



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-30

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

Introduction:

- Last week we began a new sermon series we're calling, *The God Who Is with Us*.
 - For the next few weeks, we'll be looking at how God was with Joseph and how God is with us.
 - And last time we saw what we can do when we face conflict in our lives.
 - We saw how we need to:
 - Seek the God of Jacob.
 - Speak the truth to others.
 - Search for those who reject us.
 - And submit to God's providence.
- As we continue in our series, we come to a story that seems completely out of place.
 - Some pastors actually skip this chapter and go right to chapter 39.
 - It's such a horrible and broken story.
 - At times, it even sounds unfit for church.
 - But as we study this chapter.
 - We'll see how amazing God's grace truly is.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- And let's remember this:
 - The Bible isn't a book for perfect people living perfect lives.
 - It's a book about broken people, with broken relationships, and broken homes, and broken pasts.
 - It's a book that shows how God is able to work for our good, even in our darkest days.
 - And we'll see from our passage today, how deep our sin can be, but how much deeper God's grace truly is.

Point 1:

- First, we see in our passage what it looks like to spiritually drift away.
 - Spiritual drift doesn't begin, at least most of the time, with one big decision.
 - It begins with smaller decisions that don't seem significant in the moment.
 - But before you know it, you realize you're in a place you never thought you'd be.
 - And in our passage, we see what this can look like.
- We're told in the last verse of Genesis 37 that the Midianites sold Joseph to Potiphar.
 - Joseph was forced away from his family against his will.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- And we'll come back to Joseph next week.
- But in chapter 38, the scene shifts to Judah.
 - And from verses 1 to 8, the author shows how Judah drifted away from God.
- Take a look at verse 1.
 - **“It happened at that time...”** Genesis 38:1
 - What time is the author talking about?
 - He's speaking about the time right after Joseph was sold.
 - **“It happened at that time, Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside...”** Genesis 38:1
 - Right after Joseph was sold, Judah decided to leave his family.
- Do you see the irony here?
 - Joseph was forced to leave his family.
 - He wanted so much to stay.
 - But here, Judah leaves on his own two feet.
- But why would Judah leave his family?
- Well, he could've left because he felt guilty for convincing his brothers to sell Joseph as a slave.
 - After all, it was his idea.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- Or maybe he felt guilty for making his father grieve and lying about Joseph's death.
 - If you remember, Jacob mourned for Joseph and he couldn't be consoled.
- Or perhaps he wanted to forget his past and start a new life.
- The Bible doesn't tell us why he left.
 - But for whatever reason, instead of staying with God's people.
 - He left his family.
- And then we're told that he turned aside to a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah.
 - Instead of staying with God's family, he became friends with a man who worshipped pagan gods.
 - There's nothing wrong with having friends who don't believe in God.
 - But we see from this story how Hirah was a bad influence on Judah's life.
 - Whenever his name shows up, Judah makes foolish decisions.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- And then, right after meeting Hirah, the Bible says Judah took a Canaanite woman to be his wife.
 - The Bible doesn't say Judah was meditating and waiting for his wife, like Isaac was waiting for Rebbekah.
 - It doesn't say he worked 14 years to win his wife over, like Jacob did for Rachel.
 - It says in verse 2:
 - **“He took her and went in to her, and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er.”** Genesis 38:2
 - It seems Judah was driven more by lust than by love.
 - Didn't I say Hirah was a bad influence?
- Not only does Judah seem cold to his wife.
 - He also seems to have little regard for his children.
 - In verse 3, Judah names his firstborn son.
 - **“He called his name Er.”**
 - But in verse 4, it's Judah's wife who names their other children.
 - Verse 4 says:
 - **“She called his name Onan. Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah.”** Genesis 38:4
 - In Judah's time, the firstborn son would:
 - Carry on the family name.
 - Receive the most inheritance.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- And bring honor to the family.
 - And Judah seems to favor his older son more than his younger sons.
- And then we're told that Judah found a woman named Tamar to marry Er.
 - His second son, Onan, was old enough to get married as well.
 - But the Bible doesn't say Judah tried to find a wife for Onan.
 - He just wanted a grandson from Er to carry on his family line.
- Unfortunately, Er was a wicked person.
 - He was so wicked the Lord had to put him to death.
- And so, Judah tells Onan, his second son, to go in to Tamar.
 - Verse 8 says:
 - **“Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother.”**
- In Judah's time, if you had an older brother who died, and he didn't have children.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- You were expected to take his wife as your wife, and provide offspring for your brother.
- This would ensure the wife would be taken care of, and her offspring would gain an inheritance.
- It would protect your brother's legacy, as well as care for his widow.
- But here, Judah doesn't tell Onan to take Tamar as his wife.
 - In fact, he doesn't show any regard for his daughter-in-law.
 - He doesn't even call her by her name.
 - Instead, he tells Onan to go in to her so he might have a grandson.
 - Even though it's not stated, Judah's motive seems clear.
 - More than anything else, he was concerned with preserving his family line.
- Bible scholar Sidney Greidanus writes:
 - "Judah is not ordering Onan to marry Tamar; he is only telling him..."
 - "Go in to you your brother's wife..."
 - "Judah seems unconcerned about the welfare of Tamar..."
 - "Judah is concerned only about getting offspring for his dead son."



