

Some of you have felt like you are in a losing season. You've lost a lot. You really have. This is not some moment for a Dr. Seuss "What it means is up to me. What you do is up to you". This is a theological thing that is from the beginning of Scripture to the end to show you what to do in a losing season. Back to Genesis 50. After Joseph has lost a lot... First, he had to lose his coat, and it was Gucci. That coat was so colorful. Listen to me when I say the coat was the least thing he lost. He lost his sense of connection. We've talked about context, but now let's talk about connection. What it means is up to me.

Now Joseph is going through this series of... I won't even call it unfortunate events, like the book called it. I'm going to say this series of events, from Joseph's standpoint, were disconnected. How could the Bible say in Genesis 37-50 that God was with Joseph when he went through so much? For most of us, to say that we have God's presence means we are in situations that confirm his favor. Usually, what we mean when we say, "God is blessing me" is "Things are going like I wanted them to or better". This is what I was thinking about. For the Bible to say that the Lord was with Joseph doesn't necessarily mean that's how he felt while he was walking through his life. That was written after the fact. It is always a mistake to try to figure out what this season means while I'm still in it.

Paul says, "This will mean fruitful labor to me". I'm looking forward to the future with expectation, but while I'm in it, I'm having to choose to see it that way. How do you interpret the losing season of your life? We assume, "Well, this went wrong, so God must be punishing me". The thing is you know some secrets about yourself, some things you're not doing exactly right, some things that would make you not a candidate for God's mercy and grace. Because we kind of live on an ego system of achievement, to earn it, to get it in our own strength, we kind of go, "Well, God must be punishing me". But I saw something. I saw two things. One was in John and one was in Genesis, and then I'll bring it back to Philippians. I'm going to do this backward.

Go to the second verse of John 15 first, where Jesus says... I don't know if you've heard this before, but he says, "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful". Now I'm going to ask you something. Who is he? If you don't know the answer to that, you will misinterpret the pain in your life every time. Look at it again. "He prunes". Who is he? We love to give credit to the Devil. I'm really glad for the context of verse 1, because the context of verse 1 lets me know the motive of the one who is performing the task in verse 2.

If you always think it's the Devil attacking you, "Everything bad is the Devil attacking me," you will miss the opportunity to bear fruit. I love verse 1. Jesus said, "I am the true vine..." "I'm the one you have to stay connected to. I'm the one who's in control. I'm the one who gives you sap. I'm the one who gives you life. I'm the one who gives you strength. I'm the one who gives you the ability to grow". "...and my Father..." Abbey said, "What does fail mean"? She figured she needed to get that definition from her father. I hear God saying, "Ask me about your life. Ask me what it means".

Here's what I know. Even if life is cutting on me, God is holding the scissors. Even if a virus wrecked my plans, God is in charge of my life. He is kurios, Lord, in control, in charge, on the throne, my Father. You know what? I don't have a lot of answers, I don't have a lot of wisdom, I don't have a lot of knowledge, but I have a Father. Are you ready for this? If I have a Father, that means fruit. This means fruit. This means he is bringing something out of this situation that is beyond my ability to predict or perform. I don't even know who God loves so much that he wanted me to say this whole message to you.

The proof is in the pruning. "Oh, I'm hurting right now. That must mean God is not with me. Oh, my kids are acting up. That must mean I'm a bad parent". Do you see what we do? "That must mean..." "They didn't call me. They must not love me". No. Maybe they have a headache. We interpret these

things all the time. We interpret our seasons. We interpret silence. I know I've told y'all this story about our honeymoon before. Not the whole story...this one part. I took Holly on a cruise, and it was a Princess cruise. I'm not doing an endorsement here, but to me, it was about the best I could do.

When we were on the second day of the cruise and she was so quiet, I got angry. I was like, "This cruise isn't good enough for you"? She was like, "No. When I get happy and relaxed, I get quiet". I'm the exact opposite. When I get relaxed and happy, I'm jumping on the bed. When I get happy, I'm annoying. I'm obnoxious. I'm ridiculous. I drive everybody in the family to want to go camping without me in the backyard when I get relaxed.

See, how I interpret silence comes from how I understand myself. When the kids were really little, when they were quiet, let me tell you what that did not mean. That did not mean they were praying. That did not mean they were napping. I learned with little kids that quiet means chaos. I had to learn about God, that just because I don't hear him saying much doesn't mean he isn't doing much. So, how do you interpret silence? I told Holly, "Are you too stuck up for this? This cruise isn't good"? I wasn't mean like that, but that's what I was thinking.

