

PATRIARCHS: Lesson Eight, Lessons for Joseph and Judah ***Genesis 37-40***

Subject: Resented and betrayed, Joseph was forgotten in prison, while Tamar bore Judah twins.

Main Idea: God intends to use our suffering for our good and for His glory.

Principles:

1. *Pride leads to disgrace but humility results in wisdom and honor.*
2. *Victory is gained in suffering by focusing on God's greatness rather than on our own misery.*

Introduction

This and the following two lessons in our Patriarchs study cover the Biblical account of the life of Joseph, the fourth of the great patriarchs of Israel. Genesis 37-40 actually highlights *two* of Jacob's sons, Joseph and Judah, both of whom suffered humiliation. Many have lauded Joseph as a "type" (picture) of Christ. Like Jesus, Joseph was loved by his father but rejected and cruelly treated by his brothers. Both were betrayed by being sold. Just as Jesus died, Joseph entered a kind of death during his years of suffering in Egypt. In the end, both were exalted. But one of the greatest similarities was that they both endured such intense and unjust suffering.

For Jesus Christ to lay aside many of His divine privileges in order to become human was a type of humiliation. Paul says it this way in Philippians 2:6-8: "[He] did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!" One Christian writer said that we might imagine Christ lowering Himself to become human by considering what we would give up to become a worm! The One through whom the universe was made, the very One who continues to hold all things together (Colossians 1:17), was willing to lay naked on a cross and take all of our horrific sins upon Himself.

According to the New Testament, those who belong to Christ should expect to share in His humiliation and suffering (Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 4:13). Our suffering takes various forms: mental anguish over the terrible consequences of sin we see around us, physical hardships, and for some, even torture. Some Christians' humiliation may involve a disgraceful public parading through the streets. But for many, it may simply be stooping to love the unlovely.

Paul wrote that Christians rejoice in their sufferings, because our sufferings produce perseverance, perseverance produces character, and character produces hope (Romans 5:3-4). This is exactly the process we see take place in Joseph's life. God prepared him for greatness by taking him down a long road of suffering. That suffering built him into a man with tremendous character, ready to lead a nation with humility and great wisdom.

God intends to use our suffering for our good and for His glory.

I. **Joseph and Judah Contrasted** – Genesis 37-38

A. **Joseph's Brothers' Hatred** – 37:1-11

i. Joseph's Household Position – 37:1-4

1. *Jacob in Canaan*: The account opens by picking up the storyline that was interrupted by Esau's genealogy. Chapter 35 ended with Isaac's death and burial. In 37:1, we learn that, following his father's death, Jacob remained in Mamre (near Hebron), where his father had lived. Jacob is now the patriarch of the family and the story shifts to tell us about two of his sons: Joseph and Judah.
2. *Age*: We are told Joseph was only seventeen at the time the account unfolds. Later, we learn he was thirty when he became ruler of all Egypt (41:46). Chapter 40 ends two years short of that time (41:1). Therefore, the events of chapters 37-40, as they pertain to Joseph, occurred over eleven years.
3. *Joseph's brothers' hatred*: Genesis has a running theme of conflict between brothers (Cain and Abel, Ham and his brothers Shem and Japheth, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau). That theme continues. We learn that Joseph's brothers hated him. The reasons are given:
 - a. He brought back a bad report to his father about the four sons of his father's maidservant-wives (Bilhah and Zilpah).
 - b. His father gave him an ornate robe. It was (literally translated) "a coat of extremities". The sleeves extended beyond the hands and it was long enough to cover the knees. The implication is that the person who wore it did not work; those who worked had their hands free and their robes ended above the knees.
 - c. But, most importantly, his father favored him over all his other sons. Therefore, another theme (favoritism) continues. Isaac preferred Esau, Rebekah preferred Jacob, and Jacob favored his wife Rachel over his other wives. Now, we are told, Jacob favored Rachel's oldest son over his other sons. His favoritism of Joseph was the crux of the problem.

ii. Joseph's Dreams – 37:5-11

1. *Theme of Dreams*

- a. In verse five, a third theme is introduced, one that continues throughout the Joseph narratives, the theme of God-given, prophetic dreams.
- b. Joseph had two dreams. As we learn later, the repetition of dreams indicated God's firm resolve to bring about the events indicated by the dreams (41:32).

