

“How to Bloom Where You’re Planted”

Genesis 39:1-6

During World War II, Louis Zamperini was a U.S. airman whose bomber crashed into the Pacific Ocean. He and two other crew members survived for 47 days on a raft, facing sharks, starvation, and storms. But that wasn't the end of his ordeal—he was eventually captured by the Japanese and brutally imprisoned for over two years. Zamperini endured beatings, torture, and humiliation, especially from a notoriously cruel guard nicknamed 'The Bird.' Many in a situation like that would have died. But Zamperini survived. After the war, he struggled with PTSD, nightmares, and bitterness toward his captors. He turned to alcohol in an attempt to numb his pain. Then, at a Billy Graham crusade in 1949, he gave his life to Christ.

He said that after his conversion, the nightmares stopped and he felt truly free. And he was free to forgive. In 1950, Zamperini returned to Japan, not for revenge, but to forgive the very men who had tortured him. He visited the same prison where many of those former Japanese guards were now incarcerated. While there, he spoke to them about the power of forgiveness through Jesus Christ and personally forgave them. Some of the guards were deeply moved and even responded with tears. His story is a best-selling book *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand.

Now, I think that same word applies to the life Joseph as it is presented to us in these chapters in the book of Genesis. We have considered the first part of Joseph's life from his birth up until he was 17 years old. He was a beloved son who had the special affection of his father, and he was the object of hatred by his older brothers. We left off last time with Joseph having been betrayed and sold by his brothers into slavery. His story picks back up in chapter 39 as he has been taken down to Egypt as a slave and bought by a man named Potiphar who just so happens to be an officer of Pharaoh.

(Read)

Imagine all the emotions that Joseph must have felt as the caravan of Ishamelites leaves while everything else he had known is left behind. When he gets to Egypt, he discovers that he is the midst of a polytheistic society unlike anything that he has known

before. Scholars have estimated that the ancient Egyptians recognized at least two thousand gods and goddesses, including the Pharaoh himself, who was held up as being divine. The Egyptian culture which Joseph was exposed to was religiously pluralistic, and it was architecturally advanced. The ancient Egyptians used slave labor to build their massive construction projects, and so the slave market was always in high demand. Joseph's beginnings in Egypt show him to be a rejected servant who is falsely accused and condemned, though innocent. He is tempted and proven true. And this is yet but one more way that his life foreshadows Christ. He who had his father's favor and proudly wore a coat of many colors is stripped of that coat, betrayed by his brothers, and now made to be a slave. We wouldn't think that his life from this point forward could ever amount to much since slaves don't tend to be remembered. From our perspective, Joseph had been in a prime place to lead the family into the future. So that now from all appearances, he's been abandoned by both God and man. And by the time we come to Genesis 39, Joseph has every reason to be a bitter young man. But that is not what happens at all. He doesn't just survive—he thrives.

Success is a popular topic. It's impossible to pinpoint an exact number of books written about success. However, one estimate puts the number at 130 million. But did you know that the ESV Bible only uses the word "success" one time out of 66 books, 1,189 chapters, 31,102 verses, and 757,439 words? The only time "success" is mentioned in Scripture is in Joshua 1:8. Listen to this:

Joshua 1:8—“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

Success is one of the most misunderstood ideas in our world today. The word evokes thoughts of status, wealth, titles, influence, or fame. From self-help books to social media influencers, we are constantly bombarded with the latest and greatest strategies for “living our best life.” But God's definition of success is radically different from the world's. Circumstance has nothing to do with it.

God's definition of success is different from the world's in that God uses a different standard of measurement. God defines success as living according to His will. From His standpoint, success means walking in His ways. The Bible says in Deuteronomy 10:12, "What does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul?"

The world's definition of success is misleading because it focuses on what is temporary and ignores what is eternal and lasting. Jesus said:

Matthew 16:26—“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”

In contrast, God in His Word defines success in terms of what is spiritual, lasting, and ends in eternal life and joy. While worldly success is centered on the promotion and gratification of ourselves, biblical success is grounded in obedience to God and commitment to His glory. We think like the world when we assume that unless our situation is different, we cannot be successful in life. Joseph's story is an illustration how we can succeed in the prison as well as the palace. Because what matters more than our external circumstances is our inward condition.

It has been said that there is no ideal place to serve God except the place in which He sets you down. There is no ideal job. There is no ideal location in which to live. There is no ideal office in which to work. There certainly is no ideal church to join. Joseph will find himself in a situation that is far from ideal. But we learn from his life that there is no ideal situation in which to serve God, except that place where He sets you down. If we aren't careful, we can go through life always looking for greener pastures. We assume that success lies somewhere else—in a different job, relationship, location, or season of life. Solomon writes about this:

Ecclesiastes 1:8—“The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.”

