JM Jason Mayfield

SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

THE SECRET'S IN THE SAND

Practical, Private Preparation Before the Public Assignment

> There is no secret sauce behind people who accomplish things. There is a season of practical, private preparation, time in the sand, and whether you choose the sand or get forced into it, God uses it, and nothing in your past disqualifies you from the future He has for you.

MAIN TEXT
Galatians 1:11-18

FIRST PREACHED
May 17, 2026

SERIES
Stand-alone message

BY
Pastor Jason Mayfield

AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. Most people credit success to some small visible trick, but the difference is always practical, private preparation that nobody saw.
2. Success does not come by default because of something special in a person, it comes by design.
3. Paul went into the sand and developed knowledge without demand: he already had the training, but he went to Arabia to dig a well he could draw from later.
4. Joshua went into the sand and served another leader, which gives exposure to what happens behind the scenes, sows into your future, builds connections, and teaches you how to treat the people who serve under you.
5. Joseph went into the sand and gained experience without benefits: experience without consequence under his father, resource without control under Potiphar, control without resource in the prison.
6. You either choose the sand or you get forced into it, and Potiphar's wife is the picture of the external force that causes failure for reasons that have nothing to do with you.
7. Nothing you have done, had happen to you, or been associated with disqualifies you from the future God has for you.



WATCH IT PREACHED

youtu.be/Iy_24KnBnu4



READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/the-secrets-in-the-sand

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

This is a stand-alone message with a prophetic edge. Pastor Jason received the core of it at a District Council gathering, as a word for one young preacher, and then shaped it for the whole church. Say that up front: you are going to "preach at somebody," and everyone in the room gets to benefit.

The structure is simple. Three men went into the sand, and each one came out with something different: Paul developed knowledge without demand, Joshua served another leader, Joseph gained experience without benefits. Then turn to the force that pushes people into the sand when they will not go on their own, Potiphar's wife, and close with a prophetic word that nothing disqualifies a person from the future God has for them.

Speak to two groups by name: ministers (especially young ones who want the platform before the preparation) and people with side hustles or second careers. Keep the humor light and the landing serious.

Introduction

Between ministry and business, you watch a dynamic play out that separates driven people. Two people can start in the same place, with the same capacity, the same gifting and the same passion, and ten years later one is thriving while the other is still wondering why they are always behind. The difference is not magic. It is a quiet element that is often overlooked.

The Lord spoke this message at a District Council gathering, where the church had gone to celebrate the retirement of one of its previous pastors from district leadership. While there, seeing a young preacher across the room, the word came. "I don't normally preach at people, but I am going to preach at somebody today, and you are going to be the beneficiaries."

> **GALATIANS 1:11-18** ESV
>
> [11] For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. [12] For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. [13] For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. [14] And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. [15] But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, [16] was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; [17] nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. [18] Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.

Hear this line: "but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus" (Galatians 1:17). Only after that does Paul go up to Jerusalem.

Today's message: **The Secret's in the Sand.**

Illustration: short fingernails. The church is moving toward live musicians, and in the meantime the bass parts are being recorded so every song sounds the same. While warming up to record, the strings were buzzing: fingernails too long. Trimming them brought back a memory from age 14 or 15, rehearsing with a teenage band at the drummer's house. Every player back then had VHS lessons, and the favorite was Victor Wooten, arguably the greatest bass player of all time. Watching the tape, the drummer noticed Victor's short fingernails and announced, "If you want to play like that, you got to have short fingernails."

Have the church look at a neighbor and say, "I've got a chance."

That is how most people look at success. They look at someone who has accomplished something and decide it is because of one little thing they do.

When the Holy Spirit gave this word, it came in one line: **"The secret isn't in the sauce. The secret's in the sand."**

- There is no super special secret. It is **practical, private preparation**, something that happened in a private place you never saw.
- What the drummer missed: Victor Wooten has been playing bass since he was a small child. Anything you do from childhood, you are going to be great at.
- Too often we think success comes by **default**, something special about a person. Really, it comes by **design**.

WHERE THIS SHOWS UP MOST

- **Ministers.** Many do not apply this principle, which is why this message is preached "to a preacher."
- **Side hustles.** People with a main gig and something on the side almost always underestimate what it will take to succeed. Look at your YouTube watch history: how many videos are you watching about

the secret to doing the thing? There is no shortcut. It takes time. The secret's not in the sauce; it's in the sand.

PAUL'S RÉSUMÉ

Paul was not one of the twelve disciples, but he wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament, roughly a quarter of the New Testament by word count. Many in Jesus' inner circle were fishermen and tax collectors. Paul was a trained religious scholar.

