

Winning God's Approval - Part 4

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of winning God's approval through faithfulness and obedience, illustrated by the life of Joseph.

Duration: 53:12

Scripture: Genesis 39:3

Topics: "Approval"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of looking beyond our own sorrows and reaching out to encourage others. He uses the example of Joseph, a young man who had dreams from God at the age of 17. Despite facing challenges and being thrown into jail, God had a plan for Joseph's life. The speaker also highlights the significance of winning God's approval and the promise of reward in eternity for those who faithfully serve Him.

Transcript

I started this series last weekend and we're now in number four, a series of nine messages on the subject, winning God's approval. Now, I don't know how important you feel this is. It's wonderful to be accepted by God.

That itself is a great thing. And we rejoice in it and we should rejoice in it. But there are so many exhortations in the New Testament that encourage us to press on to perfection, to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit and the fear of God, to run so that you may win.

And the Bible begins with God testing a man as soon as he had created him. And it ends in the book of Revelation with a promise of reward. The last chapter, the Lord says, Behold, I come quickly and my reward is with me to give to every man according as his work shall be.

Now, that's not salvation. The New Testament speaks about crowns. We don't understand exactly what that will mean in heaven.

But I think it is some degree of closeness to Jesus that's going to be our reward in eternity for faithfulness here on earth. But there are many, many verses in the New Testament that speak about the reward that God gives to those of his children who are faithful in the time of temptation. James particularly says that in James chapter 1, Blessed is the man who endures trial or testing or temptation for when he has, we would

say, overcome, he will receive a crown of life.

Paul at the end of his life said, I've finished my course. I've fought a good fight. And henceforth has laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord will give to those who love him.

So there are many, many scriptures like this. And it's possible sometimes as Christians for us to merely rejoice in the fact that God's accepted us. Now, that's very important.

And I would never devalue that. I believe that's the foundation. And if you're not sure of that, then what I'm saying is really not for you.

You've got first to be sure that God's accepted you. What I'm speaking about here is not how God's going to accept us. It's like a building.

You know, a building needs a foundation and then a superstructure, which is more important. Well, a foundation is important, of course, but what would the use be of just a foundation? We couldn't live on a foundation. And so that is how I see acceptance and approval.

Acceptance is the foundation. You can't build your life without that. You've got to be absolutely sure that your past is forgiven, that Christ has come into your life, accepted you without any of your works, freely, by grace, not of works.

God chose you, loves you. Christ died for you and welcomes you into his family. Accept it.

Well, then the foundation is laid. Great. Now, we don't have to, like Hebrews says, keep on laying the foundation and keep on polishing the foundation.

If you're not sure of the foundation, go check it out. Make sure the foundation is strong. But I want to encourage you, once that foundation is laid in your life, don't be satisfied with a foundation.

Build a house. That's what Jesus said when he spoke about discipleship in Luke 14. He spoke about a man who just laid a foundation and he left it there.

So, when we talk about winning God's approval, we're not talking about the foundation. We're talking about the superstructure. Many Christians seek God's blessing more than his approval.

God's blessing, of course, is given to a lot of people who are even unconverted. Jesus said that God makes his sun to rise on the good and the evil, and he makes the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous. Those are material blessings.

So, if you want material blessings from God, you've got to be either good or evil. Do you qualify? You've got to be either righteous or unrighteous. Do you qualify? God's a good God.

I mean, here's a God-fearing farmer who's got a field, and he prays for a good harvest, and he gets a good harvest. Here's an ungodly farmer, perhaps an atheist. He doesn't pray at all.

He gets the rain too. He gets a good harvest too. How's that? He doesn't say anything about these two people.

He says something about a good God who makes his sun to rise on the good and the evil, and the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous. So, if you're only seeking God's blessing, well, God's a good

God. And even if you don't pass the test, he'll still bless you.

Physically, materially, the richest people in the world are not Christians. Those who live longest are not Christians. The healthiest are not Christians.

So, what do these things prove? Nothing. But the most spiritual people in the world are Christians. That's the proof of God's blessing.

And those are the people who passed the test. They were tested in different times. So, we looked at Adam and Eve first, how they failed.

