

Now What – June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018 Part 9  
The Struggle Gap

**\*ESV unless I note otherwise\***

This morning we are going to continue this series Now What? with a story from the Old Testament that I believe will reinforce the five steps we've been talking about, but also maybe bring some new concepts that we can use in the midst of our struggles.

Will you please open your Bibles to the 1<sup>st</sup> book of the Bible, Genesis, to chapter 37.

This morning we are going to read the story of a young man who really encountered some difficult circumstances. This man's name was Joseph. But before we get to his story I want to share an encounter Joseph's great great grandfather had with God in Genesis chapter 15.

Joseph's great great grandfather was Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel. and in Genesis chapter fifteen God gives Abraham an incredible promise. God took Abraham out under the night sky and told him look up at the stars. God then told him that just as it is impossible to count all of the stars, so it would be impossible to count the future generations of your family. God promised Abraham that he would bless him for generations to come, and that through his family the rest of the world would also be blessed.

Joseph, the man we'll be reading about this morning is an extension of that blessing and promise.

Let's begin reading in Genesis chapter 37, verse 2.

**Genesis 37:2-4**

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's

wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. <sup>3</sup> Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>4</sup> But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

So, in a nut shell we have a teenaged spoiled rotten daddy's boy who is a great big tattle tale and milks it for all it's worth.

How many of you had a sibling like that?

If you aren't raising your hand it was probably you...

As you can tell, Joseph was a little young and immature in this stage of His life, but he learns and grows as we'll see.

### **Genesis 37:5-8**

<sup>5</sup> Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. <sup>6</sup> He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: <sup>7</sup> Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." <sup>8</sup> His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Let me ask you this church, Have you ever had a dream? now not just some crazy dream while sleeping, but a dream to do something great with your life? to experience something incredible?

How many of you remember being a kids and having a dream to be or do something great? (Firefighter, Astronaut, Teacher, Mom)

Maybe it was when you were in college and you got that degree that you knew would help equip you to change the world.

How about your passions? What are some of your passions? What do you love to do?

What about some dreams and desires that you have today  
(Getting out of debt, Having a healthy diet and lifestyle, Start a business, Raising God-fearing children)

These are hopefully promises that have been given to you by God and His Word.

Joseph's promise, passion, and dream from God was that one day he would become a great ruler, so great that even his family would one day bow before him. What a dream right?

You know what the problem is with big dreams and God-sized desires? There are some people in this world will ridicule you, doubt you, and become jealous of your Godly convictions. Our God-sized passions can sometimes remind others of how small and insignificant they've made God to be in their own life, and so they speak death and doubt over us out of insecurity.

Have you ever experienced that? Have you ever expressed some great passion, desire, or promise that you believed God had given you to a friend or family member only to be told how silly, impossible, or even foolish your desire was? This was exactly how Joseph's brother's responded. Let's not be that kind of person. Let's encourage one another to pursue the God-given passions given to each of us.

Let's read on

### **Gen. 37:12-14**

<sup>12</sup> Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. <sup>13</sup> And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am." <sup>14</sup> So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well

with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word.” So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.

Skip to verse 18

**Gen. 37:18-20,23-24**

18 They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. 19 They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. [b] Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.”

23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. 24 And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

