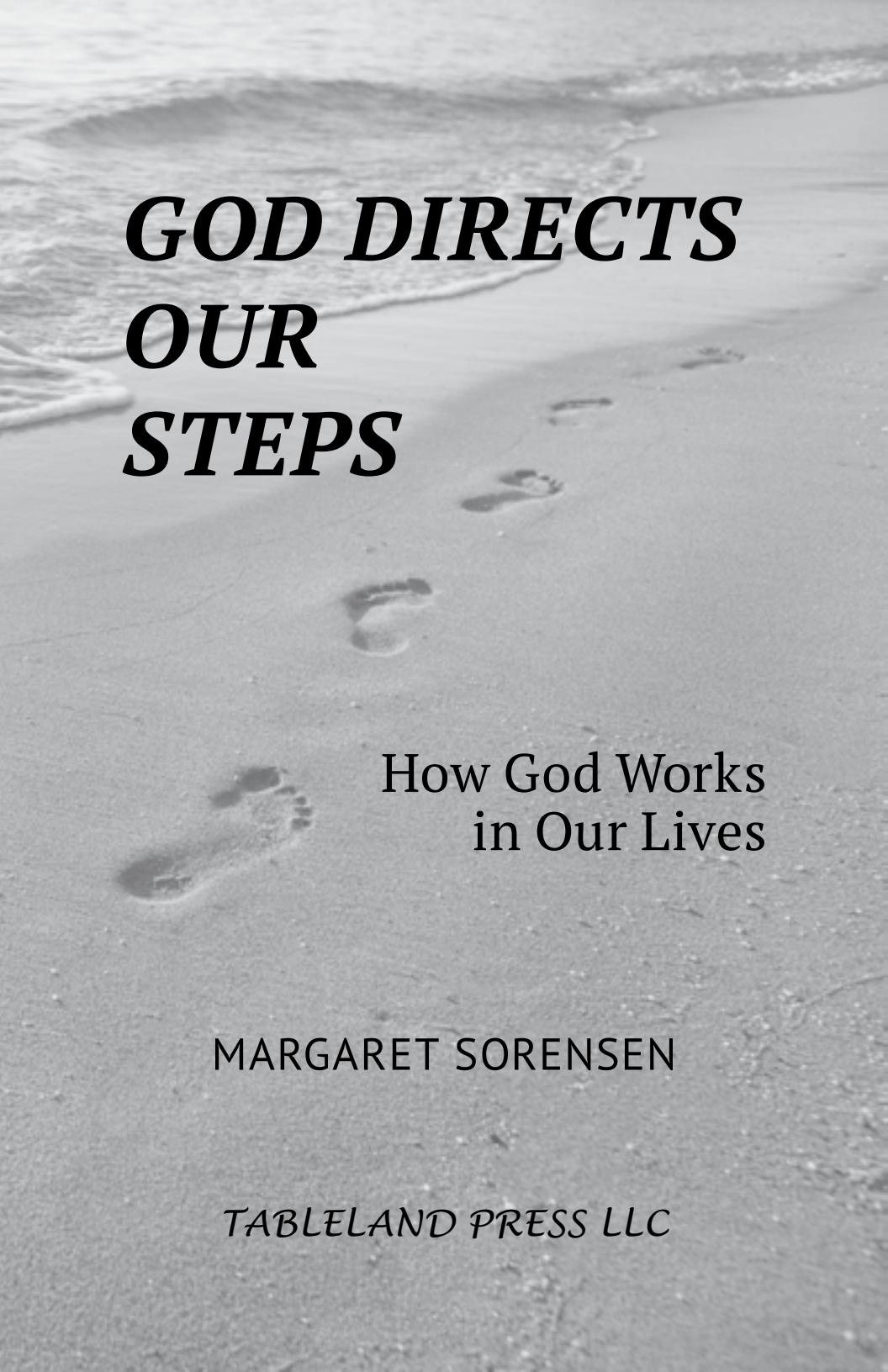


GOD DIRECTS OUR STEPS

How God Works
in Our Lives

MARGARET SORENSEN

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in Our Lives**

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God Directs Our Steps: How God Works in Our Lives
by Margaret Sorensen

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Introduction

*A man's heart plans his way,
But the Lord directs his steps.*

—Proverbs 16:9

God works in our lives in many ways. This book focuses on four of the ways. To illustrate each of them, I have selected people from the Bible as examples. Reading the Bible stories, you can see that God worked in several ways for each person. I have focused on one way that God worked in each of their lives.

