

Judges 11: Jephthah: Rejection to Redemption

Everyone wants and strives for acceptance. People will do dumb or dangerous things to gain acceptance (e.g. hazing at fraternities). Nobody likes rejection. It hurts.

I remember my first rejection. I was in high school and she was a beautiful blond girl (Paula) in the same grade as me. She gave me her senior picture and wrote something on the back. After that I was rejected by two girls (a Japanese and a Korean) when I lived in Hawaii. But I have also rejected a lot of girls who liked me. Then I met a girl from Hong Kong – she was God’s choice!

Some rejection will not bother you - it will roll off you like water rolls off a duck’s back. Some rejection will hurt a lot. It will feel like a stake in your heart. You may feel the pain of some rejection for a long time. The pain of rejection may go from feeling like a stake in your heart to a splinter in your finger as long as the memory is still there. Time doesn't heal all wounds. Eternity will. God will.

Can God use rejection to do His will? There are stories of people in the Bible who experienced rejection and God used them: Gideon (Judges 6) and Jephthah (Judges 11).

Five part sermon: 1) REJECTION, 2) REPUTATION, 3) RECOGNITION, 4) REGRET/REMORSE, 5) REDEMPTION.

REJECTION: Judges 11:1-3: *Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute. Gilead was the father of Jephthah. And Gilead's wife also bore him sons. And when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, "You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman." Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob, and worthless fellows collected around Jephthah and went out with him.*

Jephthah was the rejected son of a prostitute. He had REJECTION written on his forehead for all to see. He put the “J” in REJECTION. His brothers “drove” J out and he “fled”, so this was not a nice farewell party. They probably threatened to kill him. Other “worthless fellows” were drawn to J. These worthless fellows were also rejects who thought they were worth nothing. They were worth-less. They had no self-worth. Rejection assaults your self-worth. When someone or some group rejects you, then you think you are worth less than you were before you were rejected.

Being rejected by your own family is tough to deal with because it’s the one place you ought to be accepted for who you are. There are children who get rejected by their biological parents or they feel rejected when their parents separate or divorce.

Jephthah knew about rejection. But he had one good thing working in his favor.

Jephthah had a REPUTATION. Read **Judges 11:1, 4-11**. Now Jephthah was the son of a prostitute, but he had a reputation as a mighty warrior. J had some fighting skills. He probably developed fighting skills beating up bullies who taunted him because he was the son of a prostitute. (*I imagine a bully taunting Jephthah, "Hay, you ugly son of a prostitute!" Jephthah responds, "Come here and say that to my face!" Pow!!*)

The elders of Gilead (J's brothers) wanted him to be the general of their army and leader of the tribe. But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me and drive me out of my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?" J went from rejection to acceptance, but it wasn't genuine, loving acceptance into the family; it was *utilitarian* acceptance. (For some people utilitarian acceptance is better than nothing because they feel worthless.) The brothers wanted to use J. This shows that the brothers were really backstabbing cowards.

PPT quote: "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and 5 minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently." Build your reputation and protect it, like protecting yourself from ID theft. A good reputation will open doors for you.

Jephthah had good RECOGNITION. Read **Judges 11:12-28**. J RECOGNIZED the nature of the conflict with the Ammonites. He seemed to be a wise leader. J tried to use diplomacy first to settle the issue. J gave a history lesson (11:12-28). J's recognition of the nature of the conflict is very important. J recognized that this was a conflict between YHWH and Chemosh (11:23-24). The real battle: "My God vs. your god." And my God is greater than your god.

Main Point: Recognize God's plan in your rejection and accept it. Recognize God's sovereignty over your life. Rejection is sometimes necessary to get you where God wants you to be or for you to meet the person God wants you to meet. Rejection comes from sinful people, but God uses it to accomplish his purpose.

Jephthah experienced REGRET/REMORSE. Read **Judges 11:29-40**. J experienced deep regret and remorse due to a bad and unnecessary vow. Did J expect the family dog to greet him first or the family cat or sheep? Did his only daughter know about the vow? J knew the conflict was between his God and the Ammonite god, so he didn't need a vow. J just needed to really trust the LORD. If you know the battle is the Lord's and not yours, then the Spirit of the Lord will empower you.

Why the vow? God didn't require it. J understood the nature of the conflict, but the pressure of leadership and fear of failure from his past rejection weakened his trust in the LORD.

Anne Frank said, “Dead people receive more flowers than living ones because regret is stronger than gratitude.”

We are left to assume that J carried out his vow. She wept on the mountains for 2 months and returned to her father who sacrificed her. All future virgin daughters remembered her during a 4-day memorial. Why didn't God stop him? God doesn't accept human sacrifice. J could've prayed, “God, I made a stupid vow. Forgive me. I know you don't accept human sacrifice, so I will let my daughter live.” She was a very obedient daughter. If I were her father I would have told her to run away and never come back. The rejection of her father would save her life!

Her virginity represents unfulfilled potential. Like an aborted child who dies as unfulfilled potential. Only God knows who that child would become and what he/she would do. Don't waste your life and die with unfulfilled potential.

The last word about Jephthah is found in the faith chapter of the Bible, Hebrews 11:32-34: ³² *And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,* ³³ *who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,* ³⁴ *quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.* ³⁹ *And all these, having gained approval (obtained a testimony) through their faith, did not receive what was promised.*

By faith Jephthah became mighty in war and put a foreign army to flight. J fulfilled his potential. J obtained a testimony. His faith gained God's approval. *Youth* – your faith in God will gain His approval and you will fulfill the plan God has for you.

It isn't possible to live with NO regrets. Everybody regrets something he/she said or did or didn't say or do.

For several years I was involved in summer mission trips to Taiwan. Four churches worked together on these missions (3 churches in the USA and 1 in Taiwan). We did VBS and prison ministry. We worked with a team of youth from Good News Church in Kaohsiung Taiwan. After one of those mission trips to Taiwan, a young man from the Kaohsiung church sent me a *Facebook* message and said he regretted not giving me a hug before we separated on the last day of the mission. I felt his regret. We did a virtual hug online.

I have regrets that sometimes haunt my memory (but I will not tell you what they are). How do we handle them?

The solution is REDEMPTION. Give your rejections and regrets to Jesus and be healed. Jesus Christ knows rejection. He was rejected by his hometown Nazareth.

He was rejected by the leaders and people of Israel. Jesus was their Messiah and they rejected him.

Jesus suffered the deepest rejection possible as a sinner cursed by his own Father. He cried out from the cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" When you suffer the pain of rejection, go to Jesus for healing and forgiveness. Jesus redeemed your life on the cross. His rejection is your redemption.

Read Isaiah 53:3-6, 10-11. Christ's rejection is our REDEMPTION.

The vaccine for all rejection and regret is Jesus' redemption and acceptance into His family when we come to Him in repentance and faith.

1 Peter 2:4-9: As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

That's acceptance!

Take Communion with self-contained wafer and cup. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Read 11:23-24 and then eat the wafer. Take a minute for self-examination (11:28).

Read 11:25-26 and then drink the cup. Take a minute for self-examination (11:28).