



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Joseph: Seeing the Good in God's Detours

Part 4: Stuck: It's Not the Time to Spin Your Wheels
Tim Badal | October 23, 2016 | Genesis 39:20– 40:23



We're continuing our series on the life and times of Joseph. More has been written about Joseph than any other character in Genesis. It is a story of God doing great things through a man, while allowing him to face incredible difficulties along the way. We are learning that God's detours are always good—but that's hard to say, especially as we'll see today in this chapter.

We have discussed Joseph's chaotic and dysfunctional background, coming out of the sins and other issues in Joseph's dad's life. Jacob said Joseph was his favorite child, and this favoritism was symbolized by giving Joseph a coat of many colors. His brothers hated him for this. While hatred was kept at bay for a while, we saw a couple weeks ago how it finally boiled over.

Joseph was sent on a journey to see how his brothers were doing, while they tended their father's flock of sheep. But while he was still far off, they saw him and conspired to kill him. Through a course of events, they changed their minds and threw him into a pit instead, after which God providentially sent a group of traders their way. The brothers were thinking it was a great idea to sell their brother, making some money in the process. So, for 20 shekels of silver, they sent their brother out to the big world of Egypt.

Last week we considered the harassment and humiliation to which Joseph must have been subjected as a slave at an auction. He was bought by a man named Potiphar, who was the leader over Pharaoh's "secret police." While he was in Potiphar's house, he went from being the lowest slave to second in command in the household because of his hard work and God's favor. In fact, we're told that Potiphar didn't worry about anything except what he was going to eat; he so trusted Joseph's leadership. God blessed Joseph every step of the way.

But then Mrs. Potiphar became attracted to Joseph and hit on him repeatedly. An honorable man, Joseph refused her advances, until one day when they were alone. She grabbed his garment, begging him to sleep with her. He responded as we should to this temptation: he ran. But he had to leave his garment behind, even though he probably knew it would go badly for him as a result.

At the end of last week, we learned that Potiphar's anger was kindled against Joseph because of his wife's false accusation, and he threw Joseph into prison. Today we pick up that story in Genesis 39, beginning in verse 20. Let's see what the Word of the Lord has to tell us.

²⁰ And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. ²¹ 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 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.

Chapter 40. Sometime 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. ⁴ 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?"⁸ They said to him, "We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me."

⁹ 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."¹² 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."

¹⁶ 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."¹⁸ 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."

²⁰ 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.

When I was 17 years old, I lost my driver's license for a while. You may say that's no surprise. My parents grounded me from driving privileges for over three months, which seemed like an eternity to me. You might ask why I lost my license. Did I get a speeding ticket? No. Did I get in an accident? No. I got stuck.

Now, let's think about this. Why in the world would parents take away their son's driver's license for the simple infraction of getting a vehicle stuck? Well, before I paint a picture of my mom and dad being cruel and unusual in their punishment, I want to tell you more of the story.

It was 1992, which makes me either very old or very young in your book, and it was the day Bill Clinton would defeat George H.W. Bush in the '92 election. At that point I wasn't all that much into politics, but on that day, the Chicagoland area was blanketed with the first snowfall of the year—four inches of beautiful snowflakes coming down. It was absolutely a winter wonderland.

I had my license, and I had a lot of rowdy friends. The idea came to us to take our vehicles and enjoy driving around in the snow. You know what that means: donuts in parking lots, finding any place we could go to have fun. Well, we were one vehicle short, and my group of buddies needed a vehicle that could hold multiple people. My dad had a work van with a bench seat which would accommodate five guys. That was the right thing to do, and without asking permission I took my dad's work van and we headed out.

By midnight we had had all our fun and I found myself saying, "It's time for one last run. Let's do this." We went on a country road, doing all kinds of whiplashes and turns and before I knew it, I found myself in a ditch. It was really wet that night with the snow, and I needed to get out of that ditch. I called my parents to tell them I'd be a little late, and then I worked feverishly to get out of that ditch.

Instead of trying to back up, as any smart person would, I thought it would be easier to drive into the neighboring field. So I did. And with great success, I moved the van farther and farther into the field, thinking, "I'm just a short distance from an exit out of this field." Little did I know I was digging myself deeper and deeper into a problem. About 300 yards into the field, the van came to a complete stop. I couldn't move. I hit the gas like you've never seen before, hearing the tires spin, smelling what I didn't know at the time was a burning transmission. I couldn't get out. At that point all my friends had left. No one was with me.

