

## VALLEYS // Faithful in Little

Joseph was in this prison for 11-13 years. Think about being wrongfully convicted of a crime and imprisoned for three months, a year, three years, eight years... a decade! If you were left alone with your thoughts about all that's transpired, it would feel like an eternity!

See, occasionally, we sing this song that in the bridge it says, *"You're never gonna let me down."* Now, I know what we mean, we're saying, *"ultimately God, your plan is better than mine. Ultimately, I trust you're going to work things out for good."*

But if I'm honest, I like my plans better than God's plans. I have really good plans for my life. And if I'm Joseph, I'm going, *"my plans definitely didn't involve going to prison for 11 years for something I didn't do."*

My plans don't involve suffering, pain, grief, disillusionment, loneliness, confusion.

For some of us, we can relate to this story. Maybe it's not wrongfully imprisoned, but we've dreamed of making an impact in the world, we've had the rug pulled out from underneath our feet, and we're tempted to give up on what we feel like God has put in us to do. Or we thought that God would take our business or our life's work and do far more with it. Or that we would raise children that would become a powerhouse in the world for a good and godly purpose. Or that one day we'd be married or have children. We can feel hopeless in our current situations.

Or maybe on the other hand, we feel stuck in a challenging marriage that has felt so hopeless for so long. Why put in the effort? Why even try anymore? Or a devastating medical diagnosis that has just totally blindsided us. A bad financial investment that altered the direction of what we thought life was going to look like. A difficult boss that has it in for us or a job that we feel trapped in.

This is Joseph! This is real life. This is a God who meets Joseph, and meets us in the raw, honest, difficult realities of life. We LOVE to celebrate God's faithfulness when life goes well. But what about God's faithfulness in an unresolved tragedy? Is God not faithful then too? Is He not good even in those moments, those seasons of life?

Circumstances like Joseph's, stories like Joseph's, brings to the surface all of those questions we'd rather ignore and avoid. All of those questions that dead religion would rather ignore. See, the valleys of life just expose what was there all along, just underneath the surface.

For those of us in the room that have been carrying those questions, or those unfulfilled dreams, or hopes, or disappointment, or regret, or burdens, God wants to teach us through Joseph how to respond when we're walking through the valleys of life.

**Genesis 40:1-4**, "Sometime after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them."

**Genesis 40:4-8**, "They continued for some time in custody. And one night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own interpretation. When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, 'Why are your faces downcast today?' They said to him, 'We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them.' And Joseph said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.'"

11 years earlier, when Joseph had his dreams about his future, what did he do? He didn't consider anyone but himself. He exercised little to no wisdom or restraint. He elevated himself at the expense of his brothers, and while he was bragging about the gift of the dreams, he didn't mention God. He didn't reference God; he didn't process with God. By every indication, Joseph was not even thinking about God's role in all of this, and his life goes completely sideways.

Now years later in prison, dreams come up, and the first words to come out of his mouth are...

**Genesis 40:8**, "Do not interpretations belong to God?"

God has given Joseph the ability to interpret dreams, but Joseph is no longer interested in elevating himself. Do you see the humility that God is building into Joseph? The character change that's taking place in him?

**Romans 5:3-4**, "...but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character..."

What does Paul say produces character in us? Endurance. Perseverance. And God is clearly refining Joseph's character through some of the worst circumstances imaginable.

**Genesis 40:9-13**, "So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, 'In my dream there was a vine before me, and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.' Then Joseph said to him, 'This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days. In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer.'"

**Genesis 40:14-15,** "Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit."

There's nothing wrong with desiring to be released from a burden or freedom from a hard season. But true faithfulness is defined by how we respond even when the burden isn't lifted or how we respond when that season doesn't end—what we do when there's no light at the end of that tunnel.

Joseph is ready to get out of this prison, and so many of us are so focused on the ending of a difficult circumstance or season of life that we miss what God is accomplishing in the midst of that season. We can't wait for the hardship to end. And it's easy to think when that happens, *"Then everything will be better, then I'll make a difference, then I'll be more generous, then I'll love my neighbor, then I can really be used by God..."*

While Joseph was in prison, it would've been so easy for him to think *"God can't use me here, this is pointless..."* Or it would've been easy to wallow in self-pity or angry that God isn't fixing his circumstances and allowing this injustice to continue! He could've just moped around that prison for all those years, and maybe there was some of that we don't know, but where we find him now is a very different place. A very different kind of person with a very different character. Not only does he faithfully use the gift God had given him to deliver good news, but he used the gift to deliver a really hard truth.

**Genesis 40:16-19,** "When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, "I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head." And Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days. In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat the flesh from you."

