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Well, I want to welcome you wherever you may be tuning in from around our city or even around the world. In fact, if last week was your first week to join us, welcome back as we begin a brand-new teaching series today called *Resilient*.

Well, this young man was different. You could tell by the way that he carried himself that there was something special about him. He was young. He was talented. And I would say that he was probably good looking.

God had given him a gift in a very unique way and had given him a promise early on in his life that he would accomplish something incredible. In fact, he would grow up to eventually come to be known as one of the greatest leaders that the world has ever known. He would serve right alongside of Pharaoh in one of the most powerful empires in all of history, providing critical leadership for the world in the midst of a global crisis—but not yet. He just wasn't quite ready.

Now, his life started out with such promise and potential only to find him in a personal crisis as well as a global crisis that seemed like it would never end. His life circumstances get upended in such a sudden and dramatic way that you couldn't have blamed him if he had decided to walk away from his faith and lose all hope.

You see, it wasn't just one bad thing that happened to him. It was a series of unfortunate events in his life, sort of like a tornado in slow motion. Now, I'm talking about the life of a man by the name of Joseph. And his story can be found in Genesis, chapters 37 through 50.

Now, I'm not talking about Jesus' dad, Joseph. I'm talking about a different Joseph. This guy was betrayed by his family. He was beaten, abandoned, and sold into slavery. And just when it looked like things might get better for him, he was then falsely accused, locked up in prison, and forgotten by the people who he had helped.

And Joseph just didn't see any of this coming. Why would this happen to somebody who is so gifted and so talented and had so much potential? He hadn't done anything wrong.

Well, roughly 12 chapters in Genesis are devoted to telling his story. He gets more air time than anyone else in the book, which is saying a lot considering that the stories of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all in there as well.

We're going to spend the next several weeks together looking at Joseph's life story and kind of mining out the principles, the nuggets of wisdom, that we can then apply to our own lives as all of us currently find ourselves in circumstances that we never saw coming either.

You see, the life of Joseph can teach us many things. He is an incredible model of integrity, wisdom, selflessness, endurance, and leadership. And his example is going to encourage you and me to hold on to hope and to strengthen our faith in God during difficult times.

The one word that I think really sums up Joseph's example to us is the word resilience. And resilience defined is just simply this:

able to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions

When it's all said and done, Joseph is going to emerge as one of the heroes in the Bible. In fact, he is one of the very few leaders who finished his life well in the face of dismal odds and incredible pressure.

See, when Joseph was hated he didn't retaliate. When he was tempted, he didn't give in. When things around him fell apart, his life didn't. He stayed resilient through crisis and that resilience was off the charts. And we need a little resilience right now. In fact, we need a whole lot of it. And Joseph is going to be our guide over the course of the next several weeks together.

So I want to pick up his story in Genesis, chapters 37, beginning in verse 2. It says, "When Joseph was seventeen years old, he often tended his father's flocks. He worked for his half brothers, the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah." Wonderful names, "But Joseph reported to his father some of the bad things his brothers were doing."

Now, what I want you to notice right away is that Joseph's family was far from perfect. In fact, that's putting it nicely. There was a lot of dysfunction here. And, you know what? There is always, at least a little bit of dysfunction in everybody's family.

Joseph's dad, Jacob, was far from perfect. And as a result their family is broken in a number of ways. And Joseph, as gifted and talented and called by God as he was, he certainly wasn't perfect either. And it says right here that he told on his brothers. In other words, he was a tattler.

You know, I can remember growing up, I would oftentimes tell on my sister. I would tattler on her. And looking back, even though it was little, kind of silly things, the whole motivation for me to tell on my sister was because I wanted to look better in my parents' eyes than she looked.

Really, what a tattler spirit is, it's revealing kind of a sense of self-righteousness. And so we see that Joseph told on his brothers. This is more than just being immature. This is revealing, at an early age, some hairline fractures in Joseph's character that are all rooted in pride.

And pride can show up in a number of ways in our lives. It doesn't matter how gifted and talented you are, pride will take you down every time.

