

“God is With Me” (Joseph) // Genesis 50:15–21 // *The Whole Story*, #8

GENESIS 50: I want to begin our message today with a question: *How would your outlook on life change if you believed God was really with you—in every situation?*¹

- In that **divorce** you went through.
- In that **bad grade** you received.
- In the fact that you got passed over for a **promotion** you felt like you deserved.
- In that **disability** you were born with.
- In some of the **prejudices** you’ve experienced
- In the fact that you had to **move to Raleigh**, even though you didn’t really want to.

How would your outlook change if you knew, “*God is in this*. He **has a plan**. Even though it **feels out of control** and it’s **painful, he’s** in it.”

- *You say, “I’m not sure if I believe that about everything.* Just suppose for a minute that you did... **how would** outlook on life and attitude change if you did believe it?

I say that because a **Bible teacher named Andy Stanley** says that that is the question presented to us by the **life of Joseph**. (Genesis 50, if you have your Bible.)

- Sometimes bad things happen to good people and sometimes really good things happen to bad people and you can’t figure it out...
- That’s what you’re going to see happen to Joseph.

¹ I owe this question to Andy Stanley from his messages on Joseph, “I Don’t Deserve This,” and “Right Where You Want ‘Em” at Northpoint Church in Atlanta.

But **in Joseph’s life you’re also going to see** what it looks like if you believe God is with you in it all.

Toward the beginning of the book of Genesis, God had given the promise to Abraham that he would bless him and his posterity, be his God, never leave him, and watch over him in everything.

The writer of Genesis, Moses, is going to **illustrate for us what that looks like** in the life of Joseph.

Genesis, I believe, is the most important book in the Bible, and the character that **gets more space** in Genesis than any one else is Joseph! Over ¼ of the book is devoted to him.

Here’s the story... (I’m going to bring you up to Genesis 50)

Abraham family tree (...Jacob had Joseph (through Rachel)/11 other dudes)

- **Joseph was his daddy’s favorite**. (That’s ironic of course, because of all people Jacob should have known the psychological damage that a dad playing favorites can cause, **since Jacob himself was the victim** of that with his dad, Isaac.
 - *By the way, have you noticed how messed up these families are? There is hope for your family.*
- But, at any rate, when **Jacob was talking about Joseph**, Jacob’s face lit up and his eyes sparkled. *Joseph* always got the extra piece of chicken at dinner; he always got to have friends over.

To make matters worse, he gave to Joseph of a “coat of many colors.”

- Technically, it was a **“coat of long sleeves.”** It was a long, ornate robe that showed status, worn to show that you didn’t do **manual labor**
 - (long **pinky nail** in Indonesia).
- Typically the older brother got to **wear it...** but Jacob gave it to Joseph, who was one of the youngest brothers.

- The rest of the kids got their clothes off the **clearance rack at the Dollar General**, but Joseph sported a new trench-coat from Saks Fifth Avenue.

And then Joseph started having dreams.

- In one of them, he and all his brothers and mom and dad were out in the field **sheaving wheat**, when Joseph's sheaf of wheat suddenly grew a lot bigger than everybody else's sheaf, and all his brother's sheaves, and even his mom and dad's, began to bow down to his sheaf.
- So Joseph **shares this dream with his family one night** over dinner, and says, "Well, I think the interpretation is obvious: *One day all of you will bow down to me. I'll do the commanding and you'll do the submitting.*"
- This, of course, went over like a **barbecue at a Bar-Mitzvah** with his brothers.
- (You know, in almost every way in this story Joseph is a **role model**, but I would not advise you to imitate him here. **If you have a dream** where all your friends and your family bow down to you, **keep that junk** to yourself.)

Well, one day **all of Jacob's brothers were out in the mountains** feeding the goats (And, of course, **Joseph** didn't have to go; he got to stay home and play with this new Pharaoh play-station or whatever.)

- So his dad says to him, "**Joseph, hop on that new ATV** I bought for you and go check on your brothers." And **when Joseph finds his brothers**, they're all grimy and stinky from working with the sheep and here comes **Justin Bieber** with his wavy hair and his coat of many colors and he says, "**Hey, brothers. Older brothers. How is everybody? You guys still talking about my dream? I had another one! In this one, I'm the big gerbil and you guys are the little runt gerbils...**"

- Well, one of **his brothers**,² says, "You know, I've had about enough of you." And he grabs him and throws him into a pit and starts **planning out how** they can kill him.

