

Through the Bible - Genesis 39-41

by Chuck Smith

The sermon explores Joseph's journey in Egypt, emphasizing God's unwavering presence and the importance of faith amidst trials and temptations.

Scripture: Genesis 39:2-41, John 16:33, Romans 6:2, 2 Corinthians 4:17, 2 Timothy 2:22, Hebrews 11:27, Hebrews 13:5, 1 Peter 4:12

Topics: "God's Presence in Trials", "Integrity and Faithfulness"

Description

Chuck Smith discusses the life of Joseph in Genesis 39-41, emphasizing that despite the trials and tribulations he faced, including slavery and imprisonment, 'The LORD was with Joseph.' Smith highlights that being a Christian does not exempt one from difficulties, but God's presence provides strength and purpose through adversity. Joseph's integrity and faithfulness in the face of temptation serve as a model for believers, illustrating the importance of recognizing one's identity as a child of God. Ultimately, God's plan unfolds through Joseph's experiences, leading to his exaltation and the preservation of many during famine.

Transcript

Now we get back in chapter thirty-nine to the story again. This is just a little interlude and it is just sort of a parenthetical-kind of a thing thrown in and now we get back to Joseph.

Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, a eunuch of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him at the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down to Egypt. And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man (Gen 39:1-2);

"The LORD was with Joseph." This is the summation of the man's life. As we pointed out this morning, it is interesting how that God can sum up a person's life with just a few words: "The LORD was with Joseph". That's the story of his life. But you're sort of reminded of the fiddler on the roof where the fellow says: "Lord, I know we're the chosen people but would you mind choosing somebody else for a while", because of all of the calamities that were happening.

The Lord was with Joseph but it is interesting that the Lord being with him did not spare him the hatred of his brothers, the jealousy. Did not spare him being sold by his brothers. It did not spare him from slavery. It did not spare him from false accusations. It did not spare him from temptation. It did not spare him from false imprisonment.

Being a Christian is not any kind of a divine immunity from problems. "In this world, Jesus said, ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). Peter said, "Don't consider it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing has happened unto you" (1 Peter 4:12). Everybody has problems, Christians and non-Christians alike. The big difference is with the Christians; the Lord being with us gives us a way out of temptation, a way out of our trials, or victory in the midst of our trials.

Now here Joseph was a slave. And what does it say about him in his slavery? "The Lord was with him and prospered him." Even in these adverse circumstances, the hand of the Lord being with him, he was prospered by the Lord.

And Joseph found grace in his master's sight, and he served him: and he made him an overseer over the house, and all that he had put he put in Joseph's hand. It came to pass from that time that he made him the overseer in his house, and over all that he had, and the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; he knew not how much he had, save only the bread which he did eat. For Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured (Gen 39:4-6).

Now that is a way of saying he was very handsome, just good-looking and good actions, too. He was just a very--"goodly" though speaks of his own personal physical appearance. He was just a very handsome young man and well favoured.

And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master doesn't even know what I have in the house, for he has committed all that he has into my hand; There is nothing there is none that is greater in his house than I; and neither has he kept back any thing from me but you, because you're his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God (Gen 39:7-9)?

Now you must remember that Joseph at this time is in his early twenties, a time when in the body maturation those biological drives are becoming very powerful, and he's just a normal young man. And he is faced with a severe temptation: this woman and daily close contact, daily pressing him, urging him, pressuring him to go to bed with her.

It would have been easy for Joseph to have succumbed, but understanding who he was kept him pure. How can I? She was no doubt saying, "Hey", you know, "this happens all the time in Egypt. Everybody's doing it", you know, "it's common". "It may be common for the world but how can I? I'm not of the world, I'm a child of God. If I were a child of the world, yes, I might enter into such an arrangement. But I'm not a child of the world; I'm a child of God. How can I do this great wickedness?"

As a child of God, there are things that I cannot do because I am a child of God and I don't care if the world around me is doing it. That's no excuse for me. How can I do this great wickedness? The recognition of who he was; a child of God. The Lord was with him. And that consciousness of the Lord's presence with him was very great for "how can I do this sin against God?" You say nobody'll see us. You say nobody will know. God knows. It was an awareness that sin is against God.

