

# “Surely Goodness and Mercy Will Follow Me” // Psalm 23 and Joseph // *Goodness in the Middle* # 2<sup>1</sup>

## Announcement

FM Launch Weekend resources (will add details shortly!)

## Introduction

On the 1st day of May we started a mini-series Psalm 23 called, “Goodness in the Middle.” The title conveys the idea that a lot of us--while we believe over HERE in the concept of God’s goodness (that he **is good in his essence**); **and we believe that** one day, in heaven, we’ll experience that goodness as he wipes away all our tears, it’s here, in the middle passage, that we struggle to believe in that goodness. It’s sometimes hard to reconcile what we believe about God’s goodness with what we experience now--when joblessness or betrayal or infertility or singleness or disease or death takes so much from us. ***How can we believe in God’s goodness when life feels so bad?***

**That’s what Psalm 23 is about.** Psalm 23 is the personal testimony of a man who learned to experience God’s goodness in a time of trial--for David, he was on the run, his wife had left him, many of his friends

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<sup>1</sup> Works Consulted: Philip Keller, *A Shepherd’s Look at Psalm 23*; Dallas Willard, *Life Without Lack*; Mike Wall, “[The Good Shepherd](#),” Henderson Hills Church, Edmund, OK, 8/6/2020. Matt Chandler, Psalm 23, Right Now Media. Tim Mackie: [A God of Love, a World of Suffering](#), Bridgetown Church, Portland OR. Tony Evans, *Detours: The Unpredictable Path to Your Destiny*.

had betrayed him; his boss had back-stabbed him, he was broken-hearted, disappointed, in the presence of his enemies and walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Life was not good.

A lot of **people don’t like Psalm 23. I know of one lady** who refused to have this Psalm read at her father’s funeral because it just felt so discordant with what she was experiencing. All the lofty, beautiful language--where was this God when her dad was dying? This Psalm just felt sentimental, and fake.

This Psalm is not intended to be a poetic salve or a bedtime story. It is a gritty wrestling with where God is in a time of pain and waiting. I told you that Psalm 23 has **3 main ideas** we’ll be exploring.

- 1. The presence of the Shepherd is our life, our joy, our safety, and our fulfillment** (this is what we saw on week 1)
- 2. God is always good, but the arc of God’s goodness is longer than we typically think** (that’s what we are going to focus on today)
- 3. God uses the times of our waiting to work good in us** (that’s next week)

So, again: Today, here’s our focus: ***God is always good, but the arc of God’s goodness is longer than we typically think.***

In the last verse of Psalm 23, David declares, **“Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life” (v 6)** Which means, our Shepherd is always behind us, turning our misery and mess into miracles of mercy. We are accustomed to talking about the importance of us following Jesus, but equally important is that he follows *us*. He comes behind us, weaving blessing and beauty out of our sorrow and suffering.

The question is, “**How far back there is he?**” Because sometimes you can see goodness and mercy coming from a time of pain: you didn’t get the job but that freed you up for a better one; your struggle with cancer gave you a new perspective on life. The infertility taught you humility, and to depend on God, and set you up for the blessing of adoption. I can remember a few times in my life being really frustrated by God, only to look back now and say, “God, thank you for not answering that prayer. That would have been a disaster.”

But let’s be honest--there are some chapters in life that you look back on years later and still can’t see tangible evidences of ‘goodness and mercy’ in them, and no matter how many angles you look at it from, there seems to be no satisfactory explanation for why some bad thing happened.

And yet--David in this Psalm remains absolutely confident that even in the most painful chapters of his life goodness and mercy are following him.

**So what I want to show you today is that the arc of God’s goodness--the time it takes for God’s goodness to be manifest--is often longer than we wished, but it’s always there, always at work. In all things. Nothing is outside his control and not one second is wasted.**

We’re going to remind ourselves of a few truths from Psalm 23, and then we’re going to see how a man in the book of Genesis named Joseph experienced them. You may be familiar with the story of Joseph, but have you ever read it through the lens of Psalm 23?