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- (Greidanus, 370, Genesis)
- I know this sounds strange to us.
 - But it's like building a company and wanting your children to carry on everything you've built.
 - This responsibility was given to the eldest son.
 - And Judah wanted to protect his inheritance and family name.
- Do you see how Judah began to drift away?
 - He walked away from the family of God.
 - He stopped being influenced by the word of God.
 - He became cold and calloused towards those around him.
 - And instead of loving others and serving God, his main focus became serving himself.
 - Here we see, what it looks like to spiritually drift away.

Point 2:

- Second, we see from our passage what it looks like to be spiritually blind.
 - Spiritual blindness can keep us from admitting our sin.
 - It can keep us from moving forward in our lives.
 - And here we see how Judah was spiritually blind.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- Onan did a wicked thing by refusing to give Tamar a child.
 - He would sleep with Tamar, but he kept her from becoming pregnant.
 - He did this multiple times.
 - That's why the Bible says:
 - **"Whenever he went to Tamar..."** Genesis 38:9
 - Not only was Onan taking advantage of his sister-in-law.
 - He also didn't want to give his father's inheritance to this child he could provide.
 - He wanted to keep it for himself.
 - And because of his wickedness, he was judged by God and died just like his older brother.
- And then look at what the Bible says in verse 11:
 - **"Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, 'Remain a widow in your father's house, till Shelah my son grows up,' for he feared that he would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went and remained in her father's house."** Genesis 38:11
- Judah was culturally bound to give Shelah to Tamar.
 - And so, he told Tamar to wait even though he had no intention of giving Shelah away.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- This meant Tamar couldn't marry another man but had to wait.
 - She had to remain a widow.
- This also meant Shelah couldn't marry another woman.
 - He was stuck as well.
- Did Judah have a plan?
 - What was he going to do?
 - Because of this father's disobedience, it caused a standstill for his whole family.
- Furthermore, we're told that Judah's Canaanite wife also died.
 - Do you see what this means?
 - It means, this could be it for Judah's line.
- Doesn't Judah see how much trouble Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob had to suffer so that God's promise would be fulfilled?
 - Does he have no regard for God's promise to his family?
 - Here we see how Judah was spiritually blind to God's word.
- Even more, because he was unwilling to do what was right.
 - He put himself in a corner.
 - Tamar couldn't move forward.
 - Shelah couldn't move forward.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- Judah's family line couldn't move forward.
 - He was spiritually stuck.
- Furthermore, instead of taking responsibility and doing the right thing.
 - He blamed the deaths of his sons on Tamar.
 - Judah had no idea what his children were doing.
 - He was blind to their sin.
- The Bible says that Er and Onan were killed by God.
 - That's how evil they were.
 - They were so wicked they needed to be put to death.
 - But Judah is so blind, he blames Tamar for their deaths.
- Do you remember when Jacob thought Joseph had died?
 - Jacob mourned for his son.
 - He couldn't be consoled.
 - Jacob was overwhelmed with grief.
- But look at Judah.
 - After Er and Onan were killed, he doesn't seem to have an ounce of grief for their deaths.
 - Instead, he's more concerned about getting offspring for himself.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- Furthermore, he seems to have no concern for the danger he's putting Tamar through.
 - She has no husband.
 - She has no child.
 - She has no security for the future.
 - All she can do is wait for Judah to act.
- If you remember from last week, Judah was willing to sell his own brother for a profit.
 - Rather than protecting Joseph, he thought of a way to use his brother to make money for himself.
 - Here we see, Judah hasn't changed a bit.
- Do you see how spiritually blind Judah was?
 - He was blind to God's promises.
 - He was blind to the sins of his sons.
 - He was blind to the suffering of others.
 - He was blind to his selfish heart.
- And Judah's blindness kept him spiritually stuck.