I am assuming that the reader is familiar with the lives of these biblical people, so I have not recounted every detail in each person's life.

As you read this book, I pray that God will bless you and show you how He is working in your life.

Chapter 1

God Seeks People

For thus says the Lord God: “Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day.”

—Ezekiel 34:11-12

Because of Adam and Eve’s sin, all people have a sinful nature. No one is righteous before holy God; everyone is a sinner. God’s righteous judgment requires that we spend eternity in hell. We can never be good enough, and there is nothing we can do to earn our way to heaven.

But there is good news! Because of His love, God made a way for us to be saved. His Son Jesus Christ came to earth and lived a sinless life. Taking our sins upon Himself, Jesus died on the cross

in our place. But Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose to life on the third day. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father. Jesus conquered sin and death, so we can have victory over sin and death too. We can spend eternity with God in heaven.

When we confess our sins to God and accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we will be saved. God ascribes Jesus's righteousness to us, and we are saved from God's wrath.

God, in His infinite love, wants everyone to be saved. He actively searches for us and draws us to Himself. God seeks us by bringing people and circumstances into our lives. He seeks us through things that we read and hear. He seeks us through His beautiful creation.

Reading the Bible, I see God actively seeking Ruth and the apostle Paul.

Ruth

(Ruth 1-4)

The book of Ruth is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. There was a woman in Moab that God knew would respond to Him in faith. So God took steps to seek her and lead her to salvation.

God sent a famine in the land of Israel. In order to survive, Elimelech, his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, moved

from Bethlehem to the land of Moab. Sometime afterward, Elimelech died. His two sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Naomi was a witness of God to her daughters-in-law, and she had a good relationship with them.

After living in Moab for ten years, Naomi's two sons died, both of them childless. Naomi heard that the famine was over in Israel, so she decided to return to Bethlehem. Her two daughters-in-law wanted to go with her. Naomi blessed them and advised them to go back, each one to her mother's house. After much persuasion, Orpah left her, but Ruth clung to Naomi and said,

“Do not plead with me to leave you or to turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you sleep, I will sleep. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord do so to me, and worse, if anything but death separates me from you.”
(Ruth 1:16-17 NASB)

Even though Naomi was grieving and feeling like God had dealt harshly with her, Ruth must have seen something about her mother-in-law's faith that spoke to her. Naomi's faith was different than the worshipping of false gods that Ruth had grown up with. Ruth did not want

to go back to her old life. Her faith in Jehovah God was probably in its infancy. But she loved her mother-in-law enough to put her trust in Naomi's God.

When Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem, it was harvest time when the grain was being reaped. Poor people were allowed to go behind the reapers and pick up any stray grain that had been left on the ground (Leviticus 19:9-10). Ruth went out to glean grain from the fields, and God led her to one of the fields owned by Boaz, who was a close relative of Elimelech's.

Boaz, a godly man, had heard about Naomi's return and about Ruth's loyalty to and care of her mother-in-law. He knew of Ruth's virtue and character. Boaz blessed Ruth and said to her,

“All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know. May the Lord reward your work, and may your wages be full from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” (Ruth 2:11-12 NASB)

Boaz spoke kindly to Ruth and gave generously to her so that she and Naomi had plenty to eat.

He instructed his workers to treat Ruth with respect and to purposely drop grain for her to pick up. This was a blessing from God. Ruth gleaned grain in the fields of Boaz through both the barley and the wheat harvest.