2. *Joseph's Undiscerning Announcement*

- a. Joseph's dreams indicated his exaltation over his family, thinly veiled in agricultural and astrological symbols. The meaning to his family was obvious. After his first dream, his brothers hated him all the more. After the second dream, even Joseph's father rebuked him. His rebuke seems to indicate that Joseph conveyed the dreams arrogantly.
- b. It is impossible to imagine that Joseph would not have continued to remember his dreams. It seems God may have timed them in order that Joseph might have them to contemplate during the thirteen, long years of suffering that followed. They would have given him great hope.
- c. Joseph's unwise decision to share his God-given dreams only fueled his brother's hostility. These early verses of Genesis 37 portray Joseph as spoiled and naïve, at best, or spoiled and arrogant, at worst.

3. *Discerning What We Share*

- a. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His followers to guard against "throwing pearls to pigs." He said that if we do this, we might be trampled (Matthew 7:6). The metaphor teaches that we must be discerning about the people with whom we share truth. One commentator wrote, "One must try to *discern* whether presenting to others that which is holy will *elicit nothing but abuse or profanity*. In these instances restraint is required" (emphasis mine).ⁱ
- b. Restraint is also required, at times, in sharing our God-given aspirations ("dreams") *with other believers*. You may be convinced God has put a call on your life or plans to use you in some way that may be difficult for others to embrace.
- c. Years ago, a mentor and I were serving in different roles in the same Bible class. One day, we were praising God for the ways the class and we were benefitting from teaching notes written a half-century earlier by a well-known and beloved Christian saint. I recall sharing with my mentor friend, rather innocently, that the idea of writing such Bible notes greatly appealed to me. In my mind, I was just casually sharing a genuine interest with a trusted friend. I suppose this friend must have mistaken my aspirations as too grand, or even self-promoting, (especially considering that *she* was mentoring *me*, yet held no such aspirations herself) for she took great offense at my comment.

- d. As Christians mature, they discover that God plants *desires* into their hearts and minds that line up with His purposes for them. If we have understood God’s plans for us correctly, in time, those plans will be evident to all, without any preceding announcement on our part. This is not to say we should *never* share with others the desires God has put within us, only that we must be discerning about it.
4. *Joseph’s Family’s Response*: Verse 11 sums up the matter by saying that Joseph’s brothers were jealous but his father kept the matter in mind. During the many years ahead, during which Jacob believed Joseph was dead, he surely recalled Joseph’s dreams and wondered how a young man who believed he would be exalted over his entire family could have come to such a completely different end.

B. Joseph’s Brothers’ Plan – 37:12-38

- i. Joseph’s Trip to Dothan – 37:12-18: Joseph was sent by his father to check on his brothers who were tending the flocks at a distance from their home. Upon reaching Shechem, where Jacob told Joseph they would be, Joseph learned his brothers had moved on further to Dothan. Dothan “was close to the Via Maris, the main trade route through Syria-Palestine leading to Egypt.”ⁱⁱ
- ii. Joseph in the Cistern – 37:19-24
1. *Joseph’s Brothers’ Plan*
 - a. Jacob’s favoritism and Joseph’s announcement of his dreams set him up for a fall. His brothers saw him approaching and determined to kill him and throw his body into a cistern. They agreed to cover up their deed by telling their father Joseph was killed by a wild animal.
 - b. It is clear that Joseph’s dreams continued to fuel their hatred of him. For once they decided to kill him, they said, “Then we will see what comes of his dreams” (37:20).
 2. *Reuben’s Alternative*:
 - a. For reasons that are not given, Reuben (Jacob’s oldest son), sought to dissuade his brothers by suggesting an alternative – that they put him into an empty cistern alive. We are told that he planned to return later and bring Joseph safely back to his father.
 - b. The brothers agreed to take Reuben’s suggestion, for surely Joseph would have eventually died there as well. They stripped him of his offensive robe and threw him in.

