

THE PITFALL OF INJUSTICE

THE POINT:
PRESS FORWARD IN
SPITE OF INJUSTICE.

Leader pages on pp. 144-147

GENESIS 39:21-23; 40:4-8,20-23

MEMORY VERSE

^{39:21} But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him. He granted him favor with the prison warden. ²² The warden put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph’s authority, and he was responsible for everything that was done there. ²³ **The warden did not bother with anything under Joseph’s authority, because the LORD was with him, and the LORD made everything that he did successful.**

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^{40:4} The captain of the guards assigned Joseph to them as their personal attendant, and they were in custody for some time. ⁵ The king of Egypt’s cupbearer and baker, who were confined in the prison, each had a dream. Both had a dream on the same night, and each dream had its own meaning. ⁶ When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they looked distraught. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh’s officers who were in custody with him in his master’s house, “Why do you look so sad today?” ⁸ “We had dreams,” they said to him, “but there is no one to interpret them.” Then Joseph said to them, “Don’t interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.”

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^{40:20} On the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, he gave a feast for all his servants. He elevated the chief cupbearer and the chief baker among his servants. ²¹ Pharaoh restored the chief cupbearer to his position as cupbearer, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand. ²² But Pharaoh hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had explained to them. ²³ Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

KEYWORDS

Cupbearer (40:5)—A cupbearer brought Pharaoh’s wine to him personally, but he also attended to him like a trustworthy butler and a loyal confidant.

Dream (40:5,8)—This word is a translation of a Hebrew verb (*chalam*). In the Bible dreams were used as an avenue of com-

munication between God and humans.

Elevated (40:20)—Numerous interpretations for this word include: raising to a greater height for visibility, summoning to appear before a superior, and showing favor to. More than one meaning might apply here.

HOW CAN WE PRESS FORWARD IN THE FACE OF INJUSTICE?

Ralph J. Bunche, an advocate for Civil Rights in the 1960s, said, “To make his way, the Negro must have firm resolve, persistence, tenacity. He must gear himself to hard work all the way. He can never let up.”²¹ While Joseph never met Dr. Bunche, there’s a good chance he would have agreed with and felt that line. In today’s session, we will see how Joseph chose to press on, even through continued disappointment.

Have you walked through a season when you couldn’t seem to catch a break? Did you ever wonder if good days would be a reality for you? Maybe you lost a job around the same time a loved one died during a global pandemic. Or you went through a painful divorce just as you received devastating news from the doctor. Life can throw many hard punches at us. We may even be tempted to let our hope in God fade.

As you read this part of Joseph’s story, be encouraged that the Lord will always see His children through. As Jesus said: “You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world” (John 16:33).

Keep Doing Good

// Genesis 39:21-23

Joseph didn’t deserve being jailed because he was falsely accused. We wouldn’t be surprised if Joseph was tempted to be bitter toward God and others. Instead, Joseph appeared to live by the same principle that the apostle Paul did: “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself” (Phil. 4:11).

It’s striking how similar verses 21-23 are to earlier verses 3-6, when Potiphar promoted Joseph. The biblical writer wants us to understand the secret to Joseph’s success was God’s sovereign favor. It wasn’t Joseph’s good looks or skillset that pushed him to the top. It was God going before him and opening doors.

We see more hints of Jesus’ own life as we follow Joseph’s story. This passage is often connected to Isaiah’s prophecy stating the Messiah “was counted among the rebels” (Isa. 53:12). Just as Jesus was crucified with prisoners, Joseph also suffered with the



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accused. In both Joseph's and Jesus' journeys, God provided strength to help them endure, as He does all who trust Him.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT PERSEVERANCE DURING TRIALS FROM JOSEPH'S CHARACTER IN THESE VERSES?

Suffering is unwanted in life. No one looks forward to days of suffering, but Scripture is full of verses challenging God's children to remain true no matter what trials come. Consider Joseph's life—and your own—within these following passages:

- “One who is righteous has many adversities, but the Lord rescues him from them all” (Ps. 34:19).
- “We also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5:3-5).
- “Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing” (Jas. 1:2-4).

Though these passages were written long after Joseph's death, his life modeled their truth. Joseph was repeatedly wronged, even enslaved and imprisoned, but he chose to make the most of his circumstances by always rising up.

Circumstances can get us down, but remember: just as the Lord fought for Joseph, He fights for those who trust Him. Even when God allows disappointment, we must choose to trust Him and persevere.

Don't Take It Out on Others // Genesis 40:4-8

Joseph may have received a good position, but he was still in prison. He had some authority over the prisoners but worked in complete insignificance. Yet the Lord was working behind the scenes in ways Joseph wouldn't see for years. Two other prisoners' fates would change the course of his life, though he didn't know what God was doing.



DIGGING DEEPER PHARAOH'S COURT

Why were a cupbearer and a baker considered members of the royal court? A person who wished the ruler dead could attempt to accomplish the task directly (violent attack on the person of the ruler) or indirectly (sabotage through poisoning the ruler's wine or food). What did a cupbearer do? A cupbearer worked very closely with the king. He protected the king from being poisoned by first tasting the wine himself before placing it before the king. Similarly, Pharaoh trusted the baker to prevent indirect attempts on his life by assuring no poisons entered his food supply. The title “chief” on both of them indicated they managed other workers who helped to serve Pharaoh. The king trusted them because they were willing to risk their lives for him.²²

Why is trust sometimes so easily destroyed?



The two men were “the king of Egypt’s cupbearer and baker” (v. 5). They cooked for and served Pharaoh which were significant roles. Someone with access to a leader’s food and drink could easily poison him; therefore, the cupbearer and baker were highly trusted.

We don’t know exactly why these two men were imprisoned; we just know they “offended their master, the king of Egypt” (v. 1). Perhaps Pharaoh became ill after a meal, which would’ve made these two men suspects. For all they knew, their days of status were over.

Dreams once again play an important role in Joseph’s life. It was young Joseph’s dreams that caused his brothers’ jealousy (Gen. 37:5-11). In ancient times, dreams were believed to provide divine revelations, and the Egyptians thought a tribe of magicians could reveal their meanings.

Joseph went against the culture when he proposed “interpretations belong to God” (v. 8). He immediately pointed these men to God, the only One with power to rightly explain dreams. With faith in God, Joseph requested to hear the dreams and believed the Lord would help him.

HOW CAN TIMES OF INJUSTICE BE AN OPPORTUNITY TO POINT OTHERS TO GOD?

As we experience great trials in life, we must follow Joseph’s example and trust God. One of the strongest temptations in suffering is to have pity parties. We become self-focused and lose sight of others around us who are also suffering. In loss, we should take cues from Joseph and refuse to play the role of victim; instead, we should continue to point others to God.

Don’t Be Discouraged

// Genesis 40:20-23

In verses 9-19, Joseph heard the dreams of the chief cupbearer and the baker—and he precisely interpreted the dreams. Joseph surely expected his time in the dungeon was about to end—but not so. Even though Joseph kept his promise to interpret the dreams, the chief cupbearer let him down. The baker was executed as Joseph predicted, but the cupbearer was restored to his position in Pharaoh’s inner circle. The cupbearer could’ve easily spoken up for Joseph, but he didn’t. He simply forgot.

People often disappoint us. It hurts to be overlooked, dismissed, or outright forgotten. Joseph may have been forgotten by people including the cupbearer, but God never forgot him. Yet, two more years would pass before his season of suffering ended.

Delays like this can cause discouragement. Joseph’s extended stay in prison was a major setback, but he patiently endured. We might think he didn’t have a choice, but patience has to do with attitude. All we know of Joseph points to a character of calmly enduring and waiting on God to act.

We recognize patience as a good quality, even though we want what we want now. Praying for God to give us patience is a courageous prayer. As an answer, the Lord might make us wait for something we want now. In the process, we learn to walk through seasons of difficulties with

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a sense of calm that God is in control and will deliver us.

WHAT CAN HELP US WAIT ON THE LORD DURING PERIODS OF INJUSTICE?

It's depressing when our plans are delayed, but the Lord's plans are always perfect and always on time, His time!

- "Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart be courageous. Wait for the LORD" (Ps. 27:14).
- "But those who trust in the LORD will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not become weary, they will walk and not faint" (Isa. 40:31).

Joseph eventually discovered what Langston Hughes declared in his poem "Dreams": "Hold fast to dreams / For if dreams die / Life is a broken-winged bird / That cannot fly. / Hold fast to dreams / For when dreams go / Life is a barren field / Frozen with snow."²³ Joseph had to continue being patient and trust that God was with him. May we learn the same. Let's keep our eyes looking up even when life brings us down.

DID YOU KNOW?

