

Genesis 40:4–7

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5 Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night and each man's dream with its own interpretation.

6 And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they were sad.

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

Do you ever feel like...

life hasn't turned out the way you were hoping or expecting?
you are stuck in a holding pattern or in a dead end situation?
you've wasted the best years of your life?

Perhaps you can relate to: Winston Churchill:

This Nobel Prize-winning, twice-elected Prime Minister of the United Kingdom was defeated in every election for public office until he finally became the Prime Minister at the ripe old age of 62.

Or: Theodor Seuss Giesel:

27 different publishers rejected Dr. Seuss's first book To Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street.

Welcome to the saga of Joseph! His life's story includes slavery and imprisonment for his young adult years / many in his situation would think that life was being wasted – what should be the best years of his life

But Joseph shows us that it isn't about where you live or even to what degree of worldly success you achieve, but rather, that you spend your life well.

Joseph's life wasn't wasted in prison for many different reasons, but we are just going to consider 3 lessons from our text this morning.

These three issues of focus:

AN ETERNAL FOCUS / AN OTHERS FOCUS / & A JESUS FOCUS

And then we will learn a quick, moment-by-moment STATUS CHECK to see if you are in the right place to invest your life well and avoid wasting it in futility...

First, some BACKGROUND: (I'm summarizing verses 39:19–40:3)

Mrs. Potiphar throws Joseph under the bus – blaming him for her own adulterous lust and infidelity
Mr. Potiphar's anger rages and he throw Joseph in the prison that is under his jurisdiction as captain of the guard

But, just like in every situation he is in, Joseph flourishes with God's blessing upon him

The jailer recognizes this and puts Joseph in charge of the prison and the other prisoners are put under Joseph's oversight and care

Two prisoners show up at the jail – Pharaoh's servants – a baker and a butler, or "cupbearer" have offended the king in some way and are incarcerated with Joseph

4 And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while.

We'll see how Joseph is taking care of his fellow prisoners and taking charge of them in the next passage.

It is the phrase "FOR A WHILE" that we need to start with / reflect on.

NASB = “Some time” – 41:1 / Years are passing by!

It could have been well over 5 years that Joseph is in the prison – we looked at the math last Wednesday

And as we saw on Wednesday – God begins to move in Joseph’s circumstances in the jail when his fellow prisoners have divine dreams that he interprets – yet God still leaves Joseph in the jail for ANOTHER two years!

Joseph could easily descended into a real prison or pit of despair and hopelessness – but he continued on in faithfulness

How do you feel when you sense that you are wasting your life?

It might be easy to ask: “Has God forgotten me?” / there are others in scripture that could have thought this:

- MOSES was adopted into the Egyptian royal family, but had to endure 40 years of shepherding before he was properly prepared to lead the people
- DAVID was anointed as king as a young boy – but he had to endure Saul for years before he actually received the kingdom
- MOST OF THE PROPHETS – like Elijah or Jeremiah, faced periods of rejection and frustration, especially those who were in exile, like Daniel and Ezekiel
- EVEN JESUS – lived 30 in obscurity as a carpenter before He could do the ONE THING He came to earth to do – seek and save the lost!

If you are in a “holding pattern” in life – look at Joseph’s mindset = he kept on TRUSTING God with the TIMING of his life –

You might feel imprisoned by

- Singleness – or even lonely in a busted marriage relationship
- Or in a job you didn’t want and unable to move forward in
- Or slugging away in night classes trying to improve your resume
- Or parenting a kid you weren’t expecting
- Or injury or sickness – unable to do the things you were hoping to do

In these circumstances, you might be in the place that Joseph found himself

Let’s being by consider the words “FOR A WHILE” or “SOME TIME” again...

This might equal many EARTHLY years – but with an eternal perspective time spent in confinement, obscurity or suffering takes on a whole new meaning – it is but a moment, a second, or an instant!

Joseph knew that years were slipping by in what seemed like a major detour or dead end – he mentions it later in the chapter – but this doesn’t affect the quality of how he is living for God!

He clearly had a higher perspective on life that gave him the ability to live well in spite of his circumstances.

In fact, I would suggest that the way Joseph valued his time in slavery or imprisonment was no different than how

he valued his time in Pharaoh's palace leading the country to survive the famine.

Look at how Joseph behaves in each situation he finds himself and how he deals with each authority figure that he served – there is no difference! He is the same in every circumstance!

This shows us that Joseph didn't differentiate the value of his time based on his circumstances – unlike we are so prone to do!

And Joseph treated Potiphar, and the Prison Warden no differently than he treated Pharaoh or his own father – for Joseph, his earthly work was being held up to a heavenly standard

#1 | An ETERNAL FOCUS / or perhaps you would call it a HEAVENLY PERSPECTIVE

Joseph clearly had a heavenly value system, not an earthly one – and he had an eternal perspective about his time – not a worldly one.

You know how everything takes FOREVER when you are a little kid

But as you get older things seem to speed up – to the point that you feel like life is racing by?

We need the heavenly perspective on time! So many people are so desperate to have a meaningful life on earth that getting sidetracked from their plans for a time – months or even years – causes great distress

Imagine looking back on the months and years of life from the ETERNAL & timeless point of view = there won't be any comparison

2 Corinthians 4

17 For our light affliction, WHICH IS BUT FOR A MOMENT, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen ARE ETERNAL.

ROPE ILLUSTRATION! (I'm borrowing this – so bear with me) = Eternal perspective. Eternal values!

How long is our life span on earth compared to eternity...?

Psalm 39

4 "LORD, make me to know my end, And what is the measure of my days, That I may know how frail I am.

5 Indeed, You have made my days as **handbreadths**, And my age is as nothing before You; Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor.

Truth #1 = don't get so stressed out if life doesn't work out the way you hope!

In the same way: don't get so wrapped up in the world's system & values

Guess what = when you meet Jesus, the earthly things are taken away and you are transformed into perfect new you: all of the junk that you are so worried about here won't even exist in heaven!

As long as you are living for the Lord: don't consider time on earth as wasted – how can a decade of faithful waiting upon God be considered wasted?

Truth #2 = Every moment on earth should be lived for eternity – since our short time on earth carries eternal weight / each moment lived for God on earth bears eternal fruit!

Value each second we have on earth and make sure that it is lived well!

Why get distracted or stressed out about worldly, temporary things, when we should be living with the rest of our eternal existence in mind?

The second key to NOT wasting one's life is found in this phrase...

#2 | "and he served them" | We've talked about his servanthood as a reflection of his eternal perspective, but it also gives us another reason why Joseph was able to endure years in a prison, unjustly accused, without giving up hope: because his focus WASN'T ON HIMSELF! He had AN OTHERS FOCUS

If Joseph was thinking about all the time he was wasting of his life, he surely would have lost hope and spiraled down into despair

BUT Joseph's mind was never on his own life – it was always on others!

If Joseph thought that his own life was being wasted, he could have turned dark and negative

BUT – instead, he realized that his life was being well invested in others! He understood the principle that Paul taught – that investing in people is a joy, a treasure, and a crown of glory!

My friends – do you want to transform your life? Do you want to sense that your life has value and meaning? The solution is this: don't worry about your own life – focus on serving others! Make their lives better!

The selfish, self-obsessed person will never find satisfaction. The one who gives their life away to others will know deep down that their life is being well spent!