3. It is difficult to conceive that brothers could treat one another so evilly. Their actions were reprehensible, regardless of the role Jacob and Joseph played in exacerbating their hatred of their brother.

iii. Joseph Sold to Ishmaelites – 37:25-28

1. *Reuben's Plan Thwarted*: Reuben's plan to rescue Joseph was thwarted when an Ishmaelite caravan, loaded with goods en route to Egypt, passed by. (The Ishmaelites are called "Midianites" in verse 28, which more than likely were one of many Ishmaelite people groups, as Judges 8:22-24 indicates.ⁱⁱⁱ) For some reason, Reuben was not present at the time.
2. *Judah's Leadership*
 - a. The passing of the caravan gave Judah an idea; one that, as it turned out, actually saved Joseph's life and was used by God for great good. Rather than leaving Joseph to perish in the cistern, they might as well profit from his disappearance by selling him.
 - b. Judah implied they would experience less guilt for selling Joseph than they would in killing him. We later learn that he was entirely wrong about this for they felt guilty over what they did to Joseph their entire lives (42:21-22; 50:15-17).
 - c. Joseph's brothers sold him to the merchants for twenty shekels (about eight ounces) of silver.
 - d. This is our first introduction to Judah's character but not the last! Although Joseph's life was spared, Judah's motive was not goodwill but greed. It is noteworthy that Jacob's sons, ultimately ignored the advice of their oldest brother, Reuben, and listened to Judah, an indication of the leadership role Judah was assuming among them.

iv. Jacob's Sons' Deception – 37:29-36

1. *Reuben's Fear*: Reuben returned and when he discovered what his brothers had done, tore his clothes in grief, terrified over his father's response to Joseph's disappearance. We previously learned of Reuben's disgraceful act of sleeping with one of his father's wives. Here, Reuben's character is further revealed, for he was not really concerned for Joseph's welfare. He was concerned about facing his father! Perhaps Reuben's plan to return Joseph to Jacob was an attempt to regain his father's favor. Regardless, that his motive was selfish is confirmed by the fact that *he agreed* to his brothers' plan to deceive Jacob.

2. *Theme of Deception*: Joseph's brothers dipped his robe in goat's blood and took it to their father. Again, another recurring theme emerges: deception. Jacob continued to reap the consequences of his own weakness, one his sons had surely observed in him.
3. Jacob refused to be comforted over what he believed to be Joseph's death. "Daughters" are mentioned as among those who attempted to console him. Since Dinah is the only daughter named as having been born to Jacob, the mention of "daughters" perhaps included daughters-in-law.
4. Meanwhile, we are told, Joseph arrived safely in Egypt and was sold to one of Pharaoh's officials, Potiphar, the captain of the guard.
5. The chapter ends, leaving us in suspense.

Summary Statement: Joseph's decision to share his dreams had grave consequences! It was high on the list of factors that led to his removal from his father's household. But what his brothers meant for evil, God used for good. Had Joseph remained to enjoy the comforts and indulgences granted by his father, he might have become so spoiled and arrogant that he would have been useless to God! Therefore, God allowed the consequences of Joseph's foolishness in order to enroll him in a school of humility, as a slave, far away from home.

Transition: We are left in suspense regarding the outcome of Joseph's story for a very good purpose.

- What first appears to be an unrelated digression in Genesis 38 actually serves to further contrast Joseph and his brothers, whose characters are represented by Judah.
- Additionally, the digression brings Judah into greater focus as the sibling, along with Joseph, who had a significant role in Israel's future, both in the near-term and the long-term.