Even as David had the awareness when the prophet Nathan came to him and rebuked him for the relationship that he had with Bathsheba. David in his prayer for mercy, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. For against thee and thee only, have I sinned, and done this great wickedness in thy sight" (Psalm 51:1,4).

Paul tells us in Romans the sixth chapter, "How can we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein" (Romans 6:2)? That's the equivalent to Joseph. How can I do this great wickedness? How can we who have been washed by the blood of Jesus Christ, who have been cleansed from the old life and the old nature, who have been made new creatures in Christ Jesus, who have been made one with Christ, how can we being one with Christ join Christ together with a harlot, with a prostitute? Or with an illicit relationship? "How can we who are dead to sin live any longer therein?"

You need to know who you are. You need to have that recognition of who you are and you need to have the recognition of God's presence with you at all times. You cannot and do not hide a thing from God and do this sin against God. How can I who have been washed by the blood of Jesus Christ add more sins to Him? "For he in his own body bore my sins on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). How can we, dead to sin, be living in them?

And so it came to pass, as she was speaking to Joseph day after day, that he did not hearken to her, to lie with her (Gen 39:10),

He started avoiding her.

It came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men in the house. And she caught him by his garment, and said, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out (Gen 39:11-12).

That fleeing to me was a sign of great courage and bravery, not of cowardice. It was a lot harder to run than it would have been to stay. It's a lot harder to run from temptation than to yield to temptation. It takes a lot more courage to run from temptation than to fall into temptation.

Again, like my mom used to tell me: "Son, any dead fish can float down the stream. It takes a live fish to swim upstream". When the pressure is all going downhill, it's easy to coast downhill. It's much harder to run uphill against the pressures, against the mores, against the whole cultural concepts that we have. It's a lot harder to stand up for righteousness and morality and purity. When the whole direction of the world is going downhill so fast, it's awfully hard to go uphill. It takes a lot more strength, a lot more courage, a lot more fortitude. Running is sometimes the wisest, bravest thing you can do.

Paul said to Timothy, "Flee youthful lust" (2 Timothy 2:22). If you feel the pressure on, if you feel yourself slipping, starting to go, hey, run! Get out of there just as fast as you can. Flee the place of temptation. Oh, they may laugh. They may say, "Look at him go. Chicken". Hey, that's all right. Let them call me what they want. I'm getting out of here. This is no place for me. "Flee youthful lust."

So Joseph ran from her presence.

And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had run out, she called unto the men of the house, and she spoke to them, saying, See, he has brought in a Hebrew to mock us; he came in to force me to lie with him, and I cried, I screamed, and he ran (Gen 39:13-14):

It is interesting that she is probably taking a certain bit of animosity and jealousy that they already had for Joseph because of his position. "A Hebrew". "He's made this Hebrew ruler in the house over you Egyptians. And now this man has tried to disgrace me. If I hadn't screamed, he surely would have raped me."

So it came to pass that when her husband came home, she spoke to him the same words saying, The Hebrew servant, which you have brought to us, came in to mock me: it came to pass, as I screamed and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out. So when the master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, his anger was kindled. And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison. But the LORD was with Joseph (Gen 39:15-21),

Wait a minute. How can that be? This is worse than the Tijuana jail. And you've got false charges. You're family, man; they've sold you out. Now this woman is telling lies and you've been sentenced with an indefinite term into prison, and the Lord is with me? But that's what it says, "The Lord was with Joseph". That's the story of his life. In prison, in slavery, the Lord was with him.

It's glorious to know that the Lord is with me in the toughest circumstances of life. When everyone else has turned against me. When everything else has failed, the Lord is still with me. Oh, praise the Lord! Others may desert me. Others may turn against me but the Lord never will. The Lord was with Joseph even in prison.

and He showed him mercy, and He gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph the hand of all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. And the keeper of the prison did not look after any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with Joseph, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper (Gen 39:21-23).