This is the first time I've ever told her I was thinking all that, right here in this holy moment with you. Do you see this question? "What does it matter"? That's a big one. But what does it mean? You're always putting meaning on things. You don't even know you're doing it. If you're in a good state of mind, you're like, "Oh, a bird showed up on my door, and that made me think of Matthew 6: 'Consider the sparrows.'" If you're in a bad state of mind, the same bird can show up. "I heard birds mean death in some cultures". You're putting meaning on things.

I know that's kind of an extreme one or it's dumb, or whatever, but the other day when Jett and I went to eat barbecue... Jett's father LaShawn was a part of our church. April, Jett, and LaShawn moved here to be a part of the church, and we lost him last year. It has been just over a year. We were talking about some of these things. Jett is a musician, and his dad was a great songwriter and a great producer. He wrote for Brandy. When I heard them talking about "The Boy Is Mine..." That was LaShawn's song on the Billboards last night, and he did get a Grammy.

But we lost him so suddenly, and it was horrible. Jett was showing me how he's still writing songs, and I was sitting there thinking, "Oh man. That's LaShawn who's still living in Jett, and he's going to be even better than Shiz ever was". I'm thinking all this in between eating my barbecue, and I'm telling Jett, "Hey, God's hand is on you," this, that, and the other. He goes, "Pastor! Pastor"! He's very respectful, and he's interrupting me. I'm like, "This is weird. He never would do that". He goes, "Do you hear that"?

It was the song on the TV in the barbecue joint that his dad had put on his album ("I can't wait...") that he sampled... We didn't even have to say anything. We knew Shiz wanted to eat barbecue with us. I said, "Jett, do you think..."? He goes, "Yeah". That's all we had to say. When you're looking for loss, you'll find it. When you're looking for the love of God, even in the worst loss of your life... "Every branch in me... I have a Father who prunes". "What you do, Lord, is up to you. I can't control".

That's where I do believe in the sovereignty of God, and Paul did too. Philippians 3:21. Look it up. It says he's able to bring everything under his control. The phrase is in the book. But I don't think that means what we think it means. We think that means things in our lives come

with meaning. No, they don't. One time I taught a session to the campus pastors called BYOM (Bring Your Own Meaning). The thing I keep confessing over my life... Because you can really misunderstand things. I keep saying, "This means more". Even when something is going away, the proof of his love is in the pruning.

"Every branch that bears fruit..." Paul said, "If I go on living, this means more fruitful labor". Are you looking for his love or are you looking for the losses? Whichever one you look for, you'll find a meaning to back it up. In a lot of pictures, I like to do the "I love you" sign when I take the picture. Y'all should see my Instagram account, the trolls that come on there. "Why are you making Illuminati signals or Devil signals"? or something like that. It's the ESL for "I love you". That's what it means. But they said I was making Devil rock concert hands.

I guess when you don't use the thumb, or something, that's the Devil. I didn't know. I thought it meant "Rock on". I thought it meant Motley Crue, Bon Jovi, Megadeth. I didn't know that's what it meant. Isn't it crazy how I mean love, and they're on there saying, "Why are you putting the Devil on your picture"? What does it mean? Has God been trying to show you his love? Even in the things like, "Oh, well, I'm not that great at this, so I guess God..." No. Maybe that means God wants to use you a different way.

I told somebody... When Elijah turned 13, I said, "He's having some trouble," and this and that. It was a bumpy spot. I said, "That must mean I'm a bad dad. That must mean I'm doing it wrong". The person saying back to me was older. They said, "It means he's 13". Do you see what I'm saying? "You're misinterpreting the season. He's supposed to..." They said, "If he didn't start making you mad, you would never let him leave the house. He has to make you mad a little while, and then you'll love him again, and then he'll make you mad again. It means he's 13". It means you're growing.

Paul said, "It means God wanted to do something in this prison". See how we bring meaning? We bring the meaning. We make it mean what we want to make it mean. "You meant it for evil, but God..." How many believe we can spend an hour talking about "But God"? Your life is not controlled by the intention of your enemy, and your life is not limited to the scope of your circumstances. Somebody say, "I've got a Father. I've got faith". Apokaradokia. "And I eagerly expect..."

Let me tell you something. Paul had such a great faith he had to make up a word out of other Greek words to explain his expectation. Somebody say, "I can't explain it, but I've got it". Paul said, "I have peace in this prison. I know I shouldn't. I can't explain it, but I've got it". You can't make me panic. You can't make me hate. You can't make me bitter. What you do is up to you, but what it means is up to me.

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