

“Testimony”

BEYOND Sermon Series | Week Five | Newbreak Church

May 30th, 2021

This week is about how we steward our testimony. At Newbreak, we often use the language of “sharing our God story.” This week is like an elaboration of that, but from the unique angle that all the events of our life (even the ones we don’t like!) are opportunities to grow. This message answers the question: How do I increase the impact of my experiences? While this might not be a question you and I are proactively thinking about, perhaps it is one we should begin to consider!

For more insights relating to this week’s sermon, see <https://newbreak.church/blog/>. We post a new blog every Sunday which coincides with the sermon passage or theme from that day.

Start Here

- If you had a time machine, would you go to the past or the future? And what would you do/experience?
- Describe a time when a circumstance you didn’t like turned out to be a blessing in disguise. What did you learn about God from that experience?

Going Deeper Into the Message

For context, read Genesis 39

Point 1 – Embrace where I am right now.

Genesis 39:1-2 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. (Genesis 39:1-2 NIV)

One of the most challenging things for us is to be faithful where we are, not just faithful when we are where we want to be. A hallmark of Joseph’s life was his ability to stay faithful to God, when plenty of us would probably be blaming God for what was going on. Perhaps Joseph had the spiritual maturity to see that not everything that happens is an extension of God’s direct activity in our lives. In other words, many times we are the victim of someone else’s choices. (And sometimes we are the perpetrators because we

have choices with consequences too!). But through it all, the circumstances do not change the fact that God is a kind and loving Father. And years later, Joseph saw this confirmed (see Genesis 50:20).

Joseph had spiritual fortitude. Furthermore, he was adaptable. Although he had a dream of what his life would become (literally, had a dream!), he “rolled with the punches,” so to speak, and was determined to flourish wherever he found himself. Maybe there is a lesson in here for us (see **Additional Insight** below). There are no simple answers when we contextualize our life alongside Joseph’s, there is simply wrestling through how this might look for us as we learn to trust the story.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- Are there any circumstances in your life that you sense God calling you to “embrace”? What might be the reason God has you right where you are? Do you believe God wants you to learn something? To grow your character?
- How do we discern when we are called to “embrace” our circumstances versus when we are supposed to be proactively making a change to our circumstances?

—ADDITIONAL INSIGHT—

WHEN PROSPERING LOOKS DIFFERENT THAN WE IMAGINED

**This is an excerpt from the Newbreak blog associated with this week. Read the full blog post by going to newbreak.church/when-prospering-looks-different/*

Honest question: ***Does following God always lead to prosperity?***

It depends on how we define prosperity. It would be a great task to develop a whole biblical theology on what "prosperity" or "flourishing" looks like (in fact, we wrote about it from one angle in [this blog HERE](#)). But for today, let's consider a narrative from a famous person in biblical history—Joseph.

Many people are familiar with Joseph. But just in case you need a refresher, [check out THIS video](#). If the amount of ink hints at a character's importance, then Joseph is really important. He has 13 chapters devoted to his story (Genesis 37-50)! Joseph's story is the epitome of being mistreated unfairly. Have you ever felt like life was not fair? Then this is your guy! His own brothers wanted him dead but saw selling him into slavery as a way of getting rid of him while also lining their pockets with a few extra dollars. Perhaps even more frustrating, every time Joseph seems to get some momentum in rebuilding his life, he is unfairly treated again, making

his situation even worse! But within the framework of the story, a line is strategically repeated. What is it?

"The Lord was with Joseph." Could anything else be more encouraging?

² ***The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.***³ ***When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did.*** (Genesis 39:2-3, NIV)

²¹ ***the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.*** ²² ***So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there.***²³ ***The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.*** (Genesis 39:21-23, NIV)

Read the above passages closely. Take special note of the way the Lord's presence (being "with him") leads to some sort of prosperity. The surprising thing about both of these instances—the prospering occurs just after Joseph is the victim of unjust treatment.

The Hebrew word behind "he prospered" (Genesis 39:2) is the same one behind "gave him success" in the next verse. The verb's stem has causative force, with God being the one who is "causing" the prospering to take place. Its most literal meaning has to do with "cutting through" or "forcefully entering" a premise. It would be like seeing many trees, thorns, and bushes in front of you, but making a path through it all—slashing your way to the other side! Beyond the verb's literal meaning it came to take on the figurative idea of "prospering" or "succeeding." But maybe these are not such opposite ideas after all!

What if God is an expert in making a way to thrive even when we see a dead end? What if the obstacles are just one opportunity for God to show His hand in your life?

Joseph's story shows us the connection between the Lord's presence and the prosperity that follows. But the shocking thing is that the prosperity is hardly what Joseph imagined it would be.

God does not have to work within our ideals to accomplish something impactful.

Like the "blessed" man described in [Psalm 1:1-3](#), everything we do can "prosper" if we live according to the Lord's instruction, guided by His presence—but be prepared for your expectations of prospering to be modified. After all, everything God does is ultimately for the grand purpose of revealing Himself and rescuing the world ([Romans 8:18-28](#)). In fact, that's exactly how Joseph's narrative arc concludes. Because Joseph was obedient and steadfast—because He trusted the story and the God behind it all—many people were saved through his leadership at Pharaoh's right hand. Hence the climactic conclusion to the story:

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Genesis 50:20, NIV)

In light of this, know these 2 things:

1) Like Joseph, God will never leave you, that's a promise ([Hebrews 13:5](#)).

