



Unit .04

Session .02

God Redeems Adversity

Scripture



Genesis 39:1-6,19-23; 41:14-16

1 Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. **2** The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. **3** His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. **4** So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. **5** From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. **6** So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. ... **19** As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. **20** And Joseph's master

took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. **21** But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. **22** And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. **23** The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed. ... **14** Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. **15** And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." **16** Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

Intro Options

Main Point:
God uses Joseph's circumstances and sufferings to accomplish His plans and purposes.

Option 1

In the previous session, Joseph went from being the favored son of his father to being a slave because of his jealous brothers. Jacob's favoritism fueled hatred, strife, and bitterness in his sons, driving them to plot to rid themselves of their reviled brother. The brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites, who took their new slave to Egypt.

In this session, we will see God set the stage for His plans to come to pass—just not in the way Joseph and his family may have expected. The dreams God gave Joseph would come true: Joseph's brothers would bow down to him (Gen. 37:5-7,9). But first, Joseph would have to endure more adversity. God's act of redemptive reversal was not yet complete. We can be confident that God works providentially in our lives—even through adversity—for His glory and our good.

- **What have you prayed for that God didn't answer the way you hoped?**
- **Looking back, how do you think God was working in that situation to accomplish His purpose?**

Option 2

Place students in groups of 3-4, and give them a stack of index cards. Ask them to list major events in Joseph's life so far, each on a different index card. Examples include: the gift of the multicolored coat from his father, being thrown into the pit, his brothers plotting against him, and being sold to the Ishmaelites. Then, instruct each group to switch cards with another group. After they switch, allow five minutes for the group to prepare a skit that tells the story on their card. Call up groups one at a time to present their skits. Allow the other groups to guess what's going on in the skit. Once someone guesses correctly, ask them to tell the story to the rest of the group. Then ask:

- **Do you think Joseph expected or enjoyed the difficult things that happened to him? Explain.**
- **How would you have responded if any of these things happened to you?**

In this session, we'll see exactly how Joseph responded to adversity in his life and how God was with Him through it all.

TEACHING PLAN

Joseph was only 17 when his life took a tragic turn: His brothers betrayed him and sold him into slavery. His owners took him to Egypt, far away from his beloved father and his father's people. Joseph's story would continue, and God would use Joseph's adversity.

We cannot forget that Joseph was still a kid, torn from his family and taken to a foreign land. Maybe for the first time in his life, he was alone; a lonely Israelite slave in the house of a powerful Egyptian.

Read Genesis 39:1-6.



- **What do you think Joseph thought and felt during his journey to Egypt, especially when Potiphar purchased him? What do you believe would have been most difficult?**

Joseph may have felt lonely, but he was never alone because God was with Him (39:2). God was with Joseph in Potiphar's house, just as He had been with him on the road to Egypt and in the pit where his brothers had thrown him. Joseph's brothers had betrayed him and cast him away, but God had not.

The Lord was with Joseph and brought him success in Pharaoh's house, which did not go unnoticed by his Egyptian master (39:2-3). Potiphar recognized God was blessing his young servant and that all he did prospered. The shrewd Egyptian placed Joseph in charge of his household and all he owned and the Lord continued to bless Potiphar because of his Israelite slave.

- **When have you felt God's presence in adversity or loneliness?**

Joseph's life appeared to be improving. While he was still a slave in Egypt and separated from his family, God blessed him in his master's house. Joseph became Potiphar's personal assistant and was in charge of his entire household. But Joseph's world was about to be turned upside down.

Scripture says Joseph was well-built and handsome, which did not escape the notice of his master's wife. Potiphar's wife spoke to Joseph day after day, enticing him to have an affair with her but he refused. How could he commit such an evil against Potiphar, and how could he sin against God?

One day, Potiphar's wife was alone with Joseph and she grabbed him by his clothing and told him once more to sleep with her. Joseph broke free and ran from her, but when he ran, she was left holding his garment. Potiphar's wife called for the other servants, showed them Joseph's garment, and accused him of attacking her. Later when Potiphar came home, she showed him the garment and shared the same story.

- **How would you respond if you were falsely accused of something? How do you think Joseph responded?**

COMMENTARY

Genesis 39

Main Point:
God uses Joseph's circumstances and sufferings to accomplish His plans and purposes.

39:2-6. Joseph was away from his people, but he was not away from the God of his people. Undoubtedly Joseph knew and believed the promises God made to his great grandfather, Abraham. He also surely knew Isaac (his grandfather) and Jacob (his father) were sons of that promise. He also knew the promise would continue through one of his father's twelve sons. He knew God was at work, and he knew (from stories Jacob likely told) God often works in unusual ways. God gave children to the childless. God chose the older to serve the younger. God had remained faithful to His covenant promises and blessed Joseph's family even when they doubted and disobeyed.

