

Perfect Timing

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[0:00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweep from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. And as always, if you'd like to learn a little more about us, you can go to FCCgreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, we are excited today to get into the Word of God, but most of all, let the Word of God get into us. We are in our series called Living the Dream. This is the sixth week, and today's message is called Perfect Times.

So let's go ahead and jump into the message. Now, I want to take you back 19 years. I was an intern here at First Christian under Pastor Danny.

I had just graduated from Bible College and was excited to learn from the FCC staff before I would jump into my first full-time lead pastor role.

And while the ministry training was great, the best part that came out of that time was a certain young lady. See, I had gone through four years of Bible College without meeting, quote-unquote, the one.

[1:05] And if you know the Bible College culture, there's a lot of girls that get their MRS degree. There's even a joke where incoming freshmen are told, ring by spring or your money back.

But I'll tell you, I just wasn't impressed with the crop at St. Louis Christian College, if you know what I mean. So I came back home to Greensburg after graduating, and honestly, I was acting pretty desperate.

If a girl was attractive and a Christian, I was like, wow, she must be the one. And finally, after trying to force a couple relationships that just were not from God, I came to my senses.

I cried out to him, okay, God, I'm done trying to force this. I'm just going to pursue your heart, follow your lead. And if you have someone for me, I'll wait until that time.

And you know what? I think that was exactly what God needed from me. Because within two or three months, one Friday night, shortly before Christmas, I went over to Mitch and Courtney Sefton's home.

[2:14] Mitch is now our youth pastor here at the church. But we had become good friends during my first internship, and they had just gotten married that previous summer. And the plan was for Mitch and I to go to a Greensburg basketball game.

What I didn't realize is that Courtney would have her lifelong best friend also at the house. And I also didn't gather that we were being set up. See, Mitch would later say that they just wanted two of their best friends to be together so that we could all hang out.

Well, after the game, I came back to the house, and conveniently, there we were, the four of us. Mitch and Courtney had devised this plan without Bethany or I knowing about it.

And they also conveniently decided to go to McDonald's and leave the two of us there to talk. Well, the rest is history. She fell in love with the Irish stallion.

And now, 18 years and three ornery kids later, God's grace has guided every single step. Perfect timing.

[3:18] So here we are, already in the sixth week of our series over the life of Old Testament Joseph. Just in case you've not been with us, let me paint a quick picture for you of where we've been in this true story.

See, Joseph was the 11th son and the baby of the family to Jacob, a.k.a. Israel. And to put it mildly, there was some generational dysfunction.

Joseph was clearly Daddy's favorite, born to Rachel, strutting around in the amazing Technicolor dreamcoat, spewing dreams about ruling over his older brothers.

And while there was some real favoritism from Daddy, there was even more envy and hatred from the older brothers. That led them to take his coat, throw him in a cistern, pull him back out, sell him into slavery, and lie that he had been killed by a ferocious animal.

But the Lord was with him. And as Joseph pursued the heart of God, he was blessed in everything he did. A slave to Potiphar, one of the most powerful men in Egypt, he quickly rose through the ranks to be put in charge of everything in Potiphar's house.

[4 : 33] His master was clearly impressed. And guess what? So was his wife. To keep it G-rated, she pursued Joseph. And yet he would not disrespect his God or his earthly master.

So she lied about him. He's thrown into prison. And once again, he rises through the ranks. He is put in charge of everything in the prison.

Basically, a volunteer warden. And it's running better than it ever has. Then, after years of integrity and godly character, in comes the cupbearer and the baker for Pharaoh.

This is the most powerful man in Egypt. Probably the world. Both of these guys had a dream one night. And God gave Joseph the ability to interpret them.

Only by God's strength. Cupbearer, you'll be restored to your position. Baker, you're in big trouble, dude. And you're going to die. And both of those things came true, just as he said.

[5 : 33] But the cupbearer didn't remember Joseph and didn't tell Pharaoh anything about this Hebrew man. So for two more years, he sat in prison.

Until God's perfect timing. So, grab your Bible. And let's go ahead and turn to the very first book of your Bible, Genesis chapter 41.

Genesis chapter 41. And as you're getting to that first verse in Genesis 41, Let me remind you of last week's message that Joseph's life had to feel like a series of not-agains.

From daddy's favor to then slavery. From slavery to property manager. From property manager to prisoner. From prisoner to volunteer warden. And then forgotten for two more years.

Not again. And while the journey can be hard, we know that. But God's timing is always perfect for those who love him.

[6 : 36] For those who serve him. Now let's start here in Genesis 41, verse 1. And let's look at how God is always moving, even when we don't see it, to bring about his perfect will.

