

Detours

LESSONS FROM JOSEPH

The Unpredictable Path
to Your Destiny

TONY EVANS

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About the Author

DR. TONY EVANS is one of America's most respected leaders in evangelical circles. He is a pastor, a best-selling author, and a frequent speaker at Bible conferences and seminars throughout the nation.

Dr. Evans has served as the senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship for more than 35 years, witnessing its growth from 10 people in 1976 to more than 9,000 congregants with more than one hundred ministries.

Dr. Evans also serves as the president of The Urban Alternative, a national ministry that seeks to bring about spiritual renewal in America through the church. His daily radio broadcast, "The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans," can be heard on nearly one thousand radio outlets throughout the United States and in more than one hundred countries.

Dr. Evans has authored more than 50 books, including *Oneness Embraced*, *The Kingdom Agenda*, *Marriage Matters*, *Kingdom Man*, *Victory in Spiritual Warfare*, *The Power of God's Names*, *God's Unlikely Path to Success*, and *Horizontal Jesus*. Dr. Evans, a former chaplain for the NFL Dallas Cowboys, is currently the chaplain for the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, a team he has served for more than 30 years.

Through his local church and national ministry, Dr. Evans has set in motion a kingdom-agenda philosophy of ministry that teaches God's comprehensive rule over every area of life, as demonstrated through the individual, family, church, and society.

Dr. Evans is married to Lois, his wife and ministry partner of more than 40 years. They are the proud parents of four—Chrystal, Priscilla, Anthony Jr., and Jonathan.

Introduction

I don't know about you, but I like to get to where I am going without any detours. When I take a long road trip with the family, I won't even stop for normal things like food and bathroom breaks, unless my family insists. So you can imagine how I feel about a detour. It's not good. I sigh. I moan. I wonder why on earth did this have to happen to me right now.

Few of us like to be stalled, for any reason. But detours are necessary if any improvement is going to be made on the paths we travel, or if any wreck is going to be cleaned up or hazard avoided. Detours are designed for our own good, regardless of how we view or feel about them. Detours are a good thing that often feel bad.

As people, we like to plan. We make our itineraries when we travel. Or we keep a log of our schedule on a calendar app. We appreciate the efficiency of moving forward steadily. We would never plan chaos and detours into our lives on purpose. And yet that seems to be God's *modus operandi*—His go-to mode for guiding us.

Rarely does God ever take someone to the destiny He has for them without taking them on a detour, or two or ten, or even a hundred.

Not too long ago, one of the men from the church came over to my home to meet with me. He had been going through a rough time. As he sat in my family room, head hung low, he lifted his eyes to mine and said, "Pastor, I feel as if my detour has met another detour and they got married and had a baby detour." In other words, he felt as he were running into detour after detour after detour and that the detours merely kept replicating and multiplying rather than taking him anywhere meaningful.

God will take us on a detour because He is constructing something in our lives as well. Granted, detours are anything but convenient. They take you out of the way. They are longer than you originally had planned to travel. But they are necessary. God is more interested in your development than your arrival. He cares more for your character than your comfort, more for your purity than your productivity.

How we view our detours will often determine how useful they wind up being. Which is why we are going to spend the next few weeks examining the purpose, power, and perfection of the detours God both uses and allows in our lives.

How to Get the Most From this Study

This Bible study book includes six weeks of content for group and personal study.

Group Sessions

Regardless of what day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with the group session. Each group session uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members, with God's Word, and with the teaching of Dr. Evans.

START This page includes questions to get the conversation started and to introduce the video segment.

WATCH This page includes key points from Dr. Evans's teaching, along with blanks for taking notes as participants watch the video.

RESPOND This page includes questions and statements that guide the group to respond to Dr. Evans's video teaching and to relevant Bible passages.

Personal Study

Each week provides five days of Bible study and learning activities for individual engagement between group sessions. The personal study revisits stories, Scriptures, and themes Dr. Evans introduced in the videos so that participants can understand and apply them on a personal level. The days are numbered 1–5 to provide personal reading and activities for each day of the week, leaving two days off to worship with your church family and to meet as a small group. If your group meets on the same day as your worship gathering, use the extra day to reflect on what God is teaching you and to practice putting the biblical principles into action.

Tips For Leading a Small Group

Prayerfully Prepare

Prepare for each meeting by—

REVIEWING the weekly material and group questions ahead of time;
PRAYING for each person in the group.