In other words, our eyes are always scanning the horizon for something else. If I have that, if I live there, if I do this, then I will have arrived. The fact of the matter is that God intends for us to bloom where we're planted. We think if we change our circumstances, we can finally achieve the perfect life. But the problem is rarely the pasture itself. It's often something within us. That's why when people chase greener grass, they often end up disappointed. Someone said, "The grass is greener where you water it." In other words, it's not the place but the practice that leads to our fruitfulness. Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt. He's made to be a slave in the house of Potiphar. If ever there was a brown pasture, this is it. But what I want you to see is that he makes the most of that situation and lives under the prospering hand of God. Verse 2 says, "The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man." Now, let me show you some things about how to bloom where you're planted in life. First of all, it involves:

1—TRUSTING God in every circumstance (39:1-2)

"Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master."

Verse 1 tells us how Joseph finds himself in a situation that is far from the ideal. Think of all that he has experienced up to this point. He's been betrayed and mistreated by his brothers, taken from his home, stripped of all his dignity, separated from his father, and made to be a slave in Egypt. He is now forced to travel a road that he certainly would not have chosen for himself. If ever there were unwanted circumstances, surely this is it. But notice:

God's protection of Joseph

Notice that verse 1 says, "Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there." These are not just random details in the story, but is proof that God in His wisdom is orchestrating the circumstances of Joseph's

life. Through it all, we can trace the protecting hand of God in Joseph's life. He isn't protected from circumstances, but is protected in circumstances. God protected him from the murderous plan of his brothers. God protected him while he was in the pit. God protected him while he was sold as a slave.

In the same way, there is much that God's protecting hand spares us from in this life. And it doesn't necessarily mean He always keeps us from circumstances, but that He promised to be with us in the midst of those circumstances. Part of His discipline in our lives requires that we walk the road of hardships. The Bible says in:

Proverbs 3:11-12—“My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of His reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom He loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

The writer of Hebrews references this and then explains:

Hebrews 12:7-11—“It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

Hardships are often God's tools to grow us. Paul says in Romans 5:3, “We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” Like gold refined by fire, we are refined through trials. God is more interested in our character than our comfort. He doesn't promise us a life free from trial, but let me tell you what He does promise:

- His presence in the trial

Psalm 23:4—“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”

- His purpose through the trial

Romans 8:28—“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.”

- His peace despite the trial

Philippians 4:6-7—“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Joseph was in a season of hardship, but he was not alone and he was certainly not forgotten. And God may not have spared him from the storm, but He’s sustaining him through it. And friends, He will do the same for us.

God’s presence with Joseph

Plotted against, sold as a slave, and bought by Potiphar in Egypt, Joseph will discover that even though he is a long way from all that is safe and familiar, the watchful eye of God is upon him. He will experience what the psalmist would later write about in:

Psalm 139:5-7—“You hem me in, behind and before, and lay Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence?”

I want you to pay attention to this wonderful phrase found in verse 2—“The Lord was with Joseph.” The phrase is used four times in the chapter—verse 2, verse 3, verse 21, and verse 23. God’s covenant name is used seven times here. That’s significant because it only occurs once more in his entire story (49:18).

I like what one commentator writes:

William Philip—*“It is as if the writer is shouting through a megaphone right at the start of the story that the Lord is with this man Joseph. He is in the midst, making His blessings flow through Joseph. The reason is surely because when we read the detail of each story, what we see is apparently Joseph receiving anything but the blessing of God’s presence—he is unjustly treated, cruelly punished, and ends up forsaken and forgotten. In each account there is no doubt about the powerful presence of God’s blessing around him, and through him, yet in each Joseph’s personal life is full of perplexing pain. It looks like he himself is not being blessed, but rather cursed by God. Without verses 1-6 and 21-23, we would assume God has surely abandoned this man.”*

The Lord is with Joseph both to protect and to bless. God has not abandoned him, but is working through Joseph’s circumstances to accomplish His purposes. And it is the presence of God with Joseph that makes all the difference. God was with him in the pit, God will be with him now in the house of Potiphar, and God will be with him when he is later thrown into prison. Verse 2 says the Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. He not only adjusted to his new situation, but he flourishes in it, and the reason is owed to the fact that the Lord was with Joseph.

