

FOREWORD BY
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THE POWER OF HOPE WHEN CATASTROPHE CRASHES IN



JEREMY FREEMAN

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

#butGod

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Day 1

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

—GENESIS 50:20

The life of Joseph is perhaps one of the most powerful stories in the Bible. Joseph epitomizes trusting God regardless of life's circumstances. There is much we can learn from his life.

God gave seventeen-year-old Joseph some unique dreams. They revealed that one day Joseph would be in a position of great authority and everyone in his family would submit to him. When Joseph relayed the dreams to his family, his brothers grew extremely jealous.

Joseph's brothers developed a plan to harm him. They stripped him of a coat his father had given him and threw him into a pit. Not long after, they sold him into slavery to a group of travelers. The brothers then put the blood of an animal on Joseph's coat and returned it to their father,

exclaiming that a fierce animal had torn Joseph to pieces and all that remained was his coat.

This began a long journey for Joseph and his family. Joseph ended up in the home of a high-ranking officer of Pharaoh's, a man named Potiphar. Potiphar soon noticed that Joseph was special. In fact the Bible says, "The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man" (Gen. 39:2). Potiphar trusted Joseph completely and put him in charge of his entire household.

Potiphar's wife took notice of Joseph and pursued him day after day. One day she grabbed hold of him but Joseph fled, leaving behind his garment. Potiphar's wife lied to her husband and said that Joseph had tried to lie with her, and Potiphar threw him into prison. The Bible says, "But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Gen. 39:21). God continued to show Himself faithful regardless of Joseph's circumstances.

Two of Joseph's fellow prisoners had dreams and Joseph explained what they meant. One dream resulted in death for one of the inmates, and the other dream resulted in restoration for the other prisoner. When that prisoner was released, Joseph pled with the man not to forget him. The man forgot him. *But God* did not.

I encourage you to read Genesis 41–50 for the rest of Joseph's amazing story filled with *but God* moments.

Joseph placed his life in God's hands and left the results to Him. This is often easy to do when everything is going

your way, but it is in the trying times when you discover if you truly love and trust God. This is why the story of Joseph is so spectacular. I am sure Joseph wavered in his faith. I am sure Joseph questioned God at times. I am sure Joseph grieved the loss of time with family. I am sure Joseph was frustrated by being falsely accused.

Yet in all of it, we see that God was with Joseph and Joseph was with God. He knew that God had used all the ups and downs of his life for a greater purpose. He knew that everything he was and had was a result of the goodness and grace of God. This allowed Joseph to stand before his brothers after many years had passed and say, “You meant evil against me, *but God* meant it for good.” God always has the final say.

Today, live in that reality. Nothing touches your life that does not first pass through the hands of God. God is with you and is using whatever you are facing for your good and His glory! #butGod.

Day 2

*My flesh and my heart may fail, but God
is the strength of my heart and my portion
forever.*

—PSALM 73:26

The psalms contain some of the most powerful verses in the Bible. In many ways it is like reading the journals of some of the heroes of the faith. In fact, if you want to feel normal about your Christian life, just read the book of Psalms. If you read five psalms each day, you can read them all in thirty days, and personally, I think that is a great thing to do.

You will read phrases similar to the following:

“How long will You forsake me, Lord?”

“How long must I wait for you?”

“Against You and You only have I sinned.”

“Have mercy on me according to Your lovingkindness.”

“The Lord is my light and salvation; whom shall I fear?”

“Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.”

In one psalm the writer wonders where God is, and in another he praises God for His faithfulness. This is what much of our Christian lives look like. Some days we find ourselves reveling in the nearness of God; other days we feel like God is nowhere to be found. This is when we must remember who God is and focus on Him instead of on our feelings or circumstances. Our perspective is largely shaped by our view of God, and our view must be derived from the truth of God's Word.

Psalm 73 delivers some powerful truths: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you" (v. 25). The psalmist wrote that he is nothing apart from God. He knew that God was his strength and help. He understood that without God he had nothing. This why at the end of the psalm he said, "But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge" (v. 28). This truth is critical to embrace in our hard world. We must draw near to God, for He is the only true constant in our lives. As I frequently say, "Life is often not good, but God is always good."

