

Resourced to Bless

Meant for Good Series Week 5: Genesis 42: 56 - 43:2

9/24/17

Welcome/intro: back at Woods, intro/explain team teaching model

Thanks Mark and Michelle/pre-sabbatical blessing

This is week 5 in a series of messages called “Meant for Good”—if you’re new

We’re looking at the crazy life of a guy named Joseph in the Bible—some of the highest highs and lowest lows all wrapped into one life of anyone in the Scriptures

And because Joseph experiences so many different things there’s going to be lots of easily relatable things about it: to start with there was family drama and dysfunction, lots of it

Brief overview: Joseph gets sold into slavery by his own brothers, gets promoted to management as a slave in his master’s house, gets falsely accused and thrown into prison, again ends up in management as a prisoner, running the prison

He interprets a dream of a fellow prisoner who 2 years later tells Pharaoh the king of Egypt about him when Pharaoh has a dream that’s disturbing him

they call him up from the dungeon, and in one of the most dramatic scenes in the whole Bible Joseph interprets Pharaoh’s dreams

there’s going to be 7 years of great crops and then 7 years of famine, and Joseph suggests a plan to prepare for the famine to come

And as a result of what Joseph says and does, Pharaoh puts him in charge of the whole land of Egypt: prisoner to Prime Minister in about 30 minutes!

Throughout this story we’re seeing that two things are true in life:

first, hot mess happens. if we live long enough we’re going to experience pain and difficulty in this life, sometimes that happens TO us, we’re victims, and sometimes we create or generate the mess

secondly, the good news is that no matter how bad the mess, there’s a God who is bigger than the mess who has the power to redeem the mess—who can take your hot mess and my hot mess and work it for good, make it good, bring good out of it

This week we’re going to talk about what do we do with the stuff and/or experiences that God gives us

When my kids were little, I remember multiple times working with each of them on that whole sharing thing because what comes more naturally to us, sharing or shrieking bloody murder if someone asks for them?

Yeah, so we worked a lot on the whole sharing thing, because it’s not the most natural for us

But there was always a little bit of shame for me when I was talking to them about it, because I realized that I was asking them to do something that I wasn't always good at either!

And so eventually I tried to shift that whole sharing conversation from "why don't you share" to "you know what, sharing is something I'm working on too, we both need Jesus to help us to be able to share. Let's work on this together."

Because here's the reality: God has designed the universe to run on generosity.

Chances are, if you look back over your life some of the people who most changed your life are the ones who were generous with their time, their attention, their skillset and training, something that impacted you deeply:

parent, teacher, coach, boss, manager, mentor, friend, even a book you read or a speaker you heard, sharing their insights or understanding

And it might just be that the places where you feel the most disappointment or pain or gaps in your life are those places where you needed someone to be generous and share something with you who didn't, and that gap is something that you've had to live with ever since.

Today, we're going to pick back up on Joseph's story as he's been stockpiling grain for seven years

and when the famine hits Joseph is going to have an opportunity to be generous with and share the resources under his control

And in the process, he's going to challenge us to consider what kinds of resources God has entrusted us with—not all distributed equally, we've all got different kinds of resources

And then he's going to challenge us to consider who God has positioned us and resourced us to bless.

Bible/No Bible/Genesis 41, pick up after Joseph interpreted the dream: 7 years of plenty, then 7 years of famine

Joseph's been promoted to Prime Minister and he's essentially running the stockpile of grain operation—so much grain that they stopped counting it is how the Scriptures describe it

Then we get this:

⁵³ The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, ⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. ⁵⁵ When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph and do what he tells you."

Matriarch story: uses relational power and money to keep everyone in orbit around her

Joseph here is being given a whole lot of power by Pharaoh—do whatever Joseph says. And with this blessing of power, there's a ton of temptations, too!

A couple of weeks ago we talked about this thing called **the Integrity Cycle** that people throughout the Scriptures walk and that we also have to walk

It starts with **God's presence**, which is always the source of **blessings**—those blessings could be very tangible like food, money, good jobs, a nice house, positional authority or provision of any kind

It could also be emotional or spiritual, like the knowing we're forgiven, the peace that grace brings when Christ is at the center of our lives, freedom from striving and straining

But we talked about how on this side of heaven, blessings always brings **temptations**--the temptation with ANY resource is to clutch and cling to it rather than hold loosely and bless

Whether the resource is money or power or authority or grain or knowledge or a skill, the most natural thing in the world is to think that in order for me to get the life that I want to live, I have to get what I can and hold onto it as tightly as I can

Here, Joseph is prime minister, he's stockpiled more grain than anyone else in the world because God blessed him with the ability to interpret Pharaoh's dream

And the people go to Pharaoh because they are starving, and he says "This is 100% Joseph's call"

Joseph has got all this power—life and death kind of power. And what kinds of temptations are always loaded up with this kind of power?

all kinds of ways Joseph could use these resources and leverage them for merely personal gain of all sorts

Can you imagine at least one slightly sketchy thing that you might be tempted to do if you owned all the grain that was in the whole world and people were coming to you for help?