God had established a law that if an Israelite became poor and sold some of his property, a near relative should buy back or redeem what was sold (Leviticus 25:25). This relative is known as a kinsman redeemer.

Also, God said that if a married man dies without a son, his brother should marry his widow, and the first son born would carry on the name of the man who died (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

Knowing the law of the kinsman-redeemer, Naomi wanted to make sure that Ruth was taken care of. When a closer relative declined to marry Ruth, Boaz agreed to fulfill the role of the kinsman-redeemer and marry her.

Boaz and Ruth had a son named Obed. He was the father of Jesse, who was the father of David. What a blessing for Ruth! She was the great grandmother of King David, and through David's line came the Messiah.

I can see God's hand in every circumstance in Ruth's life. Elimelech and his family moves to Moab. Their son Mahlon marries Ruth. Naomi's faith in God influences Ruth. Ruth goes back to Bethlehem with Naomi. Of all the fields where

Ruth could have gleaned, God leads her to one of Boaz's fields. Boaz is kind to her and is willing to marry her. Then she is blessed by being in the line of Christ Jesus, the Savior of the world.

Paul

(Acts 7:54–8:3; 9:1–31; 13–28)

The apostle Paul was also named Saul. Being a Pharisee, he was zealous for God, and he strictly followed the law. Saul, at first, rejected Jesus Christ as the Messiah. He even kept safe the robes of the people who stoned Stephen, a Christian who was full of faith and grace. Even though Saul consented to Stephen's death, perhaps a seed was planted when he heard Stephen's witness before he died.

With zeal, Saul persecuted the early church. Acts 8:3 says, "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison." Also, Paul said,

"So I thought to myself that I had to act in strong opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, after receiving authority from the chief priests, but I also cast my vote against them when they were

being put to death. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was extremely enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.” (Acts 26:9-11 NASB)

Saul journeyed to Damascus with letters that would give him the authority to arrest any Christians and take them to Jerusalem. On the way, Jesus Christ appeared to him in a blinding light from heaven. Jesus identified Himself and asked Saul why he was persecuting Him. Christ said to Saul,

“But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”
(Acts 26:16-18)

When Saul got up from the ground, he was blind and had to be led into the city. God had

gotten his attention. For three days Saul was blind. He spent the time praying and, I imagine, thinking about his experience on the road to Damascus.

God sent Ananias to lay his hands on Saul to restore his sight. God said of Saul, “He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:15-16).

When Saul returned to Jerusalem, the apostles were afraid of him and did not believe that Saul was truly a believer in Jesus. They thought that it was only a trick to trap them so they could be arrested and thrown into jail. But Barnabas, a fellow Christian, reassured them that Saul was a believer.

God sent Paul to the Gentiles to tell them about God’s plan of salvation for the world. Paul took missionary trips with Barnabas and then with Silas. Even though he faced severe persecution as a Christian, Paul was always true to his Savior Jesus Christ.



If you are not a Christian, God is seeking you today. His grace, love, and mercy are overflowing

toward you. The Lord wants you to be in heaven with Him for all eternity.

You can be saved today. Please don't put it off. Second Corinthians 6:2 (NASB) says, "Behold, now is 'a favorable time,' behold, now is 'a day of salvation.'"

The way to be saved is simple. Follow these four steps:

1. Admit that you are a sinner and that you cannot save yourself.
2. Accept that Jesus paid the price for your sins on the cross. Believe that Jesus rose from the dead, conquering sin and death.
3. Turn from your sins and ask God to forgive you and to cleanse you spiritually.
4. Ask Jesus to come into your life and save you.

If you have done these four steps, then you are saved. You will go to heaven when you die. You are no longer under God's wrath.

In order to grow as a Christian, you need to do the following:

1. Read and study the Bible every day. I would suggest that you start in the gospel of John.
2. Pray every day. Praise and thank God for all He has done for you. Talk to Him about your concerns and ask for His help.

