

**“STEWARDSHIP OF GOD’S GIFT OF AFFLICTION:  
THE FRUITFULNESS OF AFFLICTION.”**

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**Scripture Texts: Genesis 41:46-54**

**Introduction.**

In the first chapter of James we read every good and perfect gift comes down to us from our Father in heaven, everything we have and are, our lives and all the gifts that come with life. Apart from Him we are nothing and we have nothing.

Because all we have is not ours but from God, that makes us stewards of all His gifts. We have been reflecting on a number of those gifts and how we are to be stewards of them, protectors of them, how to use them and not abuse or neglect them.

So far we have considered the gifts of retirement, children, marriage, sex and technology.

We have all had the experience of receiving a gift from someone they thought was a gift, but we didn’t see it that way. Well-meaning perhaps, well-intentioned, but missed the mark. That’s when we say it was the thought that counts.

So it is with adversity, with affliction, with trials and troubles and disappointments in life. These are the sorts of gifts that lead us to say, “Why?” “Why me?” “What are you doing, Lord?”

The hardest questions all of us have to face in life have to do with suffering and affliction, the problem of evil and sin in our world. It is interesting to notice the longest single story in the Bible and the longest story in the book of Genesis have to do with God answering the hardest questions. The Book of Job and the story of Joseph, fourteen chapters in Genesis.

**Romans 15:4** For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

God wants us to know Him and His ways. He has given us these stories for our hope, for the strengthening of our faith, preparing us how to endure the trials that come.

The story of Joseph is especially instructive and a great encouragement to build our hope.

## **Joseph.**

You know his story well and the path God took him on to become number two in all of Egypt.

Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob, born of Jacob's favorite wife Rachel. Joseph was well known as Jacob's favorite son. As a teenager Joseph flaunted that status among all his brothers, which led to jealousy and hatred, which led to a plot to kill Joseph, but ended in his being sold into slavery and taken to Egypt.

There he was bought by Potiphar and made a slave in his house. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph but Joseph resisted and so Potiphar's wife slandered Joseph and falsely accused Joseph of immorality, landing Joseph in a slave's prison for years. When Joseph interpreted some dreams for two servants in Pharaoh's palace, he hoped that would be his ticket out of jail, but he was forgotten and languished for two more years in prison.

Finally he was remembered, interpreted a dream for Pharaoh and was catapulted to Pharaoh's prime minister, in charge of agriculture and food acquisitions for seven years before the coming seven year famine.

Joseph had two sons by his Egyptian wife and he gave them meaningful Hebrew names.

*Manasseh*, means God has made me forget my toil and my father's house. Meaning God has been active on his behalf and has taken care of him and provided for him. God has made up for the troubles of his youth with brothers and slavery and imprisonment. God makes him forget his previous trials and toil by bringing about a huge change of fortune and a brighter outlook on life.

But wait. Notice the irony. He forgets the past by naming his son forget, so every time he sees him or says his name, he remembers what he forgot. What's going on here?

God reshaped and redefined his suffering. Joseph changes his perspective. Instead of looking at it through his own filters, he looks at it through God's lens, from God's perspective. He puts it in the context of what God is doing in his life.

Instead of looking at it through pity, he looks at it through the providence of God. God gave Joseph the grace to see the terrible things he had been through in a new light, in a redemptive context. He sees the hand of God and that changes everything.

In other words, this kind of forgetting isn't just brave resolve, or stiff upper lip, it is a divine work, a kind of forgetting God does with our sins.

Joseph came to a place of forgiving his brothers, forgiving the sin, dying to pride. Joseph chooses to let go of the pain of the past, he doesn't let the painful emotions control him or hold him hostage. He chooses instead to see God's hand and God's gift.

God is God, He is bigger than your past, He is bigger than your sin and the sins of others against you. The same power that brought good out of the cross, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, is the same power at work in us, redemptively bringing good and healing.

God overwhelms the past with His glorious grace and promises and future hope.

And how does God do this for Joseph? He gives him a second son.

*Ephraim* means God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction. The name signifies how Joseph's fruitfulness came about by direct divine intervention. God is the author of fruitfulness, and God is sovereign and able to bring fruit out of even dry ground.

You have to know there were many very dark moments for Joseph over the past twenty years. Dark nights of the soul, sold a slave, languishing in prison, in chains, in a foreign land.

You have to believe he had moments of doubt, despair, depression, times when he thought nothing good would come out of this, that there would never be any fruit.

Did he think he would never have freedom, never have a wife, never have children?

He had been faithful to Potiphar and that went south.  
He had been faithful in prison and nothing came of that.

God is especially known for bringing fruit out of affliction. Notice God doesn't take Joseph out of the land of affliction, He makes him fruitful in the land of his affliction. God's plan for Joseph was to use him in the land of his affliction and to make him fruitful there.

Ephraim actually doesn't just mean fruitful, but doubly fruitful, or twice fruitful. He will not just bear fruit, he will bear much fruit.

God made Joseph fruitful as a husband/father in the land of his affliction and he made Joseph fruitful as a wise, political leader, a fruitful blessing to the nation of Egypt and Israel and the world.

God makes him useful, fruitful, helpful to those around him who are enduring their own sufferings and trials and difficulties.

**John 14:8** By this my Father is glorified, that you bear *much fruit* and so prove to be my disciples.

God has created us to be fruitful. Jesus came to make us fruitful in His service in His kingdom. And one of His means is through our affliction.

*What are we to take away from this story* that is written for our benefit and understanding?

God is sovereign, God is in control, God is always at work purposefully and meaningfully working all things for His glory and our benefit and blessing. What God does in Joseph's life He still does in all our lives.