God's hand upon his life, whatever he did, God blessed it because of Joseph. The Lord was with him. So beautiful how God is with us and will be with us. He said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

Chapter 40

It came to pass after these things, that the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was angry against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers (Gen 40:1-2).

So these guys were pretty topnotch honchos, the chief of the butlers, the chief of the bakers, but somehow they got in trouble with the Pharaoh. Now it could be that the Pharaoh discovered a plot to kill him. It could be that the taster, the butler was bringing him the bread and that the taster eating the bread dropped over dead. And so he doesn't know if the butler slipped it in to the already baked loaf or if the baker did it. So he has them both thrown into prison until he can find out who the guilty party is. And so the investigation is going on while both of these men are in prison.

And he put them in the ward in the house of the captain of the guard, unto the prison, the place where Joseph was bound (Gen 40:3).

So they were sent into the same prison where Joseph was. Now it is interesting it is called the prison of the captain of the guard. We are told earlier in the story that the captain of the guard was none other than Potiphar. So it could be that Joseph was actually put in Potiphar's prison.

And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them: and they continued for a while in the prison ward. And they dreamed a dream both of them in one night, and each man according to

the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, they were bound in the prison. And Joseph came to them in the morning, and he looked at them, and they were sad (Gen 40:4-6).

He was very--Joseph was a very understanding, perceptive person.

He asked the Pharaoh's officers that were with him there in the ward of the lord's house, saying, Hey, how come you guys look so sad today? And they said to him, Oh, we've had some weird dreams, and there is no one to interpret them. And Joseph said to them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me, I pray you. What did you dream? And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, he said, In my dream, behold, there was a vine before me; the vine there were three branches: and it was as though it budded, and there were blossoms shot forth; and clusters of grapes, ripe grapes: and the Pharaoh's cup was in my hand: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into the Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup to the Pharaoh's hand. And Joseph said to him, This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days: within three days the Pharaoh will lift up your head, and restore you to your place: and you will deliver the Pharaoh's cup into his hand, in the former manner when you were his butler. But hey, when this happens, remember me, think about me that it might be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, to get me out of this place (Gen 40:7-14):

So Joseph is interpreting his dream saying, "Hey, you're going to be back serving the Pharaoh again. But when you do, would you mind remembering, tell Pharaoh all about my story and try and get me out of this place, man, you know.

And so,

For indeed I was stolen away of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon. Now when the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, I also was in my dream, and, behold, I had three white baskets on my head: And in the uppermost basket there was all kinds of pastries that I have baked for the Pharaoh; and the birds came and ate them out of the basket on my head. Joseph answered and said, This is the interpretation: The three baskets are three days: and within three days the Pharaoh will lift your head from off of you, and he'll hang your body on a tree; and the birds are going to eat your flesh. And so it came to pass on the third day, which was the Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast to all of the servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants. And he restored the chief butler to his butlership again; and he gave the cup into the Pharaoh's hand: But he hanged the chief baker: as Joseph had interpreted to them. Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him (Gen 40:15-23).

Your opportunity of getting free but forgotten. And so for two more years, he languishes in the dungeon. How long Joseph was in the jail the total period of time we don't know, but we do know that from the time that he was sold as a slave to his standing before Pharaoh was thirteen years. Hey, that's an awful long time to be in those conditions of a--as a slave and a prisoner both for causes beyond yourself, things you haven't done. It shows a little bit of Joseph's faith, unswerving faith in God.

Many people when adversities come they begin to slip. They begin to question. They begin to doubt. If things don't work out just exactly like they think they were supposed to have worked out, they begin to murmur against the Lord and challenge God. Surely there is a remarkable insight into that steadfastness of Joseph in this whole experience.

Chapter 41

Now it came to pass at the end of two full years (Gen 41:1),

That is after Joseph said "don't forget me, pal". "Oh, I won't." "At the end of two full years,"

that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river. And there came up out of the river seven well favoured cows, fatfleshed; and they fed in a meadow. And, behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the river, they were ill favoured, leanfleshed; and they stood by the other cows upon the bank of the river. And the ill favoured and leanfleshed cows did eat up the seven well favoured and fat cows. So Pharaoh woke up. And he went back to sleep and he dreamed again the second time: and, behold, there were seven ears of corn (Gen 41:1-5)

Now the top of the corn was the top of the wheat where there were all these little kernels, that little straw thing at the top was called corn. It was called the corn of wheat, that top.

