

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: The Good News About Redirections

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¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷ This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Genesis 50:15-21

Transcript:

Listen, if you have your Bible, why don't you get it out. We're going to read together our scripture for this morning from Genesis 50 starting with verse 15. When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died. This is what you are to say to Joseph: 'I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

Now, his brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. Well, heavenly father, we want to thank you for this word because it is good and it is right and it is the best. So father, would you help us to understand what you're saying to us in these moments and in these times. And we pray it in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Well, hi BelPres, my name is Rich Leatherberry, I'm the mission's pastor here. And just recently, my wife and I, Kristen, we celebrated our 35th wedding anniversary. Well, that makes me think of a story that you may have heard me tell a number of years ago.

Right after we were married, we flew to Waikiki for our honeymoon. Unfortunately, the end of July is a very popular time and it turns out there were thousands of people who were there at the same time. I have never had to wait in line for a spot at the beach. Well, we wanted to be able to say that we did more on our honeymoon than to wait in line for a spot at the beach. So, we got to brainstorm. Someone had given us a blow up party raft at our wedding shower. So, it was big enough for two people to float on and had this space in the middle for a cooler and a bunch of cup holders so we could float around sipping adult beverages. So, we ditched the line, blew up the raft, pushed off from shore and jumped on.

Well, almost as soon as we jumped on, the wind started blowing and it started blowing us out to sea. Within just a few minutes, we were a hundred yards from shore. I'm not kidding. So, we started paddling. But the wind just kept blowing us farther and farther out. And as it did, our paddling became a little more urgent. Well, the results were good, because I'm a little stronger than my wife and my side was going a little bit faster than her side. Which meant we were going around in circles. Now, this started our first marital disagreement. "Hun, you have to paddle harder." "I'm paddling as hard as I can. You need to paddle slower." "If I paddle slower, we're going to blow farther out to sea." Silence. "You're splashing me, quit splashing." And suddenly now the story about standing in line for the spot at the beach is sounding a whole lot better than this story we are creating about being blown out to sea and needing to be rescued.

We splashed and argued and spun around for what seemed like a half an hour. And then suddenly, I don't know how, I fell in. But the crazy thing is, I immediately hit bottom as soon as I did. So, I stood up and there I was a couple hundred yards from shore standing waist-deep in the water. We had spent all that time splashing, and arguing, and spinning around in circles when all we really needed to do was get off the raft and walk back into shore.

So, we did. And that was the last time we ever used that raft. Well, life can be like that, can it? One minute everything is going as planned, the next minute unexpectedly blown out to sea. This COVID pandemic is redirecting everything. Many of you feel like your lives have been hijacked and you're lamenting that. Sports teams canceled, classes going online, colleges in lockdown, friends and family you cannot see, a lost loved ones or a job lost, or a forced retirement.

Some things that are going on now, though, as part of redirection are not related to COVID. As a nation, we're recognizing our deep need for racial justice and reconciliation. So, we're being redirected to think and see differently, to speak and act differently. My message today is that redirections can be good things. We can find new opportunities when we direct our attention to God. And that was Joseph's story.

One of my favorite preachers, John Ortberg, likes to describe Joseph's story as a good news, bad news story. Joseph is his father's favorite. And his father gives him a special coat. That's really good news. But his brothers hate Joseph and they plan to kill him. That's really bad news. One day they seized Joseph and in a rare moment of moral conviction, they decide not to kill him after all. That's really good. But then they sell Joseph to some traders who take him down to Egypt, where he's sold as a slave to one of Pharaoh's officials named Potiphar. That's really bad.

Well, Potiphar likes Joseph. And so he puts him in charge of everything. Really good, but Mrs. Potiphar also likes Joseph, but not with the same kind of like that. Mr. Potiphar likes Joseph with. And so, she tries to seduce him. That's really bad. You're getting the hang of this?

Well, Joseph refuses her. Really good, but she becomes furious and lies to her husband and accuses Joseph of a crime he did not commit saying that he tried to sleep with her. Really bad. Mr. Potiphar takes Joseph and throws him into jail. That's very, very bad. But while Joseph is in jail, he meets the Pharaoh's wine steward. And Joseph has the opportunity to interpret a dream the wine steward had. The wine steward will be released in just a few days and he will once again be able to work for Pharaoh. So, Joseph concocts a plan with the wine steward to help get him freed from prison. That's really good. But when the wine steward is freed three days later, he totally forgets about Joseph. And Joseph sits in prison for two more years. Ah, really bad. And on, and on, and on it goes. But as Joseph's story unfolds, we keep hearing these words, "And the Lord was with Joseph."

When life does not go as planned, the good news about redirections is you are not alone. The Lord is with you. As the Lord was with Joseph, the Lord is with you. Genesis 39 says, "Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered. When his master saw the Lord was with him and gave him success in everything he did, Potiphar put him in charge of everything he owned."

