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*Understanding God's Work
of Righteousness*

Isaiah 61:10-11, Psalm 23:3

While on life's journey we all experience trials, tribulations, ups, downs, valleys, mountains, good times and bad times. That's just how life is. And, it can be difficult to "stay the course" in the midst of trying times. We can get discouraged and distracted by roadblocks and pitfalls that may come in the form of grief, loss, pain and disappointments. We can become vulnerable in hard times and think of giving up, giving into temptation, quitting, or turning back. Ultimately, we can get stuck in a rut.

Some of us may even begin to question God. We might say or think things like, "Am I being punished or am I reaping the consequences for some sin that I committed?" We may do a quick scan of our "sin" file. We may confess, repent, forgive and reconcile, hoping to cover all the bases. During the severity of our pain, we may even think of cursing God and dying, like Job's wife. (Job 2: 9) When the chips are down and it seems like all the cards are stacked against us, we wonder "why me" and "how long will this situation last?" I have been there a time or two.

I faced one of the darkest, most difficult times of my life about four years ago when everything seemed to hit rock bottom. I experienced the simultaneous traumas of divorce, disease, debt, and other major disappointments including a now defunct church plant. Within a matter of months things spiraled down. I went from being a healthy homeowner to

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being homeless, disabled, and debt-ridden. I went from being a co-pastor and a pastor's wife to being an "ex" wife and an ordained minister without a church home. I went from being a guardian and a custodial parent to being an involuntarily estranged parent.

Fortunately, God spoke to me in the midst of these difficulties and gave me hope. He let me know that sometimes our suffering is NOT as a result of sin, but rather His testing and refining process. It is as if God had presented me before Satan, like He did His servant Job, to test my faith, build my character and glorify Himself in me. (Job 1: 6-12)

More specifically, God spoke to me through the life of His servant, Joseph, who also experienced great challenges. As I scanned the life of Joseph and his journey from chapter thirty-seven to the end of the Book of Genesis, I saw something very interesting! Joseph had a garment change each time God performed a "new" work of righteousness concerning him. This "fresh" insight helped me to realize that God was working His plan of righteousness concerning me, despite the devastation that I had experienced. Understanding God's plan of righteousness is what encouraged me to stay the course.

In order to understand God's plan of righteousness, I had to first recognize it as a wonderful gift. I began to meditate on the thought that the God of Righteousness is my Righteousness. How awesome! How sobering! God is Righteous, perfect in all His ways and He does all things well. (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 145:17; Mark 7:37) Yet, He made provision for me to be righteous like Him by clothing Himself in human flesh. The God of the Universe chose to put on human flesh as His clothing and live in this world that He created. He sent His only Son Jesus to earth from His throne in heaven to become righteousness for me. While I was still in sin, Christ died for me. (Romans 5: 8) What a great love!

Jesus suffered the horrors of the cross for you and me, to turn away God's wrath for our sin. His finished work at Calvary makes us righteous. We did not earn this special sacrifice, nor did we deserve it. Because He paid the penalty for our sins, we are now justified and made righteous through Jesus. He made Him who knew no sin to take on our sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5: 14-21) What a great sacrifice!

He clothed us in His righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus to all who believe. (Romans 3: 22) He clothed us with garments of salvation and covered us with robes of righteousness. (Isaiah 61: 10) Why? First of all, because our righteousness is as "filthy rags" before the Lord and Jesus was the only one qualified to offer an atoning sacrifice for us. (Isaiah 64: 6)

The Bible gives a vivid illustration of Him "taking off" the old filthy clothes of the priest and "putting on" new clean garments. (Zechariah 3: 4)

Secondly, God has clothed us in righteousness so the world can see His righteousness in us. We are the Body of Christ. Jesus did not want His Body to be naked or without apparel. And He wanted the whole earth to be full of His glory, so He chose to glorify Himself through the Church. He wanted the world to see His glory through His creation; and we are His creation-- the works of His hands. He adorns us in heavenly apparel to cover the nakedness of our sinful nature and to show us off: to put us on display before the world. The Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth. (Isaiah 61:11) He will bring forth your righteousness as the light. (Psalm 37:6)

Once I was fully assured and thoroughly convinced about the "gift" of God's righteousness in Christ Jesus, I also needed to understand the two-fold nature of God's righteousness.