John Phillips—*“We have to learn life’s adversities before we can be trusted with life’s advancements.”*

I heard Joby Martin say it this way, “Everybody wants to be strong, but nobody wants to be sore.” In other words, we all want the benefit of the gym without the pain of the workout. Friends, faith in Jesus will take us down a bumpy road. God loves us too much to spare us from adversity. He has so purposed to build and refine our character through the struggles of this life. Instead of sparing us from hardship, He will enroll us in the school of hard knocks where we learn to trust Him as we make the most of our situation. That’s what Joseph will learn in Potiphar’s house. He blooms where God has planted him. Then notice a second thing from his life:

2—FAITHFULNESS in every responsibility (39:3-4)

“His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had.”

How do we make the most of our situation? It begins with trusting God in every circumstance. But notice how it also involves faithfulness in every responsibility. Joseph’s faith was being formed in the crucible of circumstances beyond his control. He now finds himself in a situation that he did not choose, in Egypt of all places. Jacob’s son is now Potiphar’s slave. If anyone had a reason to be bitter, it was Joseph. As a slave, all of his independence has now been stripped away. And no longer can he go where he wants, do what he wants, say what he wants. If anyone had a reason to give up, it was Joseph. But that doesn’t happen because God has His hand on his life.

Nowhere do we read of Joseph protesting his situation or scheming for ways to get out of it. There’s no mention of resentment toward his new master, no mention whatsoever of him complaining about life not being fair. While we can expect him feeling the emotions of the situation, the thing that stands out is God’s presence in his life. And that is the only explanation for his response. Rather than abandoning him to those circumstances, the Bible says the Lord was with Joseph, and as a result he became a successful man. And in the house of his Egyptian master, of all places. It is one thing to become a successful man, but it is another thing for it to happen to a slave. And even there, God’s hand of blessing will be on his life, causing whatever he touched to prosper and putting him in a place of influence.

In life, we cannot choose our adversity, but we can choose our attitude. Each and every day, you and I are faced with the choice of what our attitude will be. The transformation of our attitude is the key to seeing the circumstances of our lives through the eyes of faith. In the world of aviation, the word ‘altitude’ refers to a plane’s height above sea level. It is interesting that the word ‘attitude’ is also used by pilots to describe a plane’s horizontal relationship with the runway. If the plane’s ‘attitude’ is correct, it is aligned properly and can soar to 30,000 feet. But if it is wrong, it can lead to a crash. Attitude affects altitude.

Tony Evans—“*One thing to learn from God being with Joseph is that Joseph was also with God.*”

In other words, Joseph did not allow these circumstances to compromise his spiritual relationship. He might have been separated from his father, but he wasn't separated from his faith. And he might have lost his coat, but he did not lose his character. The coat doesn't make the man! Listen to this:

*It isn't the style or the stuff in the coat,
Nor is it the length of the tailor's bill.
It's the stuff in the man inside of the coat
That counts for good or ill.*

He might be a slave in an unwanted place, but that did mean that his spirit had to be defeated. I've known a lot of people who get bitter toward God when faced with a trial or trouble. They maybe question whether or not God is real. But these are the times when you are to worship God like you've never done before. These are the times when you are to draw near to Him. (illus. of sponge)

James 4:8—“**Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.**”

The Lord was with Joseph, and Joseph was with the Lord. Somewhere along the way, he must have said to himself, “With the help of God, I'm going to make the most of a bad situation.” And friend, the day that you and I do that will be a great day, because it is the day we'll be set free from the greener pastures syndrome. When we say, “This is where I am, this is where I work, this is what I face. Here are all the bad things, and I can't hardly see any good things, but guess what? I'm going to make the most of this thing.” So that we quit moping around and get on with our life.

In the little responsibilities

Joseph gave himself to the task of making the most of an awful situation. If he was to be a slave, then he would be the best slave Potiphar ever had. And the way that Joseph went about his responsibilities caused Potiphar to take a closer look. He didn't

just see a hardworking servant—he saw the evidence of God’s hand. That’s what verse 3 says, “His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.” That is really an astounding statement. Potiphar is a pagan, a worshiper of Egyptians gods. And yet he comes to see in Joseph a glimpse of the God of Israel. The Bible doesn’t say that the master heard Joseph running his mouth all day long talking about his God while getting nothing done. He didn’t turn in sloppy, half-hearted work, complaining about the boss. No, Potiphar saw that the Lord was with Joseph and that the Lord caused all that Joseph did to prosper. I believe Joseph was loyal, he could be trusted, he worked well with others, he was a leader, he had creative ability, and had a knack for finding ways to get things done. His attitude was reflective of his faith. The Bible says in:

Titus 2:9-10—“Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.”

Now, I should ask the question, “When others look on your life, do they see evidence of God’s grace?” Grace isn’t just something we receive—it’s something we radiate. And our attitude might be the greatest argument that proves God’s presence is with us. When God’s grace flows through us, others can’t help but notice.

