THANKS GIVING Jamie Buckingham

# **Thanksgiving**

### in the Pit

This book is adapted from a message preached by Jamie Buckingham on November 21, 1976, to the Tabernacle Church, Melbourne, Florida.

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## Jamie Buckingham

Risky Living Ministries, Inc.



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Edited for print by Bruce Buckingham

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### Thanksgiving in the Pit

I'd like to read something to you this morning. It's an element of praise as we approach this Thanksgiving season. Almost every week, we get letters from people who have been in the service. Usually the letters are about how they have been blessed, and those blessings come in ways that none of us would ever expect.

I'll read you a portion of this letter from a lady who had driven down to Florida from a little town in Pennsylvania.

I was at the Tabernacle on June the 20<sup>th</sup> and although you were not there, it was a good service because the Lord was there. My daughter, who is 14, and I had come to Florida looking for my 20-year-old son. We found him. He was living with an unbeliever who is now carrying his child. The next day I came to the Tabernacle. I was hurting so bad. Then a lovely couple, whose name I promised never to forget, ministered God's love to me.

While I was sharing my burden, my daughter, Barbara, admired the woman's necklace. It was a seashell with a cross on the inside. Before I could say anything, that lovely lady took off her necklace and put it around Barbara's neck as a gift. What a blessing that was. Thank you for that ministry. Thank you for allowing the opportunity for God to work through that wonderful lady and touch me and my daughter in our time of great hurt.

The baby is due in December and Barbara and I are hoping to drive back down for Christmas. We ask you to pray for us as we declare Romans 8:28. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

We never know what just a little act of kindness will do for someone. We never know how just being there for someone will bless them, allowing the presence of God to cover them in a time of great need. You see, true ministry does not come only from the pulpit. This pulpit is not a place of real, practical ministry. Sure, I come here on Sunday morning to be with you, to share with you out of the Word of God. But real ministry comes as one member of the body touches someone in need. That's real ministry.

Now I want to share something with you this morning. It's a message of and for this Thanksgiving season. I want to talk to you about how to be thankful in tribulation. If you are not in some sort of tribulation now — well, you listen anyway, because sooner or later you will go through a tough time, and you need to be prepared.

But, I have a feeling that most of you here this morning are experiencing some form of tribulation in your life today.

You have heard me talk about the fact that when I go out as a writer, a journalist, to interview people for a story, one of the first things I begin looking for in a person's life is what we call "the dark pit." It's there in everybody's life, a dark pit of some sort. It's where all the lights have gone out. It's where all the crutches have been snatched away. It's where everything you leaned on is suddenly taken, and there is nothing left. You are just flat on your back in a hole. And there is no place to look except up, waiting for somebody to dump dirt in your face.

Most of us have had some kind of experience in a dark pit. But it's in those dark pit experiences that God really begins to speak to us.

We are not to run from these experiences, nor are we to seek them either. I know some folks who wander through life looking for dark pits so they can jump into them. They are the misery hunters. They are never satisfied with mountaintop experiences. They can hardly wait to get off the mountaintop and back down into the valley, the pit,

because that's where they have lived for so long. Maybe they just like the sympathy they get there.

We are not to go searching for dark pits. God does not intend for us to live in a dark pit. But when it happens — and it will happen — I want to share with you about how to be thankful in the midst of it.

How do you praise God when the lights have gone out? When your dreams have been snatched away from you? When all of the things that you have longed for and believed in are taken away? How do you praise God when all the things you feel God has promised you fail to come true? All the prophesies, all the dreams, all the visions that you have been hoping for are ripped away, and people tell you that you are no good? How do you praise God in the midst of a situation like that?

This is a message of giving thanks. And I want you to take your Bibles and turn with me to the 37<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis.

In Genesis 37 we find a remarkable story about a young man who had all of his dreams and visions for the future snatched away. His name was Joseph, and there are some lessons I want us to learn from this man today.

Remember, Israel was the second name that had been given to the grandson of Abraham. His original name was Jacob: Abraham, Isaac and then Jacob. This is the lineage God was working through at the time. But when we get down to Jacob, we see that God changed his name to Israel.

#### Let's look at the 3<sup>rd</sup> verse:

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors (Gen. 37:3).

There were eleven other brothers in the family. Joseph was the youngest, number 12. He was a young fellow, only 17 years old. And he was extra special to his father, because his father, Israel, had Joseph in his old age. So Israel made Joseph a special coat, a coat of many colors. But this caused Joseph some trouble.