On one hand, God's work of righteousness is finished and complete. I call this "positional righteousness," the unconditional, unearned and unchanging nature of His righteousness. All the distinct benefits of this righteous relationship (*favor, protection, love, provision, power, and promises*) are resting on us because we are clothed in His righteousness. This positional righteousness is like the garment of our skin that covers our entire body continually, completely and permanently.

I saw distinct evidence of *positional righteousness* in the life of Joseph. He was the much loved and favorite son of Jacob and his second wife Rachel. He was given a special robe as a symbol of his earthly father's love and favor towards him. His brothers were jealous of him because of the special treatment that he received at their loss. The Lord showed Joseph two dreams that predicted his elevation above his parents and siblings. When he shared the dreams with his family, his brothers hated him and plotted his death. Yet, God, the Heavenly Father was with Joseph.

The Lord remained a constant presence and source of protection through all of the difficulties that Joseph experienced. Early in his upbringing, God showed him dreams and visions about his future. And, the Lord granted him favor with every level of authority including his father, Jacob, his slave master, Potiphar, the prison warden and his fellow inmates, and finally, the ruler of Egypt. Eventually, God even allowed him to be at peace with his jealous brothers. Positional righteousness enabled Joseph to stand during difficult times because he held onto the vision and promise God gave him for his future.

At first, it was difficult for me to see any evidence of positional righteousness taking effect in my life. I felt more like Joseph's brothers in

the story, who did not receive the same level of favor and love from their father and became hostile towards their brother. As a youth, I suffered from feelings of rejection as a result of the "favoritism" that was practiced in my family of origin. I perceived that there were, and still are, two main favorites in our family: although, my siblings and my parents may insist that there were different favorites at given times in our history together. Nonetheless, I needed to overcome these feelings of rejection because they were causing interference in other areas of my life.

I did not realize that I had become an over-achiever, one who was driven by accomplishments in an attempt to earn the love and favor that I felt was being unfairly withheld. I discovered that God had blessed me with a variety of strong natural abilities that caused me to excel in several areas, and my efforts seemed to be rewarded. This pattern of coping seemed to suffice for a time. But, the spirit of rejection resurfaced viciously as a result of infertility in my Christian marriage that also ended in a hostile and traumatic divorce.

Thankfully, during a supernatural encounter with the Lord, I was able to fully embrace my "beloved-ness," my "favored" status in the Lord. He has completely healed my womanhood! (I'll write more about this in coming books and articles.) I resolved that, even if I was not deemed a "favorite" child of my parents, and even though my husband dumped me, I am God's "favored" child for all of eternity! That means forever! I had been assured of my "rightful" place in God. Now I am secure in my positional righteousness because it was not something that I had to earn.

Not only is God's righteousness finished and complete, it is ongoing and unfolding on a daily basis. I call this "progressive righteousness" which concerns the measures of righteousness yet to be discovered, the higher heights and deeper depths in God to be explored. We are "works in progress" being molded and fashioned according to His will. We can think of progressive righteousness as the garments that we wear to cover our nakedness. This work is a continual, ongoing process that results in spiritual growth and development, maturity, cleansing, correction and character development. Essentially, we are led in paths of righteousness for His names' sake to conform us to the image of His Son as He works in us to will and to do His good pleasure; completing the good work He began in us. (Psalm 23:3, Romans 8:29, Phil.1:16, 2:13)

Progressive righteousness requires that the garment of righteousness be "put on" daily like our clothes to cover our sinful nature and to protect us from exposure to the enemy. We must "put off" the old nature and "put on" the new nature being renewed in the image of Christ. We must clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness,

Refined by Fire: Secrets of Becoming a Champion of Life Challenges and patience. And over ALL of these we must "put on" love. By our fruits, people should be able to detect that we belong to Christ. (Matthew 7:16)

Progressive righteousness allows for the times when we may experience green pastures, still and peaceful waters, tables prepared before us, anointing for our heads, cups that overflow and goodness and mercy following us. It also, accepts that we may also experience valleys, shadows of death, the rod and staff, and the presence of the enemy.

