

flourishing FAITH

CLOUD OF WITNESSES | 07:: Joseph

PRAYER: Before you begin, find a quiet place (if you can) and just take some time for you and Jesus. As we've done in all these studies, invite Him in. Ask Him to speak to you – to give you fresh wind in your sails. Today, as we cover such familiar passages, ask Him to reveal something new to you and that He would help you apply these Biblical truths to your life. And be sure to thank Him for all He's done and all He will do in the future.

Then grab your journal and pen and let's go!



Well, girls! We're continuing along the story line and today we're studying the life of Joseph. You may recognize a few of the passages we read today, because Joseph is pretty famous.

READ GENESIS 35:23-26. WHO WAS JOSEPH?

Joseph was one of the 12 tribes of Israel – one of Jacob's sons. And he wasn't just a son of Jacob's. Joseph was Jacob's *favorite* son. And we skipped over Jacob's love story, but Joseph was the firstborn from Jacob's favorite wife (told you there was a love triangle...) who – like his mother and grandmother – had struggled having children. So, as we saw in the last post, Jacob's parents played favorites and sadly, he took that trait from them. Let's see how this plays out.

READ GENESIS 37:1-11. MAKE A BULLET LIST IN YOUR JOURNAL DESCRIBING EACH EVENT THAT HAPPENS IN THIS TEXT.

Well... here, we see the awful emotional toll it takes on people when we play favorites. Joseph's brothers *hated* him simply because their father *avored* him. Well, if you read verse 2 carefully, that might not be the *only* reason – it also says he would tend the flocks with his brothers and would come back home bringing "bad reports" about them to his father. So, he could have been a tattler. Who knows?



Then there was the “richly ornamented robe” that Jacob made for Joseph – the famous “Coat of Many Colors.” We don’t have a lot of information about this robe, but archeologists have found ancient paintings (from around this time period) of men wearing colorful knee-length robes, so that gives you a mental picture of it. Some depict robes like these with or without sleeves. But what is important about the robe is that in this time period, clothing communicated a person’s status or rank in the community. 1 This robe would have been a symbol of not only his father’s favor, but also of authority – which is interesting considering Joseph’s dreams...

The straw that broke the camel’s back was Joseph’s dreams. He, in his little teenage self, didn’t make things any better by bragging about them to his family. Nevertheless, Joseph had the spiritual gift of interpreting dreams. And while this wasn’t the wisest thing he could have done with his God-given gift; we’ll see soon that it all had purpose and meaning.

READ GENESIS 37:12-36. WRITE A SUMMARY OF THE EVENTS IN YOUR JOURNAL.

Poor guy. Despised, rejected, and betrayed by people who were supposed to love him. If you feel like you’re in a similar boat, take these next few seasons of Joseph’s life to heart.

While none of the brothers are guilt-free in this, at the very least, his brother Reuben, the oldest, thought it best not to kill him and sought to pacify his brothers by leaving Joseph in a cistern. In those days, rainfall was one of the only sources of water (especially in a desert) and they would build cisterns to filter and collect rainwater. 1 Think of a cistern as a huge “vase” in the ground that had a stone lid. It would have been big enough for Joseph to fall into and not be able to climb out.

Reuben came up with this plan, but he also planned to come back later, once things cooled off. Judah also didn’t like the idea of killing his brother but set the plan in motion to sell Joseph into slavery. Nevertheless, God had the ultimate plan and Joseph landed in the home of Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials.

READ GENESIS 39:1-6. WHAT DOES THIS TEXT SAY ABOUT JOSEPH?

Joseph got to work, and scripture doesn’t say how he was feeling, but you can assume he was confused, heartbroken, and full of pain. BUT we can infer from this text that Joseph was NOT eaten up with bitterness. The text says the Lord was with Joseph and he prospered. It says the Lord gave Joseph success in everything he did, and that Joseph found favor in Potiphar’s eyes. For all this to have occurred, Joseph would have needed a good attitude and would have had to work diligently, be respectful, and get the tasks done. He must not have stewed in his sorrows and let that affect his work. We also can infer that he trusted the Lord, even in this precarious situation.