Here's what Joseph does:

⁵⁶ When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout Egypt. ⁵⁷ And all the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe everywhere.

When I was in high school we had this club called Future Business Leader's of America, FBLA, and mostly it was an excuse to hang out with friends

But I think if we were doing what we were supposed to be doing, we would have been figuring out how to do this: how do you create a business where everyone in the known world needs exactly what you have and you're the only one who can supply it?

Notice here that the people both in Egypt and from far off lands are purchasing the grain, Joseph isn't just giving it away

And there's a whole lot of discussion among Bible nerds about whether or not Joseph was just to sell the grain to the Egyptians rather than just give it away.

In my small group this past week we kicked this around—was it good or right that Joseph sold the grain or should he have just given it away?

Most of us thought it was good that he sold it—there's something about asking people to put some skin in the game that forces them to be better stewards of it

And then we talked about our own personal tendencies when it comes to using our own resources, especially money—some of us were more on the saver side of things, some of us were more spenders

in many marriages where one person is the spender and one person is the saver—for how many of you is that true for your marriages?

And one person pointed out that part of what's important about how we handle resources isn't just the behavior itself but the spiritual dynamics around it and what it reveals about our HEARTS

Whether we're savers or spenders, many of us are using money to fill some sort of a need or void in our lives: control, safety, security, comfort, importance, significance, influencing other people

Jesus talks about money more than just about anyone else in the Bible because he knows that money promises so much and delivers so inconsistently
money is God's biggest competitor for most of our hearts.

For spenders, there are healthy ways that not holding onto money too tightly can be really beautiful, more free to give it away, more free to part with it

But spending more freely could also be trying to fill a void in our hearts with more and more stuff, which is essentially the core dysfunction of so much of the world around us

For savers, there are healthy ways that being a great steward of the resources God has given to us sets us is simply wisdom! You're not just freewheeling spending money everywhere or merely giving money to random needs impulsively

You're more deliberate which could set you up to be more consistently generous rather than random

But there's also the unhealthy way of being a saver, where you're grasping for control with a clenched fist, looking for control and security that money tries to promise but fails to deliver on over and over and over again

The question "do I love and trust in money to fill my needs or do I love and trust in God more than money?" is the question that challenges all of us when it comes to our resources.

Might be worth stepping back and thinking through: ***what's your natural disposition when it comes to your resources***: are you more ***cautious and conservative*** or are you a little more ***free-wheeling***

And then maybe look back and see ***where have you expressed that in a way that wasn't as healthy and when have you expressed that in a way that was great?***

When has that been a blessing to you and the people around you and when has your natural disposition been an obstacle to blessing the people around you?

And can you name at least one of the spiritual pitfalls that are part and parcel of your tendency and begin to pray about it?

"God, I know that I like to buy cool stuff in part just because it's fun and kind of cool. Free me from that so that I can honor you with all my spending."

"God, I know that I like to save and save and save because I want to feel secure. Help me to be faithful in my saving but ultimately look to you for my security."

Here in this passage, Joseph has the most valuable resource in the world and he's not hoarding it, but he's not just giving it away, either—he's selling it

But one indicator that he's operating from a generous heart is this little part right here: "**all the world**" is coming to buy food from Egypt—not just his own people, it's open to everyone!

It's one thing to sell *your* grain harvested from *your* fields to *your* people who grew it in the first place AND who all look like you and speak your language and know your customs

It's another thing to be the one nation on earth who has food stockpiled for this famine and to open up the doors and say: there is grain available for you, too.

Now this is significant in part because earlier in the book of Genesis chapter 12, we met a guy named Abram, and God had said something very specific and very bold to him:

"I will make you into a great nation,

and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,

and you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you,

and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you.

This promise given to Abram, changed his name to Abraham was Joseph's great-great grandfather! And so as Joseph opens up the storehouses of grain to all the surrounding nations who are starving, what's happening?

