



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Joseph: Seeing the Good in God's Detours

Part 5: Forgotten

Tim Badal | October 30, 2016 | Genesis 40:23



We're in a series entitled "Joseph: Seeing the Good in God's Detours," and we've already seen many of the detours Joseph has experienced. Many of us have also experienced detours when we're driving. We're headed down a familiar road, then come to those orange signs that say, "Road closed: Detour." At that point we really have no idea where we'll be going, but as we follow the signs, we do know one thing. These detours will take us farther than we want to go, and they also keep us there for longer than we would want. Detours are never fun.

I remember one time when I was driving, I went from one detour into a second detour. That's even worse. And that's what Joseph experienced—two detours. Neither of these were minimal situations he could walk away from. His detours were huge!

Remember, he was serving his father by checking on his brothers when detour number one occurred. While he was still far off, his brothers conspired to kill him. They assaulted him, throwing him into a pit, but through a course of events they got the bright idea to sell their brother into Egyptian slavery. That's detour number one. At 17 years of age, Joseph thinks he's going to live a great life with his dad and family—but all of that changed.

He's sold at a slave auction in Egypt to a man named Potiphar. Joseph entered Potiphar's household, and we're told that because the Lord was with Joseph, he actually did well in that situation. His faithful service, along with the fact that God prospered everything he did, caused him to be elevated until he was second in command over all that Potiphar owned.

But then detour number two arrived. Potiphar's wife saw Joseph's success and also noticed that he was handsome and well built, so she began to lust after him. Moving beyond simple desire, she tried to allure him to herself, finally grabbing him to compel him to sleep with her. But Joseph in his integrity was faithful to his God and his master Potiphar, choosing to do what we all should in moments of sexual temptation: he fled from her.

But because he had to leave his garment behind, Mrs. Potiphar came up with a story to incriminate him. Even though he had done everything right in his position as a slave, he found himself in prison—and not for a short time, but for years. That was detour number two. With both detours, he might have wanted to ask God, "Why did you allow these unjust things to happen to me?"

But today we're going to look at detour number three. As we learned last week, while Joseph is in prison he again does exactly what he did in Potiphar's house. He faithfully serves, doing whatever is asked of him without complaining. He transforms what might have been a terrible situation into something of value. We learn in Genesis 39:23 that *"whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper."*

In fact, Joseph cared for his fellow prisoners so well that the warden made him the assistant warden. It was mind-boggling that a slave would become second in command in Potiphar's house, and it's mind-blowing that a prisoner would become an assistant warden over all the other prisoners—while he too was still a prisoner.

During that time, Joseph gets to know two of his fellow prisoners: the king's cupbearer and the king's baker, two men very close to Pharaoh. We aren't told why they were thrown into prison or for how long. But one day as Joseph does his daily duties, he notices

that these two men are downcast and discouraged. He asks them what is bothering them, and they both tell him they had had dreams. Joseph understands what it's like to have dreams, having experienced them when he was young, and he knows dreams can be messages from God. He tells them, "My God interprets dreams, so tell me what you dreamed, and I'll ask Him for His interpretation." After the cupbearer explains what he dreamed, Joseph tells him, "In three days you'll be taken from your prison cell and restored to your position of service to Pharaoh."

The baker is excited to hear this, so he too tells Joseph his dream about breadbaskets and birds. Joseph then tells him that while he knows the interpretation of this dream, it wasn't going to be positive. He says, "In three days Pharaoh is going to lift you out of prison, and you're going to be killed." Good news. Bad news. Joseph faithfully gives both.

We're also told in Genesis 40 that Joseph says to the cupbearer, "When you're restored in three days, I want you to do one thing. I was faithful in interpreting your dream—would you remember me when you come back into the throne room of Pharaoh? He could set me free. I was brought to Egypt under duress, having been treated with treachery by my brothers and brought as a slave from my Hebrew homeland. I'm now in prison due to no sin of my own. Please tell Pharaoh of my innocence—maybe he will release me." We see the brokenheartedness of Joseph who had no desire to spend the rest of his days in prison—and who can blame him?

I want to focus today on a couple words. In Genesis 40:23 we read, "*Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.*" Then chapter 41 begins like this: "*After two whole years...*" It would be very easy for us, having read the last verse in chapter 40, to zoom on over to the first verse in chapter 41: Joseph was in prison, and now he's out. That's not what Moses, the author of Genesis, wants us to do. He uses the phrase "two whole years" to emphasize that these were two long years—730 long days—that Joseph waited in prison.