God has created a universe in which He temporarily accommodates the presence of evil, but it is on a leash, His leash, always under His control, always for His glory and always for His redemptive purposes. God who knows and controls the future and all outcomes.

**Isaiah 45:5-7, 9** I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; ... 6 that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. 7 I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things.

God may not shield us from evil, from trials and troubles, but He promises to bring good out of them. Affliction isn't a detour, it is God's path to fruitfulness and usefulness and purposefulness and glory.

In Egypt God rules over the climate and the land and the economies and destinies of nations. And He controls them for a specific purpose and plan, for the redemption of His people, for the salvation of the elect. God was preparing the way for a purposeful migration of Israel to Egypt.

Take from this great confidence that God is in control of America, God is perfectly accomplishing His purposes, and it can only result in His glory and redemptive purposes. Have faith and be bold in living out your faith, confident in our sovereign God.

### **How can we see fruit in our affliction?**

Joseph's suffering refined him. He is no longer the brash boy that provoked his older brothers. God was sovereign over Joseph's immaturity, his folly, his sin. God was

sovereign over his brothers, over their sin, over their anger and their lies. God is sovereign over our sins.

God is using our afflictions to refine us in His fire, to remove the dross of sin and pride, to sanctify us, to humble us and make us more dependent on Him, to make us more compassionate, and to make us put our hope in heaven and not in this life.

Joseph held on to hope. He had the dreams God gave him to give him hope. He held on to God's promises.

What promises do you hold on to?

**Philippians 1:6** I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

**Romans 8:18** I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

**Romans 8:28** We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

(II Corinthians 1:9; I Peter 1:6-9; Romans 5:3-5; James 1:12)

God is always at work. God never stops working in His world and in our lives. When God seems most absent in our world, there He is most present. The cross proves it.

For Christians suffering is always redemptive. Christ's suffering and death have profound significance for believers, not only in securing our salvation but also showing how we can endure suffering with faith and hope.

God is intimately present with His people in their suffering, encouraging us to trust His goodness and sovereignty even in the midst of suffering.

One of the great lies of Satan is that our suffering has no value or that it is only God's punishment for some sin or failure or that it is only limited to our benefit.

With all affliction there is benefit beyond ourselves. When God us, He blesses us always to be a blessing for others.

Phama and I recently had an opportunity to spend time with a couple who for the past two or three years have been walking through a very painful, emotionally heart wrenching trial.

As they told their story we could hear how they hung on to God and His Word, how by God's grace they stayed faithful and true, without wavering. And while they wouldn't wish what they have been through, and are still going through, on anyone, they are now able to talk about it and are willing to be used by God to help others going through the same experience.

Many of us have the same testimony, some pain, some suffering, that God uses in our life that we are now able to minister to others, able to weep with those who weep, able to understand.

That is stewarding God's gift for His glory.

### **Joseph, a picture of Christ.**

Jesus came into the land of His affliction, the land of His suffering. He received the marks and scars of great pain and affliction. Jesus still bears the scars of the nails and spear. God could have healed them, could have made them go away completely, so why does He still have the scars? They are the marks of something that is not to be forgotten, but rather marks that are made beautiful by the fruit that comes from them, the beauty of God's saving, redemptive purposes.

Jesus will never forget the cross, He will never forget the profound suffering at the hands of His "brothers." He will never erase from His memory the worst thing ever done on the face of the earth.

Read John's Revelation of heaven and notice how often the Lamb is referred to and sung to. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God.

Jesus never forgets His suffering and Jesus never forgets the fruit of His suffering. Permanent scars that point to permanent, lasting grace.

Jesus takes all our scars, all our sin, all our suffering, all our crosses, all our heartache, all our broken lives, broken families, broken relationships, all of it, and redeems it, heals it, gives it new meaning, new perspective, and begins even in this life to heal it and use it as a blessing in others' lives.

God is never so limited to just use our suffering for us, He will use it for the sake of those around us. Nothing is ever lost to God, nothing is ever wasted, nothing is useless, meaningless, hopeless.

Make the cross central to your understanding of suffering. The worst suffering in the history of the world became the most gloriously redemptive thing in the history of the world. If God can do that, He can do the same with our afflictions.

I can guarantee you in heaven every one of us say whatever we have experienced in this life, is worth gaining what we will have in heaven. No suffering here will be able to compare to the glory there. And glory to God, heaven will be a land utterly free from any and every affliction.

### **Implications and application.**

In the land of your affliction, pray for your Ephraim. Pray to see God's double fruitfulness from your affliction, fruitful in your life and fruitful in the lives of others He puts in your path.

Pray for faith like Joseph who remained faithful through all his trials, through every turn of events that could have led him to give up, deny his faith. Pray to see God's hand in the valley you are in and then pray to see how God will use your valley for someone else.

Ask for the ability to see double fruitfulness, like ripples in a pond reverberating beyond your own troubles. The sooner your eyes shift to that view, the sooner, like Joseph, you will see the meaning of your own suffering and the glory that has come with it. Pray for God to make you a good steward of His gifts of sufferings.

### **Prayer:**

Holy Father, thank you that because of the glory of your all-sufficient grace in our lives we can say thank you in the midst of everything that goes wrong in our world and in our own lives and bodies. You have given every pain a purpose to the glory of your grace, you have sanctified every suffering that we be more like Christ and our faith more like pure gold. You have carried us in your arms through the fiercest storms. You have never failed us, you are not failing us now and you never will. Increase our joy as we fix our eyes on Jesus who for the joy set before Him endured the cross.