We looked at Abraham. We looked at Job, how they passed. Today, we want to look at Joseph.

Genesis and chapter 37, we read about Joseph. In fact, all the way from 37 to the end of the book of Genesis is the story of Joseph. And I want you to see here, in these 14 chapters, well, not all of them, about 13 of them, how Joseph was tested by God in four places.

And those are the four places where we are tested too. It's interesting how relevant scripture is to our life. First of all, he was tested in his home.

And then, in his place of work. And then, in a very difficult place, a place of adversity and trial. And then, what is more difficult, in a place of prosperity.

And in all these places, he passed. He won God's approval. Joseph is the first young man in scripture, who is portrayed as a God-fearing young man.

Look at him in chapter 37. It says here in verse 2, that he was 17 years of age. And he had 10 older brothers.

And those older brothers were not a good example. They were, you know, Joseph, Jacob, his father had four wives. And those other 10 were born out of the other three wives.

And Joseph and Benjamin, the last two, were born out of the fourth wife, Rachel. And the other 10 brothers were not at all a good example. They were bad, evil.

And Joseph had to work with them. Now, it's not easy to work with 10 bad brothers. And he found it difficult.

And it says here, his father was a God-fearing man and naturally loved Joseph more. And the other brothers, it says here in verse 4, hated him and would not speak to him on friendly terms. Now imagine living in a house where you've got 10 older brothers and they hate you and they don't speak to you on friendly terms ever.

Always irritating you, troubling you. Now I want to say, this is the preparation that God was giving this young man for one of the most fantastic ministries in the book of Genesis. He was going to be the second ruler of the whole world.

And he had to be trained at home with difficult family members. Now there are many cases like this. Jesus himself had younger brothers who were very difficult, who didn't believe in him.

This seems to be part of the way in which God trains us to be overcomers, to be free from bitterness against family members who hurt us. It's part of our training for something wonderful that God has ahead of us. And that's the first thing we see here.

And the other thing we see here is, in verse 5, Joseph had two dreams. And both of those dreams were fulfilled about 15 years later. And that's why we know the dreams were from God.

The devil doesn't know the future and we ourselves don't know the future. So when Joseph had this dream where he saw, it says here in verse 7 that there were a number of sheaves in the field and his sheaves stood erect and all the other sheaves of his brothers bowed down to him. And that was literally fulfilled later on when Joseph became a ruler in Egypt.

And then he had another dream in verse 9 where the sun, moon and 11 stars bowed down to him. And that was a picture of his father and mother and 11 brothers bowing down to him one day, which is also fulfilled 15 years later. Now the point I want you to notice here is, here was a man, a young man, 17 years of age.

Some of us have got 17-year-old children. You know what it is for a 17-year-old young man, what his interests are in life, what his passions are and what he dreams about. And here was a young 17-year-old man who was dreaming things that God gave him in his dreams.

It's amazing. Here was a man who was obviously attuned to God at a very young age. Now the things we dream about, I have discovered through the years, to a large extent are dependent on what we think about during the day.

We have a thing called our subconscious. Not all dreams are from God. Sometimes we get dreams because we ate a heavy dinner or something like that at night or ate too much.

But occasionally, occasionally, God even speaks to us in dreams. The Bible is full of it. Examples of God speaking in a dream.

But we've got to be sensitive. And our subconscious knows the type of things we like to think about. We can fool other people about what we like to think about, but we can't fool our subconscious.

Because our subconscious knows what you like to think about because it knows what you like to think about during the day. It may be making money, it may be the opposite sex, it could be anything. But the more we think about that, those are the type of things that come back to us in our dreams at night.

So when I see a young man getting dreams about God's purpose for him in the future, I get a little inkling into what he was thinking of when he was awake. Is it possible for a young 17-year-old man to be thinking about God and to think about God's purpose for his life? That is God's will. And that's God's will for all of us.

That we think about God's purpose for our life. And then God can speak to us. There are many ways in which God speaks to us.

He can speak to us in a service like this. Or He can speak to us as we read the Word. And He can also speak to us through dreams.

But it's all a question of being attuned. Many people say, I can't hear God speaking to me. Well, it's like this.