Why two years? Why wasn't he released right away? Why wasn't his request granted? Verse 23 simply tells us "*the cupbearer...forgot him.*" He forgot about Joseph. While we usually spend a lot of time focusing on the "black" part of the Bible, today I want to specifically consider the "white" part, the space between those words. If we don't create some space there, we miss out on two very long years of waiting and the trial it represents in the life of Joseph. I'd like to share three lessons we can find there.

My theme this morning is simple: "Forgotten." We by nature forget things. Who hasn't forgotten to pay a bill? Some of you have forgotten to pay a bill for three months, until the lights are turned off. "Oh, yeah, I forgot that." We've forgotten anniversaries and birthdays. Right now, some of you are thinking, "I don't remember my anniversary or my wife's birthday." We forget things.

We forget appointments. We have all this technology in our computers and phones that we depend on. After the first service one of our parishioners told me that on Grandparents Day at one of the schools, a young lady in our church was brokenhearted that her grandparents told her they would be there—but they forgot. Forgetting can bring real heartbreak.

We can even forget children. The Badals have done that. Sundays are difficult for our family. Amanda serves on the worship team and I'm busy with various pastoral duties. So we have to plan our Sunday mornings on Saturday to make sure everything is in place. Usually we take one car—going to church as a family and returning as a family—because then at least we know where everybody is.

One day some years ago—Noah was probably eight, Joshua was about four, and Luke probably two—Amanda left early to prepare for worship, while I had a little more work to do on my sermon. Now, usually we'll discuss who's going with each of us. "You've got One, Two and Three? You've got One and Three? You've got Two?" Well, on that day we assumed too much. I assumed that Amanda had One, Two and Three. One and Three were with Amanda.

When I came downstairs, ready to leave for church, I remember doing what parents ought to do—that last final, "Hey, is anybody here? Last call. Heading to church." Nobody answered. It was a quiet house. I got in the car and headed to church. Amanda was finishing up practice, and she asked, "Where's Joshua?" That's four-year-old Joshua. I said, "He's with you. Come on. Don't be funny." She said, "He's not with me. I brought One and Three. Where's Two?" I said, "He's not with me."

Dread began to come over this dad—where's Joshua? He was home. We have forgotten our son. And of course, all manner of images come into mind. I envisioned him juggling flaming knives in the kitchen. I called the house—we still had an old-school answering machine that you can hear in the room. So I called, "Joshua, it's Daddy. Hey, I'm coming back to get you. Don't be afraid. Everything's fine. Just wait for Dad." Of course, he didn't answer.

It takes 15 minutes to get home, so I called my parents because they only live a few minutes away. "Dad, go over and get Joshua. Just tell him we're on our way. Don't make a big deal about it. Don't scare him." Dad said, "Hey, I'm just headed out to church. I'll

run right over. Stay on the line so you'll know everything is okay." I heard Dad get out of the car and walk up to the front door. I told him the code to the garage door. "No, son, I can't work this dumb technology."

"Okay, Dad, go to the front door." Then Dad did the unthinkable. He pounded on the door, "Joshua! Open the door! Open the door, Josh!" I'm like, "Dad, don't scream like that. You'll scare the daylight out of him." Joshua didn't come to the door—he was freaked out. "Who was banging on the door? I'm not going to the front door." He was probably under the covers by this time. So I got all the way home and Joshua said, "Dad, you forgot me. How could you forget me?"

Now, I want you to know, everything is fine with Joshua. After six months of therapy, he's started using complete sentences again—and we're encouraged by that!

Seriously now, we forget things, right? I mean, who can forget the movie, *Home Alone*? A whole movie based on the hubbub of a holiday trip causing the family to forget one of their kids—and all the chaos that results. We forget things as human beings. But who can make an excuse for the cupbearer? This is a man who is told he is going to be freed from prison by this man whom he had served so faithfully over the years. Joseph interprets his dream, and then makes just one request, "Remember me. Tell my story to Pharaoh so that I might get out of this place as well."

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that the cupbearer did not remember Joseph. What does that teach us? I think there are three lessons we should consider. We need to see what it means to care for people, what it means to trust people, and what it means to wait when things don't go the way we want them to.

1. This scene from Joseph's life teaches us about caring.

We see in verse 23 that the cupbearer forgot Joseph. Let's give him the benefit of the doubt—maybe he struggled with dementia. The Bible doesn't say that. He seems to remember at a later point, as we'll learn next week, that Joseph is in prison. But something is keeping him from remembering the need of a guy who has asked for his help.