After the psalmist declared his need for God, he wrote, "My flesh and my heart may fail, *but God* is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (v. 26). There are those two words again: *but God*.

This is what it means and looks like to live totally dependent on God. He is not interested in those who desire to show Him how strong they are. Rather, He looks for the weak to show Himself as strong. Isn't that what the apostle Paul

discovered in his journey with God? Paul had a thorn in his flesh that he begged God to remove, yet God let it remain. Paul learned to say, “I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me . . . for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:9–10).

God is attracted to weakness, for it is in our weakness that we look beyond ourselves to Him. Suffering and hardship have a way of doing what nothing else can: they cause us to look beyond ourselves. The psalmist captured this perfectly as he declared that his heart and flesh will indeed fail, but his strength and hope are not in himself, they are in “but God.”

Today let your weakness, suffering, pain, heartache, frustration—anything—cause you to turn your heart to the only One who can help you. Instead of resenting your life, embrace it and live for the glory of God. Always remember, God has the final say. Trust Him!

Day 3

And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”

—LUKE 16:15

God is always most concerned with the heart. “For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). This is one of the things that made Jesus’ presence on the earth so powerful. He knew if someone truly trusted Him—or just appeared to.

Jesus was harshest with the religious leaders. They wanted to appear different than they were. Instead of helping people find God, they often made the path to God more difficult. They loved to stand on the street corners and say prayers and tout their biblical knowledge for others to see. They loved to appear as though they were generous and cared for the poor. In reality they were “like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but

within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27). In other words, they were phonies. They had everyone fooled except God.

Jesus often told stories, and the point of His stories was to make a truth-connection to people's hearts. It is beautiful to read about tax collectors, adulterers, liars, thieves, and so forth, repenting of their sins and trusting in Jesus. But not everyone responded that way to Jesus. The religious leaders were extremely critical of who He claimed to be, what He said, and what He did. They hated that He spent time with sinners. But the Bible says He came "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

Jesus, 100 percent man and 100 percent God, not only saw the religious leaders' physical presence, He also saw their spiritual condition. In Luke 16, Jesus had just said, "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (v. 13). Knowing that the religious leaders were lovers of money, Jesus directed His next statement right at their hearts: "You are those who justify yourselves before men, *but God* knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (v. 15).

Jesus was proving to these men that He knew what was inside them. In other words, they could fool man, but they could not fool God. God knew their hearts and even though they were often exalted before men, it was not men they would ultimately stand before; it was God.

This is a great reminder for us that we are to live for an audience of one. As Jesus would later say, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36). What matters most in this life is humbling ourselves like children, admitting we have sinned, and entrusting our lives entirely into God’s care. God did not reject the religious leaders because they were sinners but because they were too prideful to admit they were sinners.

Today, remember that God knows your heart. You may have everyone fooled but God. Stop trying to be someone you are not. Admit your need for God. Confess that you have fallen short. Ask God to help you. Place all your hope and trust in Jesus. Stop worrying about what people think about you, and concern yourself only with what God thinks about you. He loves you. He died for you. He rose from the dead to give you true life. This is why He gets the final say over you, but you must turn your whole self over to Him. Why? #butGod.

Day 4

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

—1 CORINTHIANS 1:27

Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory” (Psalm 115:1). Twice the psalmist says “not to us.” He understood that his existence was to give glory to the only One worthy of it. Scripture says over and over that if we boast, we are to boast in the Lord. We exist for God. God does not exist for us.

If you study the Bible, you will see that God has a different way of doing things. Man is all about picking the smartest, strongest, and most attractive, but God often does the opposite. I can remember being on the playground during recess, and when the time would come to choose teams, the best players always got picked first.

That mentality is engrained in mankind. We think the people God uses will be like the people the world would choose. Thankfully, this is not the case. God likes to take

weak people, who yield themselves fully to Him, and use them to do incredible things. Not so they get the glory, but so that He does. God likes to select people the world would not pick and display His power through them.