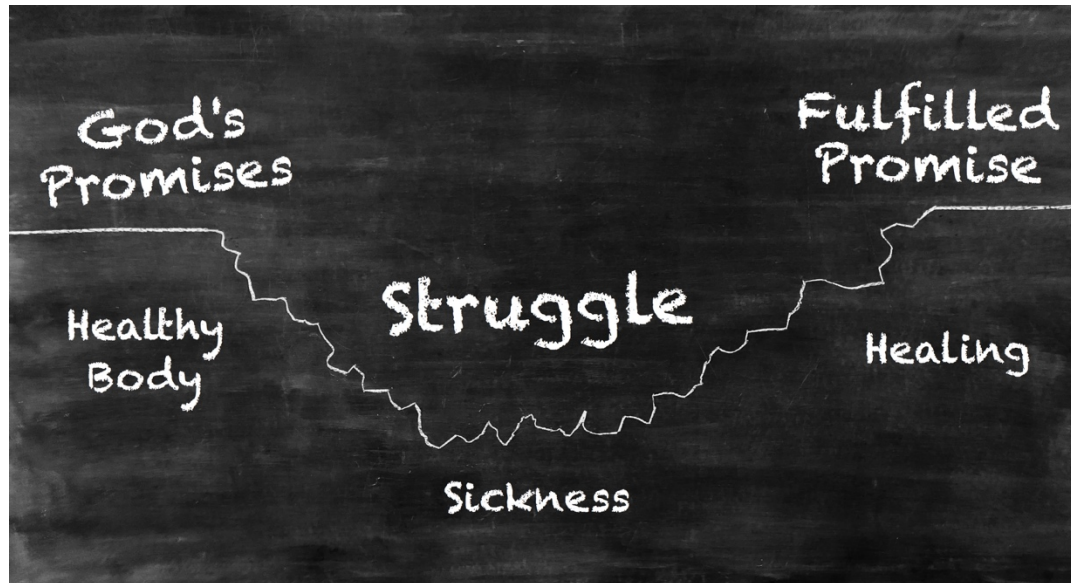
This morning I want to talk about “The Struggle Gap”

What’s the struggle gap?

I believe that our struggles, here on this earth, take place in the gap between the promises that God has given us through His Word and Holy Spirit, and the complete physical manifestation and fulfillment of those promises in our life here on earth.

Let me say it another way. Heartache, loss, and hopelessness can come when our current life circumstances don’t appear to line up with the promises found in God’s Word.

illustration:



### God's Promise

Psalms 119:93 (NLT) says "I will never forget your commandments, for you have used them to restore my joy and health"

Proverbs 14:30 (NLT) "A peaceful heart leads to a healthy body" (NLT)

3 John 2 (NLG) <sup>2</sup> Dear friend, I hope all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit.

The Struggle happens when we experience sickness.

But God is faithful to heal.

We've already established that this is an expected truth and reality as we live on this earth.

Jesus himself said, and it's been one of our key verses found in **John chapter 16:33 (NLT)**. Jesus said, "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." (NLT)

This morning I want to talk about five truths to remember and remind ourselves when going through the Struggle gap, and I want to use the life of Joseph as an example of how to do so.

Here is truth number one, and we pull this from verse 5 when we read that “Joseph had a dream”

Truth number one to remember when going through the struggle gap is, ***1. God has given me purpose and significance***

**Ephesians 2:10** says, 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

This truth supports step numbers two and three that Pastor Frank has been teaching us. Know your identity and get a vision.

One thing that I want to add to these steps is the importance of having your vision and knowing your identity before the descent into the struggle gap.

For most people it is extremely difficult to form a healthy vision or healthy identity in the midst of our struggles. Our struggles have a tendency to distract us and consume us from the greater plan God has for us. it’s dark in the struggle gap and hard to see. So, when we can help it, we need to confirm and know our purpose and significance before challenges come, so that we can readily remind ourselves of our purpose.

Joseph was given his dream and purpose before he was forced into his struggle gap. I believe it was because of His early recognition of God’s plan that helped him through his challenges as we’ll see as we continue reading his story.

Truth number two to remind ourselves when we are in the struggle gap is:

***2. There is more to my struggle than what meets the eye.***

What do I mean by that? I mean that when we are going through the struggle gap, we must remember that what we see is not the problem. The problem is not sickness, the problem is not your rebellious children, the problem is not your spouse, the problem is not your boss. Sometimes the problem is not even you... although sometimes it is let's just be real.

Look at Joseph's story again. **Genesis 37:18-20**

“18 They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. 19 They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits.[b] Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.”

See, most of us would look at this story and think, “Joseph's brothers are the problem.” Joseph's brothers are just pawns in this story.

But there is more than what meets the eyes, we must set our focus on what's eternal

So what's the problem? The problem is found in John chapter 10 when Jesus says in verse 10, “The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy”

and when Paul wrote in **Ephesians chapter 6 verse 12,**

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

When we go through the struggle gap, we have to remind ourselves that we live in a fallen, broken, sinful world that is heavily influenced by the

deceiver, the liar, Satan, who wants nothing more than to see you fail, give up, and waste your life in the bottom of your struggle gap. Satan doesn't want to see your God-given dreams and passions realized!

