

Genesis 37-50

It's All Part of the Plan

The Summit Church

MPT: *God is sovereign and fully in control of history. He is working all things together for our good, for his glory, and for the salvation of the nations.*

MPS: *Everything that happens in our lives is part of his plan. He is always in control.*

Introduction

Welcome to TSC, my name is Curtis. PJD is actually in Germany right now spending time with three of our church planters over there and fully immersing himself in all-things-ML culture during the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. So join us next weekend, when Pastor J.D. will preach his first ever sermon in lederhosen - exciting stuff going on around here.

I travel every once in a while for my job, and I've been flying a lot lately – **How many of you are terrified of flying?**

- Well we get on this plane the other day and the pilot decides that it's a good time to tell us that we are **in luck**, that we are on a "historic" flight...because in nine short days that very plane would be decommissioned due to being so old.
 - *How in the world is that comforting?* They always tell you these things on flights that are of **no help** at all:
 - *"We're going to take off 30 mins late due to mechanical issues..."*
- Ever been on a plane when it starts acting crazy? You know, when you're in freak out mode but the pilot and the attendants act like it's completely normal. The rest of us are **praying the sinner's prayer** and trying to **call our loved ones** from 35k feet in the sky.
- Well every time once the plane levels out the pilot comes on and says something along these lines, *"Sorry about that, folks. We went through some rough skies, but we're all okay now. If*

*we approach it again, don't worry, it's **all part of the plan**. The plane is designed that way."*

- **THAT'S SUPPOSED TO COMFORT ME?** → You saying, *"It's all part of the plan"?!?*
- From the pilots point of view, everything is perfectly fine...but from mine everything is in **disarray**. I think I'm about to end up on the LOST island.

I can't help but wonder how many of us who are Christians live like this – where we believe, of course, from God's view, everything is perfectly fine...but from ours it's **pure chaos**.

That's actually the title of my message today: **It's All Part of the Plan**.

Not sure about you, but every time I turn around there seems to be some new **national tragedy**, some new **injustice influenced by race**, some new **natural disaster**, some new **moral failure**, or some **unthinkably awful thing happening**, or some **terribly depressing news**.

- Even as a pastor, if I'm honest with you– with so much **bad** constantly going on, I've sometimes wondered, *"Where is God? What is he doing through all of this?"*

People I know are going through **financial stress**, **miscarriages**, **health problems**...suffering from **anxiety**, **depression**, **stress**, and **loneliness**. **"Lows"** seem to be more common than **"highs"** in both personal and spiritual lives.

You know what the **most popular Christian answer** to pain and suffering is?: *"God is in control."* And you know what? That's true. I don't usually doubt that. **You know what I doubt sometimes? That God is with me during the suffering.**

- Have you ever felt like this in your situation?
- Ever wondered where God is? Or if he actually even has a plan for you life?

- Questioned whether he really knows what he's doing or if he even cares?
- Cried out, "God where are you? Where is your grace? Your love? Why will you not comfort me? Why will you not fix this?"

What I want to do today is tell you a story of someone in a similar situation and show you that **there is an answer**. I want to give you some hope by showing you that not only is **God sovereign over your situation**, but also how **his grace** always meets you in your suffering. Now I know the answer of God's sovereignty **does NOT** minimize pain; but it **does give us purpose in the pain**; in Christ, pain is never pointless. And I know some of you hear that and say, "Sure, pastor. I know that's the *right* answer, but it's just not an *honest* answer for me." **That's fine**. Because Scripture has something to say directly to *you*. Bring your **honest doubt** and let's consider together.

So, if you have your Bibles I'd invite you to open it to **Genesis 37**

- Today I want to look at the **life of Joseph**. For you church people, you've heard this story before. **But you've heard it wrong**. You've heard it as a story about a guy who has the **worst luck in the world** ... but because he trusts God, everything works out in the end.
- That sounds good and all, but **some of us are going to end our lives in what feels like the middle of our story**. We won't see things tied up in a neat little bow. But I want to say to you, today: **that doesn't mean God's lost a handle on things**.
- Way back in **Genesis 12...**

CONTEXT

TELL STORY: **God promised to bless Abraham and his descendants**

The whole point of Joseph's story is to show you that in all things God is in complete control of Joseph's life...and because you and I are sons and daughters of Abraham, **God is also in control of our**

lives...working all things together for his good purposes just like he was in Joseph's life."¹ This is not a story about the **success of Joseph**; it's a story about the **faithfulness of God**.

So let's read Joseph's story in light of that question: *What would it look like for you to live your life with the assurance of knowing that everything that happens to you is **all part of the plan**? That God is **always** with you and in control?*

Let's dive in...