C. Judah's Sons' Wickedness – 38:1-11

i. Judah's Departure from Jacob – 38:1

1. "*At that time*": With the first three words of chapter 38, "at that time", we realize that the account we are about to read occurred during the same extended time period as Joseph's adventures in Egypt (the telling of which is postponed).
2. *Judah's Departure*: Judah left his father's household in Hebron and went down to Adullah, about fifteen miles to the northwest.^{iv} There is no clear explanation about why Judah moved away. Some have suggested that Jacob's inconsolability caused the entire family added suffering, a situation Judah sought to escape. As it turns out, rather than successfully dodging his guilt, Judah's decision to leave led to his guilty, self-serving nature being exposed!

ii. Judah's Marriage to a Canaanite – 38:2-5

1. *Canaanite Marriage*: In Adullam, Judah married a Canaanite woman. This was a portent of disaster, since the Patriarchs had continually warned their sons against intermarriage with Canaanites (24:3-4; 26:34-35; 28:1-2). In Judah's case, the result was the near ruination of his family.
2. Judah's wife bore him three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah.

iii. Judah's Sons' Death – 38:6-10

1. *Er's Death*: When Er was grown, Judah got a wife for him named Tamar. There is no indication about Tamar's background. Shortly after his marriage, the Lord put Er to death, for he "was wicked in the Lord's sight."
2. *Onan's Obligation*: As a result, Onan was called upon to perpetuate his brother's family by a custom known as *levirate marriage*. (The Latin word *levir*, means "husband's brother".)
 - a. Onan was to take his dead brother's wife as his own and the first son she bore him would have been reckoned as belonging to his dead brother with regard to name and inheritance. The child would have cared for their mother as she aged.
 - b. This custom was not unique to Israel, nor did it find its origins there, but was practiced in different forms in many parts of the ancient world.^v
 - c. The Law of Moses later enjoined the duty out of love for one's brother in order to preserve his family and name (Deuteronomy 25:5ff).
 - d. Although the dead brother's family was perpetuated and the widow provided for, there was no direct benefit to the living brother. In fact, taking this role was often undesirable (Ruth 4:5-6).
3. *Onan's Death*: Onan was willing to comply for his sexual gratification but was too selfish to actually be of family assistance. By practicing a form of birth control, he kept Tamar from having children. Therefore, the Lord put him to death also.

iv. Judah's Rejection of Tamar – 38:11: Since two of Judah's sons died shortly after marrying Tamar, Judah superstitiously considered she might be to blame and refused to give her to his third and only living son. Judah was unwilling to take responsibility for Tamar, so he sent her back to her father's household in disgrace. He promised to give her to Shelah when Shelah was older but had no intention of actually doing so.

D. Tamar's Plan – 38:12-30

i. Tamar's Deception of Judah – 38:12-23

1. Once Tamar saw that she had not been given to Shelah, she came up with her own plan to procure children.
2. In the interim, Judah himself became a widower. Once his days of mourning passed, he went to shear his sheep in Timnah.
3. Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and positioned herself at the entrance of Enaim, where Judah would pass on his return trip. She successfully lured her father-in-law Judah. He propositioned and slept with her without ever discovering her true identity.
4. Judah left “the prostitute” with some valuables (his seal, cord, and staff) as collateral until he could send her proper payment.
 - a. These were personal items by which he could be identified.
 - b. The seal was a cylinder-shaped stone or piece of metal worn on a cord about the neck, the insignia of a prominent man.
 - c. The staff was a symbol of authority with a mark of ownership etched on top of it.
5. Upon his arrival home, he sent his friend back with payment for her, but “the prostitute” was nowhere to be found! Rather than continuing the search and risking humiliation, Judah decided to simply let her keep the collateral.

ii. Judah's Discovery about Tamar – 38:24-26

1. About three months later, Judah was notified that his daughter-in-law was pregnant! He self-righteously called for the death penalty to be imposed on her.
2. As Tamar was being led to her death, she quickly sent the message to Judah that she was pregnant by the owner of the seal, cord, and staff he had given her.
3. “*She is more righteous than I*” (38:26)
 - a. Tamar wrongly deceived Judah into sleeping with her. But, in the process, Judah was exposed for his complicity in extra-marital sexual relations. More than that, his unwillingness to keep his word to his own daughter-in-law, and thus provide for her, was also highlighted once the results of Tamar's shameful manner of gaining Judah's provision became evident.
 - b. Judah acknowledged his responsibility for the desperate measures taken by Tamar, stating, “She is more righteous than I.”

