

Genesis 42

Driven By Need How God Positions Us

We have all faced times of need in our lives. It is at these times that we can question God the most. However, **as Christians we must learn to accept the fact that God is in control of every aspect of our lives. If there is an exception to this rule, it is the place in which we do not allow God to operate.**

Today we will see how Jacob, when driven by need turns to Egypt for help. In his mind this is just the logical thing to do. However, in the grand plan of God, God is already waiting on Jacob. One trick to living a life according to the plan of God is to remember that God is in control. **Peace comes from knowing that God is in control.** I did not say this is easy to do, but it is something that we must learn to do. We learn this through repetition. If we really meditate on our lives, we will be able to see God moving. **We need to take note of these things so that we recall them in the future when a need arises. This allows us to apply faith to our walk.**

There is something else I want to point out to you. When I say that God is in control it does not mean that we just sit back in cruise control. We have decisions to make. We are to be guided by the Holy Spirit. We have an active part to play, not just a passive one. **Later in the OT Israel is rebuked by God for turning to Egypt for help in time of need. We can't say, "Well, we went to Egypt once and it was ok, so let's go back again." Each situation is different. We have to consult God in each case. That requires a relationship.**

Today we pick up in Genesis chapter 42. Jacob, while living in the land of Canaan, is beginning to feel the effects of the famine that has hit the entire Middle East. Logically speaking, Jacob has only one way to turn and that is to go to Egypt for food. He has heard that there is grain stored there and he wants to send his boys to buy provisions.

Gen 42:1 *When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?"*

Gen 42:2 *And he said, "Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die."*

We open chapter 42 seeing that Jacob's knowledge of the famine has driven him to go to Egypt for corn. **We are often driven by need.** This need is often times not something we enjoy. Therefore, we tend to look at a serious or dire need as something of a curse or a setback. **However, many times for the Christian, the follower of God, it is only a way in which God is using something to steer us onto a different path.** In this case, God uses the need that has been produced by the famine in order that he might reunite Jacob, his family and Joseph.

Famine is certainly not a good thing. Many would argue that there were certainly better ways to get the family back together. But, God is omniscient. That is he knows all things and in his divine providence he has chosen this method of getting the family together. We have to remember in God's grand scheme of things that **this is not just a family reunion.** God needs to move the entire clan of Jacob into Egypt so that they can receive a type of college education. This family has to become a nation and not just any nation, but *the* nation that God is going to use to minister to the entire world. Therefore, he has to bring what is now just a Bedouin family to the most advanced civilization of its day in order that they learn how to be a nation. This will take centuries, but it is necessary to complete God's greater plan.

We also need to note that once Jacob found out there was grain in Egypt, he saw that his boys had a strange look on their faces. For some 21 years, these men had lived with the fact that they had sold their little brother into slavery. They well knew that he was probably in Egypt. So there was obviously some trepidation about them going back there. Their dumbfounded look though seems to be interpreted by Jacob as them just standing around not knowing what to do. So therefore he asked why are y'all just standing around. Despite the fact that they did not want to go to Egypt, they agreed to go for the sake of their families and their flocks.

Gen 42:3 *So Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt.*

Gen 42:4 *But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "Lest some calamity befall him."*

Gen 42:5 *And the sons of Israel went to buy grain among those who journeyed, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.*

In verse four we see that Jacob did not send Benjamin with his brothers. Jacob still seems to be pessimistic and not trust his older boys with Benjamin. Jacob does not want to lose his baby boy.

We also see in verse five that it wasn't only Jacob's family that was going to Egypt for food. Verse five states that they were among those who journeyed, for the famine was in the land of Canaan. So we see that the famine had extended into all of Canaan and most likely the surrounding areas such as Assyria and Babylon.

Gen 42:6 *Now Joseph was governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the earth.*

Gen 42:7 *Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan to buy food."*

Gen 42:8 *So Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.*

Gen 42:9 *Then Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them, and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land!"*

Gen 42:10 *And they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food.*

Gen 42:11 *We are all one man's sons; we are honest men; your servants are not spies."*

Gen 42:12 *But he said to them, "No, but you have come to see the nakedness of the land."*

Gen 42:13 *And they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and in fact, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no more."*

Gen 42:14 *But Joseph said to them, "It is as I spoke to you, saying, 'You are spies!'"*

When Jacob's sons got to Egypt they had to see Joseph. Upon their arrival, Joseph recognized them but his brothers did not recognize him. As they approached Joseph, according to custom they bowed before him and it was at this time that Joseph remembered his dreams. If you recall this was one of the main reasons that Joseph was disliked by his older brothers. He was always seen as special by his father and he probably saw himself as somewhat special also. This does not mean that he was cocky per se, but that he probably knew somehow that he was chosen by God. Upon telling these dreams to his brothers they mocked him and eventually this led to their throwing him in a dry well, plotting to kill him, and selling him into slavery.

