

Joseph's Life

by Charles Anderson

The sermon explores the story of Joseph and how his experiences can be a model for our own lives, emphasizing the importance of trusting God's plan and interpreting our trials through God's word.

Duration: 47:45

Scripture: Genesis 50:17

Topics: "Joseph"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of feeling trapped and forgotten, longing for the joy and freedom that others seem to have. Despite the difficulties, the speaker emphasizes the importance of not forgetting God's word and promises. The story of Joseph is used as an example of how God can refine and shape our character through challenging times. The speaker encourages listeners to live in the word and trust that God's plan for their lives will be fulfilled.

Transcript

Well, I'm glad to be here, finally. I am sure I owe to the leaders of this conference and to you people in this congregation a profound apology for the terrible mistake I made. It's the first mistake I think I ever made in my life, but somehow I got my calendar all mixed up, and last Saturday evening when I thought, in fact I just said to my wife, what a day this has been.

It was nice. I had nothing special on. It was rotten weather outside, so we stayed in and just enjoyed it.

And I said, this is a nice way to get ready for the Lord's Day. And then all of a sudden the telephone bell rang. And on the other end of the line was our brother Erickson, and he made the announcement that I was due here the next morning.

I was in New Jersey at that time. Well, I was stunned, I can assure you. Absolutely stunned.

And I'm sorry. I don't know whether it's worse to be where you ought to be, or to be where you're not supposed to be. On one occasion I got into a church, well not very long ago, and this time it wasn't really my fault.

I sat down in the meeting, and pretty soon a brother tapped me on the shoulder, and he said, are you just visiting, or did you come here to speak? I said, I think I'm supposed to speak, but do you have a special speaker? He said, yes. I said, put him on. I'll enjoy him.

So I don't know which is the worst thing, but I apologize indeed for all the mix-up. We had to leave a missionary conference on our campus. We have some, I think, 30 missionary agencies and groups with their representatives challenging the students on campus today and throughout the rest of this week to consider God's plan and purpose for their lives.

And I had to really sneak out. They don't know I'm here. They won't find it out until tomorrow morning.

And then I'm too far away to do anything about it. But at any rate, it's great to be here, and I appreciate your prayers for us. We don't understand always some of the events that take place in our lives, little things, sometimes big things, sometimes potentially dangerous, sometimes really just mere peccadilloes that don't matter very much.

They're just irritants, but the whole bundle of life is made up that way. And when we were all set, ready to go to the airport yesterday morning, bags packed, all set, in just a little while they'd be calling for us, take us to the airport, all of a sudden I heard a terrible noise. And when I looked down to the foot of the stairs, there lay my wife on the floor.

She had fallen the entire distance from the second floor to the first. And when I rushed down, she made the first announcement, I can't move. I can't move.

And I immediately imagined the worst possible scenario, that maybe she was paralyzed. And in one awful moment, you try to put all those pieces together, and you try to write the future out when you have no business to do that. God has the future in his hands, and he knows what he's doing for sure.

And we found that out. But you know, so of course we had to postpone coming yesterday, but today I gave her the choice. I said, would you like to stay home and I'll go alone? No way.

After all, she has solid Plymouth Brethren stock. And add to that British stubbornness. You know, put the two together, it makes a marvelous combination of things.

And so she said, no way, I'm going with you. So I'm very grateful that she's here tonight. I thank you for praying for her.

Hasn't been too pleasant a day, but hour by hour we believe the Lord is working on our behalf there. And I appreciate our brother Woodhouse speaking in my assigned spots here. I was thinking as I sat here on the platform, when I was a young student in seminary, I was ordained eventually in a little Baptist church way down the southern part of the state in New Jersey, in the salt marshes down there.

Really quite swampy area. Backwoods kind of a situation. This was a small little Baptist church, but even then they were fighting the battle against the encroaching modernism, we called it then the liberalism, in the American Baptist Convention.