- He was "educated at the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22:3), one of the most honored teachers in Jewish history. Jewish tradition remembered him this way: "When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Torah ceased" (Mishnah, Sotah 9:15).
- Why did that glory fade? "Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it" (2 Corinthians 3:10). A better covenant came in Jesus Christ.
- He was, in his own words, "a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees" (Acts 23:6), and "as to the law, a Pharisee" (Philippians 3:5). Pharisees were not simply uppity religious people. They were strict, trained experts in logic, argument, interpretation and debate. Paul was an encyclopedia, the internet of the Torah in his day.

Paul came into the faith more qualified than any of the disciples who had traveled with Jesus. And yet he hit pause and withdrew into Arabia. Galatians 1 puts about three years between his conversion and his first visit to Jerusalem.

He was qualified, and he still withdrew. People say, "God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called." Paul shows that God also calls people who are well able and well capable. Competent people can get saved too. The gospel is for everybody.

Today, look at three people who went into the sand before they stepped into their destiny, and what each one received there.

1. Paul Went into the Sand: Knowledge Without Demand

In Arabia, Paul was not performing. He was learning. He took everything he knew as a student of Gamaliel and a Pharisee, and he let the revelation of Jesus Christ sink in. It has been said that Paul went into Arabia with the Torah scrolls and came out with Romans, Galatians and Ephesians written on his heart. He went into the sand to internalize the revelation.

The Dunning-Kruger effect. Psychologists have a name for a pattern: people with the least knowledge of a subject tend to be the most confident about it. That is why it is easy to solve every political problem in the country around the dinner table. The more you know, the more you realize there is to know. Nothing is as easy as it looks; there is always more to the story. When we make judgment calls about other people's lives, it is our opinion, but they have to live in it every day.

Illustration: the seven-minute sermon. At a church in Michigan, a young Bible college student came home and was given a Wednesday night to preach. After leading worship, Pastor Jason stepped out to his office. About ten minutes later the secretary walked in: "We're done." In the foyer, the young man explained, "I got to the end of seven minutes. I didn't have any more content." Why not go back through it? "I preached it twice." He had three and a half minutes of sermon for a service that normally ran an hour.

You can get on stage. You can get on the platform. You can launch the business today. But **if you don't have a well in you that you can draw from, you won't be able to do what the moment calls for.**

Paul did not go into the desert to be in the desert. It was not isolation, punishment or withdrawal. **He went into the desert to dig a well,** so he would have something to draw from when he got to Corinth.

2. Joshua Went into the Sand: He Served Another Leader

Joshua the son of Nun served under Moses in the wilderness for forty years. "His assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent" (Exodus 33:11). There is no secret sauce, but this is the closest thing to a cheat code you can get.

Serving another leader accomplishes several things:

- **Exposure to the behind the scenes.** You start to see what you don't know that you don't know.
- **A form of sowing.** "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). The way you serve a leader is the way you will be served in the future.
- **Connections.** If you want to build houses, work for a general contractor. You will meet the drywall guys, the carpet man and the plumber you will call later.
- **The biggest asset: you learn how to treat people on your team.**

Your investment in the people who work for you will produce your biggest success.

When people launch too quickly without ever serving another leader, they have a gap in their education. Senior pastors who have never worked for another pastor often carry unrealistic expectations of their staff. They want "the baby without the labor pains." The same is true of business owners who never served under anyone. A visceral understanding of what it is like not to be the one in charge sharpens your leadership and helps you care for those who serve under you.

Joshua served another man, and Joshua was the one who led Israel into the promised land (Joshua 1:1-2). He stepped into his destiny.

3. Joseph Went into the Sand: Experience Without Benefits

Joseph dreamed of ruling.

> **GENESIS 37:5-8** ESV
>
> [5] Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. [6] He said to them, “Hear this dream that I have dreamed: [7] Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.” [8] His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Illustration: “Don’t tell anybody.” Some of the best advice for the sand came from an older brother in the faith (he was about 21) when Pastor Jason first felt called to ministry as a teenager: “Don’t tell anyone you feel called. Keep it between you and the Lord, because people will hate you for your dream.”

They may hate you for your dreams. Don’t let them hate you for your words.

Joseph’s dream did come true: “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt” (Genesis 41:41). But before it came true, he had to find the secret in the sand. He served under three very different situations, and each gave him experience without the benefits.

- **Under his father: experience without consequences.** Joseph oversaw his brothers’ work, and “Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father” (Genesis 37:2). That is where the trouble started. But with his father he could try things on without fear. His father even “made him a robe of many colors” (Genesis 37:3). He got to put the clothes on and give it a shot.
- **Under Potiphar: resource without control.** Sold into slavery, Joseph became the number two in a wealthy man’s house. Potiphar “left all that he had in Joseph’s charge” (Genesis 39:6). He had all the money he needed, but no latitude. If you think all you need is more money, money is not the only thing you need.
- **In the prison: control without resource.** “The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph’s charge, because the LORD was with him” (Genesis 39:23). Unlimited latitude, but it was a prison. If you think all you need is control, stuff costs.