I say all this because sometimes when things don't go our way, bitterness can sneak in. When we are overtaken with bitterness we live in an angry, depressed state of mind and it seeps out of our heart and into our actions. We're quick-to-anger, snappy, sarcastic, and rude. This is because we are focused on our circumstance and the hurt and disappointment we feel. And while the person (or group) we are bitter toward is hardly affected, we are hurting ourselves and are miserable to be around.

Joseph didn't deserve to be a servant, but he lived out what we read in Philippians 4:4-9:

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." (NIV)

If you're tempted to be bitter, don't let it suck the life out of you! Instead, change your focus to Someone who is life-giving – Jesus! If you look around you and *nothing* is true, *nothing* is right, *nothing* is pure, *nothing* is lovely, *nothing* is admirable, *nothing* is praiseworthy... Jesus is! Go to Him and tell Him how you are feeling and ask Him for guidance and help. He will not disappoint. He will not fail. He will be with you just like He was with Joseph, and He will redeem your situation. I know because scripture says, "Behold! I make *all things* new!" (Revelation 21:5, NKJV).

Another thing I want to focus on is that it says the Lord was with Joseph and *he was successful*. That isn't just for Joseph. The Bible is filled with stories of people (and groups of people) who overcame impossible obstacles, won battles they shouldn't have won (by any earthly standard), were "blessed in all they did" etc. because they sought the Lord's guidance and then obeyed Him. God's favor was on Joseph because he honored God. If we honor God in everything, He will bless us in everything we do, too.

WE SEE THIS SAME CONCEPT IN DAVID'S AND JOSHUA'S STORIES. FLIP FARTHER INTO THE OLD TESTAMENT AND READ JOSHUA 1:7-8 AND 1 KINGS 2:3. HOW DO YOU THINK THIS CONCEPT APPLIES TO YOUR LIFE?

Let me say that it is *impossible* to do this all the time, otherwise we would be perfect people. But that shouldn't stop us from seeking to obey the Lord and living it out.



NOW FLIP TO THE MIDDLE OF YOUR BIBLE AND FIND PSALM 1:2-3. WRITE DOWN WHAT IT SAYS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO DELIGHT IN THE LORD AND THEN JOURNAL A BIT ABOUT WHAT THAT COULD LOOK LIKE IN YOUR OWN LIFE.

Those who delight in the Lord will be like a tree planted by rivers of water and bear fruit in the right season. And they do not wither. Sounds like our leading verses for Flourishing Faith, Psalm 92:12-13, doesn't it? When we follow the Lord, in whatever we do, we will flourish!

So, what does it look like in our own lives to delight in the Lord? Well, when you accept the Lord into your heart, He breathes life into your spirit and the Holy Spirit moves into your heart. Your spirit has been made Holy (Hebrews 10:10) and it naturally desires to bring glory to God, to worship Him, to be like Jesus.

Think about what we discussed a few posts ago when we talked about Abel, and we went down that bunny trail about the war between the spirit and the flesh – and what it meant to walk in the Spirit. Delighting in the Lord is living all of that out. It's bringing each and every situation to the Lord, asking His advice, and doing what He says to do. It's thinking about what would be a Godly reaction when we want to be angry and lash out. It's having patience. It's being kind, especially to someone who is not being kind to us. And if we seek to honor Him in everything we do, He will bless our efforts in everything we do. It's called "favor." But it's not because we're "being good," it's because obeying God leads to blessing. He only knows how to be good and only wants good for us. So, if we obey what He says to do, clearly that action will lead to a blessing.

One final thing on this and then we can move on. This scripture says the Lord blessed *Potiphar* just because Joseph was around. The commentary in my NIV study Bible astutely noted that "... the offspring of Abraham continue to be a blessing to the nations." Other than God in some-part fulfilling His promise to Abraham, why do you think God blessed Potiphar's house just because of Joseph's presence? Personally, I think it's because people notice it when good things happen. It even says in Genesis 39:3 that Potiphar *noticed* the Lord was with Joseph and he realized that the Lord gave Joseph success in everything he did.