Point 3:

- We saw what it looks like to drift away.
 - We saw what it looks like to be spiritually blind.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- Third, we see what it looks like to truly repent.
- In verse 13 we're told that Judah went to Timnah to shear his sheep.
 - After shearing sheep, there would be a festival or party with drinking, and celebrations, and slaughtering meat.
- And knowing her father-in-law was going to this festival.
 - Tamar dressed like a prostitute, and put a veil over her face so she could deceive Judah to sleep with her.
 - It was the perfect time to execute her plan.
- And when Judah saw her, he didn't recognize her because she covered her face.
 - And he asked to go in to her.
 - It's so sad, Tamar felt she had to resort to this plan.
 - It's even sadder that Judah fell so easily into sin.
- Last time when Judah was with Hirah, he lusted after a Canaanite woman and went in to her.
 - This time, he's with Hirah again, and now he wants to take a woman he thinks is a prostitute.
 - Did I mention Hirah was a bad influence?
- And Tamar asks him what he will give to her.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- Judah offers a young goat from his flock.
- But since he didn't have a goat with him, Tamar asks for something as a pledge.
 - She asks for his signet with its cord, and also his staff.
 - The signet and cord were like an identification card.
 - And his staff probably had carvings that would show, it belonged to him.
 - You could say he was handing over his license and credit card.
 - For one night with this woman, Judah was risking his life's reputation.
- Tamar agrees and she becomes pregnant with a child.
- In our day today, it may look as though Tamar is committing a horrible sin.
 - But later Judah declares Tamar to be righteous for what she did.
- Think about all she did.
 - Instead of leaving Judah's family, Tamar acts to preserve the family line, Judah neglected to secure.
 - Judah had no concern for God's promise.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- But this Canaanite woman went out of her way to provide an offspring for her husband's family.
- Did she know about God's promise to this family?
- Did she have faith in the God of Jacob?
- We're not told.
- But she acted, when Judah refused to obey.
- After sending the goat to this prostitute to get his signet and staff.
 - Hirah finds out the prostitute is gone.
 - But Judah doesn't want to look for her.
 - He'll become the laughingstock of the city.
 - It's like looking for your wallet at the brothel.
 - He'd rather lose his stuff than announce to everyone he slept with a prostitute.
- After 3 months, Judah was told that Tamar was pregnant.
 - And without hesitation Judah judges Tamar and calls for her to be burned.
 - Adultery was punishable by death, and so he wants her dead.
- Now, wait a minute.
 - Judah slept with a woman, he thought was a prostitute.
 - He withheld Shelah from Tamar.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- He abandoned his responsibility to care for his daughter-in-law.
- But instead of looking at his sin, he's calling for Tamar to be burned.
- Do you see how blind Judah is to his sin?
- I wonder if he was thinking:
 - "Perfect, this is my way out."
 - "If she dies, I can give Shelah to another woman and he can provide offspring for me."
 - "Tamar needs to die!"
- But then Tamar shows Judah the signet, and cord, and the staff.
 - And immediately he saw they belonged to him.
 - Judah is forced to face his sin.
 - And do you know what he says?
 - He says:
 - **"She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah."** Genesis 38:26
- For the first time in this chapter and probably his life.
 - Judah stops blaming others.
 - He stops running away.
 - He stops hiding his failure.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- And Judah finally acknowledges his sin.
- And we know Judah's repentance was genuine because later in Genesis, we'll see how:
 - Judah returns to his family.
 - Cares for his father.
 - And is willing to give his life for Benjamin, his brother.
 - And when Joseph sees and hears what Judah says, it brings to him tears to see his brother who once sold him off, now offering his life for Benjamin.
- Genesis 38 shows how Judah began to change.
 - The man who brought pain to his brother, and pain to his father, becomes the man God uses to help bring his family back together.
- In chapter 37, Judah killed a goat and used its blood to cover his sin and deceive his father.
 - But in chapter 38, a goat was sent to his daughter-in-law, and God used it to uncover Judah's sin and to lead him to repentance.
 - In chapter 37, the goat helped Judah hide.
 - In chapter 38, the goat helped Judah repent.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- Judah may have wanted to forget the past, and move on with his life.
 - But if he wanted to move forward, God had to bring him face to face with his sin.
- In the same way, sometimes God's grace may expose our sin.
 - Not because God wants to destroy us.
 - But because he wants to restore us.
 - Because he loves us.
- And isn't this what God has done for us by sending his Son?
 - Our sins put Jesus on the cross.
 - And Jesus had to shed his blood.
- But God raised Jesus from the dead.
 - So that we might repent.
 - So that we might be forgiven.
 - So that sinners like Judah, and sinners like us can be restored.
- Here we see what it looks like to truly repent.