And so we had a great, well they said it was great, ordination service. There were 90 men present, and they were evenly divided between liberals and fundamentalists. And I was the victim in between, you see.

I was the guy who was being ordained, so they had a lot of fun working me over and had a chance to get at one another. But I preached in that little church for a while, and back in the country, farther back, there was a small, very small, Negro church. And once a year, we were invited from the, what they called the big white church, to come for a service.

And it was an interesting service, I can assure you. It lasted a long time. If I ever wanted to get my people to stop criticizing me for being so long-winded, I always invited them all to come to that service, because it sometimes lasted four, five, six hours.

They're those that are tired and quit. And the second reason I think they had us there was they always took a good, big, fat offering, and these white folks came very generously. And that was the first time I got interested, or introduced to the practice that the offering isn't big enough, you just take another one, until you keep, and if you have to, you get a third one until you've got enough money in there to satisfy you.

And this brother, he always had at least two offerings. But I shall never forget how he introduced me. And he said something like this, Brethren, we have had preachers of the highest rank, and we have had preachers of the lowest rank, but this and the rankest preacher we have ever had in this church.

There's a great way to get started. Rankest preacher. Well, I hope I don't qualify for that title this week.

I can imagine that that must have been a very emotional meeting that occurred in Pharaoh's palace when Joseph's brethren, who by now knew who their brother was, and their conscience was stricken as they remembered what they had done to him earlier in his life, when they realized that now, all of a sudden, they were candidates for vengeance. Their father has died, and let me let the Bible tell the story the way it does. It says that when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us.

And he certainly had a lot of cause for doing that. Hate them. And he will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him.

And that's sound logic. They knew they were right in that. So they sent a messenger to Joseph saying, My father did command before he died.

Now, you know, I believe in the inspiration of the Bible, but I think some people told lies, and those lies are recorded in the Bible, too, just as faithfully as truths are recorded in the Bible. And I think these fellows were lying. And they were working Joseph over a little bit by saying, this is what our father said on his deathbed.

How are you going to prove that he did or didn't? His father was dead. It was their word, and their word only. But it's just too pat, too nice to satisfy me.

Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall you say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren and their sin. For they did unto thee evil, and now we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. Please forgive us.

We're sorry. And don't forget your father commanded that you do this when he was dying. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.

And his brethren also went and fell down before his face, and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. And Joseph said to them, What a blessed word it was. Fear not.

Don't be afraid. You think that I'm going to reach vengeance. I'm going to get even with you.

You can dismiss that from your mind once and for all. Don't be afraid. For am I in the place of God? But as for you, you thought evil against me.

But God meant it unto good to bring to pass as it is this day to save much people alive. Now therefore, fear ye not. I will nourish you and your little ones.

And he comforted them and spake kindly unto them. I'm impressed by Joseph's reaction and interpretation of what had happened to him in the past. And there is a comment from the Psalms that is most illuminating on this whole situation.

The psalmist wrote in the 105th Psalm these words. He sent a man before them. He's reciting a little bit of Israel's history, and he chooses this episode.

He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant whose feet they hurt with fetters. He was laid in iron until the time that his word came. The word of the Lord tried him.

The king sent and loosed him, even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. Now, hidden in our authorized version of the Bible is a meaning that rises out of the Hebrew word that was used by the psalmist that I think sheds a little more light on what happened to Joseph in his prison experience. It says that he was laid in iron until the time that God's word came.

The word of the Lord tried him. And in the Hebrew, it is the word refined him. The word of the Lord refined him.

And I'd like to bring before you this evening two or three, maybe, snapshots of this man, Joseph. His life is full of suggestions and full of typology and symbolism. He's a great, outstanding type of our Savior, the Lord Jesus.

But I select just one or two snapshots of Joseph's life to show you what happened to him. The psalmist said that the word of the Lord came to Joseph when he was in prison, and it, our authorized version says, tried him. Hebrew says, refined him.