One example is the apostle Paul. Paul may have appeared to be strong in man's eyes, but in reality he was weak. God appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and temporarily blinded him. God got Paul's attention and radically changed him. Paul became one of the greatest missionaries and church planters the world has ever known, along with writing much of the New Testament. God did this, and He got the glory.

The church at Corinth had many problems, but Paul loved the people and longed to see them walk with Jesus in purity and power. When he wrote them, he reminded them of his weakness. He said,

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:3–5)

What powerful words! Paul was saying, “Not to me, not to me, but to God be the glory.”

Imagine your life being like a simple baseball glove. The glove has no power until a hand goes into the glove, and then the glove does whatever the hand tells it to do. That

is like you and me. We are powerless without the power of God. On our own, we are nothing but empty gloves. But when God fills our lives, He uses us in unimaginable ways. When Christ comes to dwell in our hearts through faith, He changes us. He empowers us. He strengthens us. Not for our glory, but for His.

Today, recognize your weakness and rejoice in His strength. He has chosen to use you. He has gifted you. He has called you. He has empowered you. He has done all these things and so much more, that you might be used in ways beyond yourself and bring glory to His name. Do not focus on you, focus on Him, and watch what He will do in your life. God can do so much more with a weak servant dependent on Him than with a strong, self-dependent person. This is what #butGod is all about, and it's all about Him!

Day 5

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us.

—EPHESIANS 2:4

The word *gospel* literally means “good news.” Everyone loves good news. We especially love good news after we have received bad news. Think of the doctor who walks into the hospital room and says, “Bad news, you’re sick. But the good news is, I am going to prescribe a medication that will make you better.” All of a sudden, the bad news is swallowed by the good news. Good news changes everything.

When we think about the gospel, we must think of both bad news and good news. In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul began by delivering the bad news:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out

the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Eph. 2:1–3)

This is not just bad news, it is the worst news. These verses describe the condition of every human being who has ever lived or will ever live on the planet. Left to ourselves, we are hopeless. It is as if the doctor walked in the room and said, “Bad news, you’re not just sick. You’re dying, and there is nothing that can be done.”

But in the very next verse in Ephesians, two powerful words change everything. Paul wrote, *“But God,* being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (vv. 4–5). *But God!* Those words are beautiful and transforming, and they deliver the good news to us. This time, the doctor says, “Bad news, you’re dying. Good news, I have a cure.” All of a sudden the bad news is swallowed up in good news, all because of the truth of #butGod.

The gospel reminds us that our sin does not need to have the final say in our lives. We can look to our Creator and Savior and find forgiveness, healing, and life. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). That is the power of #butGod. We were dead in our sins, without hope, but God did not abandon us there. He entered the brokenness and chaos of this world and rescued sinners

from themselves. He provided a way to pass from death to life. Why? Because He is rich in mercy. Because He is a good God who loves to redeem and restore. Because He refused to let sin and death have the final say. Because He gets glory from bringing people from death to life.

All of the gospel can be summed up in these two words: *but God*. Have you embraced the gospel? Have you trusted Jesus? Have you experienced #butGod? If not, you can. Call out to the One who created you. Confess your sin and your need for forgiveness. Surrender your heart and life to Jesus. When you do, you will find all that you have desperately been searching for. You will be changed by the only One who is rich in mercy and who is mighty to save.

Day 6

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

—ROMANS 5:8

How do you know if someone truly loves you? Is it by what they say or what they do? What a person says is important, but what they do is even more important. If their actions do not back up their words, then their words become meaningless. The age-old expression is true: “Actions speak louder than words.”

God’s Word says many things, and behind every word are His faithful and perfect actions. All of God’s words are true. The moment He makes a promise, He keeps that promise. He is never early or late, and He is faithful 100 percent of the time. His Word never returns void, and what He says always comes to pass. He is the embodiment of truth, always acting with sovereign grace and perfect love.

