

# ***IS GOD GOOD WHEN LIFE ISN'T? GEN.40-41***

You'll Get Through This #4

◆**Intro:** Bad things happen. There are many conclusions people draw because of this. Maybe God is good, but not powerful enough to stop and five year old little girl from being kidnapped into the sex trade. Maybe God is powerful enough to do anything, but he isn't good and doesn't care about us. Some give up on the idea of God altogether because of the bad circumstances they see in life. The idea of a sovereign God, who is all powerful and all loving doesn't fit into their outlook, because if he was able to, and also loving, he would certainly not let happen the things that we don't like. Therefore there must not be such a God.

◆Of course what this person has just done is to set herself up as God, the one for whom things must make sense. And if we take this approach then we shall have to take on the rest of God's responsibilities as well, to be fair. Is there still an all-loving, all-powerful God, if there is also pain, heartbreak, lost love, and atrocious darkness. The answer is yes. The presence of darkness does not negate the existence of light. In fact, darkness isn't a thing at all. It is the absence of something; namely light. Light is the presence of something. Light can overcome darkness. But darkness cannot overcome light. Darkness can exist only if the light is hidden.

◆Let me put it to you as a story. In the fall of 1991, a car driven by a drunk driver jumped its lane and smashed headfirst into a minivan driven by Jerry Sittser. Sittser and three of his children survived, but Sittser's wife, four-year-old child, and mother died in the crash. Over the years Sittser has offered some profound reflections about loss, grief, and suffering. In his

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book A Grace Revealed, Sittser shares the following story about how his son David responded to the tragic accident.

◆ My son David is—and always has been—quiet and reflective. After the accident, he was the least likely to talk about it; but when he chose to, he usually had something significant to say or ask. I had to be ready to respond to him when he sent cues indicating he was ready to talk. Our best conversations happened in the car. One particular conversation has stayed fresh in my memory. David was eight at the time; we were driving to a soccer match some distance from our home. Typical for these occasions, David was quiet. The car was full of silence—not a heavy silence, but a liquid silence, as if some question was brewing inside him.

◆ "Do you think Mom sees us right now?" he suddenly asked.

◆ I paused to ponder. "I don't know, David. I think maybe she does see us. Why do you ask?"

◆ "I don't see how she could, Dad. I thought Heaven was full of happiness. How could she bear to see us so sad?" Could Lynda witness our pain in Heaven? How could that be possible? How could she bear it?

◆ "I think she does see us," I finally said. "But she sees the whole story, including how it all turns out, which is beautiful to her. It's going to be a good story, David."

◆ Joseph's story is a bird's eye view of the larger picture that Sittser was talking about. **God is good all the time; all the time God is good.**

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## ◆ 1. God rules even in my ruins.

◆ One of the interesting themes in Joseph's story is how the robe-thing keeps coming around. Who hasn't heard of Joseph's Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat? In chapter 37 we hear about the "richly ornamented robe" seven times! It's a significant symbol, but of what? In chapter 39 the author belabors the fact that Mrs. Potiphar got Joe's cloak and kept it to get him in trouble. It's mentioned six times in six verses! It's the second time he loses a robe and gets thrown in a deep dark place. And this time, he was being highly moral, godly, and upstanding! And in chapter 41, after Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream, what happens? The king puts a robe on him and a gold chain around his neck. The author draws our attention to Joseph's "wardrobe". There may be other reasons, but at least one thing is clear: the robe is like the circumstances of life. At one point it shows his father's favoritism, and his youthful swagger. At another it shows, injustice done to a good man. At another, it's a result of the miracle of God. I think the robe represents God's hold and call on Joseph woven in and out of all the good and the bad. God rules even in your ruins. **God is good all the time; all the time God is good.**

◆ Strange. When difficulty comes we are quick to assume God is against us, or God has abandoned us. You would think that if God was with Joseph he wouldn't have been sold into slavery. He wouldn't have been thrown into the jail. He wouldn't have been forgotten by the chief cup-bearer. But the presence of God is not to be measured by the absence of adversity, or the presence of success. We think, or maybe Satan suggests, that trouble is a sign of God's leaving. And

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yet with Joseph the times of trouble are the exact times we are told the Lord was with him.