Ask the Holy Spirit to work through you and the group discussion as you point to Jesus each week through God's Word.

Minimize Distractions

Create a comfortable environment. If group members are uncomfortable, they'll be distracted and therefore not engaged in the group experience. Plan ahead by taking into consideration—

SEATING;
TEMPERATURE;
LIGHTING;
FOOD OR DRINK;
SURROUNDING NOISE;
GENERAL CLEANLINESS

(put away pets if meeting in a home).

At best, thoughtfulness and hospitality show guests and group members they're welcome and valued in whatever environment you choose to gather. At worst, people may never notice your effort, but they're also not distracted. Do everything in your ability to help people focus on what's most important: connecting with God, with the Bible, and with one another.

Detours

Include Others

Your goal is to foster a community in which people are welcome just as they are but encouraged to grow spiritually. Always be aware of opportunities to—

INCLUDE any people who visit the group;

INVITE new people to join your group.

An inexpensive way to make first-time guests feel welcome or to invite someone to get involved is to give them their own copies of this Bible study book.

Encourage Discussion

A good small-group experience has the following characteristics.

EVERYONE PARTICIPATES. Encourage everyone to ask questions, share responses, or read aloud.

NO ONE DOMINATES—NOT EVEN THE LEADER. Be sure that your time speaking as a leader takes up less than half of your time together as a group. Politely guide discussion if anyone dominates.

NOBODY IS RUSHED THROUGH QUESTIONS. Don't feel that a moment of silence is a bad thing. People often need time to think about their responses to questions they've just heard or to gain courage to share what God is stirring in their hearts.

INPUT IS AFFIRMED AND FOLLOWED UP. Make sure you point out something true or helpful in a response. Don't just move on. Build community with follow-up questions, asking how other people have experienced similar things or how a truth has shaped their understanding of God and the scripture you're studying. People are less likely to speak up if they fear that you don't actually want to hear their answers or that you're looking for only a certain answer.

GOD AND HIS WORD ARE CENTRAL. Opinions and experiences can be helpful, but God has given us the truth. Trust God's Word to be the authority and God's Spirit to work in people's lives. You can't change anyone, but God can. Continually point people to the Word and to active steps of faith.

Keep Connecting

Think of ways to connect with group members during the week. Participation during the group session is always improved when members spend time connecting with one another outside the group sessions. The more people are comfortable with and involved in one another's lives, the more they'll look forward to being together. When people move beyond being friendly to truly being friends who form a community, they come to each session eager to engage instead of merely attending.

Encourage group members with thoughts, commitments, or questions from the session by connecting through—

**EMAILS;
TEXTS;
SOCIAL MEDIA.**

When possible, build deeper friendships by planning or spontaneously inviting group members to join you outside your regularly scheduled group time for—

**MEALS;
FUN ACTIVITIES;
PROJECTS AROUND YOUR HOME, CHURCH, OR COMMUNITY..**

Week 1

THE PURPOSE OF
DETOURS

Start

Welcome to session 1 of Detours. Begin by taking a few minutes to be sure everyone knows one another, especially if this is your first time meeting as a group.

When has your life been going one direction and then something happened to make it change course?

When a detour occurs in your life, how have you generally reacted toward it?

Dr. Evans describes a detour as an unexpected shift in the route we were trying to travel. We often think of detours that happen when we are in our cars, but Dr. Evans will explore the detours of our lives and how the Lord sends them and uses them to draw us closer to Him.

Before we learn what Dr. Evans has to teach us about detours, would somebody pray for our time together, asking the Lord to open our hearts and minds to His Word as we begin this study?

Detours

Watch

Complete this viewer guide as you watch the video for session 1.

A _____ is an unplanned, often unexpected, _____ in the route we were taking to get to where we were trying to go.

Detours are determined by:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Your destiny is your divinely-designed _____.

Joseph was given the position of the _____.

Why does God not take us on a direct route from where we are to where He wants us to be?

1. To _____ us

A _____ in the Bible is an _____ that God causes or allows to take place in our lives to bring us to the next level of _____.

2. To _____ us

Detours have a way of _____ you to things that you were unaware of previously for the purpose of _____ you.

3. To _____ us

In order for us to be tempted, it may come from Satan, but it must be _____ from God. _____ proves whether you are _____ for what God wants to give you.

Our destiny is all about keeping _____ with God.

Video sessions available at lifeway.com/Detours

Respond

Discuss the video with your group, using the questions below.

