

WHY?

SERIES DEVOTIONAL

"GOD'S GREATER PURPOSE" | SUNDAY, MAY 24, 2020

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

KEY THOUGHT

#1

God did not create evil, but God can control evil and use it for His good purposes.

We've already learned in our *Why?* series that God is not the author of evil (Deuteronomy 32:4; James 1:13). Evil is the result of our choices to go against God. However, God can use evil to attain a good objective. If God could not control evil, He would not be God. His sovereignty demands that He be in control of everything, even evil actions committed by others against us. We see this demonstrated in the life of Joseph of the Old Testament.

God had given Joseph a gift to interpret dreams. But his jealous brothers sold him into slavery, and afterward an Egyptian named Potiphar, the head of Pharaoh's security, bought Joseph and brought him into his beautiful home and put him in charge. Joseph managed Potiphar's household expertly. But Potiphar's lustful wife set her sights on young Joseph. He resisted her constant advances, but one day when they were alone in the house, she tried to seduce Joseph, grabbing him by the coat. Joseph ran out as fast as he could, but she falsely accused him of rape. So, Joseph was sent to prison.

About eleven years passed from the time Joseph went to Potiphar's house to the time he left prison. Joseph could have easily lost faith and hope, and given up. But Joseph trusted in God and waited. Ultimately, Pharaoh had a dream. Joseph interpreted that dream and Pharaoh promoted Joseph to the second most powerful position in Egypt. He warned Pharaoh that a severe famine was coming, so Pharaoh put him in charge of the food supply.

Eventually Joseph's brothers who had betrayed him years earlier came looking for food in Egypt. And, in God's providence, the only food supply was under Joseph's control. Joseph could have sought revenge, but instead Joseph made an amazing statement: *"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"* (Genesis 50:20). Joseph understood that God was in control of his life. And he knew that God can take what is intended as evil and bring good out of it.

Joseph seemed to understand Romans 8:28 before it was even written! Romans 8:28 says, *"We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."* "All things" means everything! God can use struggles, heartbreaks, and even evil in ways to bring about His glory and our good. Trust in God to bring a good result out of what you're going through!

TALK ABOUT IT:

- Every event in Joseph's story—from his brothers' betrayal of him to Potiphar's wife's false accusation of him to his being sent to prison—was negative. And yet God used all those negatives to add up to great positives in which Joseph forgave his brothers and rescued his family and a nation from a famine. When have you experienced God using "negatives" in your life to add up to some "positives"?

KEY THOUGHT

#2

The presence of God sustains us as we wait for Him to bring good out of evil.

The Bible teaches that God is omnipresent: He is everywhere and always present. As a little girl in children's church said, "Omnipresence means there ain't no place that God ain't!" She's right!

David wrote in Psalm 139:7-10: "*Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.*"

But there is another sense in which we experience God's presence on a more intimate, personal level. In this sense, the presence of God refers to His divine companionship and embracing love.

It was this deeply personal aspect of God's presence that sustained Joseph during his adversity. In fact, four times Scripture emphasizes that God was with Joseph during those tough times (Gen.39:2-3; 39:21, 23).

The presence of God made all the difference in Joseph's trials, and the presence of God will make all the difference in your trials, too. He has promised, "*I will never leave you, nor forsake you*" (Hebrews 13:5) and "*I am with you always*" (Matthew 28:20).

Life is filled with unexpected circumstances. But during every moment of your life, from the very best to the very worst, God is with you. He cares for you. You will never walk through something difficult alone. In fact, God is never closer than when you are hurting. You can rest more easily today knowing that God cares. He has never left you; He is with you now; He has been with you all along. You are not alone.

David Brown of the U.S.A. Paralympic Team is the fastest blind runner in world. He has a running guide named Jerome Avery, a veteran sprinter who runs alongside Brown – they are tied together by a string on their fingers. Avery guides Brown with words & touches: "Swing out here, pass on the left, speed up here." Brown says, "It's all about listening to his cues. Every day we go over race strategies, communicating with each other!" (*Our Daily Bread* 2/5/20)

Avery and Brown were tied together with a string, but God is eternally tied to us through His indwelling Holy Spirit. Our job is to stay in communication with Him, listening to His directions and following Him obediently. God doesn't promise we won't face hardship, but He does promise He'll journey with us through our hardship guiding and strengthening us every step along the way, working everything together for our good and His glory.

TALK ABOUT IT:

- Read Joshua 1:9. What difference did the presence of God make to Joshua?
- Read Psalm 23:4. What difference did the presence of the Lord make to David?
- When do you find it easy to be aware of the companionship and embracing love of God's presence in your life? When do you find it difficult?

KEY THOUGHT

#3

What may appear to be a setback can be used by God as a setup to prepare us for greater service.

It was because of—not in spite of—Joseph’s adversity that he was in a position to provide for his family and nation during a famine. All of those years in prison eventually led to the palace! His temporary incarceration led to ultimate influence in helping others!

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*”

In these verses, notice that God does not comfort us in our pain so that we will be comfortable; rather He comforts us so that we will be *comforters* to others! God wants us to use the comfort we received from Him during our suffering to reach out and encourage others in their suffering.

It is important to remember that suffering is never random or meaningless for the child of God. What may appear to be a setback can be used by God as a setup to prepare us for greater service. The tears you shed in suffering may water someone else’s garden. The gold refined in you through trials may be credited to someone else’s account for their benefit.

Author Robert Louis Stevenson spent much of his time bedridden because of poor health. When asked how he could possibly consider his days wonderful, he pointed to the sunlight streaming through his window and said, “I’ll never allow a row of medicine bottles to block my horizon.” Don’t allow your pain to keep you from all that God wants to do in you and through you.

It has been said that suffering can be either a tombstone or a stepping stone. The apostle Paul, for example, saw prison not as a tombstone, but as a stepping stone. He used his experience to share Christ with others who may not have otherwise listened to him, and to encourage believers in their Christian walk. John Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim’s Progress* while locked up in prison. Martin Luther translated the New Testament into German while locked up in prison. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote *The Cost of Discipleship* while locked up in prison. The apostle John was exiled on the isle of Patmos when he wrote the Book of Revelation. Turning tombstones into stepping stones is part of God’s redemptive plan and work. Just like he did for Joseph, God can turn your tombstone into a stepping stone toward more effective ministry to others.

TALK ABOUT IT:

- It has been said that for almost anything to be good, something else must be broken first. For a house to be built, a tree must be broken; to raise a crop, soil must be broken. How does this apply to our lives as we follow God?
- When has someone ministered to you out of the comfort God provided them when they had suffered?
- When have you ministered to someone out of the comfort God provided you when you had suffered?