OK, first, Psalm 23:

- **Vs. 1, David says, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”** David makes the extraordinary claim: “**The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing. I have no needs.**”<sup>2</sup> David, of course, had all kinds of what we’d call needs, but in the presence of the Shepherd, he said, “I lack nothing.” Is that how you feel?
- **Vs. 2: “He makes me lie down in green pastures.”** I explained in our first week that in order for a sheep to lie down in a green pasture, the sheep has to be comfortable. Normally in a green pasture a sheep will eat; so, if a sheep is lying down in a green pasture, that means he is full.
  - Philip Keller, the Shepherd who wrote a reflection on Psalm 23, says that in order for sheep to lie down and rest, they have to be free of 4 things: **Hunger, Fear, Conflict with Other Sheep, and Pests.**
    - **Hunger:** When you’re starving, you can’t be at rest.
    - **Fear:** When you are afraid, you can’t rest. You ever hear some noise in your house and you can’t go back to sleep, but you also don’t feel like getting up and checking it out, so you just lay there, straining your ears to see if you hear anything else? I do that: I don’t want to go down there--that’s giving up my tactical advantage. If someone is in there I want them to come through the door so I’ve got a clear, focused shot at them--to throw my Chinese stars at them and whatnot. But I usually can’t go back to sleep, I’m so focused on trying to hear what’s happening.
    - **Conflict:** Sheep can’t rest when they have conflict with other sheep. One of the things that keeps me up at night is when I feel like someone has wronged me and I’m up late nursing my wound and musing about how I will get them back. Or, reviewing my argument with that person in my head thinking about what I could have said to win it. I told you that when I lose an argument, I always rerun it in my head later and y’all, in the rerun, I ALWAYS find a way to

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<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word for “want” (hasser) means “lack.”

win. I've lost lots of arguments in my life, I've never once lost a rerun.)

- **Pests**--Sheep can't rest when they are being bitten by fleas or disturbed by mice or parasites. Think of these as the niggling worries that keep us up. My finances; my kids at school or with friends; the stock market.
- David says, "I've learned to put the weight of all these things on God, and I trust him to provide all that I need for them."
- **This corresponds to vs. 5, "He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies."** A table for David represents food, fellowship and security. Even in the presence of his enemies, that's what he experiences with his Shepherd. Have you ever tried to eat when you were nervous or afraid? It's almost impossible. But David says, "Even with my enemies just a few yards away, I commune in peace with my Shepherd because I know even my enemies are under his control--not a hair falls from my head without his knowledge and consent."
- **And so, David says, "My cup overflows!"** For someone walking closely with Jesus, it's not just that THEIR soul is full, their cup overflows with comfort and joy and love so much that even in times of pain and emptiness they can minister to others. Maybe you've known a Christian like this--even in a time of trial, they are still ministering to others out of the overflow of joy and peace in their heart. **I sure have--many right here in this church.**

You're going to see all this play out in the life of Joseph. Genesis 37, if you want to follow along in your Bible, but it might be just as easy for you to stay in Psalm 23 and I'll come back to you in a minute.

(Joseph)

**Joseph was the son Jacob, who was the son of Isaac, who was the son of Abraham. So, basically, Joseph was Abraham's great-grandson. Joseph was born 11th of Jacob's 12 sons, and of all 12, Joseph was his daddy's favorite. Whenever Jacob talked about**

**Joseph**, his face lit up and his eyes sparkled. *Joseph* always got the extra piece of chicken and the last brownie. His brothers saw this, of course, and resented it, but it all came to a head when **Jacob gave Joseph a "coat of many colors."** Technically, it was a "**coat of long sleeves**," which is what the Hebrew actually says. It was a long, ornate robe that communicated status, worn to show that you didn't do **manual labor** (When I lived in SE Asia, a status symbol for men was to have a long **pinky nail**... it showed you had an office job and didn't do manual labor. Something similar going on here). Typically the older brother **wore this kind of jacket**, showing his seniority, but Jacob gave it to Joseph, one of the youngest. Talk about galling: the rest of the kids got their clothes off the **clearance rack at the Dollar General**, but Joseph was sporting a new Gucci trench-coat.

**And then Joseph, who was still just a teenager, started having dreams** about his future greatness. In one of them, he and all his brothers were out in the field **sheaving wheat**, when Joseph's sheaf of wheat suddenly grew a lot bigger than everybody else's, and everybody else's sheaves began to bow down to his sheaf. So Joseph **shares this dream with his family one night** over dinner, and says, "Well, guys, I think the interpretation here is obvious: *One day all of you will bow down to me. I'll do the commanding and you'll do the submitting.*" This, of course, went over like a **barbecue at a Bar-Mitzvah** with his brothers. (I will say, in almost every aspect of life Joseph is a kind of **role model**, but I would not advise you to imitate him here. **If you have a dream** where all your friends bow down to you, **keep that** to yourself. That's a you-and-your-diary story.)

