

THROUGH IT ALL: UNFAIR TREATMENT (39:21-41:1)



Ever been falsely accused or treated unfairly? How did you handle it? How did you respond?

1 Peter 2:20 (NLT) *"Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten [punished] for doing wrong. But if you suffer [punished] for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you."*

These are two vastly different scenarios:

- **Scenario #1** – You do something wrong, so you're punished. Of course, you should endure it patiently because you deserve it.
- **Scenario #2** – You do *nothing* wrong, you're punished for it, and you patiently endure the punishment while maintaining your trust in God. The Lord is pleased with this person!

But the truth is, we don't like either of those scenarios. Even when we *know* we're guilty of doing wrong, we often feel like our punishment is unfair or unnecessary. But we certainly don't think it's fair to endure suffering for doing something *good*!

This is exactly where Joseph finds himself – suffering for doing what is right. And he teaches us a few things to remember about unfair treatment.

1. God often has unseen reasons for allowing unfair treatment.

You see, God is still working on Joseph and developing his character because God has an assignment for Joseph that he doesn't know about yet. Joseph can't see what God is preparing him for. All Joseph can see is that he's sitting in a prison cell abandoned and forgotten by people. But not abandoned by God...

Genesis 39:21–23 “But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.”²² And the keeper [warden] of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it.²³ The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph’s charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.”

So, after being unfairly treated, and falsely accused, Joseph is in prison. In fact, later he describes it this way...

Genesis 40:15 “For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.”

Joseph says he’s back in a pit again, this time the very bottom of an Egyptian pit – a *dungeon*. He’s not just in prison; he’s in the dungeon of the prison. So, he’s starting all over again for doing *nothing* wrong.



Where is God in times like this? Where is He when life is unfair?

Verses 21 and 23 tell us: “God was with Joseph.” That’s where God was. He was right there. He never left. God was in the pit with Joseph, and He blessed Joseph right there in his unfair circumstances.

You see, even in the worst circumstances of his life, Joseph prospered. Yes, it was false accusations that put Joseph in prison, but it was there that he learned to draw near to the Lord. And, as a result, he found favor with the prison warden. And the warden could see God’s hand of blessing in Joseph’s life.

Life Lesson:

- ***When a “pit” experience comes, God is often doing something far deeper and more profound than we can see or imagine.***

Make no mistake, Joseph did *not* deserve to be in prison, but he responded to it beautifully. And that's the greatest part of his story – his response to all this. And that leads us to the next thing we learn about unfair treatment.

2. God often sends someone who can relate to our unfair treatment.

Genesis 40:1–3 “Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt. ² And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³ and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined.”

A cupbearer was a person who tasted the wine and food of the king before he ate or drank. That way, if it was poisoned, the cupbearer would die, not the king. The cupbearer would also make sure that only the best food and drink was being served to the king (for taste, diet, health, etc.).

This led to a *very* close relationship – built on trust – between Pharaoh and his chief cupbearer. If that trust was ever broken, serious consequences followed. And something like that must have happened because the chief cupbearer *and* the chief baker landed in prison with Joseph.

You see, it's amazing how God often brings people into our lives who have gone through similar experiences as we have. These two men were falsely accused just like Joseph. And this is how God often works – He brings someone who understands our pain.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

God was sending the chief cupbearer and baker alongside Joseph

because they knew what it was like to be falsely accused, treated unfairly, thrown into prison, and forgotten. Notice what happens...

Genesis 40:4–7 “The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody. ⁵ And one night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own interpretation. ⁶ When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh’s officers who were with him in custody in his master’s house, “Why are your faces downcast today?”

Even with all the troubles that Joseph had experienced, he wasn’t bitter or angry, or sinical. In fact, he noticed their sadness and ministered to their needs.

In other words, because Joseph was free from bitterness, he became useful in the hand of God. But, if Joseph would have wallowed in resentment or a desire for revenge, then we would be reading NONE of this about him in the bible.

Life Lesson:

- ***When your heart is right, it’s remarkable how sensitive you can be to someone else in need.***

These guys didn’t even have to say anything to Joseph. He noticed something was wrong as soon as he saw them. And rather than saying, “Wait a minute, you think *you’ve* got problems, listen to *my* story!” Instead, Joseph said, “What’s wrong guys, how can I help?” It shows his ability to look beyond his own problems to minister to other people.