◆B. Joseph's story is a vivid movie of a biblical theme that we hear over and over. While God does not author evil, and although he permits it, he is certainly in charge over it. Jacob, Joseph, the brothers, Egypt, Pharaoh, – they are all players on God's chess board.

◆1) Job's story says it. In his book the angels all come and report to God in heaven, *even* the Evil One! Satan accuses Job of being good because God is good to him so God *permits* Satan to afflict Job to see if it's true.

◆2) The Psalms writer says it. *You who have made me see many troubles and calamities, you will revive me again. From the depths of the earth you will bring me up again. Psalm 71:20*

◆He recognizes that even troubles are under God's command and that God in the end always uses them for the up rising of his own.

◆3) Isaiah says it. "I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things." Isaiah 45:6, 7, NIV.

◆4) Paul says it.

◆"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28, NIV.

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### ◆ 2. God uses my ruin for some greater restoration.

◆ A. When we read Joseph's story we may start to think its about his ascent to greatness and success, but it's not. Remember in week one when we read that this is the tenth division in Genesis and it's called "Jacob's account"? Similar to Pharaoh, Joseph is a pawn on God's chess board. Albeit a willing, faithful one. Joseph's painful life was used by God to create and preserve a nation (Jacob/Israel) that would know him. It was about developing a family (the brothers) into leaders of tribes that would represent God in human history (Israel). Joseph saw this.

◆ "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good *to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*"

Genesis 50:20, NIV. Those lives include you and me sitting here, not just those who were hungry around 1900 BC.

◆ B. Can we learn to see our struggles from the view of the "whole story"? Can you decide to accept your pains for precisely what the Bible says they are; not accidental disregard by God; not a slip up in sovereignty where the devil gets an upper hand; but all part of a complex and expert strategy to perfect a kingdom?

◆ "*For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*" 2 Corinthians 4:17, NIV.

◆ When you belong to God your troubles are always God making your life into something more than you! Your troubles are never frustrating God's plans. As Lucado puts it, struggle "may puzzle you, but it does not bewilder God."

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◆ *In 1986, a Christian worker named Steve was traveling through the country of Mali when his car broke down. Stranded and alone, Steve tried to rent a truck, despite warnings that he wouldn't survive in the Sahara Desert. After he failed to find a truck, in his fear and discouragement, Steve's thoughts ran to his father, Nate Saint, a former missionary in Ecuador. When Steve was only five, natives speared to death his dad and four other missionaries. Now, thirty years later, Steve found himself questioning his father's death. Steve reflected, "I couldn't help but think the murders were capricious, an accident of bad timing."*

◆ *When Steve asked some locals directions to a church, a few children led him to a tiny mud- brick house with a poster on the wall showing wounded hands covering a cross. A man in flowing robes introduced himself as Nouh Af Infa Yatara. Nouh started sharing with Steve about his faith in Christ. After becoming a Christian, his family disowned him. His mother even put a sorcerer's poison in Nouh's food at a family feast. He ate the food but suffered no ill effects.*

◆ *When Steve asked Nouh why he was willing to pay such a steep price for following Christ, he simply said, "I know God loves me and I'll live with him forever." But Steve pressed, "Where did your courage come from?" Nouh explained that when he was young, a missionary gave him books about Christians who had suffered for their faith. Then he added, "My favorite was about five young men who risked their lives to take God's good news to people in the jungles of Ecuador. The book said they let themselves be speared to death, even though they had guns and could have killed their attackers!"*

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◆ *Utterly shocked, Steve said, "One of those men was my father." Now Nouh felt stunned. "Your father?" he exclaimed. Then Nouh told Steve that God had used the death of those five brave missionaries to help him, a young Muslim who had become a Christian, hold on to his faith.*

◆ Listen to me. There are no accidents with God. Pains and hardships, and things that have gotten out of hand, are never out of God's hand. God is always doing more than you can imagine or see.