In this, we should see how we ought to care, and see some of the things that can get in the way of caring for those who need us most. We're not told why the cupbearer forgot Joseph, but I want to speculate as to the possible reasons.

We tend to neglect others because of our duties.

The cupbearer may have forgotten Joseph because he was busy. Imagine that this man is sitting in prison for some time, then suddenly the king's men come in—just as Joseph had predicted. The door opens and they grab him. "Hey, cupbearer, let's go. Pharaoh wants you back. You're about to be restored as his cupbearer." He gets cleaned up and puts on his robe or whatever he wore in his role as cupbearer. He stands before the king. He's back in his role as the one who tested all the food before the king ate it.

I want to give him the benefit of the doubt. We are told that the reason he was put in prison was that something he had done had angered Pharaoh—we're not told what. In some way he had not been a good employee. We also know that the baker had lost his life because he had failed Pharaoh. So perhaps the reason the cupbearer forgets Joseph is that he wants to be the best employee he can be. "I get a second chance. I'm reinstated in my role, and I am determined to be the best cupbearer I can be. I won't bother Pharaoh in any way, shape or form. I'll leave everything else alone, and focus on making my boss the happiest guy in the world." Let's say that's the reason for forgetting Joseph.

What a great reminder for us to be careful not to allow our employment to trump our relationships. We must be careful not to make our boss the happiest person in the world when our spouse and our children are unhappy. That's a hard thing to do. Where do we draw the line? As a man who is busy with two careers right now, how do I draw the line between doing a good job for my employers and taking care of my family and the needs of those around me?

Some of us have task-oriented personalities. We love giving you guys jobs, because you are so faithful to get them done. But there can be a problem—and I've got a little of this in me as well—sometimes the task causes us to run over people. With our focus on the task being number one, it can cause frustration in people who find themselves in second place.

What we can learn from the cupbearer is that it is possible he elevated his position to the extent that he forgot the one thing that got him there. He forgot the man who ministered to him and who asked one simple thing. It would have only taken a five-minute conversation.

“Pharaoh, I want to thank you for this opportunity to have my job back. It is such an honor to serve you. Can I tell you just a quick story? Will you give me a couple moments of your time? When I was in prison I had a dream. And I didn’t know what to make of it—it was the craziest dream I’d ever had. But there was a Hebrew man in the prison who was one of the most faithful guys I’ve ever known. He worked harder than anyone in the prison. He interpreted my dream—and you know what? His interpretation was spot on, to the very last detail. He nailed it.

“And the reason I’m telling you about him, Pharaoh, is that this man is in prison for a crime he did not commit. He’s a long way from home because he was stolen from his land and brought to Egypt. Second, he is the most incredible man I’ve ever met, and maybe you could use him. You’re always saying you’re looking for great people. Here’s a great man who could work for you.”

That didn’t even take five minutes to say. It took two. He could have done that. But instead he focused on making sure he did the best job he could, making sure his job was secure, putting his tasks first even if it meant forgetting people in the process. It’s a great reminder that we too should never allow projects to trump people as it did for the cupbearer. He did not remember Joseph.

We tend to neglect others because of our distance.

Maybe it was the duties—I’m speculating here—but it also might have been the distance. We don’t know the distance from the prison cell to the palace room. It may have been a couple blocks, or it may have been a couple miles. But we should assume they were in the same vicinity. The distance I’m talking about is the kind of rooms they were. The culture shock the cupbearer went through was quite significant.

Think about it. He was probably lying on the ground, maybe in mud, in his prison cell. We’re told that Joseph was chained, so he may have been restricted at his neck and feet. We can doubt these were 100-foot-long chains, but more like five to six feet long, with the other end fixed to a wall. There was no sanitation, with only the basic necessities—maybe gruel every day. His clothing would have been tattered. He would have been hearing the endless cries and murmurs of the other prisoners.

Then suddenly he was taken from this place of utter despair to a place of incredible luxury—the palace hall. The smells would change. He would be cleaned up and given fresh linen clothing. He might have been given ornate jewelry to wear. He would now be eating the king’s food—the best food in all Egypt. I wonder if maybe the distance between where he now lived and where he had lived before was so great that he had no desire to remember anything about his prison experience.

Some of us also find ourselves not caring to think about people who are far away from us. We might think of care as an “area code issue.” We care about the people who live close to us—our family (which is right), our friends who are closest (which is also right). But when we go outside our area code, our care for people can begin to wane. The distance affects us. I read an article that said one of the great things about technology is that we now can care about people in ways we never could a hundred years ago.