Now, first of all, the very first little picture I want you to see is Joseph at home when he was a young boy, certainly needing refinement. You know, he enjoyed a special distinction. He was especially beloved of his father.

And his father didn't disguise this in any way. He had a lot of brothers. If you're raised in a large family, that can be a blessing, and it can be another kind of a thing, too.

And he had some brothers who didn't like this special favor that was shown to their brother Joseph. And I have a feeling, when you read the divine record, that Joseph himself must have contributed to a feeling of superiority and pride among his own brethren, added to which he was always dreaming about his greatness. You remember the dreams he told.

And they must have rubbed his brothers the wrong way. This kid, this kid brother of ours, he comes along and he says, he's going to be number one, and we're going to be under him. He's going to be on top.

We're going to be underneath. And so, as Joseph recites his dreams to his brothers, he certainly contributed to the feelings of superiority that he must have exhibited. He was a spoiled brat, really.

Really, he was that. I don't know whether, you know, how many children you have in your family. If you only have one, maybe you can be forgiven for spoiling them.

But if you have more than one, you can't always afford to spoil them, because you've got to divide what you've got between them. Well, if you were an older child, do you ever remember complaining to your parents, do you know that you let him get away with what you never let me get away with? Eh? You used to give it to me, let me tell you, and I did half what he did, or she did. Just because they're so young, maybe they're your special favorite, you let them get away with murder.

And we have four boys in our family. We don't have any girls. We decided that maybe the best thing to do is choose your own girls.

You can go out there and pick out what you want. But with boys, you take them as they come. Now, our youngest, I guess he was spoiled.

I'm sure he is. What? His. Both.

And I remember one Christmas morning. Our other kids were all gathered around, and they already had plunged into the Christmas gifts and toys, and they were having a wonderful time. And this little guy, I guess he was maybe only, what, six or seven.

My wife could verify this at the time. And he had a coat, a night coat, you know. And it was many colors, a lot of colors.

And as he came down the stairs to get his present, we overheard one of his brothers say, Hi, Joey. How are you? Joey. Now, you have to know your Bible to know the significance of that.

From their point of view, he was Joseph, a little brat. Look at him. He is spoiled beyond belief.

Well, I think Joseph was that way, too. And he needed some refinement before he could fulfill the purpose that God had in mind for him. And that refinement was a costly process, as the word reveals.

And so, our first little glimpse of Joseph is in his home, needing some special refinement of personality. Now, the rest of the story of how he got to where he was, and how he finally wound up in prison, I must leave to you. You know it well.

But I'd like you to think about him when he was in prison. What was happening to him? It was a long way down from the high and exalted position he had enjoyed. Now, he's a prisoner.

He had had prosperity, unbelievable prosperity. The word of God says, whatever he put his hand to, God blessed him in it. And he was a prosperous man.

All of a sudden, he finds himself in prison. His feet are bound with iron chains. And he's in need now of some real inward spiritual going over by God.

He must have asked himself a hundred times over, why has this happened to me? Maybe I'm speaking tonight to some of you who are in a time of your life when you've experienced unusual difficulties and trials. I can't imagine, as I look out over this audience and see how much snow there is on the roof, and how many shingles are missing. And this audience, this crowd, have gone through all kinds of experiences in life, and I cannot for a single moment imagine that you haven't gone through deep waters from time to time.

And there may be in your mind a question. You say, have I a right to question God? Some people think that it's wrong for doubts to rise in a Christian's heart. I'm not so sure that I agree with that.

We're human. And it's very easy for us to doubt that God is really mindful of us, particularly when we're going through a time of discouragement, despondency, despair. And we have to recognize that this may be a refining process.

Maybe God is putting you to the test, especially at this time, or maybe it's happened only recently. George Whitefield, the English evangelist, once wrote this, and I quote him. He says, I remember some years ago I went into a glass house, and standing very attentively, I saw several masses of burning glass of various forms.

