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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

MARCH 5, 2006

PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: I called my son up on Monday and
2 he lives in Seattle and he's our technological expert.

3 I said, "Adrian, I have a problem, and if I don't
4 have this problem solved it may cost your mom's and my
5 marriage."

6 I said, "When I get up in the morning and I'm doing
7 my quiet time, my up time, I'm really wanting to use some
8 music and if I'm turn music on I wake my wife up and she
9 will kill me."

10 (Laughter)

11 So I said, "I see everybody with these little
12 electronic deals, these little iPod things. What do you
13 recommend? You know how horrible I am. I want the simplest
14 one to run."

15 He said, "You need one of those iPod nanos."

16 So I went to Best Buy and got one. It is the
17 coolest thing.

18 It isn't any bigger than a credit card and Laura
19 has helped me to load some music on to it.

20 I have 160 songs on it, and I'm not done yet, but
21 now when I get up in the morning I can put my music on and I
22 can just get into that and the next thing you know it's like
23 twenty minutes goes by and it's awesome.

24 I'm not a big technological guy, but you might want
25 to go spend \$149 at Best Buy.

1 That's horrible, isn't it, when we are going to
2 talk about stewardship.

3 Somebody in the congregation just said don't give
4 it to the church; give it to Best Buy.

5 (Laughter)

6 That would be okay if it's for your up time. Let's
7 be real.

8 (Laughter)

9 So that is where we are going. It's more than
10 math. In fact, my subtitle is stewardship is not the pits.

11 It's about reconciliation and our launching pad for
12 that is a couple of verses, one in the middle, one at the
13 end, one at the beginning.

14 This one is at the end. This is Jesus talking,
15 Matthew 6, we don't need to read the whole thing again,
16 "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

17 Notice that, it's very important, because he
18 doesn't say it the other way around.

19 He doesn't say where your heart is, there your
20 treasure will be.

21 A lot of people think, well, if I'm get my heart
22 right, then I will give in response.

23 Where we are putting stuff, it will draw us there,
24 so that is Jesus. That's the way he teaches.

25 The next verse is in the middle of the Bible, Psalm

1 86:11, "Teach me your way, O Lord," your way, not my way,
2 "that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart
3 to revere your name."

4 And then my teacher today is from the Old
5 Testament, the Book of Genesis, Joseph.

6 And so join me in Genesis. It's not really fair to
7 jump in where we did, but where we jumped in was the story
8 of Joseph being promoted, and he's really promoted.

9 We don't spend a lot of time with that, but Pharaoh
10 was the most powerful man in Egypt; in really the whole
11 organized world at that period in history, and Joseph is
12 promoted to be second in charge.

13 So he's come a long way, he has come a long way,
14 but we need to see where he has come from in order to get
15 the full significance of what he's doing.

16 And so we are going to look at that a little bit
17 more closely this morning.

18 Because, you see, his story begins in the 37th
19 Chapter of Genesis, and what we see from Genesis 37 all the
20 way to Genesis 50 is a fourteen chapter family fight.

21 It's a story of sibling rivalry, which is nothing
22 new to the Bible.

23 Here are some other examples of biblical sibling
24 rivalry. Right away from the get-go, we have Cain and Abel.

25 And we've Jacob and Esau. We've got Isaac and

1 Ishmael, and true to form, in the family, there is no fight
2 like a family fight, and you know that.

3 That's why we have so many denominations in the
4 Christian family. They are over family fight issues.

5 So somebody over a period of time has gotten upset
6 and they go in a different direction. It's nothing new. It
7 has been going on.

8 The story of Joseph is a great story. It's not a
9 story of Joseph overcoming his poor childhood and his family
10 background and rising to a high level of success.

11 I've heard it preached that way. He used to be
12 just in the pits and he's the Pharaoh's second in charge, so
13 your dreams can come true, too.

14 That may be true, but that's not the end of the
15 story.

16 The story is a story about forgiveness and
17 reconciliation for the whole human family, because if we
18 fast-forward to the end of the story in Genesis 50, here is
19 the verse, but the verse is that leads right up to it is
20 equally astonishing.