And I just want you to stick with me. Because we're going to read these first 14 verses. Because I want you to see and hear this story. Okay? So picture it as I'm reading it.

Here's what it says. When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream. He was standing by the Nile, one of the largest rivers in the world.

When out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank.

And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up. Wow. Man, that's quite a dream. I don't know what the guy ate, but wow.

[7 : 38] Okay. Then, verse 5, he fell asleep again and had a second dream. Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk.

After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted thin and scorched by the east wind. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up.

It had been a dream. Verse 8, In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

Now, let me stop right there. So, their magicians, their wise men, they were known to interpret dreams. Dreams were a really big deal to the Egyptian culture. And so, these guys did this all the time.

But whether they could not interpret it or whether the interpretation they gave to Pharaoh just did not satisfy him, we know that he's not happy about it.

[8 : 38] Okay? And then look at verse 9. Here's where God starts to show up in a big, big way. Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, Today I am reminded of my shortcomings.

Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.

Now, a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream.

And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us. I was restored to my position, and the other man was impaled. So Pharaoh, watch this, sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon, from the prison.

When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. Now, two big lessons I want us to get today, okay? When we get done listening to this, I hope we have more confidence in both of these things.

[9 : 45] Here's the first thing. Trust the Lord's timing. Trust his timing in your life. And I like how R.T. Kendall put it a way that I'd really never heard before.

He said, if God's time has not come, then our time has not come. If God's time has not come, then our time has not come. So what does that mean?

It means that God's timing is perfect, even when we don't understand, when we can't see the big picture. And if we try to force his hand and take the timing into our own control, what we're going to get is human results, not what the Lord would have for us.

And listen, wonderful, Bible-believing, Jesus-loving people do this all the time. And I know because I'm guilty too.

Now, last week I shared with you a little bit about our first ministry and just some of the unhealth that was there. And after being at the church for five or six years, I'll tell you, I was suffocating.

[10 : 51] The church was growing, good things were happening, but it wasn't healthy beneath the surface. And a church can only last so long when that's the case before it goes back to what it was before.

And literally, I mean, it felt like literally anyways, I was beating my head against the wall, trying to change the culture. I was also very inexperienced.

And I made my fair share of mistakes. I didn't always help the situation. And you know how when things are tough, we have the tendency as humans to want to run away? All of us do.

So I saw a church that was not far from Mattoon, Illinois, pretty far east, not far from the Indiana line, east-central Illinois, and they were looking for a lead pastor at the time.

I quietly threw out a resume to see what would happen, and they quickly responded. To make a long story short, we took a couple trips there, one to interview and see everything, the second to do a trial sermon.

[11 : 50] And all the while, I made it clear to them, hey, we are still praying whether this is what God wants. And they said, that's okay, just come and preach. So we did. They offered the position, and I'll tell you, they were amazing.

They treated us so good, and it would have been a great church family to be a part of. They're still doing great things. A community, honestly, that's very similar to rural Indiana that I love.

So we asked for a little time to pray, to seek the Lord's leading, and at the end of the day, God showed us this was not His will for us, because Bethany wasn't on board.

She didn't feel like we were supposed to leave at that time, and there were a few other things that just didn't feel right. And as a couple, you always have to be on the same page.

And I trust what God reveals to my wife, because she is a spiritual rock star. And what time has taught me is that I was simply hurt.

[12 : 49] I was in pain. I was struggling. I was trying to get out of Dodge. I was trying to escape. Instead, I needed to be patient. I needed to wait on the Lord. I needed to follow God's leading.

I needed to understand that He doesn't waste our pain or our hardships. So we stayed another two or three years at the church until God made it abundantly clear that He was releasing us.

And all of that has led us to right where we are right now at FCC. And we know we're right where God wants us to be. Now, do you remember in last week's message, it said that Joseph, after he interpreted the dreams for the cupbearer, all he asked for in return was that that guy tell Pharaoh what he had done for him.

And after studying this, looking at some good Bible scholars have said on this and that they've agreed on this, that most likely, we don't know for sure, but most likely, Joseph is doing what I did with that church in Illinois.

He didn't need to tell the cupbearer to remember him. He shouldn't have whined about his unfair plight either to him. It sure looks like he was trying to take control in that situation instead of trusting that God had the timing under control.

[14:05] See, the Lord had already given him these dreams. The Lord had already made a promise to him. But like us, he got impatient. He tried to force God's hand. He tried to jump into the equation when he wasn't really needed.

And did it work? Absolutely not. The cupbearer forgot him anyways for two years. And the big picture was that God wasn't ready. God was still molding and maturing Joseph because he wasn't ready for the task ahead.