And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all the brethren, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him (Gen. 37:4).

Joseph was a man like many of us. He had received a special gift from his father. But unfortunately, he didn't know how to handle that gift.

Joseph was a strutter. He had a peacock-like syndrome. He didn't know how to handle the special gift he had received from his father, so he paraded around in front of his brothers wearing this coat of many colors.

I know some charismatics who have this same problem. They have received a special gift from God, and like Joseph, they don't know how to handle it.

There are special gifts from God. There are many special things that God wants to give to His children because He loves us. But there is also a wisdom in knowing how to handle these various God-given gifts. Joseph was young and immature. He didn't know how to handle the gift he had been given. And I can just see him strutting out in the field in front of his brothers wearing his colorful coat. Sure, he was the favorite son, but it was very foolish for him to flaunt it in front of his brothers.

I can picture him parading back and forth so that everyone would know he was something special. He's the kind of fellow that struts into his Episcopal church after having been to a charismatic prayer meeting on Saturday night and received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Then on Sunday morning he swaggers down the aisle, laying hands on everybody and disrupting the entire service.

So Joseph's brothers hated him. They hated him because he didn't know how to handle the gift that his father had given

him.

Joseph had also been given other gifts, and not just from his earthy father. God had given Joseph special gifts. He was a dreamer. And God had given Joseph some very legitimate dreams concerning the future of the sons of Abraham.

And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brethren: and they hated him yet the more (Gen. 37:5).

How immature can a fellow get? It wasn't enough that they already hated him because of the coat of many colors; now he's decided to tell them that he also has gifts from God in the form of dreams and visions. And of course, they hate him even more.

But still, Joseph kept at it. He must have been like the fellows who say, "Well, Satan comes against the people of God. Satan is never happy when God's people are excited. So I'm going to be more excited, and more excited, and I am going to fight Satan."

Unfortunately, Joseph wasn't fighting Satan. He was fighting his brothers. And they hated him for his haughty attitude.

In verse 6 we read about Joseph actually telling his brothers about his dream. I can just hear him now. "I don't care whether you hate me or not, I'm going to tell you the dream anyway. I don't care whether you want to know what God is saying or not, I'm going to tell it to you just the same."

And he told them.

For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood up right; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf (Gen. 37:7).

In other words, "brothers, your sheaves all bowed down to my sheaf."

And the brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? Or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words (Gen. 37:8).

I hope some of you have discovered as you walk in the wisdom of God that there are just some things that you don't discuss with other people. Even things that God discusses with you. I hope you are learning that.

I hope you are learning that every little bit of knowledge that God gives you is not meant for you to blabber to everybody else.

Sometimes a believing wife has to hold a whole lot of things inside her before she has the freedom to share those things with her unbelieving husband. The wise wife will not tell her husband everything that God has told her because some of those things are not to be shared, perhaps for a long time. The reason is if you cast too many pearls before a pig, he will turn and tear you apart. There are some things that you should not share.

Joseph, unfortunately, had not heard that particular teaching.

And so he just blundered in, pearls here, pearls there, pearls scattered everywhere. Not only did his jealous brothers get the pearls, but they got him at the same time. Suddenly, things were not so good for Joseph, because he did not know how to handle the gifts of his father.

Once God has given you something, be very, very careful about how you try to give it to somebody else. Sometimes you must wait and let God do the giving, in the same way He gave to you.

We have a tendency to receive something from God and then think everybody else should have it at the same time, not realizing that God may want to speak to others in the same way he spoke to us. The reason most of us get ourselves in trouble is that we take a burden that we have and we try to place that burden on somebody else. Gifts, visions, burdens — it's the same principle.

Some of you have learned something about the tyranny of trying to operate under somebody else's burden or somebody else's vision.

Say someone has a vision for the body. "We're all going to do this," he says, and he tries to give it to us. But nobody is ready to receive it. So we just stand there and look at him. And he gets upset because nobody is hearing his word from God.

I have seen this truth in the area of foreign missions. God speaks to a person and lays something on his heart. Something important, something for him to do. His eyes are opened to the tremendous needs in the world. But in his haste and immaturity, he feels God is not speaking to him alone, but to all his friends and family, and it is his job to impress upon them the importance of foreign missions. When they fail to see his vision — the vision God gave to him alone — he gets angry and frustrated. And as his frustration grows, his friends get angry with him.