To make a **long story short**, instead of killing him they **decide to sell him into slavery** and then they **take his coat**, tear it and dip it in goat's blood and take it to their dad and said, "Dad, we found this coat on the road. We guess **Joseph is dead.**"

Meanwhile, **Joseph shows up on the slave market** in Egypt and an Egyptian named **Potiphar buys him** as his slave. Potiphar happens to be the captain of Egypt's armies.

And then **we see this phrase for the 1st time**: **Gen 39:2: "The Lord was with Joseph..."**

- "Really, God? **How is that?** Sounds like if anything you were with them, not me. Where were you when my brothers were selling me into slavery?"

But Joseph understood that **even in those things, God was with him**, and so he served Potiphar faithfully. **And Potiphar saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands...and so he made him overseer in his house and put him in charge of all that he had." (39:5)**

This is a **crucial turning point** in the life of Joseph. What if Joseph had said, "God has forsaken me," and gone into depression, or maybe said, "There can't be a God if he let that just happen?" The **story would have stopped** right there.

- But Joseph doesn't believe that. He said, "Even in this I believe God is with me," and so he **serves God faithfully in the place God had put him.**

² Judah

Potiphar saw that God was with him and elevated Joseph to be in charge of everything in his house.

ENTER Potiphar's wife. Potiphar's wife decides that Joseph a lean, mean hunk of Hebrew kabob. (The writer of Genesis, by the way, says that Joseph was **handsome in both "form" and "appearance,"** the same way it describes Rachel: great face and body).

So one day when Potiphar was out doing military stuff, Mrs. Potiphar comes in with her tight jeans and her clear heels on, doing her "walk like an Egyptian" routine and **propositions** Joseph. She's **pretty direct**. The only thing she says in the story is, "Lie with me." **(39:7)** which has to be the **most blunt come-on line** ever. Literally, in Hebrew, she says, "**Sex, now!**" Over and over again.

Well, Joseph won't do it, because a) it is **against the laws of God** and b) it would be a **betrayal of his master who was trusted him so much**.

- **Maybe it was easy to say no.** (We always **assume she was good looking**, but nothing says that. Maybe she looked like Jabba the Hut. We **don't know**.)
- But **hell hath no fury like a woman scorned**, so she steals Joseph's coat and says to Potiphar, "he left this behind when he was trying to rape me."

So Potiphar throws Joseph in prison. And there we see the phrase again. **Gen 39:21**, "But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love." At this point Joseph is like, "Really, God? Could you be 'with me' a little less? Steadfast love? Doesn't feel too steadfast."

Gen 39:22, "And God gave him favor with the keeper of the prison. And the keeper put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners."**23** The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.

How would your outlook and attitude in life be different if you believed that God was with you?

- **Joseph is in prison, but his spirit soars free in all situations** because he believes God is with him...

Well, after several years in prison, **a couple of PHARAOH'S COURT SERVANTS** get thrown in: a **butler and a baker**. Both of them have had a dream, and they **tell their dreams to Joseph**, and Joseph says to the BUTLER: **Yours means that within 3 days you'll be out of here.**

- To the BAKER he says, "And yours means that within the week Pharaoh will hang you and the birds pick away at your flesh and will eat your eyes of their sockets."

Sure enough, it all takes place, and **Joseph says to the butler**, "Hey, **when you get out of here**, remember me, because I'm here unjustly." And the **butler says**, "**I promise**" and promptly forgets about him as soon as he is out. **For more than 2 years.**

Can you imagine Jacob at this point? God, **really?** I'm not asking for much. Just a little justice.

But then, 2 years later, **Pharaoh has his own dream**. And it's a **weird one**: 7 fat cows come out of the Nile river followed by 7 skinny cows, and the 7 skinny cows eat the 7 fat cows, and then they turn to Pharaoh and say, "EAT MORE CHICKEN." No. No one can figure out what it means, and then the butler is like, "Oh yeah! I know this guy in prison who interprets dreams."

So they go get Joseph and Pharaoh says, "**Can you interpret dreams?**" And Joseph says, "No, **no man can** interpret dreams, but I **know the God in heaven** who can."

- And **everyone in the room** was like, "**Oh NO HE DIDN'T!**" (Pharaohs **believed themselves to be God**; and you don't tell the most powerful man in the world who thinks he's God that he's not God and you know the real one and he isn't him.)