Before Joseph stepped into his greatest opportunity, he spent years gaining experience that was not his dream come true, and he learned how to execute from every angle.

NOBODY WANTS THE SAND ANYMORE

Without griping on a generation: we have come to a place where very few people value simply getting the experience. Many expect six figures, or at least the perk of wearing their AirPods all day, before they will start.

Illustration: the young preacher. This whole message landed because of a young man, about 20, with a genuine call of God on his life, who would rather be a preacher today than be prepared for tomorrow. Nobody needs a 19-year-old man of God to roll up in the church and start calling the shots. You have to grow, develop, learn and deal with your stuff. If he would hit the brakes at 20, by 25 he could be a

formidable force, the most anointed 25-year-old in the room. But he does not want to dig a well, serve another man, or gain experience without the accolades.

Some of us are like that in areas of our lives. We want to do the thing, but we do not want to take the time.

Illustration: twelve years ago. About twelve years ago, Pastor Jason and Ashleigh tried to go pastor. At 28 he had more experience than most of his peers, had served in churches big and small, and had the Word in him. It did not happen. Today the well is deep: no downloading sermons from the internet or copying other preachers. That takes time in the sand.

Second careers. Some of you are going after a second career, the "second mountain." It is tough to go from supervisor back to the bottom. **It's not the bottom. It's the sand.** Pull away, serve another leader, get experience without the benefit, and after a couple of years God will give you favor, because you will have something to work with on the inside.

That failed season of trying to pastor is the reason Pastor Jason's first book, *Money from the Master's Hand*, exists. Every time he was forced back into the sand, it was for his good.

4. Potiphar's Wife: Choose the Sand or Get Forced into It

You have a choice. You can go into the sand, or you will get forced into the sand, but you are going to the sand. It is better to make it your own decision, so you do not have to get over the hurt before you get the benefits.

Joseph had a great situation in Potiphar's house. As slavery goes, it was a win-win: authority, resource, good food. He might have been content to stay forever. Then Potiphar's wife pursued him, and Joseph did the right thing. He said no. Doing the right thing cost him. Offended, she made up a story, and Potiphar chose peace in his house over keeping a slave, and Joseph went to prison (Genesis 39:7-20).

Potiphar's wife represents the external force that causes failure. It is unexplainable, it comes out of nowhere, and it usually has nothing to do with you. Joseph was doing the right things, had success and God's favor, and still got removed.

Illustration: the search committees. When Pastor Jason and Ashleigh tried to pastor twelve years ago, they got to the finish line with church after church, and then something would come out of nowhere: a last-minute board member asking bizarre questions, strangers calling in bad references for someone they did not know. It is a force that comes in and derails the situation.

When that happens, bitterness can creep in. Instead of moving forward, you anchor down and replay it over and over. A season of being upset is human. But at some point you have to ask, "Am I going to live here, or am I going to move my life forward?" Say, "I'm going to trust the Lord in this."

From hindsight: every time Potiphar's wife has pulled you out of what you were sure was your assignment, if you walk the timeline through, it has worked out for your benefit. There are things we walk

in today that we could not walk in without those experiences.

When the job doesn't go through, the relationship doesn't work out, the doctor's report isn't what you hoped, or the tax refund isn't what you expected: trust the Lord through the process. Do not reject or resent your time in the sand. Make the most of it, grow and develop yourself, and God will do a great work in your life.

Conclusion

Close prophetically. Some here are wondering, because of how they were raised, who they have been around, what has happened to them, or mistakes they have made, "Can my life actually go to the next level, or is this just my lot in life?"

There is nothing that you have done, nothing that has happened to you, and no one you have been associated with that will disqualify you from the future God has for you, and from the next-level living available to you through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

It is time to drop a marker in the ground and say, "This is far enough. My life is going to change, and I'm going to do what it takes."

With heads bowed, invite people to say, "I'm committing to go back to the sand, to the place where I can develop myself and move into the life promised at the cross."

- "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).
- Those "who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17).
- "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).
- "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

All you need is to take the Word and mix it with a little time in the sand. Close with praise for what God is about to do.



ABOUT

PASTOR JASON MAYFIELD

Pastor Jason Mayfield is the Senior Pastor of Citylight Church in Saraland, Alabama, an author, and the creator of POWER 27. He has given more than 20 years to the local church and helps pastors and ministry leaders lead BIG.

Free outlines, articles and leadership resources: **jasonmayfield.com**

You are welcome to preach from this outline. Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.esv.org