

SESSION 2

WHEN LIFE GOES TERRIBLY WRONG

Leader pages on pp. 134-137

THE POINT:
EVEN HARD
INTERRUPTIONS PLACE
US WHERE GOD CAN
USE US.

GENESIS 39:21-23; 40:5-8; 41:10-14

MEMORY VERSE

^{39:21} But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him. He granted him favor with the prison warden.

²² The warden put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph's authority, and he was responsible for everything that was done there.

²³ The warden did not bother with anything under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him, and the LORD made everything that he did successful.

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^{40:5} The king of Egypt's cupbearer and baker, who were confined in the prison, each had a dream. Both had a dream on the same night, and each dream had its own meaning.

⁶ When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they looked distraught.

⁷ So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why do you look so sad today?"

⁸ "We had dreams," they said to him, "but there is no one to interpret them." Then Joseph said to them, "Don't interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."

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^{41:10} Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and he put me and the chief baker in the custody of the captain of the guards.

¹¹ He and I had dreams on the same night; each dream had its own meaning.

¹² Now a young Hebrew, a slave of the captain of the guards, was with us there. We told him our dreams, he interpreted our dreams for us, and each had its own interpretation.

¹³ It turned out just the way he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged."

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and they quickly brought him from the dungeon. He shaved, changed his clothes, and went to Pharaoh.

KEYWORDS

Prison warden (v. 21)—The Hebrew term for warden means "chief" or "prince" and is used to describe someone who has rule over a specific sphere of government or life.

Dream (v. 5)—In this context, a dream is more than what most people experience when they sleep. The dream were prophetic

in as they provided glimpses into the futures of the men who dreamed them.

Dungeon (v. 14)—The Hebrew term can mean of a pit, cistern, or well. The royal dungeon may have used converted cisterns for holding prisoners.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE A POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE IN NEGATIVE SITUATIONS?

The birth of a giraffe is amazing to see! First, the newborn calf drops ten feet to the ground at birth. Then, his mama kicks him. Hard! Somehow, the calf knows what this means and tries to stand. But those stilts-for-legs rarely work on the first try.

Bam! A second kick sends the calf flying and stumbling. This cycle of kick, try, and fall repeats until the infant giraffe finds its wobbly balance. Then, bam! Mama kicks him off his feet! Her baby must learn how to rise and get moving right away or predators will pick him off.

I've got some things in common with a baby giraffe. I've been knocked off my feet, kicked while I was down, kicked by the people I expected kindness from. Can you relate?

Joseph certainly can. His life was interrupted by jealous and evil people, cruel injustice, and harsh hardship. Yet, his God-centered response offers an example of trusting God on a road full of potholes. How we can learn from him how to handle less challenging circumstances in our own lives and still keep a God-trusting posture enabling us to know confidently, "Won't He do it!"

God May Allow Suffering for a Season // Genesis 39:21-23

Meet Joseph. In Genesis 37, he's seventeen and his life is a reality show, full of drama. Nothing could have prepared him for what was about to happen.

- He was born into a dysfunctional family.
- His half-brothers took turns being brutal, conniving, and openly morally wrong.
- He was his dad's favorite, and his brothers hated him for it.
- Jacob's gift of the "coat of many colors" signified firstborn privileges and position to Joseph, deepening the conflict with his siblings and expanding the hate.
- God gave Joseph dreams predicting his status in his family. Excited, immature, and clueless, Joseph shared the dreams that showed he would rule over his family. You can guess how that went.

So, what happened when daddy's favorite, with firstborn rights and big dreams of future influence,



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was spotted by his hateful, jealous brothers as he walked toward them in a remote area — wearing that irritating coat? Answer: Nothing good!

In one afternoon, Joseph went from spoiled heir in a rich family to pitiful slave headed for Egypt, where he was sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's head man in charge. Imagine what Joseph must have felt during that terrible road trip: injustice, grief, anger, devastation.

We all carry wounds caused by others. It's easy to check in to Hotel Hurt and stay there, putting on replay how we've been wronged. Questions weigh on us in times like these: "God, where are you in all this?"; "How could You let this happen to me?"; "What did I do to deserve this, God?"

But Joseph's story gives a different perspective despite the trials, God had not walked out on him. Quite the opposite, God was with him in every valley. As Genesis 39 opens, Joseph had a choice to make. Joseph chose God and that made all the difference. He could let what others had done to him define his life, becoming a hardhearted, bitter man — OR — He could trust that God, the dream giver, was present and doing something he couldn't see or understand.

HOW HAS GOD SHOWN GRACE TO YOU DURING SETBACKS IN YOUR LIFE?

Four times in Genesis 39, we read that "the LORD was with Joseph" (vv. 2,3,21,23). Hebrews 13 tells us what happens when we believe this truth. "...I will never leave or abandon you. Therefore, we may boldly say, The LORD is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (vv. 5-6).

