

June 15, 2014 – Father’s Day

“How God Grows Us Up” (based on *Home Run*, by Kevin Myers)

Romans 7: 4

So, my dear brothers and sisters, this is the point: You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God.

When a person dies to the old life and belongs to Christ, a new life begins. The unbeliever's mind is centered on his or her own personal gratification. Those who don't follow Christ have only their own self-determination as their source of power. By contrast, God is at the center of a Christian's life. God supplies the power for the Christian's daily living. Believers find that their whole way of looking at the world changes when they belong to Christ.

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Yet, too many who believe in God have lives that don't look much different from those who do not follow God. Why is that?

Romans 12:1-2

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

The idea of this verse is that there is a pattern of life the world follows for living and there is a different pattern that God desires for us to follow. Today I want to share with you a specific pattern that God uses to grow our lives.

Someone who was feeling hopeless, because things weren't going his way; his life was not going as he wanted; he had dreams all his life of what his life would be like and what he would accomplish, but his dreams were not being realized. He was frustrated and angry at God and found himself saying, “God, you owe me!” In other words, “I have spent my life following you, and now you are letting my life sink into a pit. How could you let this happen? You owe me!

And then he said that he sensed God saying to him, “I do not owe you. I *own* you.” He said that at that moment he realized that although he spent his life saying, “It's all about God,” he had been living in a way that said, “It's all about me.”

Someone has wisely said, “Never put a period where God puts a comma.” Perhaps today you have placed a period on a dream, but God has not. We all experience disappointments, loss, brokenness; perhaps this morning this is your experience because of a struggle in your marriage, or a child going in a wrong direction, or a struggle with your own character, perhaps it's a treat to health or finances, or broken

dreams. What is God doing? Well, what if all along God has still been at work while things weren't going as you'd hoped and planned? What if God is using this time of powerlessness in your life to grow you? We don't like being powerless, we want to be in control and be able to fulfill our purposes in our power. The problem is you aren't God. And it's frustrating to try and be God without the power of God.

The only power you have is to fall at God's feet and depend on Him. Why? So God can build you. Recognizing your powerlessness and depending on God is the breakthrough God has been waiting for so He can be free to help you change, learn and grow.

Okay, so now what? There is a pattern, It's God's pattern and I think it is most clearly seen in the life of Joseph.

Do you know or remember the life of Joseph? He was one of 12 brothers, the great-grandson of Abraham. He grew up hearing the stories of God's interaction with his ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who was Joseph's father. So he had some religion in his upbringing.

Joseph was his father's favorite. That didn't go over so well with his brothers. As a matter of fact they grew up hating him. Joseph would work with his brothers but then report to his dad all the wrong things his brothers were doing. One day his father had a special gift made for Joseph, a beautiful robe. Then to make things worse at age 17 Joseph shared a dream God gave him for his life: Genesis 37:5-9

One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever. "Listen to this dream," he said. "We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!"

His brothers responded, "So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them.

Soon Joseph had another dream, and again he told his brothers about it. "Listen, I have had another dream," he said. "The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!"

Joseph seemed certain that he was going to do great things. Maybe he even expected to immediately become the leader of his family. But God often takes us in a different direction from the one we expected. God will keep His promises, but not our timetable or game plan.

In the case of Joseph, instead of ruling his brothers, he was thrown into a pit by them and then sold into slavery. Talk about things not turning out the way you expected!

The problem was that Joseph thought it was all about him. I'm aware that many of you know the end of the story, but let's not be tempted to skip over how Joseph got there. When Joseph was sold into slavery he may have thought that was the end of his dream. No one was going to look for him, not his father, whom his brothers convinced Joseph was dead. Not his brothers who hated him enough to want to kill him. No one! Yet, God had *not* abandoned Joseph. And while everything looked wrong to Joseph, everything was right with God. Joseph was about to begin a journey that neither he nor anyone else would have ever expected and it was being guided by the hand of God.

Joseph would discover God's pattern for living, a pattern opposed by the world, but one that God uses to grow His people.

1. The first thing we must go through to follow God's pattern for our growth is Dependence on God.

Joseph started leaning dependence the moment he found himself down in that pit. What do you think Joseph did when he landed in the pit, I bet he prayed. I would, wouldn't you? Haven't we all prayed from the pits? What if the last word's he heard from his brothers as he landed in that pit was, "Let's see what comes of your dreams now." He must have wept, he must have been shocked, confused, he must have felt anger, sorrow, helplessness, hopelessness and he must have prayed.

Joseph lost everything he had ever depended on to accomplish his dream. But God was with Joseph. When we are in the pits of life and God is not coming to our rescue as we expect, we wonder what God is doing. We may even think He has left us. But God was with Joseph. God was teaching Joseph how to depend on God for the dream. This is the first, the most important, and the most difficult lesson of growth.

In the world, growing up means becoming more independent. Right? We raise our children to be less dependent on us and to become more independent. But in our spiritual lives growing means the opposite: we need to learn to become more dependent. We start out far away from God, then we come to Christ and He give us new life, a spiritual life and we learn to become dependent upon God our Father in heaven. Spiritual growth is the process of moving from independence to dependence. The first gate we must go through our growth process is dependence on God.