Now, to make matters worse, Joseph's father just kind of fed his pride problem.

Look at what it says in verse 3. “Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children because Joseph had been born to him in his old age. So one day Jacob had a special gift made for Joseph—a beautiful robe.” Now, maybe you’ve heard of this before. Joseph and his colorful coat, that’s what this is.

In verse 4 it says, “But his brothers hated Joseph because their father loved him more than the rest of them. They couldn’t say a kind word to him.”

I just want to say this. As a father of four kids, I love all four of my kids equally. But if you are the parent of more than one child, you’d be lying if you said that you never, ever, ever had favorites. Of course you had favorites, at different times, depending upon age or interests or attitude at the time. It’s not a bad thing, or a wrong thing even, to have favorites among your kids. What’s wrong is to actually tell them and to act on it, and that’s what Jacob does.

Jacob has a favorite. Joseph is his favorite, maybe for all kinds of reasons, but the Bible tells us it’s because he was born to him in his old age. And I would say that because of Joseph’s talent and ability, there were probably some things attractive about that as well.

The mistake that Jacob made was that he let his other kids know. The mistake that he made is that he gives Joseph this really expensive coat. What did he think was going to happen by buying Joseph a Gucci coat?

See, it might have been Jacob’s fault, but it went straight to Joseph’s head and he was flaunting it. In addition to being self-righteous, telling on his brothers, and prideful, he was also unwise.

Look with me at verse 5, “One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever.” Joseph had some crazy dreams.

Now, my wife likes to give me a little bit of a hard time because I have weird dreams almost every night. And she never remembers any of her dreams. In fact, she says that she doesn’t dream. So it’s not uncommon in the morning when I wake up, I will say to her, “Honey, I had the weirdest dream last night that I was riding on a one-eyed tiger up the Alps.” And she’ll look at me and she’ll just say, “That doesn’t surprise me at all because you’re weird.”

So I really like Joseph because he’s got some pretty crazy dreams going on. In fact, there are two dreams that he has. And one has to do with agriculture and the other astronomy. But the gist of the dreams is that Joseph is in a position of supremacy over the rest of his family.

These dreams are actually a part of God ushering this promise into Joseph’s life at an early age—that God is going to use him in an influential way. So much so that his family is going to be dependent upon his leadership, that his brothers are actually going to be needing the leadership that Joseph can provide.

Now, none of that was inaccurate or untrue. But it was unwise of Joseph to actually talk about it and to tell them. There was really no point in that, other than feeding Joseph's budding pride. And see, really that's the issue.

God is telling Joseph at an early age that he has big plans for his life. And God is going to use Joseph in profound ways, but if Joseph doesn't root out some of the pride and the other junk that is in his heart, then it's going to ruin God's big plans for his life. So God, out of his love for Joseph, he's going to need to uproot some of this pride. And can I just tell you that that's going to require some pain and some discomfort?

Well, at the end of chapter 37 we see it. Beginning in verse 18, it says, "When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him. 'Here comes the dreamer!' they said. 'Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, 'A wild animal has eaten him.' Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!'"

Now, you've heard me say before, over and over again through the years, that God loves you just as you are. And can I say that that has never been more true than it is right now. But if you've been around here for a while, you've also heard me say that God loves you far too much to leave you there. And that has actually also never been more true than the season that we are in right now.

You see, in the middle of all of the uncertainty that we are experiencing currently, the one thing that I am certain about is the only way this crisis could be any worse is if you and I emerge from it unchanged, and we come out, when this lifts and when all of this goes away—and it will, we will emerge from this—if we come out of it and just kind of go right back to the person we were before or the way that we were living before, then that is the only way that this crisis gets any worse.

Now, listen. I know that right now that all of us long for a sense of normal. But can I just lovingly say what is normal anyway? God isn't normal. In fact, God doesn't want normal for your life. He never has. God wants to do above and beyond and far more in your life.

In Ephesians, chapter 3, verse 20 it says, "Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think."