People, you have to wait until God gives others the vision the same way He has given it to you.

Well, Joseph had some problems in this area. So he pressed on. In fact, he had another dream, one that was worse than the first. The first dream was about sheaves standing in the field. The second dream was about the sun, the moon, and eleven stars all bowing down before him.

And the brothers said, "You mean, not only are we going to bow down to you, but Father and Mother are also going to bow down before you? Little brother, you've really got a thing going on the inside, don't you?"

So his envious brothers did the only thing they knew to do. When Joseph came out in the field flashing his coat of many colors and talking about his dreams, they found a hole and they dropped him in it. And they intended to leave him there to die.

And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it (Gen. 37:24).

When I was in the Sinai Desert in June, we found one of these kinds of pits. Created by thousands of years of wind and rain, they can be up to 30 feet deep, forming a natural reservoir. They are all through the desert, and it was into one of these holes that they dropped Joseph and left him to die.

But that did not satisfy his brothers. When they saw a caravan heading into Egypt, they quickly decided to sell Joseph for 20 pieces of silver. When he was gone, they took his colorful coat and put blood on it to make it appear to Daddy that a wild animal had eaten the favorite son.

Did you know that brethren, even those in the church, are capable of that kind of thing? Some of you have had experiences like that? You have shared some of God's good things only to find out that your brothers are quite capable of dropping you into a hole and leaving you there to die, or selling you into slavery. Then, just as bad, they go around making up stories about you — about how you destroyed the church or how you split the body open or how you ran your wife off.

Before you know it, the rumor is out, and you're off to Egypt or some other forsaken place.

Things were better, for a while, when Joseph got to Egypt. I won't go into all the stories, but by the time he got there he had learned some critical lessons. One of the lessons he learned was that he was going to be fully obedient to God. He was not going to do anything that God had not told him to do. God had given him the dreams, but God had not told him to share the dreams. His past troubles had come by

going beyond what God told him to do or say, and he was not going to repeat the same mistakes.

I constantly have people who come to me and tell me that God has told them to write something down. They want to get to me because I am a successful writer. I tell them, "That's wonderful. But if God has told you to write it, why are you asking me to write it for you?" They reply, "Well, maybe you can get it published." And I say, "Did God tell you that it was to be published?"

There is a difference between having something written down and having somebody else read it. We need to hear what God is saying and not elaborate on it or take it beyond what He is saying.

God tells a lot of people to write things down. But He has not necessarily told them to share it with anybody else or try to get it published. Sometimes you are to just write things down simply for the purpose of writing it down, and for now, it is for you alone.

God may simply want you to think through these things, to meditate on these things. And if that is what He wants then it is not necessary for you to have any kind of communication with anybody else about it. The problem comes when you think everybody else out there needs to hear what God is only telling you.

Joseph learned his lesson. He was now determined not to do anything God had not told him to do. He is going to be totally obedient to what the Lord is saying.

He gets to Egypt and decides, "I am going to obey God. I am going to be God's man. I am not going to speak unless God tells me to speak. When God tells me to speak, I am going to say only what He tells me to say. And then I'm going to keep my mouth shut. I am going to be totally obedient to the Lord God."

And, of course, you know what happened. God blessed him, and everything was wonderful in Egypt. Well, not quite. He entered the house of Potiphar, who was the commander in chief of the military forces in Egypt, and he rose to a high position within that household. Then one of his old temptations came along. And he said, "Hallelujah, praise the Lord. I have been waiting for one of these temptations to come along so I can prove to God and everybody else that I am an obedient child of God."

Well, not exactly.

One day Potiphar's wife comes in. Her husband is 40 years older than she is and he's not around very much. And here is young Joseph, fresh out of the desert. He is strong and bronzed and good looking, and she puts the moves on him.

And Joseph says, "Hallelujah. I have been waiting for somebody to try to seduce me, because I want to prove that I am a man of God. I will not sin against God." So he turns his back on Potiphar's wife and walks out of the house singing praises and hallelujahs.

Apparently, Potiphar's wife decides she doesn't like fellows who treat her like that. So she tells her husband, and even makes up a few little stories about Joseph. Before you know it, Joseph is back in the pit again.

It's an interesting thing that has happened to poor Joseph. First he is in the pit because he did something wrong. Now he is in the pit because he did something right. It doesn't seem very fair, does it?

Some of you have had some of those kinds of experiences, haven't you?