Knowing these things, Joseph did not waver in his faith. What Joseph had endured, and what he would continue to endure, was difficult. He was not immune to the pains of betrayal and loneliness. But he also knew how God had been kind to his family in the past, and he witnessed God's continued kindness to him even as a slave hundreds of miles from his family. Joseph saw that his loneliness and pain and God's presence and blessing were not mutually exclusive. God was with him and working through him even in the darkness of the moment.

39:19-23. Adversity and injustice were not the only themes in Joseph's life; God's presence and kindness were as well. In yet another dark hour of Joseph's life, God was with Joseph and blessed him. Echoing Potiphar's decision to place Joseph over his house, the warden placed Joseph over everything in the prison, and God made everything Joseph did successful.

Joseph's hope in God did not waver. Even as his circumstances declined, his hope in God did not. Joseph knew the situation he was facing was not good, but his God always is. So, he continued serving God and accepting God's kindness to him and extending it to others.



99 Essential Doctrines *(p. 16, DDG)*

God's Providence

Providence refers to God's continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God's preservation of the created order, His governance, and His care for His people (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Gen. 8:21-22). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God's personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order, but also the individuals and events within human history.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Genesis 39:19-23.



At this point in Joseph's account, we might expect him to lash out, to shake an angry fist at God. But not Joseph. He seemed resilient to the injustices that plagued him. Scripture doesn't record Joseph turning from God. There isn't even a hint of it. Instead, it seems Joseph continued in full surrender to God's will. Joseph's circumstances became more difficult, but his faith in God seems to have grown with each difficult situation.

- **What lessons can we learn from Joseph's victory over temptation?**
- **Why is it important to do the right thing, regardless of the outcome?**

At some point, the chief cupbearer and chief baker angered Pharaoh, so he threw them into prison—the very prison Joseph was over. One night, the cupbearer and baker both had dreams that distressed them. Neither could figure out what his dream meant. When Joseph arrived in the morning to tend to them, they shared their dreams with him and he was able to interpret both.

The cupbearer's dream meant he would be restored to his role serving Pharaoh in three days. The baker's dream was not as encouraging: he would be executed in three days. Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him when he was restored to serve Pharaoh. This was just the break he needed. But the final verse in Genesis 40 records what seemed to be the heartbreaking conclusion of this account: The chief cupbearer forgot about Joseph (v. 23).

- **Imagine yourself in Joseph's position. How would you feel if the cupbearer forgot to mention you? How might Joseph's belief in God being there through the good and the bad give comfort and hope during these moments?**

Two years passed. Then one night Pharaoh himself had a dream, no one could interpret. Finally, the cupbearer remembered Joseph. The cupbearer shared the story of his imprisonment and finally told the most powerful man in Egypt about Joseph. 

Read Genesis 41:14-16.



Notice Joseph's response to Pharaoh when the king said he heard that Joseph could interpret dreams. He said, "I am not able to." Imagine the shock, disappointment, and anger that likely flooded Pharaoh's face. Then Joseph clarified, "I cannot, but God can." Joseph's response provides insight into how he handled the disappointment of the two previous years and being forgotten by the cupbearer. Joseph continued to recognize God's presence and power in his life. The cupbearer had forgotten Joseph, but God had not.

God interpreted Pharaoh's dream through Joseph. A famine would come upon the land in seven years. Joseph advised Pharaoh to appoint a man to oversee the process of storing up food during the seven years of plenty leading up to the famine. Pharaoh agreed to the plan and, in God's providential act of redemptive reversal, he appointed Joseph as the man to oversee the process. Pharaoh made Joseph the second most powerful man in Egypt. Joseph's journey was complete. The exalted son had become the exalted official by way of being a slave and prisoner. 

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God uses Joseph's
circumstances and
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Genesis 41

41:14-16. We learn something else about Joseph from his reply to Pharaoh. Joseph was not about to take credit for what God was doing. He was not going to rob God's glory and seek acclaim for himself—even if that glory and acclaim could lead to his freedom from prison. Ultimately, this moment was not about Joseph; it was about God. So, Joseph trusted God and sought His glory. In response, God gave Joseph what He had given him all along—favor.

Joseph found favor with God and gave God the glory whether he was in the pit or the palace; in chains or on a chair; before Potiphar's wife or jailers; walking along as a slave or riding as the vice-regent of Egypt; in jail or before the king. Likewise believers must stand firm on the Word of God and always seek His glory. We have an advantage Joseph lacked: We have received Jesus Christ as Savior and know the end of the story. "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Consequently, we are to submit to God's plan, even when we cannot understand or see it. We are to believe in the God of the promise even when it is difficult to believe in the promise of God.