How do you think of detours when you encounter them while driving?

How do you normally feel when your plans run into detours?

Do you ever take into consideration the purpose of a detour? Does that influence how you respond or react to the detour?

Dr. Evans discussed three reasons why God uses detours. How have you seen these three reasons for detours brought about changes in your life?

Dr. Evans said, “A test in the Bible is an adverse circumstance that God causes or allows to take place in our lives to bring us to the next level of spiritual development.” How have you seen testing grow or change you spiritually?

Have you ever tried to refuse taking a detour? What happened as a result?

When you have been on a detour, what are some important lessons you learned along the way?

Share some biblical examples of God leading someone in a “roundabout way” toward an intended destination.

What are some emotions you commonly feel when you’re stuck taking long detours?

Read James 1:2-4. What does James say our perspective should be on “detours”?

Read week 1 and complete the activities before the next group session.

Positive Interruptions

When we get in our cars, we do so with a destination in mind. We plan to go somewhere. We typically know how we plan to get there, which highway we are going to take—even which streets we are going to turn onto in order to arrive at our destination.

And if we don't, we at least type in the destination address into our smartphone app and rely on an automated voice to guide us every step of the way.

Whether we are following our own mental map or the one in our phone, sometimes we run into a detour—some closed end that requires us to make a U-turn or go down a path we had not previously expected.

I don't know about you, but I like to get to where I am going without any detours. When I take a long road trip with the family, I won't even stop for normal things like food and bathroom breaks, unless my family insists, so you can imagine how I feel about a detour. It's not good. I sigh. I moan. I wonder why on earth did this have to happen to me right now.

Have you ever done something similar? You can admit it, too.

Few of us like to be stalled for any reason, even if it's just someone cutting us off in traffic and forcing us to slow down. But detours are necessary if any improvement is going to be made on the paths we travel or if any wreck is going to be cleaned up or hazard avoided. Detours are designed for our own good, regardless of how we view or feel about them.

They are a good thing that often feels bad.

Divinely designed detours in our lives are also positive interruptions designed to divert us to a better path so that we might have the opportunity to reach our destination well. What's more, they often provide the development we need in order to reach our destiny. How we view our detours will often determine how useful they wind up being, which is why we are going to spend the next few weeks examining the purpose, power, and perfection of the detours God both uses and allows in our lives.

Day 1

THE ROUNDABOUT WAY

Few of us like to be stalled for any reason, even if it's just someone cutting us off in traffic and forcing us to slow down. But detours are necessary if any improvement is going to be made on the paths we travel or if any wreck is going to be cleaned up or hazard avoided. Detours are designed for our own good, regardless of how we view or feel about them.

Detours are a good thing that often feel bad.

If you were to sit at a detour sign and stubbornly refuse to take the diversion, you would go nowhere. You would just sit there. For days. Possibly weeks sometimes. Yes, a detour may cause you to take longer than you had originally planned; however, it won't take any longer than if you were to try to push through it on your original path. That will get you nowhere.

Ultimately, while detours may feel like negative things, they are good things. They provide safety, opportunities for road improvement, and a different way to get you where you wanted to go. When viewed from a short-term perspective, they may not seem that good, but when you look at them from the overall long-term vantage point, they are always good. This is why your perspective toward personal detours matter and will influence the impact they have on your life. If you spend your time complaining rather than seeking to understand the purpose of detours, you will be less likely to benefit from them.

Share how you feel when you come across a detour while you are driving. Do you ever take into consideration the purpose of the detour, and does that influence your emotions at that moment?

In what ways might understanding that your personal detours have a purpose (as opposed to those you come upon while driving) affect the way you view them?

Detours

As people, we like to plan. We make our itineraries when we travel or keep a log of our schedule on a calendar app. We appreciate the efficiency of moving forward steadily. We would never plan chaos and detours into our lives on purpose. And yet that seems to be God's modus operandi—His go-to mode for guiding us. Rarely does God ever take someone to the destiny He has for them without taking them on a detour, or two or ten, or even a hundred. It is the one-in-a-million Christian who gets to go from point A to B to C and straight on to Z. Most often God takes you from A to F to D to R to B to Q and so on. You never know which letter He is pulling out next, either.

Read Exodus 13:17,18. Why did God not allow the Israelites fleeing Egypt to take the shortest, straightest path?