Right now, in this room, in this room, there are many sounds. But you can't pick them up. If you had a radio and you tune it to a certain frequency, you could get sermons, you could get rock music, you could get all types of things, good and bad.

It's all in the air here. It all depends on whether you tune into that frequency. And it's there and you don't hear it.

And then you tune into that frequency and it's loud and clear. It's like that with God. If you tune in and God sees you're tuning into Him, you really want to hear Him, you'll hear Him.

You'll hear Him even when you're asleep in your dreams. But if you're not, if your Christianity is just a matter of going to church to ease your conscience or as a ritual or a tradition, then your subconscious knows that. Your subconscious knows this guy's not interested in God.

He's not interested in Christ. I mean, it's just a form and a ritual for him. And it knows that you're not interested in those things.

You're interested perhaps in making money. You get dreams about how to make money. But Joseph had dreams about God and God's purpose for his life.

I want to tell you this. It's wonderful to be able to have God speak to us and direct us and encourage us. And you see, God was encouraging Joseph with these visions and dreams because when he went through trial, he could remember what God had shown him.

And that's the reason why God speaks to us. To encourage us so that when we go through a trial, He says, don't give up because I've got a purpose for your life. And it's wonderful to know that.

The other thing I want you to notice here is, see, young people can do foolish things and I believe one of the foolish things that Joseph did here was to tell this dream to his brothers. It's very foolish to go and tell your brothers, I saw all of you bowing down to me. Or to go and tell your dad and mom, I saw you bowing down to me too.

There are certain things that God tells us which we should keep to ourselves, particularly if they show us in a very favorable light. We're not called to make other people feel small and that was one of the foolish things. In fact, it's about the only mistake I see in Joseph's life.

In an otherwise almost spotless life, here was the one mistake he made when he was a young man. But going on from there, notice here also, his father, it says here, his father called him one day and said to him in verse 13, aren't your brothers pasturing the flock in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them. And immediately Joseph said, I'll go.

I want you to see this. There was an attitude of respect to his parents that when his dad told him, I want you to go, I don't know what distance there was from his tent all the way to Shechem, and Joseph without any hesitation said, I'll go. One of the things that I've observed through the years from the time when I was a young teenager to now, more than 50 years later, is I find that young people have gradually begun to lose respect for authority.

It's becoming worse and worse and worse and worse and worse and that's an indication of the world drifting away from God. So I want to say to all young people, if you want God to bless you, honor your father and mother. It'll go well with you.

You'll live long on the earth. It's absolutely true. Honor those who are older to you.

Honor your parents. And that's what we see Joseph doing. And there are a number of examples like this in scripture, including Jesus himself.

But Joseph, he honored his father. And I tell you, whenever I see a young man honoring his father and mother, I know for certain it'll go well with him. Never despise your parents.

Never speak rudely to them, even if you're 50 years old. Honor your father and mother. You don't have to obey them once you've left their home and set up your own home, but you still have to honor them.

The first place where God tests any young man is in his home. And he said to him, please go and look for the welfare of your brothers and come and tell me how it is. And when he went to this place Shechem, his brothers were not there.

And he could have come back and said, dad, I looked for them. I couldn't find them. But he didn't do that.

He was a very responsible young 17 year old who wanted to honor his dad. And when he didn't find his brothers, he didn't just come back lazily and say, well, I looked for him, dad, and couldn't find them. I've got other things to do now.

He inquired with someone, have you seen my brothers? And someone told him, yes, they've gone from here to Dothan. Now, I don't know how many miles that was. But Joseph walked that distance, I've got to find my brothers.

There was a sense of responsibility there. And these are the little, little things in which God tests a young man before he can give him some tremendous responsibility and a great ministry in the days to come. I believe there are many, many good young people who are tested at home and fail.

If it says, honor your father and mother, and it'll go well with you. What's going to happen to someone who doesn't honor his father and mother? I don't believe it'll go well with him. In fact, that's not just mentioned in the Old Testament.

It's a commandment. It's one of the Ten Commandments. But in the New Testament, in Ephesians 6, it says, children, obey your parents, honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment that God gave.

Which had a promise attached to it. All the Ten Commandments, none of them had a promise attached to it, except this one. Isn't that interesting? The only one of the Ten Commandments that had a promise attached to it, that if you honor your father and mother, it'll go well with you.