When I first started working, I prayed for the Lord to make me a blessing for my boss, my project leads, and my coworkers. And so many times, He has been faithful to give me creativity to solve issues at work and has blessed our projects. And they *do* see me as a blessing. Not because I'm so great, but because the Lord has answered my prayer.

So, what's the point? Is this just to be successful and keep the blessings all for ourselves? *No way!* Like I said, people notice when good things happen. This gives you the opportunity to give the Lord glory. Anywhere you are, you have a platform. You have a platform at school, in your friend groups, on your sports teams, in your gymnastics class, at Cheerleading, at orchestra or band...



If you don't believe me, pray for the Lord to make you a blessing to the people around you and follow His direction and see if this doesn't ring true. People will see a difference in you. You will be like a light to this dark world because you will stand out – and pointing people to Jesus will be the true blessing.

FAST FORWARD A BIT AND READ GENESIS 39:19-23. WRITE BULLET POINTS LISTING THE EVENTS IN YOUR JOURNAL.

We skipped over the part where Potiphar's wife asked Joseph to do something scandalous but rest assured – he stood strong and by his convictions and did not give into her request. And, once again, poor Joseph was thrown into hurtful circumstances through no fault of his own. BUT the Lord was with Joseph, even in prison, and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison guard. And just like Potiphar, the prison guard put Joseph in charge of everything and "paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did." This guy is unstoppable with God on his side! And that is the same blessing we have with Jesus in our hearts!

NOW READ THE WHOLE CHAPTER OF GENESIS 40. WHAT UNIQUE THINGS HAPPEN IN THIS SET OF EVENTS?

Remember Joseph's spiritual gift of dream interpreting? Here we witness it for the first time on full public display. Let me take a second to say that I don't believe the concept of the Lord speaking through dreams is limited to the Bible. If you've had a dream that came true, pay attention to your dreams. The Lord may use some of them to tell you things He needs to share. And at first, it might be random things like "I dreamed I was at this restaurant sitting in this chair and my grandmother was with us in a striped shirt" and then one day you end up at that restaurant in the exact chair you dreamed about, and your grandmother was wearing a striped shirt. But that could be the Lord conditioning you to pay attention.

In high school, the Lord really hammered into me the concept that the Holy Spirit speaks. And He wanted me to learn what it sounded like when He was speaking to me. So, he started off by sharing things about the future. One day, I passed by the lockers at school while walking to class and He drew my attention to a particular locker. The conversation in my heart went something like this: "See locker number 154? That's going to be your locker next year." I don't remember hearing the Lord's voice that specifically before that moment, but maybe He had, because I had been a Christian a long time by that point. Anyway – I do remember thinking, "Ok... yea sure." And lo and behold! Guess what locker I had the following school year!? Locker 154!



That year I was also witnessing to a friend who was part of an occult and thought she was a Christian but believed a lot of really wrong things about God and the gospel. One day I wrote an email to her and pointed out several false beliefs she had and explained what the Bible *actually said* about those things. After I finished, I pressed “send” and the email wouldn’t go. So, I pressed “send” again and got the same error message. It was some kind of “your message is undeliverable” nonsense.

So, fully believing in spiritual warfare at that point, I prayed Jesus over that email and rebuked the enemy from blocking it from being sent. Not willing to give Satan credit for what God was doing, the Holy Spirit quickly spoke up in my heart and said “*It’s not him who is blocking this email. I am.*” Turns out there was this one sentence I wrote that *I knew* as I was writing the email shouldn’t be included. But I brushed past it and included it anyway. And the second he iterated that the sentence need to come out, I took the sentence out and *the email sent!*

I say all of this to say – sometimes the Holy Spirit says things that seem superfluous (like the locker story) just to get you accustomed to hearing His voice. Or if you have a silly dream like you’re in that restaurant and it comes true, that seems superfluous too. But if these kinds of things happen over and over and over (can be months or years apart), pay attention because you serve a spiritual Being who is not limited by anything. And He may be trying to communicate with you.

So, going back to Joseph, he interpreted these dreams and asked the cup bearer to remember him once he was let go. This shows Joseph was 100% confident in what the Lord told him about these dreams. And sure enough, 3 days later everything happened just as Joseph said it would. But the cupbearer went about his merry little way and poor Joseph was forgotten.