Now the second time Joseph is in the pit, he's there for a much longer time. The first time in the desert it was just for a few days. This time, however, he is in the pit for five years. Here is another important principle for us today: I believe God may take longer to teach us a lesson when we have done something right than He does to teach us a lesson when we have done something wrong.

When you know that you are wrong, it's a simple matter of repentance. A lot of folks get right with God when their sins are heavy upon them. It's quite a different thing to get right with God, to seek God, when you haven't done anything wrong.

It is difficult to understand, difficult to see justice and rightness, as God tries to teach us something, despite our goodness and obedience. It is what Joseph experienced in the Egyptian dungeon.

These are the two pits I want to talk to you about this morning. The first pit I call the *pit of correction*. The second pit I call the *pit of curing*. I want to talk about these two pits, and how to be thankful in the pit experiences in life; how to be thankful during a time of tribulation.

Some of you are in pits right now. Your home has become a pit. It's a battleground, and you and the bulldog go round and round and round in the pit. It's like a chicken fight. Whenever you go home, everybody has their spurs on, and boy, you are right back into it again. And the neighbors are all standing around betting on who is going to win this time. We know that. It's okay. Word gets out. Some of you here this morning have your scars all covered with makeup. It's rough out there. We understand that.

Some of you are in the pit of finances. Things may look good on the outside with your new shirt and tie on, but that's the end of it. That's all there is. Somebody may ask you how you're doing, and you grin and paste your big charismatic smile on. "Everything is just wonderful, praise God. It's all wonderful."

You have read all the books that say praise is the answer to everything. So you paste that smile on your face and profess, "Hallelujah. Praise the Lord."

But your pocket has a hole in it, and everything has drained out. You don't have enough money for lunch tomorrow. You are in debt to a whole lot of people, and there are wolves out there who are knocking at your door. You are in the pit of finances.

There are other kinds of pits, too. There are the pits of emotional despondency. Last week, Jackie and I were talking to a friend of ours down the coast who was in one of those pits.

She is a beautiful young woman who loves the Lord Jesus Christ with all of her heart, but she is in depression, and depression is a horrible pit to get into.

Now it's easy to say, "All you have to do is praise God and you will be out of the pit." But that's like telling an alcoholic to "just stop drinking. The problem is the alcohol, so just stop it."

Well, it's not that easy.

Some of you who have been in the pit of depression know how hard it can be. You can't just say "Praise the Lord!" and pretend everything is okay. Depression is a deep pit. It's a dark pit. There are serious difficulties getting out of that pit.

Some of you here this morning are in a deep, dark pit like that, and I want to talk with you just a little bit, if you will open your ears just enough to hear what I am saying.

First of all, you have to determine which pit you are in. Are you in the pit of correction, or are you in the pit of curing? Are you in the pit because of something you have done wrong, or are you in the pit because of something you have done right?

God loves and corrects and chastens His children. But the Father will not chasten us or correct us without telling us why He is doing so.

When you find yourself in a pit, the first question you need to ask is, "Why am I here?" Is it because you strutted around a little bit and tried to pretend that you are something that you are not? Is it because you shared some things that you shouldn't have shared, and you were unwise in what you did? Or is it because you really were following God, and now God has something else to teach you, and the only way he can teach it to you is to throw you into a pit for a while?

Determine which pit you are in.

Most of our pits are the pit of correction. Not many of us get ourselves into trouble for doing the right things — but it happens. Instead, most of us get ourselves in trouble for doing the wrong things. So if you are in the pit of correction, you need to know that there is only one way out: the way of repentance. You need to look at yourself honestly and say, "I have made a mess of my life," and then ask God to help turn you around.

Now, I know some people who are active pit-goers. You are constantly in a pit. You climb out of one, you stagger around for a little while in the desert, and then you either fall back into same pit or you find a different one to fall into. Every time I see you, it seems you are in one pit or another.

You may try to pretend otherwise, but you have done some very unwise things that keep dragging you into a pit. Perhaps you have a personality problem. You can't tell the truth. You can't relate to your employers or employees.

Get honest. Look around. Look at who you are and why you are there and know that the only way out of the pit of correction is the way of repentance. In other words, stop

doing whatever you are doing that keeps getting you thrown into that pit.

Now, there are a whole lot of books out there that will tell you how to get out of pits. One book says all you need to do is rebuke Satan. Just rebuke him, rebuke him, rebuke him. But when you get honest with yourself, you will realize that Satan didn't put you in that pit. Your own actions did. So all the rebuking you do is not going to get you out of the pit.