21 And see what happens in Verse 18. "Then his
22 brothers also wept, they fell down before him, and they
23 said," these are his eleven brothers who had mistreated
24 Joseph horribly, and they come before Joseph and they say,
25 "We are here as your slaves. But Joseph said to them,

1 "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? Even though
2 you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good in
3 order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today."

4 The context of that is, for fourteen chapters they
5 have been at odds and distance from one another.

6 Because the eleven ganged up on the one, and they
7 beat the tar out of him, and they sold him into slavery.

8 And at the end of the story, the natural human
9 response would be for Joseph, now that he's in this position
10 of leadership, to put all of them in prison, or to punch
11 their lights out, or to kick them in the shins, or tell them
12 go fish, just get out of here, I've knocked the dust off you
13 knuckleheads, you guys did this stuff to me, so get out of
14 here.

15 What he says is, "Even though you intended to do
16 harm to me, God intended it for good."

17 It's an amazing response, and so that is what the
18 story is about. It's about sibling rivalry.

19 It's a matter of the heart, because there, if you
20 look literally, as he is doing today, the family dynamic is
21 still operative.

22 It's not just three thousand years ago when the
23 story was written, as he is doing today, the rivalry is
24 fourteen chapters along. It continues to play itself out to
25 this very day.

1 The story is filled with twists and turns. It's
2 essentially the same story as the story of God and God's
3 people, because there is no fight like a family fight.

4 And there is no place in the world where you want
5 revenge more than when a Christian brother or sister has
6 slapped your face, or kicked you in the shins, or lied about
7 you, or put you in the pits.

8 What we want to do is we want to come back with
9 resentment, revenge, and retribution.

10 What Joseph teaches, he resists the chance to get
11 even and, see, that's the parable, is it's just like Jesus,
12 because who had him killed?

13 The church. He's the brother that they made go
14 through hell, and he comes back, and instead of punching
15 their lights out, putting them in prison, telling them to
16 go, he says I forgive you. I love you. What you meant for
17 bad, God meant for good.

18 Same as that story, different consequences, so we
19 are going to look at it a little bit today, and what I want
20 you to notice is the two primary issues in the Joseph story.

21 It begins in the 37th Chapter. That's where we are
22 going to launch into, but here is what I want you to see.

23 I want you to see the two primary issues in the
24 story of being pride and envy.

25 That's another family dynamic, you see, pride and

1 envy.

2 I did a little bit of internet search this week.
3 I've always heard people talk about the seven deadly sins
4 and here they are for you, for your little lunch quiz, when
5 you go out to lunch you can quiz people, can you name the
6 seven deadly sins? Here they are, in order.

7 Pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed, and
8 sloth. Do you know where they come from? About the 6th
9 Century. They aren't scriptural.

10 There is a part of Matthew's Gospel where Jesus
11 talks about that which goes into a person doesn't defile
12 him; it's that which comes out.

13 These are somewhat on that list, anger, all these
14 things that come out of a person, but the seven deadly sins
15 have been around for about 1400 years, and there has been
16 all kinds of movies made about them.

17 I guess that's one of the most horrific movies
18 ever, "Seven", and I don't like scary movies so I won't be
19 watching it, but a person dies by each of these methods in
20 that movie, and the point being these are deadly, and they
21 indeed are.

22 Here is my definition for pride. Pride is the
23 excessive belief in one's own ability that interferes with
24 the individual's recognition of the grace of God.

25 Pride is to say I don't need a God because I am

1 God. I can do it myself. That's pride.

2 We are all supposed to be proud of our kids, of our
3 character, and stuff like that.

4 But if we start thinking we do it, it's all about
5 us, it will kill us and those around us, to not need a God
6 because we are God. It's First Commandment stuff.

7 Envy is the desire for other people's traits,
8 status, abilities or situation, and that is equally as
9 fatal.

10 That's seeing something else and wanting it so
11 badly that we just can't let go of that lust for that, that
12 envy for that.

13 Man, if I had one of them nanos. If I had a car
14 like that guy.

15 If I had a spouse like that person. If I only had
16 kids like theirs.

17 If I only had a house like that. If I only had a
18 title like that. If I only had wealth like that .

19 If I only had as much power as that person. If I
20 only won the lottery.

21 We were in California and we were filling out a
22 deal to get our bags and stuff and they go, "Where are you
23 from?"