You remember it says the disciples were going through the fields of corn on the Sabbath day and they were rubbing the corn in their hand. It isn't corn like our maize kind of corn or sweet corn, golden or whatever. It's that corn of wheat and they would take it when it was dry, rub it in their hands because you rub the hull off, blow it out and then you can eat it. And it's good to eat.

I like to eat wheat just fresh from the field that way. You just take and rub the corn or the top of it in your hands to get the hull off and blow it out and then eat it. And so that's what the disciples were doing when the Pharisees found fault with them.

So this is actually instead of corn, don't think of Post Toasties or that type of corn with this, but think of the wheat. It's that that little thing with all the kernels of wheat and the little straws going up from it that is referred to here. So in some of your other translations it might read wheat and that's why, because in reality it is what they call the corn of wheat, but it's that top of the wheat.

And so there were seven ears of corn that

came upon the one stalk, and it was rank and good. And, behold, there were seven thin ears and they were blasted with the east wind that sprung up after them. And the seven thin ears devoured the seven full ears. And Pharaoh woke up, and, behold, it was just a dream. And so it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and the wise men: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh. Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, Oh, I remember my faults today: Pharaoh was angry with his servant, and he put me in jail in the captain of the guard's house, both me and the chief baker: And we dreamed dreams one night, both of us; and we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream. And there was there a young man, who was a Hebrew, he was a servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret. And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, and so it was; me he restored to my office, and him he hanged. Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh (Gen 41:5-14).

And so Joseph shaved himself because that was the custom of the Egyptians actually. They were very clean people and so he had to shave, change his clothes to be for the Pharaoh.

Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, there is none that can interpret it: I have heard them tell of you, that you can understand dreams and interpret them. And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying,

It's not in me: but God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace (Gen 41:15-16).

I love that. Here Joseph is brought before the Pharaoh now because of the fact that he had interpreted dreams and the Pharaoh says, "Hey, I hear you can interpret dreams. None of my men could do it". And Joseph said, "It isn't in me, but God shall give you an interpretation of peace". That's beautiful. He's not ready to take credit for God's work. And it's always a sad day when people try to take credit for God's work. It's always dangerous when you take the bows for God.

Jonathan smote the Philistines with the great slaughter and Saul blew the trumpet in Israel. Saul was going around to get the glory. "Hey, don't try to touch God's glory. Don't try to take God's glory". If God uses you, be thankful and give God the glory and the credit that God used you. But don't try to tell us how smart you were or how wise you were or what tremendous program you devised. Give the glory to God for the work that God does.

The same thing happened with Daniel when he was brought before Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar said, you know, "Can you give the interpretation?" He said "there's a God in heaven who knows all things and He will give the interpretation to Pharaoh". Daniel wasn't about to take credit for God's work.

Joseph here in no wise taking credit for God's work. And I admire him for this.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, In my dream, I stood upon the bank of the river (Gen 41:17):

And he repeats the dream to Joseph about these seven fat beautiful cows grazing, and these seven lean cows coming up and eating up the fat ones. That must have been a weird dream; these skinny old cows eating up these fat cows. But then the other is just as weird because then there were these beautiful shucks of wheat and these blasted, withered shucks of wheat and the wheat starts eating up the other wheat until there's just nothing but the skinny, blasted ones left.

And Joseph said to Pharaoh [verse twenty-five], The dream of Pharaoh is one: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do (Gen 41:25).

It is interesting that these dreams came in pairs. Joseph his first dreams were in pairs. First of all, it was the sheaves that bowed down to his sheave and the sun, moon and the stars bowing down to him. With the butler and the baker, the two dreams. They came in pairs. Each of them the three, one three baskets, one the three branches. And now this dream of the king is in pairs. Both of them having to do with sevens. Seven fat and seven lean. And the lean eating up the fat.