Through Joseph's great and hard work, all the nations are being blessed, just as God had said to Abram a couple generations before

Thousands and thousands and thousands of lives are saved here, in fact, you might be here today because one of your ancestors about 5,000 years ago was saved by Joseph's wisdom during this famine

Joseph is opening the storehouses of grain to the nations, in part fulfilling the word of God to his great-great grandfather that his family would be a blessing to all the nations

And for those of us who are Jesus-followers here this morning, the Scriptures say that we've been grafted into this family of Abraham, we're sharers in this promise

and we are called to be participants in this blessing to the nations in some way, somehow

Now, while we've been tracking the story of Joseph in Egypt we haven't heard much about his family back in Canaan, the dad who loved him and the brothers who sold him into slavery

But what's happening back home with Joseph's family is what the writer of Genesis is particularly interested in

that family was also supposed to be a part of the promise to Abraham but they're struggling under the weight of this famine along with the rest of the world

And that's the turn the story takes next:

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?"² He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die."

Has it ever been obvious to you that someone else around you needed to get some help but they couldn't see it?

It can be a little maddening can't it? Sometimes they can't see that they need help, other times they kind of know it but just don't want to.

We can get all self-righteous and eye-roll-y about that time that person drove us crazy because they wouldn't ask for help.

But let me ask you: has there ever been a time when YOU probably needed to get help and you couldn't see it? Or you saw it, you just refused to do anything about it?

About ten years ago, I was in a season of ministry where it felt like I had the anti-Midas touch. Everything I was trying to do was backfiring, not working, everything I touched was falling apart

And I started getting more angry. And more frustrated. And more anxious. And more anxious. And I have the spiritual gift of sleep usually but I couldn't sleep at night, I'd wake up covered in sweat

And I was getting snippy with my wife and kids and co-workers and on my blog

And after a couple of weeks of this thing building and building and building, my wife who was watching me implode said to me very gently: maybe it's time to take a step back

So I did, I pulled back and I got some help. Started meeting with a mentor, stepped into some new spiritual disciplines

I couldn't just keep going. I had to change some things to get healthy. And I was too deep into my own head and my own mess to really see it—I needed someone else to tell me to do so.

Jacob is Joseph's dad, the dad with all those brothers that sold Joseph into slavery. And they're starving.

And he says to them this line that maybe all parents have said to their kids if they've got more than one: "why do you just keep looking at each other? Get moving!!"

See, sometimes we're stuck in a difficult situation and we need help but we're stuck in inactivity for whatever reason:

maybe we're blind to the situation, maybe we're unsure of what to do, maybe we know exactly what we need to do but we're too proud to ask for help

This morning, if you're stuck just looking when it's time to get moving, perhaps this is why you're here today: time to stop looking around, time to get moving

Time to wake up to what's going on around you. Time to put away foolish and stubborn pride. Time to move out of denial into reality

Time to stop pretending that it's going to get better on its own, time to stop telling yourself that you can handle it when it's clear that you can't, if you could have fixed it you would have done so long ago

Time to move out of being isolated and disconnected and into healthy relationships—to find resources outside of yourself to navigate whatever challenge it is that you're facing

This morning, my friends, it's time to stop waiting, stop hoping it'll magically fix itself, and start moving—to go to the place that you have heard might have grain, might have the resources that you need to overcome the stuck place where you are right now.

Jacob hears about grain over in Egypt, somehow they've got this huge stockpile while everyone else is running out, and the choice is stark: either we get food from someone else, or we die

This is not the reality that most of us are facing, most of us are not making life or death choices for ourselves and our families

But this life or death choice is where they are here in this passage, and it's where many people around the world are—it's the reality that so many people face around the globe

And this morning, we're going to have an opportunity to be in the place of Joseph to make a difference in one child's life

Now as Jacob pushes his ne'er do well sons in the direction of Egypt, we as the readers see that this is all leading somewhere

There is going to be a dramatic reunion between Joseph and his brothers who sold him into slavery

Here's how that plays out:

⁶ Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. ⁷ As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them.

Joseph has been positioned and resourced not just to bless the nations

he has been positioned and resourced to save the family that God had made a promise to through Abram a couple generations earlier

Joseph is in the perfect position, with all the resources he needs, to do the work that God has sent him to Egypt to do

BUT to do that work, he's going to have to get over the little fact that to do God's work is going to require that he forgives the very people who made his life miserable for so very long—his own brothers who sold him into slavery

And next week, we're going to see how Joseph struggles and wrestles and agonizes over whether or not to do that hard work of forgiveness

But for this morning, as we close, we're going to have an opportunity to participate in this call on our church as the people of Abraham

That through us, all the peoples on earth might be blessed

And this morning, the **Take-WITH** is simply this: "***Who have you been positioned and resourced to bless?***"

RESOURCES: all different kinds of resources, not the same, not distributed the same.