The workman took a piece of glass and put it into one furnace, then he put it into a second, and also into a third. And I said to him, why do you put this glass through so many fires? He answered, oh sir, the first was not hot enough, nor the second, and therefore we put it into a third, and that will make it transparent. And so sometimes God has to put us through a series, a succession of trials.

Not merely one, but a succession of trials too. That which is human in us often asks the Lord to relieve us from the discomfort we're experiencing in the time of testing, or change the circumstances round about us. It takes a high degree of spirituality to say, Lord, I'm not asking you to change anything.

I'm not asking you even to deliver me from this trial through which I'm passing. If this is where you have put me, by your sovereign choice, I'm content to be here, and I want you to fulfill what you have in your mind and heart in my life. Whatever it costs, I say it takes a high degree of spirituality and maturity to come to that point and make that kind of judgment.

We had a ladies' prayer meeting one time. Well, a lot of times, but I mean this one particular time. My wife came home and said, what do you think one of the ladies in our church prayed for today? I have many ideas.

She said, Lord, at this moment, right now, by faith I claim it, right now, at this very moment, let everybody in the world be healed. Let everybody in the world be delivered from pain. Let everybody in the world, the whole world, be happy.

Can you imagine praying like that? Well, she did, but she didn't know what she was asking. That's an impossible request. God couldn't fulfill that.

That's not what he has in mind and purpose even for the whole human race. But we want to be delivered from our trial and our testing. We're accustomed, you know, friends, to thinking that the purifying and refining work is accomplished by trials.

Now that's, of course, partly true. Peter writes it, Now for a season you are in heaviness through manifold testing, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is true that trials, testings, troubles, heartaches, disappointments, have a refining effect in the life of a believer in Christ.

But the lesson that comes to us out of Joseph's life and experience is this. The psalmist said it was the word that refined him, the word of God. The psalmist seems to have ignored his troubles as if they didn't

matter.

I'm sure he didn't think of that, but nonetheless he didn't emphasize that. He says the word of the Lord came to him and tried him or refined him. I think that what we have to understand is this.

It is trial interpreted by God's word that alone proves beneficial to us. That's it. How do I interpret what I'm experiencing now from the word of God? What does it have to say about this trouble I'm in, this distress I'm experiencing? Let the word do its work, not merely the trial itself, the difficulty.

And that's what Joseph had to learn. And in that prison cell, he was indeed being refined. And when he talks to his brethren later on, he says, you know, you meant it unto evil.

I know that. You had evil thoughts against me. But God meant it unto good.

Ah, there's God's meaning. What is the meaning of God in your life right now? What is it he is trying to do through whatever you're experiencing? Sometimes God's meanings are mysterious. From palace to prison cell.

Why? Well, because of God's meanings behind all the sufferings and the humiliations of this experience was the divine purpose in Joseph's life. God was preparing him for a lofty position. And he needed desperately to be refined.

Otherwise, he might not be able to cope with that lofty position that he was eventually to fulfill. Do you know that very few of us are able to cope with success? Certainly a lot of us cannot cope with wealth. Somebody once said it takes a steady hand to hold a full cup.

If that's the case, when it comes to money, the Lord kept mine very, very shallow. I don't have much water in the cup. But it does indeed take a steady hand to hold a full cup.

And sometimes when God wants to prepare one of his own for a position of power or influence or so he can reach out and become a great blessing to so many people, it takes a lot of preparation. That little word, until, hints at the timing of God in our trials. The refining word of God comes to us in his own time and in his own manner.

You could rise here and testify and say, yeah, that's true. I've experienced that. A few years ago, I wasn't feeling so good.

I went to a doctor down in Boca Raton. I should have known better. It costs more to go to a doctor in Boca Raton than it does anywhere else.

But I went to see a doctor. You know, how do you react when the doctor looks at you and says, I don't like what I see? I said, what do you see? He said, I don't like what I see. I said, neither do I since you told me.

What's the matter? Oh, he says, I just don't like it. So then he suggested some tests. And finally, he said, I fear that, well, first of all, you're going to have to have major surgery.

