

## Genesis 41:42-52

### Forgetfulness & Fruitfulness

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro  
www.calvarydcmetro.org

We've got a lot to look into this morning, so let's just dig right in.

42 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. 43 And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, "Bow the knee!" So he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44 Pharaoh also said to Joseph, "I *am* Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." 45 And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah. And he gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On. So Joseph went out over *all* the land of Egypt.

47 Now in the seven plentiful years the ground brought forth abundantly. 48 So he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; he laid up in every city the food of the fields which surrounded them. 49 Joseph gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for *it was* immeasurable.

50 And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him. 51 Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: "For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house."

The name Manasseh, as your margin shows, literally means "Making Forgetful" (NKJV margins). By overwhelming him with goodness, God has made Joseph forget all his hardship and loss.

Did you know God can make you forget your pain and your sin? At least three times in Scripture (Is 25:8; Rev 7:17, 21:4) God promises a day is coming when He will wipe away every tear from the eyes of those who love Him.

But that is not something we have to wait for entirely, we can have part of it today. As we see here, God has done such an amazing thing in Joseph's life that he has forgotten all the junk he has been through and this same sort of spiritual amnesia is available to you and me.

Now that doesn't mean God is going to suddenly pour out all this prosperity on you, or that Obama is going to have a dream one night and the Secret Service is going to come knocking on your door to interpret it. But God is still able *and willing*, to pour out His goodness on you in ways that will make you forget all your hardships and losses.

What does that look like? Well, first of all, let me say what it doesn't mean, and then we can say what it does.

**1. It doesn't mean it didn't happen** – we're not talking about some religiously based denial, that you just start doing some positive self-talk and it makes all the pain and hurt go away if you do it enough.

The painful events in Joseph's life really happened. His ten older brothers really hated him, they really sold him into slavery for twenty pieces of silver, he really was unjustly accused and really spent a good part of his twenties in jail.

Painful events really happen to us, things that we bring on ourselves as well as things that we don't deserve. When that happens, the pain you feel is real, the anger, the frustration, the depression, it's real, and so are the events that cause it. Actually, it's the fact that they're real that makes God's offer so valuable. If we could only forget the little things what good would that do? Old age helps us do that, right?

**2. It doesn't mean the consequences aren't still there** – God can miraculously wipe away our consequences, but typically He doesn't; at least not all of them. Joseph's life just took a radical turn in some ways, but it's still the same in some others. He's still separated from his family, he's living in a foreign land, and he's still serving a foreign boss. He's got a lot more freedom, but it's probably not the life he dreamed of as a little boy.

In our lives, when God comes in and rescues us from our sin, sometimes some aspects of our lives change radically: addictions might be broken, overwhelming guilt may be washed away, relationships might be restored. But we're still going to live with some of the consequences of life. You're not going to suddenly have a degree if you never went to college, you're ex isn't going to suddenly disappear and never have to be dealt with again. Much of the fabric of your life will remain – it will be washed clean, but the fabric you have woven will remain.

**3. It doesn't mean the memory is gone** – your mind is like film, the sights, sounds, smells and experiences you have had are burned in there forever. With just a little bit of prompting you can suddenly be taken back to a moment in time and remember amazing details of what happened. You can see it just like it was happening again right in front of you. And sights, sounds, even feelings, can trigger those memories. If I get just the right feeling of heat and humidity, it takes me back to South Korea, or if it's just the right amount of cold with a little breeze early in the morning, I'm suddenly back in boot camp.

Or, they can be triggered by nothing at all – something you haven't thought of in years can just appear out of nowhere in your mind, and you think, gee, I was doing perfectly fine without that memory, why did it have to come up?

Even if God comes into your life and radically transforms it, He doesn't completely wipe your hard drive and erase all the old files. Your memories are still there and every now and then something causes them to open, and if you want to, you can even go back and open them yourself if you're that foolish.

Well then, if God causing you to forget doesn't wipe things out completely, what does it mean?

**It means you aren't haunted or dominated anymore** – it means those files aren't open all the time; that they can be shut. No more going to sleep with them every night and waking up with them every morning. No more being interrupted by your fears and worries, or your schemes and your plans in the middle of the day.

When we are living life with our self as the central focus instead of God as the central focus, we tend to obsess about stuff. "This happened, now what am I going to do? That's coming up, what am I going to do? He said that, now how am going to respond?" We're constantly worrying or planning because we think we're responsible for making it all happen. Or we're constantly held captive by our memories and think there's no way out, and when that happens you can respond in one of two ways: you accept it and realize you're done, or you fight against it all the time trying to change in your own power.