And you will live long on the earth. This is very, very important. And I believe that every Christian young man should be distinguished, man and woman, should be distinguished from all the other people in the world by the fact that they are respectful to people who are older.

I can testify it's gone well with me in my life because I sought to honor not only my parents, but all those who are older than me, all through my life. It's true. God's word is true.

And I want to encourage all of you to do that. And so we see here that he went to Dothan and found his brothers there. The second area, well, let me just, before I come to that, you see, when he met his brothers, they mapped this little plot.

They wanted to get rid of him. Imagine ten brothers who hated him so much. They said, let us kill him.

They hated him so much that they wanted to kill him. Now, you've got to bear this in mind when you see later on how Joseph treated them. These were murderers.

They wanted to kill him and they wanted to take his coat and spread some blood on it and bring it back to the father and say, we don't know what happened to your son. But, you know, when God has a purpose for a young man, nobody can kill him without God's permission. Someone will be there to save him.

And that's what we see here, that when these brothers were all scheming to kill him, one of the brothers said, hey, let's not kill him. Let's just put him into a pit. These little stories in scripture teach us the sovereignty of God, that when you have given your life to Christ, you are one of God's chosen then.

That God's purpose for your life cannot be frustrated even if somebody tries to kill you. Much less if somebody or God's purpose for you will be fulfilled. Even much more, if somebody tries to do some other type of harm, it will definitely be, there will be somebody there God will keep, like Reuben, to protect you from some harm coming, which God hasn't planned for you.

And so, you see, Reuben saved his life. And then, as they had finally put him in a pit, while they were waiting, it says here in Genesis 37-25, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites traveling. Now, you got to see the sovereignty of God here.

God's care for someone whom he's got his eyes on, like Joseph. He arranges for a caravan to come along. Because God's got a plan for this young man, that in another 13 years, he's got to be the second ruler in Egypt.

So, I've got to somehow get him to Egypt. And see how God works it all out. He works it out through Joseph's enemies.

Just as they're about to kill him, along comes this caravan of Ishmaelites sent by God. And where was this caravan going? To Egypt, of course. Where else? And they sell him.

And that's step one in God's plan. Step one, being fulfilled by our enemies. Joseph's enemies.

It's amazing. That's why the Bible says, love your enemies. They're just fulfilling God's purpose for you, if you can believe it.

All things work together for good to those who love God. I mean, can't I love a man who's helping me to fulfill God's will? If only Joseph could look from where he was going to be 15 years later, look back and say, hey, my brothers were the ones who sent me to Egypt. Think how I would have missed God's will, if they hadn't hated me so much as to get rid of me, send me to Egypt.

And I'll tell you this, if you love the Lord, one day you will look back over your life and thank God even for what your enemies did. Because they only fulfilled God's purpose for your life. It has to be like that.

But you've got to trust Him. So love your enemies. Love God and love your enemies.

They are doing good for you. So that's what we see here. Now the second area where we see that Joseph was tested.

His testing period at home was over. All of us live in our parents' home only for a short while. It's only for a short while that you have the opportunity, young people, to be tested there.

Soon you will leave your home and that phase is over. And I hope you would have passed the test before you leave. Joseph did.

And then he went to this Egypt where he was kept as a slave in the house of the Egyptian general, captain of the bodyguard of Pharaoh. And that was his place of work. Young man, far away from home, in a different culture, different language, nobody whom he knows.

Imagine going to work in an office where you don't know anybody. Everybody is a different culture. They speak a different language.

And you are just a slave. You are just the lowest person in that office. And you are a child of God.

You can take an example from Joseph. There he was, faithful. Faithful in the little things.

I don't know what bodyguard told him to do. It must have been to sweep the floor or clean the cow shed. It must have been lowly jobs.

It must have been the lowest jobs because that's what slaves were told to do. And he was so faithful. It says here in verse 2, the Lord was with Joseph when he was cleaning the cow shed, when he was sweeping the floor, when he was removing the manure and everything.