And he did his best to prepare me for it by saying he thought I had cancer of the stomach. So I went under the surgeon's knife with that feeling that maybe this was it. Maybe I would not come out.

And while the operation was successful, I developed an infection that nearly took my life. As close as I've ever been to death, I guess, I was in that hospital. And weeks and weeks went by.

And the worst of it was it was over the holiday time, Christmas time. What a terrible time to be in the hospital and be ill when everybody else seems to be so happy and having a marvelous time. And here you are.

And here I was. They had me and they had tubes and all kinds of stuff sticking in me all over the place, bottles and tubes and whatever. I was wired up for space.

And so it came to Christmas Eve. And I thought that in a hospital on Christmas Eve, it would be a happy place. All the nurses would come in singing Christmas carols.

There would be a lot of fun. They all went home. They wanted to get out of there.

It was the dullest, drabest, quietest place you can imagine. And there I was, Christmas Eve. And my family had gone.

And here I am lying in this bed, all wired up. So I said to myself, Lord, you have totally forgotten me. Did you know that my room number is 807? It's the 8th floor, Lord, in case you got the wrong floor.

It's the 8th floor, not the 7th. 807. You've forgotten all about me.

Here I am. And when you start feeling sorry for yourself like that, I guess you're crying, pal. You're nearly drowning in your tears.

You see, you're so sorry for yourself. It's pathetic. And I was sorry for myself.

And I lay there and I said to myself, I'm going to look out that window. And I want to see what the rest of the world looks like and imagine all the fun they're having. And here I am in this miserable spot where I am.

So I try to get out of bed. Man, did I get tangled up. I got a leg stuck somewhere and I got the bottle fell off the thing.

And then there was another tube that I pulled out. And first thing I know, I'm all tangled up here. But I said, I don't care.

I'm going to get to that window. So I got to the window. And I stood there looking out.

And I could imagine all the fun and the joy and the gladness that everybody was experiencing. And here I am. God's forgotten all about me.

Now I try to get back in bed before the nurse came. And that was an operation of itself. I couldn't get things back where they belonged.

I pushed the button and she came and she gave it to me. Boy, she really lectured me. And that made me feel worse.

So I lay there. It was a tough experience for me. But you know, the word of the Lord came to me.

And I feel to this very hour that that word was a refining word. And here's what the Lord said through His word. From the page of this book.

God said this. Because thou shalt forget thy misery. Isn't that nice to start that way? Because thou shalt forget thy misery and remember it as water that shall pass away.

Thine age shall be clearer than the noonday. Thou shalt shine forth. Thou shalt be as the morning.

And thou shalt be secure because there is hope. Yea, thou shalt dig about thee and thou shalt take thy rest in safety. Also thou shalt lie down and none shall make thee afraid.

Yea, many shall make suit unto thee. And I said, thank you God for that. That's beautiful.

Now could I please have one night's rest here? I haven't had too many. They gave me all this stuff. And I had nightmares.

They're incredible nightmares. If you know anything about the city of Boca Raton, you know we have bridges across the intercoastal canal. Half a dozen bridges or so.

And in my dreams on my bed, they came to, whoever they is, they came to me and they gave me about six sticks of dynamite and they said you can't ride it in a car. You can't ride on a bicycle. You can't get a motorcycle.

You got to walk. And you got four hours between now and sunrise to blow up every one of those bridges. And the rest of the night I was running like mad trying to get from bridge to bridge to blow it up.

The next night was even worse. We have the big Boca Raton Hotel there with a high tower and it's painted pink. And whoever they were, they said your job tonight is to paint that tower.

And I got one paintbrush and one bucket of pink paint and I had to paint that whole tower before the sun rose the next morning. I tell you, you wake up tired. So I said, Lord, if you mean it, thou shalt lie down and none shall make thee afraid.

Amen, and shall make suit unto thee. Please do it. And God did.