For example, remember the picture that depicted the horrors of the war in Syria. There was a little boy in an ambulance who was dust-covered, bleeding and crying. If you have a heart, what you saw broke your heart. We know his family is gone, because he lives in Aleppo, Syria, where the most severe fighting is taking place. He’s an orphan and injured. But this was a picture of the human side of that war—a little boy, no older than my youngest son Luke—and my heart welled up with compassion and sympathy.

You see, technology moves Tim, who lives in Hinckley, in America, all the way to Aleppo, Syria. And if we didn’t have that technology, I would never know of that situation. But then what we do is change the channel. We say to ourselves, “That’s their problem. They created it. They’re not as civilized as we are.” As if this little six- or seven-year-old boy had any involvement in global relations, that he had anything to do with the process that threw Syria into this super-power war that’s going on between the U.S. and Russia. But we say, “You know what? That’s their problem. We have our own problems to deal with here.”

The Bible uses a word I think is important: sympathy. This is what the cupbearer lacked. He moved from being in a place of total despair to a place of great luxury. What he lost in that transition, because of the distance between the two, was his sympathy. Do you know what sympathy is? It’s a compound Greek word that means to share in someone else’s sorrows.

So if our friend in another area code has a problem, sympathy moves us from where we are in an okay place to the place of their pain. We enter into the pain of someone else. But here is what selfishness can do. It says, “I’m in the palace. I don’t need to worry about the people in prison.” The cupbearer said, “Everything is good with me; I don’t have to remember Joseph. I don’t want to even think about Joseph, because here’s where I am now.” Some of us have that cupbearer spirit—because we’re okay, we don’t want to worry about others who aren’t. We lack sympathy. We lack a heart for those who are hurting.

We tend to neglect others because of our delights.

It might have been the cupbearer's duties. It might have been the distance. Or one other thing might have affected him: the delights. What do I mean by that? The cupbearer is enjoying all the good in his new situation. There is no crying or screaming in the palace halls. There are festivities. There isn't gruel—there's the finest food. There isn't tattered clothing—there's the best wardrobe. Everything is different.

Now, of the three causes I've mentioned, there's nothing in Scripture that tells us his exact reason for forgetting Joseph. Remember, I'm speculating, hopefully in an objective way. But in the small Old Testament book of Amos, he tells us something very different. In Amos chapter six, starting in verse four, he is prophesying to the people of Israel. He warns them not to give their attention to the good things going on while missing out on the bad things that are also taking place. He says:

Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music.

What he's saying is, "In a time of trial and travail, don't act as if life is going to be perfect. Don't think that just because you have food and music, that life is good." He then continues, "[Don't be those] *who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!*"

"What? What, Amos? I'm following you. We shouldn't party when we should be pitying. We shouldn't throw festivities when we should be fasting and praying. But now you say, 'Don't drink wine in bowls and anoint yourself with the finest of oils, yet not be grieved over the ruin of Joseph.'" Amos is saying, "There was a man in the past who knew Joseph, but forgot him and lived it up instead."

So we ask ourselves, "Who is Amos talking about? Is he talking about Joseph's dad?" No. Nowhere in Scripture do we see that Joseph's dad might have done that. Nor do we see that Joseph's brothers would have done that. Let's look at Potiphar. Nope, it doesn't apply to Potiphar. The only person in Joseph's story who would have forgotten the ruin of Joseph and had the opportunity to be lavish with lotions and oils and the finest of wines was the cupbearer.

The prophet Amos is saying, "Don't be a cupbearer who ascended into the throne room of the king and forgets Joseph because life is too good." One of the things we can do when life is good is insulate ourselves from the hurts and cries of other people. It's not just an area code thing—a distance thing. We can simply begin to callously close ourselves off because we want to have a good time. We don't want to be involved in other people's business, because it could cramp our style somehow.

For example, you saw that I took a late flight to Atlanta last Sunday. I was tired. I didn't want to talk with anyone. I didn't want to do anything. Because I'm a big guy, plane seats are no fun. People on planes beg not to sit by me. I walk down the aisle, and they say, "Please don't sit by me. Please don't sit by me." I hate flying.

I sat in a middle seat, between two women who knew each other. They were playing the "two cans with the string" game. The two cans were my ears, and the string was my brain. They were talking to each other, and the last thing I wanted to do was listen to them. They were talking about absolutely nothing! I didn't want to go off on them, because at some point I would have to tell them I'm a pastor—and that's not a good testimony.