The New Living Translation records Exodus 13:18 like this, “So God led them in a roundabout way through the wilderness toward the Red Sea.” Give another biblical example of God leading someone in a “roundabout way” toward the intended destination.

Share a personal example of how God led you in a “roundabout way” toward a desired goal. What are some important lessons you learned on the path?

God has a plan for you. He has a plan for your life. He has a purpose for your existence. The reason why you were not taken to heaven the moment after you were converted is because you have a purpose on earth He desires you to live out. Your destiny is not just to go through the motions day in and day out. It is a God-designed stamp on your soul that involves the use of your time, talents and treasures for His glory, for good, and for the advancement of His kingdom.

The Purpose of Detours

Yet, the development of your talents, the increase in your treasures, and the wisdom you acquire doesn't always come quickly. Just as an Olympic athlete must train day in and day out in order to prepare himself or herself for the race, or event, we are on a path to destiny that requires development.

Read Habakkuk 2:3. What are we to do when what we have been shown or guided to do faces a delay?

Is God mean to make us wait? Why or why not?

List three benefits you can gain from delays in reaching your destiny or purpose in life.

1.

2.

3.

God is a loving Father. His heart desires for you to be all that you can and should be. But just as any parent would not put their five-year-old child in high school, God knows that we require time and lessons to develop us to reach our destiny.

Thus, part of experiencing the fullness of your destiny simply comes in understanding your detours.

Far too often, we fail to understand our detours, and as a result, we wind up viewing them in a wrong light. When this happens, we give room for things like impatience, bitterness, regret, and doubt to grow. Rather than allowing the detours to produce the development we need, they actually set us back spiritually, setting us up with a need for more detours in order to grow. It can become a vicious cycle.

Detours

What are some common emotions and reactions we feel when our “plans” run into a detour?

Read Psalm 37:5. What does it mean to “commit your way to the LORD”? Can you simultaneously hold on to “your way” and “commit” it to God? Why or why not?

What are the benefits of committing your life path to God and trusting in Him? Also read Proverbs 16:3.

If you’ve never made the connection between your detours and your destiny, will you take some time to intentionally look at your detours in this light? It might be helpful to rehearse past detours in your life by writing in a journal or on a notes app and recording how these detours were used to get you where you are today.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for these lessons on detours and how You use them to positively impact my life. Please open my eyes to see how You have done this in my past and even how You are presently doing this in the circumstances and situations I face. I want to approach life’s detours in a mature manner so that I don’t cause additional delays. Increase my wisdom, patience, and insight so that I can. In Christ’s name, amen.

Day 2

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPMENT

When you were in school you had to take regular tests. These tests let the teacher know where you stood on the material you needed to learn. If you didn't pass those tests, then more assignments and more tests would have needed to be given.

Have you ever known someone who “tested out” of a class or an assignment? Have you ever done this? What enables a person to “test out” of a class or assignment?

What prevents someone from testing out of a class or assignment?

God is not going to bring you to the fruition of your destiny until He knows you are able to handle it spiritually, emotionally, physically, and the like. If you cannot handle it, you will lose it rather than use it for His glory. That is why He focuses so intently on our development as He takes us to our destiny.

The timing and length of our detours in life are often dependent upon our personal choices and growth. God may have a short detour planned for us, but we make it longer through our hard headedness, stubbornness, resentment, or immaturity and doubt.

What things can make a detour longer? Have any of these things ever made your detour, and what did you learn from that experience?

For those of you who work out, did you know that your muscles change almost immediately after a strength training session? The process called protein synthesis

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occurs anywhere from two to four hours after exercising. This is how the muscles grow stronger and bigger. Even though it happens so quickly after strength training, it is typically four to six weeks before noticeable muscle changes are seen by others.

Have you ever started an exercise regime only to quit it because you did not see any results? If so, how long after starting did you quit?

Why is it important to continue exercising even when you do not see immediate results?

How can we apply this physical lesson to our spiritual and personal lives with regard to the development we are experiencing in our detours?

Can you list three practical ways to remind yourself to keep going in those times when you do not see any results? Be sure to use scriptural truth to back up these reminders when possible.

1.

2.

3.

Moses was on a detour for forty years. He knew what God wanted him to do. God wanted him to deliver His people from slavery. Yet it took forty years in the wilderness to develop Moses into the humble and trusting servant that he needed to be in order to have the mindset, faith, and abilities to carry out the plan.