Perhaps nothing shows this more than the person and work of Jesus Christ. Hundreds of prophecies foretold a Messiah would come, and He did. It was said the Messiah

would be sinless, and He was. It was declared that the Savior of the world would suffer and die, and He did. Jesus Christ came into the world as the perfect fulfillment of God's redemptive plan, and He exemplified God's sacrificial love for mankind. As the most famous verse in the Bible says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). God proved His love for us by doing what He said He would do. Jesus Christ is the evidence of how loving and faithful God is; through Him the Word became flesh, and God's word became action.

Romans 5:8 declares that God did not just say He loved us, He proved it. "*But God* shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Isn't that beautiful? While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Think of it this way:

but God showed He loved us when we were unlovable.
but God showed He loved us when we ran from Him.
but God showed He loved us when we rejected Him.
but God showed He loved us when we trusted in things other than Him.

The list could go on and on, but the message is clear. *But God* showed His love for us, period. We did not deserve His love. We could not earn His love. He simply gave it. When you and I understand this reality, it is a game changer for our lives. When we realize who we are and what we deserve apart from Jesus, we are forever humbled and grateful for

the words *but God*. Because of those two words, we can never be the same. In light of this life-altering truth, read these words from the beloved hymn “The Love of God”:

*The love of God is greater far, than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell.*

*The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled and pardoned from his sin.¹*

Never forget, God did not just say He loves us, He proved it. He died for us and the only fitting response can be that we live for Him.

Day 7

But God raised Him from the dead.

—ACTS 13:30

There are so many important events in Jesus' life. Among them are the virgin birth, His sinless life, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. Honestly, each one of those events is crucial. If you were to remove any one of them, the validity of Christianity would crumble.

But the resurrection of Jesus is the capstone. As the apostle Paul wrote,

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ. . . . And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Cor. 15:14–15, 17–19)

Think of the power of these words: If Christ had not been raised from the dead, then we of all people are to be most pitied. I can't emphasize enough the importance of Jesus' resurrection. Without it we would still be dead in our sin and left without hope. The good news is, although Jesus died He did not stay dead, "*but God* raised Him from the dead" (Acts 13:30). The resurrection proved once and for all that sin and death do not have the final say. God does.

When Jesus walked on the earth, He was both loved and hated. Strangely, the people who hated Him most were the religious leaders. They did not like that He claimed to be the Messiah. He came into the world as a suffering servant instead of as the conquering king they wanted.

The religious leaders resented Jesus because they knew only God could forgive sins, and when Jesus declared that He forgave someone's sin, He was asserting His divinity, that He *was* God. But as much as they hated Him, they could not deny His incredible power. He was healing the sick, driving out demons, and raising the dead. With every miracle Jesus performed, the religious leaders hated Him even more.

They believed that the only way to get rid of Jesus was to kill Him, so they had Him arrested, falsely accused, and sentenced to death on a cross. But this was all part of God's redemptive plan. Jesus' life was not taken; it was laid down, and it was laid down because God so loved the world, even those who plotted against Him.

The religious leaders thought they had won.

“But God raised Him from the dead.” Three days later, the greatest miracle of all time happened, showing that Christ was indeed the King of kings and Lord of lords. A declaration once and for all that God has the final word over death and the grave and over every single thing in this life and eternity. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25–26). Jesus is the only way. He is the embodiment of God’s promise fulfilled. He is the hope for yesterday, today, and forever. He is #butGod!

Songs That Have Inspired Us Along the Way

“Battle Belongs,” Phil Wickham
“Because He Lives,” Carrie Underwood
“Christ Be Magnified,” Cody Carnes
“Even If,” Kutless
“Even If,” MercyMe
“God of Miracles,” Chris McClarney
“God of Revival,” Phil Wickham
“God’s Not Done with You,” Tauren Wells
“Goodness of God,” Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson
“Here Again,” Elevation Worship
“His Name is Jesus,” Phil Wickham
“Homesick,” MercyMe
“How Great Thou Art,” Carrie Underwood
“Resurrecting,” Elevation Worship
“The Reason for the World,” Matthew West
“Until Grace,” Tauren Wells
“Way Maker,” Leeland
“We Praise You,” Bethel Music, Brandon Lake
“Worthy of Your Name,” Passion Worship, Sean Curran