

THE POINT OF LOW POINTS



A STUDY OF THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

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KEN GURLEY



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The Point of Low Points

by Ken Gurley

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

“Who wants to hear a message about low points?”

That’s what I asked myself for weeks on end. I had convinced myself that the discussion of low points was a “bummer” of a subject and, to my way of thinking, was pointless.

Then came the fateful Sunday when the proverbial well ran dry. I simply had nothing I could lay my hands on to say with any degree of confidence that the Spirit was in it until I heard His gentle voice ask, “Why not talk about where you’ve been?” This gentle question prompted a rush of mixed emotions: hurt, sorrow, anxiety, and, curiously, hope. For where I had been was a place I could wish on no other; but what I had learned probably needed to be shared.

In my own valley experience, I pored over the story of Joseph. I studied him, his circumstances, and his reactions. So, that Sunday, I shared what I felt to be shallowest of the low points in Joseph’s life—an experience he had in Shechem. When I finished, I momentarily thought, “There, that does it. I’ll never have to do that again.” The Spirit, however, had other ideas.

Over the next few weeks, I continued to address this subject to profound results. For me, it was as if a dam had burst and the things I’d pondered for months on end had come gushing out. Hearers began to invite people who were struggling with issues in their lives. Copies of the series were purchased and shared with others. God showed me yet again that human wisdom often falls short and only those

who grow conversant in the language of low points can minister to a hurting world.

The Point of Low Points began with that series. I've excluded some of the material discussed in the sermon series and included other items to give this book the focus and the breadth needed to meet readers where you are. I've also included a few personal experiences I believe will help you and small group participants to learn the lessons of the low points in our lives.

Although this book could be read in two or three hours, but I urge you to not read it in such a manner. No gold stars will be granted for finishing this book quickly. A riverboat's maxim works here: rushing waters are not necessarily deep; still waters are often deceptively deep. Take the time to look up the Scripture references, make some notes, ponder what you're reading and make applications to your daily life. Let the words of this book lead you to a greater appreciation of the power of God visible in the low points of your life.

I don't strive to be eloquent in this book. Yet, many of the sentences in this book represent hours of seeking God's face and wrestling with my own wishes and wants. Truth sometimes sounds as a trumpet, but it can also come as a whisper. Tune your heart to hear the whisper of God when you read this.

And finally, I think this book should be shared. In coffee shops and over coffee tables, find fellow travelers in the valleys of life and discuss what you're reading and experiencing. The sections in this book along with the video sessions fit well in small group settings. Many people in your neighborhood or sphere of influence could benefit from a joint study and discussion of this book. You may wish to consider this.

This book has seven sections; the first opens the series with an understanding of the purpose of low points and an introduction to the life of Joseph—the man whose experiences will guide us through this

study. The second and third sections introduce the first two low points in Joseph's life; the last three sections include the third, fourth and fifth low points.

The fourth section is my story and the background for this book. I call it, "In the Eye of the Storm." It's an interlude adding nothing to the narrative of Joseph's life or to the storyline as a whole. You may skip over it or you may wish to read it first. In this fourth section, I explain the low point that led me to look afresh at the life of Joseph. My church family walked with me through this low point, yet for one reason or another, I'm still unable to share some of the pertinent details of this trying time. I am painfully transparent with the emotions and thoughts I experienced during that time and catalog some of the changes God brought to my life. I pray it may help someone else who is going through a similar trial.

Thanks for joining me on this transformational trip. I believe you'll be glad you did.

SECTION I



VALLEY FEVER

CHAPTER 1:

THE FISHHOOK IN EVERY HEART

Adversity and humanity are synonyms.

A mother struggles to give birth to a child; a child struggles to be born. A fallen world welcomes another fallen man. Our days are few, but seem marked with endless difficulties (Job 14:1). “God had one Son on earth without sin,” opined Augustine, “but never one without suffering.” All of God’s children struggle and suffer.

Have you ever wondered why? Why is there pain? Why does adversity abound?

To ask why is to explore what has been called the “Achilles Heel” of Christianity. Achilles was the mythological character whose mother tried to protect him from a prophesied demise by dipping him as an infant in the River Styx. She missed a spot on one of his heels—the spot that an arrow later found. The problem of pain and suffering is the tender spot for people of faith.

Our reasoning goes like this: “If God loves me, then why has this happened to me?” Or, “If God is good, then why do bad things happen?” Or, still yet, “Since God is all-powerful, why can’t He take away the pain?” From our childhood, we have been taught to pray, “God is great; God is good.” His greatness and goodness should, to our way of thinking, eradicate our pain. But it doesn’t and we are left wondering why.

God hears a lot of questions. Saul of Tarsus lifted sightless eyes and asked, “Who art thou, Lord?” (Acts 9:5). On the heels of that question, the future apostle Paul asked a second question, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). We ask the who, what, when and where questions of God frequently, but there is no question more pervasive and painful as why.

Christian author Lee Strobel commissioned a national survey that posed the question, “If you could ask God one thing, what would it be?” The most frequent response was, “Why is there so much suffering in this world?”

“Why?” It’s the fishhook in every human heart. Sickness, disappointment, abuse, betrayal, broken relationships, sorrow, crime, accidents and a host of other troubles assail each of us.

And we ask the question, “Why did this happen to me?”

Made in His image, we seek to understand and perceive His ways. We want to know there is a reason behind what’s happening to us—that life is more than fate, chance, or the roll of a dice. His way though is sometimes “in the sea” and “His footsteps are not known” (Psalm 77:19). Over the years, I’ve learned that we don’t necessarily need to know why, but we need to know that there is a why. We must perceive that present sufferings work toward future glories (Romans 8:18-31).

What we know of God, however, keeps us from being cynical. We know that He is good and He created this world to be good (Genesis

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

--Helen Keller

1:31, I Timothy 4:4). Man's sin shattered the goodness, but God through His grace sought to restore fellowship with man. Suffering is not good, but God does His best work in those times when we hurt the most. Paul said, "All things work together for good..." (Romans 8:28). "All things" surely includes suffering.

Behind each and every low point in our life is a loving God working His will. If you're in a valley, it doesn't mean you made a wrong turn. It may mean that God has something for you. God shapes His best and chosen ambassadors in the valleys of affliction.

Through the odyssey of adversity witnessed by Joseph, we see that there is a point in each and every low point of life. By looking at his life, maybe our own lives will achieve greater clarity. We may not arrive at the place where we welcome adversity, but we may affirm with the songwriter, "In the valley, He restoreth my soul" (Dottie, Rambo. *Soul Classics*, 1968).