The Purpose of Detours

Abraham was on a twenty-five-year detour. At one point God had told him His plan for him—that He would bless nations through Abraham and make his name great. The vision and the proclamation from God to Abraham were real and vivid. It would have been odd for Abraham to believe at that point that it would be nearly three decades before he would witness the literal birth of it. But it was.

The greatest apostle in the New Testament, Paul, went on a three-year detour to a desert where God removed him from the front page of culture and life in order to strengthen him, teach him, and develop him for his calling.

Detours are often a regular part of God's plan in guiding us to our destinies. God will often give us a glimpse of our destiny long before we are prepared to actualize it, as He did when He told Abraham that there would be a 400-year detour in Egypt before they would reach their promised destination (Gen. 15:12-16).

Read Acts 24:24-27. In your own words, describe the situation that Paul faced.

How might Paul have felt, languishing in jail for so long?

Do delays always come with a ready explanation? Why or why not?

Read Psalm 62:1 and Psalm 69:3. List some common emotions that come when we are waiting on God, stuck in a detour we do not understand.

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What are some common feelings experienced when someone exercises longer than they want to or more frequently than they want to due to doctor's orders, the encouragement of others, or even personal willpower?

Share some approaches to overcoming the desire to give up when negative emotions appear and to push through even when results are not readily apparent.

Have you ever had to do this in your own life? Describe the situation and the ultimate result.

Development is not an event. Neither is it a one-size-fits-all experience.

Development takes time, tests, failure, and overcoming. God knows each one of us individually. He knows what we each need in order to develop and strengthen our spiritual muscles and sharpen our spiritual insight and wisdom. More often than not, this requires detours in life to allow us the opportunity to learn, grow, and develop.

God has a destiny for you. He has a purpose and a plan that He wants you to live out. But it may not happen tomorrow. You probably won't get there by going in a straight line. Patience is a preeminent virtue needed in order to reach your destiny.

Read Romans 5:3-5 out loud. Substitute the word "detours" for the word "tribulation" or "affliction."

Hope does not disappoint. Detours disappoint, momentarily. But when we allow them to produce hope, God promises that hope will not disappoint. But in order to arrive at an authentic hope in your spirit, accepting your detours is necessary.

The Purpose of Detours

Just like your muscles will not grow simply by wishing them to grow stronger, neither will your hope. The process of strengthening your hope comes by detours, tribulations, afflictions, and trials.

Show me someone with an indomitable hope, and I will show you someone who has had his or her share of detours. This is because authentic hope is a learned trait. Authentic hope is that level of hope which stays steady despite the storm and circumstances. It is the hope that enables you to keep going on faith alone.

Prayer

Loving Heavenly Father, thank You for your gift of detours. Thank You for loving me enough to want me to grow, develop, and mature. Thank You for not giving me my destiny or dream too soon, before I am able to handle it because then, Lord, I may waste it, lose it, or even ruin it. God, You know what is best. And You are a gracious Lord to patiently develop me to reach that place of ultimate purpose and destiny. I am thanking You in advance for all You have in mind. In Christ's name, amen.

Day 3

INTRODUCING JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

The eleventh son of Jacob, we discover Joseph as a teenager in a very dysfunctional home. His father was a deceiver and a trickster. He was a manipulator by trade. One of the more infamous deceptions he is known for is tricking his father into giving him the birthright that was due to his older brother.

Jacob had twelve sons by four different women, which explain a lot of the dysfunction right there. In the midst of baby-mama-drama, the children grew up to create their own form of chaos. One of the sons, Reuben, had sex with one of his father's concubines. When Jacob found out about it—which he did—you could imagine what happened. Reality TV has nothing on Joseph's family. You may be able to keep up with the Kardashians in our world today, but I doubt anyone could keep up with Joseph and his brothers.

Two of Joseph's brothers, Simeon and Levi, were mass murderers. In Genesis 34:25 we read, "Now it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city unawares, and killed every male." Not surprisingly, these two brothers set up the township for murder through deception. They talked the entire town into getting circumcised and then brutally murdered them while they were healing and unable to fight back.

Then there was Joseph's brother Judah who had sexual relations with his daughter-in-law. Holidays in Joseph's home would have been, no doubt, a disaster. This was one messed up family. If we were looking for a home out of which to pick the future savior of an entire nation, and even the known world to a large degree, from starvation by famine, it is doubtful we would have landed on Jacob and his twelve sons. How could anything good come out of such mess?