2. Joseph's journey reveals the next part of God's pattern for our spiritual growth: the quality of character within. We must win character battles. The greatest battles we face are not the ones around us, but within us.

Joseph ends up in the house of Potiphar, a military leader, a man of power. The bible says, Genesis 39:2-4

The LORD was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master. Potiphar noticed this and realized that the LORD was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did. This pleased Potiphar, so he soon

made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned.

Things were looking up for Joseph. But he faced a new trial: His boss's wife propositioned him. At the time Joseph was a young man in his late teens or early twenties. I'm sure Potiphar's wife was a beautiful woman. Joseph could have thought, "why not? My brothers have betrayed me, my father thinks I'm dead, my dreams are dead, I have natural desires, I deserve to find some self satisfaction, so why not?"

Joseph had a decision to make. Would he depend on God and honor his values, or would he seize the moment? Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife, leaving his coat behind. Through his dependence on God, God begins now to form Joseph's character. Through his dependence on God, Joseph was able to withstand and pass the test of character. In that moment Joseph recognized that sleeping with Potiphar's wife would be more than betraying his boss; more than a lapse in judgment. It would be a sin against the God he had come to rely on. Joseph was no longer chasing his dreams, he was chasing the God of his dreams and depending on Him. Through difficult circumstances God is offering you a chance to grow. Hold on to your heart of purity, learn to kill the ego even if it means living in obscurity, and let God help you address your issues of insecurity.

There are things God wants to see come about in us that can only be developed by our going through trials and struggles. That's not because God doesn't love you, it is because God does love you.

Proverbs 3:11-12

My child, don't reject the LORD 's discipline,
and don't be upset when he corrects you.

For the LORD corrects those he loves,
just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.

Although we often don't understand what is happening to us, we can be confident that God is forming Christ in us. We must embrace God's process and win the battle within before we can proceed to the next part of the process.

3. We must learn to develop positive relationships with people.

Joseph did not have a very good track record in this area when he was young. He certainly didn't get along with his brothers. He treated them so badly they wanted to kill him. But now he has gone from favorite son to a fallen slave. Maybe at one time Joseph thought the favor upon his life was permission for him to think less of others and he valued himself above everyone else. Perhaps when he had servants he ignored them, now he was an ignored slave; that had to transform his thinking. He was learning that God did not love and value Joseph's brothers or their servants any less than Joseph. D. L. Moody once said, "Moses spent his first forty years thinking he was somebody. He spent his second forty years learning to be a nobody. He spent his third forty years discovering what God can do with a nobody."

Through sorrow, struggles, pits and prisons Joseph developed compassion for other people. He learned how to treat people with dignity and to care about others because God allowed him to experience being on the same level as servants and prisoners. Only by depending on God and developing godly character do we have the power to love others. This is what Joseph learned, but God wasn't done with Joseph yet.

4. To be complete in God's way of doing things there is a fourth part of the process of growth: **Getting Results.**

To fulfill his purpose, Joseph had to do the work God had created him to do. We see this again and again in Joseph's story. We read that "The Lord was with him" and "gave him success in everything he did." If you're going to be a slave, you may as well be the best slave you can be!

Joseph wasn't competent when he was seventeen. It took time, and God put Joseph in places where he could learn, grow, and develop. It took thirteen years of preparing Joseph for the work he would do – the fulfillment of his dream. Joseph was not just passing time, it was all for a purpose. He learned that it was only with God's help that he was able to accomplish anything of value. He had traveled the entire spiritual journey: dependence on God, growing character within, loving others, and winning results. Joseph in the end was used to save his family, the nation of Israel, and perhaps the whole world.

This pattern is seen not only in Joseph's life, but in David's life, Daniel's life, Peter's life, Paul's life; and it must be the pattern in your life. You may be expecting God to make your life easier, you need to get a sense that God wants to grow you to make your life better. But you have to follow God pattern not the world's pattern. The order that we have seen today in Joseph's life is important. God's pattern for you must follow the same pattern: first dependence – love/trust God, second character-love God and yourself enough to win your battles within, third love for others, then results.

The world has it backward, results are first. How many people do you know who put career first? Ask people who they are and they will tell you what they do. We live in a performance-driven society. This pattern of the world is so ingrained, we are not even aware that it is the world's way and not God's. So we conform to it out of habit and end up neglecting or ruining the most important things in life.

Some people put relationships first and neglect the other parts of God's pattern. Relationships are important, so is career by the way, but they should never be first. God is always first. Even working on your character first will not accomplish the fullness of life that comes from following God's pattern.

Think of it like a baseball game. Home is dependence on God. This is where we start, this is where we come up to bat. Then think of first base as character, second base as our community with others, and third as competence or accomplishing God's purpose for you. To score you have to hit all the bases in the right order. In little league it's cute when they hit the ball and run to third, but not so cute in the majors. And just like in

baseball you have to come all around the bases and return home to score. It all come back to God and giving glory to God.