c. Judah’s “private sin” of fornication resulted in his very public humiliation. We may think we can get away with our “private sins”. But, in truth, no sin remains private. Even wrong attitudes and motives are eventually displayed by our actions.

iii. Judah’s Twin Sons by Tamar – 38:27-30

1. Tamar was not killed. In fact, she bore twins to Judah: Perez and Zerah. The circumstances surrounding the birth of these twin sons reminds us of another set of twins, Esau and Jacob, in that the second son usurped the position of the first.
2. Not until much later in the “story” of the Bible do we learn the greater significance of this account. For Judah, Tamar, and Perez were all ancestors of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:3)!

Summary Statements: These things all occurred in Judah’s life over a relatively long period of time, indicated by the births of his sons as well as their marriages. This points the reader to conclude that God was working to shape Judah’s character during the same approximate period of time that He was molding Joseph in Potiphar’s house, in prison, and as lord of Egypt.

The positioning of Judah’s story in the middle of Joseph’s story serves several purposes.

- First, it shows how God shaped the characters of two brothers over the same extended period of time, allowing both to suffer humiliation.
- Second, it highlights the two sons of Jacob who played the most significant roles in Israel’s future and in the greater story of the Bible.
 - These two brothers received the greatest blessings from their father at the end of his life (Genesis 49:8-12, 22-26).
 - The descendants of these two brothers later comprised the larger part of the nation of Israel, Judah in the south and the tribes of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, in the north.
 - Finally, these are the two brothers through whom God’s patriarchal promise to bless the world was largely fulfilled.
 - Through Joseph, Jacob and the rest of his family (70 in all) were brought to Egypt where they lived until the Exodus (430 years, according to Exodus 12:40). They were preserved in Egypt until they grew into a nation. Joseph became a blessing to his family and the rest of the world by his provision of grain during a severe famine (41:57).
 - Through Judah, the entire world has been blessed with the Messiah.

The stories in Genesis 37 and 38 portray Judah as a man who lacked integrity, a man of weak moral character. He was hypocritical, deceitful, defensive, and above all, self-centered. His statement in Genesis 38:26, “She is more righteous than I,” hints at self-awareness on Judah’s part and possible change. That change is not revealed until chapters 43 and 44.

Both Judah and Joseph had to be schooled in humility in preparation for God’s use of them.

Principle: *Pride leads to disgrace but humility results in wisdom and honor.* (Proverbs 11:2, 18:12)

Joseph and his brother Judah were both disgraced. Although it is not recorded, we can imagine the humiliation for Joseph of being displayed for auction as a slave, perhaps stripped and leered at. Judah was humiliated when his seal, cord, and staff were displayed as evidence that his daughter-in-law resorted to prostitution in order gain what he owed her.

1 Peter 2:19-20 and 4:13-16 tell us there is no glory in suffering that results from our own wrongdoing. We cannot claim to be sharing in Christ’s sufferings when our trouble is the result of our own folly. *Yet that does not mean that our suffering needs to be wasted.* The moment we acknowledge our wrongdoing and submit to God, He will use our suffering for our good.

Application: Sometimes, God uses the last person we would want Him to choose as an instrument to humble us! From Judah’s perspective, Tamar was a real “sore spot” in his life. We can imagine that his guilt over not fulfilling his obligation to her probably led him to wish he could somehow erase the memory of her. How ironic that Tamar became God’s instrument in humbling Judah!

Who is the Lord using to humble you?

- No one enjoys being humbled and it is hard to feel good about a person who is being used to humble you.
- At times, that person’s treatment of us may be entirely unjust. We may even believe that person needs more humbling than we do.
- But, if we are wise, we will see that person as *God’s instrument* in humbling us and quickly submit ourselves to Him.