A neighboring farmer offered to help me with his four-wheel drive truck. He made it about a third of the way to me before he started to get stuck. He knew that only a moron would help him in that situation, so he left, saying, "You're on your own." I was very muddy at this point, but I knew I had to get back to the house somehow. I flagged down another farmer who happened to be out, and he said, "You're so dirty you can get in the back of my truck. You're not getting in the front."

So I sat in the back and made it home. I walked into my parents' house—already late—with no vehicle. The first question my dad asked was, "Where's my van?" I was muddy from head to toe. I threw the van keys to my dad and said, "I don't ever want to drive again." Dad repeated, "Where's the van?" I said, "It's kinda stuck."

We went to look at it, and with our brights on we could barely make out what was a mud-filled van in the middle of a field. My dad said, "There's no way we're going to deal with this tonight. Let's go home; we'll handle it in the morning." We got up at the crack of dawn, probably as early as I'd ever gotten up before, and went back to the field.

But by the time we got there, word was already out that there was a van in the middle of a field. Fifty farmers' trucks are lined up, with all the farmers pointing to the van and trying to figure out who was the dummy who put the van in the field. Of course, I have to do the walk of shame, with everyone asking, "How in the world is this van going to get out?"

Now, remember my parents owned a catering business at the time. The only part of the van that was still not covered with mud was our sign that announced the name of the catering company. It's like a billboard sitting in the middle of a field. And what I didn't know in the middle of the night was that I had parked the van in the deepest mud bog you've ever seen. The field all sloped down to one low spot, and that's where the van was.

One guy said, "Bill, it was your dummy son who put you in this spot. We'll get a tractor and pull the van out." So the first tractor arrived—and the first tractor got stuck. The second farmer said, "Aw, that's a Case tractor. Let me get my Ford tractor, and we'll pull it out." Some wagering began, which was okay with me, as it was a distraction away from me. He brought the second tractor, which also got stuck.

Now the conversation shifted to the idea of leaving the van where it was until the ground froze harder. The one thing that wasn't freezing over at that point was my father's anger. He's realizing that his livelihood has been destroyed, that his van might not be out for a month.

Then another man stepped forward—a savior of saviors. I think he was an angel unaware. He started talking about how he had just purchased a John Deere 45 Million Tractor. He said it had four tires on each side, each with its own differential, and if there was a tractor out there that could pull out this van, it was his. He even needed a police escort, because it took an entire roadway. There were more than 100 vehicles on this country road; people everywhere were watching this drama unfold. The guy gets out in the field and pulls out the first two tractors. I was thinking, "Finally, redemption. Things are turning around for me." Then he headed out to get the van, wading knee-deep in mud. The farmers were loving this. They were thinking this is the greatest event in the world.

It was time to hook up the chain. And I had the gall—17 years old and not very bright—to ask, "Who's going to hook it up?" I'm not going to repeat some of the words I heard at that point, but the chain was thrown on the ground and I heard the words, "Start digging, boy. You got this in here. You're going to get it out."

I got down on my hands and knees, all muddy now. It was cold and wet. But we hooked it up, and when the tractor began to pull, you could hear the greatest suction sound imaginable. The van was freed! But my job for the next year was cleaning the mud out of that van. When I sold that vehicle, by the way, there was still mud in places I had never thought to look.

I was stuck—and I deserved everything that came as a result of what I had done. But as we look at Joseph's life, we find that he was stuck. And many of you may find yourself stuck. Oh, it may not be a vehicle. Many of us know what it's like to be stuck. You want to make progress, to move forward, but you can't. You find yourself hitting the gas harder and harder, thinking, "If I just give it a little more effort, then I'll be set free." But all that happens is you're digging yourself deeper and deeper into ruts.

Joseph was doing everything right in Potiphar's house, but from no fault of his own he was thrown into prison. He had been thrown into a pit before by his brothers, but at best that was only for a couple hours, or maybe a day or so. But his time in this "pit" would be much longer. He was there for over a decade.

So, in whatever pit or prison cells we find ourselves today, we need to ask ourselves, "Why am I here? What does God want me to do while I'm here?" Then we need to look for how God can show Himself glorious in that process. Maybe today your pit is a stagnant marriage, or financial troubles, or a hard-to-deal-with child. That was my parents' "stuckness" for a while. Maybe it's a dead-end job, or relationship issues. Whatever it is, God wants you to know that your "stuckness" isn't out of His sight, and it isn't so big that He can't take care of it.

So, see what we can learn from Joseph about being stuck, because it's not the right time to spin our wheels.

1. When we are bogged down, we must recognize the scenario that got us stuck.

When we get bogged down in life, when we get stuck, we need to look for the scenario that got us there. I gave you a short synopsis of what I did that evening, but I can list six or seven factors that let me into that situation:

1. I shouldn't have taken the vehicle.
2. I shouldn't have been out that late.
3. I shouldn't have been driving like I was.
4. I should never have been on the road I was on.
5. The vehicle was never designed to be driven like I drove it.
6. The second I got stuck, I should have called my parents.
7. I was trying to fix it myself and only got deeper into trouble.

I could go on and on. I know why I got stuck. As we're entering another Chicago winter, have you ever noticed that when you have spun out or landed in a ditch, the first thing everybody asks is, "What happened? How did you get there?" And when we get stuck in life, the question we must ask ourselves is, "How did I get myself here? How did finances roll out of control? Why did my marriage become so cold and lifeless? Why is my relationship with my child so broken? Why do I find myself in this health trial?"

If you're like me, when you find yourself unable to move forward, you stop and ask, "How did I get here?" The Bible gives us two reasons that we might be stuck in this way.

Getting stuck sometimes happens through disobedience.

We are sometimes stuck because we have made bad decisions. We know what God says in His Word, but we've made the decision to pursue our own desires over His, to choose our way over His way. But then we get to some point in our journey when we look back and ask, "How did I get here?" And if we're honest, we realize it was our decisions that put us exactly where we are.

That was the story behind my getting stuck. It was all my fault. I wasn't driving to work or doing what I was supposed to be doing and just happened to get stuck in some mud. I had made some really bad decisions along the way. We see this in the life of Jacob, Joseph's dad. Over and over again, he was stuck, not because of external circumstances, but because he made unwise decisions. And those unwise decisions gave birth to more unwise decisions that produced all sorts of bad consequences in his life.

We see this in the life of the children of Israel. God was so good and gracious to free them from Egyptian slavery. But instead of following His ways and being grateful for what He had done, they began to complain and grumble. God then warned them that their rebellious hearts would keep them wandering in the wilderness. I wonder if they ever asked, "Why are we here? Why aren't we moving forward? It should only be a couple weeks' journey from Egypt to Canaan. It shouldn't take very long. Why is it taking 40 years?" But God continually responded, "Instead of listening to Me and obeying Me, you did things your own way."

Or take the quintessential example of Samson. He was in a pretty sweet situation, but he continued putting his own desires ahead of the will of God. As a result, he found himself in trouble time and time again. We also see David—a man after God's own heart—make some unwise decisions later in his life that cost him greatly. Then when he found himself being chased down by his own children, as he watched them fight over who would inherit the throne, he could not throw up his hands and ask, "Why did this happen?" He knew it happened because he had chosen his own ways over God's.

Joseph now finds himself stuck. But before you think Joseph was sitting in a minimum-security prison, we need to look at the story one of the psalmists tells us in Psalm 105:16–21. In his words, Joseph's *"feet were hurt with fetters; his neck was put in a collar of iron."* He had chains around his feet, and he had a necklace of iron, probably with a chain hooked up to it. This is a picture of being stuck. This iron would hold him into a small area. His whole roaming space might have been restricted to a few square feet.

I wonder if Joseph rewound the tape of his life to see if he had done something wrong. I wonder if he asked, "Why am I here?" Perhaps his first thought was that God was judging him for sin. "Did I do anything bad with Potiphar's wife? No, I did what God wanted. Did I obey the commands of Potiphar and do everything he asked? Yes, and the Lord prospered me in it. Was there any sin in dealing with my brothers? No. I was honest with them. I followed the commands of my father." So the question he had was this: "If disobedience didn't put me in this prison, what did?" We also need to ask these questions when bad things happen and we find ourselves not moving forward.