His attitude really was amazing, and that leads us to the next thing we learn about unfair treatment...

3. Unfair treatment doesn't have to darken your outlook on life.

You see, just because *bad* things touched his life, Joseph never lost sight of the *good* things in life.

Illustration: Thomas Edison's son wrote about the time his dad's huge shop burned down – the place where he worked on all his inventions. When the fire was raging – burning down all his hard work – Thomas Edison ran toward his son yelling, "Hey, where's your mom? Go get her and tell her to get her friends! They'll never see a fire like this again!"

Rather than saying, "God, what did I do to deserve this? There goes 67 years of hard work down the drain!" No, he says, "Hey son, get your mother. This is an unbelievable sight!" His son was amazed that he could still see the wonder in life even when hardship came.

In fact, at 5:30 the next morning (while firefighters were still trying to put the fire completely out), Edison gathered his employees and said, "We're rebuilding! This fire has cleared out a bunch of useless things and failed experiments. We'll build bigger and better on these ruins."

Then he said, "Oh and by the way, does anyone know where we might get some money to rebuild?" Then he rolled up his coat to use as a pillow, curled up on a table that wasn't burned, and went sound asleep.

Joseph did something similar. He helped the baker, the cupbearer, and all the other prisoners find hope even in their darkest moments. Unfair treatment didn't darken his outlook on life!

Then they told Joseph why they were sad...

Genesis 40:8a *"They said to him, 'We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them...'"*

I bet Joseph had to bite his lip when he heard that! They were worried about the meaning of a dream. But they had no idea, the

dreamer of all dreamers was sitting next to them!

Genesis 40:8b "...And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me."

Honestly, it's amazing that Joseph would want anything to do with these dreams. The last time he talked about dreams, he ended up in a pit. And here he is in another pit! But that's what a positive, faith-filled attitude can do. He said, "Dream interpretations are God's specialty! And I know God personally, so let's find out the meaning of your dreams!"

Genesis 40:9–11 "So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, "In my dream there was a vine before me,¹⁰ and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes.¹¹ Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand."

Then he looks at Joseph like, "What in the world does this mean?" So, God gives Joseph the meaning of the dream...

Genesis 40:12–15 "Then Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days.¹³ In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer.¹⁴ Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house.¹⁵ For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit."

This shows us that Joseph is a real person. He says, "When you get out, please don't forget about me. Remember my kindness to you and mention my situation to Pharaoh."

Then the baker steps in and says, "Maybe my dream is good news too!" And Joseph says, "Sure thing, tell me what you dreamed."

Genesis 40:16–17 *“When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, “I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head,¹⁷ and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head.”*

So, God gives Joseph the meaning of the dream and Joseph says, “Well...*your* dream is a little different.”

Genesis 40:18–19 *“And Joseph answered and said, “This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days.¹⁹ In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat the flesh from you.”*

Can you imagine how sad Joseph was to give this news to his friend? But, you have to admire Joseph’s integrity. He could have lied and the baker would have never known until it was too late. But Joseph was a man who tells the truth (in love) even when the person doesn’t want to hear it.

Life Lesson:

- ***Having a positive, faith-filled attitude doesn’t mean you tell everybody nice, upbeat things all the time.***

Joseph told this guy, “My friend, your days are numbered, so get right with God.” And everything played out just as Joseph had told them...

Genesis 40:20–23 *“On the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants.²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.²² But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them.²³ Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.”*

Once again, Joseph is abandoned and forgotten by the people

He tried to help. Then comes our final verse for the night – the worst one of all...

Genesis 41:1 "After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile..."

Instead of being remembered and rewarded for his faithfulness, Joseph is forgotten for two more years in that dungeon! And notice the emphasis: "Two *whole* years." Two long, monotonous, miserable years!



What did Joseph think about during those two years?

He was no doubt tempted to think, "Lord, will I be on hold forever? I never deserved to be here to begin with. In fact, I've only tried to help people, tell them the truth, and be a great leader. But nobody remembers me."

However, each one of these trials are teaching Joseph that: *people* may abandon you, but *God* never abandons His child. And God will once again prove it when we pick back up next week!

Small Groups