



How do you react when life doesn't go your way? Back in 2007 Cassie and I found ourselves in a very difficult situation. After buying a house in Hawthorne, California, 18 months later we realized that the best next step for our family was to sell our house and move to the adjacent city of Hermosa Beach for better schools. We agonized over this decision. We prayed. We sought wise counsel. We looked at every option. And we felt clearly that the Lord was giving us the green light to move. So we sold our house and lost all of our equity and moved into a rental house in Hermosa Beach.

We were settled on this decision because we were following the Lord and excited for new schools and witnessing to our new neighbors. We got Aidan enrolled in school and started building relationship with all the neighbors. We felt like we were just where God wanted us to be.

After living in our rental house for seven months we got a little surprise. There was a knock on our front door at 10 am. When Cassie opened the door she met a real estate agent with the new owners of our house. They were there to walk through and inspect their new house.

Our landlord had deceived us from the first moment I met him. He assured me he'd never sell this house. He told me I could live in the house for years with my family.

I had no cash because my landlord held my \$5,000 deposit and I had to find another house for my family of five to live—immediately—hopefully in the same city so Aidan could stay at his school. And beyond the financial and relocation challenges involved, there was the spiritual mystery. We felt so sure that God led us to sell our house and move to this rental house. We felt that God had us there for a purpose. Then it all unraveled.

How do you react when life doesn't go your way? This is the topic of our sermon today. We are in the third chapter of The Story looking at the life of Joseph. He was a man who endured many setbacks, injustices and hardships. Yet God used him to save millions of people's lives. What does the Lord want us to learn from this?

Since the life of Joseph covers 14 chapters in Genesis, from Chapter 37–50, instead of reading his whole story, I'll summarize the events.

» His brothers plotted to kill him (37:15).

» He's stripped of his status and disrespected by his family (37:23).

» His brothers sold him into slavery (37:28).

» His brothers hid their evil acts by lying (37:32).

» He was purchased by a powerful man in Egypt, Potiphar, an influential man in the Pharaoh's government.

» Joseph did really well in his role because God's hand was upon him, so Potiphar put him in charge of everything in his household.

» Potiphar's wife frames him and he goes to prison (39:20).

» Joseph did really well in prison because God's hand was upon him, so the chief jailer put him in charge of everything.

» Joseph gives dream interpretations to Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and chief baker.

» After helping the cupbearer in prison, the guy forgets to mention Joseph to Pharaoh (40:23).

» Joseph is summoned by Pharaoh to interpret his dreams—something no one else in Egypt was able to do—and God provided Joseph with the interpretation to the dreams.

» Pharaoh puts Joseph in charge of the whole land of Egypt to prepare them for the 7-year famine that's coming after the 7 years of bounty.

It could be said that this ended pretty well for Joseph. He's in charge of Egypt! But that perspective would be a shallow glance at this story. Joseph's hardships were heartbreaking—emotional betrayal, separated from this entire family, powerless, slandered, forgotten.

Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 45 to see Joseph's response to all of this. In this scene Joseph is ruling in Egypt and his brothers have come to buy grain. They've had many conversations but the brothers don't know that Joseph is their long-lost brother they sold to the slave traders.

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

“So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt (verses 1–8).

In this one moment we are taught, even when you don't understand what's going on, trust in a sovereign God.

Joseph Saw God's Ultimate Plan

In verse 5 look how Joseph acknowledges his brothers' wicked actions yet acknowledged how God was sovereignly using their wicked acts to orchestrate the salvation of millions of people.

In verse 7 Joseph sees his role as a “great deliverance.” This isn't because Joseph is arrogant; there are no indications of that. But Joseph did understand that God uses ordinary people to accomplish great things.

In verse 8 Joseph clearly states that God sent him to Egypt.

Throughout his ups and downs, there's no indication that Joseph understood the meaning. That's how it usually works in our lives too. Yet, at the end of his ordeal, he's got the broader perspective to see God's bigger plan. This truth is clearly stated in the New Testament in Romans 8:28: *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love, who have been called according to his purpose.”*

God is telling us in both of these places in the Bible that even when we don't understand what's going on in our life, we can trust a sovereign God.

Joseph Saw that God's Ultimate Plan was more Important than His Comfort

Three times in these verses Joseph told his brothers, God sent me here, not you. *“Do not be distressed ... for selling me here ... God sent me ahead of you”* (v. 5). *“But God sent me ahead of you”* (v. 7). *“It was not you who sent me here, but God”* (v. 8).

Notice how Joseph doesn't seem bothered that God allowed these hardships. He was betrayed by his brothers, cut off from his family for years, slandered by Potiphar's wife, thrown into prison falsely, and forgotten by the cupbearer. A person might

say Joseph was entitled to some bitterness. It would be normal to seek revenge or at least a little payback. But Joseph doesn't choose that path.

Instead, Joseph shows the perspective that 1) God is in control of everything and, 2) God loves him. So when hardships came, he had the perspective that God must be using his personal hardships and difficulties for his purposes. And God's purposes are more important than our personal comfort.