3. Join a local Christian church where the Bible is faithfully preached.
4. Tell others about Jesus.

If you have just accepted Jesus as your Savior, today is the start of a new life for you. God has sent His Holy Spirit into you to help you in your Christian walk. He will never leave you or forsake you.

Chapter 2

God Asks Us to Wait

*Wait on the Lord;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the Lord!*
—Psalm 27:14

Many times, God tells us to wait. We wait for answered prayers, for God's perfect timing, for His promises to be fulfilled, and for Jesus Christ's return. Abraham and David are two good examples of God telling someone to wait.

Abraham

(Genesis 11:27-25:11)

When Abram was seventy-five years old, God spoke to him and told him to leave his father's house and go to a country that God would show him. Abram took his wife, Sarai, and his nephew, Lot, and set out. God led him to the land of

Canaan, where Abram built two altars to God and called upon the name of the Lord.

God made a covenant with Abram to give the land of Canaan to him and his descendants, to make Abram's descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and to bless all the families of the earth through Abram. At this time, Abram and Sarai had no children.

After ten years had passed, Sarai still had not borne any children, and she was tired of waiting. So she decided to try to help God by giving her maid, Hagar, to her husband. Hagar bore a son named Ishmael to Abram when he was eighty-six years old. Responding to Abram's prayer, God said that He would make Ishmael a great nation, but God's covenant with Abram would not be handed down to Ishmael. A son born to Sarai would inherit the covenant promise.

Years passed, and Abram still believed that God would give him a son through Sarai. When Abram was nighly-nine, God repeated His covenant to him and instituted the covenant of circumcision. He promised that Sarai would bear a son to Abram the next year. God changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah.

God keeps His promises. His timing is always perfect. The promised son, Isaac, was born to Abraham and Sarah when Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah was ninety.

Abraham waited twenty-five years for the promise of God that He would give him a son who would be his heir.

Abraham is an example of when God says, “Wait.” He was seventy-five years old when God promised to make of him a great nation, and he was one hundred years old when Isaac was born. Isaac was the son of the promise, Abraham’s heir through whom God would make the nation of Israel. To Isaac, God repeated His covenant promise.

“Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.”
(Genesis 26:3–5)

Abraham did not see his descendants possess the land of Canaan, but he believed that God would do everything He had promised. Jesus said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56).

David

(1 Samuel 15–2 Samuel 5:5)

Saul was the first king of the nation of Israel. But he had disobeyed God, so God had rejected him as king. God sent Samuel to anoint David, one of the sons of Jesse, as the next king of Israel. We don't know exactly how old David was, but he was probably in his early teens when Samuel anointed him. But David was not made king right away. He needed to wait for God's timing.

Several years later, the Israelites and the Philistines had drawn battle lines against each other. A giant named Goliath challenged any of the Israelites to one-on-one combat instead of the two armies fighting. David's three oldest brothers were in Saul's army. Jesse sent David to see how his brothers were doing. While there, David heard Goliath's challenge and accepted it. With God's help, he slew the mighty giant.

As a result, Saul gave David a high rank in the Israelite army. David was so successful in the military that Saul became jealous of him and tried to kill him.

David fled from Saul and was on the run for several years, hiding in a cave some of the time. Saul pursued him, wanting to kill him. Many men joined David and pledged loyalty to him. On two occasions, David had the opportunity to kill Saul, but he did not do it. He relied on God

to make him king in God's own timing. David knew the importance of waiting on God.

During one of the times when the Israelites were fighting the Philistines, Saul and his three sons were killed. Sometime later, the men of Judah anointed David king over Judah.

David was thirty years old when he became king of Judah. He reined over Judah for seven years and six months. Then he became king over all of Israel. He reined over the nation of Israel for thirty-three years.

God had David wait many years from the time that he was anointed by Samuel until David became king over all Israel. Those years were used by God to mold David's character and train him how to be a king.



God knows everything that has happened and that will happen. Because of His love, grace, and mercy, He can be trusted to do the right thing at the right time. God is faithful, and His timing is always perfect. We simply have to rest in Him and wait patiently. Psalm 130:5 says, "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope." What is God asking you to wait for?