SO, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? TURN TO THE NEXT CHAPTER AND LET’S READ GENESIS 41:1-40. HOW DOES JOSEPH FINALLY GET OUT OF PRISON?

It was *two more years* until the cupbearer remembered Joseph. And even then, the only reason he remembered him was because Pharaoh was having confusing dreams, and no one could interpret them. So, my question here is, do you think it was a coincidence that Joseph was in prison at the same time as the cupbearer? And do you think it was a coincidence that the cupbearer *just so happened* to have a dream about being released from prison? I mean... he could have been released without any forewarning... And do you think it’s any coincidence that the cupbearer was privy to the Pharaoh’s business – knowing that he had confusing dreams? *No way!* The Lord had a plan.

So... the cupbearer shares with Pharaoh that he remembered a guy from prison that interpreted dreams and things turned out exactly as he said. Of course, Pharaoh would want to speak with this guy! So, Joseph was invited to meet Pharaoh. Notice when Pharaoh asks Joseph to interpret the



dream, Joseph admits that he, personally, can't do it, but gives God the credit – saying, "God will give Pharaoh the answer..."

This was kind of a different situation, because Joseph was dealing with prophecy and only the Lord knows the future, but in general, Joseph's response is the right response to have. When we rely on the Lord to be our strength, or when we acknowledge that every gifting we have comes from Him, or when we lean on Him to get us through something difficult, the answer when people say, "Man! You're really great. How do you do it?" is, "Actually, it's not me. God..." And then continue with whatever the answer is. God gives us gifts and has us rely on Him in our weakness so that He can get the credit for the outcome.

Once again, Joseph does exactly what he is called to do and all of a sudden, he is given authority over everything. He didn't seek this out, it was put in his lap – because he honored God and did what God told him.

READ GENESIS 41:41-57. WERE JOSEPH'S INTERPRETATIONS CORRECT? WHAT HAPPENS?

Just as God had warned through Joseph's interpretation, Egypt and the surrounding areas did experience seven years of great abundance and then the famine came. Joseph was wise with his decision making and followed the plan that God gave him – to store grain and eat from it while the earth was infertile.

The plot thickens, though. Get ready – this next part is long, but it reads about like a good novel.

READ GENESIS 42-46:7. IF YOU'D RATHER, YOU COULD ALSO LISTEN TO THIS ON THE UVERSION BIBLE APP. I RECOMMEND THE NLT TRANSLATION, BECAUSE IT READS LIKE A STORY AND I LIKE THE GUYS VOICE.

Just like in a movie, the camera pans to a different scene and we see Joseph's father, Jacob and all of the brothers discussing what to do about the famine plaguing the land. Ironically, Jacob suggests that they go to Egypt because he's heard through the grape vine that they have grain stored up. So, the brothers go together.

Then we witness this crazy charade with Joseph pretending not to recognize them and calling them spies, giving them a hard time, etc. But let's not forget what we read at the beginning of this study: Joseph had a dream of his own, remember? And I quote, "We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it." Isn't it interesting that Joseph's dream was about *grain* and actually,



while they protested the idea before, they actually did end up being indebted to Joseph and bowed to him many times (Genesis 42:6, 43:28, 44:14, 50:18) - over grain nonetheless!

Joseph's story is filled with beautiful examples of Romans 8:28 where it says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (NIV). Joseph had a long, hard road in front of him - one undoubtedly filled with sorrow and pain - when his brothers sold him into slavery, but the Lord used that to bring Joseph to a position of influence and used him to save his family and ultimately the nations of Israel because these 12 brothers became the 12 tribes of Israel.

Hear me when I say, belief in this truth about God does not minimize the pain and heartbreak we experience in life. It does not excuse others for causing pain and suffering. It doesn't mean what you may be facing is easy or should be easy. BUT! Take heart! God has overcome the world! (John 16:33). This means He is above all things on earth - all people, all circumstances - and is able to redeem any situation in addition to healing you, if you need it. And if you can't see how on earth your situation can be worked for good, go to God and pray something like, "Lord, I know in your word it says you work all things for good, but I can't see how any good is going to come from this situation. I do trust Your word and I trust You. Please help me."