So the seven thin and ill favoured cows that came up after them are seven years (Gen 41:27);

Or actually,

The seven good cows are seven years; seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one. The seven thin and ill favoured cows that came up after them are seven years; the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine. And this is the thing which I have spoken unto the Pharaoh: What God is about to do he is showing unto the Pharaoh (Gen 41:26-28).

In other words, God is giving you an insight in about what's to happen. It is interesting that God did give to these pagan rulers, monarchs, insights into the future. God gave to Nebuchadnezzar a marvelous insight into the future by dreams interpreted by Daniel. I imagine just because of their position. Be interesting to

know what Jimmy Carter dreams about.

Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt: And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all of the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will consume the land; And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of the famine following; for it shall be very grievous. And for that the dream was doubled unto the Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass (Gen 41:29-32).

God gave it to you twice in order that you might establish it. That's the "mouth of two or three witnesses every word established" (Deuteronomy 19:15). And so God gave the second witness to assure the truth of the thing. And it will shortly come to pass.

Now therefore (Gen 41:33)

Here is the young slave prisoner standing before the Pharaoh of Egypt and now he is giving advice to the Pharaoh of what to do in order to save the land. "Now therefore." Young fellow here, just thirty years old.

let Pharaoh look out a man who is discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up twenty percent of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years (Gen 41:33-34).

Now in Egypt they used to just the taxes were ten percent. So double taxation during these good years. Let them be taxed twenty percent during the good years.

And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up the wheat under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep the food in the cities. That the food shall be for a store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; when the land that the land perish not through the famine. And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all of his servants. And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is (Gen 41:35-38)?

He said find a man wise and discreet and do this. He says, "Hey, you're the wisest one I can find". Now I don't think Joseph was pushing for a job when he was advising the Pharaoh, but yet the Pharaoh recognized the quality of the fact that the Spirit of God was in this man. He could see something different. And what a difference the Spirit of God makes.

Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Inasmuch as God has showed you all of this, there is none as discreet and wise as you are: You will be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than you. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and he arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; and he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all of the land of Egypt (Gen 41:39-44).

So Joseph was given a chariot ride behind the Pharaoh's. Men going beside the chariot crying to the people, "Bow your knee", as Joseph went by.

Those that see in Joseph a type of Jesus Christ see Jesus here in Philippians chapter two, "In the form of God, and thought it not robbery or something to be grasped to be equal with God: but he emptied himself, took upon a form of man, and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God has also highly exalted him, and given him a name that is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess" (Philippians 2:6-9). The knee is being bowed. They see the exaltation of Christ who was rejected by His brethren but who will rule one day over the world.

And so Joseph's being exalted.

Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnathpaaneah (Gen 41:45);

Which is a Coptic word, which means the revealer of secret things.

and he gave him as his wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah the priest of On. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt. And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh the king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt (Gen 41:45-46).

Now isn't it interesting how clear is our hindsight? As we look back on the trials of our lives and those hard places that we came through, when we were crying out to God and saying, "Oh God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from the cry of my roaring? God, I prayed day and night and You don't hear. Lord, where are You?" And we thought that surely God had forsaken us and God wasn't concerned with us. And surely we were going to perish in the wilderness. But now as we look back, we see how God was just working out His perfect plan all the way along.

Years ago, when we were pastoring in Tucson, Arizona, we were just coming to the place where the church had begun to grow and there was an excited group, a young fellowship and things really were beginning to just blossom; when the bishop in the church called me and said he wanted me to take a church in Corona.

Well, I had mixed emotions. If I came to Corona, I'd be near home because my parents were still living in Santa Ana where I went to high school. And so I thought, well, it'd be nice to be that close to home, get to see, you know, my family more often. And the church in Corona was quite a bit smaller than the church was now in Tucson that had really begun to blossom out. But I thought, "Oh, it's just a matter of time. We'll go into Corona and we'll sparkle there and the church would grow". I still had confidence in my abilities in those days. Corona is where the Lord began to whip out some of the confidence, I tell you. That was, that was a miserable two years. We started out with sixteen and we ended up with sixteen at the end of two years.