Chapter 3

God Develops Our Character

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

—Romans 5:3-5

After we accept Jesus as our Savior, we are not automatically Christlike in our thoughts and behaviors. We still have a sinful nature that we struggle against. God is constantly working on us, drawing us closer to Himself, and making us more like Jesus.

Both Jacob and Moses needed some character development from God. Jacob used deceit to get what he wanted, and Moses let his anger drive him to commit murder.

Jacob

(Genesis 25:19–34; 27–33; 35)

Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons. Esau was born first, and then Jacob followed with his hand grasping Esau's heel. The name Jacob means "supplanter," which would reflect his personality.

When the boys had grown up, Esau loved to hunt, while Jacob stayed around the tents. One day, Esau came in from hunting and was hungry. Jacob was cooking some stew, and Esau asked for some of it. Seeing a chance to get the better of his brother, Jacob asked for Esau's birthright in exchange for a bowl of stew. The birthright meant that the firstborn would take over as head of the family when the father died. Also, the firstborn would receive a double inheritance. Esau was guided by his fleshly wants, so he agreed to give up his birthright.

When Jacob was old and blind, he wanted to bless his sons. He sent Esau to hunt game and prepare it for him to eat before blessing him. While Esau was out, Jacob, with his mother's help, deceived his father into thinking that he was his brother. Isaac blessed Jacob instead of Esau.

Esau was so angry at Jacob that he wanted to kill him. To protect Jacob, Rebekah and Isaac sent him to Haran to find a wife from Rebekah's father's family.

While Jacob was on the way to Haran, God appeared to him in a dream. God repeated to Jacob the promise that He had made to Abraham and to Isaac. This promise was that God would give the land of Canaan to his descendants, that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth, and that all the nations on earth would be blessed through his descendants. Jacob vowed that if God would be with him, then the Lord would be his God.

Jacob arrived in Haran where he met and stayed with Rebekah's brother, Laban, who had two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel and wanted to marry her. He and Laban made an agreement that Jacob would first tend Laban's sheep and goats for seven years before marrying Rachel.

When the seven years were complete, Jacob thought he was marrying Rachel, but Laban had substituted Leah instead. Jacob was upset about being tricked. God was showing him what it was like to be deceived. Laban told Jacob that he could marry Rachel too in exchange for another seven years of labor.

While working for his father-in-law in Haran, Jacob had twelve sons and one daughter. After the fourteen years, Jacob wanted to return to the land of Canaan, but Laban wanted to get more work out of him. Therefore, Laban asked Jacob

to continue working for him, and Jacob agreed. His wages would be every speckled or spotted sheep or goat.

Jacob worked another six years for Laban. God had prospered Jacob, and his flocks had increased while Laban's flocks had diminished. Laban had tried to get the better of Jacob by changing his wages ten times during those six years. But God had protected Jacob and did not let Laban succeed in his schemes.

Finally, Jacob, his wives, and his children, with all their servants and herds, went back to the land of Canaan. On the way back home, Jacob sent a message of greeting to his brother, Esau. The messengers returned, saying that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men. Being afraid to meet his brother, Jacob sent messengers in advance with peace offerings. The night before reuniting with Esau, Jacob wrestled with God. At daybreak they were still wrestling. God blessed Jacob and renamed him Israel, which means "he struggles with God." After peacefully reconnecting with Esau, who lived in Edom, Jacob and his family settled in the land of Canaan.

God used the time that Jacob spent tending the sheep and goats to change Jacob's character and make him humble. Also, Laban's ill treatment of him helped Jacob understand what he had done to others.

Many years later there was a famine in the land, and Jacob and his children, with their flocks, moved to Egypt. God had sent Jacob's son Joseph in advance to prepare a place for them.