Genesis 37

¹Jacob (Joseph's dad) lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. ²These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father (Joseph always gets hailed as this perfect bible character, but we immediately see a few things wrong with him, the first here is that he's a **tattletale**). ³Now Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age (he's also a **daddy's boy**). And he made him a robe of many colors (what every son really wants from his dad – he also has **bad taste in clothing**). ⁴But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

- Joseph got the **coat** which all his brothers wanted...meant for the oldest...which signified status...meant no manual labor and a life of pampering.

So his brothers hated him for all of this...and to make matters worse...

Genesis 37:5-11, Dreamer: sheaves and sun/moon/stars

¹ As always, anything in green is from Pastor J.D. because, you know, he's money.

Joseph is also **immature** and **unwise**...so his brothers hate him even more. We love to put Joseph on a pedestal, but he really just comes off as the super snobby rich kid nobody likes.

Genesis 37:12-17, *Joseph's **brothers are working down in Dothan** (Alabama, of course)...and Jacob sends Joseph to see what they're up to...*

Genesis 37

¹⁸They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams." (My brother and I got into it a number of times, but never did I plot his death. They've got **Jerry Springer** level of dysfunction going on.)

²³So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore (probably doing him a fashion favor). ²⁴And they took him and threw him into a pit...

The original plan was to kill him, but then one of the brothers (~~JUDAH —the only one with some sense, and the one whom God chooses to bring Jesus into the world through~~) is like, "Wait, this is our brother, we can't kill him. Sheesh. Let's sell him and make some money!"

²⁸Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt...

³⁶Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

This is what one might call "having a bad day."

Part of what happens to Joseph is that he is **stripped of his coat**. This is not just getting mugged downtown and somebody stealing your cool expensive jacket. **This is Joseph getting metaphorically stripped of his status; he's stripped of the very thing that made him *him***. It's what made him **special** and **important**. He is stripped of the very thing that solidified his **identity**.

- **I can't help but wonder**: *Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever been stripped of the very thing that made you "you?" Has someone ever taken your "coat?"*
 - You had invested so much in your **marriage** until it was shattered by your husband's unfaithfulness, leaving you feeling **alone** and **confused**. **Your spouse stripped your coat**.
 - You had spent years pouring everything into your **company** only to end up being the scapegoat for something you had nothing to do with, leaving you **slandered** and feeling **ashamed**. **They stripped your coat**.
 - You spent day after day **raising a child** in the way they should go, and then they bailed on both you **and** the faith as soon as they had the opportunity and left you feeling like a **failed parent**. **Your child stripped your coat**.

But listen: **other's sin does not mean the end of your story**.

- For the believer, sin is NEVER the end of the story...whether it's somebody else's sin that has impacted you, or whether it's your own sin...**sin doesn't have to be the end of your story!**
 - *If you're still breathing, your story ain't over!*

But here's what you have to know...

LESSON #1:

YOUR COAT DOES NOT DEFINE YOUR CALLING

If your entire calling is wrapped up in your proverbial coat, then when it's stripped from you, your entire life will fall apart – when the **kid leaves**, or the **finances are low**, or the **relationship crumbles**. Your **comfort** and **contentment** and **identity** can never come from anything other than Christ. If God allows us to be stripped of these types of types then **he has a perfectly good reason for it**, even if it doesn't make sense to us.

We'll see this over and over in Joseph's life: he obtains status, receives clothing to represent that, and then is unjustly stripped of both his status and his clothes. **But God is the one directing all of it.**

And if Joseph had chosen to focus only on what had been **taken from him**, he never could've been used so mightily by God. Don't get so focused on what God has **taken from you** that you miss seeing what God wants **for you** and wants to do **through you**.

- In the middle of suffering, I *know* this is hard. It's hard **NOT** to focus on what's missing...what's been stripped away.
- **Just because your status is gone, that doesn't mean your purpose is.** Your **coat** may be gone, but God's **calling** is still on your life to move forward with purpose. He is still using you in greater ways than you could ever imagine!
- When you understand the security you have in God's hands, then nothing can **derail** you from your **destiny**. Life may **detour** you...but nothing can **derail** his plans and calling on your life!

So don't cling to your coat. When life strips your coat, you respond by saying, *"That's just fine – take that coat. Because I have Christ, and I'd rather have Christ than the nicest, comfiest, coziest, most expensive coat any day of the week!"*

"Often when you think everything has gone wrong, it's just that you're in the middle of a story." – Paul Miller, *A Praying Life* ²

- Tap someone: God's not done with you.

- Just because you're going through a frustrating time does not mean God is not using you. He **can** and **will** use you in whatever season of life you are in **whether you have your coat or not**. It's all part of the plan!

Joseph being sold into slavery was just the beginning of accomplishing God's plan to get his ppl to Egypt and the Promised Land. **You know how I know that?** I read the end of the story.

