

JOSEPH'S DISRUPTION**GENESIS 39, 41 & 45**

1968. I turned twelve years of age in that year, but I was old enough to remember it as a tumultuous, disruptive year. Kind of like 2020 is turning out to be. What was going on back in 1968? The Vietnam War was escalating. The North Vietnamese launched what became known as the Tet Offensive in 1968. The highest level of US troops – over half a million soldiers – were committed to that conflict by President Johnson in 1968. Opposition to the Vietnam War here in the United States began to grow significantly. Then in April 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot and killed in Memphis. Violent riots erupted in major cities around the country as racial tensions escalated. 1968 was also an election year as is 2020. In June 1968, Democratic candidate Robert Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles. At the Democratic National Convention later that summer in Chicago, more historic riots occurred between the police and antiwar demonstrators. 1968 was quite a year.

2020 is also turning out to be a tumultuous, disruptive year. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives in many significant ways. For many of us, the pandemic has been more of a disruptive experience so far instead of an experience of actual suffering. But many people have truly suffered. Nearly 140,000 Americans have died of COVID-related illness. They and their grieving families have definitely experienced suffering. So have our health workers and first responders who have had to endure long hours in adverse conditions as well as the threat of getting infected themselves. Then George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis. Demonstrations – some of which included violent rioting – erupted all over the country. Will anyone disagree with me that 2020 is turning out to be a tumultuous, disruptive year on many different levels?

Disruption. None of us enjoy it. It causes anxiety and fear to well up within us. When we experience disruption of any kind, it's normal to ask questions like, "Is God trying to tell us something? Why is God allowing this to happen? Is God really in control?" This summer I've decided to share a series of messages I've entitled "The God of Disruption." The more you read and study Scripture, the more you run into the fact that God is very comfortable with disruption. It's no evidence of His lack of control. In fact, God often uses disruption of many kinds to accomplish His will. He either created disruption or allowed it frequently in the lives of key people in the Bible or in key events that occurred in Scripture. In other words, the fulfillment of God's plan and purposes often included the experience of significant and uncomfortable disruption.

Today we begin by looking at the story of the Old Testament character, Joseph. He experienced significant personal disruption in his life; nevertheless, God was very active in and through all of his troubles. Joseph stands out to me as an example of how you and I should relate to God even in times of great personal disruption. For example, like Joseph, in the face of disruption, you and...

I CAN MAINTAIN GODLY PRIORITIES.

We hear a lot today about “dysfunctional families.” Joseph was born into perhaps the most dysfunctional family in human history. Joseph’s dad, an integrity-challenged man named Jacob - he was the grandson of Abraham, had two wives and two mistresses all at the same time! Those four ladies gave him twelve sons and an unknown number of daughters. How would you like to be in that family? Joseph was son number eleven. Since he was the firstborn son of Jacob’s favorite wife, Rachel, Joseph was his dad’s favorite son. “Favorite” isn’t a family friendly word. Favoritism in a family then and there went over about as well as it does here and now. Jacob’s family seethed with resentment and hurt feelings. Talk about a toxic environment!

One day, Jacob sent Joseph to his older brothers so Dad could get a progress report on the family sheep herding business. His brothers saw Joseph coming a ways off probably because he was wearing that beautiful robe of many colors Dad had given him to signify Joseph was his favorite son. Oh, how those men hated their younger brother! “Here comes Daddy’s little boy in his pretty clothes.” Perhaps they remembered the dreams this spoiled brat had shared with them – strange, egotistical dreams – of how one day his entire family would bow before him in respect and awe.

“Let’s kill him,” said one brother. “Let’s get rid of his royal highness.” The oldest brother said, “No, don’t kill him. Instead, let’s throw him in that pit over there and let him starve.” Another brother asked the inevitable question, “What are we going to tell Dad?” Someone else suggested, “Let’s kill a goat and stain Joseph’s robe with it. Then, we’ll tell Dad a wild animal killed him.” I’m sure Joseph was fully aware of his brothers’ hostility and animosity, but probably even he was surprised when they grabbed him, ripped off his coat, and dropped him into a deep pit. Later that evening, the brothers saw a caravan of traders headed for Egypt approach their camp. Someone asked, “What good is it to kill Joseph? After all, he is our own flesh and blood. Instead, let’s just help Joseph go away forever. Why not sell him to these traders?” And that’s what happened. Joseph went from a favorite son to a despised slave just like that. His brothers dipped his coat in blood and lied to Jacob about Joseph’s fate. Disruption. It looked as if God had abandoned and forgotten Joseph, but that’s wasn’t the case at all.