Moses

(Exodus 1–34; Numbers 10–14; 20:1–13;
Deuteronomy 31–34)

After Joseph died, a new Pharaoh who had not known Joseph came to the throne. The children of Israel had prospered and increased in number, and Pharaoh was afraid of them. To control the Israelites, he enslaved them and set them to doing hard labor. The Egyptians were cruel taskmasters.

Pharaoh also gave an order that all the Hebrew boys born should be killed, and the Hebrew girls should be allowed to live.

One man and woman of the house of Levi had a beautiful baby boy. They disregarded Pharaoh's order and hid their son for three months. Then the mother made a basket, covered it with pitch, placed her baby in it, and put the basket in the reeds along the Nile River. His sister, Miriam, watched to see what would happen.

Pharaoh's daughter found the basket and wanted to keep the baby boy. Miriam approached Pharaoh's daughter and offered to bring a woman

to nurse the baby. She brought her mother, who nursed him until he was weaned, possibly for two to three years. This was a blessing from God that Moses's own mother was allowed to influence his early years.

After the boy was returned to Pharaoh's daughter, she named him Moses. He was well educated in the Egyptian culture, learning reading, writing, languages, math, science, and so forth.

Moses grew to manhood, and he knew that the Hebrews were his people, not the Egyptians. He saw their oppression and wanted to do something about it. One day Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. He killed the Egyptian and hid the body. Moses was trying to rescue the Israelites in his own strength. When the matter became known to Pharaoh, he wanted to kill Moses. Afraid for his life, Moses, who was forty years old, fled into the land of Midian.

Moses met a priest of Midian and married his daughter Zipporah. Moses tended his father-in-law's flock for forty years. God used this time to humble Moses and give him a servant's heart.

When Moses was eighty, God called him to go back to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go. After giving many excuses why he couldn't do it, Moses finally agreed to go, provided that his brother, Aaron, was his spokesman. God told Aaron to go out to meet Moses.

Upon returning to Egypt, Moses and Aaron told Pharaoh that the Lord God said to let His people go. Pharaoh refused, and over a period of time, God sent ten different plagues on Egypt. After the last plague when all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians died, Pharaoh finally agreed to let the Israelites go.

Following God's leading, Moses led the Israelites into the wilderness. The Lord gave Moses the law on Mount Sinai. When they got close to the land of Canaan, the Israelites were afraid to enter the land, so God turned them back, and they wandered in the wilderness for forty years until everyone who was twenty years of age or older had died.

At one point during the forty years, Moses disobeyed and dishonored God, so He did not allow Moses to enter the land of Canaan. When Moses died, God buried him, and Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land.

Forty years of tending sheep had prepared Moses for leading God's people for forty years. People are a lot like sheep. We wander away. We are quick to follow someone who is leading us astray. We aren't satisfied with the green grass in front of us.

Moses had tried to rescue his people in his own strength. He failed miserably and ended up committing murder. In the wilderness, God

humbled and trained him. Then Moses was used by God to rescue the Israelites through God's power and strength. God got the glory that He so richly deserves.



All Christians battle against their sinful natures. Ephesians 6:10-18 says the following:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word

of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

As we study God's Word and apply it to our lives, the Holy Spirit changes our thinking and attitudes to be more reflective of God's character. How is God changing your character today?

Chapter 4

God Uses Circumstances for Good

*And we know that God causes all things
to work together for good to those
who love God, to those who are called
according to His purpose.*

—Romans 8:28 NASB

Sometimes circumstances seem bad at the time, but God uses them for good. This is when we learn to trust God no matter what happens in our lives. God knows what is best. Joseph and Esther are good examples of this.

Joseph (Genesis 37; 39–50)

The chapters that deal specifically with Joseph's story start when Joseph was seventeen years old. He had ten older brothers, one sister, and one younger brother. Joseph sometimes helped his brothers take care of the family's sheep and goats.

However, Jacob loved Joseph more than his other children, and he showed it by giving Joseph a multicolored tunic. As a result, Joseph's brothers were jealous of him.

God gave Joseph dreams that indicated he would one day rule over his brothers and parents. Joseph eagerly told his dreams to his brothers and father, which increased the animosity that his brothers had for him.

