

## **“WATCH OUT FOR THE WHIPLASH!”**

By Rom A. Pegram (4/30/17)

The only thing more painful than not seeing *our* personal dreams come true ... is when the dreams for our children fall apart. But, even when that happens, the one thing we can be sure of is this: *God is with us—and them, no matter what!* I'm sure that Joseph's dad was sustained by this belief, when he lost his favorite son Joseph through a series of Plan B circumstances. Just listen (Genesis 39:1-6, NLT):

When Joseph was taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelite traders, he was purchased by Potiphar, an Egyptian officer. Potiphar was captain of the guard for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. <sup>2</sup> The LORD was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master. <sup>3</sup> Potiphar noticed this and realized that the LORD was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did. <sup>4</sup> This pleased Potiphar, so he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned. <sup>5</sup> From the day Joseph was put in charge of his master's household and property, the LORD began to bless Potiphar's household for Joseph's sake. All his household affairs ran smoothly, and his crops and livestock flourished. <sup>6</sup> So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn't worry about a thing—except what kind of food to eat!

So, Joseph was sold into slavery. His was a life that was a good news/bad news kind of story. But, out of his ups & downs, I believe we can all learn some valuable lessons! Joseph's been called 'a poster child for whiplash!' Let me give you some examples:

Starting in Genesis 37, we find out Joseph is his father's favorite son. I guess that might be kind of *a good thing*, but it makes his brothers extremely jealous & hateful, which is *a bad thing*...

As Joseph's life continues, his dear ol' dad decides to give him a gift to show his affection—a *beautiful coat of many colors*. Beautiful coats would fall into what category? That's right—*good news*. 'Except for the fact that the new coat leaves his brothers jealous & angry, and wanting his very life. They rip the coat off of him, beat him, and throw him into a pit; they plan to kill him later. For Joseph, this would be very *bad news*.

However, one of his brothers feels sorry for him, so talks the others into *not* killing him. This, then, is *good news* ... if you favor breathing. But instead of welcoming Joseph back into the family, the brothers decide to sell him into slavery (and some of us thought our families were messed up!)—*bad news*, indeed! Well, unbelievably, Joseph's brothers do just that! They sell him to a caravan of traders, who take him away to live in the land of Egypt as a slave...

When he gets to Egypt, the *good news* is that Joseph gets a job with a guy by the name of Potiphar—a big-shot official in Egypt. Joseph's a hard-working guy, and the Bible also tells us he's pretty good looking, too—all *good news* for Joseph... Unfortunately, Potiphar's wife is attracted to Joseph and tries her best to seduce him when Potiphar's not around. Joseph, being the upstanding, moral servant of God he is,

resists her; so, hurt by Joseph's rejection, she lies & has him put into prison—more *bad news*...

But ... *the story doesn't end there!* While in prison, Joseph forms a relationship with a guy who has the power to release him. In short, Joseph does this guy a favor and this guy promises to get Joseph out of prison. *Good news* ... right? Except, the guy forgets about Joseph ... and leaves him in prison 2 more years—*bad news*, if you're Joseph...

Joseph's story seems unbelievable, doesn't it? Then again, some of you've probably been there! Maybe you've experienced that feeling of emotional whiplash before—that job you thought was going to be so perfect, but wasn't, that relationship you just knew would be a life-long thing, but wasn't. You understand. So, what are we to do? What do you think our response should be ... in the midst of emotional whiplash in life—those Plan Bs we didn't expect?

**SOMETIMES WE LET OUR CIRCUMSTANCES DISTORT OUR PERSPECTIVE & WE MISS GOD!** When life isn't turning out the way we'd hoped, we almost always default to feeling that God's abandoned us! Right? We all seem to have this tendency ... or at least we're tempted to think this way during trying times... Or we feel like God's absence (*which is a distortion of the truth*) is a punishment or something to that effect...

Yet the truth is: **God is most powerfully present even when he seems most apparently absent!** Folks, as followers of Christ, we need to respond differently than the world; *we need to respond to our circumstances ... as if we know GOD IS THERE* (Emmanuel); if we can do that, we will always see God in the midst of our circumstances! Otherwise, like far too many, we can miss God in our lives! Here's another way of saying it...

**WE NEED TO LEARN WHAT 'THE LORD IS WITH YOU' REALLY MEANS IN OUR LIVES...** Let me show you something interesting in this story of Joseph; it might be a bit confusing, but bear with me for a moment...

Verses 1-2 again say: "When Joseph was taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelite traders, he was purchased by Potiphar, an Egyptian officer. Potiphar was captain of the guard for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. <sup>2</sup> *The LORD was with Joseph* [italics mine], so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master."

Did you catch that? *THE LORD WAS WITH JOSEPH!* Growing up, I always thought 'the Lord is with you' meant that everything in life was wonderful ... yet here *we see Joseph as a slave*. But, even as a slave, note *why* he is doing well ... in the midst of this Plan B circumstance (v.3): "Potiphar noticed this and realized that the LORD was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did." Do you see what's happening here? *The Lord isn't with Joseph because things are going well; things are going well for Joseph because he knows/believes the Lord is with him!* And *that's a key to getting through our Plan Bs*...