What kind of confidence would you live with in life if you really believed God was with you?

Well, Joseph goes away and talks to God and comes back and says, “God says that the dream means that he will send 7 years of feast (fat cows) followed by 7 years of famine. Use the 7 years of feast to get prepared.”

And so they do that. Pharaoh is so grateful that he promotes Joseph to be the prime minister of Egypt so that he can get Egypt prepared. Joseph is over literally everyone in the kingdom except Pharaoh, which included Potiphar, which had to be a fun reunion...

Now... fast forward about 10 years. The predicted famine has come and things have gotten really bad, and the whole region is starving; the only place that has food is Egypt, because of Joseph’s warning.

Joseph’s family—his dad and brothers—are affected also. So Jacob sends his sons, Joe’s brothers, down to Egypt to buy food. Joseph immediately recognizes them, but I guess they don’t recognize him because of the whole make-up, cobra-head headdress deal he wears.

When he sees them, he’s so overcome with emotion that he can barely control himself.

Eventually, after putting them through all these tests to see if they’ve changed, he can’t stand it anymore strips off his headdress and says to his brothers, “It’s me, Joseph!”

NOW: What kind of moment was this for them? Do you think they were “GLAD,” or “SAD”?

But Joseph said, **45:5 Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here... 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God.**

How would your outlook on life change—your attitude toward others—change if you believed that in everything God was “with you?”

So his brothers return and get their father, Jacob, and bring him to Joseph and, after all these years, they are reunited.

Well, years later, Jacob dies, and that brings us back to this last scene in Genesis 50:

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.”

19 But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?
20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. **21** So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.”
Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

A couple of ways you can interpret Joseph’s life...

First, and most importantly, as a picture of Jesus.

- Did you hear the *echoes of Jesus’ story* all through this? (I want to teach you to read the Bible this way, so you do this instinctively)
- One day, many years into the future, another Savior would come and walk the same path Joseph walked. He would be betrayed by his brothers; and then lied about and falsely condemned. Of course, unlike Joseph, Jesus wasn’t just sold into slavery; he was put to death; but like Joseph, he would be raised from that pit to sit onto the highest throne of the land, and like Joseph, instead of exacting vengeance from that throne, he would use his exalted position to forgive and save his brothers. And, like Joseph, he would weep tears of joy when we were reconciled to him.

Jesus is the whole point of this story, as he is every story in the Bible. The main point of the Joseph story is not to amaze you with Joseph's incredible faith; nor is to try and say that regardless of what bad things have happened to you, as long as you avoid the aggressive cougars in your life you'll be President of the USA_one day.

The **whole point** is to make you to show you that in all things God is fully in control of history, working out his perfect plan to put Jesus on the throne, and save and glorify the church through his resurrection.

So the main point is that God will put Jesus on the throne.

But, in light of that, the other way to interpret Joseph's life is as a picture of what it looks like to live with the assurance that God is with you.

You're not going to be the one God puts on the throne; Jesus is. But **just like God was in complete control** of Joseph's life, working it all for his good plan, so he is control of your life, because you are sons and daughters of Abraham, too, working **all things for his good purposes** in your life just like he was in Joseph's.

So I ask you again, "How would your outlook on life change if you really believed that in all things, God was with you and had been with you?"

Because that is what Joseph believed!

Genesis 50:19–20

"You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."

God had a purpose in everything, Joseph said, even the bad things, overriding what others meant for evil for his good purposes:

- The **slavery led to Potiphar's house** which led to the **false accusation** which led to the **prison** which led to the **forgetting** which led to **Pharaoh** which led to a **throne** from which Joseph could save God's people!
- God was as much in the pit & the prison, as he was in the palace

*Now, a couple of things: FIRST, believing this **doesn't reduce the sin of others**. Notice that Joseph didn't downplay what his brothers did. He called what they did "**evil**."*

- Sometimes **as a means of coping we try to downplay** the bad things people have done: "Well, they were **just confused**." "They were doing **what they thought was right**." "**All families** have struggles." "**This marriage just wasn't** meant to be." "A lot of **people's parents** get divorced."
- Joseph, of course, couldn't do that: "Well, you know, **sibling rivalry** is normal. **Being sold into slavery**, covered up by the lie that I had been eaten by animals—that happens all the time. No biggie."

Part of experiencing God's healing for our past involves facing up to the fact that people have sinned against you.³

It's just that that is not where the discussion stops. **God overwrites** the evil things they do for good.

