

big trouble if he went ahead and accepted the Responsibility of the situation. But he did it anyway. He preached a sermon to those people that was bold and daring (Acts 7:2-50). He even concluded by saying:

*“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him....” (Acts 7:51-53 NIV)*

As a result of Stephen accepting the Responsibility because he was presented with the Opportunity and the Ability, he was stoned to death (Acts 7:54-60). But then Stephen was the *only* one to whom God had presented *that* specific Opportunity. Accepting the formula is seldom *easy* — and more often *difficult*! How often do we pass up specific God given “O’s” because of *fear* of accepting the “R”?

Let’s do a quick review of a couple of these stories we’ve just discussed. Joseph could easily have succumbed to anger and revenge and rationalized that he had no *need* to accept Responsibility. But he recognized that *God* had provided him with the Opportunity and the Ability and so he needed to accept the Responsibility.

Josiah was given the Opportunity to know what God wanted the people to do because of finding the Book of Law. After *knowing* what God required, Josiah realized that since he was the King, he needed to accept the Responsibility of seeing to it that the people return to worshipping God.

Perhaps one of the best Biblical examples of O + A = R is the story of Esther. In that account, we realize that Esther *created* her own Opportunity to speak to the King on behalf of her people — knowing that doing so could be dangerous for her. However, when we remember that Joseph accepted that *God* had sent him to Egypt *for a purpose*, Mordecai’s words to Esther are certainly haunting words in relation to this formula and Esther’s acceptance of the Responsibility.

*“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 royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14 NIV)*

There are many other Bible characters that demonstrate the O + A = R formula. Consider Daniel (Daniel 6), Rahab (Joshua 2 and 6) and Boaz (Ruth 2). What about someone who *failed* to use it? Read Mark 14:67-72. What about an example when *not* using it was the *right* thing to do? Read Matthew 25:1-13. Let’s all watch for *our* “O’s” and “A’s” and pray that we accept the “R’s with wisdom.”

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# DILIGENCE

*“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11*

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O + A = R

A formula? Yes it is. Perhaps one that we should all take to heart and never forget. But before we tell you what it is, let’s look at a few Bible stories where it was used. If you read carefully, it should become apparent what the formula stands for. Let’s begin with Joseph.

Most of us are familiar with the story of Joseph and how an unusual series of events placed him in an extremely unique position. Because of jealousy, his brothers sold him into slavery but Joseph ended up in a powerful position in Egypt that provided him the opportunity to save the lives of not only his own family but many others as well. Joseph’s brothers told their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Years later, because of a terrible famine, the brothers had traveled to Egypt to buy grain for their family. We don’t have room here to retell the entire story but let’s pick it up after the brothers learned that the powerful person in Egypt to whom they had been talking was in fact their brother. When Joseph finally revealed to them who he was, they were surprised that Joseph was in such a powerful position and had the ability to save them from the severe famine in the land. The following are Joseph’s words to them.

*“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. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me — you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.’” (Gen 45 5-11 NIV)*

The next Bible character we’ll look at is Josiah. II Kings 22 tells us that Josiah became King when he was 8 years old and that he reigned for 31 years. During the eighteenth year of his reign he ordered that the Temple be cleaned out and

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repaired. His grandfather Manassah had turned the Temple into a place of idolatry where the people were encouraged to worship just about every idol he could think of. During that cleaning process the workers found the Book of the Law that had been lost and ignored for many, many years. This is what then took place.

*“When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. He gave these orders... ‘Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the Lord’s anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us.’”*

*(II Kings 22:11-13 NIV)*

Josiah was obviously a King who desired to please God. Finding the Book of Law during the cleaning of the Temple provided him with the opportunity to put an end to the idol worship that had become so commonplace. Josiah used his position as King to act on the knowledge he had acquired from reading the Book of Law.

*“...Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord.” (II Kings 23:24 NKJV)*

While there are many more examples throughout the Old Testament that demonstrate the use of the O + A = R formula, let’s look at some New Testament stories where it was sometimes used and sometimes *not* used. If you haven’t figured out by now what those letters stand for, these stories should make it more obvious.

Perhaps one of the more familiar accounts in the Bible is that of the Good Samaritan. We’re told in Luke 10:25-37 that a man on his way from Jerusalem to Jerico was attacked by thieves and left for dead. Three very different individuals then came along that same road. The first was a Priest, the second a Levite and the third a Samaritan. All three of these individuals had the “O” and the “A” part of the formula but only one of them accepted the “R” portion.

Still another example of the O + A = R formula was demonstrated by Jesus Himself at the Wedding Feast of Cana.

*“On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, ‘They have no wine.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Whatever He says to you, do it.’” (John 2:1-5 NASB)*

Of course we all know that Jesus did indeed go ahead and change the water into wine. Mary apparently *knew* that given the “O” and “A” Jesus *would accept* the “R.”

Another New Testament example of the formula is found in the book of Acts.

*“While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, ‘What is this babbler trying to say?’ Others remarked, ‘He seems to be advocating foreign gods.’ They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, ‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.’ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: ‘Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.’” (Acts 17:16-23 NIV)*

We can see in the above Scripture that Paul took full advantage of his opportunity “in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.” He also had the ability to make good use of the inquisitive nature of the Athenians and foreigners concerning “...the latest ideas...” Recognizing that he had both the opportunity and the ability, Paul accepted the responsibility to preach. Yep! That’s it! Opportunity + Ability = Responsibility!

Let’s look at another O + A = R situation that had a much different ending.

*“Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue.... These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, ‘We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God.’ So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, ‘This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.’ (Acts 6:8-14 NIV) Then the high priest asked him, ‘Are these charges true?’” (Acts 7:1 NIV)*

It seems that if there ever was an appropriate time when it might have been a good idea to *not* accept the Responsibility even though the Opportunity and Ability was evident, this would have been the time. Stephen *knew* he was probably in