The Lord was with him. And to such an extent that his master Potiphar, it says in verse 3, saw, hey, there's something different about this man. It's wonderful when a Christian works in a factory or an office or a school or a hospital or anywhere and people can notice there's something different about this person.

Something special. And it says here that the Lord caused everything, everything that he did, Genesis 39.3, to prosper in Joseph's hand. In other words, whatever Joseph put his hand to was always successful.

There was a blessing there. Now I want to say to you, God wants to bless the work of our hands. See, this is not a verse found in Psalm 1 where it says, Blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the ungodly or sit in the seat of the scornful or walk in the way of sinners, but he meditates on the law of the Lord day and night.

And it goes on to say, whatever he does will prosper. That's the first Psalm. But it doesn't come in Psalm 1 first of all.

It comes here. In the case of Genesis, whatever he did prospered. And he didn't have a Bible to meditate on day and night.

He didn't have any fellowship. He was far away from home. He was in a strange country, in a difficult situation.

He was a slave. He was doing the lowly jobs and whatever he did, others saw the blessing of God upon him. He was living in the slave's shed, in the poor man's quarters, but they saw God was with him.

I tell you, it's a tremendous challenge to us. You know, so many of us complain about our circumstances, in our home or in our place of work. But here was someone who didn't have, whose conditions were much worse than any of us.

But I believe that he had some type of faith that the God his father Jacob had told him about. His father must have told him about Abraham and Isaac and how God had met with him. And this little boy had a little faith that this God, the God of his father and grandfather and great-grandfather would take care of him and he trusted him.

And God took care of him and blessed him in his place of work. Take that as a challenge. Wherever you work, believe that God wants to bless the work of your hands.

Don't believe the devil's lie that there's got to be confusion and chaos. No. Trust God.

Say, Lord, I believe that you've blessed Joseph, you're going to bless me. I'm your child just as much as he was. And it says here, the Lord's blessing was upon the entire family of Potiphar, verse 5, on his house and the field because Joseph was there.

It's an amazing thing. That's how our testimony should be. I remember, you know, we in Acts of the Apostles, we read that when the Apostle Paul was on a ship, there were many ships that were shipwrecked in the Mediterranean in those days.

But there was one ship where all the 270 odd people, not one of them were lost because there was one man of God on that ship. It makes a difference when a man of God is in a ship or a boat or a car or in an office. That's what we see here.

And his master finally recognized, this is most unusual, that he gradually promoted Joseph to the place where everything was under Joseph's charge. Now, I've heard stories like that myself of people who've been faithful, who've gone through difficult circumstances, been faithful and the blessing of God's been upon them. They've gone up and up and up and up.

And I want to say that is God's will for us. It is God's will for us that the people around us will recognize that Jesus Christ is alive, that his blessing is upon us and upon our labors. And something else, in the place of work again.

In his place of work, we read here, there was this woman. And that's so true today too. Women in our place of work who want to tempt us.

The Bible is so relevant, I tell you. And here we read that his master's wife, verse 7, looked with desire at Joseph. You find that in the place of work? Somebody else's wife looking with desire at you? That's where you're being tested.

God's got a plan for your life. A wonderful plan. Nobody can mess it up except you.

Yourself. All your brothers who try to do evil to you cannot mess it up. They can only fulfill it.

But you can mess it up when somebody else's wife looks with desire at you. And what's your response going to be then? And it says here, Joseph, she straight away came and said, lie with me. And he said, no.

And it says here, day after day, he kept on saying, no, no, no. And it says in verse 10, he not only did not listen to her, he would not be anywhere near her. Now, what Bible did he have to tell him, like it says in 1 Corinthians, flee from immorality.

It was in his conscience. You know what he told her? He said, how can I, verse 9, commit this great sin against God? I know nobody's looking, Mrs. Potiphar, but God is. Boy, good thing he passed that test.

I don't know what the story would have been if he had failed there. Remember these examples when you're tempted next time. You can mess up God's plan, God's wonderful plan.

It may take 10 years for that plan to be fulfilled. It was still another 10 years, at least for Joseph, for God's plan to be fulfilled. But he could have messed it up here by just being a little careless.

In a moment of carelessness, he could have messed up God's plan for his life. Now, I'm not saying that if he has slipped up and fallen once, that our entire plan is messed up. One of the wonderful things about the New Testament is that God could pick up people whose lives were absolutely messed up and fulfill something glorious through it.