Perhaps some of you've heard of the contemporary Christian music artist by the name of Tammy Trent. If not, let me tell you her story: It began September 2001, when Tammy and her husband were invited to join a mission trip to Jamaica. Since Jamaica was their destination, they decided to take a week's vacation prior to the mission trip. 'Makes sense, doesn't it?

Well, they'd had a fantastic week together in Jamaica. *With one day left before the mission work began*, Tammy's husband decided to go diving in the blue lagoon—a famous area water hole. He'd been a certified diver since he was 12 years old, so no big deal. It was just a lovely last day in their memorable vacation...

After driving out to the blue lagoon, Tammy and her hubby had lunch beside the dock. Tammy's husband put on his wetsuit and fins, and then they sat together for awhile beside the lagoon. Tammy took a few pictures. Then her husband slipped into the water... "Baby," he said, "I'll just be about fifteen minutes. When I get back, we'll go and do something that you want to do." "Okay," she answered casually...

Tammy watched her husband go into the water and swim out toward the deep hole he wanted to explore. About halfway there, he lifted his head out of the water, and he waved good-bye. Tammy waved back. *She had no idea that it would be the last time she'd ever see him alive...*

Tammy's husband was doing what they call 'free-diving' that afternoon—diving without an oxygen tank. As Tammy sat there watching the water, she'd see him bob up every few minutes and catch a breath. She finished her lunch. Then, she got distracted by a boat and some snorkelers in the area...

Suddenly, she realized it'd been more than 30 minutes since she last saw her husband come up for air. *It's okay*, she told herself, trying not to panic. *Everything's fine. He's a great diver. He's made this dive a million times. There's nothing to worry about.* But Tammy was worried... In fact, it was now bordering on frantic...

Some men in a boat took her out to search, but didn't find her husband. Divers were called in, but they had to give up as night fell. All Tammy could do was wait and pray... *They recovered her husband's body the next morning.*

This was the single most terrifying event in Tammy's life, and she was alone. Her family, her friends, and her church were thousands of miles away, trying to make arrangements to get to her, but couldn't. Tammy was in shock. Yet, in the midst of this incredible tragedy, *she still believed that God was with her...*

That 'next day,' by the way—when they found her husband's body—was September 11, 2001. So, *Tammy had multiple whiplash in her life*—first her husband ... and now her country. No one she knew could get to her, because of what'd happened that fateful day. So, there she was sitting in the bathroom of her hotel room weeping. With tears racing down her face, she prayed: "God, I need to know that you're real! Are you there? Can you hear me? Can you see me? Do you feel the pain I feel?" At that moment, she found herself longing for someone to love her—to just hold her. So, she cried out again: "God, if you can hear me, could you just send someone to hold me? I'm not asking for thousands of angels or even hundreds, just one angel who will hold me." Silence. She sat there for awhile longer. Then, she had the sense she was supposed to get up and do something...

Tammy stuck her head out into the hallway, noticing the door to the adjoining room was open. Inside was a beautiful Jamaican woman standing there in a hotel

uniform. Tammy looked at her and asked, “Ma’am, could you come in and make my bed?” The woman said yes ... but then she said, “I’ve been trying to get to you. I could hear you crying, and I’ve been trying to get to you. Could I just come in and sit and hold you?”

*It was an instant answer to prayer!* Can you believe that story? But, folks, it wouldn’t have turned out that way if Tammy hadn’t realized, even in the midst of this incredible Plan B situation, **GOD WAS STILL WITH HER!**

- If she hadn’t believed God was still with her, she wouldn’t have prayed...
- And if she hadn’t prayed, she never would have recognized God leading her to go and look for that next step in her life—an answer to her prayer!

Folks, Tammy knew—above all—that *the first part of God’s will for her life was to know ... GOD IS THERE* (Emmanuel)—always ... regardless of circumstances!

One thing’s for sure when it comes to God’s will: God’s will for all of us surely includes *Emmanuel*—the idea that *by faith God is with us!* Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV) reminds us: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified ... for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.” Realizing that—God will never leave us—is a *process*. But, we can get there. *Let me end with this...*

We need to concentrate on the important question! So often in life, we get into tough Plan B situations, and *we tend to default to the wrong questions:*

1. We spend a lot of time worried about **what** is happening to us...
2. We focus a lot of attention on **when** things might happen...
3. And we ask a lot of questions about **where** we’ll end up...

But, *the most important question—one that we too often neglect—is the **why** question!*

- Folks, as Joseph went through his life, he didn’t always know **what** was really going on, he had no idea **when** things were going to change, and he certainly didn’t know **where** he’d end up. **He didn’t have any control over the what, when or where...**
- The only thing Joseph controlled in his life was this: **He knew why he did what he did!** He chose to trust God, no matter what, and to allow God to use his life for his purposes. **Why ... is the most important question; why do you do what you do?** Maybe even more important for Joseph, who somehow got it all right, was this: *he was choosing whom it was he would trust...*

Joseph chose to believe in God instead of his current circumstances ... and we can too! These, folks, are some key points ... for getting through our Plan Bs... More next week!