Do you remember Mark's sermon from two weeks ago? It's not about you. It's not about me. It's about God's plans. It's about his glory. *“Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness”* (Psalm 115:1).

God is teaching us through this story that life isn't always going to go your way. But it is going to go his way. As we are living each of our days, this truth can fill our hearts with confidence and security, no matter what you're facing.

Let me explain. As soon as Joseph is reunited with his brothers, he is crying a lot. In Genesis 42:24 he's weeping because his brothers are still carrying guilt for selling him to the slave traders. In Genesis 43:30 he wept because of the lost years separated from his full blood brother, Benjamin. In Genesis 45:1 he wept so loudly that people outside the room could hear him. He wept because he learns that his father was still carrying deep pain over his apparent death.

Here's what's so remarkable about this. His deepest pain is not for himself, it's for his family. He is at peace with the hardships he's encountered in life and he's reconciled that God's plan is more important than his personal comfort. But he's seeing that his family is in deep distress and they don't see that God's plan is bigger than their pain—yet.

He explains this to them in Genesis 45, but they don't believe it. Seventeen years later when their dad dies, the brothers are afraid that Joseph is going to kill them now that their dad is dead. They send a message to Joseph asking for his forgiveness. They're still carrying this guilt 39 years after they sold Joseph into slavery. When Joseph received their message he wept because his brothers were still struggling to see that God's ultimate plan was bigger than anyone's comfort. Did they ever see God's ultimate plan and trust it? We don't know.

Let's put this section of the Bible, Genesis 37–50, into the greater context of the book of Genesis.

In Creation, God was showing humanity that he's all-powerful and good. Through the Fall of Adam and Eve, God was showing that even when humanity rebels against him, he will make a way for redemption. With the selection of Abraham, God showed that he wants his people to live by faith through acts of obedience. Now today, with our section of scripture on Joseph, God is showing that even when life gets messy and excruciatingly

difficult, his children can trust his sovereign plan. Consider how highly God considers this lesson. He used 14 chapters of the first book in his Bible, focusing on one man to teach it. That's 28%, almost one-third of the book.

Remember, the Original Audience of Genesis is the wandering nation of Israel. They have been freed from their Egyptian slavery, crossed the Red Sea, gotten the 10 Commandments, sent spies to the Promised Land, doubted whether they could conquer the land, and now they are wandering for 40 years in the desert. I think God knew that were questioning him. I think God knew that his people were accusing him of injustice. I think God knew that we might even do the same and question his goodness, his love and his character. So he gave us these chapters as a precious gift. God is preparing us for the difficulties that will come and fill our hearts with reassurance and strength.

What's the opposite of trusting God? Self-reliance—attempting to solve everything in life within your own power. Your job. Your intelligence. Your health. The problem with self-reliance is hardships and difficulties that are larger than you can handle hit everyone.

Random-reliance—trusting the mysterious powers of the universe. Luck. Good fortune. The problem with random-reliance is that you have absolutely no idea what's going on around you.

Fear and worry are the byproducts of these. Fear is the autonomic reaction to perceived danger. Our pulse increases. We sweat. Our digestion stops. Nature and God built reactions to prepare us to handle a battle. Fear is good; it protects us. But most of us are dealing with a perceived fear today instead of an actual fear. People are afraid of failure, bankruptcy, disease, being robbed, not because they've encountered these or ever will, but because they perceive the danger that is looming.

I believe Joseph's story is showing us that if you are God's child, you don't have to be afraid about anything because he is sovereignly ruling over everything and arranging everything for his good purposes. This involves trust. ***“Trust in the Lord with***

all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

When we trust we literally lean upon something, like leaning on a crutch. This verse is instructing us to lean, with all our heart, on the Lord. This means we depend upon him. We surrender the outcome to him. We relinquish the control of our life to him. We stop looking for self-reliant solutions. We stop allowing fear to control us. In contrast, the image of a self-reliant person is someone running in place and waving their arms.

The more you know God and his plans, the more naturally you will trust him. The more you talk with God, the more naturally you will trust him.

Do you want to know how my story ended with my landlord? I did not thank God for the ordeal. I did not say “Praise God” for it. At that time I was leaning on Jesus. And I was pointing to God's ultimate goal in the mess. Our neighbors wanted to come to our defense. But we felt it was important to demonstrate to them that even when life gets messy, we trust in God's sovereign plan. In the end, we don't know why it happened. The only thing I know for certain is that if we hadn't sold our Hawthorne house when we did, we would have been too far underwater on the house to move here and join the CPC staff.

I asked you at the beginning of this sermon, How do you react when life doesn't go your way? What is happening in your life right now that isn't going your way? You have the choice today to trust God with this situation. He's given us 14 chapters of the first book of the Bible to teach us that he will work everything to the good of those who love him.

You fill in the blank: I don't understand _____, but I trust him.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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