But he, the bishop, was assuring me that as soon as he got me in his district that he would move me into a church of equal size to our Tucson church. And with these promises and so forth, we leaned upon the word of man and we decided to come. And after two years of hard labor and no results, I wrote him reminding of him of his promise and I received a letter back, which was informing me that because nothing had happened there that I really wasn't deserving of any larger church. And that anyhow I'd have to wait till some pastor died or whatever before I could move up. So I wrote him back and said, "I really didn't have time to wait for a pastor to die and I resigned from the ministry". Figuring to--well, I got a laundry route for a while and I'm just figuring to get whatever I could as far as work, support the family and pretty discouraged at that point.

But while we were in Corona, we met a young couple. They didn't come to our church but his mother did. She was a very spiritual, godly woman. She used to spend a lot of time in prayer with us and encouraging us. And we kept in touch with this woman through the years.

Well, there were some changes and there was a division of districts and a new bishop came in and he came to me and said, "Hey, I would like to see you back in the ministry" and offered me a church in Huntington Beach, which we took and we spent five wonderful years in Huntington Beach, close to the surf and you know, it was nice. Church was small enough that I could go surfing in the morning and take care of the church duties in the afternoon, really enjoy it.

And we were seeing some marvelous blossoming forth and growth in the church there when this bishop asked me to go out and take a church in Los Serranos under very difficult circumstances. The pastor who had started the church in Los Serranos and had been there from its inception was discovered to have been a homosexual and have been engaging some of the young boys in the church and the practices. And it was discovered and so the church was just at that, you know, it was just broken and going to pieces.

And so the bishop asked me if I would please go out and see if I couldn't minister to the people to help put things together. So under great pressure from the Lord, not the bishop because he gave me the privilege of praying about it and giving him a yes or no answer, but at this state, the Lord was putting me under pressure. I went out to Los Serranos and those were hard years; smog and tough neighborhood. It was just--it was just a bad, bad scene.

But while we were there, because of our previous meeting this couple in Corona, and because the church wasn't that far from Corona, they started over to the Los Serranos church with some couples. And the church was prospering and flourishing. The people were great. We loved the ministry to the people; we just didn't like living in that particular area.

And then my mother was not well and an opportunity came to move down to Costa Mesa. So we moved down and began to pastor here in Costa Mesa for a couple of years to be around my mother because we could tell that she wasn't going to be with us very much longer. And so we wanted to be near her.

But at this point, I just had it with denominationalism. And I was praying and seeking that God would give me a way out, that I might just serve Him freely without the bondage and the restrictions and the restraint that were being placed upon me by the denomination. By this time we had a new bishop and we just didn't get along at all. He might be listening on the radio tonight. I want him to know I forgive. He knew--I guess somebody told him that I was sort of independent and he called me in and warned me never to go independent. But yet I just couldn't take it any longer. And so I just resigned once more from the ministry.

But these couples that had come to our church in Los Serranos during this lean time, they said, "Would you mind starting a Bible study in our home in Corona?" So we started the Bible study in their home in Corona. And God began to bless the Bible study. The thing began to grow until we had to get a--the home wasn't big enough. We had to move in the American Legion Hall, and so we started an independent church in Corona, the first; that was God's way to get me out of the bondage of denominationalism.

So then I could look back and I could say, "Oh, Lord, those two miserable years I was in Corona, thank You, Lord. You put this in the right context, you know. Those two miserable years out in Los Serranos, Lord, Your hand was just working. Oh, Lord, You're so wise", you know. And I realize how God was so far

ahead of me. It's glorious how God goes ahead of us. God said to Israel after He brought them through the wilderness experience, "And every place where you pitch your tent I prepared it for you. I went before you and prepared the place for you to pitch your tent."

Now looking back I can see how God had prepared places for me to pitch my tents. As I was living in those tents, I thought I was pretty far away from God at times. I thought God has forsaken me in this place. I'm going to die in the wilderness, but not so. God's hand was in every move. And looking back, you know, for awhile I thought, "Man, that was the greatest mistake I ever made. Boy, I sure learned not to move, you know, again at the voice of man but just really listen to God only". And yet as I look back, I see how that God's hand was in each move because there were the contacts made, there you know and I could see how God was putting the whole thing together from the beginning.