Some have more time than money, some more money than time, some don't have much of either but you've got skills or wisdom or networks that you could share generously

Is there someone at work that you could mentor? Is there a neighbor who needs a hand in a particular way?

Is there a kid at school who needs a friend? Is there a mom in your circles who could use an afternoon to take a long nap and do some errands while you take their kids?

Joseph has been put in a position where he is resourced in a particular way to bless the nations.

I want to propose to you that you, also have been positioned and resourced in a particular way to bless someone around you.

That's the call on all of our lives, it's going to look different for everyone, but all of us have some resources of some sort that God's entrusted to you to give to someone else

And MANY of you are already engaged in that, already sharing those resources super-generously—thank you!

But this week as we close, we're going to invite you to consider taking part in this call on God's people to be a blessing by considering sponsoring a child through World Vision

This won't be for everyone, and that's fine. This might not be who you've been positioned and resourced to bless.

But for some of us, this is one of the ways we're going to apply this passage

When we've talked about financial giving before, I recognize that for some people churches asking people for money has a ton of baggage around it

So what I try to say as often as we talk about giving money is that financial giving is essential for our spiritual well-being

We have to find some way to give even just a little bit, the tiniest bit away for us to be spiritually alive people and to participate in God's economy of blessing that he invites us into

And so for those of you who have baggage with churches asking people to give them money, I urge you as someone who just wants you to know the joy of the Lord, just give it away somewhere.

Don't want to give it here? Fine. Find some other God-honoring, Jesus-place to give it away somewhere, for you, for you to be fully alive!

JOSEPH'S STORY reminds us, most vulnerable people in the world are the poor, and poor children most of all

These are the people that Jesus calls us to serve and this is an opportunity for all of us to give to something that has nothing to do with this church and everything to do with participating in God's heart to care for the least of these, the most poor and vulnerable.

About 6 years ago or so I was convicted that all my charitable giving and financial giving was very local and not very global

So I looked into child sponsorship and found out more information about World Vision. Some of you have asked great questions about the program and about World Vision over the past couple of weeks

First off, a couple of years ago a massive study was conducted about the best and most effective ways to help end cycles of poverty and it found that child sponsorship was among the best ways to do so

Christianity Today ran the story with the headline, “Want to Change the World? Sponsor a Child”

This is absolutely one of the best ways to alleviate some of the greatest pains in the world

And then World Vision is an industry leader in accountability—they have some of the most rigorous accountability practices of any charitable organization in the world

They’re not just a good Christian charity, they’re one of the best run of any charity anywhere

World Vision is one of the best organizations doing the best and most effective work at alleviating the pain of poverty in the world

So there I was 6 years ago, as I was thinking about going global with my giving, and I happened across an article that talked about the ways that gangs in Mexico would get little boys into their gangs, sometimes abducting little boys and force them to serve them in their drug trafficking

And I looked at my then 6-year-old boy and was sick to my stomach imagining someone kidnapping him and forcing him into drug trafficking work

And I decided to do what little I could to help at least one boy my son’s age to have a better life than that. **So we sponsored** Jose six years ago

And we occasionally send him cards and exchange letters.

And at nights with my kids at points we’ve prayed regularly for Jose and his family, been such a great way for us to have a tangible level of engagement with God’s heart for the world

And so this morning, we’re going to invite you to join me and millions of other people who have made a small but significant difference in one child’s life through sponsorship

Again, not everyone can do this or wants to do this, that’s totally fine, but to start with, we’re going to ask everyone to pray for kids around the world who are living under the weight of poverty

And to help us with that ushers pass out some cards with the profiles of kids in poverty and some prayer prompts

Band going to come up and play, invite you to take a minute to read over this card and engage with the issues that are listed on the card that kids are facing all over the world

We'll take a minute to pray after we sing a bit, but want to give you a beat to read over this card and to get to know some of the issues kids are facing around the world

[Band plays, sing the first couple of verses of the song]

Walk through prayer prompts and invite people to pray silently for just a moment. Then invite to stand as we finish the song

Benediction: World Vision sponsorship table