He needed two more years of preparation as God was moving pieces in place, bringing about everything into alignment. By the way, if the cupbearer would have mentioned him right away, Pharaoh really didn't have a need at the time.

So it most likely would have done no good, fallen on deaf ears. But now two years later, Pharaoh's desperate. All his wise men can't interpret the dream that God had purposely given him.

And where he would have dismissed a Hebrew prisoner two years before, now he's willing to listen to a man who would have been viewed poorly in that culture. A Hebrew, a Hebrew, a man who had no way to get into Pharaoh's presence, is now the honored guest because of his gift that God has given him to interpret dreams.

[15:24] Now isn't God awesome? And does anyone listening to this right now think that God can still show up and do similar things in your life? Absolutely.

Absolutely. And Isaiah 55 teaches us a powerful truth. It says that it teaches us that God is God and I am not. One of the most powerful things you can learn in your life that will be so helpful.

God is God and I am not. His timing is perfect and mine will mess everything up. So here's what the Lord says in Isaiah 55, 8 and 9. For my thoughts are not your thoughts.

Neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

Even Joseph's great-grandfather Abraham failed at this when God promised the impossible with his wife Sarah that she would have Isaac in her old age.

[16:23] And yet when they didn't believe God and they took matters into their own hands, it caused all kinds of chaos that still continues to this day.

What about King David? He was anointed king and then he had to wait through 15 years of being persecuted, even on the run, until finally he could take his throne.

Think about the nation of Israel that longed for the Messiah generation after generation after generation until finally when God's timing was perfect.

Jesus came into this world to live a sinless life, die on the cross for our sins, and rise again offering life to all of us who will dare pick up our cross and follow him.

So, we see after everything Joseph's been through, that God's plan had been working towards this very moment. That his timing is perfect.

[17:22] And I don't know what's going on in your life right now that needs this wisdom, but like we talked about last week, when the wait seems long, stay faithful doing the right and godly thing.

Trust the process. God is preparing you. He's preparing others for the task ahead. But most of all, don't settle for your own timing. God's timing is perfect.

And in the words of R.T. Kendall again, happy, very happy indeed, is the person who learns to wait for God's time to come. And then second, let's look at one more thing from this passage.

Trust the Lord's power. Trust the Lord's power. You know, there's even a theological word that you could write out to the side here called providence, which describes how God's unlimited power connects with his perfect will and timing in everything throughout history.

We could even say that God is sovereign in his providence. Okay. Job 42.2 put it like this. I know that you can do all things, he says.

[18:33] No purpose of yours, God, can be thwarted. Or from Philippians 4.13, from the English Standard Version, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Now, as we look back at our story, Joseph is cleaned up and standing before the most powerful man in the world. Can you imagine how nervous you might be not knowing why you're standing there?

Did he hear Potiphar's wife's story and actually believe it? Or did he find out about Joseph interpreting dreams by the Lord's guidance? Is this a good thing or one that's going to cost him his life?

He doesn't know for sure. There has to be a mix of excitement and possibly even fear. Now, let's jump into our story and let's read a few scriptures so we can see the rest of this.

In Genesis 41, verse 15. Pharaoh said to Joseph, I had a dream and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it.

[19 : 35] I cannot do it. Most powerful words in this passage. I cannot do it, Joseph replied to Pharaoh. But God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.

You know, I think this passage shows Joseph's heart and his spiritual maturity that's been growing for 13 years since he was sold into slavery. Because the culture will always teach you to own your gift.

Take full credit. Make them know why they can't live without you. And yet, even talking to a man who doesn't understand God, Joseph gives God all the credit where it's due.

And he says, basically, I'm going to paraphrase him a little bit. But he says, I cannot interpret dreams. But my God absolutely can and he will. So he listens because that's what godly people do. They listen instead of always having to talk. And Pharaoh explains his dream that we read earlier. Joseph quickly makes it known that the two dreams represent the same thing.

[20 : 36] But God is simply saying it two different ways to make a strong point that this is true and this is coming soon. Now, jump back into our story here. Back in Genesis 41, verse 28.

It is just as I said to Pharaoh, God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt.

But seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten and the famine will ravage the land. The abundance in the land will not be remembered because the famine that follows it will be so severe.

Guys, I hope in heaven we will have video coverage of all the Bible stories. Because I can picture Pharaoh in this story who probably heard a bunch of false interpretations from his quote unquote wise men.

I can picture him nodding his head as Joseph gives this interpretation saying, Yes, yes, that makes sense. This guy through his God is speaking truth.

[21 : 41] Joseph even goes on to speak of what needs to happen next. He gives a plan. Find a discerning and wise man to put in charge of the land. And during the seven years of plenty, take a fifth of everything each year and store it up to be used during the seven years of severe famine.