Transition: According to Genesis 39-40, that is exactly what Joseph did. During his years of suffering in Egypt, Joseph repeatedly evidenced a proper fear of the Lord. His suffering was very real, but he trained his eyes on God’s greatness rather than on his own suffering.

II. Joseph's Suffering in Egypt – Genesis 39-40

A. Joseph's Enslavement – 39:1-20

- i. Joseph's Success in Potiphar's House – 39:1-6: The Lord greatly prospered Joseph while he served his Egyptian master Potiphar. For this reason, he gained favor with his master and eventually, was entrusted with the care of the entire household. Potiphar's household flourished under Joseph's leadership. Here, we have a foretaste of the manner in which Joseph would become a blessing to all Egypt.
- ii. Joseph's Temptation by Potiphar's Wife – 39:6-12
 1. *The Temptation*
 - a. Joseph had his mother's good looks (29:17). For this reason, combined, no doubt, with his success, his master's wife took notice of him. She repeatedly attempted to seduce him. Day after day, this went on.
 - b. Joseph resolved from the onset to resist this temptation. He spoke to Potiphar's wife of his respect for his master and most notably, his fear of God. Joseph refused her, calling her suggestion wicked and a sin against God (39:9). When she persisted, he sought to avoid her altogether.
 - c. One day, when no one was around, Potiphar's wife physically grabbed Joseph by his cloak, saying, "Come to bed with me!"
 2. *Joseph's Response:*
 - a. Wisely sensing the danger, Joseph left his cloak behind and ran out of the house. When temptation becomes too strong, physically removing ourselves from it may be our best recourse.
 - b. One cannot help but contrast Joseph's resistance of sexual temptation to Judah's indulgence of it.
 - c. Joseph *could have* rationalized that he was once destined to be the head of a prosperous family (like Potiphar's), not the slave of one. He could have lied to himself, saying that he deserved this personal comfort, even going so far as to convince himself that her invitation was a gift from God to comfort him in the loss of his own family. He also could have convinced himself that Potiphar's wife would make life easier for him if he gave her what she was demanding.
 - d. *Instead*, Joseph showed he feared the Lord. Four times in chapter 39 we are told the Lord was with Joseph. He must have been greatly encouraged by a sense of the Lord's presence. In fact, his implied intimacy with the Lord was likely what enabled him to resist temptation.

- e. People respond to suffering in one of two ways: either they resent it and grow bitter or they humble themselves and grow in grace. Joseph's refusal to take short-cuts for personal pleasure prove his willingness to be humbled.
- iii. Joseph's Betrayal by Potiphar's Wife – 39:13-20
 - 1. *The Seductresses Story*: Angry and humiliated by Joseph's refusal, the master's wife came up with a story to implicate him. She claimed Joseph sought to rape her and left his cloak behind when she screamed for help.
 - 2. *Potiphar's Anger*: Potiphar was angry when he heard his wife's story. One cannot be certain whether he knew his wife well enough to suspect her duplicity. Regardless, he could not ignore his wife's charges. Keil and Delitzsch state that his confinement of Joseph with the king's prisoners represented a moderate punishment compared to what the law of the land allowed. They suggest that the most likely reason for this was that he "did not place unlimited credence in what [his wife] said."^{vi}

B. Joseph's Imprisonment – 39:21-40:23

- i. Joseph's Promotion in Prison – 39:21-23
 - 1. Again, we read that the Lord was with Joseph. God granted Joseph the same success in the prison he had had while serving Potiphar. For this reason, Joseph was again promoted. The warden put him in charge of all the prisoners.
 - 2. The statement that Joseph's success was from the Lord is repeated *five times* in Genesis 39. God allowed Joseph's trials to shape his character, turning every difficulty toward His good end!
 - a. In addition to having humility and other character qualities developed in him, Joseph was also learning how to administrate through the positions of leadership in Potiphar's house and in the prison.
 - b. And, most certainly, Joseph learned greater discernment about what to say and what not to say while working as the head slave of an important official and a prisoner with charge of fellow-prisoners.
 - 3. Nevertheless, Joseph's success did not mean he was not deeply suffering still.