Joseph was sold to an important Egyptian official named Potiphar. Before long, Joseph proved himself to be an intelligent, honest, and hard working young man. Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his entire estate. Potiphar’s wife noticed some of Joseph’s other attributes, however, and wanted to add him to her list of sexual acquisitions. It was a critical moment in this young man’s life. Let’s read how he responded (Genesis 39:5-10). Now, Joseph was a robust, vigorous young man. A great lady – and probably a pretty one, too – wanted him. Who would know? Who would care? “God,” you say? The same God who allowed Joseph to become a slave? I can imagine Joseph wrestling through the pros and cons. Potiphar’s wife could be a valuable ally. Why say no and risk making this powerful woman angry? He was just a slave now, anyway, and slaves weren’t expected to have morals or integrity, were they?

But Joseph pronounced the most difficult word in Hebrew, Egyptian, or English. He said, “No” to Potiphar’s wife. An evidence of godly priorities is the ability to say no when

you are strongly tempted to say yes. No, I refuse to be dishonest in my business dealings. No, I will not step on that person to get ahead. No, I will not lie even if telling the truth makes me look foolish. No, I will not sacrifice my family to achieve financial success. No, I will not make material things the driving force in my life. No, I will not cheat on my spouse. Joseph's story reminds me that godly people get tempted all the time! Temptation is always disruptive. But the sin is never the temptation itself, but instead when we yield and say yes to it. In a time of personal disruption, Joseph decided to obey God regardless. He maintained godly priorities. He said, "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" How indeed! When we say no to temptation, we say yes to God. The disruption of temptation gives you and me the opportunity to show God and ourselves that we value Him and our relationship with Him above all. Let's follow Joseph's godly example. In the face of disruption, you and...

I CAN DEMONSTRATE GREAT PERSEVERANCE.

Joseph's life illustrates a truth we all need to learn. Doing the right thing in life doesn't always result in immediate blessing. Potiphar's wife might have inspired the observation, "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." She accused Joseph of trying to rape her, Potiphar believed her, and Joseph was thrown into prison. Don't you wonder how Joseph processed all this mentally there his first night in jail? "Is this how God responds when I try and live His way? Why should I keep on trying to obey God?" There's no record of God explaining any of this to Joseph. Apparently, God was silent. When we come face to face with disruptions, we often ask the same kinds of questions. But God doesn't always feel obligated to provide answers when our lives get disrupted. Judging from the way Joseph responded, I can only conclude that at some level he said to himself, "I don't understand this, but I know God still cares about me. I know it matters to live life His way. I will keep on obeying Him regardless. I will persevere."

Joseph eventually became the associate warden of the Egyptian Federal Prison. While there he met two government officials who had gotten on the bad side of Pharaoh and landed in jail themselves. Both of these men had strange dreams in prison. God gave Joseph the ability to interpret the meaning of those dreams accurately. One official was executed; the other one got his job back advising Pharaoh. But he promptly forgot all about the remarkable young man he'd met in prison. The Bible says Joseph spent two long years of his life in jail. Would you consider that to be personally disruptive?

But then something happened only God could arrange! Pharaoh had two very unusual, vivid, and powerful dreams himself. No one could interpret their meaning. It was then Pharaoh's advisor remembered Joseph. A few hours later Joseph was standing before the most powerful man on the planet at that time. He told Pharaoh the meaning of his dreams. Egypt would enjoy seven years of agricultural abundance followed by seven years of agricultural failure leading to an extreme, devastating famine. Joseph boldly offered a plan to survive this coming disaster and suggested Pharaoh appoint a gifted administrator. Let's read about what happened next (Genesis 41:37-44).