Add on top of already volatile emotions the dynamics of favoritism and you have a concoction worthy of a witch's brew. In Genesis 37:3 we find just that, "Now Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic." This is the verse where we are introduced to the famous "coat of many colors" which Jacob gave to his son, Joseph, sparking a fury of jealousy in the family.

The Purpose of Detours

Despite Joseph’s messed up background and volatile history, God went on to use him in a position of great influence and respect. Describe how this makes you feel, and why it is important to recognize this aspect of Joseph’s life.

What are some meanings that Joseph’s “coat of many colors” might have given to his other family members and community members nearby?

Based on Genesis 37:3, why did Joseph’s father love him more than the others? In what way did the fact that Joseph’s mother was Rachel play into this favoritism?

Have you ever been the “favored one” or known someone who was the “favored one”? How does this reality impact other people’s perceptions of and interactions with the so-called “favored one”?

Scripture pulls no punches in telling us how Joseph being the “favored one” made his brothers feel. We read, “His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms,” (Gen. 37:4). Joseph’s brothers hated him so much they couldn’t even talk to him right.

Add to this storm the lightning and thunder of a dream and you have a recipe for murder. Shortly after getting the robe, Joseph had a dream in which he saw his brothers bowing down to him as sheaves of grain. At the tender age of seventeen, Joseph didn’t have the wisdom to keep that type of dream to himself. So when he told his brothers about what he saw, they mocked him and said, “Are you actually

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going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?' So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words," (v. 8).

They already hated him just because of the coat of many colors. Pile the dream on top of that and they "hated him even more." Not only that, in verse 9 we discover Joseph had another dream. This time the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him. When he told his father about this dream, his father rebuked him for thinking that they would one day bow down to him. Joseph's dreams had even gone so far as to offend the one who loved him most. You can imagine what that did to his brothers.

Is it always wise to share your dreams and visions with others? Why or why not?

When might it be wise to keep your dreams to yourself or to a select few trusted friends or relatives?

What are some reactions you have seen or possibly given when someone shared a dream with you that seemed "unlikely" or "impossible"?

Wisdom is the ability to know when and what to share. Just because the Lord lays something on your heart doesn't mean you have to tell it to everyone. Joseph did not know this truth early on, and it cost him a lot. He wound up being left in a pit and later sold as a slave. Joseph still needed to be developed before the essence of his dream and vision could come true.

I know so many of us have dreams of shiny lives and magnificent futures—love like in the movies and careers that satisfy us while affording us our greatest desires. Yet God says, "I can't put you where you need to be until I clean you up first." He cannot give us our destiny if we will not allow Him to shape our character, to deal with our sins, flaws, fears, doubt, and immaturity. Until God is free to produce and promote righteousness within us, He is not free to move us to our intended

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destination. We have to take a detour first, second, third, and so on until we have been developed enough to handle what He has in store.

So few Christians understand that. If we could only grasp this truth and reality, it would make the way we view and go through trials entirely different. If we could see the purpose through the pain, we would bear up under it with a great deal more dignity. Because we don't, we often wind up like Joseph—learning lessons of loss, lust, and lies over and over and over ad nauseum.

When you look at where you are now emotionally, spiritually, and so on, what areas do you see where you still need to develop before being able to fully live out your destiny?

Read James 1:2-4. What is the purpose of detours (trials, testing)?

How does the purpose listed in James 1:2-4 differ from your viewpoint about trials, testing, or detours? In what ways does it align?

How can you help someone else who is going through a detour or trial understand this important truth without coming across as being “preachy” or “meddling”?

I can't imagine the pain God bears in witnessing our pain, especially when we can't understand what He is doing. When we blame Him, yell at Him, ignore Him, become bitter toward Him, and all along, He knows what He is allowing is for our good, His glory, and the benefit of those we love. He takes our punches and defends our blows because He knows that some day we will recognize His hand of kindness and direction, and thank Him.

Detours

You may be in a bad place right now. You may be in a pit like Joseph, without water, food, or fellowship. You may feel like you are the only one in a perfect storm designed specifically to take you down. But I want to speak to you in the middle of your detour. I want to ask you to make yourself available to God in whatever form or fashion He chooses. If you do, you will one day discover His divine providence in using the pain to strengthen your spirit and to deliver you from that pit or storm to that perfect place that is waiting for you.

God has a plan for you. Try not to fight the detours that are designed to take you to its culmination. Praise Him in the pain, even if it is just a faint word that falls off your parched lips. He knows what He is doing. He has great things up ahead for you.