Joseph's eternal, heavenly perspective allowed him to serve other unreservedly

You can see in Joseph's stewardship and servanthood that he realized that being faithful in little things was actually a huge thing to him / that every moment on earth had eternal value – no matter how important it seemed to be from a mundane, worldly perspective

His view of the world was based on a larger standard – a heavenly value system / an eternal perspective

Living as a slave or a prisoner didn't mean that his life was less valuable – but because Joseph served and trusted in God, this gave incredible meaning to the little things

And so time spent in seemingly wasted seasons of servitude and imprisonment was actually treated with incredible care and seen as eternally valuable

#3 | (The most important:) JESUS FOCUS: Because God was WITH Joseph, it was impossible for Joseph to live a wasted life – he was LIVING abundant life to its fullest potential – right there in the prison

The phrase "God was with Joseph" is repeated over and over in his saga / the awareness of God's presence meant that Joseph's life was NOT being wasted

Think of it this way: Jesus describes "eternal life" in John 17 as "knowing God" =

...this means that we are ALREADY LIVING IN THE ETERNAL TIME FRAME – but it is defined as a relationship / in fellowship with God – and not a timeline

If we have eternal life – and this is defined by KNOWING GOD – then can you every really be SIDELINED or SIDETRACKED in life?

Eternal Life is KNOWING JESUS – not accomplishing tasks or moving toward goals or accumulating wealth

These of course are important for good stewardship of our lives / but our lives don't consist of these things!

NO – if you define “real life” as the ACTUAL RELATIONSHIP with God = intimacy and fellowship with Him in any circumstance or situation you are in – then NOT a single day is wasted

If you are in fellowship with Jesus, you are not wasting your life! You are actually LIVING IT the only way possible!

No matter what your vocation, family situation, educational accomplishments or lack thereof – these don't define nor insure your life's quality or success – the only thing that really matters is your relationship with God – intimacy and fellowship with Him moment by moment and day by day

Let me invite you right now – if this doesn't describe your life – if you think that you need to change or add something to your life in order to live it to it's fullest – you are missing Jesus!

Only when you surrender your life to Him as your Savior and Lord can you have real life – and it is by drawing near to Him in intimacy and fellowship that you discover the amazing reality that life is not defined by what you've done or what you possess or any other quantifiable thing except this – that you know God and that He knows you.

The next passage will show us just how powerful Joseph's servanthood was to transform the environment around him...

We are shifting gears here. We've seen Joseph as an example of how we can trust God with the timing of our lives and how we can live passionately for him in any circumstance or situation...

Now we are going to end our study with a lesson learned from the convicts who were in Joseph's jail which will give us a STATUS TEST to see if we are living well and spending our lives well or else wasting them in futility...

5 Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night and each man's dream with its own interpretation.

We covered these men and their dreams last Wednesday night. What we are going to focus on this morning is their interaction with Joseph. Look at the next two verses...

6 And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they were sad.

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

Everything prospers under Joseph's hand – even fellow prisoners!

And, as we see here, Joseph's cares for his fellow prisoners by checking on their mood – to counsel them and encourage them

They were dejected and sad – and Joseph took notice

“WHY ARE YOUR FACES SO SAD TODAY?” – interesting question!

They were in PRISON – why shouldn't their faces be sad?!?

But Joseph's question shows us that their sadness was unusual! It was out of the ordinary!

They were under Joseph's care, so their typically their countenance was marked by JOY!

They had learned from him. They were encouraged by his care. Their outlook on life was greatly improved.

It was only when they both experienced a traumatic and terrifying divine dream that something noticeable changed in their demeanor.

JESUS IS LIKE JOSEPH – BUT WAY BETTER! Joseph is just a small picture of how Jesus changes every situation He has charge over!

Our lives are radically transformed by the GOSPEL – that we have been rescued from the curse of sin and death by Jesus' death and resurrection. The reality of the GOSPEL should transform every aspect of our lives.

And just like Joseph impacted the other prisoners, the reality of Jesus' presence in our life ought to change everything about our demeanor and countenance, right?

Philippians 4:4–5 |

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

5 Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

As Christians, our lives must be marked by joy – to the point that it is out of the ordinary for folks to see us dejected and sad

How do we know that the prisoners were affected by Joseph's presence among them? = It was unusual for them to be sad.