And this will save the nation from ruin because there will be food in Egypt. Now, stick with me as we see what God can do in his perfect timing and strength in these last four verses of our passage.

I love this. Here's what it says. Genesis 41 starting in 37. The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials.

So Pharaoh asked them, Can we find anyone like this man? One in whom is the spirit of God? Isn't it amazing even among unbelievers that when someone is truly filled with the Holy Spirit and walking step by step with him, how even an unbelieving world can see a difference and can know that God is with that person?

Look at verse 39. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, Man, this just doesn't happen, okay?

[23 : 12] This is God. And it happens again. Remember, we're going to reverse what we said earlier. From slavery to house manager. From prison to caretaker. From a life sentence to the number two man over probably the most powerful nation on earth.

Listen, church, this would be somewhat like going from a prison inmate to the vice president of the United States of America. But listen, Joseph had way more authority.

It was probably closer to the president of the United States. Wow. See, only God can do something like this because if he's not in it, I don't want to be in it either.

Can you say that with me? If God's not in it, I don't want to be in it either. But when he is in it, nothing can stop his purpose from being accomplished through you and me.

In fact, I like how Jehoshaphat said it when he and the people of Judah were seeking the heart of God. In 2 Chronicles 26, he prays this.

[24 : 16] He says, Lord, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand and no one can withstand you.

You know, it's a lot of fun for me to paint the picture of this story for you today. And when I'm in my office or in my quote unquote secret lair preparing a message, there are times when I get so excited

and I literally start pumping my fists saying, yes, Lord, this is good stuff. I'm beating on my chest. You can tell I've played a lot of sports. And I know I'm weird, but listen, at 41 years old, almost 42, I'm just going to own my weirdness. And I'm going to pray that God can mold this oddball into the godliest version possible. But listen, this isn't just a cool story where we marvel at what God did in Joseph. It's a true story that shows a glimpse of what God wants to do in you and me. And I wonder if there's anybody listening today who feels like maybe they're stuck in a prison and never getting out. [25 : 25] Now, that prison could look like a lot of things. That could be depression. That could be an addiction. An addiction is more than just drugs and alcohol, although those are terrible.

But it could be pornography or probably the fastest growing addiction that no one wants to talk about is screen time and what that does to our brains. Listen, we live in a culture where we are addicted to the high that we get off of our phones, and we're missing so much of what life really has to offer.

Maybe your prison sentence is your intense grief over losing a loved one. And I want you to know that it's okay to grieve. You should grieve. But God can help you discover, rediscover the joy of your salvation as you heal and as you grow through it one day at a time.

Maybe your prison sentence is your prodigal child and you pray, pray, and pray more to what seems to be like you're praying to a prison wall. Maybe your prison sentence is your marriage that's in shambles and you've almost given up.

Maybe it's loneliness and you're longing for a spouse. Maybe it's unforgiveness and bitterness that you've harbored and you didn't really throw it in the well a few weeks ago when we were at church. [26 : 40] Listen, I have no idea what it is. But I want you to know that God wants to come into it in His perfect timing. But we have to let Him. And we have to trust.

That's our key word. We have to trust His timing. Trust His awesome power as we give up that control. That's what God's waiting for. Give up our own control over everything that we so desperately cling to realizing that He's more than able to work all things out for good for those who love Him.

So today, here's the challenge I have for you. I want you to think about where in your life you need God's perfect timing and power and maybe even where you need to let go of control.

And then, as hard as it can be, as easier as it is said than done, give it to Him and wait patiently as He prepares you. I want to leave you with a really good passage that you've probably heard from Isaiah 40, 31.

It says, That's the kind of faith that Joseph lived out.

[27 : 58] And listen, so can you and I. Let's pray. Father, thank you so much for the word of God today that has spoken truth over our hearts.

God, have your way. Take back control of our lives and make it all about your perfect will. Teach us patience that you are preparing us and that your timing is perfect.

That your power is enough to accomplish it. It's more than enough. So, Father, have your way. Mold us. Shape us. Make us into the image of Jesus, we pray.

In His name. In the name of Jesus, we pray all of this. Amen and amen. Hey, real quick. If you have questions about your faith, questions about the church, questions about following Jesus, you can always reach out to us here at First Christian Church of Greensburg.

Once again, I'm the lead pastor. My name is Ray. I would love to come alongside you. So here's what you can do. You can call us in the church office at 812-663-8488.

[29 : 04] That's 663-8488. Or you can email me at ray at FCCgreensburg.com. Hey, thank you so much for tuning in today.

God bless you. And we pray you have a fantastic week. Thank you.