"The Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. With Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate." Burgers or barbecue, Jimmy John's or Papa Murphy's? That's all Potiphar had to concern himself with because the Lord was with Joseph. Wherever you are, whatever disappointments you are facing, whoever or whatever you have lost in this season, the Lord is with you. As the Lord was with Joseph, the Lord is with you. Now, one of the great promises of the scriptures from beginning to end is the promise that God is with us. "Your God will be with you wherever you go," Joshua 1:9, "God goes with you. He never leaves you or forsakes you," Deuteronomy 31:6. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me," Psalm 23:4.

The Bible never promises, with God in our lives, that we'll be protected from hardships, or redirections, or disappointments, or loss. But what we are promised is that God will be with us when those times come. And because Jesus, God in the flesh, experienced suffering and redirections and was put to death in the most difficult, painful way possible, God knows how to help us when we go through redirections. Because he experienced those things too.

It's not a question of whether God will be with you, the question is, do you believe him when he says he will? Now, there's an old hymn called he giveth more grace, and it goes like this:
He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater, He sendeth more strength as our labors increase, To added afflictions, He addeth His mercy, To multiplied trials, His multiplies peace. His love has no limit,

His grace has no measure, His power no boundary known unto us all, For out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth and giveth and giveth again.

You will never exhaust the supply of God's ability to help you. Wherever you are, whatever you are going through, you will never exhaust the supply of God's ability to help you. The Lord is with you. Well, Joseph's success catches the eye of Mrs. Potiphar. Again, Genesis 39, "Joseph was well built and handsome. And after a while, his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, 'Come to bed with me,' but he refused. 'My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?' And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her."

Flirting glances, suggestive looks, day after day she tries to entice Joseph, but he refuses her or even to be with her. The bad news about redirections is that your character and your values will be tested. I mean, Joseph could have thought to himself and looked at his situation and gone like, My whole life I've tried to honor God and look what that's gotten me. Just once I want to do what makes me happy? What feels good for me."

But Joseph doesn't do that. Instead, he does the right thing. He says no. And then he does the next right thing, he refuses to even be with her. Joseph will not make small talk with her. He will not even be in the same room with her. The stakes are too high. He just won't go there.

See, the good news about redirections is first that God is with you, but second that God uses redirections to shape our character because better characters live better stories. Victor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor turned psychiatrist said, "The last of the human freedoms is the freedom to choose our response in any given circumstance." No matter what you're going through, you have the freedom to choose your response.

Now, studies have shown that one of the common characteristics that people who grow stronger in tough times, the common characteristics they have is that they consistently choose to maintain their moral character. They stay committed to their values, they choose to do the right thing, and then they choose to do the next right thing.

Now, sometimes it's hard to know what the next right thing is. A woman on staff told me that the filter she uses is good, better, best when thinking about the choices that she has in front of her. But sometimes doing the right thing isn't a moral choice, it's just taking the right next step. Like deciding to accept the situation that you're in. You might not like it, you can really even hate it, but accepting it gives you the freedom to choose your response in the middle of it.

Or doing the right next thing might be just something as hard and as simple as getting out of bed and getting ready for the day ahead of you. God uses every one of those choices that we make, every one of the decisions that we make to make us better characters. And better characters live better stories because God is making us stronger, more mature, healthier.

Now, a friend of mine grew up with an abusive father and that created a bunch of unhealed pain and trauma that he learned to live with. Well, he became a Christian and after college, he went to live in another country as a missionary. The people of that country had just survived a genocide but they constantly lived with this subliminal state of anxiety and fear. My friend started a nationwide youth ministry and many young adults discovered Jesus through his ministry. But they eventually gave up on

Christianity because they couldn't find the power they were looking for that would give them healing from their emotional pain and trauma.

Well, my friend didn't know how to help them. He became depressed. He started to isolate himself. He started to drink more and more. His mission agency eventually sent him back here to the U.S. That was a really hard redirection for my friend because he loved those people and he missed the ministry. He was lost, but he chose to do the right thing. He got help. He found a counselor who could help him at this time. And then he chose to do the next right thing. He started going to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and he got clean, and he got sober. His therapist helped him find healing and pain from his trauma through spiritual reflection.

And this trauma that he'd been carrying around since he was a child that gave him peace and an intimacy with God that he'd never experienced before. And then two years later, my friend moved back to that country. He totally redesigned and revamped the ministry that he'd created to include everything he'd learned about emotional healing and trauma.

Today, hundreds of young men and women have been through that program and they're finding new life in Christ, freedom and healing. God used my friend's redirection to change his character. And now he is living a way better story than the story that he had been living before. Well, Mrs. Potiphar is furious with Joseph, so she falsely accuses him of trying to sleep with her.