24 "Nebraska."

25 "Oh, you're the people that won that lottery."

1 "No, we're not, we don't even know them."

2 But that's a national thing. Now we are the people
3 that got the 364 million dollars dropped on us.

4 It will be interesting to see if that comes out
5 good. Usually that wrecks people's lives.

6 But, see, it takes that I'm so great, I don't need
7 God, and I desire these things so much that I'm willing to
8 just do anything to get them.

9 And in Joseph's case we see it right away in
10 Genesis 37. Take a look.

11 It starts out in Verse 2. "This is the story of
12 family of Jacob."

13 That's Joseph's dad, and his name is also Israel,
14 and maybe you've seen "Joseph's Amazing Technicolor Dream
15 Coat".

16 That was put on at Mt. Michael a few years ago, it
17 was a fabulous production, and people are always doing it.

18 I have the tape of it. It has Donny Osmond in the
19 role of Joseph, and it's really pretty good.

20 Joan Collins plays Potiphar's wife, and I would not
21 dare show that, it's kind of an R rated thing, but it's a
22 very good portrayal of the story of Joseph and his sibling
23 rivalry.

24 We are introduced to it right away. He's 17 years
25 old it says.

1 "Joseph, being 17 years old, was shepherding the
2 flock with his brothers. He was a helper to the sons of
3 Bilhah and Zilpah."

4 Those are the other wives of his dad. His father's
5 wives.

6 "And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their
7 father."

8 I want you to really see that verse, because a lot
9 of people think that Joseph didn't ever do anything wrong.

10 There is only one sinless person, and that was
11 Jesus, and some people think that poor old Joseph, but when
12 it says he brought a bad report back, he was a tattletale.

13 And so he comes back to the old man, and I don't
14 know what he said, he must have said like I'm out there
15 taking care of these sheep and those no good brothers you
16 gave me, they aren't doing their share.

17 Or, dad, you should hear the way they talk about
18 you.

19 Or, dad, you know, I'm only the one playing any
20 defense out here.

21 But, you see, Joseph had it coming. Don't think
22 that it's just the brothers. Everybody in the family has
23 the issues.

24 But his is going to play out in a fascinating way,
25 because we look at him and right away we are introduced then

1 to the dynamics.

2 Verse 3, "Now Israel loved Joseph more than any
3 other of his children," and he had twelve of them, twelve
4 tribes of Israel, twelve sons, he's daddy's boy.

5 "Because he was the son of his old age and he had
6 made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers
7 saw that their father loved him more than all of his
8 brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to
9 him."

10 They hated Joseph so much. How much? They wanted
11 to kill him, and we will see this, and we will also see
12 another reason for it.

13 "Once Joseph had a dream," Verse 5, "and he told it
14 to his brothers and they hated him even more."

15 They just can't stand him. They are jealous of
16 him, they are envious of him, because he's a good looking
17 kid, the dad likes him the best, he's got this really cool
18 coat, and they just absolutely hate him.

19 And in Verse 8 it says, "So they hated him even
20 more, because of his dreams and his words."

21 He's a brown-noser, he's an apple-polisher, he's a
22 goody two shoes, he's a pretty boy.

23 Who does he think he is, dreaming. I mean, come
24 on, there's no scientific background behind dreams.

25 They hate him. They hate him so much that they are

1 going to have him killed, and we see that right across the
2 column then in Genesis 37, beginning at Verse 18.

3 "They saw him from a distance and before he came
4 near to them they conspired to kill him. They said to one
5 another, "Here comes this dreamer," notice they don't even
6 call him their brother, "Come now, let's kill him and throw
7 him into one of those pits. Then we shall say that a wild
8 animal has devoured him and we'll see what becomes of his
9 dreams."

10 And they do it. They lock him up, throw him down,
11 tie him up, throw him to the bottom of this pit.

12 And then one of the brothers, Reuben, he kind of
13 comes to his senses, he says don't kill him; let's just
14 throw him in the pit.