Second, knowing that God has a good plan in everything doesn't mean you can always see it.

Sometimes you can...

- Here in **Joseph's life we can...** Each stage of the journey was a **necessary part** of the end. But in the **middle of it all**, Joseph couldn't see that. It wasn't until the **very end** that he could see it!
 - Recently read **7 Women: Corrie Ten Boom: Thank God for the fleas**.

³ Josh Harris, "God Meant It For Good," Genesis 50:18–20

- **Dutch Christian** put into a concentration camp by the Germans in WW2 for helping Jews escape. Many sufferings and humiliations. One of the worst was the fleas that came because they made them live in filth. Her sister Betsie said, “You should thank God even for the fleas on our clothes.” Corrie said, “There’s no way God can make me grateful for a *flea*.” Until a few days later, when they met in secret to have a worship service. If they had been discovered, they would have been beaten. But the guards never walked in the room. They only walked past and peered in. And suddenly it dawned on Corrie Ten Boom **why**. The guards didn’t want to go in the barracks because of the fleas! Even in the fleas, God was at work!
- **Can you thank God for the fleas in your life?** (Who is a flea?)

- Sometimes you **die, of course, without seeing it**:
 - It’s more like a **tapestry**
- Sometimes the **growth is in you**.
 - I’ve told you about **Japanese pottery**... Some parts of Jesus you can know only through pain
- Sometimes your pain enables you to **minister** to others in pain:
 - **Paul said, “Because I was afflicted, I was able to comfort others with the comfort I experienced from Jesus.”**
 - **Because you went through the cancer, the miscarriage**... you can say, “I’ve been there. I’ve tasted Jesus in that wilderness. I’ve been in that valley and found him to be the still water there.”
- **Romans 8:28**, And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (AND WHAT IS THAT PURPOSE?) [29] For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...

Sometimes what you are going through **makes NO sense**, though, and you just have to trust.

The **story of Joseph doesn’t mean that God will work it all out** satisfactorily to your understanding in your lifetime, but that God will work it out **in the grand scheme of history**: One day **God is going to put Jesus on the throne**, and you can know as **surely as he has resurrected that** he’s going to work all things out for his purposes.

You say, **“But I want resolution in my lifetime.”**

- I understand. **Me too**.
- **Ten seconds into eternity**, however, that’s not going to matter.
- **2 Cor 4:17** “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison...”
 - Light and momentary? Do you know anything about Paul’s life? His suffering was not JV. He’s not talking about slow Internet speed, or having Time Warner Cable.
 - Beaten; stoned 3x; forsaken by friends; lied about; betrayed. But it’s light and momentary *compared*...
 - **Think about this scene in Genesis 50**: Does Joseph seem to remember with disgust all the bitterness of the pain? No. It’s all washed away in joy.
 - In eternity, neither will we remember. **“When we’ve been there 10,000 years**, bright shining as the sun, (it doesn’t say) we’ve no less days, to complain our case, than when we first begun...”

Joseph’s life shows you that there is not **one wasted event**; not one **wasted second**; one **spurious molecule** in all the universe.

God was as much in the pit & the prison, as he was in the palace... **and what’s more**—the pit and prison were the **means to** the palace

Joseph’s life does show you, however (and this is very sobering) – the **path to God’s salvation in the world involves suffering**...

- *God didn't save the nation of Israel despite Joseph's suffering, but because of it. Through it.*
- Paul said, "I fill up in my body what is lacking..." What is lacking in the wounds of Christ...? What could be lacking there?
 - The way people will hear about Jesus' wounds will often be through our wounds.
- **We have this idea that the abundant life is about slowing moving toward comfort and ease** and luxury, away from suffering and stress and worry, and occasional sacrifices we are asked to bear.

Not true. Doesn't matter who says that or how nice their smile is. Jesus said, "If you are going to **come after me you** have to up your cross!" It is through our suffering that God brings life to the world.⁴

Jesus saved us **not despite** his wounds, but through his wounds. **How God uses us** in the blessing and salvation of others will be the same.

- ***God calls us not to a platform, but an altar.***

So I ask you again: How would your life change if you believed that in everything God was with you? That he had been with you?

- For Joseph it meant that he just served God; he didn't get bitter; he didn't despair...
- Wherever he was, he applied himself and said, "What does it look to serve God *here?*"

And here's what's more: He learned to give grace! ***"Do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones"***

- Because he knew that God had a *good* plan; a plan that involved salvation—not only of Joseph's brothers but of Joseph, too! He was able to extend grace.

⁴ **Ed McCulley, son of missionary to Auca Indians** whose dad died in the attack (summary) "Knowing the information that we know now... It seems there is no way my dad could have died apart from divine intervention." God ordained it.

Joseph's **ability to forgive here is amazing, isn't it?** It's not a feeling that he has from being superhuman. It is a choice that **grounded in the knowledge that a) God has been in control of all things in his life, and b) God has been showing great grace toward him.**

- You've heard of the **golden rule** "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Jesus gave the **platinum rule**, "Do unto others *as I have done to you.*"

Some of you have people in your life that you can't forgive. Let me tell you **WHY:** You **feel like they damaged** you; they **took something away** from you that you can't back and **you hate them** for it!

But what if you believed that behind all those bad things there was a good God taking care of you and working all things for good?

Me in my quiet time recently, read **PSALM 91:**

"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

³Surely he will save you from... the deadly pestilence. ⁴He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge;

⁵You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, ⁶nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

⁷A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

⁹If you say, "The LORD is my refuge"... ¹⁰no harm will overtake you. ¹¹For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; ¹²they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

I read that and I thought, "But I have **often banged my foot** against stones." Where was my **angel?** (Where was my **Nic Cage?**) People's

sharp arrows of criticism or lies have often penetrated me deeply. Maybe you've gone through the **storm of a bad relationship**, or the pestilence of bad health, or bad finances. You **don't feel like you've been shielded** from these things.

Ever feel that way? So is this **Psalm not true?** Is it just **sentimental** poetry? Was it **not true for Joseph?**

MUSIC

The only way it could be true is **if God was somehow in all these bad things** using them for good; **ultimately the arrow wasn't doing damage**; God **shielded me** and **turned those arrows of hate** as they were flying through the air into his **surgical instruments of good** in my life, just like with Joseph.

I may have gone through the storm, but God transformed the storms into rivers of blessing in my life!

Here's **the end of the Psalm**: "I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. ¹⁶With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation." (vv. 15–16)

- I know that **even in trouble God is with me**, overriding the pain for good and using it as a part of his salvation plan.

The Bishop of Rwanda

- A few years ago I read a book called *The Bishop of Rwanda*. Pastor named John Rucyhana who went through the genocides in Rwanda... are one thing, but how to get over the horrible bitterness and hatred people feel for what happened to their families is an even more difficult task.
- TWO lies "from the pit" about forgiveness keep us...
 - **Lie #1: You must wait until the person shows they've repented.** This is not something between you and them, but something you and Jesus.

- **Lie #2: Forgiveness is a feeling; you can't really do it until you feel it.** Forgiveness is not a feeling. A choice based on what you believe about God and your statement about his control over all things.

- **Corrie Ten Boom, again.** She talked about some of painful, humiliation she endured in the concentration camp. One German guard was especially loathsome and she remembered clearly his face... Well, **several years after the war**, she was speaking at a church service—about forgiveness—when afterwards an old man stepped forward. She recognized him. It was that one, cruel guard. He told her he had become a Christian since the end of the war. **"Will you forgive me?" he asked.**
- She said, *"I had to take the man's hand. I knew that... I told myself, 'I can lift my hand. (an act of obedience) I can do that much. Jesus, you supply the feeling.' And as I [reached out my hand], an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. 'I forgive you, brother!' I cried. 'With all my heart.' For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then."*⁵

BOW HEADS...

- What would **change about your life**, today, if you really believed that God was with you? How would your attitude change toward what has happened in your past?
- **Whom would you forgive?** You are only hurting yourself.

⁵ C. S. Lewis said, "When you are behaving as if you love someone, you will presently come to love him." C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 116. *Forgiveness is a conscious choice; it is the absorption of the blow so that a relationship can be pursued.* Ken Sande, *Peacemaking for Families*, 85.

- **Are you working now in the situation you are in** as if it is an assignment from God?
- **Can you rejoice even in the broken places** in your life, knowing they are there for purpose? (For you to know him better, demonstrate his strength more, and out of which you could minister to others?)
- **Can you kiss the wounds** which have made you weep, knowing they came from the Savior who died for you, sits on the throne and promises that just like he was resurrected from the dead he promises to work all things for good in your life?