And then even in our coming down to Costa Mesa to begin our pastoring of Calvary Chapel. We look back and we see how God's hand was in the whole thing. God had this in mind all the time. I had no idea God had this in mind. I was hoping that he had in mind a church of two hundred and fifty people someday. And that was my ambition and my prayer. That shows how "God does exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).

Our very first service in the new little chapel that we built over here a block away. The reason why it was built to accommodate three hundred people is because in seminary I learned that you can only hold five-sixths of the seating capacity of the auditorium so you build your auditorium one-sixth bigger than what you want your congregation to be. And if your auditorium is for three hundred, you can maintain a congregation of two hundred and fifty. After that, they get so crowded they get discouraged, they don't come back.

I learned that in my pastoral theology class. So when our very first Sunday the place was packed, we had built it for expansive purposes figuring to expand into it. And when in the very first Sunday the place was packed, I thought, "Oh, it's grand opening Sunday, everybody loves a grand opening. By next Sunday, we'll be down to two hundred and fifty and I finally got my dream church. Imagine that!

And it was my dream church, that church over there the way it was just a dream that I had of glass walls, green carpeting, burnt orange upholstered pews, overhanging walls with gardens outside. You're sitting in a garden to worship the Lord. What could be more beautiful? My dream church, two hundred and fifty people. And we're just going to sit there and love the Lord and grow and, you know, fellowship and all with each other and it's just going to be great.

Well, when the next Sunday the place was packed again, I began to wonder what's going on. I really expected two hundred and fifty the second Sunday because that's what I learned in seminary. So I want you to know it wasn't my faith that built the church. I was confident we were going to be down to two hundred and fifty one of these days. But looking back I can see how all the way the Lord was leading. Lord had His hand upon it. The Lord was preparing.

Paul, looking back in his life could see the purposes of God for each situation. Why he was born in Tarsus. Why he was educated at the feet of Gamaliel. Why he had a Greek background and a Hebrew background both. And he could see then how God was preparing him for the special ministry and special mission. And I look back at my own life and I see from the beginning how God's hand was upon me. Though I didn't at many times realize it or know it, yet as I look back I can see how God's hand was protecting me. How God's hand was keeping me. How God's hand was watching over me for the Lord was

with me.

And Joseph now in the position of ruler over Egypt, he could see now the total plan of God and the picture now begins to come into focus and make sense. All of that was to get me to this place. If I'd never been thrown in the prison I would have never met the butler. I'd never have been able to interpret his dream. I'd never have been called to interpret the Pharaoh's dream. The prison experience is necessary. If I hadn't been sold by my brothers as a slave, I'd never come to Egypt, you see. And so you start looking back and all of a sudden, click click click, oh-ho-ho, I see God's hand. God's been working. His hand is on my life.

And it's always wonderful when you can get to some of those vista points. Now we go through a lot of valleys but you can't see nothing. It's just bleak. All you can see is just the massive cliffs around you. But God gets us out on the vistas every once in awhile. We begin to look, "Oh, yes, oh look at that valley. I can see it now and I can follow my path through the valley and I can see where all had a purpose. I'd never have gotten to this point unless I'd come through there". Glorious to see how God's hand leads and guides and the circumstances of our life. Those that we thought were horrible. Those that we thought were God-forsaken places. Those that we looked upon as the wilderness experiences of our life.

Yet in all of those, God had a purpose. God had a plan to bring us to this place. For you see, God is preparing all of you to reign with Him. That's God's ultimate purpose. We shall live and reign with Him. That's God's ultimate purpose in your life. Now in order to groom you for this position of reigning, you've got to go through some schools.

You're not yet equipped to reign. You're not yet able to reign. And so God must bring us through these necessary experiences, some of them bitter, some of them hard, some of them difficult, some of them we don't understand. But one day when we're reigning with Him, we'll be able to look back on it all and rejoice and thank God for every trial and all that we went through.

