

Sunday, September 25, 2022 | Feels: Thriving in the Valleys

Genesis 45:1-8 | "The Valley of Difficulty"

Sometimes our spiritual lives feel like a series of peaks and valleys. One moment, we're soaring high; the next, we experience a crushing low. This Sunday, we'll be starting a five-week series called *Feels: Thriving in the Valleys*, and this study is all about what we should do when we hit the low points in life. Along the way, we'll examine the journey of faith through the eyes of five famous bible characters: Elijah, Paul, Moses, Joseph, and Peter. By the end of this series, the hope is that the Christian will be equipped to combat the negative "feels" that seem to plague us and steal away our inner peace.

In week 1, we navigated the valley of depression through the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19. We saw how the Lord comforted this depressed prophet by providing for his needs and listening to his pleas. And while Elijah was still in a sorry state even after his encounter with God, the Lord still chose to use him. Elijah's depression did not disqualify him from serving. This is not to say that the prophet wasn't changed in some way. He still went back to the very thing that made him flee. Thus, the lesson we took away from Elijah's valley was that **communing with God and fellowshiping with others helps to soothe the depressed heart.**

In week 2, we explored the valley of deficiency through the lens of Paul's own testimony in 2 Corinthians 12. What are we supposed to do when we face our own legitimate weaknesses, knowing full well that we don't have enough to succeed at whatever task we've set our minds to? Thankfully, Paul showed us that our inadequacies and imperfections do not hinder the work of God. And, often, those fragilities are not curses but **gifts from God which help us rely upon him** because God's power is made perfect in weaknesses. Thus, as the apostle put it, we can say, "When we're weak, then we are strong."

In week 3, we explored the valley of doubt from the perspective of Moses. And this might come as a surprise to most people. After all, what sort of persona do we attach to Moses? Surely not doubt. But while he eventually became a great leader, Moses wasn't a bold and brazen individual at first. Nor was he willing to confront the most powerful nation on the planet without hesitation. No. Moses was a man *plagued* by doubt. Before he was ever used by God to wrestle a nation to its knees, he first had to come to grips with his disbelief, skepticism, and even cynicism. Moses had to walk a valley of doubt before he ever got to the mountain of God. And Moses learned what we all must learn: **God's sufficiency is sufficient to counteract our doubts.**

Today, we'll explore the valley of difficulty from the perspective of Joseph, as few Bible characters have had as hard a time as him. Ironically, even his father's love will be used against him. Yet, through it all, we never once see Joseph complain. This is not to say he did not rightfully protest what was happening to him. He undoubtedly does. However, despite being wholly innocent and undeserving of the misfortune that befalls him, Joseph remains faithful to God. His example is one we all ought to emulate, especially since we often complain about much less.

This is a troublesome life we live. But for those who can see God's hand at work in our most desperate hour, we can find great comfort in knowing that even the bad things in this life can be used for good. God wastes no experience, for he utilizes them all to accomplish his work.

READ: Genesis 37:2-4 (ESV)

²These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. ³Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. ⁴But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

READ: Genesis 37:25-28 (ESV)

²⁵Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. ²⁸Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

READ: Genesis 39:11-21 (ESV)

¹¹But one day, when he [Joseph] went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, ¹²she [Potiphar's wife] caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. ¹³And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, ¹⁴she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and

I cried out with a loud voice. ¹⁵ And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house.” ¹⁶ Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, ¹⁷ and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. ¹⁸ But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house.”

¹⁹ As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, “This is the way your servant treated me,” his anger was kindled. ²⁰ And Joseph's master took him and **put him into the prison**, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. ²¹ **But the Lord was with Joseph** and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

READ: Genesis 40:16-23 (ESV)

⁹ So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, “In my dream there was a vine before me, ¹⁰ and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.” ¹² Then Joseph said to him, “This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days. ¹³ In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and **restore** you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ Only **remember** me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. ¹⁵ For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.”

READ: Genesis 40:21-23 (ESV)

²⁰ On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. ²¹ He **restored** the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. ²² But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. ²³ Yet the chief cupbearer **did not remember** Joseph, but **forgot** him.

READ: Genesis 41:46-49 (ESV)

⁴⁶ Joseph was **thirty years old** when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁷ During the seven plentiful years the earth produced abundantly, ⁴⁸ and he

gathered up all the food of these seven years, which occurred in the land of Egypt, and put the food in the cities. He put in every city the food from the fields around it.⁴⁹ And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.

READ: Genesis 45:1-8 (ESV)

¹ Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, "Make everyone go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³ And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

⁴ So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

So, what's the takeaway?

For those who follow God, no difficulty is without some divine purpose.

Think about Joseph's life from his perspective. He had no idea why God allowed one misfortune after another to visit him. From his brothers selling him into slavery at seventeen to being falsely accused of adultery, thrown into prison, and, finally, being forgotten by a baker who promised not to forget about him, Joseph's setbacks were a complete mystery to him. Or, we should say it was a mystery until Joseph was seated on the right hand of Pharaoh and finally realized all that God had done.

READ Romans 8:28 (ESV)

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28 is one of the verses which is easy to say but hard to live out. To honestly believe that "all things work together for good" means we must choose to see God's hand in our most

difficult situations (i.e., loss of a job, death, sickness, frustration, etc.). This promise is conditional upon our choice to love God and answer his call. The only way for "all things to work together for good" is if we are working towards and are obedient to God's good.

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Video Description

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: