

VALLEYS // In the Pit

Finding Hope in Life's Hardest Moment

God's apparent absence is not evidence that He has abandoned you, but proof that He is working in ways you cannot currently comprehend.

Genesis 37:17-20, "So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams."

Genesis 37:21-22, "But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, 'Let us not take his life.' And Reuben said to them, 'Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him'—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father."

Now, I want you to think about the courage of this one man. You're outnumbered 10 to one. If you speak up in defense of Joseph, there's a high probability that they'll turn on you and kill you both. Reuben risked an enormous amount to be the voice of reason in the middle of this frenzy. Even if it's risky, even if it costs you dearly, don't ever underestimate the power of a single voice of reason.

Genesis 37:23-25, "So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. Then they sat down to eat."

There's three different perspectives in this story three different lenses I want is to see through...

LOOKING UP
LOOKING DOWN
LOOKING BACK
LOOKING FORWARD

What's amazing to me is that Joseph had big dreams, great aspirations to rule, to be a prince, to be served, and be worshiped one day. And now, he finds himself stuck in mud in the bottom of a pit looking up pleading for help.

We're not told how long Joseph was down there. We're not told what he was thinking. We're not told what he did while he was down there.

Joseph was stripped of his identity and left for dead.

Q: What are we tempted to do we do when we're in the pit?

1. Play the Victim

- a. *"Life's not fair! I don't deserve this! Why is this happening to me! I can't believe this is happening to me..."* Or, *"This isn't what I wanted life to be.. this isn't what I hoped for... poor me..."*

2. Point the Finger

- a. *"It's everyone else's fault. They're the problem, not me! After all I've done, this is what I get!?"*
- b. *We do this with God... "God if you really loved me, you would have prevented this! It's your fault... you had the power to do something and you didn't. You didn't intervene when I needed you. All this is your fault. How could you let this happen?"*

3. Plot Revenge

- a. This shows up later in Joseph's story... but we allow the poison of revenge into our thinking. When it gets quiet in that pit, and we begin to imagine *that* scenario, *that* moment, when we finally let them have it... and we get back at those who hurt us... those who put in the pit in the first place... because someone has to pay...

You know each of these things...we've all done them. They're normal. In fact, in our culture, each of these things are encouraged. They're advantageous in a myriad of ways.

And oftentimes we think the pit is useless. Pointless. Arbitrary. That no good can come from it. As painful as they are, there's a far better to handle the pits of life.

1. Consider Your Part

Much of what happened with Joseph happened TO him. He didn't choose to be the favorite. He didn't choose to have those dreams. He didn't choose his family. Some would say he is an innocent victim. Please hear me say this – there are some innocent victims in this room. You were thrown into the pit by someone or something evil. For some, I am not suggesting that you had anything to do with the evil that was done to you. You had no responsibility for the pain that inflicted against you. But that's not the case with Joseph. His arrogance, his lack of wisdom, his impulsivity, his pride, greatly contributed to his current circumstance. If he would have asked God about if, when, and how to share those dreams, if he hadn't brought back half-truths about his brothers work ethic to his father, maybe he wouldn't be stuck in the pit. But now that he's here, this is his moment of clarity. Pits, valleys... these places are incredible opportunities to look inward and invite God to reveal what He wants to change in you...

2. Cling to the Promise

Some of you are struggling in your life right now because you want God to show up and make it all better. You want resolution because if God really loved Joseph, and if God really loved you, He would make the pain, the heartache, the hurt go away. But what we need to understand is that God will use the lowest moments to bring about the greatest good. What's hard to understand is that God is using this pit to SAVE Joseph from his arrogance. It's only through the pit, through these awful circumstances, that Joseph will be delivered from the pride that was destroying his life.

Joseph needed the pit to get to the promise! And we do too. And when you're in the pit, you have to cling to the promise, cling to the reality that God is a God who takes death and turns it into a resurrection. While Joseph was in that pit, the dreams would've seemed utterly absurd, but what is impossible with man, is possible with God.

3. Choose to Forgive

When you find yourself in the pit, instead of entertaining imaginary conversations, or plotting revenge, release them into God's hands. Know that He is a God of mercy and a God of justice, and you can trust and let God deal with things in His timing for His purpose.

But, if you practice these things in the pit, what you're doing is robbing suffering of its power to poison you, or harden you, and turn you into an embittered person. If you practice these things, suffering can only do two things to you...

1. **Hurt but not destroy you.** I know what God is doing, because I'm going to trust in Him.
2. **Give you an early promotion.** You can look at hardship, or suffering and boldly say that the worst thing you can do is kill me, and IF you kill me, then all your doing is making me far better than I ever was before. You're just sending me into the fullness of glory... so do your worst!

Now the other perspective I want you to see is Joseph's brothers...

LOOKING DOWN

Joseph is in the pit looking up, the brothers are above the pit looking down.

And the irony is that Joseph knows he's in a pit. Reality just smacks him right in the face—this what I'd refer to as the severe mercy of God. God is saving Joseph in the pit.

But the brothers are in a pit too, they just don't know it yet. They are filled with jealousy, envy, resentment, contempt. They're conniving, and scheming, plotting to murder their own brother!

And if you're surprised that one human being would do this to another, you haven't been paying attention to the human story. The story of the first siblings end in murder with Cain and Abel. Noah's generation in Gen 6 only committed evil acts.

Jesus addresses this issue in Matthew 5.

Matthew 5:21-22, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."

Jesus is talking about the danger of resentment or contempt. Of course, murder is wrong, but what Jesus tells us is that the end result of any attitude of offense, of resentment, of bitterness, anger, of contempt toward another person, or viewing yourself as superior to someone else and criticizing, insulting, condemning them in your heart—you're in as much danger of hellfire as you would be if you actually committed the murder itself.

See, these brothers' souls are so twisted in sin, their resentment and contempt toward Joseph is so great, that the meditations of their own hearts, the sinful attitudes they allow to fester eventually leads them to do the unthinkable. And what should be a warning to us is that they think they're justified in what they're doing to Joseph.

If you allow resentment and contempt to fester, whether that's in your marriage, in your friendships, with your boss, or within the church, it will eventually lead you to say and do things that you feel justified in doing. Yet they are utterly evil and in absolute rebellion against the character and the ways of God. These things will twist and rot your soul and destroy your relationships.

LOOKING BACK

Genesis 37:25-28, "And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. Then Judah said to his brothers, 'What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.' And his brothers listened to him."

Many of us go through life on thinking about this moment, and we give into sin, or impulsive decisions, not taking a moment to consider the ripple effect on our children, and their children. Never in a million years would Abraham ever imagined the horror of this scenario that came about because of his own dysfunction and sin.

LOOKING FORWARD

Genesis 37:28, "Then Midianite traders [in this narrative Midianite is interchangeable term with Ishmaelites] passed by. And they [the brothers] drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt."

Joseph wanted a rope to get out and go home. He got a rope to get out and was sold into slavery. Sometimes, you beg God to intervene in a situation, in a circumstance, and you pray and believe, and you claim the promises of God, and you're quoting the scriptures, and you're doing everything you know to do to get God to do what you want Him to do.

And sometimes, like Elisha, God shows up with Chariots of fire and brings an immediate deliverance, and other times He leaves you in the pit even when you're pleading, even when you're begging. And then sometimes, you're pulled out of one pit, only to be thrown into another one. The temptation is to believe that if God really loved you, He would give you what you're asking for. And sometimes the most loving thing God can do is withhold from you what you want in order give you what you really need.

Sometimes God is doing something far greater by leaving you in the pit, than ever would come about if he rescued you from it.

No one in this story could have imagined what God was going to accomplish in and through Joseph's pain and betrayal. No one could have imagined the good that would come from this. No one, not even Joseph, could have imagined how God was going to change his character, and grow him, refine him in the pit.

And yet, all throughout the story we see a God that continually takes what the enemy meant for evil and turns it around for good.

Whatever pit you find yourself in today, whatever valley you're walking through, even when you can't see an ounce of goodness anywhere around you, God is at work in ways you can't even imagine right now.

And eventually, if you don't abandon God, you like David, will be able to declare one day...

Psalm 40:1-3, "I waited patiently for the Lord; He inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord."