

**Message No:** AR016  
**Series:** Appearance and Reality  
**Section:** People  
**Subsection:** Joseph  
**Date preached:** 8 Mar 87  
**Date edited:** 23 Sep 18

## **JOSEPH AS SLAVE AND PRISONER – MEANING AND IMPLICATIONS OF “THE LORD IS WITH YOU” (3)**

The basic thrust in the previous two messages on the meaning and implications of “The Lord is with you” has been at the individual level. In this message, we will consider it at the corporate level. Is the Lord with us as a congregation? And to what degree do we as a congregation identify with the flow and fulfilment of God’s purposes?

Although it is right for us to be concerned with living a life pleasing to God at the individual level, at the heart of God’s call is His calling forth a people to be the “bride” for the Lord Jesus Christ. This bride is the Church. Central to God’s purposes is how His people grow and develop as members of the body of Christ and how they can effectively serve Him together.

Recognising how central this issue is to God can help us have a clearer and fuller sense of direction in our lives. We will not be occupied with just specific issues, but will have a broad perspective of life. And as each member in the congregation is clear about this issue, we can then labour and move together in the same direction.

### **Factors affecting corporate response to God’s call**

There are three important factors affecting a congregation’s response to God’s call.

The first is the spiritual health and quality of life of individual members in the congregation. When each member is spiritually healthy and aspires to live quality lives, we will be in a better position as a congregation to understand God’s call and respond well to it.

The second factor is how clearly the congregation understands God’s plans and purposes and how they are to be fulfilled. Believers may be generally healthy. They may love the Lord and the truth, but they may be carrying on their daily lives without a clear understanding of God’s plan and purposes. If this is the case, their ability to contribute to the accomplishing of God’s purposes will be significantly restricted. The better our understanding of this issue, the better equipped we will be in fulfilling God’s purposes.

The third factor is the actual outworking of God’s will and purposes. Beyond understanding God’s will and purposes, we must diligently work them out in our lives. In so doing, we will grow spiritually and God will be with us to empower us to work

out His will. But if we are unwilling or if we lack the determination to grow and fulfil our part, the spiritual vision will dim.

God being with someone in a meaningful sense does not come about just by that person asking God to be with him and help him with what he is doing. That person needs to align his heart with God's will and purposes. Likewise, God being with the congregation in a favourable sense takes place when the congregation recognises and aligns itself with God's plan and purposes and seeks to fulfil them. God is with us when we are with Him.

We should not be satisfied merely with some evidence of God at work in the midst of the congregation and with some answers to prayer. We should seek for deep meaning of the Lord being with us and for depth of His approval of all that is taking place in church life by ensuring the thrust of what is going on is in line with the fulfilment of His purposes.

*Helpful to see the interrelationship of the three factors*

The first factor – the quality and health of the brethren in the congregation – will help the brethren recognise and work out God's plan and purposes (the second and third factors). Likewise, understanding and working out God's plan and purposes will provide a conducive environment for the brethren to grow and the quality and health of the brethren will deepen.

On the other hand, poor quality in the lives of the brethren will hinder their understanding and working out of God's purposes. Poor understanding and working out of God's purposes would mean absence of a suitable environment for the growth of the brethren.

### **The vital role of good leadership**

What if the spiritual health and quality of life of the vast majority of the brethren in a congregation is not good and their understanding and working out of God's purposes is deficient? Is it possible for things to work out well?

Yes, it is possible if there is a core group in the leadership who are spiritually healthy and mature and understands God's plans and purposes. The spiritual insight and understanding of the leadership concerning God's plans and purposes and how they are to be worked out can be transmitted through preaching and teaching and the provision of a conducive environment for the congregation to receive and work out the truths. All these would have a direct bearing on the spiritual health and quality in the lives of the brethren and their participation in the outworking of God's plans and purposes.

The congregation will be encouraged to obey God's call and grow in spiritual health and maturity, which in turn will help them appreciate and understand more deeply

about God’s plans and purposes. As they grow in knowledge and love for God, they will be more able to support one another – including supporting the spiritual leaders – through their prayers and through the sharing of spiritual insights during corporate worship and in other contexts. In this way, the sense of God’s calling and effective outworking of the congregation will grow.

For such a positive development to take place there must be brethren who are willing to learn, and who can be helped to respond deeply to God and the truths He has revealed in the Scriptures.

### **God’s general and specific calling for the local church**

God has both a general and a specific calling for the local church. The general calling refers to the general revelation in the Scriptures about God’s intentions for the church and how they are to be worked out. This applies to all congregations and to all believers and has to be continually worked at. The specific calling of a church, on the other hand, refers to God’s specific purposes for a particular congregation. God in His perfect wisdom and overall planning has a specific calling for each congregation. This will depend on the period in church history and the unfolding and fulfilment of God’s purposes, the geographical situation the particular congregation is in, its stage of development, its readiness, the gifts the members possess, the areas they can contribute in, as well as the situation in God’s kingdom. There can be different emphases for different congregations.

God’s specific calling for a congregation is dynamic. God’s intentions for the congregation depends on the members’ growth, their faithfulness and their response to His call. If there is significant failure, God’s calling for the congregation may change, as it may no longer be suitable for them, nor are they able to accomplish what God desires of them. But, if the failure is not so serious, and the congregation is still reasonably healthy, the Lord may want them to learn from their failure and carry on from there.

God’s intentions for a congregation is also dynamic in that it depends on how other believers, other congregations and other groups are working out God’s intentions for them.

So, in order for a congregation to know what specific calling God has for them, they need to be sensitive to God’s leading. Not only that, they need to be ready to respond to God’s call. Readiness includes the attitudes and positive responses of individual members in the congregation, and how well the congregation has been responding to the Lord in the different stages of development. They also must ensure that they have been working out God’s general calling well. Otherwise, it will be difficult for them to know and enter into God’s specific calling in any meaningful sense.

The issues we are considering are serious as they relate to the building of God's kingdom and have implications for eternity. When we are serious about fulfilling the Lord's purposes as a congregation, we should not be surprised that we will face many difficulties. There will be intense opposition from the evil one who will seek to weaken our response to the Lord. He will seek to deceive, distort and cause confusion. It is important then for us to be alert to the wiles of the enemy and learn how to counter his attacks and temptations.

In any congregation, there will be some unhealthy members. Will the presence of these members prevent the congregation from moving forward and growing well? Will they hinder the congregation from pleasing the Lord to a high degree? No. The Lord may still be pleased with the congregation as a whole – with its direction, emphases and whatever positive things that are taking place. It is possible He can still be with the congregation in a favourable sense to a high degree. But He will not be pleased with everyone in it. Those He is displeased with, He may deal with individually.

### **Personal failures may adversely affect the whole body**

At times, however, there may be significant issues relating to individuals that may affect the whole congregation. If these issues are not dealt with, the Lord may not be pleased with the congregation, and the congregation may become morally and spiritually polluted and may even go astray. Let us consider a few passages from the Scriptures.

#### *The churches in Thyatira and Pergamum*

The Lord Jesus, in His messages to the seven churches (Revelation 2 and 3) spoke not just to individuals, but to whole churches. The messages focus on the degree to which the churches have or have not been faithful to God.

In Revelation 2:19, the Lord Jesus said of the church in Thyatira: “I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first”. These are words of approval to the whole church generally.

But we read in verse 20:

#### **Revelation 2:20**

‘But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

Here, the Lord rebuked the church for not dealing with an issue which they ought to have. The brethren were being led astray by false teaching, resulting in immorality and spiritual pollution. And the church had failed to take corrective measures. The

Lord’s stern warning to the church is also a warning to us on the harm false teaching can cause and the need to nip it in the bud.

To the church in Pergamum, the Lord said:

**Revelation 2:13**

‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

In His message to the church in Pergamum, the Lord Jesus was again addressing the church as a whole, not individuals in it. The Lord commended this church for not denying the faith, even though it faced significant spiritual opposition, pressures and difficulties, as the phrase “where Satan’s throne is” suggests.

**Revelation 2:14**

‘But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.

However, the Lord was displeased with the church in Pergamum because of the presence of false teaching. The direction of the teaching was contrary to God’s purposes and intentions, resulting in spiritual pollution and immorality – like Balaam “teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality”. These are teachings the evil one promotes and uses to prey on our weaknesses.

*Ananias and Sapphira*

We turn now to the account in Acts 5 of God’s dealings with Ananias and Sapphira. Some may wonder why God dealt so severely with them.

It was a time marked by church growth and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The preaching of the apostle Peter had led thousands to be added to the church. Believers were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. The people had a sense of awe and wonder over the Lord’s mighty works. Believers loved one another. They shared their possessions and looked after the needy. One believer, Joseph (or Barnabas), was highlighted for his good deeds. He sold a tract of land he owned and brought the proceeds to the apostles (Acts 4:36-37). His act of love greatly encouraged the people.

Then in the midst of this wonderful church growth came a dramatic twist – the deception of Ananias and Sapphira. This couple wanted to be well regarded like

Barnabas. They also sold their land like Barnabas did, but gave the impression that they had given the whole sum to the Lord when they had in fact kept back a part of it.

God dealt with Ananias and Sapphira severely by striking them dead. It is likely that God dealt with them so severely because He wanted to remove the corrupting influence of their bad example, this being an important phase in the growth of the church. Hypocrisy, impure motives, and self-projection are serious issues. God was seeking to impress upon the believers the importance of having the right attitudes and motives in working out church life. If wrong attitudes and motives are present and condoned, they can easily be manipulated and can bring many problems to church life.

Acts 5:11 tells us the impact of God’s dealings on Ananias and Sapphira over the whole church.

**Acts 5:11**

And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

Although the wrongdoing of Ananias and Sapphira was personal in that they did not directly do harm to any one, it was not a private matter. It took place in relation to the outworking of church life.

Because we are members of the body of Christ, whatever is unhealthy or improper, even in our private lives, will have an adverse effect on our spiritual lives and will therefore affect our outworking in church life. All sins will directly or indirectly affect the body of Christ. However, it is helpful to bear in mind the difference between what takes place in our personal, private lives, and our conduct in relation to the outworking of church life.

*Achan’s sin and the defeat of Israel*

Joshua 7 gives an account of Achan, who took some of the things under the ban, directly contradicting God’s commandment and incurring His wrath.

**Joshua 7:1**

But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took some of the things under the ban, therefore the anger of the Lord burned against the sons of Israel.

When his deed was discovered, Achan confessed his sin.

**Joshua 7:20-21**

20 So Achan answered Joshua and said, “Truly, I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel, and this is what I did:

21 when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it.”

Achan’s greed incurred the wrath of God and resulted in Israel’s defeat in a battle that followed.

### **Joshua 7:2-5**

2 Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, “Go up and spy out the land.” So the men went up and spied out Ai.

3 They returned to Joshua and said to him, “Do not let all the people go up; only about two or three thousand men need go up to Ai; do not make all the people toil up there, for they are few.”

4 So about three thousand men from the people went up there, but they fled from the men of Ai.

5 The men of Ai struck down about thirty-six of their men, and pursued them from the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them down on the descent, so the hearts of the people melted and became as water.

As we read the whole account, it is clear that Achan’s sin had a direct bearing on Israel’s defeat.

Earlier, the Lord had made clear He was with Joshua.

### **Joshua 6:27**

So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land.

Jericho had just been overcome miraculously by the Lord’s enabling and intervention. The Lord wanted to grant victory to the Israelites in the Promised Land. But although this was the case, Israel met with defeat in Ai instead – until the issue of Achan’s sin was dealt with. Sin in the midst of God’s people can hinder the freedom and the power of the Lord at work among His people. Sin gives ground for the evil one to manipulate and take advantage of God’s people. It also weakens the capacity of God’s people to fight back.

### *A parallel in the body of Christ*

We can see a parallel in the body of Christ. As members of the same body, our lives and conduct affect the life and health of the whole body.