Well, one day **all of Jacob's brothers are out in the mountains** feeding the goats (and, of course, **Joseph** didn't have to go work; he got to stay home and play with this new Pharaoh play-station or whatever), and his dad says to him, "**Joey--hop on that new 4-wheeler I got you** and go check on your brothers." And so Joseph does, and when **he finds them**, they're all grimy and stinky from chasing the goats and here comes **Justin Bieber** with his wavy hair and his coat of many

colors and he calls out to them, “**Hey, brothers--hey OLDER brothers. How is everybody?** You guys **still talking about my dream?** *Guess what? I had another one! In this one, I’m the **big gerbil** and you guys are the little runt gerbils...*” Well, one of **his brothers**,<sup>3</sup> says, “I’ve had about enough of you.” And he grabs him and throws him into a pit and they start **planning out how** they can kill him.

Well, to make a **long story short**, instead of killing him they **decide to sell him into slavery**, and so they sell him to some Ishmaelite traders, and they **take his coat of long sleeves**, tear it and dip it in goat’s blood and take it back to their dad and said, “Dad, we found this coat on the road. I guess **Joseph is dead.**”

Meanwhile, back in Egypt, an Egyptian named **Potiphar buys Joseph and puts him into service**. Potiphar happens to be the captain of all of Egypt’s armies.

And we encounter a **phrase for the 1<sup>st</sup> time, a very important phrase in the life of Joseph**: **Gen 39:2: “The Lord was with Joseph...** Now, we might be tempted to say, “Really, God? **How is that?** Sounds like if anything God was not with you. Couldn’t God have intervened and kept you out of slavery? You may have been a little annoying, but you didn’t deserve this. But Joseph understood that **even in those things, God was with him**, still in control, so he rallied his trust in God and served Potiphar faithfully. Even there, he did his work as unto the Lord and not unto men.

**“And Potiphar saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands...and so he made him overseer in his house and put him in charge of all that he had.” (39:5)**

This was a **crucial turning point** in the life of Joseph. You see, what if Joseph had said what I would be tempted to say in a moment like that: “God has forsaken me, and if God is not going to take care of me, then I’m going to have to”-- and then Joseph had taken matters into

his own hands? Well, the **story would have turned out very differently**. But Joseph believed that even in slavery and in Potiphar’s house his Shepherd was close by, and he continued to serve him and feast on his presence, even in Potiphar’s house.

**So, like the story says, Potiphar saw that** God was with him and so elevated Joseph to be in charge of everything in his house. You see, when a man’s ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him, and when God’s favor is on you, it’s hard even for the pagans to deny it.

**ENTER Potiphar’s wife**. Potiphar’s wife decides that Joseph is a handsome man, a lean tall hunk of Hebrew kabob. (The writer of Genesis, by the way, says that Joseph was **handsome in both “form” and “appearance”**--which is a Hebrew way of saying he had a cute face and a jacked body.)

**So one day when Mr. Potiphar was out doing military stuff, Mrs. Potiphar** comes in doing her “walk like an Egyptian” routine and **propositions** Joseph. The only thing the story records her saying is, **“Lie with me.” (39:7)** which has to be the **most blunt pick-up line** ever. Literally, in Hebrew, it is, “**Sex, now!**” Which she proceeds to repeat over and over again. It’s the only words she says in this whole story.

Well, Joseph won’t do it, because a) it is **against the laws of God** and b) it would be a **betrayal of his master Potiphar**. When he resists, Mrs. Potiphar grabs his coat and says, “Sex now!” . And Joseph tries to pull away from her, but as he does, his coat rips off in her hand. She, of course, feels scorned and humiliated, so later when Potiphar gets home, she says, “Joseph tried to rape me, and as I was trying to force him off of me his coat ripped in my hands.”

Tragically for Joseph, Potiphar believes his sex-predator wife and throws Joseph into prison. And there we see the phrase again. **Gen**

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<sup>3</sup> Judah

**39:21, “But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love.”**

Again, you’re like, “Really? Joseph, you are the victim of sexual assault and in the end you get blamed instead of the predator? How could that happen and you still say, “God is *with* me?”

