

NBC Devotional
January 24, 2024
“The Lord Is With You”

I love new beginnings. I love weddings. I love newborn babies. I love the first page of a new journal and the first chapter of a new book. I love making new friends, meeting new neighbors, watching a new movie, and welcoming a new employee to the team.

But I especially love a new year. Scott and I rarely stay up until midnight on New Year’s Eve because we are passionate about making the most of New Year’s Day. It’s one of my favorite holidays. I spend time asking God for direction and writing out my goals for the coming year. I make goals for spiritual growth, physical health, professional development, and interpersonal relationships.

The origin of my love for a fresh new start comes from my desire to be aligned with the heart of God, and a new beginning allows me to align myself with what God desires to produce through my life. That alignment happens on January 1st every year, but it also happens on the first day of every month, every Monday morning, and every day.

My heart has heard you say, “Come and talk with me.” And my heart responds, “Lord, I am coming.” – Psalm 27:8

This is one of my favorite verses in Psalms because it accurately describes the cry of my heart. To spend time in God’s presence, to receive a word from the Lord, to soak in His unfailing love and the reality of His grace — these are precious gifts from the Lord.

The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. – Lamentations 3:22-23

Aren’t you thankful for the truth found in these verses? Aren’t we blessed to serve a God who desires to spend time with us as much as we desire to spend time with Him? His mercies begin afresh each morning. Great is His faithfulness!

I was reminded of this blessing while reading through the story of Joseph this week. Since I was a teenager, I have made it a goal to read through the Bible every year. But a few years ago, I switched to a two-year plan for reading through the scriptures to dig deeper into certain passages without feeling rushed to keep progressing towards Revelation. 2024 is an Old Testament year for me, so I have been studying Genesis for the last three weeks.

I love Genesis! I mean, of course, I do, it starts with the words — In the beginning. I just told you how much I love new beginnings, so naturally, I am drawn to the moment when I open up my bible and turn to the first verse of the first chapter of my favorite book.

While reading through Genesis, I have seen a theme of God’s faithful presence. I went back through Genesis this week and listed some of the moments that give us evidence of the active presence of God.

Genesis 3:8 tells us that the Lord God was walking about in the garden.

Genesis 5:23 states that Enoch walked in close fellowship with God.

The same thing was said of Noah in Genesis 6:9.

In chapter 12, the Lord told Abraham to leave his home and his family to go to the country “I will show you”.

In chapter 15, the Lord said, “Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you...”

When Hagar ran away, she learned from her encounter with the angel that the Lord sees and the Lord hears (Genesis 16:11-13). Her problems did not go away, but she knew with confidence that the Lord God was paying attention. She was not alone.

When Sarah laughed silently to herself at the thought of having a baby at her age, the Lord heard her (Genesis 18:12-13).

When Abraham asked for protection over Lot and his family, God listened (Genesis 19:29).

When Abraham prayed for the women in Abimelech’s household, the Lord healed them of their infertility (Genesis 20:17-18).

When Hagar once again found herself grieving in the desert, the Lord heard the cries of her little boy. Genesis 21:20 says, “And God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness.” Notice he was still in the wilderness, God did not rescue Ishmael FROM the wilderness, but God was with him IN the wilderness.

God asked Abraham to sacrifice the son through whom God had promised to fulfill His covenant with Abraham, and He showed Abraham which mountain to climb (Genesis 22:2). And on that mountain, God provided the sacrifice so that Isaac might live (Genesis 22:8,13). God was present.

While Abraham’s servant was praying for an obvious sign of which young woman he was supposed to bring back to be Isaac’s wife, God answered his prayer before he was even finished with his prayer (Genesis 24:15).

In Genesis 26, we hear the Lord say for the first time, “Do not be afraid, for I am with you and will bless you.” He spoke these words to Isaac after he had experienced hostility towards his family in the Gerar Valley.

A few verses later, King Abimelech said, “We can plainly see that the Lord is with you...” (Genesis 26:28).

When Jacob saw the angels going up and down the stairway to heaven, he heard the Lord say from the top of the stairway that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him and his descendants. Then the Lord said, “What’s more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you.” (Genesis 28:13-15)

In Genesis 29:31, scripture says that God saw that Leah was unloved and enabled her to have children. Despite the bickering and competing against each other, God remembered Rachel as well and answered her prayers by giving her a son (Genesis 30:22-23).

When it was time for Jacob to return to his father, the Lord said, “I will be with you” (Genesis 31:3).

When his uncle went out in pursuit of Jacob, the Lord warned Laban to leave Jacob alone (Genesis 31:24).

The night before Jacob was to be reconciled with his brother, Esau, the Lord appeared to him in the form of a man and allowed Jacob to wrestle with him (Genesis 32:24).

In Genesis 35, God told Jacob to go back to Bethel, back to the place where the Lord had appeared to him while he was in distress. Jacob obeyed and God appeared to him again. He gave Jacob the new name of Israel and then introduced himself by the new name of El-Shaddai, God Almighty.

We see evidence of the presence of God generation after generation. Through all of these examples, we see that the Lord was with His people, both in good times and in difficult circumstances. God’s promise was never that hard times would not come, but that the Lord would be with them through unfamiliar territory and difficult circumstances. This is evidenced beautifully in the story of Joseph.

We all know Joseph as the favorite child — the Dreamer who lorded his dreams of leadership over his brothers and his father. His brothers did not just hate Joseph’s dreams, they hated Joseph because of his dreams. They sinned against him by ripping off the beautiful coat his father had given him, throwing him into a cistern and then selling him to a group of Ishmaelites (Genesis 37:23-28). These Midianite traders took Joseph to Egypt, selling him to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials.