Progressive righteousness unfolded in Joseph's life with each change of his garments. With each new garment there was a corresponding shift in Joseph's life circumstance and his positioning in God. Although the Bible does not explicitly indicate so, we can conclude, in good confidence, that there were probably some issues of character and spiritual development that God was addressing in the life of Joseph. It is likely that Joseph had developed an unhealthy mind-set and attitude because of the favoritism that he so readily enjoyed with his father above that of his brothers. According to the scriptures, Joseph was prone to bring bad reports to his father about his brothers. He appeared to flaunt his special robe in the presence of his brothers and to gloat about his glorious future revealed in his dreams. (Genesis 37:2-9)

Eventually, Joseph discovered that his special robe was "made" and inadequate to protect or save him from his brothers' attempts to kill him. They stripped him, threw him in a ditch and sold him into slavery. As an Egyptian slave, Joseph wore a cloak of authority and enjoyed great oversight and responsibility. However, his position of favor cost him. He left behind the garment that symbolized his position of favor to escape from the seduction of his master's wife.

While dressed in prison clothes, Joseph realized that his gift of dreams and interpretation was not just for his own personal benefit. He was able to utilize his God-given abilities for the benefit of aiding others. As a result, Joseph overcame the pride and victim's mentality that is common with innocent persons who are falsely accused. (Genesis 40:15) And, finally, Joseph wore the robe of a governor that represented the reality of his childhood dreams coming to pass and his maturity in the progression of righteousness. The Spirit of God was so evident in his life, at this point, that the Pharaoh could see God in Joseph. This was righteousness and praise springing forth. (Isaiah 61:11)

Joseph loved and forgave all those who wronged him unjustly. He even brought "new" clothes for his brothers as an act of reconciliation and healing. (Genesis 45:22) It was God's plan for Joseph to go ahead of his family so that he would be in position to aid during the severe famine in the land. (Psalm 105:17-22) God's work of progressive righteousness had

prepared and positioned him to serve his family and all the nations of the world empire.

I can attest to the progressive working of righteousness of God in my life. Like Joseph, I was forced to shed man-made coverings because they were inadequate. I had to surrender my will and be completely transformed from a mind-set that was dependent upon human beings to supply my needs. Because my earthly father had provided such a financially stable and comfortable living environment, I went into marriage expecting at least the same level of stability or better. Unfortunately, this did not become my reality. Nonetheless, God, my Omnipotent Father, proved Himself faithful as Jehovah-Jireh, my Provider through a series of miraculous provisions despite spousal abandonment, excessive divorce court fees, and escalating medical expenses.

Joseph left behind his cloak in his effort to escape seduction. He was falsely accused and imprisoned. While in bondage he learned how his misfortune could benefit others. Divorce resulted in my leaving behind what had been my blended family, my home and a beautiful daughter, a failed marriage and ministry, and great uncertainty about my titles, positions, reputation, ministry status and my future. Until a few months ago, I would still occasionally reflect upon these losses with a small inking of grief.

I received a supernatural breakthrough in my spirit when God allowed me to understand that, even through all of my suffering, He was protecting me from the dangerous influence of false doctrine that had crept in and begun to take root in my marriage partner. This revelation enabled me to move beyond feeling like a victim. Now, I rejoice in my losses because God has birthed a powerful and anointed ministry called (WIND) Word INDeed. It is like a refreshing wind of the Holy Spirit that is destined to reach nations! Close friends and loved ones who supported me through my rough times can see the powerful hand of God upon my life and how He has given me favor to be a blessing to the Body of Christ.

Dear sisters in Christ, please understand that your current trials are NOT the end of your story. God is still working. Seek first to be secure and anchored in your understanding of being positioned in the righteousness of God just as your skin covers your natural body permanently and completely. Then, experience the daily unfolding of His progressive righteousness like putting on your clothes each day. With a solid understanding of being clothed in His salvation and righteousness, you will have the motivation and fortitude to stay on the path of righteousness when the "going gets tough."

Though difficult and unexplainable circumstances can get you down and turn you around, embrace them as some of the very ways that God chooses to work His righteousness in you. Pray for wisdom and insight about how your circumstances give evidence of God's work in you. Finally, experience the positional and progressive work of righteousness in your life. Rejoice as God takes you on the path of righteousness and you weather storms of life, yet your position in Him remains unchanged. Praise be to God!

There are three things that I want you to do:

1. Be encouraged by the gift of Righteousness from a Righteous God.
2. Be absolutely convinced of the finished and completed work of God's Righteousness in our lives.
3. Willingly submit to the Lord's progressive work of righteousness in our lives (*we daily change our clothes to cover nakedness*).