Point 4:



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- Fourth and finally, we see from our passage what God's grace can do in our broken lives.
- At the end of this chapter, we're told that Tamar gave birth to Zerah and Perez.
 - And do you know who Perez was?
 - Let me read for you, the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew 1.
 - **"Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king."** Matthew 1:2-6
 - Perez was an ancestor of King David.
 - And generations later, Jesus Christ was born through the line of David.
 - Not only Judah, but Tamar is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.
- Do you see the power of God's grace?



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- Judah made horrible decisions.
 - Tamar was in a horrible situation.
 - This was a deeply broken family.
 - And yet, none of it was able to derail God's plan of salvation.
 - In fact, from one of the most sinful and broken stories in the Bible, God brought the family line that would eventually lead to the Savior of the world.
- Didn't I tell you?
 - Even though our sins may be deep, God's grace is even deeper.

Applications:

- So, what can we do?

Return:

- If you're here today, and you've been drifting away from God.
 - It's time to return.
 - Stop trying to live on your own.
 - Get back into Christian community.
 - Stop allowing your heart to grow cold and calloused.
 - Stop turning away from God's word.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- Draw near to him, and he will draw near to you.

Repent:

- And if you've been living in sin, ask the Lord to open your eyes?
 - Repent of your sin.
 - Stop hiding your sin.
 - Stop running away from what you need to face.
 - You may have stained your life with sin.
 - But Christ has washed you clean with his blood.
 - Let's confess our sin.
 - Because he is faithful and just to forgive.

Receive:

- And finally, let's receive God's grace.
 - Stop trying to earn God's acceptance.
 - Stop trying to prove yourself.
 - Stop believing your life is too broken for God to redeem.
 - No matter how broken your family may feel today.
 - No matter how broken your life feels right now.
 - Christian believer, you have hope.
 - Because the same grace that was at work in Judah's life is still at work in your life today.



THE ORCHARD

The God Who Is With Us In Our Failure

Genesis 38:1-50

Pastor Tom Yoon

September 20, 2026

- Return to the Lord
 - Repent of your sin.
 - And receive his grace.
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- Amazing grace how sweet the sound.
 - That saved a wretch like me.
 - I once was lost, but now am found.
 - Was blind but now I see.