Someone here in the sanctuary knew I was about to fly and how much I don't like it, and he told me, "I've got some headphones. Put these on, and you won't hear a thing. They're called 'noise-cancelling headphones.'" What a blessing! I put those headphones on, and I couldn't hear them anymore. I was in bliss. I insulated myself from what they were talking about.

This is a terrible illustration, isn't it? No, it's a great illustration—and here's why. When we are delighting in the good things—we have money in our checking account, we're not fighting with our spouse, our kids are doing well, everything seems to be going well at work—we say to ourselves, "I like my life. I'm going to put on noise-cancelling headphones so I don't have to hear the needs of others. I don't want to hear about them. I'm enjoying the wine, the lotion, the palace. I don't want to worry about anybody else."

We put these headphones on, and when people say something to us, we respond, "What? I didn't hear you." Why not? "Because I'm not listening. I surely would give something if I knew there was a need." The problem is you've got headphones on. You're not hearing about the needs around you. You, like me, want to be left alone. You don't want anybody in your personal space. "Just leave me alone. Let me delight in my life. Let me enjoy myself. Don't involve me in your garbage or troubles."

So, according to Amos, the cupbearer is enjoying his life so much that he does not want to be burdened by Joseph's issues. How true is that of us? Do we turn away from the hurts of those close and far because we're too busy enjoying our lives, enjoying what

we think is our money, our resources? We see someone in need, and we say, "Give me some blinders so I don't have to see them. Give me some headphones so I don't have to worry about them. I want to forget them and remember them no more."

How does your caring live itself out? Do you care for others? Do you minister to others, or are you so busy in your duties or in your distance or in your delights that you forget the hurts and struggles of those around you?

2. This scene from Joseph's life teaches us about trusting.

We see that Joseph now has to trust in a man. He knows that the only way out of the prison is if the cupbearer takes a moment to share his story. During those two years, I wonder if, as Joseph saw the prison gate open every day, he didn't run there thinking, "It's my day of release. The cupbearer finally did his job." His hopes rise, only to see the gate shut again. "Didn't the cupbearer remember me? Why haven't I been set free yet?"

After two years of waiting, there are two lessons Joseph learned.

People will let us down.

First, he came to realize that people are going to let us down. It's part of life. The Bible tells us over and over to be careful not to put our trust in other people. Here's why. The Bible says that by nature—not because we make bad decisions, but because of our makeup—we are not dependable people.

Here are some passages to chew on. In Isaiah 2:22, the prophet gives us a word from God. "*Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?*" What he's saying is, "Don't trust creatures who could be here one moment and not be here the next, because they don't have oxygen." They're not very dependable, right? Tim could be here today and gone tomorrow because his body doesn't get enough oxygen—and he dies. How truly trustworthy is an individual who could be here today and gone tomorrow?

Second, we're told in Jeremiah 17:5, "*Thus says the Lord: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord.'*" Let's stop here for a moment. Is the Lord saying I can't trust anyone? That we're all totally untrustworthy? Yes. And no.

What the Bible is saying is that man by nature is untrustworthy because of his frailties. Therefore, we need to be careful that we don't put our ultimate trust in another human being. Now, in 1 Corinthians 13 I'm told that love hopes all things, endures all things, believes—or trusts—all things. So if I'm going to show you love, then I need to trust you. But how can I trust someone who is completely untrustworthy? Well, they're not. Twenty years ago, my wife made vows to me that I believe she's been faithful to. I can trust her, because she has proven herself faithful. Now, can my wife say, "I'm going to be with you for the rest of our days"? Nope. Amanda doesn't know how long she's going to live. Can Amanda say with 100% guarantee that she will always remain faithful to those vows? Nope. She can't. She has no idea what a day might bring. Can I believe that there's a good probability that she's going to be faithful? Yes. Here's why: because of the first 20 years. She's had a whole lot of reasons to get out of the marriage, but she hasn't. She's remained faithful. When I've screwed up, she's been faithful. When things haven't gone the way we wanted, she's remained faithful. She has remained committed. She is a dependable person.

Now, she can't promise me things that she can't live up to, because she's a broken, fallible individual. She can say, "I strive for this. I want to do these things. I commit to these things. But I have no idea what will come." So every one of our promises contain, if you will, disclaimers. There are asterisks, because we are fallible and broken individuals.

As a business person, my customers can know—and my employees can know—that I'm a faithful employer and business person. When I say I'm going to be somewhere, I'm going to be there. Now, is that always true? No. There have been times when we've had accidents on the way to an event. There have been events where the wrong food has been brought. There have been events where we've been late because of broken equipment. Can I tell my customers, as a caterer, "There is 100% probability that I'll be there"? No.