But God knows the future, and He knew that a famine was coming. God was going to make a great nation of the children of Israel, and He was going to do it in the land of Egypt.

In the process of caring for the flocks, Joseph's older brothers took them to Shechem. After some time, Jacob sent Joseph to see how his brothers were doing. Joseph was to return to his father to let him know.

When Joseph reached Shechem, his brothers and the flocks were not there. Joseph wandered about in the field until a man came up to him and told him that his brothers had moved the livestock to Dothan.

Joseph went to Dothan in search of his brothers. When he was some distance away, they saw him and plotted to kill him. Joseph's brothers stripped him of his tunic and threw him into a dry pit. Then they sat down to eat.

As they were eating, they looked up and saw a

caravan of Ishmaelites coming by on their way to Egypt. His brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. Then the brothers dipped Joseph's tunic in goat's blood and took it to their father Jacob, who concluded that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

In Egypt, Joseph was bought by Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard. Seeing that God was with Joseph and that He gave him success in whatever he did, Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his household.

Potiphar's wife lusted after Joseph, and when he did not reciprocate her advances, she falsely accused him. Potiphar punished Joseph by putting him in prison where the king's prisoners were kept. However, God gave Joseph favor in the eyes of the chief jailer, who put him in charge of the care of all the prisoners.

Sometime later, both Pharaoh's cupbearer and his baker were put into the same prison as Joseph. One night, each of the officials had a dream that disturbed him. With God's help, Joseph correctly interpreted each man's dream. Everything happened exactly as Joseph had said it would. The baker was hanged, and the cupbearer was reinstated to his position. Joseph asked the cupbearer to mention him to Pharaoh so he could be released from jail too.

But after the cupbearer was restored to his

position, he forgot about Joseph, and Joseph remained in prison.

After two years Pharaoh also had a dream that disturbed him greatly. None of Pharaoh's "wise men" could interpret it. The cupbearer then remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh, who had Joseph brought out of the prison.

Pharaoh told his dream to Joseph, who, with God's help, correctly interpreted it for Pharaoh. There would be seven years of abundance and seven years of famine in Egypt. Joseph recommended that Pharaoh put someone in charge to store up grain during the seven years of abundance so the people would not perish during the years of famine.

Pharaoh was so impressed that he made Joseph second in command of all Egypt. Joseph was thirty years old at that time. During the seven years of plenty, Joseph stored up grain, and when the famine hit, he sold the grain to the people.

The famine extended into the land of Canaan. Jacob sent Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph tested his brothers for a time to see if their hearts had changed. Then he made himself known to them.

Joseph's brothers were afraid that he would seek revenge for the way that they had treated him, but Joseph said to them,

“But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

“Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph: “God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children’s children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine.”’”
(Genesis 45:5-11)

Because the famine was so severe, Jacob and all those with him went to Egypt to live, and Joseph provided for them in the land of Goshen. After Jacob died, Joseph reassured his brothers again.

“Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” (Genesis 50:19-21)

Joseph did not harbor any anger or unforgiveness toward his brothers. He understood that God had orchestrated everything that had happened in order to save the children of Israel, His chosen people.

Think about how God timed everything. The brothers decided to move the flock to Dothan, which happened to be along a trade route. When Joseph could not find his brothers in Shechem, a man was there to tell him where they were. God prevented the brothers from killing Joseph right away. A caravan came along at the proper time for Joseph to be sold into slavery. That was how God moved Joseph to Egypt. Even though being sold as a slave is bad, God had a purpose behind it. While Joseph was in Potiphar’s household and then in the jail, he gained experience and maturity in dealing with people. His organizational skills increased.

I’m sure that Joseph was disappointed when the cupbearer forgot about him, but God needed Joseph to stay in jail for two more years. The

seven years of abundance and the seven years of famine were going to occur in God's timing.

