

MULTIPLY WEEK 2

Stewarding Your Position: Genesis 39:2,21, 41:37-57, 50:20

Genesis 39:2,21

The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

Genesis 41:37-57

This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. 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." And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." 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. 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. 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." And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah. And he gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On. So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.

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. During the seven plentiful years the earth produced abundantly, 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. 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.

Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bore them to him. Jo-

seph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.” The name of the second he called Ephraim, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

The seven years of plenty that occurred in the land of Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. There was famine in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do.”

So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth.

Genesis 50:20

You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Introduction

Have you ever met one of those unflappable, steadfast people who seem to be productive and forward thinking no matter what is going around them? Every company, every family, every team is better for having such people around. Joseph became that type of person. This story from Genesis 41 is the third time in his life that Joseph received significant responsibility because he was successful and excellent in the way he served his employers/masters. It was not always that way. He started as a bratty, spoiled kid who ended up getting sent away from his home and sold into slavery. But when things became really rough for Joseph, he turned to God, and the Lord’s hand was upon him to give him the success for which he became famous.

The story of Joseph is often called “literary perfection.” One scholar says it is “the most artistic and most fascinating of Old Testament biographies.” Genesis 37 to 50 covers the story of Joseph, and it is well worth reading all the way through for this study. Joseph is also one of those rare Old Testament characters whose life offers a very good example to follow.

Joseph is a model for us in how we conduct ourselves in every circumstance, whether we are afflicted or exalted.

In Genesis 41, Joseph rises to power as the second in command in Egypt, one of the most powerful nations of that time and region. Like most successful people, Joseph's rise included lots of hard work, lots of adversity, and also divine providence at opportune moments. In between miraculous interventions, Joseph exuded the Spirit's work inside of him so much that his co-workers and employers took notice. He dealt fairly with people and acted with integrity, even when things were not going his way.

When he first arrived in Egypt as a slave, he did well in a rich man's house — that is until he got thrown into prison for false accusations. While in prison, Joseph gained a reputation for being trustworthy and responsible, and he rose in prominence there (as much as you can in an ancient Egyptian prison). However, he was forgotten and left unjustly in prison longer than he deserved. Joseph did not give in to bitterness or self-pity. When he finally got another opportunity, he continued to serve well. This time it was in Pharaoh's court, concerning matters of the state. Joseph ended up leveraging his position in Pharaoh's court to save thousands of lives through skillful administration and wise ruling.

There are two important lessons for us in Joseph's story. First, we can learn how we should interpret God's work and purpose in our lives, even when it seems confusing or counter-productive. Joseph understood that God intended all his suffering and triumphs to serve one purpose: that God might preserve the offspring of Abraham, through whom the Messiah (Jesus) would come.

This radical trust in God's goodness, wisdom, and omnipotence enabled Joseph to be the steadfast, successful man that he was, both in the pit and in great power. Thus Joseph could say these comforting words to his brothers who betrayed him and left him for dead: "**God sent me before you** to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors" (Genesis 45:7). Like Jesus, Joseph's personal afflictions helped him save a multitude. Though this salvation was only physical, it was still important in the history of God's people.

Multiplication Principle

Too often when we think about our position in life, we start with our hopes, plans, and dreams and then try to fit God into it. We want to write the story and let God be the helper who makes our dreams come true. We have our own ideas of what blessing, fruitfulness, and multiplication mean. However, this is not the real world; it is a mirage. The Bible presents us with the world as it really is: created and run by God himself. God writes the story, and we must find our place in it. Before we ask, “What is God’s will for my life?” we must ask, “What is God’s will for God?” Joseph understood his life as one small part of God’s global plan to bless all nations, and then he trusted God through pain and pleasure. How does your life fit into God’s larger plan? God plans to bless all nations through the offspring of Abraham, Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:14). God wants the gospel of his Son Jesus to bear fruit and multiply in all the world. Is your life in line with this glorious purpose?

The second lesson to see here is the importance of God’s presence. Repeatedly we see in the narrative that it was not merely Joseph but also God’s presence that caused him to prosper in the lowest and highest points of his life (Genesis 39:2-3, 21, 23). Too often we judge the quality of our life by our outward position instead of our communion with God. Betrayed by his own family, falsely accused, forgotten in the pit of prison — God’s presence was Joseph’s refuge in all these circumstances. The secret to Joseph’s success, at the end of the day, had much more to do with God’s power and presence in his life than anything he could accomplish on his own. Trust in God allowed Joseph to move forward with God’s plan in triumph and in destitution.

Study Questions

1. Read Genesis 41:37-57. What characteristics do you observe about Joseph as an employee/servant/administrator in this chapter?

2. In verses 51 and 52, he gives some interesting names to his children. Why did he choose those names? What do those names indicate about his relationship with God?

3. Read Genesis 39:2-3,21,23 (and 41:51-52). What is the author trying to tell us about Joseph's success? What changed and what stayed the same for Joseph between the prison and Potiphar's house?

Reflection Questions

1. What are some hopes, plans, and dreams you have for your life? How do your plans and dreams intersect with God's purpose in the world?

2. God put Joseph in some drastically different settings, but Joseph remained faithful in both high and low places. What does faithfulness to God look like in your particular vocation?

3. Have you had a "pit" experience like Joseph? Briefly describe it. Where did you turn for refuge and comfort in that time, and why?

Prayer Guide

Pray James 1:2-5 and Romans 15:1-2.

Pray Deep:

- Ask God to help you “count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness” (James 1:2).
- Ask God to let the gospel have its “full effect” in your heart; making you complete and lacking nothing in him (James 1:4).

Pray Wide:

- Ask that God would make your vocation and position in life useful and uplifting to others, not looking to please yourself but working so that others would come to know Jesus as Savior (Romans 15:1).
- Pray that the church would be a blessing and positive influence in our culture for the good of our neighbors and to build them up in Christ (Romans 15:2).

Further Reading

“Gospel and Work” Sermons and Resources
by J.D. Greear, summitrdu.com/sji

Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work
by Timothy Keller