Another book says if you praise God enough, you will escape from your pit. Praise is the answer to everything, it says. Just praise the Lord, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, and suddenly you are out of your pit.

Now praise is a wonderful and beautiful tool. It is something that God has given us to do. And it is something that the church for centuries has neglected and not used properly. Praise is an answer to many things, but praise is not the answer to the pit of correction. God doesn't want your praise when you are in the pit of correction. What God wants is your repentance.

I praise the Lord for the new emphasis on positive confession. That's good, because there are a lot of things that you can confess negatively.

At times I am a negative confessor. I confess negative things on my wife. I tell her that she is a poor housekeeper. I go through the house after we have been out all day and the kids have been home all day and the house looks like a hurricane has blown through it. There is food all over the counter and food on the floor and the trash cans are filled to overflowing and clothes are scattered all over the place.

We have a couple of kids who come in the front door and shake, and everything falls off them. It's just all right there. Then I come in and I confess a negative thing on my wife. "You are a poor housekeeper," I say. "Why can't you be like my mother?"

She says, "Do you really want me to be like your mother?"

So we get into this negative confession cycle, and she confesses negatively back to me.

"You want me to be like your mother. You never have been satisfied with a wife. All you want is a mother."

And so we are confessing negative things, and before we know it, we begin to act negatively.

She says, "Well, if you are going to think I am a poor housekeeper, I am going to act like a poor housekeeper. The heck with everything. You pick it up."

And then I have a reaction back to her, and the cycle continues.

Now, God has been teaching me some things about positive confession, about saying positive things to my wife.

"You are a good housekeeper. It's the kids who have done this. I understand that. Come on. I will get in there and help you out with it a little bit."

That kind of attitude will just lift the cloud off of a house in a second.

"Hey, that's really a good dinner. You have really done a good job. You have out-done yourself. It's been a long time since we've had such wonderful wieners in sauerkraut."

Let me tell you something: a kind word like that can go a long way toward making a pit situation better. But if you are in the pit because of something you have done wrong, then all of the positive confession you do will not get you out of the pit.

Look at the situation you are in. Can you honestly say, "I am not here? There is no pit. Everything is good." That's a good

Christian Science stance. "I am not here. It's not here."

But it *is* here, and all the positive confession in the world will not get you out of the pit of correction.

Let me tell you something. There are a lot of you who are praying and asking God to anoint your disobedience. You refuse to repent but continue to ask God to bless your disobedience. That's not the right prayer. You are not to pray and ask God to anoint your disobedience. What you need to do is pray that you will fail quickly, because only in the recognition of failure will you escape from the pit of correction.

I have learned something about correction: God may protect you even when you are wrong. But you cannot mistake God's protection for His blessing. He will not bless disobedience.

God protected Joseph when he was in the first pit, when he was in rebellion. Joseph was proud. He was strutting around being insensitive. He was talking about and sharing things that he had no right to share. His older brothers couldn't take it, so they dropped him into the pit. Still, God protected him, even as they intended to kill him.

God even moved upon Joseph's enemies. He moved upon his brothers who said, "No, let's not kill him. Let's just sell him as a slave down into Egypt."

And God took that Egypt experience and turned it into something bright and wonderful. What his brothers meant for harm and evil, God meant for good. God turned around their evil intent and used it for something wonderful and good.

We need to remember that point. I know it is hard to imagine it when you are down there in the bottom of that pit, but you need to remember that you are a child of God. God is going to take care of you because His promise is

secure. God has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." He goes with you even into the pit of correction. He is there with you

When the children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness, in full rebellion and disobedience to God, He watched over them. God told them to go and possess the land, but they wouldn't do it. So He sent them wandering in the wilderness and waited for the disobedient generation to die. Yet, He remained with them, protecting them at the same time.

He provided for them. He gave them manna from heaven. He gave them shoes that didn't wear out. He protected them from the snakes. He had rocks break open for water to come out. He takes care of His people, even when they are disobedient and rebellious. God will not forsake you. But do not mistake God's protection or His provision as a blessing on your disobedience.

Now, I have heard a lot of strange theology that comes and says God will forsake you when you disobey. That's not so. God does not forsake His children, even His disobedient children. He loves you, and He will provide for you, and He will protect you, but He won't bless you, because the blessings of God come through righteousness and obedience.