But take note of these five words in Genesis 39:1 —The Lord was with Joseph...

JOSEPH WAS A SLAVE IN POTIPHAR’S HOUSE, AND THE LORD WAS WITH HIM.

Joseph was far from his home and the only life he had ever known. He was only seventeen years old (37:2) and had lost his family, his home, and his freedom. But the Lord gave him success in everything he did, and his master noticed. He quickly found favor with Potiphar, and everything the Egyptian official owned was placed in Joseph’s care.

Now Joseph was strong and handsome, which Potiphar’s wife quickly noticed. Every day she demanded that Joseph join her in her bed, but he refused out of loyalty to his earthly master. He also did not want to sin against God, who was so faithfully providing for him amid these difficult circumstances. Insulted by his rejection, Potiphar’s wife lied about Joseph, and he was thrown into prison — the same confinement where the king cast his prisoners. Let’s look at Genesis 39, starting in verse 20.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. – Genesis 39:20b-23

JOSEPH WAS IN PRISON, AND THE LORD WAS WITH HIM.

One morning while in prison, Joseph noticed that both the king's cupbearer and the king's baker were upset. When he found out they were both struggling to understand their dreams from the night before, he offered to listen.

There was something about TODAY that was different, and Joseph was quick to notice it. And because he took the next step to ask his friends if anything was wrong, he was able to help them by interpreting their dreams. The interpretation of one of those dreams is what led to the opportunity to interpret Pharaoh's dream, which in turn led to Joseph's freedom. It also positioned Joseph to allow God to use him to save his family and the whole nation of Israel.

Because Joseph paid attention that day, because he cared enough to ask a question and listen to the emotional struggle of another person, Joseph was postured to be used by God in both big and small ways — in ways that had a long-term impact. Because he was willing to BE THERE for someone, just as the Lord had BEEN THERE for him, Joseph was able to make a difference in the lives of millions of people.

Joseph interpreted both of their dreams, asking the chief cupbearer to show him kindness by mentioning him to Pharaoh when he was restored to his position in three days. The man forgot about Joseph, but the Lord did not. He continued to faithfully provide for Joseph during difficult circumstances.

Two years later, Pharaoh had a dream that troubled him. He sent for all the magicians and wise men throughout Egypt, but no one could interpret his dream. Then the chief cupbearer remembered the young Hebrew man who had accurately interpreted his dream. He told the king about Joseph, and the king sent for him.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

"I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." – Genesis 41:15-16

JOSEPH STOOD BEFORE PHARAOH, AND THE LORD WAS WITH HIM.

With the Lord's help, Joseph interpreted both of Pharaoh's dreams — the dream of seven skinny cows eating seven fat cows and the dream of seven thin heads of grain swallowing up seven good heads of grain. He told the king of Egypt that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Joseph went on to give Pharaoh instructions from God on how to store up a fifth of the harvest during the years of plenty to be prepared for the years of

famine. Pharaoh recognized that Joseph had the Spirit of God in him, and he appointed him to be second-in-command over all of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.” – Genesis 41:39-40

JOSEPH WAS PLACED IN LEADERSHIP, AND THE LORD WAS WITH HIM.

Pharaoh placed a ring on Joseph’s finger, dressed him in robes of fine linen, and placed a gold chain around his neck (41:42). He gave Joseph a wife, and he gave him the authority to carry out this new assignment. Joseph was now 30 years old, which meant he had spent 13 years as a slave and prisoner. He trusted in God and God faithfully provided for him, yet he did not experience earthly freedom for 13 long years.

Some of you have been waiting for God to answer your prayers for what seems like a lifetime. My prayer for you this morning is that you can recognize God’s presence in your life, even through season after season of what seems like unanswered prayer. I want to encourage you this morning to overcome the human expectation that God’s presence is always evidenced by earthly blessings and physical healings — by answers to questions and solutions to problems. Just like Joseph, at times God’s provision comes during difficult circumstances.

The Lord was with Joseph through betrayal, slavery, imprisonment, and through a season of great responsibility.

The Lord was with Jacob through very necessary moments of relational restoration.

The Lord was with Leah when her husband didn’t love her.

The Lord was with Rachel when she was unable to have children.

The Lord was with Isaac during a season of hostility towards him and his family.

The Lord was with Lot when his family was captured during a battle and then again when sexual harassment landed at his front door.

The Lord was with Abraham when he was asked to make a sacrifice that humanly made no sense.

The Lord was with Sarah while she waited for the promise of a son.

The Lord was with Hagar when she was abused by her mistress and then later sent away to the desert — a place where she struggled to provide for her son.

THE LORD’S PRESENCE IS EVIDENT EVEN ON OUR DARKEST DAYS.

If you remember one thing from this morning’s devotional, remember this — The Lord is with you.

Joseph's wife gave birth to a son, and Joseph named him Manasseh because God had made him forget all about his troubles and about how he had been sinned against by his brothers. His second son was named Ephraim, because God had made him fruitful in the land of his suffering (41:50-52). Joseph had experienced troubles, been sinned against, and was forced to live in a land that represented his suffering, yet the Lord was with him.

Praise the Lord! For he has heard my cry for mercy. The Lord is my strength and shield. I trust him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy. I burst out in songs of thanksgiving. – Psalm 28:6-7

May God make His presence known to you today, even amid difficult circumstances. And may He give us ears to hear and a heart to listen to what those around us are going through. May the impact of our empathy and understanding make a difference in the lives of each person we come in contact with today. Let it be so, Heavenly Father, let it be so.

Mrs. Sherry Sherwood