- You know who *doesn't* know that in Chapter 37? **Joseph**. Joseph is right in the middle of it, and the whole thing looks like a tragic, senseless mess.
- **God may have allowed Joseph to be stripped of his coat, but he was fulfilling his calling on Joseph's life.**

Let's keep reading to see what God is doing in Joseph's life...

Genesis 39

¹Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ²**The Lord was with Joseph**, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³His master saw that **the Lord was with him** and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

This is another recurring theme: **the Lord was with Joseph**, and *that* made him successful. Joseph may have been a **slave** in Egypt, but knowing God was with him made him a **success**, even in the midst of slavery.

Well the story goes on to tell us that **"Joseph found favor"** with Potiphar, and he put him in charge of everything he had...to the point Potiphar is only worried about what's for **breakfast, lunch, and dinner**.

² Miller, *A Praying Life*

- See this unfolding? **It's all part of the plan.** God is **protecting** and **preserving** Joseph...even in his **pain** and **uncertainty**...moving him sovereignly between the **pit** and the **palace** to accomplish his **purpose**.

Now this is where the story gets good, and it's one of the reasons why I love the Bible – the author decides that **now** is the perfect time to tell us a **very important detail** about Joseph: that he is one incredibly good-looking dude.³ The only description I think adequately conveys his striking good looks is: think **if Pastor J.D. and Nicolas Cage had a child together**...that's how handsome he is...brains and brawn. The **envy of men** and the **desire of women**.

Well because he's so good looking, **Potiphar's wife keeps trying to sleep with him**...she keeps rolling up on him and is all, **"I like Hebrew boys and I cannot lie."**

- But Joseph refuses to sleep with her...and this makes her mad because she's not used to being rejected, because she's royalty.
- So she **revises her 90's R&B playlist** and keeps making advances...

Genesis 39:11-12

¹¹But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, ¹²she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house.

Well, she lies and accuses Joseph of rape. **Again** he is stripped of an article of clothing, **again** he is slandered, and **again** (as you would imagine) he is thrown unjustly into jail.

That's how life goes sometimes, right? The hits just keep on coming. **You can't seem to catch a break.**

³ Genesis 39:6b-10

- Just when you were making progress on that **credit card**, all of a sudden your car breaks down and needs \$2k in repairs.
- Just when you're finally feeling hopeful about your circumstances, something happens and all of the **fear** and **anxiety** come rushing back and remind you of why you were so afraid to move forward in the first place.
- You feel like if you could "just get through **this season**" then everything would be okay...but "**then**" seems very unrealistic in light of what's happening "**now**" in your personal prison.
 - *And for some of you, this **isn't** metaphorical. Some of you are literally in prison. I'm talking to you, too.*

²¹But **the Lord was with Joseph** and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²²And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. ²³The 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**.

LESSON #2:

GOD'S PRESENCE IS IN THE PRISON

At this point, if you're Joseph, your situation seems even worse than before. He may have been a **slave** before, but he was still ruling over all of Potiphar's house...he **wasn't in prison**.

But even in the midst of this situation we're told that the Lord was with Joseph. **God's presence was in Joseph's prison, and he is with you in yours, too.**

God is with you in **prosperity**, and God is with you in **adversity**.
 God is with you in **health**, and God is with you in **sickness**.
 God is with you in the **marriage**, and he is with you in the **divorce**.

God is with you on **Sunday at church**, and he is with **you late at night** when you're crying in your bed.

God wasn't surprised by Joseph's situation, and he's not surprised with yours. God didn't wake up to your cries of pain this morning and think, "Oh my goodness...I had no idea you were going through this. How did you end up here?" NO, **God was with Joseph in his prison and he is with you in your pain.** Now God may not be ready to take you out of your jail, but he **has** promised to come join you in it! Here's how I know: **Psalm 23**, "*The Lord is my Shepherd...*":

- (v2) *He leads me beside still waters...front of me*
- (v6) *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...behind me*
- (v4) *Even though I walk through the valley...next to me*

I'd rather be in the **shadow of death** with my Savior than have temporary **comforts and successes** in this life *without* him. God's presence *in prison* is **truer freedom** than living without God anywhere else.⁵

Joseph is in prison alongside two other guys: a former **cupbearer** of Pharaoh's (what a fantastic job) and a **baker**.

Genesis 40: *Joseph interprets the cupbearer and baker's dreams*

Genesis 41: *Joseph interprets the 7/7 cow dreams which pleases Pharaoh, who then puts Joseph "over all the land of Egypt." He "clothes him in garments of fine linen."*

The famine spread **just as predicted** and "**all the earth**" comes to Egypt to buy **food and supplies** from Joseph. **Genesis 42-44:** *Joseph's brothers visit Egypt, but they don't recognize him (headdress and mascara).*

Joseph had the power (and the right) to do w/e he wanted with his brothers – **kill** them, **imprison** them, **shun** them, **embarrass** them – instead he chooses to **show compassion**.