**But God was with him, and all his guidance in Joseph’s life was according to the dictates of steadfast love, and Joseph knew that, and Joseph feasted on that whether in prison, the palace, or Potiphar’s house.** This was Joseph’s secret of success; what he held onto when everything else in life fell apart.

I pointed out last week that in Psalm 23, in the middle verse of the Psalm, David shifts his language from “he” to “you.” He goes from 3rd person, “*The Lord is my Shepherd... he restores my soul,*” to “As I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, *YOU* are with me.” He goes from talking about God to us to talking to God in front of us.

Interestingly, in Hebrew, there are 27 words before the YOU in vs 4, and 27 words after. The word “You,” (You are with me) is literally the middle word of the entire Psalm. That is a Hebrew poetry device showing that the focal point of this Psalm is God’s saving presence with David! There comes a time when you are not spouting theology about God, just communing with him. That’s what happens to David, and to Joseph.

**Gen 39:22, “And God gave him favor with the keeper of the prison. And the keeper put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners.”** **23** The 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.**

Here is my big question for you: **How would your attitude in life change if you believed in all things that God was with you?** **Joseph is in prison,** and yet his **spirit still soars** because he believes God is with him. And wherever he is, even in the presence of his enemies, he feasts at the table of God’s presence.

Well, after several years in prison, **a couple of PHARAOH’S COURT SERVANTS** get thrown in there with him: specifically, Pharaoh’s **butler and his baker**. They both have dreams, and they **tell their dreams to Joseph**, and Joseph says to the BUTLER: **Your dream means that within 3 days you’ll be out of here, restored to your place of honor.** And the baker is excited, “That sounds promising. What’s my dream mean? And Joseph says, “Well, your dream means that within the week Pharaoh will hang you and the birds will pick away at your flesh and will eat your eyes out of their sockets as you hang in the sun.” So, that was a downer.

**And sure enough, it all takes place.** The baker is executed, and the butler is released. And just as the butler is leaving, **Joseph says to him,** “Hey, remember me **when you get out of here.** I’m here unjustly.” And the **butler says, “#neverforget”** but promptly forgets about Joseph the moment he’s released. **And so Joseph languishes there in prison for 2 more years.** How long must those 2 years have felt to Joseph? I mean, can you imagine Joseph at this point?

But then, 2 years later, **Pharaoh has his own dream--**and it’s a **weird one:** 7 fat cows come out of the Nile river followed by 7 skinny cows, and the 7 skinny cows eat the 7 fat cows, and then they turn to Pharaoh and say, **“EAT MORE CHICKEN.”** No, I made that part up. The dream ends with the 7 skinny cows eating the 7 fat cows, and no one can figure out what the dream means. And then the butler is like, “*Oh yeah...!* I knew this guy in prison who could interpret dreams. I wonder if he’s still alive.” So they send for Joseph and Pharaoh says, **“Can you interpret this dream?”** And Joseph says, **“No. No man can interpret dreams, but I know a God in heaven** who can. And God gives to Joseph the interpretation, and Joseph says, **“This dream means that God** is about to send 7 years of abundance (the fat cows) followed by 7 years of famine (the lean cows). A wise person would use the 7 years of abundance to get prepared for the 7 years of famine.”

**Pharaoh is really moved by this, and authorizes Joseph to get the land ready for the famine. Eventually Joseph gets promoted to be the prime minister of Egypt.** Joseph literally goes from being in prison to being **over everyone** in the kingdom except Pharaoh himself--**which would have included, btw, Potiphar and his wife,** which had to be an awkward reunion.

Now... **fast forward about 10 years.** The predicted famine has come and things have gotten really bad, and the **whole Middle East region is starving**, and the **only place** that has food is Egypt. So, Jacob sends his other sons, all of Joseph's brothers, down from Canaan to Egypt to buy food. Joseph **immediately recognizes** his brothers, but they don't recognize him (I guess because of the whole make-up, cobra-head headdress deal he wears). And, of course, they assume by now that he's dead.

**When Joseph sees them**, he's so overcome with emotion that he can **barely control himself**. Eventually, after putting them through **all these tests to see if they've changed**, he just can't stand it anymore, strips off his headdress and says to his brothers, **"It's me, Joseph!"**

**NOW... What kind of moment** was this for them? Do you think they were more "GLAD" or "SAD"? **They were terrified.** The runt brother they sold into slavery and lied about is now the 2nd most powerful man in the world.