- ii. Pharaoh's Servants' Imprisonment – 40:1-5: Some time during Joseph's imprisonment, Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and chief baker displeased him and were put in custody where Joseph was confined. Each of these men had a dream that left them troubled. Noticing their distress, Joseph inquired about their sad state. When he learned they had each had perplexing dreams, he asked them to tell him their dreams, confident that "interpretations belong to God."
- iii. The Dreams – 40:6-19
 - 1. Both men had dreams that, seemingly, could have had the same interpretation. However, Joseph interpreted the chief cupbearer's dream as indicating that he would be restored to his position within three days while interpreting the baker's dream as indicating that he would be executed within three days.
 - 2. Joseph pled with Pharaoh's cupbearer to intercede for him with Pharaoh once he was released.
- iv. The Dreams' Fulfillment – 40:20-23
 - 1. Both dreams were fulfilled exactly as Joseph interpreted them.
 - 2. Joseph's ability to interpret their dreams leads us to believe that he was also able to interpret the meaning of his own dreams, which he had many years earlier. Surely the fulfillment of the dreams of the baker and cupbearer encouraged Joseph to expect God to fulfill his own dreams as well!
 - 3. In the next lesson, we find Joseph interpreting more dreams and giving God the sole credit for his ability to do so.
 - 4. Shockingly, after the chief cupbearer was released, he completely forgot about Joseph.

Summary Statements: Throughout a prolonged period of suffering and humiliation, Joseph demonstrated integrity and faithfulness to the Lord. The Lord was preparing him for the greatness his dreams foretold.

Throughout the accounts of Joseph's service in Potiphar's household and his imprisonment, we see that Joseph displayed *a high view of God*.

- He saw God as the giver and interpreter of dreams.
- He believed that honoring God was of far greater importance than enjoying a moment's pleasure in sin.
- As we read Joseph's story, we are increasingly aware that God was providentially overseeing all Joseph's circumstances *and that Joseph believed this to be true*.

The depth of his suffering during these years is not fully disclosed until after his trials ended.

- Later in Genesis, we will read that Joseph's brothers saw *how deeply he was distressed* and how he begged for his life when they plotted against him (42:21).

- We will learn that Joseph has sons born to him whose names are very telling about the *depth of his suffering* in Egypt (41:50-52).
- Joseph's suffering was real, it was intense, and it was unjust. But he trusted God in it! He experienced victory in his suffering *by training his eyes on God's greatness rather than focusing on his own misery*.

Principle: *Victory is gained in suffering by focusing on God's greatness rather than on our own misery.*

Application: Do your circumstances dictate your view of God? Or does your view of God dictate your attitude in your circumstances?

Holding a high view of God involves focusing on the magnitude of His character.

- One of the best ways to raise our view of God is by training ourselves to praise Him in our difficulties. Naming and delighting in His qualities (attributes) of wisdom, mercy, sovereignty, unchangeableness, and love (among others), in prayer and as we speak with others, causes our problems to seem small in consideration of His greatness.
- Someone once said, "*Big problems, small God. Big God, small problems.*" We are never at risk of thinking too highly of God. However many times our view of Him is elevated, in this life, we will never be able to fully grasp God's greatness.
- As our view of God is raised, we come to realize that He is *more* involved, *more* sovereign, *more* powerful, and *more* loving than we previously imagined. The end result is that we act in greater faith and greater dependence on Him.

Conclusion

Peter wrote to Christians suffering in the first century: "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12). Sometimes Christians act surprised by suffering, seeing it as some unusual misfortune. But we are to expect to suffer. Even Christ suffered!

With all this in mind, how do you view suffering? Do you avoid it, even at the cost of obedience to Christ? Do you only pray that God will *remove* your suffering or do you ask Him to change your attitude *toward* it?

God used Joseph's suffering to prepare him for greatness. Will you waste your suffering by whining and complaining your way through it? Or will you train your eyes on God and believe He is using it for your good and His glory?

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