How's that for a sudden reversal of fortune? In the face of personal disruption, Joseph demonstrated great perseverance. Ultimately, it paid off. There was no quit in Joseph. Whatever disruptive situation he found himself in, he made the best of it. When he was sold to Potiphar as a slave, he didn't waste his life complaining and grumbling about the unfairness of life. When he was sent to prison, he didn't give up on God, turn his face to the wall, and wait to die. The Bible doesn't tell us, but I have to think Joseph had his moments of despair and deep discouragement. There must have been times when he questioned God and His goodness. In the face of personal disruption, he continued to obey God regardless. Pretty remarkable. Great perseverance marked Joseph's life.

When you and I decide to persevere in the face of disruption in our own lives, we turn life's problems into opportunities for God to work through us. This is more than just having a positive mental attitude. God gave Joseph the grace to turn real tragedy into real triumph, real disruption into real blessing. Most of us just give up too soon. We don't persevere. We give up on relationships: marriage, kids, parents, other followers of Jesus. When we face personal disruption, we can even give up on living life God's way. Do you know who has enriched my life the most? It's the people who have experienced enormous personal disruption in life of one kind or another, but who have endured. They haven't gotten all bitter at or defeated by life's disruptions. They keep on holding on to God and His promises regardless.

When you and I decide to persevere in the face of disruption, we invite God's blessing into our lives. And God's blessing follows us, flows through us, and pours out onto others. The Bible says God blest Potiphar because Joseph was there. The prison was blest because Joseph was there. Pharaoh was blest because Joseph was there. Where has God put you today? What family... what neighborhood... what job... what life situation? I wonder... is that place and the people in it blest because you're there? It will be if you persevere. It will be if you continue to obey God regardless even in the face of whatever disruptions you might face. Persevere. Hang in there. Let God do something marvelous through you. What else can we learn from Joseph's example about how to face personal disruption? Well, it's only then when you and...

I CAN EXPERIENCE GOD'S PROVIDENCE.

The seven years of famine followed the seven years of plenty just like Joseph predicted. It wasn't just a local famine either. Like our pandemic, that entire part of the world – many countries - was affected. Big time disruption. Jacob, Joseph's father, heard there was grain in Egypt. He sent his sons to buy some to keep the family from starving. There they met Joseph, but they didn't recognize him. He was just some very important Egyptian official before whom they bowed in deep respect fulfilling those odd dreams Joseph had when he was just a boy. Joseph tested his brothers. He forced them to go and get their youngest sibling, Benjamin, who was Joseph's only full brother. Then Joseph framed Benjamin to make it look like he was a thief. Would his brothers abandon Benjamin as they'd abandoned Joseph? Did they hate and envy Benjamin as they had Joseph? But when the very same brother who suggested Joseph be sold as a slave offered to become Joseph's slave so Benjamin could be freed, Joseph realized

there'd been a change of heart among his brothers. In one of the most dramatic and moving scenes in the Bible, Joseph broke down and revealed his identity, "I am Joseph! I am Joseph!" The Bible says the entire palace could hear the sound of Joseph weeping. The brothers feared the worst when Joseph revealed his identity to them, but the reunion was a grand, happy, wonderful one.

Why? How come? Because Joseph recognized something we refer to as the providence of God. Providence is the belief God has a plan and purpose for everything that happens in our lives: good or bad, happy or sad, wonderful or disruptive. For Joseph it meant learning God is bigger than betrayal, bigger than injustice, and bigger than being forgotten. I see at least two examples that Joseph knew he had experienced God's providence in and through his personal disruption (Genesis 45:4-8; 50:15, 18-21). Joseph realized God was there all along. Becoming a slave led him to Potiphar's house. Resisting Potiphar's wife's advances got him thrown into prison for two long years. But that was God's way of getting him in front of Pharaoh. God then made him second in political power only to Pharaoh. Why? So many people's lives could be saved in the famine including the lives of his own father and family.

