Now God tends to measure things back to us, but that's His job. It's not ours. Vengeance is His. It's not for us to repay. We should let things go, but Ahithophel's not doing that. He's looking for a way to get even and to do back to David the exact same thing that David did to his family.

Now let's notice some additional advice he gives him. Skip over to chapter 17 and start in verse 1.

**2 Samuel 17:1.** *Moreover Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Now let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight.*

2) *"I will come upon him while he is weary and weak, and make him afraid. And all the people who are with him will flee, and I will strike only the king.*

3) *"Then I will bring back all the people to you. When all return except the man whom you seek, all the people will be at peace."*

4) *And the saying pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel. (NKJ)*

Now again, follow what he's doing here. He's just said previously "Go sleep with David's women." Now he's saying, "Let me go kill David." He's doing exactly back to him—that's what he's trying to do—is what David did. "Let's take his women and now let me go murder him just like he murdered my granddaughter's husband." He's trying to exactly get even with him.

Well, fortunately for David, David was aware that Ahithophel had joined forces with Absalom. And he sent basically Hushai over to be a double-agent, as you might say, to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. So Hushai comes in and basically convinces Absalom and the other elders of Israel this isn't a good time to follow-up on Ahithophel's advice. "It's good advice but now's not the time to do it. Let's do something else right now." He also turns around and sends word back to David that "Ahithophel's after you. You need to take precaution here." So he basically prevents all this from being carried and saves David's life.

Well, let's notice Ahithophel's reaction when his plan doesn't come about. Look down in verse 23. It says:

**2 Samuel 17:23.** *Now when Ahithophel saw that his [counsel] was not followed, he saddled a donkey, and arose and went home to his house, to his city. Then he put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died; and he was buried in his father's tomb. (NKJ)*

So this is why I say he was seething with resentment and bitterness. He basically developed a root of bitterness because he gives them advice and planned to go kill David. And when it doesn't come about, what does he do? He goes and commits suicide. This is not a rational act this guy's doing. He's so consumed with hatred towards David that when his plan doesn't come about, he winds up caving it in on himself and he turns that in and he winds up committing suicide. It absolutely destroyed him.

See he had been a man whom God had used in a powerful way. Again, he was known for giving advice that was so wise that it was as if you'd asked God Himself. And he winds up ultimately destroying himself. And why did that happen? Well, he got hit with a very hard trial that he had no control over. He didn't choose that David's actions came and devastated his family in the way that he did. But he also didn't choose to let it go. David repented. Did David let it go? David repented before God. God forgave him.

Years went by. There was lots of opportunity here for Ahithophel to get control of himself and to realize what he was doing, to let it go, to forgive, to work through his negative feelings, and move on but he didn't. He let it build into a root of bitterness. Then he got tempted with a trial of "Hey, come and join the conspiracy against the guy that you hate in the first place." "Sure, I'll sign up for that!" He jumps in full force and starts giving advice of "Hey, let's measure right back to him what David did to my family. Let's get even!" When that doesn't come about, he ultimately destroys himself.

The same trial that could have wound up developing his character and making a positive outcome wound up absolutely destroying his life and killing him. That's the key: We have to choose.

A very powerful lesson Ahithophel neglected to see is about forgiveness. Because you ever noticed in the model prayer, it says, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"?

Now if you think about that terminology of a debtor, that's a term oftentimes used in the financial industry. That's you owe money to somebody. You're a debtor. If you have a mortgage on your home or a payment on your car, you're a debtor to a bank. And what do you do? You send them a payment every month.

Well, if you think about what forgiveness is really about, forgiveness is not a gift you give the person who hurt you. Forgiveness is a gift you give to yourself. And here's why I say this. Because if you think about it from the context of a debt like that, if you have resentment and bitterness and hostility and negative feelings you haven't let go of and you're holding towards another person, who's making the payments on that debt? It's typically not the person that you're mad at.

Because if you look at what happened in David's situation and Ahithophel, Ahithophel had lots of bitterness toward David and David had repented years earlier. But who was making the payments on that debt? It wasn't David. It was Ahithophel's life it was destroying! And it eventually wound up literally destroying him. The debt got so big it caved in and it crushed him.

If he had learned to forgive and let it go, he would have given a gift to himself because he was the one making the payments on the debt. That's what forgiveness would have done. And that's the principle he should have chosen to illustrate and to, I should say, put into practice in his life. If he had done that, his trial would have ended very differently. He could have been a positive success story in the Bible just like Joseph was. He was put in very adverse circumstances, chose to deal with it in a very positive manner, and had his life turn out to be a hero, someone we all hold up as an example that we want to be like.

But we face those same tests today in our lives ongoing. We get hit with trials that we don't like; we didn't choose; we don't want to have to go through. But we always have the ability to choose how we decide to respond to it. It's really the key and it's

determining is it God's objective that gets accomplished—the development of our character, us making it into His Kingdom—or is it Satan's objective that gets accomplished and we wind up being destroyed and our life ended. And we really hold the key as to which one of those two comes about. It's the choices that we make every day. And if we look to these Biblical examples and we strive to be like Joseph, we can make a positive situation come out of the difficult trials that we face. And we can see that our lives have the positive outcome of making it into God's Kingdom.