Sounds like Joseph, doesn't it? Confidence in God protected his heart from toxic emotions and opened him up to God's blessing. Each time God's presence with him is mentioned, we're told his work succeeded and Joseph advanced. We see God steadily moving Joseph up the status ladder, but it wasn't easy for him. It's obvious that Joseph told Potiphar and the prison warden the reason for his attitude or skill (vv. 3,23). They acknowledged that God was the explanation for Joseph's life. God got all the glory.

Even when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him daily (v. 10), Joseph never gave in to temptation. He was living his life according to God's standards: he would not give in to this "great evil" and sin against God (v. 9). It was obedience that cost him. She smeared Joseph's character, and canceled him, landing him in prison (vv. 11-18). Joseph did what was right and got burned.

How encouraging it must have been for Joseph when while incarcerated, the warden gave him favor and complete trust.



DIGGING DEEPER JOSEPH

Throughout Joseph's life God used dreams as a vehicle carrying him on the path planned for him. From his first dream when God revealed Joseph's destiny to rule over his family, to the dreams revealing His providence from a prison cell; God disclosed His relationship with and power through Joseph. His accurate interpretation of dreams won him favor and status in Egypt. The fulfillment of Joseph's dreams showcased God's control over history and His ability to use human events for His divine purposes. Joseph's dreams and interpretations remind us God works through every situation, guiding His people toward His ultimate purposes. Reflect on this Joseph's life and your challenging situations to see God's plans at work for you. Meditate on the sentiment from Genesis 50:20, "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people."

How does Joseph's statement provide you comfort and hope to endure through hard times?



It makes me think: How many times has God met me with mercy and help in the darkest times of my life? How often, in those hard places, has He opened doors I would never have seen?

God Can Make You Shine in Any Situation // Gen. 40:5-8

When we hear of a “God-forsaken place,” we usually picture a location so harsh, isolated, and miserable it’s unfit for human thriving: a scorching desert, a freezing arctic, or a dark dungeon. That prison wore on Joseph.

The trauma of his imprisonment shrink-wrapped Joseph’s life. He felt claustrophobic, his whole existence confined to the length of his chains in a cell likely located underground. His limitations would bring up questions—the kind that haunt us when circumstances restrict us. Questions that focus speak to our doubts, trust and faith in God.

Sometimes, we Christians say to one another, “God is good all the time.” We declare this as public praise and mutual encouragement when prayers are answered, or when sickness is healed, or when God opens doors. But here’s an important question: Do we really believe He is good and do we believe it all the time?

Is God still good when tragedy comes, when prayers aren’t answered, when you get laid off, or your child is critically sick? According to Dr. Tony Evans in an X (Twitter) post, “One of the most difficult times to trust God is when He has disappointed you. Yet one of the most

important times to trust God is when He has disappointed you.”

HOW DO YOU THINK JOSEPH WAS ABLE TO KEEP A GODLY FOCUS EVEN IN PRISON?

We aren’t given the details, but judging from Joseph’s attitude and actions, he was stabilized by the kind of faith that stands even when God doesn’t do what we think He should do. He believed God had him there for a reason, which was confirmed by his release from his chains, his promotion over the prisoners (which included Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker), and his God-enabled success in his work.

So, when Pharaoh’s two attendants told Joseph their confusing dreams, God enabled him to explain their dreams: the cupbearer would be released and restored to Pharaoh’s service in three days; on the same day, the baker would be released and hanged. Both were fulfilled exactly as Joseph predicted.

There’s a flip in the script in the story that we’re about to see. Joseph fulfilled God’s purposes while in prison. If God can use Joseph in a dungeon, Daniel in a lion’s den, and Paul in prison, he has work for you to do right where you are.

God Can Make Your Setback Your Setup // Gen. 41:10-14

While in prison, Joseph had two fellow inmates that had dreams on the same night. There was no one to explain the dreams (Gen. 40:8). After his interpretation, Joseph made a heartfelt appeal to the cupbearer to mention him to Pharaoh once he is released (Gen. 40:14).

Genesis 40:23 delivers the blow: “Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.” Joseph’s whole life seems to be two steps forward, three steps back—a dance step no one wants to learn. Then, Genesis 41:1 adds to the pain. Read literally, it says, “After two whole years. . .”

Yet, Joseph’s trust in the Lord didn’t waver. His humility and focus on God when he stood before Pharaoh reveals the character-shaping work of his testing. Joseph couldn’t see the bigger picture,

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but he trusted God with the unknown. So, when the time came, Joseph was ready. It happened in a flash.

- The king had two fantastic dreams but Egypt's occult magicians couldn't make sense of them.
- The cupbearer's memories of prison kicked in and he remembered Joseph's accurate interpretation of his and the baker's dreams to Pharaoh.
- One royal command later and Joseph's unjust imprisonment was over.

Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, pointing him to God's wisdom and power as he explained the coming famine and Egypt's role in global relief. Hearing God's plans through Joseph, it was clear to the king who should manage the plan. And so, a Hebrew slave became the Prime Minister of Egypt. Look at God!

WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS TO MAINTAIN A GODLY PERSPECTIVE IN HARD TIMES?