And I want you to hold onto to that promise. God wants to do infinitely more in your life. So much so that you didn't even think to ask for it. And maybe that's what he is doing right now in this season.

So, what is God doing in Joseph's life? Why would he allow this horrible thing to happen to somebody who he has promised so much to? Well, I want you to understand this right here:

God was stripping Joseph of his pretense and pride so that his character could grow.

And he wants to do that in you, and he wants to do that in me as well. And can I just tell you that always requires some pain and some discomfort?

I'm reminded of Michael Angelo when he was sculpting this sculpture of King David. And he took these big, giant marble blocks and he just kind of set them out in front of him. And he was just sort of looking them before he ever started his work.

And there were some people around Michael Angelo who asked him, "Why are you staring at these blocks." And he said, "I'm not staring at the blocks." He said, "I'm looking at what these blocks could be." And when he began to chisel out the sculpture of King David the same people asked him, "How are you going to do this?" And I love Michael Angelo's reply. He said, "I'm going to chip away everything that doesn't look like King David."

See, God wants us to look like Jesus. That is his ultimate goal. God isn't wanting us to accomplish the American dream. God isn't wanting us to just kind of go through life with great comfort and economic well-being. And there's nothing wrong with any of those things. It's just not his ultimate goal. God's ultimate goal for you and me, if you've ever wanted to know what the purpose of life is it's that God is trying to shape us into people who look more like Jesus.

I love what author Philip Yancey said years ago. He said that the purpose of life is to prepare us for eternal life with God. It is more of Jesus and less of me until it is Christ alone. So God is chiseling away. He's going to chip away at everything in your life and in my life that doesn't look like Jesus, so that we become more like Jesus in the process.

And that's painful. And that can be really uncomfortable at times. But in the midst of the pain and the discomfort God gives us a promise. He will never leave you.

See, this is what he does for Joseph in chapter 39. Look with me in verse 1. It says, "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. The LORD was with Joseph," look at that again, "The LORD was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master."

So here Joseph is. He's been beaten up by his brothers. He's been abandoned. He's been sold into slavery. Now he's in a foreign land and these are circumstances he didn't want to be in. But it says that God was with him and, as a result, he succeeded in everything that he did in his new normal.

You see, through it all, God was with him. And those might be the most important words in Joseph's story. And next week we're going to continue to walk through his story.

But today, let me just leave you with three primary take aways of application from his life. If you're taking notes, you might write these down. Here's the first one. I want you to know this, that just like Joseph:

God has a plan and a purpose for your life.

And in times of incredible uncertainty like the one that we find ourselves in, this has not changed.

In Jeremiah 29, verse 11, God says this to you and to me. He says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." You want to know what God is doing? And you want to know what God wants for you? Then you hold onto that promise out of Jeremiah 29.

See, Joseph goes through a lot. And we have the advantage of sort of looking in the review mirror at his story as a whole, and we can see, maybe what Joseph couldn't see in the moment. We can see that his set backs were actually set ups. And his character and his strength and his spiritual maturity came about, at least in part, through the crisis that he endured. You could say it this way, trouble trained him.

Here's the second word of application:

God, right now, is preparing you for those plans and purposes.

None of this... This whole pandemic has not caught God off guard. God is using this to continue to work on the plans and the purposes that he's always wanted for your life. And God is working on this important characteristic within each one of us: faithful endurance.

I love what the great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, said one time. He said, "If I had 25 years left to live, I'd spend 20 of them in preparation."

And I'm reminded of what Scripture tells us in Galatians, chapter 6, verse 9. It says, "So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up."

So don't give up.

In Romans, chapter 5, starting in verse 3 it says, "We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love."

Here's application three:

God has promised to be with you through it all.

In Hebrews 13:5 God tells us: Listen, I will never fail you. And I will never abandon you. So how do we endure? That's kind of the question. It's the question I've been asking myself. And we can't necessarily change our circumstances. There is so much that we don't have control

over, but what we can do is we can armor up. We can make sure that we are putting on what Ephesians 6 tells is the full armor of God.