15 They do that, Verse 24, "They took him and threw
16 him into a pit. The pit was empty. There was no water in
17 it."

18 I want to sit there for a while with you in the
19 pit, okay?

20 Joseph is not there for very long, but we are going
21 to stay there for a few moments.

22 Notice it says the pit is empty and there is no
23 water in it.

24 It is Joseph's own little wilderness experience.
25 It's not unlike the pit of Lent, forty days.

1 He's not in there for forty days. I don't mean to
2 lead you into that conclusion.

3 He is sitting in there, and again, I said Joseph is
4 not perfect, don't think he is, he had it coming.

5 He was a tattletale, his brothers hated him for his
6 giftedness, which wasn't all his fault, they were jealous,
7 they were envious.

8 But we need to look at Joseph's actions and we also
9 need to look at Joseph's reaction to being treated that way.

10 Because most of the people I know in life, when
11 they are in a pit, they come out of that pit and they are
12 just horrible.

13 They come out of that pit and they are bitter,
14 angry, resentful, revengeful, vengeful, they want to get
15 back at whoever put them in the pit, even if nobody did it,
16 it was just something that happened by the grace of God.

17 But we need to look closely at Joseph's actions and
18 his reaction, because here is my little tip.

19 I think the secret to life is found in the pit. I
20 believe that.

21 Some pits are choices; some come upon us by chance,
22 challenge, choice, or change.

23 The way we react to them, and what we find by
24 listening to God when we are in the pit, is the secret to
25 life.

1 We see it in Joseph. It has been true in my life.
2 It has been true of people who have told me, you know, those
3 were the best times of my life and yet they were the worst
4 times of my life.

5 People who can come to that conclusion somehow
6 react differently than the people who come out of those with
7 this bitterness and this hard heartedness that is so hard to
8 figure out.

9 But, see, somehow Joseph discovers grace in the
10 pit.

11 Here is a picture of the pit. I don't know if that
12 is really what it looked like.

13 But when you are in the pit you can't get yourself
14 out, Americans, this is not pull yourself up by your
15 bootstraps stuff.

16 The pit means there's no water there, you can't get
17 yourself out of this one, and how did you get there?

18 Choice; challenge; change; chance; whatever. But
19 when you are there, you better discover the grace of God, or
20 you are going to respond angrily, with malice, with hatred.

21 The pit was empty. There was no water in it. It
22 was his own personal wilderness experience.

23 What happens next in the story is he's released
24 from the pit from somebody's generosity -- isn't that
25 interesting -- sort of.

1 His brothers are going to make a profit and instead
2 of killing them they say, let's don't kill him; let's sell
3 him to the next slave traders that come around.

4 So they do. Do you know how much they got for him?
5 Twenty pieces of silver.

6 Do you know how much Judas got for Jesus? Thirty
7 pieces of silver.

8 It's interesting, isn't it, the way the Bible all
9 fits together.

10 But you see what happens, the grace of that payment
11 lets Joseph go free.

12 He doesn't pay it; somebody else does, see? He
13 can't get himself out.

14 He could have all the money in the world and he's
15 not getting out of this pit.

16 It gets him out of the pit and he goes free --
17 well, almost free, because then you see he's captive with
18 these slave traders and so he goes into Egypt into a
19 different pit.

20 And the next pit is really interesting, because
21 it's not the pits, but in some ways it's every bit as bad as
22 the first one, because now it features promotion, success,
23 and proposition.

24 I just had a friend tell me last week, he said with
25 tears in his eyes, "This new job is the worst thing

1 possible. I've really done well at it."

2 And I'm like, "Come again?"

3 "I have been promoted and now I have to fire fifty
4 people."

5 That's the pits. Sometimes when we rise to our
6 level of incompetence, as the Peter Principle says, the pits
7 are also up there when we keep getting promoted and we do
8 our work, it's no fun anywhere, that can be a pit as well.

9 It doesn't have to be when I get fired; it might be
10 to have to give somebody their pink slip; been there, done
11 that, despise that. I hate that. That's the pits, but some
12 pits are that way.