It had been thirteen brutal years since Joseph was sold into slavery by his hateful brothers. But Joseph endured faithfully, looking past the wrongs and the losses. Joseph looked to God, who was preparing him for beyond belief purposes.

DID YOU KNOW?

People will often doubt Christian faith when hard times come asking "How could a loving and caring God allow terrible things to happen?" As we mature spiritually, we realize though God's desire is for our good, because we live in this fallen world, we will face hardships and difficulties. If we focus on the darkness of the challenges, instead of the light God provides as He's with us in them, we will miss our opportunities to deepen our faith and reveal it to others as living testaments of a real and present God. James 1:2-4 assures enduring challenges isn't in vain, but necessary for perfecting of our faith through endurance. In addition to suffering being necessary, James encourages us to count it joy when faced with trials because we know it's an opportunity to develop spiritually.

Biblical Truth: Every event and encounter in the believer's life is ultimately for our good and God's glory!

When has a difficult period in your life prepared you for a greater opportunity?

LIVE IT

How can you develop a positive perspective while adversity perfects your faith?

James warns us "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world" (John 16:33). Suffering is part of life in the world we live in. Though we'd rather avoid hardships, they're necessary to develop spiritual maturity. Consider the following ways to help develop a positive perspective on adversity.

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- **Pray about everything.** Read 1 Peter 5:7 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Practice talking with God daily about everything. Set reminders to pray throughout the day.
- **Fuel your faith.** God is bigger than your problems, fears, and future. Make a list of current trials. This week, review your list while reflecting on these verses: Job 42:2; Matthew 10:29-31; 19:26; Romans 8:28,32; Romans 11:33; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 1 Peter 1:6-7.
- **Consider blessings in suffering.** Life is hard and unfair. People can be thoughtless and mean. But God is GOOD! Meditate on Joseph's words in Genesis 50:20. How could his perspective help you this week?

DAILY READINGS

1. GOD'S PRESENCE IN ADVERSITY // GENESIS 39:21-23

Nelson Mandela was born into royalty, baptized in the United Methodist Church, resisted apartheid in South Africa, and was imprisoned for twenty-seven years. During his time, he befriended the guards and found favor. Joseph was his father's favorite son, and now, in Genesis 39, he is unjustly imprisoned due to false accusations from Potiphar's wife. But the Lord showed him favor with the prison warden. Joseph became a leader in the prison and found success during his adversity. In life, we face tribulations where everything seems out of control; like Joseph, we must remain faithful. These stories remind us that in chaotic, dark times, God's presence is with us.

God's presence turns our tribulations into victories. Hallelujah!

2. VIBE CHECK // GENESIS 40:5-8

What is your vibe during hard times? Are you rude, disrespectful, or compassionate and kind? A vibe is the energy you give off in certain situations. Joseph, imprisoned with the cupbearer and baker, saw they were concerned by their dreams and offered an answer to their concerns. Joseph's vibe reflected his trust in God, and he conveyed to them that God knows the answer. Psalm 43:5 asks, "Why, my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him, my Savior and my God." By checking our vibe, we can point others to God.

Lord, let my vibe guide others to you. In Jesus's name. Amen.

3. DIVINE OPPORTUNITY // GENESIS 41:10-14

We all face times when it seems we are taking one step forward and two steps back. Joseph interpreted the cupbearer's dream and asked him to remember him when Pharaoh restored him to his desired position. The cupbearer forgot. Others may forget; however, God always remembers

His creation. Two years later, Pharaoh had a dream, then the cupbearer remembered Joseph. Immediately, he is summoned for this divine opportunity. What seemed like a setback became a glorious promotion. "I know your works. Look, I have placed before you an open door that no one can close because you have but little power; yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name" (Rev. 3:8).

My God is a Way Maker, Miracle Worker, Promise Keeper, and Light in the Darkness!¹⁵

4. WHO'S IN CONTROL // JAMES 4:7

Researchers at Cornell University estimate "we make 226.7 decisions each day on food alone."¹⁶ How many of our decisions align with God's plan? In Exodus 2, Moses made an impulsive decision after seeing an Egyptian abusing a Hebrew. He lost control of his emotions and killed the abuser. How many times have we lost control and did the unspeakable? Did someone see us commit the crime? James 4:7 tells us, "Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." The next time our emotions overcome us, say a quick prayer to God so the devil will flee. God will help us control our emotions.

Father, control me when I cannot control myself. In Jesus's name. Amen.

5. SAFETY IN A FOREIGN LAND // LEVITICUS 19:34

Lifetime Movie Channel makes dramatic movies inspired by real-life stories. Some people are fleeing for their lives. Moses is running for his life after killing an Egyptian. He finds safety in Midian, a foreign land, where he marries and starts a family. Moses' name means "to draw out."¹⁷ God has rescued Moses from many dangers as He prepares him for his future purpose as a liberator. Exodus 2 reminds us that when we run to avoid the consequences of our sins, God will give us a safe haven until He calls us to fulfill our destiny.

God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble (Ps. 46:1).