Paul highlights this truth in 1 Corinthians 12:26:

**1 Corinthians 12:26**

And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

In the spiritual realm, our lives affect one another and the health of the whole body. If our lives are healthy, we will affect the life of the body positively. On the other hand, if our lives are unhealthy, we will affect the life of the body negatively. Sin has destructive effects not only on our own lives, but also on the health of the body and on the Lord’s work. However, we need not be discouraged when we fail, for God is there to help us. He will help us if we maintain a repentant and contrite spirit and are committed to Him. We can also be encouraged that those who love God will also come alongside to help us in our spiritual journey. What is needful is to maintain a humble and contrite spirit and seek to respond well to God's call.

Let us return to our consideration on the life of Joseph.

**God’s presence in Joseph’s life**

We have seen that as a slave and a prisoner, Joseph appeared to be in a miserable state, a victim of circumstances, and suffering meaninglessly. But in reality, none of these was true because:

- a. The Lord was with Joseph.
- b. Joseph’s attitude, faith and conduct were generally positive.
- c. God was sovereign and His hand was in the whole matter.

The preceding three points are interrelated. The Lord was with Joseph because of Joseph’s positive attitude and conduct. And because the Lord was pleased with Joseph, in His sovereignty, He watched over Joseph and intervened in his life. That brought positive meaning and outcome to Joseph’s life even though the external circumstances suggested otherwise.

We have considered the first two points in some detail in the first message on Joseph: AR013. We will now spend some time to consider the third point.

**God’s sovereignty and intervention**

We find clear evidence in the Scriptures of God’s sovereignty and intervention in Joseph’s life. Stephen referred to this in Acts 7:

**Acts 7:9-10**

9 “The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him,  
10 and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household.



This passage tells us that God intervened and rescued Joseph from all his afflictions, which included not allowing his brothers to kill him. God was the One who granted Joseph favour and wisdom in Pharaoh’s eyes, leading to Joseph being made the governor over Egypt and over all Pharaoh’s household.

Stephen explained that God’s sovereignty was at work in Joseph’s daily life, in the acts of people around him, and even in influencing Pharaoh’s dealings with Joseph. God was not only undertaking for Joseph at the personal level, but was also working out His purposes through Joseph’s life.

It is helpful to see God’s sovereignty over the whole chain of events in Joseph’s life: sold as a slave; falsely accused; thrown into prison; interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams; gaining Pharaoh’s favour; appointed governor of Egypt. Though the earlier periods in Joseph’s life had been difficult, they were nevertheless part of the chain of events that God saw fit for Joseph to go through.

Genesis 45:5-8 records Joseph’s recognition of God’s sovereignty and intervention in his life.

**Genesis 45:5-8**

5 “Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

6 “For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.

7 “God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.

8 “Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

In his conversation with his brothers, Joseph emphasised God’s sovereignty over his life. Note that he used the phrase “God sent me” three times. Though others were at work in the different situations he went through, and though they were culpable for their wrong actions, Joseph was conscious of God watching over the whole chain of events. He recognised that human actions were subject to God’s sovereignty. Ultimately, it was God who wanted him to be in Egypt and be “a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt”.

God sending Joseph into Egypt was not merely Joseph’s personal opinion. In Psalm 105:17, it is recorded that “God sent Joseph”.

**Psalm 105:17**

He (God) sent a man before them,  
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.

In Genesis 39:2-6, we again see God’s intervention.

**Genesis 39:2-6**

2 The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

3 Now his master saw that the Lord was with him and how the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hand.

4 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.

5 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.

6 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.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

Verse 2 tells us that because the Lord was with Joseph, he became a successful man. And verse 3 tells us that his master saw that the Lord was with him and caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. God in His sovereignty was watching over, undertaking, and actively intervening in Joseph’s daily life. As a result, he found favour in his master’s eyes. This led his master to make Joseph an overseer over all he owned.

When Joseph was thrown into prison, the Lord continued to be with him. He undertook and intervened; and this time, he found favour in the sight of the chief jailer.

**Genesis 39:21-22**

21 But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.

22 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.