So, that is true. But still, I want to encourage you to be faithful because there are tremendous rewards for faithfulness. We're not to be discouraged if we have failed in the past because if we have failed in this area, don't let the devil condemn you and say, well, you slipped up.

Sorry, God's purpose for you cannot be fulfilled. That's not true. The Bible says that in the New Testament, because Christ has come and shed his blood, when we confess our sin to Christ, even in this sexual area, he not only cleanses us.

I mean, that itself would be great if the Lord turns around and says, okay, I've forgiven you completely for what you did. That itself would be a great relief that that guilt has gone. But something even more wonderful in the New Testament is Hebrews 8 verse 12 says, I will not remember your sin anymore.

I mean, imagine a person, imagine a young man today who has not been faithful like Joseph and perhaps has failed repeatedly in this area. And he really repents and comes to the Lord. And the Lord says, I cleanse you.

Your sin is forgiven. Your guilt is taken away. And not only that, I will not remember your sin anymore.

You know what that means? It's like God saying to you, believe it or not, I'm going to look at you just like Joseph who didn't fall. Can you believe that? It's almost too good to be true, but it is true. That's what the New Testament gospel is.

That is the meaning of this wonderful word found in the New Testament that we are justified by his blood. It's a wonderful word. It's more than being forgiven.

Forgiveness itself is great. But Romans 5 and 9 says we're not only cleansed in his blood, but justified by his blood. That means a person who has fallen in an area many times, God can so cleanse him in the

blood of Christ that God can look upon him just like one who didn't fall.

And so that he's never discouraged, he can press on to the future and still fulfill God's purpose for him. Now, I want to go to the third area where he was tested. And that's when, you know, this evil woman, when she saw that she didn't succeed with Joseph, she told a lie about him, said that he tried to rape me and I grabbed his coat and he ran.

And the master believed it. Her husband believed it and without any investigation, locked up Joseph in jail. See, this is all part of God's plan.

Don't forget that. You know, have you had that experience where somebody has accused you falsely of something you never did? And it looks as if everybody's ganged up against you in some situation and punished you. And you've got a punishment.

It could be jail, it could be anything. Well, Joseph went through that and that was also part of God's training. God could not fulfill his purpose through Joseph until he had trained him in a difficult place.

I mean, being a slave was difficult but this was a higher class. He got promoted to a higher trial. He was going to be in jail now and he was going to come out a strong man at the end of this.

I want to tell you, dear brothers and sisters, that God wants to make you strong and that's why he increases the level of the trials from one to the other. False accusation and then when he's locked up in jail, it says here, verse 21, it's wonderful. The blessing of the Lord moved away from Potiphar's house to the jail because Joseph was now here.

Poor Potiphar, he's lost his blessing and he's wondering why his business went down. It's because Joseph had left his business. And imagine being a blessing in a jail.

And remember, the prisons in those days were not like prisons today. They were just dungeons with rats and cockroaches and all types of things crawling around and all the worst criminals in society over there. Imagine for it to be said here that the Lord was with Joseph there in the jail.

And the jailer could recognize that, hey, God is with this man. And there, verse 23, we come across the same expression again in Genesis 39, 23. In the jail, whatever Joseph did, the Lord made it to prosper.

You know, something we learned from there, your circumstances don't matter. If the Lord is with you, whether you're in a jail or in a general's house, you'll prosper. If the Lord is not with you, even in the most favorable circumstances, you won't prosper.

So Joseph had that faith. If God is with me, that's all that matters. And that's the place where he wants us to come to as well.

It doesn't matter where we are. I'm going to be a blessing wherever I am. You remember when we were studying about Abraham, we saw the Lord said, I'm going to bless you in such a way that wherever you go, you're going to be a blessing.

And I want to say to each one of you, in Jesus' name, that is God's will for you. Wherever you go, every place you go, every home you visit, every place you work in, you may not reach the top of the office, that's not important, but you'll be a blessing. I mean, you will come there and bring the blessing of the Lord into that place.