Prayer

Dear Lord, I give You permission to develop me in order to prepare me for my destiny. I understand that this will require tests, trials, and detours along the way. I only ask that You make Yourself present to me in every way, reminding me along the way that You have a purpose to the pain and a greater good in mind. Make me into the person You most desire and allow me to serve You in ways I have previously only yet dreamed. In Christ's name, amen.

Day 4

THE LORD WAS WITH JOSEPH

When you fill a sponge full of water and then you squeeze the sponge, water is going to come out of it because it is full of water. When you are going through a trial and you feel the pressure of life caving in around you, how much of God comes out? Or is it cussing, fussing, complaining, and blaming that comes out instead? Why are those things coming out? Because that is what you are full of. A sponge only lets out what is in it.

Most people fill themselves with entertainment, alcohol, gossip, distractions, bitterness, and things of that nature when life is not fair. But in order to have your detour fulfill its purpose of taking you to your destiny, you have to draw near to God so that God will also be near to, and in, you.

The key to making it through your season of testing is not found in your contacts, notoriety, name, or bank account. The key is found in your intimacy with the Lord.

As we look more deeply at the life of Joseph, we discover that the Lord was with Joseph through the difficult times, even if it may not have appeared to be so at that time.

Read Genesis 37:21,22. In what way was God with Joseph when he was in the pit?

Read Genesis 37:26-28. How was God with Joseph in having him be sold to slave traders? In what way would this seemingly negative reality later prove to be a positive life detour?

Read Genesis 37:36. Why is it important to note that Joseph was sold to the “captain of the guard”? In what way does this indicate that God was with Joseph at this time as well?

Detours

When Joseph was in the pit, God sovereignly guided his every step, using the difficult detour to ultimately get Joseph in a position where he would one day rise to prominence. Not only that, but once Joseph arrived in Egypt, God was able to give Joseph favor in his position as a slave, and even later in prison. God was able to cause Joseph's hand to prosper and let other people give Joseph authority because God was with Joseph during the detours. What's more, Joseph was with God. We do not read of Joseph complaining, whining, or doubting what God had told him despite his dire situation.

Read Genesis 39:2-6.

The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD's blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.

Also read Genesis 39:21-23:

But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it. The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.

The Purpose of Detours

Describe what you think it means when it says that the “LORD was with Joseph”?

Because the “LORD was with Joseph,” what were some of the things the people in authority over Joseph gave to him?

**Have you ever experienced favor in your life from someone in authority?
Do you recognize God's hand in giving you this favor?**

What did God give Joseph and do for him on his detour in Potiphar's house and in the prison?

In what ways has God prospered you while you have been on what seems to be a “detour” in your life?

Do you recognize a pattern of your trust in Him and His hand of favor and prosperity in your difficult situations?

**Are there areas in your life right now where you need to trust God more?
What practical steps can you take to do this?**

Detours

One of the purposes of detours is to develop you to have the capacity, skills, and character you need to carry out your destiny. While Joseph was a slave in Potiphar's home, the Lord prospered him so that he became second in command in Potiphar's home. Little did he know that one day he would become second in command of the entire nation of Egypt. God was preparing Joseph with the skills necessary to both follow and lead simultaneously.

Joseph did not have the details of his destiny, but his obedience in his detours and his aim for excellence in all he did gave him the opportunity to learn skills he would use later on as a ruler.

Joseph acquired experience in leadership, management, handling staff, dealing with problems, and more. One of the problems we have today in our culture is that people want what they want right now. What we don't realize is that if you can't handle where you are now, how will you handle more responsibility later?

Read Jeremiah 12:5. How important is development of skills, character, mindsets and all else before being promoted to your destiny?

Who among your friends or family has gone through development when they felt they were on a detour but later came to discover how that played into their future destiny? Can you share about their experience and what encouragement it ought to give to yourself and others?

Look back at your last few years, or even a decade, and see if you can discern a pattern of God developing certain skills, character qualities, leadership abilities, and more in your life.

The Purpose of Detours

List three of these and share how God has used them to take you to your next level, or how you think He may want to in the future. Do any of them surprise you?

1.

2.

3.

Training for greater things always takes place in lesser things. Be faithful and responsible and content where you are now. That is one of the major secrets to God taking you further and giving you more.