13 But Joseph keeps getting promoted and he gets
14 positioned into this wonderful position of advancement.

15 We read about it in the 39th Chapter. He's on the
16 rise.

17 39th Chapter, beginning right away there, what he's
18 doing is he's doing his homework, he's getting his job done.

19 "The Lord was with Joseph," it says in 39:2, "and
20 he became a successful man. He was in the house of his
21 Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him
22 and that the Lord caused all that he did to prosper."

23 This guy has it going on, and what happens?

24 This resentful, angry woman who had incredible
25 power comes along and she says lie with me.

1 Joseph says no way. That's not the way I roll.

2 She says again, you didn't understand, lie with me.
3 You can't say no. I'm the boss's wife.

4 He says I'm not going there.

5 So what does she do? She rips her own garment, she
6 rips a piece of his robe and stuff and cries rape.

7 Where does Joseph end up? Another pit. Prison.
8 He ends up in the pit of prison now, you see.

9 But every pit that he was in, it's a different pit,
10 Joseph, whenever he's in a pit, what does he do?

11 He dreams and he prays. He dreamed and he prayed
12 in the pit.

13 Here is my little word of advice for you. When we
14 are in the pits, we are right where God wants us to be.

15 Dreaming and praying, empty, unable to bring
16 ourselves out.

17 That's right where God wants us, because then he
18 can work with us. It's right where God wants us to be.

19 That's where Joseph is. That's where we are when
20 we are in the pits.

21 There's a quote that is popular, and I have heard
22 this preached so many times by people, they say, "God
23 doesn't need your money, but you need to give it."

24 And the insinuation of that is that God is God, he
25 can do what he wants to do with or without your money.

1 I know the sentiment of that, but I wholeheartedly
2 disagree.

3 Because what we are going to see in the Joseph
4 story is the same thing that we are now seeing in Africa
5 with Bono and Bill Gates.

6 Lives are being saved, and people are living,
7 because of people's financial gifts.

8 So don't tell me that God doesn't need your money.
9 He does need our money.

10 And if you ever hear a preacher say that to you,
11 well, this is all about how good you feel, or how rotten you
12 feel when you give, God doesn't need your money, I would
13 call that into question and say, you know, the God I believe
14 in is my best friend, and what is mine is his.

15 That's the way we roll. It's his money. It isn't
16 ours anyway.

17 But that has always been a little bit offensive to
18 me, but Joseph's story teaches us that God does need our
19 money.

20 Because, see, what happens is he tells them now for
21 seven years you are going to have it really good, but you
22 need to put some away each year because then there is going
23 to be seven lean years and you better have it in the bank or
24 you are going to die.

25 And that's exactly what happens, and you know how

1 it is, when things are going good, man, I'm going to roll
2 the credit card, I'm just going to keep buying Nasdaq.

3 Whoops. Seven good years, seven bad years, and now
4 where are we?

5 Well, some would say we're in the pit. I've heard
6 that, too, that whole deal, it's the economy.

7 The economy is not the pits; oftentimes the human
8 heart is.

9 We were in California a couple weeks ago and I was
10 glad the Winter Olympics were on, but I can't tell you how
11 thankful I am that they are over.

12 The ugly American made his presence known, didn't
13 he?

14 I am so sick of Bode Miller. I am so sick of that
15 thing between that Hedrick guy and that Davis guy.

16 I'm so sick of the state of the American platform,
17 and that's what most of the media calls it, and Sasha Cohen
18 and how she didn't go to practice, and only got a silver
19 medal, and some girl was surfing along on that board thing
20 and piddled around and got second place. I'm so glad they
21 are over.

22 I don't know how many even heard the story of Joey
23 Cheek.

24 He's the kid that won the 500 meter speed skate and
25 then he got second in one of the other ones.

1 You know what he did? He gave all of his money
2 that he won away.

3 But we hear about Shani Davis, Chad Hedrick, Sasha
4 Cohen, and Bode Miller, who was zero for five, and they
5 asked him, "Did you have a good Olympics?"

6 And do you know what his response was?

7 "I didn't even get drunk very many times."