And here is one example of it. We read here in chapter 40 that Pharaoh, you see how God, you got to see, it's wonderful how God plans his plans for Joseph, works it all out. It's something like a chessboard where finally you've defeated the enemy and captured his king.

It's something like that where he plans and it looks as if things are going badly for Joseph, but no, God's got everything planned because when he goes to the jail, God's got it planned that he's going to meet Pharaoh's cupbearer or butler over there and get an introduction to Pharaoh, which he wouldn't get if he didn't go to jail. So we've got to get somebody to put Joseph in jail. Okay, let's get Potiphar's wife to put him into jail so that he can get an introduction to Pharaoh's butler.

It's all God's plan. There's a song which says, one of the hymns which says, I'll bless the heart that guided and I'll bless the heart that planned. One day when I'm in Emmanuel's land and I look back and I see how God planned everything in my life, I'll really praise him.

The man of faith praises the Lord now. Lord, I can't see the end, but I know it's all working out wonderfully. You've got some plan even though it doesn't look very good right now.

The scripture is written to encourage us in such situations. And so we see Pharaoh's butler or cupbearer and baker were jailed by Pharaoh because he was angry with them. Now I want you to notice something very, very important here.

There were a number of people in the jail and Joseph had enough sorrows of his own to not bother about anybody else. He could have sat in a corner moping and saying, Oh God, I've been so faithful to you and you've treated me so badly. And I don't have any relatives here.

Nobody to come and visit me in this prison. And here I am. So he could have just sat there complaining.

He had enough problems of his own, but he didn't do that. He walked around the prison and he sees two other people, new prisoners, looking a bit discouraged. And he goes up to them, this young man who's got enough problems of his own, goes up to these men and says, Hey, why are you fellas discouraged? That was what gave him an opening, which finally brought him to Pharaoh.

There's something you've got to see here. When we forget our own sorrows and begin to look with concern and compassion at other people who are discouraged and go up to encourage them. That is the channel through which one day God will fulfill his purpose for us.

So when he went and said to these folks, why are you so sad today? And they said, we had a dream and we don't understand it. And Joseph said, okay, I'll explain that to you. He was in touch with God.

He wasn't complaining there. A man who's complaining can never hear what God is saying. I'll tell you that.

Many times we don't hear what God is saying because we're complaining about something or the other. And we're not in touch with God. Thank God Joseph was not like that.

And when he saw these people discouraged, he went up to them and spoke to them, explained their dream. And that's how he finally got an introduction to Pharaoh. To me, it's amazing and wonderful to see how God in his sovereignty works all these things together.

And these things are written for us, for our instruction to encourage us that the same God who lived in Joseph's time is just the same today. He's willing to do the same for you. If you trust him, the important thing is faith.

And finally, just like Joseph predicted, Pharaoh's cup bearer was released and went back into Pharaoh's presence three days later. And Joseph had told him one thing. When you get there, please tell Pharaoh about how I've been unjustly treated.

Please tell him to release me and send me back to my home. And we read these sad words. The cup bearer completely forgot.

What do you do when you've done something good for someone? And you ask him for a little bit of help and he completely forgets. Can you thank God? Oh Lord, thank you. He forgot to help me.

He forgot to. He said he would do something, but he never did it. Oh Lord, there must be some very good reason why it didn't happen.

That's faith. Because I'll tell you why. Joseph at that time was 28 years old.

And God's plan for Joseph was, when he becomes 30, something's got to happen. If Pharaoh had released him at the age of 28, supposing the cup bearer had not forgotten, and had told Pharaoh, hey, my Lord King, there's a man there who is being unjustly treated and he helped me a lot. Could you release him? Pharaoh would have released him.

What would have happened to Joseph? He would have gone back to Canaan. Completely messing up God's plan for his life. And living at God's second best.

But God said, no, no, no. He's got to become the ruler of Egypt at the age of 30. Two more years to go.

So let's remove some of the cup bearer's memory, so he doesn't remember what he's supposed to do. Believe that. Believe that when somebody forgot to do something they promised to do for you, God has a plan in that also.

And thank the Lord for it. These things are written for our encouragement. And two years later, chapter 41, verse 1. Two years later, now Joseph was 30.