Joseph was barely a teen when God gave him dreams about his future rule over his older brothers. By the time his brothers' jealousy became unbearable and resulted in their angry attempt to get rid of him, he was 17 years old. As a teenager and a slave, God set Joseph on a path to power that many wouldn't expect for someone in his position. Though our lives may be peppered with hardship and injustice, they don't keep God's plans from happening. We see God's power and plans override difficult circumstances throughout Scripture.

– Joseph's brothers changed their minds and didn't kill him though they despised him (Gen. 37:26-27).

– Though Joseph was a slave and accused of a crime that usually resulted in death, Potiphar only jailed him because the Lord was with him (Genesis 39:19-21).

– Jesus is a consistent example of not growing weary and not giving up even when we face hostility and injustice (Heb. 12:1-3).

What other events within Joseph's life display God's plans in action?

LIVE IT

What choices should we make when faced with injustice?

Injustice is a common occurrence in today's culture. Unfortunately, it can be experienced due to race, religion, gender, class, and more. Human kindness is often lacking, and our world grows cold and harsh at times when compassion and empathy are most needed. Because of this we may not be able to avoid injustice. Here are ways we can prepare ourselves to address and rise above injustice when it comes:

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- **Choose good.** Instead of seeking revenge for injustice, overcome evil with good. Choose to respond in ways that display godly character like kindness, peace, patience, gentleness, or self-control.
- **Choose forgiveness.** As Jesus Christ forgives us, we should follow His example by forgiving those responsible for injustice in our lives. Jesus helps those who are His when we face injustice.
- **Choose joy.** Use injustice as an opportunity to experience and display joy received from the deepening and strengthening of your faith in God. Give God all the glory by displaying His joy.

DAILY READINGS

1. STEADFAST LOVE // GENESIS 39:21

Have you ever felt alone and misunderstood during a period of undeserved trials? You, like many others, may have experienced feelings of isolation, loneliness, and being misunderstood, especially if falsely accused. The beauty of the living Word is that it speaks to any situation we might ever experience and provides not only answers, but comfort in reminding us of the love God has for His people. The Bible tells consistently of the love of the Lord that never changes. Joseph experienced more trials in his lifetime than most people, but God showed His steadfast love for Him through it all.

Though we may face disappointments in this world, let our minds be secure and our hearts always fixed firmly in God's immovable love.

2. SUFFERING SERVICE // GENESIS 40:7

As we've seen in this study, there are many verses related to the suffering of Christians. Suffering is even heavier when our thoughts are consumed with it and burdened by longing for it to end. We can overcome suffering by taking our minds off what we are going through and placing it on helping others. Think about when you suffered an injury and were told not to focus on the pain. It's the same principle with any kind of suffering. Joseph models this, and Jesus modeled it for all mankind through His suffering. Serving while suffering brings blessings to others and ourselves.

Let us follow Jesus as a suffering servant who is focused on serving others.

3. WORKING WHILE YOU WAIT // GENESIS 40:23

Waiting can be incredibly challenging especially when we really want something right now. It's even more difficult when we are counting on others to provide something based upon what we've done for them. Disappointment and despair can set in due to injustices if we're not careful to trust God

in our waiting. I once heard a church planter say, "While we're waiting. God is working!" Waiting on God to work things out for our good strengthens our dependency on Him and deepens our trust in Him. God is our Jehovah Jireh, our faithful Provider! **Though we may have to wait for vindication through God's perfect will, let us stand assured in His timing and His way. He is always working things out for our good.**

4. POWER DOWN TO POWER UP // ISAIAH 40:29

How many times have you not noticed your phone or computer needing updates and began experiencing glitches, losing information, or completely shutting down because of needed downloads? It can be frustrating when you're not prepared for the powering down required to load updates that make your device perform better. We can apply this scenario to our spiritual lives as well. When we fail to take time to "update" ourselves in God's Word, we may lose access to His power. We will feel powerless; therefore we should see our weakness as a "notification" to be powered up in God.

Don't wait until weakness or powerlessness sets in. Take time today to power up in God's Word so you can press forward.

5. THE POWER OF ENDURANCE // JAMES 1:2-3

Did you know that God uses trials and difficulty to bring us joy? Say what? Yes! He uses our struggles and challenges which test our faith to reveal the power of endurance. Would you ever know how strong your faith was if it were never tested? Most times you would not. James encourages us to find joy in the testing of our faith because of the endurance it produces. Since God allows hardship and trials to come, let us choose to be joyful as we develop endurance.

Trust God and find joy in every circumstance, especially during trials. Be mindful that God is using your trial to develop endurance.