I can show them that I'm trustworthy. I can tell them about all the events for which I've been on time, all the events that have had the right food, all the times that even when things have gone wrong, we've done everything in our power to be in the right place at the right time serving the right food—getting the job done. But I cannot with certainty tell someone I 100% guarantee it.

That is what the Bible is saying. It says that by nature as humans, we are untrustworthy people. It's because we're frail—here today and gone tomorrow. There are a lot of circumstances we can't predict, that can keep us from fulfilling our tasks. However, we need to recognize that although humans are untrustworthy, Christians should be the most dependable people around.

Maybe the employees where you work are undependable—but you can be dependable. Maybe you can't trust most people with money, but can they trust you because you're a follower of Jesus Christ? Can they depend on you—not because of your 100% guarantees and promises, but because as a believer you keep your word. Why? Because you serve a dependable God. If you are a Christ follower, you should be modeling your life after Him.

We should turn to a wholly dependable God.

Even as the cupbearer let Joseph down, people will let us down. But Joseph learned to turn to the God Who is wholly dependable. He is utterly and completely faithful. His mercies are new every morning. Great is the faithfulness of God. We serve a faithful God, therefore we ought to also be a faithful people. When God says He's going to do something, He does it—and we should do the same.

The Bible says we should let our yes be yes and our no be no, because we are speaking truth. We know what we're committing to, we know what we're making oaths about, so when we say we're going to do something, we do it. Listen, when Christians borrow money or take out credit, we'd better come back and pay that bill. If we don't, we're giving a bad testimony. If we're going to borrow money, we need to pay it back. I'm going to think about what might interfere with my paying it back before I get into it. The worst thing that can happen is that I have to sit before a banker and tell him I can't pay back my loan. I'm not dependable.

Christian spouses, if you're going to commit to things, you'd better live them out. Why? Because Jesus proved that when the going got tough, the tough got going. When He faced all kinds of hardships, He didn't say, "This whole redemption business is too hard. I'm out." He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and He did it for the joy that was set before Him, as Hebrews 12:2 says. We too are to work, endure and stay committed to Christian principles. We are to be dependable people—not because we're super-human, but because we serve a God Who is dependable, and we're going to model our lives after Him.

People will let us down. You have been let down. Some of you have been let down by your spouse, by your children, by your parents, by your employer, even by your church. We know that people will let us down. But because God has modeled dependability, we're going to be faithful like Him. The cupbearer forgot; he let Joseph down. But Joseph shows us that he—as a picture of Jesus—remained dependable. He kept serving. He kept honoring God. He continued to care for and ministering to others.

3. This scene from Joseph's life teaches us about waiting.

Trusting. Caring. Then finally we need to look at waiting. Oh, I hate waiting. It says in Genesis 41:1 that Joseph waited for "two whole years." You might underline the word "whole." That's 730 days. I don't know how many hours are in those 730 days, or how many minutes or seconds, but that's a long time.

It has been said that waiting is perhaps the hardest discipline in life. We hate to wait. Even a couple minutes out of our precious time is time wasted in waiting. I am always amazed at how people market different services. We have billboards all around the Fox Valley area for a local hospital that advertises the service of mammograms. Maybe you've seen it. If you think about it, mammograms are important to women's health, helping detect cancer. It's what captured my wife's cancer a year and a half ago. It's an important thing.

But I'm amazed at how they advertise it. You would think that this local hospital would advertise that the machine they're using is the best around, right? They don't. They don't say it's the best. You would think they would say, "We are going to be so gentle with you and respect your privacy. We're going to make sure our customer service is the best." That should be what they advertise, right? No. They're not advertising the machine; they're not advertising their care. Maybe they're going to advertise the skill of the technicians who are going to look at the image—they're the smartest and best around.

That's not it either. Do you know what they're advertising? "Mammogram today—results the same day." Why? Because they know that when Amanda got her mammogram, we wanted to know what the results were. We know that waiting is really, really hard. So this group of doctors say, "The most important thing regarding the mammogram isn't the machine, isn't the technician, isn't the customer care. The greatest thing with the mammogram is the waiting."

Can I tell you—Amanda had her mammogram. We got the news on Thursday, and here was the news. “You need to see a doctor.” And do you know when the doctor’s appointment was? Monday. And do you know what the blessed nurse said? “Have a great weekend.” You know what I mean? We didn’t know anything. We just knew that they wanted to see us. Do you think we had fun that weekend? No. We had something hanging over us. We just knew that on Monday we were going to go to the doctor to hear whatever it was. And it was cancer, and we had to deal with it.