The pits of life are God's classroom. If we are to move on to the greater things He has in store for us, we must learn from those pit experiences.

Now, consider the second pit. Joseph is out of the pit of correction when he is sold to the caravan of Ishmaelites. He ends up in Egypt where he soon finds himself right back in another kind of pit, a dungeon. This time it is even worse because he is there for a much longer time. He keeps asking people for help, and they all promise to help him, but then

they go out and forget about him. He is in that pit for a long time.

But this is not a pit of correction. This is a pit of curing. This is the kind of pit that they used to have in Virginia, or North Carolina, or West Virginia. It's like a smokehouse out in the back yard where you take a ham, or slab of bacon, and you hang it there until it is done, until it is cured.

This time Joseph is in the pit of curing because God has a claim on his life. You may say, "Well listen, I am really a mountaintop kind of person. I don't acclimate well down here in the pit." But I am here to tell you that is where you learn. That's the classroom of life.

Jeremiah talks about God as a potter who is constantly shaping and molding the clay on the potter's wheel. He is that kind of God.

Malachi says God is like a refiner's fire, where He sits as a refiner, a purifier of precious metals.

If God loves you, He is not going to leave you alone. And in the process of loving you and not leaving you alone, He is going to shape you, and make you, and purify you — and the only way that happens is through these pit experiences in life.

Joseph lost some things in his pit experiences which were necessary for him to lose.

First of all, he lost his coat of many colors. He didn't really need that coat. He found out later that he could take his coat off and still be God's man.

I don't have time to get into all of that this morning, but a lot of us are still carrying around our religious trappings — some kind of a coat of many colors. It is what gives us the feelings of authority. And as long as we have these trappings around us, as long as we say, "Well, I am a

member of this organization or I am a member of this institution, or I have this title," then we feel that we have authority, or even superiority.

Joseph learned that everything could be taken away from him and the authority of God still remained, because God alone had placed that authority upon him.

Joseph had to lose some other things. Another thing he had to lose was his reputation. The first time his reputation was forcibly taken away from him by his brothers. The second time he voluntarily gave up his reputation. And that, of course, is a far better way.

In giving up his reputation, he chose the way of Christ, who counted Himself of no reputation. Jesus gave up something in order to come to earth and show the world the love of God. That's the higher way.

I enjoy being around people who are people of position and authority but who never talk about it. I enjoy people who don't need to wear their status or reputation like a pin on their lapel or on their coat sleeve. I enjoy going into a man's office who is a highly educated man, as I did the other day, and found that he had no degrees or diplomas hanging on the wall. He didn't need those degrees or diplomas on the wall to convince me who he was. He was who he was because of who he was, not because of a piece of paper on the wall.

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So what about giving thanks in the midst of all of Joseph's problems? How are you to find thanksgiving when you are in these pit experiences? Well, let me just give you one or two ways to do it.

First of all, remember who you are. It may be necessary to go back into your memory to those times when God singled you out and told you who you are. Most of us get ourselves in trouble because we don't remember who we are in the Kingdom. You need to remember that, whether you are being corrected or whether you are just being taught through a curing process. You need to remember who you are in Christ and that God loves you.

Occasionally, I have to enter into corporal punishment with my children. That means applying the board, and we still do that. The other day I had to wallop my youngest son, Tim, who is 16 years old. It was a fearsome thing, because he is stronger than I am. But we had to go through that. Yet, before I disciplined him, I sat him down and reminded him who he was.

"You are a son of your father," I said. "You are a child of God. And because of that, some correction is coming your way. Now even in the midst of what I am about to do to you, I want you to remember who you are. I don't want you to forget that. After it's all over, I don't want you to forget that. I want you to hold onto that fact, because otherwise you will not understand the perspective of the punishment. And if you forget who you are, you'll think you can just walk out of this place and go back to doing what you were doing, or you'll get mad and storm out, or you'll pack up your clothes and run away."

There are a lot of God's children who have done — walked away from god, stomped out of the church — because they didn't know who they are, or didn't have the perspective of God's curing process. They didn't know they are sons of the Father. They didn't know His love transcended the punishment.

So you need to constantly remember who you are when you are in the pit experiences of life, and you need to define why you are there.

I have found that when you know who you are and why you are in a particular pit, joy comes. Joy comes through confession and it comes through repentance. There is joy and thanksgiving that comes in that realization.