But Joseph said, **45:5 Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here... 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God.**

**I ask again:** How would your outlook on life change if you believed that in everything God was "with you?"

For Joseph, he said: "My cup overflows." Forgiveness, overflowing from satisfaction with God and a complete confidence in his sovereign plan!

His brothers **return and get their father, Jacob**, and bring him to Joseph and, **after all these years, they are reunited.** They keep thinking Joseph is going to get revenge on them,

**Gen 50:18,** But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." **Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.**

**My cup overflows.** *All my life you have been faithful. All my life you have been so, so good. I have feasted at your table and dwelt in your house forever. You've been with me as much in the valley of the shadow of death as you were in the green pastures. You've poured so much goodness and mercy into my life that there's plenty in my cup to pour out on others, even on the unworthy.*

Somehow, in the midst of his completely chaotic life, Joseph grasped the faith of Psalm 23. If somehow you could have read Psalm 23 to Joseph when he was in the pit, or in the prison, and asked if he'd believed it, he might have said, "It certainly doesn't feel like 'goodness and mercy' are following me right now." But I know it's true. And in time, he would see it. And in the middle passage, in the awful time of waiting, he rested in the arms of the God of Psalm 23, whose goodness and mercy were with him all the days of his life, whether he could see it or not.

So, let's return to our thesis again: **God is always good, but the arc of God's goodness is longer than we typically think.**

**The point of Joseph's life is not**, "Hang on, no matter how bad today is, one day before you die, you'll be promoted to be the Prime Minister of Egypt." **No, Joseph's story is first and foremost given to us, like just about every story in the Old Testament, as a foreshadowing of Jesus.** Jesus said that the whole Old Testament was given to paint for us the patterns of the Messiah, to show us that "the Christ should suffer and rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations."

Which means, Joseph's story ultimately gives us a glimpse of Jesus'. You see, one day, many years into the future, another son--a descendant--of Jacob, would walk the same path Joseph walked. He would be betrayed by his brothers; then lied about and falsely accused. Unlike Joseph, though, Jesus wasn't just sold into slavery; Jesus was put to death in it; but like Joseph, he would be raised from that pit to sit onto the highest throne of the land, where he would offer salvation to the nations of the world. And, like Joseph, instead of using that throne to exact vengeance on his betrayers, he would forgive and restore them, and, like Joseph, he would weep tears of joy when his brothers were reconciled to him. We see in Joseph's story a pattern that is repeated over and over throughout the Old Testament. God's righteous servant suffers and through that suffering offers salvation to the world.

So, Joseph's first and foremost about Jesus. But see, if you and I are in Jesus, then ultimately our stories are tied into his, and that means the same providence we see at work in Joseph's life and Jesus' life we can expect in ours also.

Joseph shows us what it looks like to exercise the faith of Psalm 23 in a time of waiting. Specifically, I think he demonstrates **5 ways Psalm 23 teaches us to wait:**

## 1. Wait patiently

**I'll say it again: God is always good, but the arc of God's goodness is longer than we typically expect.** And sometimes, like Joseph, we don't see the resolution until far in the future. We're talking decades between when Joseph was betrayed and when he saw it all work out for good. Decades of, "God, this doesn't feel fair" and "God, what are you doing?" Sometimes you have to stick around to the very end to see that "goodness and mercy" really have been following you all the days of your life, and for many of us, we won't see it this side of the resurrection.

Think about how many Bible characters experienced this. *Joseph, David, Job.* Even *Jesus* and his disciples. Can you imagine how LONG those 3 days between Jesus' crucifixion and his resurrection felt like to his disciples? Those 3 days are the picture of where we are now. We wait between Jesus' humiliation and ultimate resurrection.