Think what would have happened if Joseph had been released from prison when the cup-bearer was restored to his position. Joseph might have gotten a lower position job in Pharaoh's court, and then slowly worked his way up to a higher position. Joseph would have advanced by his own abilities. But God got Pharaoh's attention through his dreams. It meant more to Pharaoh to have his own dreams interpreted than from hearing how someone else's dream was interpreted. Only God can take someone who is a political prisoner and make him second in command of a country. God alone elevated Joseph to the second highest position in Egypt, and He gets all the glory!

Esther

(Esther 1–10)

In 597 BC, the Jews were exiled to Babylon. The Medo-Persian empire then conquered the Babylonians in 539 BC. The story of Esther takes place during the time that Xerxes I (Ahaserus) ruled Persia.

Vashti, the queen of Persia, refused to obey a summons from King Xerxes, and he sought to replace her as queen. They made a search for

young virgins throughout the whole empire. The virgins would be brought to the king's palace, and the king would choose the one he liked the best to be the next queen.

Esther was one of the virgins to be taken to the palace. She underwent a year of beauty treatments. When Esther was brought before the king, she pleased him better than any of the other virgins, so King Xerxes made Esther queen.

Mordecai was one of the Jews that had been taken captive during the Babylonian captivity. He had raised Esther after her parents died. Mordecai sat at the king's gate in an official capacity, and one day, he saved the king's life by revealing a plot to kill the king.

King Xerxes elevated a man named Haman to a position higher than all the other nobles. Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman. This made Haman so angry that he wanted to kill not just Mordecai but all the Jewish people.

Haman got the king's permission to write a decree in the king's name to have all the Jews in the Persian Empire killed on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. Copies of the edict were written in all the languages and sent throughout the Persian Empire.

When Mordecai read the edict, he mourned and put on sackcloth. Through a messenger, Mordecai told Esther about the decree and urged

her to go into the presence of the king and plead for her people. Now, it was forbidden for anyone to enter the king's presence without being summoned. The person who did that would be killed. The only way for a person's life to be spared would be if the king held out the golden scepter to that person. Esther was afraid to go before the king because he had not summoned her for thirty days.

Mordecai responded to Esther by saying,

“Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:13-14)

Esther sent word to Mordecai to have all the Jews in the city fast for her for three days. She and her maids would fast too.

Three days later, when Esther stood in the inner court in front of the king's hall, King Xerxes held out to her the golden scepter. The king offered to grant her request, whatever it was, up to half his kingdom.

Esther invited King Xerxes and Haman to

a banquet that she had prepared for the king. At the feast, Esther invited them to another banquet that she would prepare the next day. She promised to tell the king her petition at that time.

Meanwhile, Haman was full of pride, and he hated Mordecai so much that he had had a gallows built to have Mordecai hanged as soon as possible.

At the second banquet, Esther told of the plot against the Jewish people and identified Haman as their enemy. The king had Haman hanged on the gallows that he had made for Mordecai.

Esther requested the king to save her people. King Xerxes promoted Mordecai and gave him permission to send a decree throughout the Persian Empire that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the Jews had permission to defend themselves and to kill those who wanted to kill them.

So, the Jewish people were saved from annihilation, and they avenged themselves on their enemies. The Feast of Purim was instituted to remember what happened.

God knows all things and is in complete control of everything. Isaiah 14:24 (NASB) says, “The Lord of armies has sworn, saying, ‘Certainly, just as I have intended, so it has happened, and just as I have planned, so it

will stand.” He knew that Haman would plot against the Jews, and He had a plan for saving them. God had King Xerxes look with favor on Esther and make her queen. Because of Esther’s obedience, God used her to save the Jews.



No matter what bad things happen in your life, submit to God’s will. He knows what is best. God created the world, and He is sovereign. Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. God is righteous and holy. He can be trusted.

Conclusion

*Being confident of this very thing,
that He who has begun a good work
in you will complete it
until the day of Jesus Christ.*

—Philippians 1:6

God works in our lives because He loves us so much. He seeks us, makes us wait for His timing, develops our characters, and uses circumstances for our good.

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)



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