I continually emphasize this to you so that you are aware of all the bad things that have happened to Joseph, but at the same time **we have to realize that God was working behind the scenes in order that Joseph may be where he is right now in chapter 42.** Twenty-one years have passed since Joseph was sold into slavery and now he is the second in command of Egypt. Twenty-one years is a long time to have to wait to reach your calling. It is a long time to wait for all in which you have labored to come to fruition. However, our lives are but a vapor. In God's

economy we can be seen as just a blip on the timeline of all humanity. It can be said that Joseph has paid his dues and now he is in the place in which he needs to be in order that God's plan can be carried out. Take advantage what time you have.

Joseph begins by speaking harshly to his brothers and accusing them of being spies who have come to see how just how bad things are in the land of Egypt. I don't think Joseph really believes they are there to spy and I don't think that he really wants to be harsh. I believe he is just attempting to feel them out as to how they will react to him.

They attempt to explain their plight and to prove to Joseph that they are just ordinary people, all brothers from the same household. Therefore Joseph devises a way to test their sincerity.

Gen 42:15 *In this manner you shall be tested: By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here.*

Gen 42:16 *Send one of you, and let him bring your brother; and you shall be kept in prison, that your words may be tested to see whether there is any truth in you; or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies!"*

Gen 42:17 *So he put them all together in prison three days.*

Gen 42:18 *Then Joseph said to them the third day, "Do this and live, for I fear God:*

Gen 42:19 *If you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined to your prison house; but you, go and carry grain for the famine of your houses.*

Gen 42:20 *And bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they did so.*

Joseph devises a test. In my opinion he is doing a couple of different things here. For one, I think he really wants to see his little brother. For another I think he is teaching them a lesson about integrity. He is also

showing them who the boss is. When the truth comes out his dreams will be shown to be true. I also believe he is torn. Part of him wants to hug his brothers because he loves them. The other part of Joseph wishes to assert his authority in order that they respect him and what he has become.

All of us are torn like this at times. Joseph is human just like us. Just because he is a main character in the Bible doesn't mean he is immune to pride.

Gen 42:21 *Then they said to one another, "We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us."*

Gen 42:22 *And Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not speak to you, saying, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us."*

Gen 42:23 *But they did not know that Joseph understood them, for he spoke to them through an interpreter.*

Gen 42:24 *And he turned himself away from them and wept. Then he returned to them again, and talked with them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.*

Getting back to the conversation, we see that the brothers are speaking to each other in Hebrew concerning how they sold Joseph into slavery. At this point they still don't know what had happened to him. Now they believe that they are in the middle of some sort of "tit for Tat" theology. In their minds they are now being punished for selling their brother into slavery. They had just seen Simeon bound and believe that this has come to pass because of what they did to Joseph. In a way that is right, but it is not as if God is getting them back. This is Joseph's doing.

They don't know that Joseph understands them. He has been speaking to them via an Egyptian interpreter. However he still understands Hebrew,

the language of his family. Therefore he is privy to all that they are saying.

Gen 42:25 Then Joseph gave a command to fill their sacks with grain, to restore every man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. Thus he did for them.

Gen 42:26 So they loaded their donkeys with the grain and departed from there.

In verse 25 we see Joseph's compassion come back to the forefront. He orders his men to place his brother's money in the top of each sack of grain. Therefore they are getting the grain for free.

I see this as Joseph blessing his father whom he loves. However some people see this as simply not fair. Joseph is using his position in order to bless one family while not doing the same for every other family. It always amazes me that the people who make these claims about things not being fair are usually some of the same people that want a favor from someone else. They want someone to cut them a deal. They want help getting a job. They want someone to put in a good word for them. But when someone else is blessed they scream that it isn't fair.

We would do well to rejoice when someone is blessed this way. When someone gets a job, maybe somebody did put in a good word for them. But I'm sure most of us have had someone do the same for us at one time or another. Why is it different for them? Maybe you have tried to get a position or a promotion in your company only to have the spot go to someone else. Maybe they were not as qualified as you but got the job anyway. Did you rejoice in their blessing or did you go screaming around the office that it was not fair? **Maybe God was blessing them.**

Do you understand what I'm saying? We should not be known as the ones who are always complaining and crying about things. As a Christian, our life is in God's hands. When we don't get a promotion, it is because God did not want us to have that promotion at that time. When

we don't get a raise, it just wasn't in the cards. We can't throw a tantrum like a child or hang our heads and sulk when we don't get what we think we deserve. That makes us no better than the heathen. **It makes us look like a child. It does not make us look like Christ.**

At any rate Joseph has blessed his family and given them back the money that they brought with them. They will not find it until later.

Gen 42:27 But as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey feed at the encampment, he saw his money; and there it was, in the mouth of his sack.

Gen 42:28 So he said to his brothers, "My money has been restored, and there it is, in my sack!" Then their hearts failed them and they were afraid, saying to one another, "What is this that God has done to us?"