Again, back to Genesis 39, "When his master heard the story his wife told him, he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the King's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him."

Now, I have to admit, I want to hear more from Joseph at this part of the story, especially in these critical moments. His brothers throw him in an empty cistern, and they sell him to passing merchants. It's crickets from Joseph, nothing. We hear nothing. And then the merchants drag Joseph to Egypt where he's sold as a slave to Potiphar and it's crickets again, nothing.

Joseph does the right thing, but then he's falsely accused of a crime he didn't commit and he's thrown in prison. And it's the same sound, nothing from Joseph. But that's the point, that's the point. Joseph's words are not what's important here. It's his placement. And even more importantly, we need to see that it's God, God is the one who's doing the placing because Joseph's story is part of a larger story, God's story.

The good news about redirections is the Lord is with you, he is making you a better character so you can live a better story. And your story is part of a larger story, God's story. And that's the good news. Now, Joseph's life was hijacked. He went from his father's favorite, to a dried up well in Canaan, to the house of the captain of the guard in Egypt, and then finally to prison. And at each venture place matters. God is placing Joseph at exactly the right place in exactly the right time.

Finally, Joseph gets his break. He gets to interpret Pharaoh's dream. A dream that Pharaoh has of seven years of prosperity for Egypt that will be followed by seven years of famine. Well, that earns Joseph a promotion to the second in command in all of Egypt. And in that place, Joseph can manage the wealth, the food supply during the seven years of prosperity so that he can literally save hundreds of thousands, if not millions of lives, during the seven years of famine.

And even more importantly, he saves his father, Jacob, and his brothers, the chosen people of Israel. What Joseph's brothers meant for harm, God intended for good, the saving of many lives. Now, when I was a youth pastor, there was a woman in our church at that time who had the voice of an angel. When she sang, the Holy Spirit moved. Her kids were involved in the church, but her husband wouldn't set foot through the door of the church.

Well, then she was diagnosed with breast cancer. What a redirection that was. There was a radiation and chemotherapy. We had prayer meetings and healing services, but over a long period of time and a hard battle, the cancer won and took her life.

Well, she lived her last days with remarkable courage and an unshakeable peace. Her faith grew to a deeper and deeper trust in Jesus. And she boasted with inspiring confidence that she would soon be living the endless life that lies before us all who followed Jesus. Now, you'd think that that experience would have completely turned her husband from Jesus, but it had the exact opposite effect. Not long after her death, he decided to become a follower of Jesus. He was baptized right there in our church. And then several months later after he had gone through some healing, he started helping families as they were going through the exact same redirection he'd gone through.

See, the Lord was with her. He gave her courage and he filled her with his joy. She could have been angry and resentful, but she trusted Jesus and prayed instead. She did the right thing. And then she did the next right thing. God made her strong and resilient. And because her story is part of God's larger story, God used her suffering and even her death to show her husband what a wonderful savior we serve.

No matter what you are going through, wherever you are, God will not waste a hurt. God redeems your disappointments. Your losses are not lost on him. He will use them all. That's what the cross is all about. That what was an end was just a new beginning, that what was dead comes to life in three days. And ever since that day, redirections, and disappointments, and loss are never the end of your story. Because your story is part of a larger story, God's story. And it is a wonderful story.

So, Bell Pres, here's your homework this week, ask God one or all of these questions and then write down what you think God is saying to you through them. Lord, what is the next right thing you want me to do? Lord, will you help me trust you even when I don't understand what you're doing?

Lord, what does your love require of me? Lord, will you show me how to live my story for your greater story? You see, the story about being blown out to sea is a whole lot better than the story about standing in line waiting for a spot on the beach. And 35 years later, I can trace some of the principles that have made my marriage to my wife strong. I can trace them back to those early beginnings.

Forgive everything. Don't splash her when she asked me not to. And go on adventures together. God has such great things in store for you who are watching this this morning. He can do so much through you when you invite him in.

So Jesus, we surrender to you our circumstances, our redirections. And Jesus, we want to thank you that you are the God who is with us. We are not alone. So, we look to you for strength this morning, for encouragement this morning, for your peace this morning, for your wisdom this morning. And Lord, we want to thank you that you're using these circumstances to change us, to shape us. So, help us Lord to know what the right thing is, and then the next right thing so that, God, we can live a better story. And that you would use our story for your greater story. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Please read Genesis 37-50

- 1) Joseph's story can be found in Genesis 37-50. What redirections did Joseph encounter?
- 2) What disappointments and/or losses might Joseph have experienced in each one?
- 3) How is God with Joseph?
- 4) What was God's greater purpose for it all?
- 5) What redirections are you going through and what disappointments are you facing?
- 6) In what ways does Joseph's story help you live your own story?