When the Duke of Wellington fought Napoleon at Waterloo, the fate of Europe hung in the balance, and everybody knew that. So everyone in England waited anxiously for the news of the battle. Of course, we're in a day with no advance communication--no cell phones or TV or telegrams. The quickest way news would get back to England would be by ship. And so, on the day of the battle, a large mass of people stood on the shore waiting on the news. Many were parents or loved ones of English soldiers fighting in the battle. Well, a ship came into view and began to signal by semaphore--where you flash the lights. It was a foggy day, however, and the message received on land was "Wellington defeated." And the people began to wail in despair, and weep, but after a few minutes, the fog cleared and they saw the rest of the message, "Wellington defeated *THE ENEMY.*" When Jesus died, the demons screamed out "victory," but when the fog lifted on that bright Sunday morning, we got the rest of the message. Jesus defeated... *THE ENEMY.* When your loved one dies, when you've been betrayed by the friend or the spouse or you are

languishing in prison like Joseph, the demons scream into your heart, “Jesus defeated...” But there is a day coming when the fog lifts and you see that NOT ONE THING was out of God’s control and not one thing was wasted.

**God is always good, but the arc of God’s goodness is longer than we typically think. That’s how it has always been.**

*Which leads to our second way that we should wait:*

## 2. Wait confidently

Think about all the things Joseph’s story demonstrates God’s sovereignty over: The jealousy of Joseph’s brothers led to selling him into slavery. It just so happened that Joseph was bought by Potiphar which set him up to be held in a prison for royal prisoners, where he would meet the baker and butler. The butler’s poor memory led to Joseph being right where they would know to find him when Pharaoh had his dream.

Even in what appeared just to be bad luck, God was exercising providence: Think about it: When Potiphar’s wife grabbed Joseph’s coat when he was trying to run away, why did the coat rip so easily? What if he had worn a nicer coat that day--the one that was double stitched and wouldn’t have ripped so easily? Or what if he’d been one second faster in trying to avoid her grasp? Without the evidence, Potiphar may not have believed her, which means Joseph would never have gone to prison, and then never met the butler in prison which means he likely would never have met Pharaoh and wouldn’t have been able to save Israel. In a way, Israel’s whole salvation came down to one cheap piece of Egyptian fabric.

Scripture presents God as in control of everything: The wind, the rain, lightning, earthquakes, tsunamis, the flight of a sparrow, the blooming of a lily, the hairs on your head, good kings, wicked kings, every roll of

every dice, the outcome of battles, the placement of every one of the billions and billions and billions of stars, your thoughts, my thoughts, angels, demons, even Satan himself. All of it is under the providence of God. (This doesn’t mean God is the one acting in those things, just that he is orchestrating all of them for the accomplishment of his purposes.)

**Now, I know what some of you might say, “Well, what about the ways I have messed up my own life?”** If you are surrendered to him, he uses even those things, providentially, as part of his good work in your life. I have to think that in that first bout in prison Joseph probably said to himself, “Why did I have to be so braggish about my dreams with my brothers? What if I’d been more humble? More discreet?” But Joseph came to the same realization that David did in Psalm 23. It’s not just goodness that follows me, but mercy. Steadfast mercy, Joseph says. Mercy means that even when we mess up, God responds with **never-stopping, never giving up, unbreaking always and forever love. Which covers even our mistakes.**

**And so, we wait not only patiently, but confidently, too...**

## 3. Wait authentically

I just want to say: It’s OK to tell God you’re hurting and that you’re upset--David did. The Psalms record some scorching laments and complaints. Job did--have you read the book of Job? Job spent the better part of his book kvetching about God. I would assume Joseph did--Scripture doesn’t record any of his anger, but I’d bet if we could get our hands on Joseph’s journals from his prison time, they’d be filled with some pretty salty things.

The point is: It’s ok to be honest. These Bible writers were. Be authentic. But then from that place of anguish, call out to God in faith. But also,

#### 4. Wait intimately

The theme running through Joseph and David's life is that even in the worst of times, they communed with God. They feasted upon God.

- David said, "In the presence of my enemies, you prepare a table before me."
- Joseph, in the prisons, learned to feast upon a God who was with him. While you're waiting, draw as near to God as you can. Don't run away from him. Run to him. Spend time in his Word. Journal your prayers.
- Isn't it amazing how often Joseph responded to the worst situations with peace, joy, confidence, integrity, trust, and even forgiveness? That's because in times of waiting he filled himself up with the presence of God, so when life squeezed him, God is what came out of him. **When you squeeze something**, what comes out of it is what is in it.

