



SERMON NOTES

From In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley

WALKING WITH GOD THROUGH THE DARK TIMES

KEY PASSAGE: Genesis 37-39 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Genesis 50:20 | Psalm 119:105; 139:7-12
Romans 8:28 | Colossians 1:13 | Hebrews 13:5

► SUMMARY

We all experience challenges in our lives.

Often they are connected to relationships, finances, family, health, or career. It's sometimes difficult to understand why these trials have occurred. In these times, we may feel overwhelmed, confused, hopeless, and helpless.

When we're in the midst of trials, it is not possible to comprehend all God plans to accomplish through our difficulties. Scripture assures us that He has our best interest in mind and will work through even the dark times for our good.

It is vital to understand the difference between walking in darkness and walking through darkness. As believers, we do not live in the darkness of sin (Col. 1:13). However, to refine us and help us become all He wants us to be, the Lord allows His children to encounter certain hardships and trials. In the story of Joseph, found in Genesis 37-39, we discover six principles by which to operate in challenging times.

► SERMON POINTS

God is with us in dark times.

This is the foundational principle for seasons of hardship. Because of jealousy, Joseph's brothers plotted to kill him, but the Lord changed Reuben's and Judah's hearts (Gen. 37:21, 26). Scripture teaches that the Lord was with Joseph through every event from slavery to imprisonment—God prospered him and gave him favor with Pharaoh (Gen. 39:2-6, 21-23).

In Hebrews 13:5, God says, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever abandon you." There is no place so remote and no situation so desperate that we can ever be beyond God's reach (Ps. 139:7-12).

God has a purpose for allowing difficult times.

No matter how disastrous a trial seems, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, God has a specific reason for permitting the hardship in your life. Joseph was 17 when he was sold into slavery, and it wasn't until he was 30 that he became prime minister of Egypt. So for 13 years, he walked in the middle of adversity.

Sometimes, when we are wronged, our focus strays from God to our situation or to the people who have mistreated us. God had a purpose for every step of Joseph's rocky journey. In God's plan, he would act as savior of both his family and the entire Egyptian civilization during the 7-year famine. Joseph later told his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to keep many people alive" (Gen. 50:20). The Lord's sovereign direction of Joseph's life illustrates the truth of Romans 8:28: "God causes all things to work together for good to those who are called according to His purpose."

The darkness will last only as long as necessary for God to accomplish His purpose.

We all become impatient for stressful times to end. But if we could look through the darkness and see our future, we would thank God because we would understand His purpose for our trials. How did the Lord use Joseph's 13 dark years? Through his experiences at Potiphar's house and in prison, Joseph learned the Egyptian language

and customs. What's more, he developed administrative and organizational skills, learned how to live under authority, and came to know how to manage others. God was preparing him for an awesome place of service—as second in command to Pharaoh.

God, however, did not reveal to Joseph the plan or timetable, and He doesn't tell us, either. So, though you want to rush through dark times, realize that it is precisely these experiences that build the most character. Don't fight against God. Instead, surrender your will to Him and say, "Lord, I don't understand this or like it, but I yield myself to whatever Your purpose is. Keep me here until You accomplish it."

Often, we discover more in the dark times than we do in the light.

No matter where Joseph was—at the bottom of a pit, in Potiphar's house, or in prison—he was walking toward the light. The entire time, God was moving him toward His divine purpose: Joseph was to become prime minister. His plan would save not only Joseph's family but also the entire population of Egypt. His account would be recorded in Scripture to teach and bless countless individuals throughout history.

We all prefer to avoid learning the hard way, but lessons don't become truly ours until they are tested and tried. Experiencing God's dependability during dark times is infinitely more effective than hearing about His trustworthiness.

In dark times, walk toward the light.

"Do not be wise in your own eyes" (Prov. 3-7). God has the perfect plan for our lives. Only through trusting and following Him in obedient faith can we carry out that plan. We must obey even when life makes the right choice difficult—or calls for personal sacrifice. Why? Because our Father is building character in us. Only faithful obedience will allow us to grow in wisdom and maturity to serve Him.

If you can't see light at the end of your tunnel, you may be looking in the wrong direction. Don't focus on the darkness; fix your gaze upon the Lord. He will not illumine the whole path at once, but rather will shine enough light for one step at a time (Ps. 119:105). Walk in it!

What we learn in the darkness, we are to share in the light.

Raised in a family that believed in Jehovah, Joseph ended up in a culture that worshipped multiple gods. When interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph did not in any way try to disguise his faith in the one true God (Gen. 41:1, 25, 28, 32).

God is building scriptural principles into your life, and He wants you to share His life-giving truths with others. People all around you are walking in darkness, futility, anxiety, and frustration. Make yourself—and the lessons you have learned in the darkness—available to them in their time of need.

► RESPONSE

- Since no life is free from dark times, it is important to learn these six principles so that we can recall them when adversity comes to us or to others. People going through hard times desperately want to hear that God is with them, He has a purpose for their struggle, and it will not go on forever.
- However, God's blessings and promises are not a universal guarantee. It is promised only to those who have received Jesus Christ as Savior (Heb. 13:5); anyone who rejects the Son of God has no right to that claim. If you are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, the wisest thing you can do is trust Him as your Savior. Acknowledge to God that you have sinned and believe that Jesus died on the cross in your place, paying your sin debt in full. Then all of the rights, privileges, blessings, and promises belonging to God's children will be yours.

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