Supernatural problems, require supernatural solutions.

### **Colossians 3:1-4 (NLT)**

1 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand.<sup>2</sup> Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. <sup>3</sup> For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> And when Christ, who is your<sup>[a]</sup> life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

When we have this perspective, we can stop fighting against people, and begin fighting side by side people; against the real enemy whom we have complete victory and authority over through Christ who has empowered us with His Holy Spirit. Instead of fighting against your spouse, you can fight with your spouse. Instead of fighting against your kids, you can fight with your kids on the same side against the real enemy.

When you let struggle keep you from accomplishing what God has called you to do, the enemy wins.

So Joseph get's thrown into a pit by his brothers, and instead of leaving him there to die like they originally intended, His brothers decided to sell him to some Ishmaelite traders who then took Joseph to Egypt and sold him to a man named Potiphar.

Look at verse one of chapter 39



### **Gen. 39:1-2**

“Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. <sup>2</sup> The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

Truth number three to remember when going through the struggle gap is:  
**3. *God is still with me!***

Many people have the temptation to ask the questions, “Why did God do this to me?” “Does God even care about about me?” “Why has God abandoned me” in the midst of their struggles. These are the wrong questions church, because as we read above, it’s the thief that comes to steal, kill and destroy, Jesus said that I have come to give life!

When Joseph was abandoned by his family, taken from his home, and sold into slavery we read, “THE LORD WAS WITH JOSEPH”

and He is with you too!

**Romans 8:37-39** says,

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

and in **1 Peter chapter 5 verses 6 and 7**

“<sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, <sup>7</sup> casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”

God cares for you, Nothing can separate you from His love, not trials, not sorrows, not cancer, not poverty, not failure, not addiction, not unemployment, not abuse, not failure, not anger, not demons, not debt, not your past, nothing in all of creation can separate you from the love of God! NOTHING!!!!

Cast your cares on Him, He cares for you  
God Is with you!

### **Genesis 39:6-12**

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. <sup>7</sup> And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." <sup>8</sup> But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge.<sup>9</sup> He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" <sup>10</sup> And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

<sup>11</sup> But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, <sup>12</sup> she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house.

Truth number four to remember when going through the struggle gap:  
***4. God gives me strength to overcome temptation***

Have you ever realized that trouble comes when you are having trouble?

We must be on guard when we are dealing with heartache, loss, and conflict so that we don't allow our struggles to lead to sin.

Let's go back to **1 Peter and read verse 8 and 9**

“Be sober-minded (Be on guard, be alert), be watchful, Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith...”

When a lion is hunting a herd of zebra or wildebeest, do you know what they are looking for as they scout the herd?

The weak, the tired, the injured, the sick

They are easy, targets, easy prey, easy to catch,  
How many stories have you heard where someone turns or falls into sin in the midst of their struggle.

Those who turn to substance abuse when they are having stress at work.

Men and Women who commit adultery in the midst of marriage tension

Children who show dishonor towards their parents in the midst of a stressful and heavy work load at school.

When struggling in our health we lash out in anger towards your children or spouse.

I believe that identity and our ability to run to the Word is so important here. How easy would it have been for Joseph, a man who was abandoned by his brothers, unwanted, alone, to give into his flesh with this woman that was pursuing him, infatuated with him, desiring him? What this tells me is that Joseph knew that his identity was in what God thought about him, rather than what this woman thought about him, His convictions were strong and they were founded on the Word of God. and he chose to flee from sin and preserve his honor and character before God.

We must remain strong in times of struggle by immersing ourselves in the Word of God, praying regularly in the Holy Spirit. Putting on the Joy of the Lord for it is our strength. Reminding ourselves that we were put on this earth to please and glorify God with our lives.

**1 Corinthians 10:13** encourages us that

“<sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

He gives us the strength to endure; and thank God for His grace that even when we do fail in our moments of weakness He has provided restoration through His son Jesus when we humble ourselves before Him and ask for forgiveness.

Unfortunately, Joseph was not immediately rewarded for his strong character. He was falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife, and Joseph was sent to prison.

Let’s continue reading in verse 20 of chapter 39.

**Genesis 39:20-23**

“<sup>20</sup> And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. <sup>21</sup> But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. <sup>22</sup> And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. <sup>23</sup> The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.”

