

GENESIS

RockPointe Church Small Groups

Patriarchs of Scripture • Joseph: The Promises of God • Genesis 41 • Fall 2018

Main Point

God uses suffering and adversity to prepare His children for extraordinary service to Him.

Background

Video: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/VideoElement/182904>

Video: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/illustration/98224>

Note: Requires Access to Right Now Media; if you have issues with accessing the link, copy and paste directly in your browser

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Besides your relationship with Jesus, what is the best thing that has ever happened to you?

Did you have to go through anything challenging in order for that to happen?

Describe a time when God worked in your life through difficult circumstances. What was that experience like at the time? How did you respond to what God was doing? How did God show Himself faithful to you?

Difficult situations often become teachable moments that God uses to prepare us for harder situations to come. This is seen in Genesis 41 with Joseph's story of suffering. God was with Joseph in prison, as demonstrated by his ability to interpret the two prisoners' dreams. God is again with Joseph through a promotion brought about by the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream (Gen. 41). As Joseph's life story continues to unfold, it becomes evident that God uses suffering and adversity to prepare His children for extraordinary service to Him.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have your group scan through Genesis 41:1-40.

Genesis 41 describes a turning point in Joseph's life. Up to that point, his life had been characterized by slavery, wrongful imprisonment, and broken family relationships. But when Pharaoh called upon Joseph to interpret his dream, the trajectory of Joseph's life changed in an instant. Three specific things we can learn from Joseph in this story:

Hurry up and wait upon the Lord. Had Joseph gotten out of prison earlier, he likely would have stayed a

slave. God's timing is best, and through our patient waiting He is transforming us into who we need to be.

Bless the One who blesses you. Who we are and what we have is all thanks to God, so worship Him. Remove the hidden idols in our lives. We all struggle with idols, like power, approval, comfort, and security. It's when the pressures of these idols press in on us that our true character is revealed.

What does it say about Joseph's character that he continued to use his gifts of interpreting dreams while he was in prison? What does it say about God?

Look back at Genesis 41:28-30,32. What does Joseph's response reveal about his relationship with God? What response might you expect from someone in prison?

When you are asked to do something, what does your response reveal about you and about what or who you trust?

Joseph's 13 years of hardship had taught him to depend on God's guidance. He had practiced his faith while serving Potiphar, resisting Potiphar's wife, and while living in prison. Pharaoh's statement that Joseph could "hear a dream and interpret it" prompted Joseph to give credit to God.

How did Pharaoh describe Joseph in verse 38? Do the people in your life—family, coworkers, neighbors—see you as a person in whom the Spirit of God lives? What can you do differently this week to make the Spirit's presence more evident to those around you?

In what specific ways has God been preparing Joseph for this assignment? How have you seen his confidence and trust in God grow? Similarly, how do we see evidence of God's sovereignty through Joseph's story?

What are some practical ways we wait upon the Lord? Why is it so hard for us to practice patience, especially when it comes to God's plans and His timing? How can we grow in this area? (See 1 Peter 5:6-7.)

| Have a volunteer read Genesis 41:41-57.

What was the extent of the famine? What does this tell us about the breadth of Joseph's impact on the world of his day?

Who is in an equivalent position of authority in our world today? What might be different if that person was dependent on God and humble enough to give Him the credit?

Read verses 50-52. What is the meaning behind the names for both of Joseph's sons? What does Joseph acknowledge about God with both of these names?

Joseph willingly accepted the God-given opportunity to serve Pharaoh and to save his people. He also faced the challenging task with great competence as measured by his success. He embraced the difficult circumstances with joy, as is revealed in his son's names. The first he named Manasseh, meaning "God has made me forget all my hardship in my father's house." The second he named Ephraim, meaning "God has

made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Joseph’s life was not easy. Because of what he had to endure, Joseph could have grown bitter and selfish over time, but instead his life is a picture to us of a humble servant who recognized his dependency on God and God’s power to work through him. The apostle Paul gives us practical teaching on this type of outlook in Romans 5.

Read Romans 5:1-5. What two things did Paul say we can rejoice in because of God’s grace?

Which of Paul’s stated reasons for rejoicing is a little tougher for you to swallow? Why?

What are normal human responses to suffering? How do these compare to Paul’s teaching?

The more we live faithfully amid afflictions, the more we build endurance. As our spiritual endurance keeps growing, it produces proven character. As we display proven character time after time and in diverse situations, we build an unquenchable hope. Thus, Paul taught that even the most difficult experiences in life are packed with divine purpose.

What role does our attitude play in the progression Paul outlines in these verses? How does Joseph’s story help us understand what attitude we should have amid suffering?

How can a believer’s Christlike endurance of suffering offer a testimony of hope to others?

Pray

Close in prayer, asking God to help you and your group members be prepared to practice your faith in the challenging opportunities He places in your lives. Pray that you, like Joseph, live lives that offer a testimony of God’s power and hope to others.

Commentary

| Genesis 41:1-57

41:1-7 Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the world of his day, was also the Egyptian who received dreams from God that were far-reaching in their implications. His two dreams, both on the same night, had essentially identical plots, though the images were different. Both had 14 items, seven healthy and seven thin and sickly. In both dreams the seven healthy things appeared first, only to be consumed by the afflicted ones. Both were symbolic since they contained features not found in the real world.

41:8-14 These dreams clearly indicated trouble, but exactly what trouble was the question. To unravel the mystery, Pharaoh summoned all the court magicians, who would have received instruction from ancient Egyptian scrolls of dream interpretation. Pharaoh also summoned all of Egypt’s wise men to assist in the

critical task of discerning the dreams' meanings. However, no one could interpret the dreams satisfactorily. The crisis caused the chief cupbearer to remember how Joseph had accurately interpreted two mysterious dreams two years earlier. Desperate for insight into his own dreams, Pharaoh immediately sent for Joseph. Prior to entering the royal court, he had to be shaved—probably both his beard and scalp—and he put on clothes made of linen, as was appropriate for the Egyptian court. Joseph's change in appearance mirrored the change that was about to occur in his career.