Time for God's plan to be fulfilled. So God gives a little dream to Pharaoh, which nobody can explain. Then suddenly the cup bearer remembers, oh yes, now I remember.

There was this man who could, you see how God's timing, God's timing is perfect. He is never behind schedule. He's on time in every single thing he does.

If you can believe that, you'll never have a complaint in your life. You'll be able to do what the choir just sang just now, rejoice in the Lord always. You really will be able to, because you believe that everything is just fitting into God's plan.

Now, I want to show you a verse, which I don't know whether you've noticed, in Psalm 105. Which says, concerning Joseph's time in prison. It says in Psalm 105, Joseph was, verse 18 to 20.

Psalm 105, verse 18 to 20. They afflicted Joseph's feet with fetters, laid him in irons. Until the time that God's word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him.

You know what is happening in the prison? The word of the Lord was testing him. What's his reaction going to be? Is he going to mope, and complain, and grumble, and frustrate my purposes? Or is he going to trust me? Everything we go through is a test of our faith. Do you believe that you've got a father in heaven who cares for you? Job said in Job 23, verse 10 in the Living Bible, it says, He knows every detail of what is happening to me.

In the New Testament, we go one step further and say, He plans every detail of what is happening to me. Not just knows, but he plans it. That's faith.

And the word of the Lord is testing you and me today. And one translation puts it like this, very beautiful. They afflicted Joseph in the jail, Psalm 105, verse 18, Until iron entered into his soul.

That's really great. God has to wait till iron enters our soul. And we become strong.

That's the purpose of testing. And you know the rest of the story, how he got released. God never allows us to be tested beyond our ability.

And he finally came to the fourth place. And interestingly enough, this is the most dangerous place where we are tested. When everything goes well, and we become prosperous.

That's the time when most people fail. Now Joseph was coming to a place of prosperity. He was the second ruler in Egypt, just next to Pharaoh.

And remember there was only one superpower in the world those days, that was Egypt. They ruled the whole world, there was nobody to compete with them. And here was the second man in the whole world, Joseph.

A man with such tremendous power and at the age of 30. Administering a kingdom. Feeding in the next seven years, the whole world.

Advising Pharaoh, how to store the grain and how to distribute it to the people. And it's at that stage that his brothers come. Because they want food.

And he recognizes them. They don't recognize him. And there we see another test.

How is he going to treat these people who once wanted to kill him? And you see the graciousness and the goodness with which he treats them. And he tells them in the last chapter of Genesis. Chapter 50 and verse 20.

Wonderful words. I always say this is the Romans 8.28 of the Old Testament. Romans 8.28 is a New Testament verse which says.

All things work together for good to those who love God. Who are called according to his purpose. But Joseph said something very similar to that.

Way back before Christ. Genesis 50.20. You meant it for evil against me. But God meant it for good.

You know if you can look at every person. You can think of who has harmed you in some way. Or tried to harm you.

And say well. You meant it for evil. But my God is more powerful than you.

He turned it around for good. It really will be fulfilled. It really is true.

And he was gracious to them. He provided their need. And I want to say one last thing before I close.

And that is. There is something wonderful you see about Joseph. Genesis 48.

His old father. Remember. Joseph is the most powerful man in the world almost.

And his old father. Was blind. Was there.

And it says here. He brought his children. To his old father Jacob.

And he wanted his father's blessing. On his children. And it says here.

In Genesis 48. Verse 12. Joseph.

The ruler of the world. Bowed down to the ground. Before his father.

He never lost. That respect for his father. I'm not surprised.

That God blessed a man like that. We come to the. Same conclusion.

Honor your father and mother. It will go well with you. Remain in humility.

Humility and faith. Go together. And let's be encouraged from the story of Joseph.

God has a plan for your life too. A wonderful plan. And it will be fulfilled.

If you will trust him. And say Lord. I will never again complain.

In any situation. I'm going to trust you. That you've got a wonderful plan.

You're training me. You're putting iron into my soul. And a time will come.

You will never allow me to be tested beyond my ability. And you'll bring me to the place. Which you planned right from the beginning.

While our heads are bowed in prayer. I want you to respond to the word. That God spoke to you today.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/19/SID19050.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/winning-gods-approval-part-4/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net