#### SPONGE ILLUS.

- Question: When you are going through a trial and you feel the pressure of life squeezing you from all sides, how much of God comes out?
- Or, to quote our friend Tony Evans, do you respond with **'cussing, fussing, complaining and blaming'<sup>4</sup> instead?**
- You want to know why those things come out at your moment of trial? Because that is what you feast on when you wait. You nurse disbelief and anger and self-pity in a time of trial, so that's what comes out of you when life squeezes you.
- If you want to respond like Joseph responded, you have to feast where Joseph feasted.

Finally...

#### 5. Wait expectantly

I've told you that you may not get to see the culmination of goodness in your lifetime, and that is true. But, Joseph got to see glimpses of it. So did Job. A lot of believers get to see glimpses of God's good plan on earth.

A verse we love and sing here at TSC: **Psalm 27:13**, "I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD *in the land of the living!*" IOW, now, while I live now, before I get to heaven. In the land of the living. David said, "It's not just in the sweet by and by (in heaven) ) where I want to experience God's goodness, but *now*. I want to see it in my marriage, in the lives of my children, in this church, in my circle of friends, *NOW*. And while, by God's grace, I'll wait patiently--until eternity if that's what it takes--I don't want to give up yearning, expecting him to pour his goodness out now, in the land of the living where I can glorify God on earth and bless those whom I love. And you are right to expect that, and ask for it, because God is a good God who loves to bless people.

#### (Kylie White)

Some of you may not remember Kylie White. She was a member of our church for over a decade (in 2020 she moved to Atlanta). Well, in January of 2019, while she was a member here, she went in for a routine eye exam when she received completely unexpected and devastating news. She was going blind. She had noticed that her peripheral vision was getting a bit hazy and she was having some headaches, but she assumed it was nothing out of the ordinary that some glasses wouldn't fix. The doctor told her it was caused by a degenerative, incurable blindness that would slowly take her sight over 5 years.

She said it was ironic, she had just asked God to help her *trust in things not seen*. She felt like God had given her as her theme verse for the year, "We trust in the things that are not seen, the things that are eternal." She wrote in her journal: "*Help me to fix my eyes, thoughts, and affections not on the temporary, but on the*

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<sup>4</sup> Tony Evans!

*eternal. I want a faith that depends on you at every turn and eyes that are focused on you and you alone."*

She said she was not expecting God to answer her prayer that way. She was in her 30's and had four children, two biological and two adopted. If things went as the doctors said, she won't physically see them walk across the stage to receive their high school diplomas.

But listen to her words: "As I listened to the news of my diagnosis, I heard in my heart God speak over me truth: 'So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. I was reminded of Jesus' words to his disciples when they came across a blind man: This has come to pass so that the work of God could be displayed.

At the end of 2019 she wrote, "God has shown me more of him in the midst of this suffering than he has in all the years before. As painful as it has been, I'm learning what it means that my spiritual sight is far more valuable than my physical sight.

I do not bank my hope on any healing for my coming blindness, as there is none. I bank my hope on the suffering Savior, Jesus Christ, who is far more precious than sight, or my ability to drive, or to see my four children's faces. These things are inconsequential in light of eternity.

Shortly after my diagnosis, I was praying when I saw a vision in my mind. Jesus was leading me, blindfolded, in the midst of the most beautiful landscape I've ever seen. Once I got to an overlook, Jesus took my blindfold off. In that moment, I realized God was showing me I can trust my good Father even with a blindfold in his hands. I can give up my sight for a short time here on earth because I trust my Father knows what's best for me, always working for my good and for his glory. Because what is seen is temporary and what is unseen is eternal. "

**I shared that story with you at the end of 2019 as an example of amazing faith in suffering, and even included it in my book, *What Are You Going to Do With Your Life?***

What I haven't shared with you is what happened next, after she moved to ATL. Her sight continued to fade. She said it was like a tunnel whose walls got closer and closer, slowly closing a door on her sight. She said for a while she prayed for healing, but eventually gave up--she said that continuing to ask just set her up for disappointment. But then at a prayer meeting one night, a friend speaking (I believe) with the gift of prophecy, said, "You don't get to be an overcomer without having obstacles... I think God has put this on my spirit for you: "If you ask for healing and the answer is no or not now, then God will use the disappointment to cultivate greater love and trust in you. But (and this was the key part), ***"Don't limit him because you are afraid of disappointment, he can handle your disappointment."*** This friend then put her hands on her face and said, "Your view of God is like this (small tunnel, which was about all Kylie could physically see at the point). But God is like this. Don't limit him."