But that's not what Joseph did; he says, "**God** has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house." It wasn't what Joseph did; it was what God did.

So how does that play out?

**Without therapy** – Joseph didn't read the latest book or listen to Oprah's newest guest, he didn't make an appointment to go see a counselor.

There is only one real counselor mentioned in the Bible – His name is Jesus. You might remember the verse that is commonly read around Christmas:

"For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, **Counselor**, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6)

We have to remember, people have coped for thousands of years before professional counselors and psychologists came along. What we do see in the Bible is discipleship – sharing truth and applications. We can look at a situation and say, "here's what the Bible says about God, here's what it says about you, and here's what it says about your circumstance, now how do you want to respond?"

And then you can choose - you can turn to Jesus for help or you can keep trying to make another appointment week after week, or head down to Barnes & Noble and try another book, but only one of those options has an eternally backed guarantee.

Joseph's outlook changed without counseling, but he also did it **without drugs** (legal, illegal or prescribed) – some of those things work for a season, but the problem with trying to run from your memories or from your current circumstances by turning to drinking or

drugs is that whenever you come down or whenever what you're on wears off, whenever you sober up, you realize nothing has changed.

Prescription drugs aren't much better. The Journal of the American Medical Association came out with an article<sup>1</sup> last year pointing out that anti-depressants only work in 50-60% of all patients – usually the most severe cases, but placebos work in 40-50% of the cases. In other words, you can take a Flintstone vitamin every morning as long as you tell yourself Fred and Barney are going to help you make it through your day, and you've got a 50/50 chance you'll feel better.

Now, let me stop for a minute and say, there are some good reasons to get a prescription, there are some legitimate needs, sometimes it is appropriate to see a doctor about your issues.

After Mady had Christopher we started to notice something was going on. After a woman gives birth there is a lot going on physically and emotionally in her and so you just kind of poke your way along until life settles into a bit of a pattern. But it had been a while and Mady was still showing two strange signs – the baby fat was pouring off her body, but then she started dropping farther and farther in weight without doing any real exercise and she always seemed really tense and on edge about everything.

Finally we decided she needed to go and get checked out and sure enough, she was diagnosed with hyperthyroidism. She started taking a little Aleve to reduce the inflammation in her thyroid and everything went back to normal.

It's OK to use some of the pharmaceuticals that God has blessed us with the wisdom to develop. But we have to remember *theology always trumps biology*. Your medical issue, even if it is legitimate, is never going to be an excuse before God for why you sinned.

So, if it wasn't a counselor, and if it wasn't drugs, what was it that made Joseph forget his problems and pain? The answer is, the goodness of God.

The past happened, his circumstances are still real, his memories are still valid, he's still separated from his family, but he isn't thinking about all of that anymore. And it's not because he had a really good counselor in prison, it's not because he got his prescription finally figured out, it's not because he found his favorite club to hit up on the weekend – it's because the goodness of God overwhelmed everything else.

Everything that had happened up to this point in his life paled in comparison to knowing God. If you have a dollar and I give you \$100, your dollar is still worth something, it's still real, but are you even going to think about the fact that you now have \$101? No. You're going to be overwhelmed by what you just received.

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<sup>1</sup> "Antidepressant Drug Effects and Depression Severity" - *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Jan. 6, 2010

If you get it, if you really understand who God is and what He is offering to you when He grants you forgiveness of sin and lets you into His family, the magnitude of what you have received can make the pain of everything else seem inconsequential. It's a total shift of perspective.

I'll tell you how some of this has worked out in my own life – I had it kind of rough at times growing up.

When I was really young, a neighborhood kid who was a few years older than me sexually abused me once.

I lived in a KOA campground for a while because my family didn't have enough money to get a house. We eventually moved into a fifth wheel and then moved to Texas and lived with my stepdad's brother in a single wide mobile home.

My step dad would get drunk regularly and send me and my little brother outside to play so he could watch porn. He'd come home late at night and come into our bedroom and yell at us or pull us out of bed because we'd given my mom a hard time during the day. He'd even push her around. I went with her one time to the hospital and told the doctor what a great mom I had because she was playing baseball with us and tried to catch a ball, but got blinded by the sun and the ball came down and broke her nose, when the truth was that she had been in fight with him. As I grew up I dreamed of the day I was going to be able to stab him with a kitchen knife from my backpack.