It is interesting to see Joseph continually being given significant responsibilities, first as a slave, then as a prisoner. When he was a prisoner, he was in charge of all the other prisoners. The chief jailer did not have to supervise anything under Joseph’s charge because whatever Joseph did, the Lord caused it to prosper.

The scriptural presentation suggests that the Lord had allowed all these things to take place in Joseph’s life for a purpose. The responsibilities that Joseph assumed in his master’s house and in prison prepared him for what was to come – being a ruler over Egypt. Though he might not have seen the meaning of his experience then, God was preparing him for the task ahead.

Similarly, in the dreams of Pharaoh, we see God intervening and undertaking for Joseph.

**Genesis 41:25**

Now Joseph said to Pharaoh, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one and the same; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do.

**Genesis 41:28**

“It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do.

**Genesis 41:32**

“Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about.

Joseph recognised God’s hand was in Pharaoh’s dream because He had a message for Pharaoh. Joseph also recognised God’s hand in the events that followed. In Genesis 41:16, he told Pharaoh that his ability to interpret the dreams came from God.

**Genesis 41:16**

Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.”

And it was the same with the dreams of the chief cup bearer and the chief baker of Pharaoh. God was the One causing their dreams and enabling Joseph to interpret them.

**Genesis 40:8**

Then they said to him, “We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it.” Then Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please.”

God’s hand was in the whole chain of events leading to Joseph’s exaltation as ruler over the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh had those dreams, Joseph was introduced to him. And as Joseph interpreted the dreams, Pharaoh recognised his capability and God’s working in him. And so he appointed Joseph ruler over the land of Egypt.

We can thus see that Joseph’s life was rich in meaning: the sovereign, almighty God was with him and was pleased with him because of his positive attitude and conduct. God was sovereignly undertaking so that the role He intended for Joseph to fulfil in the outworking of His purposes would be fulfilled.

In whatever he had to go through, in whatever others tried to do to him, Joseph did not have to feel miserable because God was with him. And because God was with

him, and sovereignly undertaking for him, Joseph could maintain joy and peace in the Lord.

The same can be true for us. If our lives and attitudes are pleasing to the Lord, He will be with us, and we will fare well. No situation we go through will be meaningless, whatever the outward appearance may suggest. Let us therefore not be discouraged by circumstances, but concentrate on the things that truly count. Let us concentrate on being faithful to the Lord and learn to walk by faith and not by sight.

### **Application of the truth of God’s sovereignty**

How then can we apply these truths in our personal life and in church life?

#### *Personal life*

First, let us consider the personal level. If God approves of our personal life and is with us in a deep sense, we can have deep confidence in Him. Even if circumstances appear negative, we can be assured that they are purposeful and meaningful. As long as God is with us, we can be confident in Him even when we face times of difficulties, disappointments, opposition from people or the powers of darkness, and even when these are prolonged.

Consider Joseph. He seemed to be a victim of his brothers’ cruel act and his master’s wife’s false accusations. For being faithful to God, he landed in prison. Joseph might not have realised it at that time, but through all the difficulties, God was preparing him to be the ruler of Egypt. And because he was in that position he could save his family and many others when the severe famine took place. His presence and role in Egypt were also instrumental in opening the way for the nation of Israel to be in Egypt for that phase of its history as intended by the Lord. Even though his brothers cast him away, Joseph was moving in the direction of God’s will and purpose for his life.

If we are walking with God, we will not be helpless victims of circumstances. There will be purpose and direction in our lives even in the most adverse of circumstances. God in His wisdom allows us to go through life’s difficulties to transform us and equip us for the future. He will undertake for us all the time.

We may not perceive what is going on in the spiritual realm. At times, nothing may seem to be happening even when God is working. Some situations may appear perplexing and senseless. And with the evil one manipulating events, some situations may even appear very negative. If we are not vigilant, we may become miserable and depressed, and we may lose our sense of direction and joy in the Lord. At such times, we should examine our walk with the Lord. If we are reasonably clear that we are walking with Him, we can then affirm our faith in Him and reject the works of the evil one. We can take the stand that what God is doing in our lives is meaningful and we are not helpless victims of circumstances. When we adopt this posture, we will

not be discouraged or depressed, and will be able to enter into the joy and peace in the Lord. Such affirmation of faith in the Lord and the stand we take will hinder the evil one from working in our lives and facilitate God’s freedom to work in and through our lives.