God is not ready to give you your destiny until you can handle where you are now. How can you take care of your destiny there if you are not yet taking care of the destiny He has you in right here? You have to get enough experience first with the “this” you are in now before He gives you the “that” you are hoping for.

As a believer, you should be the best employee, the most on-time employee, the most productive employee because the Lord is with you. Translate that into any area—to be the best volunteer, spouse, parent, friend, etc. Your relationship with God should bring favor to those around you due to your integrity, honesty, morality—not theirs. You should stand out as Joseph stood out—wherever you are.

Prayer

Lord, I want You with me. I want You to show up in all that I do. Give me Your favor and develop a heart that seeks You first in everything. Help me live closely related to You, so much so that other people can't help but recognize it. Even in my detour, God, I want to glorify You. In Christ's name, amen.

Detours

Day 5

WHAT DETOURS ARE

Let's take a moment to review what we've covered this week. First, we looked at what detours are. We also looked at how they may feel like a negative thing we don't want, but if we look at them through the lens of God's purpose, we can discover they are good after all.

Next, we talked about the importance of development on the path to our destiny. We looked at a few biblical people who experienced significant detours such as Moses, Abraham, and Paul. Then we went deeper into the life of Joseph on Day Three. Since Joseph serves as the basis for our study on detours, we started his story at the beginning where we found him in a very dysfunctional family.

Yesterday, we introduced the concept of sovereignty—a concept we will look at in greater detail later on. We examined how even in those times that it didn't appear that God was with Joseph that He was, in fact, working things out to accomplish His intended purpose. And later, as Joseph inched closer to his destiny, we saw how God brought favor, authority, and prosperity to Joseph in the midst of his being in positions of servitude and slavery.

Today, as we conclude our time looking at the purpose of our detours, I want to add a few more important things. One of them is something we touched on briefly before—that is God using Joseph's detour to literally take him someplace he didn't plan to go.

Sometimes detours God will use detours to re-route us to an entirely new location that we wouldn't have even thought of going to ourselves. Yes, it would be nice if God simply spoke to us like He did Abraham and tell us to go to a land unknown. It would also be nice if we would have the courage to respond as Abraham did. But far too often we either fail to hear, or if we do hear, we fail to follow because it just doesn't make sense. So God ties us up, as He did Joseph behind some camels, and He finds a way to get us there anyhow.

The problem comes if you or I only see the camels. The frustration happens if you or I only see the ropes. If we only feel the hot sun or the hunger and emptiness night after night and miss seeing what God is doing—we will miss the divine purpose of the detour.

God allows people to move us, shape us, and take us to our next step on the path He wants us to travel. So never think that just because it's people you see that it isn't God directing behind the scenes. God will often use people—even

people in your family, even messed up people in your family—to move you to your destiny through a detour.

Read 2 Kings 6:15-18. In what way was God working behind the scenes to bring about His ultimate good in this situation?

Name or describe a time in your life, or someone's you know, where God was arranging things behind the scenes to usher in the next scenario.

Read 2 Kings 8:1-6. Describe the critical nature of “timing” in how God brought about a positive solution to this woman's dilemma. Why is it important to wait on God's perfect timing?

Timing matters—which is how it always is with God. It's a matter of timing. It's a matter of Him setting up the intersections of life so that when you get there, the people you are connecting with are ready for you. And, even more importantly, you are ready to handle what has been given to you as well.

Is there something you are waiting on that God has put in your heart? Describe how you feel about the wait and how a perspective on God's perfect timing helps you to wait with expectation.

Detours

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1. What does this verse tell you about life's ebbs and flows and the purpose of our detours?

It's easy to worship God and surrender to Him when all is well and life doesn't seem to have any detours, isn't it? It's not easy when you are in a jail, like Joseph wound up in. But for us, jails come in all shapes and sizes. It may be an emotional jail. A relational jail—like a relationship you wish you were never in but have no way out of, or a relationship you wish you had but are, at the moment, alone. Your jail could one of finances or health or even your job.

Are you in a holding pattern emotionally, relationally, career-wise, or in any other way? In what way does this impact your worship of God?

Take some time to identify ways you can improve your relationship with God in the midst of your detours and disappointments.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I am choosing to humble myself before You as I discover Your purposes for detours in my life. Help me to open my mind and my heart to learn about Your ways and reasons for allowing things in me and to me. Use this Bible study as a time to develop me spiritually so that I become more and more like Your Son, Jesus Christ, in my attitudes and in my character. In Christ's name, amen.