How much more should our faces be marked by joy – especially when we get to live FREE with JESUS!

Now – let me make this disclaimer – I'm not talking about a false plastic smile or cheesy positivity

Joseph's jail was in no way Disneyland. It wasn't the happiest place in Egypt. In fact, it was one of the worst. People died there. The baker will be executed shortly after this. People were locked away for years. It was a place intended for punishment and humiliation. It was still a prison.

In the same way, our world is not perfect – there is much pain and suffering here. There is much to be grieved about. We can't smile at the suffering. That would be ridiculous and insulting. We are told to rejoice with those who rejoice, but also to weep with those who weep.

Jesus Himself wept at the suffering and sin that He encountered.

We can't just smile our problems and by our positivity overcome them – like many Christians unfortunately believe.

Instead – we cry out to God as our help and our salvation – we look to Him to come alongside us to comfort us and empower us to overcome and remain faithful in the midst of our trials.

Think of the Apostle Paul – on one hand he writes from prison that we are to “rejoice always” and “be content in every circumstance” – yet he also writes about burdens, concerns, struggles, hardships, groaning, distress. He was grieved beyond words because of how his fellow Israelites had rejected Christ! He was truly distressed about it.

And yet – below that, Paul’s countenance demonstrated true joy: that he had a well spring of living water in Christ Jesus that was gushing forth in real life

THE REALITY IS THIS – when we are walking with Jesus, no matter what outward emotion the current situation imposes upon us, there will exist the deep down, foundational, unshakeable attitude of joy and contentment.

And people will notice it.

ILLUSTRATION:

Charles H. Spurgeon, was emphasizing to his class the importance of making the facial expression harmonize with the speech.

“When you speak of Heaven,” he said, “let your face light up, let it be irradiated with a heavenly gleam, let your eyes shine with reflected glory. But when you speak of Hell—well, then your ordinary face will do.”

Do you know what the shortest verse in the Bible is?

“Jesus wept” – of course. But in the Greek, this verse has three words.

There is a verse only has two words in Greek = “Rejoice always!” (1 Thess. 5:16)

Hey – the two shortest verses in the Bible tell us this truth: because Jesus carried our sorrows, and wept and suffered for us – we can rejoice always in Him!

So – this gives us a TEST to make sure we are living our lives well / a moment–by–moment status check...

Just like the prisoners were impacted by Joseph’s presence in the jail, the JOY OF THE LORD Jesus should be seen on our faces!

How is your face today? How is your attitude and demeanor?

Does your countenance show that you are in the presence of Jesus?

Or have the worldly, temporal things weighed the corners of your eyes and mouth down to look like those without hope?

Are you gloomy because you feel that your life has been sidetracked and you are wasting it?

Or are you letting Jesus’ priorities drive you serving others – investing in His Kingdom, which is the only sure way to spend your life well and not to waste it!?!

Are you living as passionately for Jesus in your FREEDOM that Joseph lived in slavery and imprisonment?

As we close – I am going to pray for a supernatural transformation of our faces – which comes from a transformation of our perspective – that our minds are on the eternal perspective – a heavenly focus that comes from intimacy with Jesus.

Think of the High Priestly blessing often spoken over God’s people from Numbers chapter 6...

24 *The LORD bless you, and keep you;*

25 *The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you;*

26 *The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.'*

A smile is contagious – if God is every smiling over us – lifting up His countenance on us – shouldn't we reflect God's demeanor? Shouldn't our face be shining on others and showing grace to them in turn?

Keep thinking of God's love and grace. Keep imagining how your caring father in heaven is so proud of you and how his heart is glad to call you His own child. Imagine God smiling upon you. This isn't pie in the sky – God truly is your heavenly Father and is rejoicing over you.

And one more thing about a smile – it is the cheapest way to improve your appearance. That is a free tip.