002 – *INCREASE*

DAY TWO – The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." (Gen 41:52)

The story of Joseph is one of grief, disappointment, frustration, false accusations, false imprisonment and interestingly, his rise to power in a foreign land. He had a traumatic journey and yet he maintained his integrity, character and faith in God even when he was treated unfairly and had "every right" to be bitter and vengeful. I have walked through seasons that felt crushing, I have felt betrayed, I have felt deep grief, I have felt confusion and many times I have wondered what I did wrong to deserve the hell I felt had been unleashed in my life. The last thing I would have named those seasons in my life would be "fruitful". But, what we name things is a reflection of our perspective and heart posture.

We can tend to believe the only places we can increase and be fruitful are the easy, beautiful and peaceful seasons. When our lives are void of trial, our perspective tends to be more positive; we can see God's fingerprint a little more clearly. When we walk through pain and disappointment, our filter changes and we can forget that God is still very present and active in those seasons as well. We discount those moments and believe the lie that God doesn't love us, has forgotten about us, isn't for us or that we are being punished.

What if the opposite is true? What if we looked back and re-examined those seasons? What did you learn? What priorities shifted? What creative ideas were downloaded into your heart? What unhealthy relationships were removed? What new characteristic of God were on display? What if people surrounding you were watching you walk through your pain refusing to let it break you? What if the land of your suffering was the stage for God to increase you and use your life as a billboard to show a broken world that He is who He says He is and will accomplish His plans and purposes despite the pain and suffering you are walking through.

Our culture leads us to believe "success" and "fruitfulness" is equivalent to financial prosperity, rise in power, advancement on a job, our kids getting accepted into an Ivy League college, finding the right man or woman. However, valuable and sustaining increase is the stuff people don't see and rarely celebrate.

- Tenacity is increase.
- Saying "no" when everyone else says "yes" is increase.
- Choosing to stay married when it would be easier to leave is increase.
- Forgiving when you didn't do anything wrong is increase.
- Tithing when money is tight is increase.
- Having Godly accountability in your life even when your flesh wants to follow the ways of the world is increase.
- Asking for help when shame wants you to withdraw is increase.
- Interceding for those who can't intercede for themselves is increase.
- Trusting God's Word even when we can't see the end result is increase.

These are all non-glamorous forms of increase, but these are the ones that are foundational and will sustain us. These are the things that will prevent us from being crushed by the weight of applause, that keep us grounded, that prevent us from making idols of the fickle and fluid riches of this world. Instead of looking back on the painful moments, the seasons of loss and confusion, the moments when you felt hopeless and naming them as such, try renaming them. Shift your perspective. God was near. He was faithful. He was active. He was present. He was kind and merciful. He fought on your behalf. He moved mountains. He provided. He sustained you. He made wrong things right. He brought dead bones back to life. He made beauty from ashes. He saw. He forgave. He loved. He is the God who brings increase even in the land of our suffering.

Application

Spend time in prayer asking God to help you reinterpret your past as increase, and to show you your present opportunities for increase.

Prayer

Father, thank you that in all things, all seasons, every valley and every mountain top you are ever present. You give good gifts to your children, even those gifts the world doesn't celebrate or acknowledge. Shift my perspective and reclaim every season I disregarded as unfruitful. Give me eyes to see when You were at work, help me to recognize Your fingerprint, help me to see the way You see and think the way You think. Thank You for never leaving me or forsaking me but carrying me through when I didn't have the strength. Continue to lead me and guide me, from season to season, in Jesus' name, amen.