And His Word came to me in the midst of my trouble and my trial and I feel that Word refined in me. It took out a lot of the dross. It subtracted much of the miserable complaint that I was giving myself to and instead brought me to that peaceful resignation to His plan and His purpose so that I could say, my life is yours.

You can do anything you want with it. Fulfill your purpose through it, Lord. Well, in Joseph's case, he found that the meanings of God were mysterious.

But God's meanings are always merciful. Genesis 39, 21 says, That's right. The Lord showed him mercy even in the midst of his trials, his troubles.

What is it that you've been going through lately? Loneliness? Fear of the future? Is God able? Of course you say you believe He is. Well, have you submitted yourself the trial and the Word working together to refine you so that you will indeed have a faith that has been tried by the fire and is more precious than gold that purishes? Well, that was his purpose in Joseph's life. Now, sometimes the meanings of God allow the malevolent.

You meant it unto evil. You hated me. You sold me to Midianite merchantmen as a slave.

They sold me to Pharaoh as a slave. I've known what it is to be debased, to be nothing. But back of all of that, God meant it unto good.

Have you ever noticed when Paul is writing to the Romans in the great eighth chapter of that book, he says, Who? Who? Who shall condemn us? Eh? You see, behind every what, there's a who. Every evil thing that is designed against the believer comes from an adversary, and that's Satan. But we have victory over him.

We need not fear him, indeed. Now, God's meanings are ultimately master-planned. It's wonderful to know that, that God has a plan for your life and mine, and He's working that plan out.

Just today, as we were at the airport, a fine-looking black man took my bag, and they said, Would you like a wheelchair for Mrs. Anderson? I said, Sure, why not? Boy, it's wonderful. You know what? They treat you better when you're sitting in a wheelchair. They even let you on first.

They treat you fine. So anyway, we got this wheelchair, and he said, What's the matter with your lady? I said, Well, she fell, and she broke her collarbone. Well, he said, That's the way life is.

He said, It's all in the ticket. I said, Yeah, that's true, except for one thing. I said, You know, the good book says, God works all things together for good to those who love Him, and to those who are called according to His purpose.

Did you ever read that? Read it. Man, I believe it. I believe it with all my heart, he said.

And I'll tell you one more thing. He said, They can't convince me that we ain't living in the end times. This is real.

We're coming down to the end, and soon the Lord is coming. I said, You're a believer. He said, Yes, I am.

We had a wonderful time together, he and I. There was a tie that bound us together as we thought about the ways of God, plotting, planning every detail of our lives. In the early days in Pittsburgh, I understand even before they built the bridges across the three rivers there in Pittsburgh, one of the first bridges that was built was designed by a very able and competent architect and engineer, and when they started the construction on the bridge, something happened, and he fell and broke his back, and he was taken to the hospital, and there he was put in a cast from neck all the way down, and he spent weeks and weeks and weeks in that hospital while the bones that were broken mended and were healed. And one day they came to him shortly after he was released, and they said, Did you know that the bridge that you designed and that you started, did you know that that bridge is to be opened today? They're going to dedicate it.

Would you like to be there and see it? Would he ever? Of course. But he said, Will you do me a favor? I don't want to be on the bridge. Just put me in a little boat somewhere and take me out in the middle of the stream, and if you can anchor it there, do it, and let me see the bridge from down there on the river's face.

And so they did. Turned the motor off eventually and let the boat drift where he could see that whole span from those massive supports and the cables and all the rest of it. And the only noise they heard aboard that little boat was the lapping of the water against the sides of the boat.

And in the moment after getting control of his emotions, he said, You know, it's just like the plan, isn't it? It's exactly like the plan. Beloved friends, I hope that when we face our Lord Jesus Christ and we can see the whole sweep of the life we've lived here from the moment he saved us until he called us to himself, I hope that he'll be able to say, My child, your life was just like I planned it. It's according to the plan.

No deviation, no drastic change. I fulfilled my plan and my purpose in your life. It's just like the plan.