Getting stuck sometimes happens through divine appointment.

We should now consider the second reason the Bible gives us for getting stuck, which is that we may be where we are because of a divine appointment. Nowhere in Scripture are we told that Joseph was in prison due to some fault of his own. In fact, we know

from Genesis 39 that he had done exactly what he was supposed to do. He followed the commands of his owner, Potiphar, who loved having him as a slave. He was a model slave and was elevated almost to the point of equality with his master.

As we've mentioned earlier in this series, Joseph is a type or picture of Jesus. One aspect of this is Joseph's experience of being elevated to the right hand of the men over him. He was elevated in Jacob's eyes, becoming the favored son and gaining the birthright. He was elevated in Potiphar's house, where he went from slave to second in command, a position of equality with Potiphar.

We'll see today that in prison Joseph was again elevated to a place that was second only to the warden, so that whatever Joseph spoke was done. This pictures Christ, Who humbled Himself and made Himself nothing, but was then elevated to the right hand of the Father (Philippians 2). Through Christ's life and Joseph's life, we can learn that their suffering was not due to any disobedience, but rather for doing right. God had a plan and had appointed Joseph to suffer for doing what was right, even as later He did His own Son, Jesus Christ. In other words, they suffered for righteousness' sake.

We know this in Joseph's case because we watched how he ended up in prison. In the Egyptian culture, if you would have attempted to assault your master's wife, there was one penalty for it: death. Why then is Joseph alive? His life should have been taken then and there. Potiphar was judge, jury and executioner. That in fact was his job, to oversee all the executions in Egypt. So when a crime was committed by a foreign slave in his own household, it should have been a quick decision. It wouldn't have been a hung jury, but a hung Joseph.

So why is he in prison instead? Bible scholars speculate that Potiphar may not have bought his wife's story. He knew he had to get rid of Joseph—after all, it was his wife and he had to side with her. It was the right thing to do. Our closeness to our spouses should cause us to focus on their wellbeing first. But Potiphar's wife could have had a history of such behavior. We are told that Potiphar was angry, but we aren't told exactly what his anger was about. So instead of killing Joseph, which would have been the normal course, he put him in prison. This isn't the first time this sequence occurred. Remember, Joseph's brothers wanted to kill him, to be done with him through a quick and ugly death. But then they didn't do it. Their decision moved Joseph to the next place God wanted him to be. Thus, we see God's appointment taking place in the life of Joseph.

And the second parallel between Joseph and Christ is that they were both innocent of the crimes for which they were being punished. Later we hear Joseph telling the butler that he was there having done nothing wrong. "I did nothing wrong to bring me to Egypt, and I've done nothing wrong to land me jail. I'm innocent." While it would have been easy for him to admit that he had gotten too close to Potiphar's wife, that as a "red-blooded Hebrew man with needs" he had made mistakes that got him into trouble, but that's not what he said. "I'm here under no sin of my own."

But if that was the case, why had God allowed this hardship in his life? Why does God allow you and me to get stuck in life? Why do we find ourselves in troubling circumstances? Let me give you three reasons why God allows this.

First, it draws us closer to Him. Maybe success was starting to make Joseph feel comfortable, and maybe it's doing that for you. Maybe you're feeling a little more independent, you're not praying as much, not seeking wisdom from the Lord as often. If everything is going well—money in the bank, good health, everything going according to your plans—then while you may pay some homage to God, you can be tempted to think, "I don't really need Him. I'm doing well on my own." God allows the storm clouds and thunderclaps and broad strikes of lightning to bring us back to Him, just as children who fear a storm come running to their father for protection.

Second, trials cause us to dig deeper. In times of drought, plants send their roots down deeper and deeper, seeking water until they find it. In times of famine or struggle in our lives, we too send our spiritual roots deeper, seeking the sustenance and provision we need.

Finally, the struggles we face make us stronger. Joseph is learning in the school of hard knocks about the difficulties in life. This causes him to gain strength in muscles he'll need later. He's going to learn how to wait, which we'll talk about next week. Scripture promises over and over again that we will suffer for righteousness' sake, and that it is a good thing. Even though at times we'll ask God, "Why did You give me this illness, or bring this financial calamity to me, or take away my job? Lord, why do You allow my kids to not have a strong relationship with You, or with their mom or dad? Why, Lord? Why?"