He is always with us! But sometimes we live in such a way that ignores Him. Posture yourself to be ever-more aware of God's constant presence. It is a blessing to walk in the awareness of God's presence.

2) God's ability to prosper you will always be according to His purpose.

Be faithful and steadfast even when you cannot see the way forward. Remember, that is what the Hebrew verb for prospering means, in effect, to cut a path through when it may not look like there is one.

P.S., this blog does not intend to address the problem of suffering. If you want to read more blog posts about this topic you can read what [we wrote about it HERE](#) and also in [another blog HERE](#).

For context, read Genesis 41

Point 2 – Engage the opportunities to speak up.

So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." (Genesis 41:14-16, NIV)

The word "engage" in Point 2 speaks to a willingness to jump in and participate in God's unfolding plan. Joseph is a fantastic example for all of us of what God can do when we choose to be used by God. If you consider Joseph's life, he could have let life's frustrations consume him and keep him closed off to God all together. He was taken from his home and sold into slavery by his own brothers. He was maligned and mistreated by Potifer and his wife and was forgotten about in prison. Like any of us, Joseph could have easily become hardened and bitter towards God. That's not how he responded. When presented before Pharaoh, Joseph soon recognized that God was at work. All of his hardship brought him to that moment in his life and he chose to participate in God's plan to save the world from famine.

Each of us are faced with similar choices every day. Will we see our everyday moments as opportunities for God to use us? Will we choose to engage and step through the doors that God presents to us? Are you willing to be like Joseph and let God speak

through you? We can't always control the different scenarios we find ourselves in, but we can control how we respond to them.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- When is the last time that you were presented with an opportunity to be used by God? Did you take the opportunity? At what point in the conversation did you realize that God had prepared you for that moment?
- What is one thing that keeps you from being used by God in your circumstances?

—ADDITIONAL INSIGHT—

Many people have never heard of a pastor and educator named Frank Laubach. In 1915, Frank went with his wife to the Philippine Islands as a missionary. Through years of service to the Lord they founded churches and established a college in Manila. Frank is also well known for teaching thousands of people to read and write. One author noted that through Frank's educational efforts, he helped teach one-half of the ninety thousand Mohammedan Moros (who despised the Christians) to read and write on the island of Mindanao.

How was Frank able to be so powerfully used by God? What set Frank apart? A note from his diary on January 3, 1930 shines some light on his **commitment to open windows for God to work**. Frank wrote that he resolved to be "As wide open toward people and their need as I am toward God." He lived his life asking God without ceasing, "What, Father, do you desire said? What, Father, do you desire done this minute?" Frank recognized that each moment was sacred to God. He wanted to be a vessel for God's power and love to flow through him into the lives of others. Frank's journey of daily surrender didn't happen overnight. Over time, he learned to respond to God's "windows of opportunity."

What "windows of opportunity" do you see open in front of you right now?

For context, read Genesis 49-50

Point 3 – Expect God to use your story.

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Genesis 50:20)

In the midst of suffering, it's hard to imagine that God could use what we're going through to build up His kingdom, or help others. It's easy to be so focused on the hurt that we can't see any way for good to come out of it. Joseph certainly wasn't saying to himself that he was happy he was being sold into slavery, happy that he would have a chance to tell Midianite merchants about God. He wasn't happy he was thrown into jail or forgotten about. What he did do was do his best for God during these hard times. He trusted God to be with him. He was diligent in the tasks given him and showed he was worthy of more responsibility.

Like Joseph, we have two options when we're suffering. We can cry and scream and say how unfair our circumstances are, or we can do our best in the midst of our trials and watch God work His will in our lives. This is not to say there isn't a time when we need to get out the crying and screaming. But then we need to take a deep breath, wash our faces, and tell God we're ready to be used by Him no matter what that looks like.

We need to remember all of the times that God has used a trial, or suffering, to grow us or to help someone else. We need to practice telling others how God has worked in our lives, how a time of deep heartache was a time for God to show His greatest love to us. The more we tell others how good God has been to us, and what He's done for us, when things have been hard, the more likely we are to remember His goodness in the midst of our suffering.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- *Think about the humanity of Joseph.* How do you think Joseph felt during the years of mistreatment? Do you think he was always joyful going through his suffering? How does this make Joseph relatable to our lives today?
- Think of a time you endured great suffering. Looking back, was God there with you? What did He teach you during that time? Did you grow?
- How can you use part of your story to help someone else during suffering? What is an important Scriptural truth about God that anchors you through life's hardship? Have you ever shared this with someone going through hardship?

—SUMMARY—

How do I increase the impact of my experiences?

- 1) Embrace where I am right now.
- 2) Engage the opportunities to speak up.
- 3) Expect God to use my story.

—FINAL CHALLENGE QUESTIONS—

1. How are you going to think differently in light of what you have read, heard, and discussed this week?
2. What is one thing you are going to change in your life in light of the sermon?
3. BONUS: For those of you with kids or around kids: What is one truth from this message that you can share with your kids?