We want that, don't we, above everything else. And so Joseph finds that his life was refined when he was in that terrible prison cell. And when he was going through this time of deep distress, the Lord was working in his life and the word of God came to him.

It not only healed him, but it acted like a refining process that produced the strong character that he needed so desperately later on as he became the ruler of all of Egypt and held the lives of the whole populace of that nation really in the palm of his hand. And so I guess when we close the divine album, picture album, we look at just a couple little snapshots of Joseph's life, I would like to say two or three things by way of exhortation. First, don't forget God's word.

Don't forget it. Don't lose sight of God's promises to you in the book. Live in the word.

Let the word speak to you. And interpret every experience of your life by the teachings you find in the word of God. It'll keep you from error.

It'll keep you from hasty decision. It'll keep you, the word will, from laying blame upon God for whatever you are experiencing. So, don't forget God's word.

My second exhortation is this. Don't pray for the heat to be turned down or turned off. Don't do that.

It's easy to do that. It's natural to do it. Lord, deliver me from this experience.

Lord, I can't take anymore. Turn down the heat. It's too hot for me here.

Change the circumstances, God, because I cannot stand anymore. Don't pray like that. Pray for grace, an addition of grace to enable you to endure so that at the end of it all, He will be glorified and you'll be satisfied that your life has counted for something for Him.

And then, my third exhortation is this. Don't run away from the circumstances where the Lord has put you. Whatever those circumstances may be, adverse as they may be, don't run away from them.

Accept them as from Him. Am I calling for impossibilities here? I recognize that maybe I am. But in the light of what God promises in His Word, that His grace is sufficient for us, I don't believe that we're calling for that which is impossible.

And our world, in its desperate plight tonight, needs to see examples in the flesh of men and women who have conquered and are conquering because of the sustaining grace of God. I heard about a man who had lost, he thought, everything. His business had collapsed.

His family had turned against him. His wife became ill and eventually the illness took her away. And there he was, penniless, sort of friendless, lonely.

And he was wandering down the street one day and he saw some workmen. They were building a church. It looked like it was going to be quite an imposing sort of a building.

And it was a brick church, stone church. And there was a man over here, a stone mason on the side, and he was working away at a fairly large piece of stone, chipping it very carefully, cutting it apparently to design. And so this poor suffering man said to the workmen, What are you doing? Oh, he said, Look, look way up there at the top.

You see near the belfry? See there's a little opening there. It's triangular in shape. This stone goes there.

The man said, But nobody will ever see it. He said, I can't help that. He said, My job is to prepare it down here so it'll fit up there.

And you know, God is preparing us down here so we'll fit in up there. And we mustn't wince at the sharp edge of the chisel or the hard blows of the hammer, but instead yield to him in the firm confidence that his word is trying us and refining us in order that we might bring more glory to his precious name. Let's pray.

Blessed Lord, as we look back at the wake of our lives, we don't understand what the future holds. We can't predict where the ship will sail, but we look at the wake and we see how faithful thou hast been to us, how thou hast kept thine own promises and thy word to us. And when life became difficult, and when we trembled, yes, even maybe rebelled against the pressure of thy hand upon us, even in those moments thou wert refining us.

Purifying us. Yes, sanctifying us. In order that we might one day be to the total praise and honor and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that day when we see him face to face.

And so tonight, as we sit here in this house of God, some of us have had some hard experiences in our lives. We've lost loved ones. Maybe some of us have unconverted family members who break our hearts because of their rejection of thy love and thy grace and thy mercy.

Some of us may have been experiencing physical weakness. Whatever it is, whatever it is, like Joseph in his prison experience, remind us again that though the enemy meant it unto evil, God meant it unto good. And so help us to interpret thy meanings in the light of thy plans for each of our lives.

And give us that grace that is needed not merely to cope, but to conquer in the midst of all of life's pressures. Hear us, we pray, for we ask it in the matchless, wondrous name of our risen Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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