◆ *"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God...who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine..." Ephesians 3:17-21, NIV.*

◆ **God is good all the time; all the time God is good.**

◆ C. There something else a God-follower can be sure of. When you belong to God, your troubles are always God making you into a better you.

◆ When we first met Joseph he was a big-headed, tattling teenager.

Thirteen years later, after being sold like a lawn mower, purchased like an appliance, accused of a crime he specifically resisted, and imprisoned –he has become something of a different man.

◆ His compassion for others has blossomed. In 40:7 he is concerned for the sadness of the faces of two inmates.

◆ Instead of moaning about the lost hopes of his own dreams (remember he saw others bowing down to him?) he suggests God's help for the other men's dreams.

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- ◆ Instead of putting on an air like some powerful wizard ["I see greeeat doom on your horizooon." (Long syllables, liltng speech.) I see seven years of abundaaaance...] in 41:16 he flat out denies that he is something special or great, and that it is God who is great and able to help Pharaoh. Twice in his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream Joseph says, "God has shown Pharaoh..."
- ◆ God clearly matured Joseph until he was fit for the task of being the government leader he would become. And God is developing you too. He's always developing you. (Ps.138:8)
  - ◆ Whether we get caught cheating and get thrown out of school, or lose a loved one in a car accident, God is always making something of us.
  - ◆ *"And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?" Hebrews 12:5-7, NIV.*
- ◆ Think of the old hymn...
  - ◆ *Though satan should buffet, and trials should come*
  - ◆ *Let this blessed assurance control*
  - ◆ *That Christ has regarded my helpless estate*
  - ◆ *and has shed his own blood for my soul.*



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◆ The song writer sees that anyone who would die for your soul, will certainly care about your estate. As Lucado puts it, "If you see your troubles as nothing more than isolated hassles and hurts, you'll grow bitter and angry. Yet if you see your troubles as tests used by God for his glory and your maturity, then even the smallest incidents take on significance."

◆ Christ-follower, your troubled marriage may be Satan's buffet but be assured it is also God's growing of you. God does not cause your choice to become addicted, but even that choice he will use to make more of you if you will cooperate. And may it never be that your father is speared to death, or that your infant dies in the night. But even these are part of a bigger story, his good story.

◆ *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." Romans 8:18, NIV.*

◆ **Conclusion:** Author Philip Yancey writes: In high school, I took pride in my ability to play chess. I joined the chess club, and during lunch hour could be found sitting at a table with other nerds poring over books with titles like Classic King Pawn Openings. I studied techniques, won most of my matches, and put the game aside for 20 years.

◆ Then, in Chicago, I met a truly fine chess player who had been perfecting his skills long since high school. When we played a few matches, I learned what it is like to play against a master. Any classic offense I tried, he countered with a classic defense. If I turned to more risky, unorthodox techniques, he incorporated my bold forays into his winning strategies. Although I had complete freedom to make any move I wished, I soon reached the conclusion that none of my strategies mattered very much. His

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superior skill guaranteed that my purposes inevitably ended up serving his own.

◆ Perhaps God engages our universe, his own creation, in much the same way. He grants us freedom to rebel against its original design, but even as we do so we end up ironically serving his eventual goal of restoration. If I accept that blueprint--a huge step of faith, I confess--it transforms how I view both good and bad things that happen. Good things, such as health, talent, and money, I can present to God as offerings to serve his purposes. And bad things, too--disability, poverty, family dysfunction, failures--can be redeemed as the very instruments that drive me to God. *Philip Yancey, "Chess Master," Christianity Today (5-22-00), p.112*

◆ You are part of a whole story. And it's a good story. God rules even in your ruins. And God uses ruins to make a greater restoration.

**God is good all the time; all the time God is good.**