What a freedom it is to be able to confess that you are wrong. What a relief it is to get that burden off your shoulders and not have to bear that thing all the time.

What joy is there to walk through life pretending you're somebody you are not? That's the heaviest of all burdens to carry, the burden of hypocrisy. It weighs you down. What a struggle it is to wear that kind of mask. What a freedom and a joy it is when you release it and confess it. What thanksgiving there is in knowing who you are and not confessing or pretending to be something else.

Now hear me on this: praise alone is not the answer. Praise is the evidence that the work is done. When you are in the pit of curing and you get to the point where you begin to praise God, you will know that the work there is already done in your life.

I'll give you a perfect example. Paul hears from God that he is to go to Macedonia. And when he gets there, the first thing that happens to him is he finds himself in a Philippian jail. Do you remember the story? They arrest him. Because he was obedient to God, he was put in jail.

Do you remember what he does in that jail? He and Silas are in fetters, bonds and chains. But what are they doing? They are praising God. They're singing to God at midnight.

As they were singing, the Bible says, a great earthquake came. The walls of the prison shook and the fetters came off. Still, they continued to praise God.

Then the jailer came running in because he thought the prisoners had escaped. In a Philippian jail, if a prisoner escaped, they would kill the jailer — which is a pretty good

motive to keep the prisoners intact. So he comes running in, and Paul says, "It's okay. We are still here. We're having a ball. What a great place to sing and praise God down here in this dungeon."

Was it the praise that brought the walls down? No. Their singing and praising did not cause the earthquake. Their praise was simply the evidence of what had already happened in their lives. Regardless of their circumstances, Paul and Silas were going to praise God. They could not help but praise God because their lives were right with God. They knew they had been obedient to God, and as a result they were praising Him.

They knew God had placed them in that jail for a reason. And because of that, they were willing to stay there the rest of their lives. I am convinced Paul and Silas would have been just as joyous and full of praise had the jailer locked them back up again and thrown the key away. They would have continued right on with their praise.

The point is, they were not praising God in an effort to escape their situation. They were praising God because of the relationship they had with God.

Later, Paul wrote back to the church that formed in Philippi:

For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want (Philippians 4:11-12 NIV).

The fourth chapter of Philippians is a chapter of great joy, great thanksgiving. And it too, by the way, was written from another jail cell. Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote back to them and said,

My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19 NIV).

Paul had learned that it was more important to follow the Lord, to be in the Lord, than to be concerned whether he was in jail or not. So in Philippians 4 he constantly talked about being in the Lord, in the Lord, in the Lord.

Somebody could have said, "Hey, Paul is in jail."

But Paul would not have heard that. He did not consider himself in jail. He was in the Lord. He may have been locked up, but he was free at the same time.

So simple praise is not the answer to your dilemmas or to your pits. Praise is the evidence that the work is done. It's the result of being cured. Praise, like joy, is a fruit of the spirit. It's not given, it's grown.

You don't manufacture praise. True praise comes out of an experience you have had, out of a relationship that you have with God, a relationship that makes you hate rebellion and pride and love obedience and righteousness.

The Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. When you are in the Kingdom of God, there is going to be joy that wells up inside of you. And the result of that is fruit: joy, love, peace, and patience.

We had an avocado tree in our backyard. It was a very rebellious, independent avocado tree. Our avocado tree never wanted to submit to anybody or anything. It just stood tall and straight out there in the backyard. As it grew up, it decided that it didn't want to bear fruit. It was going to be a leaf avocado tree, and so it never had any fruit on it.

Well, to me, the only purpose of an avocado tree is to bear fruit — avocados to be precise. So I went out one day and cut it down. I just sliced it off, axed it down, right down to the ground. And I said, "There. You are now a good example of the John 15 principle. I cast you into the fire."

The next spring, a little branch started to come out of the stump of that tree. Higher, higher and higher it grew. And, now, guess what? I have a full crop of avocados on the new tree. That tree had learned a lesson.

Let me give you a passage of scripture from the book of Job:

At least there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again, and its new shoots will not fail. Its roots may grow old in the ground and its stump die in the soil, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a plant (Job 14:7-9 NIV).

God wants us, even in the pit experiences, to be like a tree that is planted by the rivers of water, a tree that brings forth fruit in its season. And one of the fruit that it brings forth will be joy.

John the Baptist said,

The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire (Luke 3:9 NIV).