But waiting was the hardest part. So when they advertise their services, what they choose to say is this, “We know waiting is hard, so we’re going to shorten that time so you don’t have to wait as long.” They get it.

Going back to the story of Joseph, he had to wait two whole years. Oh, my! Two years! “Is today the day I’m going to be released?” He waited and he waited and he waited. Listen, you have two responses to waiting. You can grow bitter, or you can become better. Some of us right now are in a waiting mode because God hasn’t answered our questions or dealt with our situations—and we’ve gotten bitter.

Nowhere in the text does it say Joseph started cursing in the prison. Nowhere do we read that he said, “I hate my brothers—they put me in Egypt and now I find myself here. I hate Potiphar’s wife, that scoundrel of a woman who said I did something I didn’t do. I hate the cupbearer who said he was going to tell Pharaoh about this, but he’s forgotten me.” We don’t see any name-calling or any trace of bitterness in Joseph. He waited.

Some of us right now are shaking our fists at God. We’re angry at everybody. We’re bitter because God’s answer hasn’t come. We find ourselves sitting in a waiting room, and there’s nothing worse than waiting. Maybe you’re waiting on grades. Maybe you’re waiting on an acceptance letter. Maybe you’re waiting on a job offer. Maybe you’re waiting on loan papers. Maybe you’re waiting on a pregnancy test. Maybe you’re waiting on someone to ask you to marry him. Maybe you’re waiting for the right person. Maybe you’re waiting on a medical report. There are all kinds of waiting rooms in our lives.

We can grow bitter when those answers don’t come. Or, we can get better. Joseph got better. Here’s how he did it, and how we can do it.

We can rehearse God’s past provisions.

Joseph could have become angry or bitter, but if he took some time to look back over his life and the life of his family, he would have seen that God had been with them. He would remember his great-grandparents, Abraham and Sarah, who waited and waited and waited for a son—a promised son. Abraham would be 100 and Sarah would be 90 before she gave birth to Joseph’s grandfather, Isaac. God came through. His plans became reality.

Joseph would remember, as he sat on his grandfather Isaac’s lap as a young boy, that he had asked Isaac to tell him the story about when his father had taken him up Mt. Moriah. “Tell me how freaked out you were when he put you on that altar, because God wanted to test his faith, to see if he believed in God’s provision. He put you on the altar and was ready to sacrifice you—and then in the thicket you heard the ram. Tell me the story again, Granddad, how God provided for you.”

As a child, Joseph would also have heard the stories of how God had provided for his father Jacob over and over again. He would look over his own life and realize, “I could have been dead at least a couple different times. My brothers could have left me in that pit. Egyptian law meant Potiphar could have killed me for assaulting his wife. But I’m still alive today. God, You have provided for me so many times. Why should I doubt that You will provide for me here in this prison?”

Some of us are in a waiting mode right now. We’re asking God, “What are You doing?” But God wants you to look back at how good He has been in the past. Rehearse those things over and over again. I’ve always been amazed by my father’s steadfastness. My dad never, ever gets frazzled. The world can be coming apart at the seams. I’ll look at my dad and say, “Dad, aren’t you nervous?” And he says, “No.”

I am going into my 40s and am beginning to appreciate how good it is to have in your back pocket some memories of things God has done. God says, “I’ve been there, done that.” He’s taken care of things. God has ministered to us. We’ve had financial questions before, and God’s been there. We’ve always had food. We’ve always had clothes. He’s always taken care of us. We’ve got a medical issue going on. God has been faithful.

My 13-year-old son had to write a personal narrative. I sometimes think his mind is only focused on food and video games. But he had to write a narrative, so he wrote what was going on in his heart and mind during his mom’s diagnosis of cancer. He wrote very vividly of the day when Amanda and I had gone to the hospital early in the morning for her surgery. When I read what was going

on in his mind that day, I was blown away. He was scared to death. He was really nervous for his mom. My mom and dad were there to take care of the boys and get them to school. My dad was playing loud music on his phone, celebrating. And Noah came down and was righteously indignant. "Grandpa! Don't you know today is Mom's surgery? Don't you know she's got cancer? Don't you know this cancer could kill her? How could you play celebratory music?" My dad responded, "Noah, we have a God Who can defeat cancer. And that's why we're celebrating." And my son said, "My Grandpa's view of God was a whole lot bigger than mine." And man, I fell apart. Oh, my! This kid is more about God than his video games.