In the larger responsibilities

Verse 4 says that Potiphar made Joseph overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. Now, don’t forget that we’re talking about the future prime minister of Egypt. Joseph didn’t know that, but God did. Joseph didn’t know that managing Potiphar’s household would be good experience that prepared him to one day be the second in command over all Egypt. We don’t know what God is up to now in our lives to prepare us for what He has in mind later.

Joseph didn’t get promoted overnight. He proved himself to be trustworthy day by day. Potiphar saw how Joseph worked, how he handled small tasks. And because he was

faithful in the little things, he is given opportunity with larger responsibilities. How true that faithfulness in the little things often leads to more opportunity.

Luke 16:10—“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.”

If you want to be trusted with more, start by being faithful with less. Joseph wasn't dreaming about being second-in-command in Egypt while neglecting his work in Potiphar's house. He served where he was—and that prepared him for what was ahead. And his success wasn't due to random luck or talent. It was the result of divine providence and blessing. Remember that we've said providence is the invisible hand of God orchestrating events in our lives for His purposes. It is not luck or fate or chance. Rather, it is the Lord working behind the scenes and in the details. In the life of Joseph, it is seen in a number of ways:

- God used the betrayal to position him where He wanted him to be.
- God used the slavery to develop him into the man He wanted him to become.
- God used the injustice to advance him to the place of influence with Pharaoh himself.

How do we make the most of our situation? It begins with trusting God in every circumstance, and then faithfulness in every responsibility. A final thing I'll mention involves:

3—STEWARDSHIP in every blessing (39:5-6a)

“From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.”

Now, based on what we read about Joseph, it is hardly a surprising thing that he becomes Potiphar's household manager. Men of character are few and far between. It

was true then, and it is true now. And the Bible says that God blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake.

A man who can be trusted

In Potiphar's house, Joseph is a man of industry and is a man of influence. But he is also a man of integrity. The master could leave all he had in Joseph's charge because he could be trusted. When Potiphar conducted a 'quarterly review' of his slaves, he saw something in Joseph that made him stand out from all the rest, so he puts him in charge of all that he had. And from the time he is made chief steward, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake. That means his life brought blessing to all who were associated with him.

George Lawson — *“When men are precious in God's sight they are honorable, whatever be their station in life. It is good to have those for our friends who are beloved by the Lord. His kindness towards His people overflows to all with whom they are connected.”*

God's hand of blessing was on Joseph's life, and that same blessing spilling spilled over to those who were around him. His success wasn't the result of self-promotion, political networking, or manipulating his way to the top. His promotion came all because God opened the door.

Psalm 75:6-7 — **“For promotion comes neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: He puts down one, and sets up another.”**

Joseph wasn't promoted for his own comfort. His success in Potiphar's house wasn't about luxury, but it was about stewardship. Later on, his promotion in Egypt will not be about making a name for himself, but will be about saving many during the famine. God blesses us not to elevate our name, but to fulfill His purposes through our lives.

- If He gives you influence, use it for His glory!
- If He gives you resources, invest them for His Kingdom!

- If He gives you a platform, point others to Jesus!

Matthew 5:16—“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

A man who will be tempted

Notice the Bible says at the end of verse 6, “Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.” Young man, good looking, single, in pagan territory where there are no other believers. You can bet your bottom dollar that the enemy sets his sights on such a man. That’s what will happen in the chapter, as we will see next time.

How do we bloom where we’re planted in life? We’ve seen that it involves:

- Trusting God in every circumstance
- Faithfulness in every responsibility
- Stewardship in every blessing

Psalm 1:1-3—“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

Psalm 37:5—“Commit your way to the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.”

Joseph’s story is not just about making the most of a bad situation—it’s a shadow of a much greater story. Just as God is with Joseph in slavery, the Lord Jesus came down into our fallen world, took on our sin and shame, and He remained faithful. He alone is the faithful Steward who is over the household of God. Not once did He ever fumble the ball or mismanage the Father’s goods. Joseph brought blessing to Potiphar’s house, but Jesus Christ brings eternal blessing to all who trust in Him as their Savior! You may feel like you’re in a place you never wanted to be—a trial, a setback, or even a season

of loss—but just as the Lord was with Joseph, the gospel is the good news that in Jesus Christ, God is with you too. And more than that, if you place your faith in Christ, His righteousness becomes yours, His success becomes yours, and His presence will never leave you. The greatest success isn't to be found in worldly status, it isn't found in some greener pasture, but in knowing Jesus, the One who gave Himself for you. And when you truly know Jesus and are walking in fellowship with Him, then you can bloom where He's planted you.