The only way you will bring forth fruit is to be a seed that falls into the ground and dies. And that's the reason we can thank God for the pit experiences of life. Because it's in the pit experiences that we get covered up. And in the covering up, we sprout and bring forth fruit.

There is a passage in the Bible that talks about songs in the night. I have been through some night experiences, some pit experiences, along with my wife and kids. I know you have as well. And I learned something about songs in the night. I can do all of the singing in the night I want to, and the darkness will not go away. It's like whistling in the cemetery. But you don't sing songs in the night to make the darkness flee. You sing songs in the night because you have seen the light. And in seeing the light, you can give praise and thanksgiving unto God. Even in a pit.

Let's enter into a time of prayer together:

Lord, I confess that I have gone through all kinds of formulas to try to be happy. I have done this and I have done that. I have tried to cover up my disobedience, tried to pretend that it's not there. I've tried to praise you when I didn't feel like praising you. I have tried to make my lips say things that my heart didn't really believe. And I confess that this is all just sham and hypocrisy. Because I believe, Father, that you want praise and thanksgiving to come from the inner place in my heart. So I pray this morning, starting with me and with everyone else in this room, that you will open up the wellsprings of joy in our lives.

Help us to look beyond the circumstances where we are, Father. Oh, Lord, forbid that we should cast our eyes upon the pits that we're in. Help us to look up to where the light is and to see You, the author and finisher of our faith. And help us to know that You are still doing a good work in our lives, and that You will not turn us loose, that You have not released us, that You are still there.

Lord, give us a new awareness of Your presence so that from our very innermost being there can well up praise and joy within us. For we love You and we praise Your name. In the midst of the pit circumstances, we praise You. In the midst of our jail situations, we sing praise and give thanksgiving unto You. For You are the joy of our life. You're the author of our life. You're the finisher of our life. And in the midst of this, we praise You. We bless Your name.

Hallelujah!

#### **ABOUT JAMIE BUCKINGHAM**

A master storyteller and Bible teacher, Jamie Buckingham has delighted millions around the world both in person and in print.

He wrote more than 45 books, including biographies of some of this century's best known Christians, including Pat Robertson (Shout It from the Housetops), Corrie ten Boom (Tramp for the Lord and others), and Kathryn Kuhlman (Daughter of Destiny, God Can Do it Again and others). His other biographies include the national bestseller Run Baby Run (with Nicky Cruz), From Harper Valley to the Mountaintop (with Jeannie C. Riley), and O Happy Day (the Happy Goodman Family Singers). Other books by Jamie Buckingham include Risky Living; Where Eagles Soar; A Way Through the Wilderness; Miracle Power; Coping With Criticism; Into The Glory; Bible People Like Me; The Nazarene; Parables and Jesus World (a novel).

He also wrote *Power for Living*, a book sponsored by the Arthur DeMoss Foundation that was given away to millions of people worldwide and resulted in untold numbers of people coming to Christ.

Jamie was more than an author of books. He was an award-winning columnist for *Charisma Magazine* and served as Editor-in-Chief of *Ministries Today Magazine* until his death in February 1992. A popular conference speaker, he was recognized as one of America's foremost authorities on the Sinai and Israel. He wrote and produced more than 100 video teachings on location in the Holy Land.

As a distinguished Bible teacher with graduate degrees in English Literature and Theology, Jamie was respected among liturgical, evangelical, and Pentecostal Christians. He was considered a close friend and confident of many key Christians of the late 20th century, including Oral Roberts, Billy Graham, Catherine Marshall, Jack Hayford, Bob Mumford, Kathryn Kuhlman, Corrie ten Boom, John Sherrill, Bill Bright, John Hagee, Pat Robertson, and many others.

Most importantly, Jamie was a husband, father, grandfather, and founding pastor of the Tabernacle Church, an interdenominational congregation in Melbourne, Florida, where he served for 25 years, pastoring and discipling followers of Christ. He lived in a rural area on the east coast of Florida on a family compound with his wife, Jackie, surrounded by five married children and 14 grandchildren.

For more information on Jamie Buckingham, please visit <a href="https://www.JamieBuckinghamMinistries.com">www.JamieBuckinghamMinistries.com</a>. Many of his books, columns, additional writings, video devotional series, and audio and video sermons can be found on this website, which is dedicated to preserving and promoting his life works.

For more of Jamie Buckingham's books, teachings and video devotionals, or if you would like additional copies of this book, go to:

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