On the way home between Egypt and Canaan the brothers stopped to camp and feed the animals. As one of them opened a bag of grain he saw that his money was there in the sack. This created a panic among the brethren. In their minds they would be seen as having taken the grain and not paid for it. For all they knew Egyptian soldiers were coming after them. Keep in mind that they did not go down there to buy four or five bags of corn. They raise animals for a living and went down to Egypt with a whole convoy of pack mules in order that they bring enough grain back to feed the animals for a good while. In the B portion of verse 28 we also see that they saw the blessing of the money as a curse. They rightly attribute the money to God but don't see the blessing for what it really is.

How many of us do the same thing? **How many of us have been blessed and seen it as a curse? How many of us have seen our blessings as an inconvenience? How many of us have seen an opportunity to minister to someone else as an inconvenience?** Once again, if our hearts and our minds are daily set towards seeking God's

face and His will for our lives, and by that I don't mean just the big picture but that we seek Him for the daily things also.

It is easy for us to say that we're children of God and he has a plan for our lives but we have to understand that our life is made up of subsequent days that are strung together. Our life is the big picture whereas the daily things are the details. How many of us get up in the morning with our day already planned out and don't consult God as to what he would have us do on that particular day? I know we all have to go to work and there are certain things we have to do each day but in that day, while we are at work, there are opportunities to minister and witness to others. Those are the little things that lump together to make up the bigger picture. We need to be aware of that.

Gen 42:29 *Then they went to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan and told him all that had happened to them, saying:*

Gen 42:30 *"The man who is lord of the land spoke roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country.*

Gen 42:31 *But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we are not spies.*

Gen 42:32 *We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is with our father this day in the land of Canaan.'*

Gen 42:33 *Then the man, the lord of the country, said to us, 'By this I will know that you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers here with me, take food for the famine of your households, and be gone.*

Gen 42:34 *And bring your youngest brother to me; so I shall know that you are not spies, but that you are honest men. I will grant your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.' "*

Gen 42:35 *Then it happened as they emptied their sacks, that surprisingly each man's bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid.*

In verses 29 through 35 we have a panicked group of men going home to their father to recount their story. They are afraid of being pursued by the Egyptians and being accused of stealing. So when they get home they recount the entire story in detail to their father. They also had to

explain where their younger brother Simeon was. The last thing Jacob wanted was to lose another son. So now they had to explain why they have money and why their brother's not with them. While they are explaining this, apparently they are also unloading the sacks of grain. Low and behold as they opened the sacks of grain all their money fell out. Verse 35 ends with the statement that they were all afraid. Now Jacob also fears not only being called a thief but for the life of his son Simeon. In his mind Pharaoh will discover that his sons have stolen grain and in return put Simeon to death.

Gen 42:36 *And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me."*

Gen 42:37 *Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you."*

Gen 42:38 *But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him along the way in which you go, then you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave."*

Now Jacob is at an all-time low. He states that Joseph is gone, Simeon is gone and now in order to even have a chance of getting Simeon back he has to send Benjamin also. In the context of the day you have to understand just as it was even 100 years ago around here, that on the farm boys mean free labor. They are seen as a portion of your wealth. Therefore what Jacob is seeing is his wealth diminish. I don't mean that he sees this in a financial way, he certainly loves his sons, but to him he is losing everything on all sides. As he says in the latter portion of verse 36 "all things are against me."

In verse 37 Reuben steps up and says, "Father you can kill my two boys if I don't bring Benjamin back to you! Put him in my hands and I will bring him back!" However we need to understand the Jacob has already prophesied over Reuben saying that he is as unstable as water. Therefore

Jacob doesn't have a whole lot of confidence in his son Reuben. Reuben has a reputation of not being reliable as do all of his sons at this time.

We must be careful of our everyday actions. It is these actions and how they are perceived that make up what is known as our reputation. Our reputation is our testimony. It is our witness. We have to be credible witnesses of Jesus Christ. If we are not believable, if we are not consistent, if our word is not our bond then we will also be seen as being unstable as water.

At any rate Jacob determines that Benjamin will not go back to Egypt. He has written Simeon off as dead. If something were to happen to Benjamin during the trip, Jacob said that it would bring down his gray hair with sorrow to the grave. In other words if something happened to Benjamin it would kill him.

Today we read about people who are driven by need. Seen from just the natural eye these things are nothing but toil, tribulation and hardship. They are circumstances that made life hard. And they just seem to keep compounding. It seems as if they've driven Jacob almost into a depression. The sons are panicked, there seems to have been a great loss, and even a perceived threat of God being against them. What is actually happening though is God's plan. **The need that drove Jacob's family to Egypt in search of food was a mechanism in which God employed to reunite the family. The selling of Joseph into slavery 20 years ago, a secret that his brothers had hidden the entire time, was a mechanism to get Joseph to Egypt.** Now Joseph is bringing his family to Egypt. His family will stay there for over 400 years.

That family entered Egypt as a family of just 75 people. They left Egypt as a nation. They will leave Egypt with the wealth of the Egyptians.

Daily we run into snags, inconveniences, and bothersome distractions that could very well be God trying to get our attention and move us into a certain position. Instead of sighing, throwing up

our hands, fussing and fighting we need to take a step back and see what God may be trying to do in our lives. **When this happens just ask God what He wants you to do. Then listen and act upon it.**