Definition

Flexibility is a very important and necessary character quality, yet the word flexibility is not used in the Bible. Thus, a search for the concept of flexibility must be carried out. One must understand that flexibility will usually involve change and that change produces tension. According to studies, one of the most stressful events in life is uprooting the family and moving to a new location—especially one that is unknown.

With this in mind, we discover that flexibility is one of the first qualities that God teaches His followers. God called Abraham to leave his country and kindred and move to a land that He would show him. He called the nation of Israel out of Egypt and throughout their wilderness journey had them watch the cloud over the Tabernacle. When the cloud moved, they were to move. Therefore, they had to be in a constant state of flexibility.

When Jesus called His disciples, He asked them to leave their homes and vocations and follow after Him.

Peter described the essence of flexibility when he wrote, “I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims...” (I Peter 2:11). A stranger is a visitor from another country who is just passing through, and a pilgrim is one who is traveling to a sacred destination. The necessity for such an outlook is underscored by our need to be in the world but not of the world.

God begs us to “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (I John 2:15–17).

Biblical Examples of Flexibility

Abraham is the father of faith. (See Galatians 3:6–9.) In the very call of God upon Abraham’s life, he was required to have flexibility. “Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee” (Genesis 12:1).

In the Scriptures, the land of Egypt is a type of the world, and the deeper our roots go into the love of Christ, the greater our capacity for flexibility.

“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.”—Acts 7:51

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”—Ephesians 4:14

The person who is inflexible to adopt God’s ways will usually be flexible to accept false ideas.

“That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”—Ephesians 3:17–19

It takes the wisdom of God to know when to be flexible and when to be firm.
the nation of Israel is a type of all believers whom God wants to lead out of the bondage of worldly lusts into a land of promise.

During their travels from Egypt to the Promised Land, the people were to watch the cloud of God. If it moved, they were to move with it. “When the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys: But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys” (Exodus 40:36–38).

David was a man after God’s own heart. (See Acts 13:22.) God taught him flexibility by stirring up the heart of King Saul to be jealous of David; then Saul tried to kill him. David had to flee from place to place for his life. Flexibility training was an important part of his preparation for national leadership. It forced him to focus on God and His ways rather than his own earthly surroundings.

Jesus taught all His disciples the same quality when He told them to forsake all and follow Him. “Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27).

Three of His disciples offered a faulty plan to equally honor Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Peter said, “Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles . . . . While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them . . . . And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only” (Matthew 17:4–8).

Who Failed the Test of Flexibility?

While Lot was with Abraham, he moved from place to place in a tent, but then he “pitched his tent” toward the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and soon was in the city of Sodom with all its sin and wickedness. When two angels came to bring Lot and his family out of the city, before its destruction, Lot’s wife resisted.

When she left, she disobeyed God’s instruction by looking back at the burning city and she became a pillar of salt. (See Genesis 19.) This account is important because when Jesus taught His disciples to not grasp after their own lives and goals, He said, “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32).

Both Mary and Martha followed the Lord and ministered to His needs. When Martha needed Mary’s help in preparing a meal, she accused Mary of being inflexible. However, Jesus explained to Martha that true flexibility is demonstrated by waiting on the Lord rather than worrying about the details of serving Him.

“Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about

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many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:38–42).

How Does Flexibility Relate to Serving?

The ultimate example of flexibility in serving is referred to in the following passage: “Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God” (Psalm 123:2).

It is not uncommon for heads of households to have hand signals for different instructions, which their servants understand and quickly carry out. In order to know what to do, the servants have to keep their eyes on the hands of their masters at all times. Their own plans and agendas are always subject to the wishes of their masters.

Flexibility is the willingness to change plans or ideas according to the direction of our authorities. The less we become emotionally involved in plans or ideas, the easier it will be to change them. Therefore, we are to guard our hearts “with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

Martha was attentive to the details of serving, but Mary was attentive to the personal teaching and direction of the Lord.

Ultimately, flexibility is based on the desire and delight to do the will of God, and an inflexible attitude reveals an insistence to do our own wills. David was flexible because he delighted to do the will of God. (See Psalm 40:8.)

### Personal Evaluation

**How flexible are you?**

- When plans are changed, do you get discouraged, or do you immediately look for reasons why the new plans are better?
- Do you quickly adjust to a change of direction, or does it require time for you to mentally and emotionally adjust?
- When you learn that you must move, does it cause anxiety in you, or do you rejoice in it as a further reminder that you are a stranger and a pilgrim?
- Do your parents or employers have to explain instructions twice, or do you understand what they mean the first time?
- When God calls you to a ministry or work, do you resist and make yourself busy with other activities?
- When others suggest a better way to do something, do you try it or do you keep doing it the way you had been doing it?
- Do you misuse flexibility by having no daily plans or life goals?
- Is your life so encumbered with possessions and debt that it would be impractical or impossible to exercise flexibility at the leading of the Lord?
- Are the thoughts of your heart in harmony with the will of God so that changes are easy transitions?

The **ruby-throated hummingbird** is a picture of flexibility as it uses whatever position or direction necessary to carry out its work. It can fly backward, forward, up, down, sideways, or just hover in one place.

The degree of pain we experience when required to be flexible may reveal the extent to which our affections are set on things of this world.

When did two dreams require instant flexibility and thereby save the life of a king? (See Matthew 2:12–13.)