**Genesis 40:20-22,** "On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them."

We don't know what he did, but we know that the interpretations were accurate, which means something significant. If Joseph's interpretations of these dreams came true, then there was still hope for the dreams God had given him over a decade ago. The fulfillment of these dreams meant that God hadn't abandoned him. God was still orchestrating the details of his life that would eventually take him to God's promise over his life. Which means if you're still breathing, God isn't done with you yet. If you still have a heartbeat, God isn't finished. Your story isn't over!

See, over the last three weeks we've been talking about God's faithfulness to us in the valleys of life, but what we see in this part of Joseph's story so clearly is what it means for us to be faithful to God in the valleys of life.

What's our job in the valley? What's our job when the burden isn't lifted? When there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel? What does it mean to obey God in obscurity? When no one is watching? When there isn't significant impact, or momentum, or world change?

As we think about Joseph's story, we know that his time in prison was preparation for the fulfillment of the promise. God was preparing Joseph in obscurity for future opportunity. He was refining his character in order to accomplish his purpose in a future position of prominence and power.

Many of us are in a season of preparation right now. How do we respond?

There's a principle that Jesus gives us in...

**Luke 16:10**, "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much."

What are we doing with what God has given us now? What are we doing with what He's entrusted to us? How are we stewarding and developing the people God has placed in our care? Are we being faithful with what God has given us now in whatever season we're in? Are we managing these things in ways that are pleasing to God? In alignment with the ways of Jesus? In good conscience and integrity? Are we being faithful in little?

In Proverbs it says...

**Proverbs 24:33-34**, "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man."

In other words, little things eventually amount to big things. Little habits will add up. Little decisions have big implications. And if you're just waiting for the current season to be over, you can't be faithful NOW because you're only thinking about THEN! Don't delay your faithfulness in little things, waiting for the big things to come your way.

**Zechariah 4:10**, "Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin..."

Look at Joseph. The bottom fell out from underneath him not once, but twice, and here he is 11 years later being faithful to God and serving the people around him.

*"Start where you are. Use what you've got. Do what you can."*

- Pastor Myron Goodwin

### 1. Where am I?

What circumstance do I find myself in? What stage of life am I in? Who am I surrounded by? Where am I in life?

### 2. What do I have?

What gifts, resources, talents, experiences, time, education has God given me that He wants me to be faithful with? Things that could really benefit my community or someone specific? What has God entrusted to me? What do I have?

### 3. What can I do with it?

How can I steward it? What does God want me to stop doing? What does God want me to start doing? How can I be faithful with all that God has given me no matter what season I'm in?

I want to be faithful in little things. I want to be faithful in hard seasons. I want to trust in God and His promises even when life doesn't make sense, knowing one day God will make sense of all of it.

This is exactly what we see Joseph doing in this story, and we think, surely, God is going to make it all better now right? His character, his integrity, he's being faithful, he's trusting in the promise, he's using his gifts. God's going to make it all good now right?

**Genesis 40:23, "Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him."**

Joseph needs a breakthrough, for God to get Him out of prison. But what if God's will for Joseph is to remain in prison?

We love when God brings resolution to the problems immediately, but what if God's will for this season isn't an instant resolution, instant answer to prayer but to see you through the grueling seasons slowly, and steadily, over a long period of time to prepare for a greater purpose down the road? Will you still love Him even then? Will you still trust Him even then? Will you serve Him then? Will you be faithful even then?

Now, I'm not talking about if you're in situation that where you're not safe. God's will is not for you to remain in any kind of abusive situation. And if you're there, I want you to know we can help. Our Pastoral Care team is specifically here to walk with you and help you, and I would invite you to call us or email us at [Care@gracechapel.net](mailto:Care@gracechapel.net). God's will is not for you to remain in any sort of unsafe or abusive situation.

Joseph was forgotten for another 2 years, and if you're there today, if you feel forgotten, here is a promise from God that I would invite you to cling to.

**Isaiah 42:3-4**, "...a bruised reed He will not break, and a faintly burning wick He will not quench; He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till He has established justice in the earth..."

If you're barely hanging on, if there's a little flicker of hope left in you, God will not put it out. He'll protect that little glimmer of hope.

**Romans 5:3-4**, "...but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character produces hope..."

See, Joseph refused to quit. He didn't give up. He saw circumstances that seemed to contradict God's promises as an opportunity to demonstrate faith, not as a reason to doubt or abandon it. And God continued to change him and prepare him and grow him toward the purposes and promises God had for him. Today, if God has you in a place where you're living in obscurity, where the hard season doesn't seem like it has any end in sight, where you don't yet have the opportunity you feel you should, or you feel like you been set aside or marginalized, or trivialized or rejected...God hasn't turned His back on you. Don't turn your back on Him. Instead...

**Start where you are. Use what you've got. Do what you can.**

We glorify God when we persevere under a heavy load.

**1 Peter 2:20-21**, "But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps."