

# TAKING THE HIGH ROAD

## Doing What's Right Even When Life Treats You Wrong *"The Adequacy of Faith"*

Hebrews 11:22

The famous Irish author, **Oliver Goldsmith**, once wrote: *"Life is a journey that must be traveled no matter how bad the roads and accommodations."* I want to talk about *your* journey through life.

Jesus said one time that there are basically two roads we can travel on in life. One road is heavily-populated, spaciously-wide, seemingly smooth and appealing while the other road is sparsely-traveled, incredibly narrow, difficult and challenging. But here's the thing—the first road leads to destruction but the second road leads to life.

Here is how Jesus said it word-for-word. *"Wide is the gate and broad is the road the leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road the leads to life, and only a few find it"* (Matthew 7:13b New International Version).

So He urges us, *"Enter through the narrow gate"* (Matthew 7:13a New International Version). *"Take the road less traveled."* *"Don't just follow the crowd and do what looks easy and painless and comfortable. Dare to follow the road, no matter how difficult or lonely it appears to be, that will lead ultimately to life and peace and well-being."*

A poet by the name of **John Oxenham** took this powerful image that Jesus painted for us with His words, tweaked it a bit, and penned a little verse that has become forever lodged in my mind. He wrote:

To every man there openeth  
A high way and a low,  
And every man decideth  
The way his soul shall go.

That's what I want to talk about over the course of these next several weeks. There are two roads you can take on this journey through life—a high road and a low road. The choice is yours. You can take

whichever road you want to. You are free to do what you want to do.

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But only one of these roads leads to life. Only one of these roads leads to true happiness and joy. Only one of these roads leads to a place of safety and security. That's the high road! And what I want to do is show you, from one man's experience, what happens when you dare to take the high road through life even in the midst of incredible obstacles and challenges.

Now if ever there was an individual who had every reason to just crumble and get bitter and give in to the low road in life then surely it was the Old Testament character, **Joseph**. *Are you familiar with his story?* From the day he was born, it was just one bitter tragedy after another.

**Linda Ronstadt** used to sing a song that went something like this:

I've been cheated,  
Been mistreated!  
When will I be loved?

I've been pushed down.  
I've been pushed 'round.  
When will I be loved?

Well, that song could have been written about Joseph. That's the essence of his story. He grew up in a blended family, a very dysfunctional family, and his half-brothers hated him, despised him, mistreated him.

Mom and Dad had their favorites...and things got so ugly that his elder brothers threw him in a pit out in the middle of the wilderness and left him there to die but then they saw a caravan of foreign merchants heading to Egypt and so they sold Joseph as a slave to be carried away to some distant land where he would be forever out of sight and out of mind.

They took a goat and slaughtered it, dipped Joseph's robe in the blood, took it back, showed their father, and concocted this wild story about how Joseph had been attacked and devoured by a ferocious animal. **But even in captivity, the Lord was with Joseph.**

He was a man of integrity. He was a man of character. And even though he had every reason to become angry and sour and nasty and hard to live with—take the low road—he took the high road. He worked hard. He was honest. He was trustworthy. He treated others better than he had

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been treated.

And God prospered him. He found favor in the eyes of his owner—a man by the name of **Potiphar**, a high official in the government there in Egypt, a very wealthy man, a very powerful man. Potiphar put Joseph in charge of everything he owned—his whole household, his servants, his vast and diverse resources.

But Potiphar's wife had eyes for Joseph. He was well-built. He was handsome—quite a hunk—and she tried to seduce him. **“Come to bed with me,”** she urged him. But Joseph was un-seducible. *Is that a word?* Well, you know what I mean. He was a man of honor.

He said, **“How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God and violate the trust of my master, your husband?”** He refused. And when she grabbed a hold of him, he ran. She was so humiliated and angry that this young man would refuse her advances—that she couldn't have what she wanted—that she lied about him, said she had been assaulted, raped...and her husband threw Joseph in prison.

*He does what is right—he does the right thing—but is he rewarded?* No! He is not rewarded. He is not blessed. He is unjustly punished. **But the Lord was with Joseph...even in prison.**

Although he had every right to just sit and sulk and become angry at life and disappointed in God—take the low road, treat other like he had been treated—he took the high road. Even in prison, he was a man of character and integrity and honesty. He had a spirit of kindness and love and grace.

It wasn't long until he found favor in the eyes of prison warden. The warden put him in charge of all the other prisoners. He elevated him, trusted him, and made him responsible for everything that was done there. God prospered him, brought him success, even in the midst of some deplorable conditions.

But it was still prison! On one occasion Joseph had the opportunity to help a fellow prisoner gain his release. He said to this guy, **“Now when you get out and things go well for you, remember me.**

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**Remember how I helped you. Remember that I'm an innocent man. Go to Pharaoh and plead my case. Okay?”**

But he didn't. Once that guy got out, he completely forgot about Joseph. Didn't try to help him! Didn't remember his promises! Didn't go to Pharaoh to see if he could get a pardon for the man who had saved his life! He just forgot Joseph completely.

And Joseph lingered there in prison for two more years. *How would you have responded? Would you have lost faith? Would you have become deeply depressed? Would you have become disillusioned with people, skeptical and cynical and hard to live with? Would you have just given up on God and thrown up your hands in despair and cried, “What's the use?”*

Well, Joseph didn't do any of that. He didn't take the low road. He took the high road and there came a time in his life, because of his character and his integrity and his faith, that God raised him to the very pinnacle of power in the land of Egypt and brought blessing to Egypt and to Israel and to the people of God through Joseph.

But not only was Joseph a man of character and integrity during the tough times, he was also a man of character and integrity during the good times. **Thomas Carlyle**, one of the greatest writers who ever lived, used to say it like this: **“Adversity is hard on a man, but for one man who can stand prosperity, there are a hundred that will stand adversity.”**

*Do you understand what he is saying?* Prosperity is a more difficult test for most of us than adversity. I mean when things are going bad, it's pretty easy and natural to cry out to God for help, to seek His guidance, to submerge yourself in prayer. But when things are going good...it's a whole lot easier to just kind of forget God, to walk in your own wisdom and strength, to get careless and presumptuous and self-sufficient.

But here's what I want you to notice about Joseph. Even in the good times, he took the high road. He did what was right. Now what was easy, but what was right.

There came a time when his brothers, his family, needed his help. There

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came a time when he had the power and the opportunity to treat them just as they had treated him. There came a time when he could have gotten even, when he could have had his revenge, when he could have made them pay the price for they had done to him.

But he wouldn't take the low road. He took the high road. As they were afraid and trembling and waiting to see what he would do to them in response to what they had done to him, he said, ***“Don't be afraid...You tried to harm me, but God made it turn out for the best”***

(Genesis 50:19-20 Contemporary English Version).

Here's a man whom God blessed with a dream, a vision, when he was just a young man, of how He was going to lift him to a place of honor and leadership and power...and, yet, for year after year after year after year after year nothing happened. The dream was unfulfilled. He didn't experience honor or leadership or power. All he experienced was bondage and betrayal and brokenness.

But he always took the high road and I believe there are some wonderful lessons we can learn from Joseph's life.

No you may be sitting here this morning thinking, *“Well, how am I like Joseph? What do we have in common? He lived at least 3500 years ago.”*

Well, let me ask you this: *Have you ever been hurt by someone you love? Have you ever had to deal with turmoil within your family? Have you ever been set up, falsely accused and unjustly punished? Have you ever done your best, been promised a reward, a promotion, and then seemingly been forgotten? Have you ever been tempted to use your abilities and whatever power you have to get even with those who have hurt you and make them really suffer? Have you ever had to wrestle with sexual temptation?*

If you have, then you can identify with Joseph and there are lessons from his life that can help you to take the high road in life instead of the low one. And so I have entitled this series of sermons **“Taking The High Road – Doing What's Right Even When Life Treats You Wrong.”**

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Here are some of the topics we are going to cover:

- **How To Trust God Even In The Midst Of Dark Days**
- **How To Maintain Your Integrity In A Cruel And Crooked World**
- **How To Resist The Lure Of Sexual Temptation**
- **How To Deal With Shattered Dreams**
- **How To Develop A Lifestyle Of Forgiveness**
- **How To Leave A Legacy Of Grace**

Now this morning what I want to do is give to you what I believe is the key phrase in this 14-chapter narrative about Joseph's life. On more than one occasion this phrase occurs in the midst of Joseph's story. The first time it occurs is in **chapter 39**, the **2<sup>nd</sup> verse**. Here is the phrase. ***“The Lord was with Joseph.”***

*Where was he?* He was being held as a slave, against his will, in Potiphar's house. But ***“the Lord was with Joseph”*** and Joseph believed that and trusted in it and lived by it.

We see this phrase occurring again in **verse 21** of this **39<sup>th</sup> chapter**. This

time Joseph is in jail. He's not just a slave—someone who is owned, ruled and ordered around by someone else. He is in jail. He is locked up. But listen to what the Word of God says. *“The Lord was with him.”*

A couple of verses later—**verse 23**—this same kind of phrase occurs. *“The Lord was with Joseph.”*

I want to just remind you this morning, as we begin this brief character study about Joseph's life, of **“The Adequacy of Faith.”** Joseph was able to travel along the high road in life because he had this firm conviction that God was with him every step of the way. He trusted in the power and the presence and the providence of God.

I want you to listen to what **J. Hudson Taylor** once said. He said, *“All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them.”*

Wasn't that the key to Joseph's life? *“The Lord was with Joseph.”* Joseph believed that and trusted in it and lived by it. He was a man of great faith. In fact, if you will turn to the great *“Faith Chapter”* in the Bible—**Hebrews 11**—and make your way through this great Hall of

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Fame of men and women who had great faith in God, you will find Joseph's name.

It's listed in **verse 22**. Here is how it reads. *“By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.”*

Now if you're not familiar with biblical history then you're probably sitting here thinking, *“What? What does that mean? What does that have to do with faith?”*

Well, take just a moment, pick up one of those pew Bibles and turn to the very last chapter and the last few verses of the book of **Genesis—Genesis, chapter 50**, beginning with the **22<sup>nd</sup>** verse.

**Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family. He lived a hundred and ten years....** (Now move on to verse 24.) **Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”**

**And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.”** Genesis 50:22, 24-25 New International Version

Now here's the significance in all of this. Joseph and his family, the children of Israel, are living and dwelling in a land that is not theirs. It's a foreign land. Essentially, they are refugee and they have been there for almost 70 years.

But Joseph, as he nears the end of his life, says, *“Listen, don't bury me here in this foreign land. God promised our father Abraham and his son Isaac and his son Jacob, who is my father and our father, that he would bring us to a land of our own, a Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and that He would bless us and make us into a great nation—that we would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands of the sea.”*

*“I believe that...so don't bury me here in Egypt. Put my bones in a coffin, and when that day comes, carry me to that Promised Land*

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*and let me rest in peace forever there.”*

You talk about faith! There were just a bunch of refugees living on foreign soil. They had been there nearly all of Joseph's life. There was no visible evidence at all that this would ever happen. But God had said it and Joseph believed it. And even though he couldn't see it with his physical eyes, he could see it through the eyes of faith.

Someone has said it like this: *“Faith makes invisible things visible, absent things present, and things that are very far off to be very near to the soul.”*

And there came a day...it didn't happen immediately—it happened some 400 years later—that the children of Israel left Egypt, carrying Joseph's bones; made their way through the wilderness and inhabited the Promised Land where God blessed them and grew them and made them into a mighty nation.

Joseph was a man of faith. He took the high road and he discovered that faith in God really is sufficient to carry you through life's greatest obstacles and challenges.

- **His faith was adequate, sufficient, powerful enough, when he had to endure painful experiences.**
- **His faith was adequate, sufficient, powerful enough, when he was tempted to sin deeply and give in to his lustful passions.**
- **His faith was adequate, sufficient, powerful enough, to help him keep his sense of balance in times of power and prosperity.**

As the apostle **Paul** wrote in **Philippians 4:19**, *“God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus”* (New International Version).

Perhaps you're sitting here this morning and someone has really hurt you. Perhaps you're sitting here this morning and you're just scraping the bottom of life because God planted this vision in your heart but nothing is happening. It's just not being fulfilled.

Perhaps you're sitting here this morning and even as I have been talking your mind has been drawn to some “forbidden fruit” in life that's just

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begging for you to take it and you're so tempted. Perhaps you're here this morning and you're just devastated because everything that could go wrong has gone wrong.

There are two roads you can take—a low road or the high road. I prayerfully plead with you, take the high road. Trust in God. Do what is right. Follow His word, His way, His will...and you will bring blessing to your family and to all those around you and to your

own life and legacy.