The story continues that one day in the prison two prisoners, previous servants of Pharaoh, were discussing the dreams they had the night before. Joseph came along and told them what their dreams meant, and his interpretations came true. One of those servants was reinstated to serve in Pharaoh's court. Sometime later, Pharaoh had a dream that required an interpretation but none of his magicians or wise men could give him the meaning of the dream. The servant that had been in prison with Joseph was reminded of Joseph and informed Pharaoh that Joseph had interpreted his dream, and could do the same for him.

Now look at verse **14 of chapter 41**

“Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit!!”

Isn't that so good? Joseph's struggle began when his brothers, in their wickedness and jealousy, threw him into a pit. But because Joseph was persistent in his endurance, because He knew his purpose and significance, because he preserved his character, because He worked hard unto God and not unto man, God led him to an opportunity where he was brought out of the pit!

Truth number five to remember when going through the struggle pit:

***5. When I glorify God, He will glorify me***

When we honor God with our character and with our tenacity to keep fighting and keep moving forward, He can elevate and promote us to levels of greater influence.

We can't control our circumstances, but we can control our outlook, our attitude, and our faith and dependence on God during difficulty.

## **Romans 8:27-30**

<sup>27</sup> And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because<sup>[a]</sup> the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. <sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,<sup>[b]</sup> for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Joseph's story doesn't end here. Joseph succeeds in interpreting Pharaoh's dream and tells him that 7 years of famine will follow 7 years of really good harvest. Joseph gives Pharaoh a plan to store up as much food as they can in the seven years of plenty so that there is enough food during the famine. Pharaoh thinks this is a great idea and promotes him to 2<sup>nd</sup> in command of all of Egypt.

You see, God can use your struggle gap to position you for His help and blessing!

But this is where the story gets really good. after the seven years of good crop. Joseph's father, brothers, and their families begin to suffer, begin to get a little hungry because of the famine in the land. Joseph's family hears that Egypt has grain for sale, and so Joseph's brothers travel to Egypt. to buy some food. When they arrive to Egypt, who do you guess they meet? Joseph immediately recognizes his brother, but his brothers don't recognize him. Joseph eventually reveals himself to His brothers...after a little bit of brotherly pay back. and gives them grain and invites the entire family to join him in Egypt.

Remember the text we read at the beginning? When God told Abraham that he would bless and make His family into a great nation so that He could bless the World through them?

What could have happened to Joseph's family if Joseph wouldn't have been sold into slavery, falsely accused and thrown into prison, What would have happened if Joseph wouldn't have interpreted Pharaoh's dream that famine was coming, and then promoted to his place of power in Egypt?? Joseph saw the significance of this when he told his brothers in Genesis chapter 50 verse 15

### **Genesis 50:18-21**

<sup>18</sup> His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." <sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?<sup>20</sup> As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people<sup>[b]</sup> should be kept alive, as they are today. <sup>21</sup> So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

You see the greatest blessing that came out of Joseph's ability to stay faithful wasn't just that his father, brothers, and many other people's lives were saved from possible starvation, but through the preservation of Joseph's family, this family would eventually become the great nation of Israel from whom the promised king, Son of God, Messiah, and Savior of the World would come into the World, Jesus Christ, who died on a cross, was raised back to life and restored all of humanity into right relationship with God.

Church, God's plans, His ways, His purposes are so much greater and bigger than we can even begin to comprehend. and although God's will and plan is for us to have abundant life, we live in World that is plagued with sin, death, and struggle. But that doesn't concern God, because he can take what was intended for evil and make it turn out for His good. We can experience hope, peace, joy, love, and abundant life now, because He has overcome the World, and the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead lives in us!

This is why we can agree in faith with

## **Romans 5:2-5**

<sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith<sup>[b]</sup> into this grace in which we stand, and we<sup>[c]</sup> rejoice<sup>[d]</sup> in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

We will experience struggle gaps, but how we go through them can mean the difference between life and death, success and failure.

So we must remind ourselves that when we go through struggle

1. I have purpose and significance
2. There is more to my struggle than what meets the eye
3. God is with me
4. God gives me the strength to overcome temptation
5. If I glorify God, He will glorify me