The providence of God. It's a truth that's important to get a hold of. It means God doesn't prevent disruptions in life even when we faithfully obey Him and live life His way. There's no great mystery when we disobey God and life turns out badly. That's to be expected. But what about when you do what's right and you still have major disruptions? Even though Joseph loved and obeyed God, he got hit with betrayal and injustice. It seemed like God abandoned Him. Jesus Himself reminded us that good, godly people suffer disruptions. In John 16:33 (NLT), He said, "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." God doesn't find the disruptions in my life to be an obstacle to His plans and purpose at all.

The providence of God. It means God will fulfill His plans and purposes for my life in His own time and in His own way. Despite appearances, God was fully in control of Joseph's life. Granted, at times it looked like a total disaster. But God was working out His plan. It reminds me of that well known verse in Romans 8:28 (NLT), "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." That's providence. Someone once said to me, "In God's Kingdom, the line between point A and point Z is a zig-sag line." Very true. Joseph's life story was a zig-sag line if there ever was one! Perhaps that's true of your life as well.

The providence of God. It means your whole attitude toward life and living can be altered when you acknowledge this truth. Because Joseph accepted God's providence, he was able to forgive his brothers. God was bigger than his miserable, worthless brothers! Because Joseph accepted God's providence, he was able to put betrayal and injustice behind him. God redeemed the whole situation! God was in control all along! My friend, you and I are going to face disruption. Other people will injure and hurt us. We will experience loss, pain, and heartache. We might be the victim of an injustice.

Why, we might even go through a pandemic! If you don't accept and acknowledge God's providence, you'll end up bitter, resentful, and unforgiving. You'll give up on God. But if you believe in His providence, you'll give God your disruptions, and you'll trust Him to work out everything in your life for His glory and for your good.

Helen Rosavere served as a Christian medical missionary doctor in Africa for 30 years. There were major problems with political turmoil and violent revolutionaries in the country where she served. One awful day, some rebels high on drugs attacked the village where Helen lived. They took over the hospital and seized Helen as a hostage. Helen was in her 50s at the time. She'd never been married. She'd given herself selflessly to the people she served. Despite her sterling character and sacrificial life of service, the rebels repeatedly raped Helen. Right in the midst of those terrible moments, Helen cried out to the Lord, "Why, Lord? How can you let this happen to me?" Even then she felt the Lord speak into her spirit, "Thank you, Helen, for giving me your body years ago. Helen, they're not just raping you. They're raping Me." Through God's grace, Helen felt a kind of peace knowing it was God being defiled and not herself. Didn't that horrific ordeal bother Helen? Of course, it did. She had terrible memories of the attack. But the realization that this crime had been done to Jesus and not just to her helped Helen realize that God had called her to Himself. She had died to herself spiritually. Helen didn't belong to Helen anymore. She belonged to Jesus.

A few months later, Helen found herself in the United States about to address some medical students at a university. Once she got to the podium, she noticed two girls sitting on the front row who were too young to be medical students. One of the girls stared right back at Helen – just drilled a hole right through her it seemed. At that very moment, God spoke to Helen's spirit and told her to tell the audience about how she was attacked in Africa. Helen resisted at first because it had nothing to do with her speech. But the impression to share her story was very strong. So Helen shared what had happened to her as well as her other comments. When she was done, one of the two girls she'd noticed earlier approached Helen and said, "Doctor, I'm sorry to have to bother you, but my 15 year old sister over there was raped 5 weeks ago and hasn't said one word or made a sound since. She's been to pastors and psychologists and no one's been able to help her. Could you talk with her?" Helen looked up and began walking toward the girl. Halfway there the girl stood up and ran straight toward Helen. When they reached each other, they embraced so hard they both crashed to the ground. They just cried and held each other. After an hour of crying, the girl talked non-stop for two hours. For the first time, that young woman found someone who could identify with her hurt and shame – just as Jesus had identified with Helen's.

Disruption. Sometimes it can be just little stuff. Sometimes it can be terrible moments of betrayal, injustice, humiliation, and profound suffering even for people who love God and faithfully obey Him. Just ask Joseph. Just ask Helen Rosavere. Learn from their example, child of God. Maintain godly priorities. Demonstrate great perseverance. Then you will experience God's remarkable providence.