We live on a broken planet. So bad things are going to happen. People will disappoint us, we will fail, we will be hurt, rejected, abandoned, bullied, made fun of, etc. but the Lord is always faithful to bring us through the storm. He is always faithful to heal us. If you are going through some kind of storm right now, seek Jesus. Seek His presence. Spend time with Him. Come to Him as a refuge. Read Psalm 91. It is filled with beautiful metaphors of what it is like to find refuge in the Lord. It is like being sheltered under His mighty wings.

In 2020, while we were all sheltering in place during COVID, my dad started watching different live feeds of birds with their babies. One of the cameras filmed an Osprey nest that was a dock roof by the water. There were no trees nearby, so the nest was in the hot sun. The mama bird would literally stand in that nest and hover over the babies who are so small and fuzzy and had no protection of their own because their feathers hadn't grown in yet. She was their shade. They would have been baked without her. One day she pulled out her wing for one of the babies to hide under and it reminded me of Psalm 91.

There's so much in life right now that can beat down on us and bake us like the hot sun, but the Lord is our refuge. If you run to Him, I promise He will show up and fill your world with joy and light - even if it seems hard to find right now. Just keep your eyes on him.

Let's close by looking at Hebrews 11.

THE HEBREWS WRITER CELEBRATES JOSEPH'S STORY IN HEBREWS 11:22. WHAT DOES IT SAY JOSEPH DID BY FAITH?



Joseph is another person we celebrate in Hebrews 11 that has a life full of faith, yet the author of Hebrews talks about his last days on earth. We find this story in Genesis 50. Not only is this the end of Joseph's life, but it is also the end of Genesis. So, pat yourself on the back! We literally just walked through the entire first book of the Bible together!

READ GENESIS 50:22-26. WHY DO YOU THINK IT TOOK FAITH FOR JOSEPH TO SAY, "TAKE MY BONES WITH YOU WHEN YOU LEAVE"?

Think back to the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – and the promises of God. Remember He had promised to give them the land of Canaan? Well, due to that famine, they left the land. And back then, it's not like there was some contract or paperwork saying the land they left behind belonged to them. So, without them present to guard it, the land could be taken by anyone.

Joseph's family stayed in Egypt long after the famine. In fact, we just read in Genesis that he got to witness *three generations* of family in Egypt before he died. But Joseph had faith in God's promise, and he encouraged his family that the Lord would bring them back to the land He had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Once again, we see a guy who didn't get to see the end of the story but knew it would be good. Let's be encouraged to live that way too!



DIG A LITTLE DEEPER:

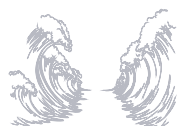
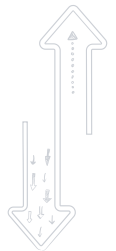
- * Do you tend to become "bitter" (angry, depressed state of mind, quick-to-anger, snappy, sarcastic, and rude) when things aren't going your way? How have you seen in your life that bitterness is toxic to you and those around you?



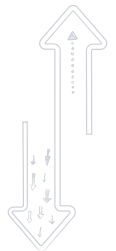
* Write a prayer that you can use in times of bitterness, asking Jesus to help you overcome this emotional state. Maybe fill it with some of the Biblical truths we discussed in this study about refocusing your gaze.

* Can you relate to what we discussed about delighting in the Lord? What parts of this are more challenging for you? Which parts do you find easy?

* Have others around you commented on your success? Or commented on how you have handled a difficult situation in a positive way? Write about this experience in your journal and then explain how you could craft your response to give God the glory.



* If you know Jesus, describe how you've noticed the Holy Spirit speaking to you, personally. Is it a whisper in your heart or could He possibly be communicating to you through dreams or through some other method? If you don't feel you've ever heard personally from the Holy Spirit, write a prayer asking Him to reveal His voice to you. John 10:27 says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (NKJV).



* Have you found Jesus to be your "Refuge"? What are some practical ways you could run to Jesus as a refuge throughout the week?



Reference Notes

¹Zondervan, NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, 2016