In those moments, we are to draw closer to God. We are to dig deeper and we are to allow God to make us stronger. Joseph did that. He knew he was in his situation not because he had sinned, but because God had a divine appointment. If you find yourself stuck, ask this question—Have I sinned? —to find clarity on what you should do.

If it's because of sin, James 5:16 tells us to confess our sins to one another so that we may be healed. Maybe you're stuck today because you've been a bad spouse. Maybe you lost your job because you were a bad employee. If you're having trouble in your relationships, maybe you haven't been the best of friends to them. We must ask that question, because if there is wrongdoing on our part, it needs to be confessed.

But if there is no wrongdoing, then we are in these situations because God has a divine purpose in putting us there—and we need to accept that. We need to ask Him, "What will You have of me now?" That's where Joseph is.

2. When we are bogged down, we need to refuse self-pity and keep serving.

Genesis 39:20–23 says:

And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper 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. 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.

Joseph was put in prison, but nowhere do we read that he complained or murmured or grumbled. But is that true of us? When we get stuck, we start spinning our wheels through grumbling, murmuring and complaining. "I don't know why I'm here, Lord, but I want You to know I'm not very happy. Everybody else is doing great, God, but not me. My neighbor's doing great, and he doesn't give a rip about You. But I follow You. I'm doing what I'm supposed to, and I can't keep up with my bills. My marriage is struggling. My kids aren't where they're supposed to be. I don't get it, God. I thought You promised to take care of Your people."

Joseph could have done that. He ended up being in prison for over a decade, but nowhere does the Bible say he grumbled or complained. We need to stop finding a corner in which to feel sorry for ourselves. We need to stop shaking our fists at God when things don't go our way. We need to stop moaning and groaning about our circumstances, and we need to do something different, as Joseph models for us.

This means seeing the opportunities before us.

Joseph recognized the opportunities before him, and so should we. Verse 22 tells us, "*Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it.*" When we find ourselves stuck, the propensity that you and I have is to withdraw. When things go bad or don't look right, we quickly think, "I need to stop serving. I need to stop going to church and engaging with my Christian friends. I'm stuck, and the last thing I want to do is to reveal my "stuckness" to a group of people."

The devil tells us that because we're stuck, we're disqualified from ministry. I wonder if Joseph felt somewhat disqualified from ministry when he landed in prison. No, instead he realized he could either allow prison to eat him up from the inside, getting agitated and angry because of his mistreatment, or he could make his prison the best place possible. That was a tall order because an Egyptian prison was not a wonderful place to be. It was probably a dungeon or pit. But he realized there were things he could do to make the place a little better for the other prisoners. So as the text says, whatever needed to be done, he was the one to do it.

Before he became second in command in the prison, I think quite frankly there were a whole lot of toilets to clean in that place. There were probably a lot of things nobody wanted to do. The prison warden might have said, "We need someone to do this," and he would bring in the guards and whips and would force the prisoners to do the task. Then here comes Joseph who tells the warden, "I'm stuck here and there's no way I can get out. So if I can be of service to you, just call my name. If you need the toilets cleaned, I'm there. If you need me in the kitchen, I'm there. If you need me to do the laundry, I'm there. You want me to clean up this place; I'm willing to do it. Whatever needs to be done, I'm willing to do it."

What a great reminder for the people of God. When was the last time you went seeking something to do? When have you been willing to offer your time and energy to do something without being asked? Now superimpose being stuck. You're sick, or without a job, or in a relational mess. It's easy to pull back. But Joseph chose to move ahead and start serving. He didn't fall into self-pity, but rather looked around at what needed to be done. God may also have us in some kind of "prison cell" so we will be the one to clean it up. He needs a willing and able person in that dark place who is willing to sweep it up and look after things there.

This means being sympathetic to others' concerns.

Joseph sees his time in prison as an opportunity to serve others. He chose to be sympathetic to the concerns of those around him. Look at Genesis 40:1: *"Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt."*

The cupbearer was the man who oversaw all the food. In other words, the cupbearer was a caterer. He made sure all the food was where it needed to be and that when it came out to the king, everything was in order. It had to look right and taste right, so when the king put the food in his mouth, he knew it was not going to make him sick or kill him. He knew he could enjoy it.