8 What is that?

9 But this Cheek kid, you get twenty-five grand for a
10 gold, and fifteen for a silver, and he gave all of it away.

11 Here is a quote about him from the LA Times, the
12 paper I was reading last week.

13 "He has inspired an enormous wave of giving.
14 Responding to Cheek's challenge, his corporate sponsors have
15 now pledged more than \$250,000. Money from individual
16 donors has passed the grand total of three hundred thousand
17 dollars. A day after his five hundred meter victory, the
18 number of hits on his web site was ninety thousand; eighty
19 thousand more than a typical day's activity."

20 We didn't hear near as much about Joey Cheek. We
21 don't hear as much about Cheeky Joseph.

22 Isn't that cool, that the guy's name is Joey Cheek,
23 and we are looking at Joseph, and how one person's gift can
24 multiply like that.

25 He's an instrument of economic survival and

1 salvation itself.

2 The organization that he gives that money to is
3 going to save kids' lives.

4 It's going to put them in sports programs in the
5 Middle East, Africa and throughout Asia.

6 Don't let anybody tell you that God doesn't need
7 your money.

8 Joey Cheek is proof of that, and Joseph, the cheeky
9 dude in the Bible, is proof of that as well.

10 We are supposed to share our financial decision for
11 the Heart of the Matter, and I needed to take an anxiety
12 pill before this morning because of this.

13 Four years ago when we did the Tomorrow campaign,
14 we just don't have a whole lot of retirement money, so
15 Pastor Wenda and I took out another mortgage on our house,
16 and the rates were favorable, so we were able to do that.

17 In over three years we were able to promise and
18 then give \$25,000 for the building of the church, this
19 expansion project, and we were blessed by that.

20 That was three and a half years ago, whenever that
21 started.

22 So Wenda and I were talking about it the other day,
23 and we had been praying about it since last summer.

24 "What do you think God is calling us to give?"

25 I said, "We gave twenty-five a little while ago.

1 Why don't we give twenty-six?"

2 She said, "Why is that?"

3 I said, "Well, we have been married twenty-six
4 years."

5 She said, "We haven't been married twenty-six
6 years. This will be our 27th anniversary.

7 (Laughter)

8 So we upped it to twenty-seven this time around,
9 and the reason that we're doing that is because we think God
10 wants us to do that.

11 Leaders lead, and we want to lead by example, but
12 it's going to be hard, because Wenda's salary was reduced
13 about twelve thousand dollars a year.

14 So we are going to do it, and so the whole concept
15 of what we give, it's unequal gifts, but equal sacrifice, so
16 we really needed to come up with something that was a
17 sacrifice and a stretch, and that's going to stretch us, so
18 that is what we are going to do.

19 And the reason we are doing it is because the last
20 three and a half years have been wonderful, but in a lot of
21 way they have been the pits, because I've felt the wrath of
22 the family of God as never before in the last three and a
23 half years; of resentment, and accusation, and jealousy, and
24 all of the different kind of things that we do as a family.

25 I've felt that, and it has been the pits, but never

1 before in my life have I experienced the grace of Jesus
2 Christ like I have in the last three and a half years,
3 because it isn't about me; it's about God.

4 I got a video that I am going to give to Gene.
5 It's an interview with Matt Redmond.

6 He's a musician who I had the privilege of meeting
7 a couple weeks ago.

8 He's from England. He wrote the song "Heart of
9 Worship", that Michael Smith has released, and Matt has
10 released it, and we sing it here.

11 "It's all about you, Jesus, when the music fades
12 and all is stripped away."

13 He tells the story that he was in a church and the
14 pastor just said, okay, I don't like the way our worship is
15 going, we are going to quit doing it, we are just going sit
16 and wait.

17 And the video is filmed in the back of a London
18 taxi cab, a pastor is interviewing Matt and he asks, "How
19 did you come up with that song, Matt?"

20 He said, "We had just sat there for like three
21 weeks without doing any worship music," he was the worship
22 leader. He said, "It was the pits," and that song came to
23 him.

24 "It's all about you, Jesus, when the music fades,
25 all is stripped away."

1 And I think that's amazingly powerful. Leonard
2 Sweet says it this way. I just finished his most recent
3 book, it's called "Out Of The Question - Into The Mystery".