Genesis 45:4-8

⁴So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. (My name is Maximus Decimus Meridius...commander of the armies of the north...) ⁵And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for **God sent me before you to preserve life** (it's all part of the plan). ⁶For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷And **God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors** (it's all part of the plan). ⁸**So it was not you who sent me here, but God** (it's all part of the plan). He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Joseph's brothers did not send him to Egypt; God did.

LESSON #3:

DON'T MISTAKE GOD'S SILENCE FOR HIS ABSENCE

All of these terrible things – every single one of them – led Joseph to his position of power **just in time** to save tens of thousands of lives – it was all part of the plan. **Think about it:**

- If Joseph had gotten his way at any point – for his **pain** and **misery** to subside – he might've stopped God's plan...
- Had he not been sold into slavery, he wouldn't have been in Egypt with Potiphar.
- Had he not been falsely accused by Mrs. Potiphar, he wouldn't have been in jail.
- Had he not been in jail, he wouldn't have met the cupbearer.

⁵ Tony Evans, *Genesis Commentary*

- Had the cupbearer not forgotten about him and left him in jail, he wouldn't have been around to interpret Pharaoh's dream and ultimately be put in a position of power to save everybody's lives.
 - If a **single one** of the links in this chain had been broken, famine would've overtaken the land, killed countless people – including Joseph and his family – and God's people never would've ultimately made it to the Promised Land.⁶

Again: Joseph's brothers did not send him to Egypt; God did.

So he tells his brothers...

Genesis 50:20

²⁰As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good (it's all part of the plan! The plan...), to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

By this point, Joseph is ~40 years old...23 years of **pain**. 23 years of **struggles**. 23 years of **questions**. 23 years of **wondering** how God was working. But now it all clicks...it's **all been part of the plan**.

We don't always get to see exactly how God is working, but neither did Joseph for 23 years. Don't mistake God's silence for his absence.

The question is, *What do I do in the middle of my situation?*: you **praise God** because of his **promises**. You can't always change your situation or make yourself happy, but you can always remind yourself of your beliefs: **the belief that God is always in control** and that he is **good** and **loving** and **wise**. You have to look at what you believe...

"The heart cannot love what the mind does not know. Right **thinking** will beget right **feeling**." – Jen Wilkin

ILLUSTRATION: Watchman Nee: Fact, faith/belief, feeling. Instead of your **feelings** what are the "**facts**" you need to focus on today? Maybe you need to remember...

- **Rom 5:3-4**, "*Suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint...*"
- **Rom 8:18; 2 Cor 4:17**, "*...that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. . . and that our momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*"
- **Ps. 34:19**, "*Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.*"
- **Heb 13:5-6**, "*God said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'. So we confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"*
- **If these things are FACT**, then who/what can separate us from the love of Christ? Shall **tribulation** or **distress**, or **persecution**, or **famine**, or **nakedness**, or **danger**, or **sword**...or **circumstances**, or **situations**, of **slander**, or **brokenness**. . . *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us!*

CONCLUSION (VAMP)

Listen, you may never know the reason God has called you to bear the crosses in your life, but we can look at **the** cross and know God is working things out.

Just like Joseph, at the cross Jesus was:

- ...betrayed by his brothers and those who supposedly loved him, and they conspired to kill him.
- ...sold for 30 pieces of silver.
- ...handed over to the Gentiles.
- ..."was silent" during his sentencing.

⁶ Insight from Dr. Tony Evans

- ...suffered to save the very ones who betrayed him.

But more than Joseph, Jesus is the Son of God who died and rose again to save his people for all eternity. He didn't just go from the **pit** to the **palace**, like Joseph. He went from the **tomb** and ascended to the **throne** at the right hand of the Father, where he sovereignly rules his kingdom until he comes again.⁹

I said earlier I don't doubt **God is in control**, but that my doubt often comes in whether **God is with me**. Here's where the cross speaks to me in **my** pain: it shows me a God who responds to the suffering in my life by entering into it.

- So when Joseph is in prison, God says, *"I'm here. I'm with you."* When he is falsely accused, God says, *"I see you. I'm here. We can walk this together."*
- How can God say that? **He knows because he's been there.** He's walked that road.
- So if you're suffering now, if you're in the middle of the story, God *doesn't* say, *"Stick it out! Trust me, it looks great from up here!"* **NO**, he says, *"Let me **share that suffering**. Let me **bear the burden** with you. Let us walk this road together. You are not alone...you are not alone. You are **never** alone. Everything you are going through is part of the plan."*

BOW HEADS

If you're going through something, raise your hand...

- Let your people feel your presence. To know that you have not abandoned them. That you are working all things together for their good and your glory. Holy Spirit, comfort like only you can.

⁹ Typology from Greidanus's *Preaching Christ from Genesis*