"Therefore, my brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations"(James 1:2). When you're faced with problems and difficulties because God is working in you, preparing you for that which He has prepared for you reigning with Him forever. Rejoice. Lift up your heart. Be encouraged in the Lord. For God has a plan even in the difficult circumstances of your life.

So Joseph gathered up all the food of the seven years, in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was round about every city, he laid up the same. [Forty-nine] And Joseph gathered the wheat as the sand of the sea, very much, until he quit counting it; for it was without number. And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah the priest of On bare unto him. And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For he said, For God, he said, hath made me forget my toil (Gen 41:48-51).

So "Manasseh" means forgetting. But the Lord was with Joseph even now in prosperity. Now there are many times when people acknowledge the Lord with them through the hard places. They know they can't get through without the Lord but when the days of prosperity come, it's a different story. But now Joseph is reigning but he still has not forgotten God. In fact, he names his first son by the fact that God has called him to forget those bitter twenty years or thirteen years of bitterness. God has caused me to forget all of the toil, all of the slave labor, all of the imprisonment.

And his second son he named Ephraim: which means fruitful, for God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction (Gen 41:52).

Again acknowledging God, the fruitfulness; the prosperity is because of God. "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction". The land was his hand of affliction but yet God blessed him and made him fruitful there, even as God can bless and make you fruitful in affliction.

The seven plenteous years in the land of Egypt was over. And the seven years of drought began to come, the dearth, according as Joseph had said: and the dearth was in all lands; but in the land of Egypt there was bread. And when the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said to the Egyptians, Go to Joseph; and what he says to you, do. And the famine was over the face of the earth: And Joseph opened all the storehouses, and he sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine waxed sore in the land of Egypt. And all of the countries came into Egypt to Joseph to buy corn or wheat; because that the famine was so sore in all the lands (Gen 41:53-57).

So God had him down there for the preservation of the people through these seven lean years. And God had gone before; God was ahead of him. God could foresee. And that is why we have difficulty often in understanding the ways of God because we can't see. I don't know what lies ahead. And I'm often prone to challenge God and to question God for the things that He is doing because I can't see what's ahead. But because God can see down the road, He's preparing me now for eternity. That which God is doing in my life now is always in the view of the eternal plan that He has for me.

And so many times in order to fulfill eternal purposes, there is a time of temporary sorrow or grief or suffering or pain. But as Paul the apostle we are convinced that "the present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. And this light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working an exceeding eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Cheer up. Go out and face the world with a smile and with a victory in your heart because you are God's child and He's preparing you to reign with Him eternally. Don't get discouraged, or under the circumstances don't think that God has forgotten you or forsaken you. God sees the travail of your heart in His soul. He knows the fetters with which you are bound. But they are all a necessary process of God, as He trains you and as He grooms you and as He brings you into that place that He might bestow upon you His glory, His power, His love that you might reign with Him, world without end.

"So we look not at the things which are seen for the things which are seen are temporal. But we look at the things which are not seen for the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). Get our eyes upon the eternal goal, upon the eternal reward, upon that which God is working out in our lives, as far as His eternal purposes. And then we endure and we can endure our present difficulties if we keep the proper perspective.

In Hebrews the eleventh chapter, talking about the Old Testament saints who went through such suffering, who went through such tribulation and trial and it said, "And they endured as seeing the invisible" (Hebrews 11:27). You tell somebody you can see the invisible things and they think you're crazy. But I tell you, that what gives you the enduring quality is seeing beyond just the temporary problem.

Just seeing beyond this temporary material physical world, into the spiritual eternal world. That's the thing that keeps you going. That's the thing that gives you the enduring quality that you need. "For we're looking for a city which hath foundation, whose maker and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10). And we're going to live and reign with Him forever in His kingdom and our eyes are set like flint towards that goal as we walk together with Him. For the Lord is with us and He is working in us even in the adverse circumstances that He might bring us into the glory of His kingdom.

Father, we thank You for Your work in us tonight. And we yield now our members as instruments unto righteousness unto Thee. Lord, as we look back we can truly say, "All the way my Savior led me". And what more can I ask? What more can I desire? That Your hand be upon my life. That You be with me and lead me, Lord. I thank You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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