



I really like reality TV shows that involve competition. *American Idol*. *Wipeout*. Even game shows like *Family Feud*. Do you remember *Press Your Luck*? The contestants would shout out, "Big money, big money. No whammies!"

The latest competitive reality show to capture the attention of America is *Minute To Win It*. I was watching it recently and the game, Blow Ball came on. It's an easy, early round game where the contestant blows red-colored ping pong balls off the surface of a pizza pan, while leaving the yellow-colored ones on the pan. The crowd goes crazy and each of us watching is thinking, "I could easily do that game!" As I was watching this clip I thought, that's just like Joseph in Genesis 39. But think about this—Joseph is blown here and there by the power of everyone in this chapter, just like the ping pong ball in this game.

Let's read Genesis 39 together and you'll see what I mean.

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there. The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD'S blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her. Now it

happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside." So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside." Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned. So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail. But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it. The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.

Did you notice how often the power shifted from person to person and Joseph is bouncing around like that ping pong ball? Look at these seven shifts of power in the chapter.

- 1—The Ishmaelites had power.
- 2—Potiphar buys Joseph, so he has the power.
- 3—Joseph is given power from God.
- 4—Potiphar gave power to Joseph.
- 5—Potiphar's wife took power from Joseph.
- 6—Joseph is put under the power of the chief jailor.
- 7—The chief jailor gave power to Joseph.

This is an important dynamic in this chapter because the Hebrew word *yad* is used eight times. Whenever we have one word repeated that much, we need to pay attention because the message God wants to communicate with his people connects to this.

So what does *yad* mean? It literally means *hand* and it implies power. Whoever has *yad* has the power. Look at each of these examples.

Examples of “yad”

Bought him (Joseph) from the Ishmaelites. Literally: bought him from the *yad* of the Ishmaelites (v. 1).

The LORD caused all that he (Joseph) did to prosper in his *yad*—“hand” (v. 3).

And he (Potiphar) made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his (Joseph) charge—“put in his *yad*” (v. 4).

So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge—“in Joseph's *yad*” (v. 6).

And he has put all he owns in my charge—“in my *yad*” (v. 8).

He left his garment in her hand and fled—“in her *yad* and fled” (v. 12).

When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand—“in her *yad*” (v. 13).

And the chief jailor committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were there—“committed to Joseph's *yad* all the prisoners” (v. 22).

That's a lot of *yad*! Whenever we see God repeating a word like this, we need to answer this question: Why? Why is this word repeated so much? What's the message God is sending us?

I believe the message is this: Joseph was helplessly pulled and pushed by forces of power. We're meant to identify with Joseph's situation. There are constant forces of power at work around us and upon us too, and we are helplessly pulled and pushed. We're meant to recall times in our lives when we have bounced around like a ping pong ball from one powerful source to another.

So let's give that some consideration. Who has *yad* in your life? Consider these examples:

»Teachers. More and more kids in elementary school at early ages are showing signs of stress, stomach aches and headaches, because they're struggling to cope with the expectations of their teachers.

»“The man is keeping me down.” Government or authority in general.

»The college where you sent applications.

»*Yelp*—the web-based reviews of any and all businesses.

»Alcohol.

»Your boss, your coach, your spouse.

»Maybe doubts that you battle in your thoughts.

»Your limited finances.

»Infertility, medical fears.

»Waiting for a relationship.

»IRS, FDA, FBI, homeowners association, insurance company.

Do you resonate with one of these examples? Did you identify what has the **power** in your life? It's a horrible, frustrating feeling when you are powerless and those with power are not looking out for your best interests. That's what the story of Joseph in Genesis 39 reveals. This is a human condition, universal to all of us. And God wants us to identify with him. Can you relate?

“The LORD was with”

The good news is that *yad* is not the only word repeated in this chapter. The phrase “**the LORD was with**” is repeated four times. Look at these examples:

“And **the LORD was with** Joseph, so he became a successful man” (v. 2).

“Now his master saw that **the LORD was with** him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand” (v. 3).

“But **the LORD was with** Joseph and extended kindness to him” (v. 21).

“The chief jailor did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because **the LORD was with** him” (v. 23).

To understand what the repetition of this phrase means, let's first look at the phrase itself. The name of God that is used here is **LORD**. “The LORD was with.” Anytime the word **Lord** appears with an initial large capital **L** and three smaller capital letters **ORD** in your Bible, it is translated from the Hebrew word *Jehovah*. LORD = “your Lord and Master.”

This is important because different names are used in different places in the Bible to give a slightly different emphasis. **Lord**, spelled with a capital **L** and lowercase **ord** is the Hebrew word *Adoni*, which means mighty and strong.

Imagine how God chooses which name to use for himself to emphasize certain characteristics. In Genesis 39, in this phrase “the LORD was with” God is reminding us that he is the Lord and Master. And as such, He is ultimately in charge, not the various shifts of *yad*. He is providing direction to all the day-to-day activities because He is the Lord and Master. He is the ultimate Ruler with all of the *yad*, all of the power. He is the ultimate Master. And to make sure we don't miss this, we're told four times that the all-powerful Lord and Master was **with** Joseph.

LORD

Now, take a guess as to how many times **LORD** is mentioned in chapter 39. I'll give you a hint—it's the same number of times *yad* is used. Eight.

For every time people are described with the hand of power, God matches it and supercedes it by reminding us that He is the LORD and Master.

Putting all of these repeating words together then (“yad,” “the LORD was with” and “LORD”) reveals the ultimate message God is communicating through Genesis 39: While you feel powerless, keep in mind that God is with you and in control.

This lesson gave me great comfort during my 16-month interviewing experience before joining the CPC staff. I needed to know that when I felt powerless, God was with me and truly in control. I've shared with you before how hard it was to wait on God during that process. But today, I'm going to share with you some of the gritty details involved in the waiting.

The first church I sent my resumé to was located in the Pacific Northwest. When I read about the church and the city it was located in, I got really excited. I could see how God could work through me to lead this church of 100, reach out to people and grow people spiritually. I thought this would be a place to do the two things God was calling me to do—lead and preach. I thought that sounded like a great fit for my passions, too.

I sent them my resumé, preaching DVDs and cover letter. The response: we're not interested.

I was pretty confused by this. They didn't even want to talk with me? Why? I felt like they didn't even give me a chance. I could more easily accept a rejection after we got to know one another. Maybe we didn't have the right chemistry or the right style fit, like my spiked hair. Or perhaps my skill set didn't match their needs. Or maybe there were some Biblical doctrinal differences that couldn't be worked through. But to not even talk to me. I felt their *yad*—their hand of power.

When we're facing circumstances like this, we start to ask, “what's wrong with me?” It's natural to lose confidence. It's normal to become discouraged. Maybe you feel this today. When we fail to see that the Lord is with us, we might feel tossed about in a meaningless manner. We might feel that life is meaningless. We might feel alone and hopeless. We might feel as if God is against us. We are living by sight instead of living by faith. All of this is the fallout result of failing to see that the Lord is with us.

In total, I was rejected by over 35 churches during my 16-month interviewing experience. I struggled with the *yad* these interviewing committees had over me. They had all of the power. And I didn't feel they were looking out for my best interests.

But every step of the way, God was my LORD, my Lord and Master. He was directing every step. He was blocking my way. His plan was to bring me to you! When the CPC elders offered me this job, I didn't know how to react. I needed to know from my LORD that this was His plan. So I took a week to process, think, pray, talk with others and at the end of the week it was crystal clear—this was the place God wanted me to be.

When we're facing situations like this, what's the right response to my uncertainty? What's the right response to my frustration? What's the right response to disappointment?

The answer is: Remember that God is with you and in control. He is the LORD and Master, so walk in faithfulness.

Look at what Joseph says to Potiphar's wife, “***How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?***” (Gen. 39:9). Alienated from his support systems and community of believers, Joseph walked in faithfulness. And because he walked in faithfulness he experienced the enduring strength of God **and** he was poised to be used by God

This pattern is repeated throughout Joseph's story. He did not wallow in self-pity. He did not throw up his hands in exasperation and check out. He walked faithfully with God. And God used him to help millions of people.

Now I don't know who of us, if any, will be used by God to help millions of people. That's not for us to decide. Our LORD and Master determines that, right? But if we walk faithfully, we will become the person God needs to do whatever He desires.

Let's turn our attention now to the New Testament to see these themes continue.

Hand of power against us

“I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me” (Acts 20:23).

The Lord was with

“Behold, the virgin will be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, ‘God with us’” (Matt. 1:23).

Jesus says, ***“I am with you always, even to the ends of the age”*** (Matt. 28:20).

Although Jesus is physically leaving the disciples he tells them, ***“you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you”*** (Acts. 1:8).

LORD and Master

“You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am” (John 13:13).

While you feel powerless, keep in mind that God is with you and in control. Consider the hardships the Apostle Paul endured.

“Five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep” (2 Corinthians 11:24-25).

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or

peril, or sword? But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us . . . nothing shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35, 37, 39).

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

While you feel powerless, keep in mind that God is with you and in control. Take encouragement today that God is bigger than any *yad* in your life. Trust him.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.