



gracefellowship

Joseph: Living Between Dreams and Reality
April 29, 2018
“Prison University”

:: Genesis 40:1-8 (don't read yet)

Illustration: Dark Days at the Car Dealership

- Interestingly, this terrible event caused some really good things to happen we could never have anticipated.
 - My Dad will tell you God used that time to soften his heart and break his pride.
 - Our family grew closer together as we prayed for and with one another.
 - Employees at the dealership watched my parent's faith during this crisis and several became believers in Jesus as my parents witnessed to them. One young man accepted Christ in my Dad's office as my Dad was being forced to terminate his position!
- These were difficult days for my family, but as we trusted God and lived in faithful obedience to Him, God did some amazing things.

In Joseph's life, God was using some dark, difficult times to prepare for a much greater assignment.

- Sold by his brothers (Humility)
- Slave to Potiphar (Military/Shaping Character)
- The King's Prison (Education in Gov't)

Joseph has been put imprisoned again, but because of God's blessing on his work, Joseph is placed in charge of the prison and the Bible records his interaction with two specific people: The chief cupbearer and the chief baker.

:: **Genesis 40:1-8**

1 Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt.

2 Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, 3 and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined.

4 The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them. After they had been in custody for some time,

5 each of the two men—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison—had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.

6 When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected.

7 So he asked Pharaoh’s officials who were in custody with him in his master’s house, “Why do you look so sad today?”

8 “We both had dreams,” they answered, “but there is no one to interpret them.” Then Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.”

This is a window into the soul of Joseph and shows the work God has been doing in him to develop his character. *Men who are consumed with anger and bitterness do not often take a concern for the personal problems of others like Joseph does with the Baker and Cupbearer.*

(Enduring Word Commentary)

When you are in the middle of difficult struggles, do you see other people around and the need they have? Or do you become so focused on your own problems you lose sight of God’s blessings in your life and forget that you are a conduit of God’s love to this world? Even in his imprisonment, Joseph is a servant.

Back to the story...

Each man has a dream, but they don’t know what the dreams mean.

:: Genesis 40:9-23

9 So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, “In my dream I saw a vine in front of me,

10 and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes.

11 Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh’s cup and put the cup in his hand.”

12 “This is what it means,” Joseph said to him. “The three branches are three days.

13 Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer.

14 But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison.

15 I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.”

16 When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, “I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread.

17 In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head.”

18 “This is what it means,” Joseph said. “The three baskets are three days.
19 Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale your body on a pole.
And the birds will eat away your flesh.”
20 Now the third day was Pharaoh’s birthday, and he gave a feast for all his
officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the
presence of his officials:
21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup
into Pharaoh’s hand—
22 but he impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his
interpretation.
23 The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

Joseph, through God’s power interprets the dreams and they happen exactly as he says—
one is killed, the other is restored to his position in the kingdom. Joseph had asked the
cupbearer for a kindness to repay him for interpreting the dream, but the cupbearer
forgets Joseph when he is released from prison.

:: Genesis 41:1-16

1 When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the
Nile,
2 when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed
among the reeds.
3 After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood
beside those on the riverbank.
4 And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then
Pharaoh woke up.
5 He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and
good, were growing on a single stalk.
6 After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted—thin and scorched by the east
wind.
7 The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh
woke up; it had been a dream.
8 In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise
men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for
him.
9 Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “Today I am reminded of my
shortcomings.
10 Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief
baker in the house of the captain of the guard.
11 Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its
own.

12 Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream.

13 And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was impaled.”

14 So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh.

15 Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.”

16 “I cannot do it,” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.”

Now Pharaoh has a dream and after two years the cupbearer remembers Joseph!

Joseph is brought to interpret his dream. But in verse 16 he says, “I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.”

This is the second time as a dream is presented to Joseph he proclaims he cannot interpret the dream, but God can. The story isn't about Joseph, it's about God! Joseph has come to realize since the dreams of his youth, when he was so excited about being worshiped by his family, and everything pointed to him being exalted, that nothing could have been further from the truth! The dreams Joseph had weren't to elevate him, but to show God's power to save His people from something Joseph didn't see coming.

The story isn't about Joseph- it's about God!

Your story isn't about you- it's about God!

The meaning of the dream: 7 years of abundance; 7 years of famine (it will be severe)
verse 31-32

Joseph does something Pharaoh doesn't ask for: he gives wise counsel.

:: Genesis 41:33-36

33 “And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt.

34 Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance.

35 They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food.

36 This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine.”

Life Lesson: Do what is right even if it isn't expected of you and won't benefit you immediately.

Joseph doesn't know what Pharaoh will do with the information; he assumes he is going back to prison! But God has bigger plans for Joseph!