She said, I heard what I believed was God say so clearly in my spirit, "Let it go. Open your hands, ask me." Each time I read another miracle of Jesus, it was as if I would hear God say, "Just ask me, you are my beloved daughter, you can ask. But each time I came up with 3 reasons why I couldn't or fear and misunderstanding would keep me from truly asking. And one afternoon, I asked as plainly and confidently as I could, 'God heal me. I believe you can and I am your daughter asking her Father for something you've told me to ask you. I don't understand it and I don't have to, but I trust you and I know you're able. Jesus, heal my eyes.'

A month later I went back to the Duke Eye Clinic where they did their litany of tests. My doctor came back in and, with disbelief and genuine bewilderment on his face, told me that all signs of the disease were gone. "He sat there stuttering, explaining that my disease gradually thins the retinal cell wall but that walls of my retinal cell had thickened since January. They were back to beyond their original thickness. He just said, "I can't understand it." I explained to him that Jesus had done this, and he responded "Well, that's an intangible I can't measure. Not at Duke."

Kyle writes: "Isn't this our God? Bigger than we think? More powerful than we know? He is still in the healing and resurrection business. Our prayers are so often too small, our vision of who he is so limited, our faith too shaky to ask or risk or trust. He has used that imagery so many times with me over the last months, my hands near my cheeks saying "this is all I can see" and he puts his hands on mine and says I know, and pushes them back, "but I am way out here." I have limited faith, limited prayers, limited perspective, limited understanding, but he is limitless. He wants to blow our minds with how good he is, we just have to have eyes to see it, hearts to ask for it, and a faith to believe for it."<sup>5</sup>

## MUSIC

Y'all, I love that story for so many reasons. In trial, God gives us a new kind of sight. And one day, he restores everything. It may or may not be in this lifetime. Lots of people's don't get to see the fulfillment in their lifetime--the majority even. But we are right to hope for it (Ps 27:13).

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<sup>5</sup> <http://onalightstand.blogspot.com/?m=1>

See last two post in August: "Invitations " and "the Gift"  
<https://app.frame.io/presentations/146f8032-8348-4a2f-b4f1-a31c2063d0ec>

In the meantime, I want you to know, like Kylie experienced, God is always good. And even if the arc of his goodness is longer than we typically expect, we can be sure he is pursuing it. *Even when I can't see it, you're working; even when I can't feel it, you're working. You never stop, you never stop working. And not one thing--not one single thing--is wasted. All of it has meaning.*

Let me close with the words of John Piper: *Not only is all your affliction momentary, not only is all your affliction light in comparison to eternity and the glory there. But all of it is totally meaningful. Every millisecond of your pain, from the fallen nature or fallen man, every millisecond of your misery in the path of obedience is producing a peculiar glory you will get because of that.*

*I don't care if it was cancer or criticism. I don't care if it was slander or sickness. It wasn't meaningless. It's doing something! It's not meaningless. Of course you can't see what it's doing. Don't look to what is seen.*

*When your mom dies, when your kid dies, when you've got cancer at 40, when a car careens into the sidewalk and takes her out, don't say, "That's meaningless!" It's not. It's working for you an eternal weight of glory.*

*Therefore, therefore, do not lose heart. But take these truths and day by day focus on them. Preach them to yourself every morning. Get alone with God and preach his word into your mind until your heart sings with confidence that you are new and cared for.*

And so we sing, "And Lord haste the day when MY faith shall be sight..." I want breakthroughs now. But if not, I'm content--I know *the Lord is my Shepherd*, I have no needs, and I can feast on his presence

now if I have to wait. God is always good, even if the arc of his goodness is longer than I sometimes think I'd prefer. And in the meantime, I have him.

Heads bowed

**Do you need this confidence?** Ask God to give to you. \*Like I said--I can't teach it to you. This is something only the HS can teach by opening the eyes of your heart to his goodness--WHO HE IS.

**GOSPEL:** You say, "But how do I know God is on my side? How do I know he's disposed toward good with me? I've done a lot of things wrong, and maybe God is paying me back for my sin..." Friend, great question. The gospel is this (everything that could separate you, he put it away!)...If you receive him, he will make you his child, and you can know from that point forward, he will pursue nothing but good in your life, and nothing but goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life, and you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever! You can be reconciled to him and know the goodness and fellowship of the Shepherd TODAY! RIGHT NOW.