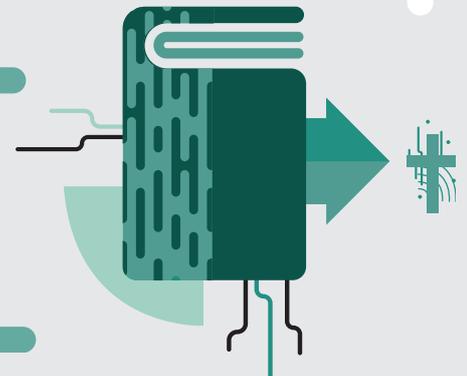
41:46-57. We glimpse the type of life Joseph began living compared to suffering he experienced in previous chapters. Joseph was 30 years old when he came to power in Egypt. He executed his plan to store up extra food in the cities during the seven years of abundance. In an echo of God's promise to bless Abraham's offspring, the text says Joseph stored up grain "like the sand of the sea" (Gen. 41:49).

Not only was Joseph fruitful in his work, he was also fruitful in his family life. He married a woman named Asenath, and she gave birth to two sons. The first son was named *Manasseh* which basically meant *made to forget*. God had made Joseph forget the hardship he had endured at the hands of his family. The second son was named *Ephraim* which basically meant *made fruitful*. God made Joseph fruitful through his affliction. So, not only had God brought Joseph through his hardship, but God produced something in Joseph through his suffering that would not have otherwise been produced.

(p. 18, DDG) Christ Connection

Joseph's life pointed forward to Jesus. Jesus would be betrayed, handed over to captivity, stripped of His robe, and unjustly sentenced to death. But Jesus' rejection and humiliation was God's plan to save Israel and the world. Maybe it looked like God had abandoned Jesus, like His cries to the Father went unanswered, but when the grave opened on Sunday morning, it was clear Jesus was not alone. God vindicated His Son.

We get a glimpse of this plan in Joseph's life. He suffered. It seemed like he was abandoned, but God was with him and accomplishing His good plan. Joseph succeeded even in captivity, and his humiliation would eventually lead to God's exaltation to bless Israel and all nations (Gen. 12; Phil. 2).



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



What is the advantage of looking at all of Joseph's trials through the big picture? How can we do the same for our own?

Why is it easier to go through trials by focusing our attention on God rather than our circumstances?

Heart



Why do we assume God is there in the good times and gone in the bad?

God never abandons His people. How does this bring you specific encouragement this week for something you are facing?

Hands



Which is easier—showing kindness or becoming bitter during difficult circumstances? Which did Joseph choose? Explain.

What can we learn from Joseph's story when it comes to focusing on others instead of ourselves during moments of personal difficulty?

Main Point: **God uses Joseph's circumstances and sufferings to accomplish His plans and purposes.**



Head

Sometimes it is difficult to see what God is doing in the moment. We need to take a step back and look at the bigger picture to see His hand. Until Pharaoh's pronouncement, Joseph could have summarized his life with the question, "Why is this happening to me?" The answer to this question comes into focus when we look at his journey as a whole.

If Joseph's brothers had not seized him, they would not have thrown him into a pit. If they had not thrown him into a pit, they would not have drawn him out of the pit to sell him to the Ishmaelites. If he had not been sold to the Ishmaelites, he would not have made it to Potiphar's house; and on and on until he was ushered into an introduction with Pharaoh. It was probably difficult for Joseph to see God at work during each link in this chain of events. But with each one, God was working to spare the lives of not only the Egyptians, but also Joseph's brothers—and through one of them, the promised future Messiah would be born.



Heart

Believers know God has not promised to make us wealthy or famous. He has not promised we will always be healthy and happy. He has not promised to spare us from adversity and hardship. We know following the Lord might bring adversity and hardship our way. But believers also know God has promised that He will never leave us alone (Matt 28:20; Heb. 13:5). Even though we might feel abandoned or even appear to be left alone, the Bible tells us a different story; this promise fuels our faith and obedience. No matter what each day may hold, we know God is present with us, blessing us and blessing others through us.



Hands

Even though Joseph was faithful to God, this doesn't mean he earned God's continual kindness to him. God's kindness is never deserved; it is always an act of grace and mercy. We are called to live with gratitude to God for the kindness He freely gives as we strive to remain true to Him and His Word in whatever situation we face: prosperity, adversity, and everything in between.

Since God extends kindness to us even when our situation is difficult, we should respond by showing kindness to one another—even those who wrong us (Matt. 5:44; 7:12). Yet, it is much easier to lash out, cast mean looks, or subject others to our screaming silence. In our hurt, our sinful hearts seek to hurt others. But we need to put this desire to death and instead follow the path of Jesus, who served others through His suffering. We need the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts, purging the sinful contempt we often have for those who persecute us, replacing it with love. We cannot do this on our own.