The baker was the behind-the-scenes guy. He was the cook. In the food industry, we talk about the "back of the house" guy and the "front of the house" guy. The "back of the house" guy works in the kitchen, getting the food made the right way. The "front of the house" guy is the cupbearer. He's the one hosting the event, making sure everything is right for those who will be eating the food.

Once again we can look for a picture of Christ in this. The cupbearer and the baker were like the two criminals on the crosses, and like Jesus, Joseph found himself between them. I've also heard it said that the cupbearer and the baker may symbolize the communion table: the bread and the cup. This suggests the reality that when we find ourselves in a pit, we need the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ to redeem us from that place.

Back to our story. The cupbearer and baker both had dreams. Verse five: *"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. When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled."*

Joseph noticed their countenances, so he asked them, verse seven, *"Why are your faces downcast today?"* Think about this. In prison, everybody's faces are downcast. I can't picture anyone sitting there singing, "Zippity-doo-dah, zippity-ay." They're all disappointed and angry. It's another day in prison. They wake up and find themselves in the same place as yesterday.

Maybe that's where you find yourself today—a new day, but nothing is different, or at least nothing that affects you in a positive way. Joseph woke up to that kind of day, with no opportunity for release, for early parole—nothing like that. As he was walking through his daily duties, he saw these two fellow prisoners looking downcast. So he asked them, "What's bothering you?" He wanted to see if there might be any way he could be of service to them. Most of us, when we find ourselves stuck, are not likely to want to reach out to others. We're too busy dealing with our own issues, right? The last thing we want is to take on someone else's troubles. Joseph was in his own pit, but he was willing to reach out to help someone else in their pit. Some of us need to do that as well. We need to take our focus off ourselves and give our attention to others. Philippians 2:4 tells us, *"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."* That's not just true in the good times, but it's all the more true in the difficult times.

Both men told Joseph their dreams. One had a good dream; the other had a nightmare. Joseph was able to give them the interpretation of their dreams. "Cupbearer, in three days you'll be reinstated in the throne room of Pharaoh. Everything will go great for you." The baker got excited, thinking, "Hey, I had a dream too. Tell me what it means." Joseph told him, "In three days you're going to die." Good news and bad news. Joseph responded in truth to the two men.

Again, there is a picture here of Christ between two criminals. He told them that one would be with Him in paradise, while the other would be in condemnation.

This means telling your story honestly and openly.

We need to remember when we're stuck to be honest and open with our story. Joseph told the cupbearer that things would turn out well for him. "You'll be in Pharaoh's presence in three days. Get ready—you're moving on up." I wonder if the Jeffersons' music started playing. "You're heading up to a deluxe apartment in the sky. Things are looking good for you."

But notice that Joseph also asked the cupbearer, "When all this happens, don't forget to tell Pharaoh about me." Verse 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. 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 asked the cupbearer to share his story with Pharaoh, openly explaining his situation. "I'm in Egypt against my will. I was stolen away. If anybody can resolve my problem, it would be Pharaoh. Also, I'm here in this prison not because I did anything wrong. I'm an innocent man, and you have seen my character as I've served others in this dungeon. Would you please take the opportunity to tell Pharaoh my story?"

Joseph was honest about his story. We see no exaggeration or lie or covering of the truth. He gave the man an honest assessment of what had taken place. Also, he openly told him he did not want to be in that pit. He wanted out. And we need to realize there's nothing wrong with that desire. We see our Lord telling His Father, "If there's any way this cup can pass by Me, I want out. But I'm willing to drink it if it is Your will."

Joseph wanted out, and some of us today also want out. But we may not have been honest with one another about it. We haven't spoken openly about our desires. American Christians tend to keep everything close to our vest. Someone will ask you, "How are you doing?" Even though your life is falling apart, you'll respond, "I'm doing great. Everything's great." Then you go out to your car and bawl your eyes out. And then you may even have the audacity to say, "The church doesn't care."

Well, unlike our God, we're not omniscient. We need to share the truth about our struggles with one another. We need to let people know we're hurting. We need to say, "Actually, life is not good. I feel stuck right now. I'm in this situation—perhaps because I've done something wrong, or maybe it's God sovereign appointment. I don't know why I'm here, but it's not fun. I don't know why God has me in this prison, and I want out, but He has not shown me the door."