They finally got a divorce after we moved back to California. I graduated from high school while mom married and divorced again and then went into the Marine Corps – my first duty station was in Japan where you could get a fifth of Jim Beam for \$6.45 and I fell right in with the whole drinking and partying crowd and got sucked in by the pornography that floats around the barracks so freely. I was just fumbling around trying to find my way through life and make sense out of all that had happened and was happening to me – trying to figure out, what is life really about?

But then in 1997, when I was a young Sergeant, God radically took hold of my life and everything changed.

And now, over the past 14 years, as He has revealed more of Himself to me, God has made me forget too. Oh the memories are still there, I can go back and watch them like movies if I want to, but I don't. That seems almost like a different person.

The memories come back every now and then, memories of horrible, or stupid, things I did, or that were done to me, but instead of thinking about them I just thank God for what I am now and who He is and I move on.

As we look at what is going on in Joseph's life, and I share with you some of mine, my question for you is: *do you believe that God can do this for you?* Look, none of us make it through this life unscarred, we all get hurt somehow, but you don't have a stain so deep that God can't wash it out; you don't have a wound so deep that God can't heal it.

The only thing you might suffer from is too small of an understanding of God, or too big of a focus on yourself.

Joseph is able to put his past behind him *because he realizes what God has done for him*. Do you?

Remember that what God does for you isn't just for eternity, it's not just your pre-paid admission into Heaven, it affects who you are **today**. God wants to use you *right now* to be a blessing to others and right now He's either preparing you for what's coming, like Joseph in jail, or He's got a position for you to fill.

Which brings us to Joseph's second son:

52 And the name of the second he called Ephraim: "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

Ephraim literally means "Doubly Fruitful" (Strong's)

Joseph was now serving as Pharaoh's right hand man – God was using him to save an entire nation from starvation. He was definitely 'fruitful,' but he was also *utterly unqualified to fulfill his position*.

What does a guy who spent the first seventeen years of his life as a shepherd and the next thirteen as a slave and prisoner know about running a nation's agricultural or emergency preparedness programs? He never went to college, didn't have his MBA or law degree, but God was at work in his life, God was giving him wisdom and insight, and everyone from Pharaoh on down could see it.

This is what makes Christianity absolutely unique – God is willing to send his Holy Spirit to live within you and empower you to do the things He wants done. He gives you the commands but then He also gives you the power. You bear fruit because of what **He** is doing in you.

There is nothing like this in the realm of finances, or dieting or fitness. You see, I could come up to you and say hey, I found this awesome fitness program, you won't believe the results; or I found this great diet, it will really help you lose the weight; or hey, are you investing like this, because we're getting great returns. I can come to you with a program and you might be into it – you say, that's exactly what I'm looking for, where do I start? And then you start throwing yourself into it, and if you work hard at it, or do it right, you might get the results you were looking for.

But Christianity isn't like that! You don't have to work the program; you don't have to follow the regimen. God comes in and wipes out your past debt of sin through what Jesus has already done – He takes the riches of Jesus and applies them to your account. And you think, OK, I'm in, what now? What's the program? But here's the deal – then He continues to work in you making you useful – you don't have to make things happen in your own power.

If I go to the gym and I want to deadlift 350 – I can't do it by myself, at least not yet. I'll get there if I keep working at it, but if I go today and pull on that bar, there's *nothing* in the gym or in the fitness program that is going to suddenly help me move it off the ground.

Now, let's say I'm struggling with preparing a sermon, I can ask God, "please help me here Lord, I don't know what to say" and I can expect that He will make me fruitful. When I come home at the end of the day, I can pray before I go in that door, "God, you want me to be a good husband, you want me to be a good dad, you want me to love and serve my family; but you know how tired I am, you know how rough my day has been, so would you please enable me to do this." And I can expect that He will make me fruitful as I rely on Him for the power to do what He has called me to do.

That fruitfulness that comes from being available to God is absolutely unique to Christianity because only Christians are connected to the one true living God.

Now, you might be saying, "yeah, Jeff, that's all great, and maybe it will turn out that way in my life too, once God gets me out of my prison and moves me into the White House." And I would respond to you that I don't think Joseph is having a sudden revelation of God, I don't think he's just reacting to all the prosperity he has walked into.

Jesus taught that those who have been faithful with little will be trusted with much (Luke 19:17). Joseph didn't mope around in prison, he didn't cry out about his circumstances - as unjust as they might have been – in every situation we have seen him doing his best and glorifying God. I believe if these kids had been born to him in prison they would have had the same names.

You see, our relationship with God shouldn't be determined too much by our external circumstances, because no matter what they are, if you focus on Him, He can make you forget and He can make you fruitful. No matter who you are, no matter where you are – it's not about you, it's all about Him.