:: Genesis 41:37-46

37 The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials.

38 So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?"

39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you.

40 You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."

41 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt."

42 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck.

43 He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

44 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt."

45 Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphara, priest of On, to be his wife. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt.

46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt.

Pharaoh elevates Joseph from prison to Governor of Egypt! In one moment he goes from wearing chains to sitting on a throne! He moves from the prison to the palace.

Vs. 46 Joseph was 30 years old. He was 17 when sold into slavery. We don't know how long Joseph served Potiphar or exactly how long he was in prison- maybe 10 years!

Life Lesson: God seeks to use those who are faithful to Him, regardless of their circumstances.

:: 2 Samuel 22:26

26 "To the faithful you show yourself faithful."

:: Psalm 37:28

28 "For the LORD loves the just and will not forsake His faithful ones."

Let's rewind for a minute and look at something kind of buried in the story that I believe is vitally important:

The prison Joseph was in wasn't just any prison, it was the King's prison, where the King's prisoners were sent. In fact, it was a dungeon in Potifar's house, where Joseph had been a servant.

Question: If you want to learn to run a business or prepare for a position of leadership in a company or the government, where do you go? College!

The King's prison was Joseph's college: Prison University!

Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years by a corrupt South African government who labeled him a terrorist for trying to oppose their system of leadership. He was given a life sentence, but when the government crumbled, he was released and was able to run for President of the nation in their first democratic election. Here's what Mandela once wrote about his time in that harsh prison:

“Prison is itself a tremendous education in the need for patience and perseverance. It is, above all, a test of one's commitment...” – Nelson Mandela

It wasn't glamorous, it was brutal- but he said it provided him with an education he would need to one day run the country of South Africa and bring healing to a nation afflicted by apartheid.

His friend, Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote:

“Suffering can break you, can embitter you, can make you a ghastly and totally intolerable creature to have around; it can also make you more humane, more compassionate, more caring, more understanding.” –Archbishop Desmond Tutu

You may not face imprisonment, but you will go through difficult times in life. Remain faithful to God and He will use you, regardless of your circumstances. Trust God with your circumstances, regardless of where you are.

God didn't allow Joseph to go to prison to punish him, but to prepare him!

How often do we see our negative circumstances as a punishment from God? Perhaps the difficulty you're facing is God sending you to school so He can use you in a big way down the road.

- Heartache College
- College of Poverty
- Temptation University
- Divorce University
- Death College
- University of Loneliness
- College of Pain/Sorrow

Some of us have multiple degrees!

Where is God sending you to school? University of _____.

Regardless of our circumstances, faithful obedience is what is required of those of us who are following Jesus. Maybe you are living between the dreams you imagine God having for your life and the reality of your circumstances. Remember, the story isn't about you! It's about God!

Not everyone gets Joseph's story of being elevated from the prison to the palace. Some of us will go through hardships and our situation won't improve.

- Some will get sick and not be healed.
- Some will be bullied and never escape their tormentors.
- Some will face financial crisis and not recover.
- Some will live in relative obscurity and never feel valued.

What is required of us, regardless of our circumstances, is faithful obedience to God.

- Live in obscurity to the glory of God.
- Struggle financially daily to the glory of God.
- Endure hardship to the glory of God.
- Die to the glory of God.

The story isn't about you- it's about God! We exist to bring glory to God. He may never raise you up in this life; that's why there is another life to come! The blessings of God you don't realize on earth will be realized in heaven.

Action Steps:

- **Look at your current situation and ask God where He is taking you to school.**
- **Refuse to be so inwardly focused you lose sight of how God can use you in the lives of other people. Ask God to help you see the hurt of others around you this week and plan to serve those people.**
- **Give glory to God regardless of your current circumstances and live in faithful obedience to Him.**

Discussion Questions for Life Groups:

Ice Breaker: Ask your group and get a few responses to the question, "What is the strangest dream you ever had?"

Remind everyone of the story from Genesis 40 where Joseph interprets dreams for the cupbearer and the baker. Read Genesis 41 together as a group or have someone tell the story and rebuild it as a group, finding what may have been left out or added, then read it together.

1. What is God teaching you through this story about Himself?
2. We saw in the passage that Joseph gave advice to Pharaoh even though it wasn't asked of him. Discuss a time you've been faced with a situation where you did

what was right even though it wasn't expected of you or didn't benefit you immediately.

3. In worship we talked about the "schools" God might be sending us to and how, in those moments, He is training us. What school(s) has God sent you to and what was the result in your growth as a disciple of Jesus?
4. The story isn't about Joseph and it isn't about us- it's about God. How do you stay focused on what God is doing in your life instead of your circumstances?
5. Who in your life may need to hear this story this week?