It says in verse 13 of Ephesians 6, "Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

Why would Scripture be speaking of armor in this way? Well, because the hits are coming. And we can't do anything about them. But we can armor up. And right now, I just want to say to you there are two pandemics going on. One is the virus and the other is the fear. And I'm not quite sure which one is worse.

We need to starve our fears and feed our faith. We need to put on the armor of God. We need to rehearse what we know is true. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is unchanging in a rapidly changing world.

So here are a few things that we can do to starve our fears and feed our faith. Number one: We just need to stop using the term *social distancing*. Now, don't get me wrong. Physical distancing is necessary during this time so that we can make sure that we can take care of our medical professionals and the people who are the most vulnerable. But right now we don't need to be socially distant from each other. More than ever, we need to be social. We need to be texting. We need to be making phone calls. Write a good, old fashioned letter. Call people. Ask them how they are doing.

This last week, whenever I would begin to have a little bit of a bad day, I'd just pick up the phone and call somebody and just ask them, "Man, how are you doing?" And after a 15 or 20 minute conversation, I always felt better.

Right now, if you are not in a group, I want to encourage you to get into a group. This week, we're launching 8-week groups where you can get in on a Zoom call, Face Time of some kind and just connect with a group.

I was, just last night, on a Zoom call with my life group. And I tell you what, man. I love those guys more than ever. And they ministered to me and encourage me.

Please don't do this alone. We'll give you information on them. We would love to get you into a group here a Traders Point, regardless of where you live around the country or around the world.

Can I say this? The term *new normal* really isn't helping us. And I understand what people mean when they say it, but I think that what it's doing is it's causing a lot of unnecessary fear.

Listen. We have weathered plagues and pandemics in our history before and we always come out of them. And God has plans to prosper us and not to harm us.

And I need you to stop watching conspiracy theories on You Tube. I need you to watch your intake of social media and media in general and rehearse what you know to be true about an unchanging God.

So, what you're feeling right now—feelings are true, but they don't always tell you the truth. And you've got to come back to an unchanging God and the promises that he has given in our past and the promises that he has given for our future.

So, where does our hope come from? Our hope has never come from our circumstances, but from a good God who has not and will not change. And right now he is encouraging us by his Spirit to endure, to stay resilient, and to not give up.

You know, in 2002, there was a movie that came out called *Black Hawk Down*. Maybe some of you remember it. And in that movie, U S soldiers are fighting to establish peace in Somalia. It's based upon a true story. And in one scene they are ambushed in their Humvee and vicious gunfire is mowing them down. And one of the soldiers yells out, "I'm shot. I can't drive." And his Colonel responded to him, "Everybody is shot. Get in there and drive."

Can I just offer you the same encouragement right now? Maybe right now you going, "Man, I'm shot. I'm wounded. I'm hurting right now." And I would just say that everybody is shot, get in there and drive. Get in there and lead your family. Get in there and reach out to people in need. Get in there and be the church right now, during these days. We will not be defeated or overcome by a virus or our fear. Get in there and drive and stay resilient, because we serve a resilient God.

James, chapter 1, verse 12 says, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised," he's promised it, "to those who love him."

Let me pray for you:

Father, we come to you today and I am so grateful for the example of the life of Joseph in Genesis 37 through 50. God, I pray that in this study together over the course of these next several weeks, that we could be encouraged by Joseph's character and his example, because right now you are calling us to be a resilient people with an enduring faith in an unchanging God.

So, God, help us right now to armor up, to prepare for battle, to be your people during these challenging days. And, God, right now we just declare that we trust you. We declare that we believe that you are in control and that you are already at work to do incredible things in our lives and in this world.



God, I ask right now that you would be with those who are hurting, be with those who are struggling with anxiety and depression, those who have lost their jobs and are facing financial difficulty. God, I pray that you would minister to their hearts and I pray that others would come around in tangible ways to minister to their physical needs as well.

And more than ever, that we would see how you are using all of these really uncomfortable circumstances to shape us into the people you've always wanted us to be—resilient. And we ask this in Jesus' name: Amen.