Just as Joseph did, we need to tell our story openly, without exaggeration, so we might be able to receive encouragement from those around us.

3. Remember, God shines brightest in hopeless situations.

Finally, I want you to see in this story that God shines brightest in hopeless situations. Three times in this passage we're told that God was with Joseph. This is a great reminder that He is also with you and me. He's with us when we're successful, as He was with Joseph in Potiphar's house. And when we're suffering or struggling, He's with us there as well.

Let's consider how God's light shown brightly in Joseph's dungeon. There probably wasn't much light in that place, and probably not much activity either. So how did God shine?

God shines brightly through your grit.

First, God shines through what I want to call our "grit." What I mean by that is our perseverance and endurance. G.R.I.T. can stand for "God's Required Intense Training." God gives us training as Christians, and there are times when it's intense. It's a required part of the Christian role. Scripture speaks of this often. We are told to "suffer well" and to "endure hardships" as good soldiers. We are told to continue to pour our time and energy into serving others, even when things aren't going well for us personally. Why does God want us to do that? First, it's good for us, and it shows the world that we have hope even when things aren't going the way we wish.

Every day Joseph worked in the prison was a picture communicating that Joseph had a hope the others didn't have, that he served a God nobody else served. Through his hard work and tenacious spirit, he showed them, "Even though I find myself stuck, I'm going to leave my stuckness to God. I'm going to serve to the best of my ability not only my God, but also the man in authority over me and those who are around me."

We need to show that kind of grit, that kind of endurance. We should not be complaining about how bad our lives are, but rather recognize that it's better to be in a "prison" with God than to be in a "palace" without Him. Some of you need to realize that it's better to be exactly where God has you than to be somewhere else on your own.

God shines brightly through your gifts.

Secondly, we show God's greatness and brightness through our gifts. Joseph's story included a situation where dreams needed to be interpreted. As we'll see, this was a gift Joseph had. He did not brag about his ability to the men, although he had had his own dreams in the past. Rather, he said, "*Do not interpretations belong to God?*" "Isn't God the only One Who can do this? Tell me your dreams, and I'll ask God for the interpretation so I can help you understand them." One of the ways God can shine brightly through us is by using our gifts for the benefit of others, and then we should deliberately point them to God, explaining that He is the Giver of our abilities.

Also, notice that when we use our gifts, it reminds us that God still remembers us. Think back: what started all of Joseph's mess? It was the two dreams he had. Remember? The stalks were going to bow down; the sun, moon, and stars would bow down. His brothers hated those dreams. But now, many years later, two men also have dreams, possibly the most vivid dreams they've ever had in their lives. I wonder if it reminded Joseph that he had had that sort of dream himself. I wonder in that moment, as Joseph

was faithfully serving and honoring God in that prison, if this provided some encouragement to his heart. “God still is here and has a plan. Those dreams I had so long ago—maybe they mean I won’t die in this prison, because God has bigger plans for my life.”

So he interpreted the dreams and watched as they came true. The cupbearer was restored to his position in Pharaoh’s throne room—just as God told Joseph would happen. Likewise, when Joseph told the baker he would be hanged in three days, that also came true. It is likely that in his heart Joseph realized, while his two dreams had not yet come to pass, he could trust that God wasn’t done with him.

When we use our gifts to serve God, He reminds us through our giving and serving—through our care for others and our concern for His purposes—that He’s not done with us either. There remained a dream, and God assured Joseph, “I’m not done with you yet. Endure, suffer well, and keep serving, until I decide enough is enough—until I decide it’s time to come out.”

You may find yourself stuck, as all of us have at some point. But we must always remember that it is Jesus Christ Who delivers us and sets us free. The same Jesus Who sets captives free, Who set you and me free from our sin and the penalty of that sin—breaking the chains of sin and death—is the same God Who finds us today in our difficult trial and Who is able to set us free if we will turn to Him and pursue His ways over our own. But we have to stop moaning and groaning about our circumstances and begin giving Him the praise due His name.

Joseph figured it out—and we need to as well. When we get stuck, we must stop spinning our tires and start turning to God.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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