41:15-16 Fluent in the Egyptian language after 13 years in the land, Joseph listened intently as Pharaoh described his problem. With humility Joseph confessed to Pharaoh that he was unable to interpret the dreams, but confidently added that his God would give Pharaoh the information he desired.

41:17-24 As Pharaoh repeated his account of the dreams, he added that the ugly cows still appeared wasted after they had eaten the healthy ones.

41:25-32 Joseph prefaced his interpretation with three important insights: first, Pharaoh actually had only one dream (lit "Pharaoh's dream is one"), though it was given twice using different symbols. Second, the dream's source was the one true God (lit "the God"). Third, it revealed what God was about to do.

41:33-36 Joseph advised Pharaoh to take four steps in preparation for the upcoming 14-year cycle of events in order to create a food reserve for the seven years of famine.

41:37-46 Joseph's insight into the dream, along with his ability to devise such an intelligent plan, convinced Pharaoh that Joseph had God's spirit in him. Pharaoh gave Joseph the Egyptian name Zaphenath-paneah ("Then God Said, 'Let Him Live'") and a wife of high social status. Asenath ("She Who Belongs to the Goddess Neith") was the daughter of Potiphera, a priest at On (Heliopolis), the prestigious religious center of solar worship in ancient Egypt. Joseph, who was now 30 years old, had been transformed by God in 13 years from an imprisoned foreign slave to the world's second most powerful man. He who had spent years in prison now went throughout the land of Egypt overseeing a project that would save the lives of untold thousands.

41:47-52 In addition to God's blessing on the harvests, God blessed Joseph's personal life with two sons. Manasseh's name reflected the fact that God had helped Joseph forget his hardship both in Egypt and in his father's house, with its sordid background of rape (34:2), murder (34:25-26), incest (35:22), deception (34:13), and betrayal (37:28). Ephraim's name confessed that God had made Joseph fruitful in a land where he had once been treated as a despised felon.

41:55 After the seven years of agricultural prosperity had passed, the land experienced famine. Events happened exactly as Joseph had said they would. Since Pharaoh was responsible for the security and well-being of the Egyptians, the people looked to him for relief from their famished condition. Pharaoh's response to his people was simple. He told them to "Go to Joseph." Joseph had stored the surplus grain

during the years of prosperity (vv. 47- 53). When the famine began, Joseph had the responsibility of distributing resources to those in need. Pharaoh had entrusted this entire operation to Joseph. As a result, Joseph enjoyed authority to do whatever he deemed wise and necessary. When Joseph received the opportunity to serve, he served well.

41:56-57 These verses describe the extent and intensity of the famine. The famine was spread over all the face of the earth (v. 56). The Hebrew verb translated as severe is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe the famine in Jerusalem preceding its fall to the Babylonian army (2 Kings 25:3; Jer. 52:6). Undoubtedly the famine in Joseph's time caused widespread hardship and even death both in the land of Egypt (v. 56) and in all the earth (v. 57). At God's directive Joseph had prepared for the famine. He opened all the storehouses (v. 56). These storage facilities housed the abundant grain the Egyptians had harvested during the years of prosperity. Joseph's first responsibility was to provide food for Pharaoh's subjects. Joseph not only sold provisions to the Egyptians; he also made grain available to the people of all the earth (v. 57).

| Romans 5:1-5

5:1 Righteousness cannot be earned by any amount or duration of good works; it is received only as a gift through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul declared that peace with God comes to believers through our Lord Jesus Christ. That is, Jesus is the Agent through whom we receive this amazing, multifaceted benefit. The name Lord connects Jesus with God's revelation of Himself as "Yahweh" [YAH weh] in the Old Testament era. Jesus is the Divine Sovereign. The names Jesus and Christ emphasize that the Lord is the Savior and the Promised Messiah. The pronoun our emphasizes the personal relationship believers have with God.

5:2 In addition to receiving peace with God through Christ, believers gain genuine hope that can withstand even the darkest times of trouble and affliction. God's grace is not just a one-time experience that comes and goes at conversion. Rather, in Christ we have obtained access into this grace in which we stand. Paul wrote the Greek verb rendered we stand in a tense that communicates a completed (that is, perfected) action, the results of which continue in full force. Thus, Paul declared that believers receive a complete supply of God's grace at conversion, yet its benefits keep on working in full force throughout our lives and in whatever situations we find ourselves. In particular, God's grace continually helps us stand strong in faith when we face life's trials (see 2 Cor. 12:8-9). God's continuing grace thus gives us cause to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Because His loving grace is permanent—not fleeting like the morning dew—the promises of redemption and glory cause us to rejoice.

5:3-4 Christian joy runs deep and endures because its source is the ever-flowing stream of God's grace. This is why Paul could state that we as believers also rejoice in our afflictions. Paul's statement doesn't imply that we somehow enjoy suffering. Rather, it means that we have confidence God will use even our afflictions to

bring about His good purposes in our lives. For this confidence we need look no further than the example of our Lord Jesus. He willingly bore the most horrendous pain and suffering with a view that His death and resurrection would open the way to our salvation (see Heb. 2:10; 12:2).

5:5 Christian hope that emerges from the nourishing flow of God's grace in our lives will not disappoint us. It goes without saying that many a person's self-generated hope has been dashed by the brutal realities of life. Hope in God, however, is hope that endures forever. We can trust that God will fulfill His promises to the end.