You see, we need to recognize that we can celebrate amidst times of trouble, because we've got a God Who's bigger than prison. We've got a God Who's bigger than waiting. We've got a God Who's bigger than medical conditions, than unemployment, than marital strife or relational struggles. We have a God Who can do exceedingly abundantly more than we could ever ask for or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). So we trust Him. We put our faith in Him.

We can remember God's promises.

We rehearse the things God has done, and we can also remember His promises. What's the promise that Joseph needs to remember? To take the words from Martin Luther King, Jr., "I have a dream." Joseph had two dreams—two dreams that had not yet come true. He knows they're from God. He knows they're bigger than just dreams he had because he ate pepperoni pizza too late in the night. He knows these are life markers, and that there's going to be a moment when Joseph's brothers and father are going to bow down to him. He doesn't know what it looks like, but he knows God has announced it—and it's going to happen. And while Joseph is sitting there in prison, he realizes his dreams have not yet come to fruition.

God has promised things to us as well that haven't yet come to fruition. You say, "My life is totally messed up. I'm not enjoying anything, and my existence is nothing." God says, "I have great and precious promises for you. Yes, your life may be difficult, but think what awaits you." He tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:9, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, what God has prepared for His people." There's a promise. Your life may be difficult. The next 70 years may be a trial for you. But awaiting you on the other side of eternity are blessings unimagined.

Joseph had this dream, and he knows it hasn't come true. He knows God is not done with him. Joseph could have confidence that the prison cell wasn't the last chapter in his life. And here's why...

We must recognize that God is still active.

Joseph could have said, "I had this dream, but I must have misunderstood it. It wasn't for me. Maybe it was that pepperoni pizza I had." But here's the problem with that: God is utterly faithful—even though Joseph is in a waiting room—to show Joseph that He is still active. How does He do this? God gives dreams to two men next to Joseph. God then gives the interpretation to Joseph so he can tell them—and Joseph watches as those dreams come true. He can then know that even as God allowed him to see the right interpretation of those dreams, he could trust that his interpretation of his own dreams was one day also going to come true.

Here's why we can trust God in the waiting room of life. When we're sitting in a small group, the bitter person can say during prayer time, "I'm angry because nothing has happened. God hasn't been faithful." But then Sally stands up and says, "I've had a prayer that was answered. We were praying about this matter, and God answered it." The bitter person then might ask, "What makes her so great that God would answer her prayer? I never liked Sally all that much. What makes her so great? What makes her so wonderful? Why does God love her more than He loves me?" The better person, however, says, "If God's doing that for Sally, then surely He'll do that for me."

Joseph said, "My friends had dreams and God fulfilled their dreams. Then He surely will fulfill my dreams as well." He recognized that while God may not be moving a lot in his life, seeing God move in the lives around him proved to him that God was still active. So we can see from his story that our life is part of a mosaic of God being active in the lives of all His people.

We must respond in faithfulness.

In those waiting-room times, we need to rehearse, to remember and to recognize—but we also need to respond. The text tells us that Joseph remained faithful. He didn't stop working. He didn't stop serving. He didn't stop honoring the warden and his fellow prisoners. Even though he'd been forgotten, he didn't give up and start acting out or rebelling. He remained dependable, and everyone in the prison knew he was being the best person he could be.

In our waiting times we can get bitter. We can kick the dirt. We can throw things. We can become angry. Or we can continue to serve and honor God. As an aside, Joseph gives us a picture of every Christian. We are waiting for our release. And at a time unknown to us, we have been given the promise of our release. One day Jesus Christ is going to come in the clouds and release us from the prison in which we find ourselves. We will be placed in the throne room of glory. We can be bitter and angry and kick the dirt and say, "How long do we have to wait? I can't stand it." Or we can be busy serving and evangelizing and caring and ministering and sharing, even as we wait for the coming of the Lord.

Here's what I know to be true: it is better to be busy while we wait, because time moves faster than when we sit and sulk. Joseph sped the coming of his release by working hard. We are told that we move the hands of time while we are busy for the Lord, instead of waiting, sitting somewhere, asking, "Lord, when will it come?"

We learned today about caring, trusting and waiting. Now the hard work is applying it to our lives. In what area do you need to care more? In what area do you need to trust God more? With what issue in your life do you need to wait on the Lord? I give this to you, as sensible people, to now apply to your lives, to your specific circumstances. And I pray that the Lord would lead you, that the Holy Spirit would empower you, to be obedient in these areas.

Village Bible Church | 847 North State Route 47, Sugar Grove, IL 60554 | (630) 466-7198 | www.villagebible.org/sugar-grove

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

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