

From the “Pit” to the Top

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“From The Past to the Present and the Future”
A Sermon Series on the Life of Joseph

Gen 41:37-52

How do you handle success? Who would you act when you are rich and famous? After two long years, Joseph was finally remembered. He came to the palace and interpret Pharaoh’s dream:

-From the Pit to the Hall of Fame (Chariots) (37-44)

³⁷ This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. ³⁸ And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?” ³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. ⁴⁰ You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.” ⁴¹ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” ⁴² Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck. ⁴³ And he made him ride in his second chariot. And they called out before him, “Bow the knee!” Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴ Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.” (41:37-44 ESV)

Pharaoh was face to face with a wise man called Joseph. Joseph, by the help of God, interpreted the dreams when the Egyptian wise men could not. Pharaoh was impressed how Joseph interpreted and gave solutions to how to deal with the coming issue. Thus, Joseph was appointed **to be the top executive in Egypt**. He was given the **royal ring**, the **robe**, a **gold chain** for his neck and a **chariot (a limousine with a license plate number 2)**. From the robe of favoritism, to the robe of mourning, to the robe of slavery, to the robe of the chief of Potiphar’ house, to the robe of “problems” (false evidence of rape accusation), to the robe of a prisoner, to the royal robe of being the second top man of Egypt after Pharaoh. The question that one could ask is: **“How will Joseph act when he is rich and famous?** Will he forget the dreams that God gave him? Will he forget God?”

And they called out before him, “Bow the knee!” Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. How in the world is this happening? Should people bow their knees? Including Potiphar and his wife!

-New Name, New Identity and New Family (45-49)

⁴⁵ And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah. And he gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On. So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.

⁴⁶ Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁷ During the seven plentiful years the earth produced abundantly, ⁴⁸ and he gathered up all the food of these seven years, which occurred in the land of Egypt, and put the food in the cities. He put in every city the food from the fields around it. ⁴⁹ And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured. (41:45-49 ESV)

Joseph is 30 years old now. Do you remember his age when he was sold to the Ishmaelites? He was 17. Thirteen long years passed. THIRTEEN!

Charles Swindoll writes: “God does not announce His appointments in advance. What you have to do, while you wait, is to believe His promises. While in the darkness of your dungeon, by faith, trust Him to bring the light of a new dawn. In the winter of your discontent, believe there’ll be a spring.”¹

Imagine a former Hebrew slave and prisoner, now is the top man of Egypt after Pharaoh. How can one handle such a promotion? How dangerous is such a promotion? One can be intoxicated! Not Joseph. I can see that all “pits” acted as a school to shape him for this position. God prepared him to become a leader.

So many “heroes” of the Bible went through the tough school of learning. Paul says:

I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. ¹³ For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. (Phil 4:12,13 NLT)

My prayer is that God will give me a heart that is content in all circumstances.

-New name Zaphenath-Paneh: it means “God speaks and lives.” Imagine this new name itself is a testimony of Hebrew God’s presence. When Yahweh promises something, He does. God speaks and lives. I don't know if Pharaoh understood what is going on, but he saw in Joseph presence of Hebrew God.

-Joseph married an Egyptian woman from a distinguished family (I don't think had too much choice) **Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On.**

- **New Children. (41:50-52 ESV)**

⁵⁰ Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bore them to him. ⁵¹ Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house." ⁵² The name of the second he called Ephraim, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." (41:50-52 ESV)

Joseph had two sons.

He gave each of them a special name. Each name had an important message to Joseph and to us today. Remember his brother Judah. He married a Canaanite woman and the names of the children (Er, Onan and Shelah). Judah did not consult with Yahweh to name his kids.

Joseph had an Egyptian wife, "but he uses Hebrew names for his children and associates them with the praise of God and possibly with his destiny back in the land of his fathers."² The two names were **Manasseh and Ephraim.**

A. The first son's name is Manasseh: "God made me forget."

20 years of injustice, 20 years of misconduct which God helped him forget. Joseph is declaring that his old life is over. He does not look back anymore. He is like a 100-meter sprinter. He looks towards the target and does not look back. It does not mean he forgot his family. It does not mean he gave up from his God. It does not mean he "excommunicated" his brothers for his memory. On the contrary, he does not live in the "pains" of the past. He refuses to say, "Oh how awful was my past; and I am a victim of my past."

He lives in the present and enjoys each moment God gives him.

Do you know so many of us live in the past? Either we recall the **good memories** and we want those days to come back, or we keep holding on to the **bad memories** and we stay there without looking forward to a new chapter in our lives.

When **Moses** saw the burning bush and had an encounter with God, he wanted to know the name of God. And God said: **“I AM who I AM.”** God is saying I was yesterday and I am now and will be tomorrow. But do not forget to experience me now. I AM.

There is a saying:

Yesterday is history

Tomorrow is a mystery.

All we have is today. It is a gift from God.

Joseph’s life is a good example of that. He learned **to live the day** that was given to him. He learned to trust God in all his days. He learned to enjoy his days as much he could. In every circumstance he did his best and he achieved something, although he repeatedly lost all he had. Yet he learned to live in the present. And I love this; he named his son **Manasseh** and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." God helped him forget. We as human beings cannot do this alone. Only God can help us forget.

B. The second son’s name is Ephraim: “It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.”

What does it mean to **be fruitful**?

Joseph experienced God’s blessings. His life was an example of being fruitful, blessed **not only in possessions, but also in relationships**. Later we will see when Joseph reconciles with his brothers; they were expecting that Joseph would change his mind after their father’s death. They were wrong. He remained merciful and understanding that God used his “pits” to save people from starvation. This attitude and wisdom comes from God. We learn not to look back. Only God’s love or *agape* can give us this.

The second part of the name: *fruitful in the land of my suffering*. Which land is he talking about? Is it Egypt, or Canaan? In Egypt Joseph saw suffering; in his homeland Canaan he was rejected from his brothers and experienced suffering. In any case, both sufferings turned to be a blessing.

Application:

1. Today is the Day; Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Many of us are caught up in the past or are worried about the future. And by doing so we do not experience today. Today is God's word.

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:18, 19a NIV)

I tried to help some families who kept held grudges against people. They remembered that in the past certain families hurt them, and they decided not to forget that and pass it to the next generation. Because of that pain, many of them did not enjoy the present. Many of them were bitter and could not see any new possibilities in human relationships. The sad experiences of their past hindered them from living today. They needed Jesus. They needed healing. They needed the "delete" button.

"Behold, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.

¹⁸But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I will create,
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy. (Isaiah 65:17, 18)

There is something beautiful when God creates things. I like to ask him to reformat my memory. I am serious. God mold me; make me your instrument of peace. Help me to remember the right things. This my prayer and I ask you to have the same prayer. Do you have a "Manasseh" in your life?

2. How do you deal with fame? (promotion, new income, better position....?)

Where do we learn moderation, balance, focus on most importantly priorities? We should learn patience in the face of unjust suffering; we should learn steadfast love (hesed) in tough circumstances; we should also learn straining ourselves when

suddenly we are elevated from the pit to the top. Most of us will lose it. Ask actors who deal with fame; ask people who become millionaires overnight.

I need Jesus in my life daily to keep me focus on Him instead of my achievements. We are who we are because of Him. Rememebr every time Joseph reminded everyone that God is the hero. So I will close again quoting what Paul said:

I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. ¹³ For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. (Phil 4:12,13 NLT)

From the Pit to the Top. To God be the Glory

Amen

1 Charles Swindoll, *A Man of Integrity and Forgiveness* (P 68)

2 Bruce Waltke, *Genesis* (p538)