4 He said, "Relationships grow through giving and
5 receiving. God gives and we receive. For us to receive
6 what God has to give our hands need to be empty. You can't
7 receive with a fist. All whole relationships are based on
8 mutual disclosure, revelation, and emptying of self in
9 conversation with another."

10 Joseph was in the pit most of his life. He had
11 mean brothers, but he also had it coming, and I have had it
12 coming, I'm not perfect, God knows I'm not perfect.

13 It would be real easy to be self-righteous, and not
14 realize and not confess that we are empty, but, you see,
15 when we are in that position, we're right where God wants us
16 to be.

17 He was right where God wanted him to be. Dropped
18 into a different pit, whether it's that well, whether it's
19 that promotion, whether it's that prison.

20 I've got a quote from my prayer partner, who has
21 been stepping it up double duty since Christmas, his name is
22 Dan, he always brings me great quotes, he brought me this
23 from Phillip Yancey, it's from the back page of the most
24 recent "Christianity Today" magazine.

25 "I've become more convinced than ever that God

1 finds ways to communicate with those who are truly seeking
2 him, especially when we lower the volume of the surrounding
3 static. I remember reading the account of a spiritual
4 seeker who interrupted his busy life to spend a few days in
5 a monastery. "I hope your stay is a blessed one here," said
6 the monk who showed the visitor to his cell. "If you need
7 anything while you are here, let us know, and we'll teach
8 you how to live without it."

9 Isn't that great? I'll bet Joseph probably wanted
10 a drink when he was at the bottom of the pit.

11 We have a wonderful woman from our church, her name
12 is Opal, here is her quote.

13 "I have been learning a lot since this happened."

14 What happened with Opal is she broke her ankle
15 right before Christmas in a car accident. She's in her 80s.
16 She lives at the Life Care Center. She gave me permission
17 to share this.

18 I said, "What do you mean by that, you're learning
19 a lot?"

20 That's the essence of being a disciple, being a
21 learner.

22 She said, "You can't always be number one.
23 Sometimes you have to sit and wait until someone helps you."

24 She's talking about being in the nursing home and
25 she hits that little button and sometimes it takes a while

1 for somebody to come.

2 And I said to Opal, I said, "God bless you, Opal.
3 Can I quote you on that?"

4 She goes, "Yes."

5 I said, "You know you are right where God wants you
6 to be."

7 She kind of went, "Huh?"

8 God didn't want her to break her ankle. God did
9 not cause the car accident that broke her ankle.

10 God does not want her to sit and wait for hours and
11 hours and hours when she rings the nurse button.

12 But God wants Opal and us to be empty and in need
13 of somebody else to help us. We can't always be number one.

14 In conclusion, the Joseph story teaches us
15 stewardship is not the pits. It's about reconciliation.

16 Pits happen, and pits will come upon you in life.
17 Pride and envy will kill you and those around you eternally.

18 And then also God does some amazing things when we
19 let him, get out of management and empty ourselves.

20 Lent is largely a choice. If you are familiar with
21 the LifeShapes vernacular, it is both a chronos time and a
22 kyros time.

23 It's a forty day period, but if we deny ourselves
24 and find ourselves in a blessed pit, who knows? God might
25 just touch our hearts. Wouldn't that be awesome?

1 Anyway, that's my words of wisdom for today. I
2 hope they bless you and we'll have some prayer ministers up
3 here after we sing a song.

4 Let's pray for a minute. Lord Jesus, we have got a
5 misunderstanding about emptiness in our culture that
6 encourages fullness. In fact, it encourages gluttony.

7 So thank you, Lord, for Joseph that teaches us it
8 doesn't matter if we are in a well, or a pit, or on the top
9 of a mountain of promotion, or in a prison, anywhere, Lord,
10 it can be a pit, but you are always there.

11 So would you bless my friends. May they
12 acknowledge their need for you and receive the grace that
13 you intend.

14 Thank you for our hearts. Would you fill them with
15 gratitude and grace every day of our lives.

16 We pray this in the name of our brother, Jesus, who
17 has taught us to pray, our Father, who art in heaven,
18 hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done,
19 on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily
20 bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who
21 trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but
22 deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the
23 power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

24

25