It is important for us not to focus on outward appearance, but to ensure that we are faithful to God and walking with Him. At the personal level, we must always seek to maintain a clear conscience before the Lord and concentrate on doing our part well. At the same time, we should be open to correction if there are failures and deficiencies in our lives. If we maintain this posture, we can be confident in the Lord no matter what happens.

Although outward appearance can be very different from the reality, it does not mean that outward appearance will always be contrary to the inward reality. So, let us not be deceived into thinking that regardless of the outward appearance, all is well with us when in fact it is not true. We need to evaluate our lives accurately. The Scriptures provides objective standards for us to do so. We can check whether we are in fact living according to the principles, thrust and direction of the Scriptures. We have the inner witness of the Holy Spirit and brethren who love the Lord to help us make an accurate evaluation of our lives. Let us not simply assure ourselves that all is well when it is not.

### *Church life*

How do we apply this principle of God’s sovereignty in church life?

At times, it may appear as if nothing much is happening in church life. There may also be times when the congregation experiences difficulties and pressures, and misunderstandings may prevail. Things do not seem to be moving according to our expectations. But if, as a congregation, we have been responding well to God’s call and aligning our ways with His, God will be pleased with us. He will be with us in a meaningful sense, and we can have deep confidence in Him. Even though outward circumstances appear negative, the reality is very different. There will be positive meaning, purpose and direction for the congregation. Therefore, we need not feel downcast, for God will undertake and intervene for us. As a congregation, we can learn much and be equipped through the whole process, moving forward together with God according to the outworking of His plan and purposes, stage by stage, and contributing to His kingdom in the spiritual realm.

There is a place to evaluate whether the congregation is working out according to God’s revelation and the teaching in the Scriptures, and to seek to understand, through the witness of the Spirit, what is taking place and whether the Lord is with the congregation. It is important to recognise areas that are not going on well, aspects that need looking into, how things can improve, and look to the Lord to lead and guide as to what corrective steps can be taken and how to go on from there.

Thus, if we are true to the Lord and walking in His will, if we have a clear conscience, both at the personal and congregational level, we can be assured that we are moving in the right direction, and we can have joy and peace in the Lord, even when situations are perplexing and difficult. Sometimes some members of the congregation may be perplexed, but there may be others who may be able to help them understand what is going on.

### **Summary**

We first considered “the Lord is with us” at the corporate level – as a congregation – and the degree of our involvement in the flow and fulfilment of God’s purposes.

We considered three important factors affecting the Lord’s presence with a congregation: the quality of life of the individuals, the degree of recognition of God’s purposes, and the actual outworking of God’s purposes.

We also discussed general and specific aspects of the outworking of God’s purposes. The general aspects refer to scriptural revelations applicable to every congregation and the specific aspects refer to the direction and emphases of a particular congregation.

Even if some members in the congregation are unhealthy, the Lord may still be pleased with a congregation as a whole. He may approve of its direction and emphases and the reality that is taking place. However, there may at times be significant issues the Lord requires the congregation to look into and take corrective measures, just as He required of the churches in Thyatira and Pergamum. He also takes seriously improper conduct at the personal level that may affect the whole group, as seen in the way He dealt with Achan in the Old Testament and with Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament.

Finally, we reflected on God's sovereignty and His intervention in Joseph’s life and the application of the truths in our personal lives and in the outworking of church life.

[www.godandtruth.com](http://www.godandtruth.com)

---

#### **Copyright**

The content of this message is protected by Copyright © 2018 Lim Kou. Permission is given to print and reproduce part (where the meaning intended is retained and the part is not quoted out of context) or all the content, for personal use or for distribution, on condition that there is proper acknowledgement, no changes are made and the content distributed free of charge. Please be prayerful and discreet in distributing or making the content available to others. *This paragraph and that below should be included in any and all content reproduced for distribution.*

#### **Scripture Quotations**

Scripture quotations unless otherwise stated, are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.