



A Pit, a Prison, and a Palace

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Please join me in prayer: *Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Finish these phrases of opposites for me:

It was the best of times...	it was the worst of times
The thrill of victory and...	the agony of defeat
Successes and...	failures
Highs and...	lows...

All these phrases define the dynamics active in Joseph's life struggle. One of the amazing things about his story is the dramatic movement we see from **worst** to **first**, from the **cellar** to the **ceiling**, from being *left for dead* to becoming a *preserver of life*. Truly he is the original *rubber band man*! – **not only** bouncing back from every misfortune that befalls him, but bouncing back **higher** and **higher** after every disappointment. Eventually, Joseph will become the second most powerful person in the known world.

In that lofty position, he manages to save **Egypt** from destruction, preserve his **own** people in the process, and he **also** preserves God's promise to his ancestors Abraham and Sarah, *that through them, through their descendants, all the people of the world would be blessed*. Not too shabby for a despised brother, former slave, ex-con, no?? He's living proof that a leopard **can** change its spots, that an old dog **can** learn new tricks.

Here's a summary of Joseph's story: Joseph, as a boy, is spoiled rotten. His dad doesn't hide it that he loves Joseph way more than all of his brothers combined – he's the one with that beautiful coat of many colors, he's the one who can do no wrong. Plus, he's a snitch – he tells on his brothers if they ever lie down on the job.

So one day the boys lose it with little Joe, and throw him into a pit. Some of the brothers want to kill him, but they decide instead to sell him to traders heading down to Egypt. Well, Joseph lands on his feet in the land of Egypt – as you heard, he's sold as a slave to **Potiphar**, Pharaoh's Captain of the Guard. And in no time at all, he becomes the **manager** of that man's whole estate, bringing his master great success.

Unfortunately, his freedom is short-lived. Let's talk about Joseph's behavior with Potiphar's wife. **Did you notice the two reasons he cites for not going to bed with her?**

1. In v. 8 he talks about the great **trust** that Potiphar has given to him – and he will not endanger that.
2. Then in v. 9 he also can indulge her desires because that would be *sinning against God*.

So fast forward to the time that Joseph is thrown in jail for something he didn't do.

What does it feel like to be falsely accused?

What would you be tempted to do if you'd been thrown in jail and knew you were innocent?

What does Joseph do? Amazingly, once again, he picks himself up, brushes himself off, and goes to work. Everything he does pleases the jailer – and the Lord – so much so, that eventually he's placed in charge of the entire prison!

Does anyone remember how Joseph gets out of prison?

Well, Joseph soon hears about two inmates who were servants of Pharaoh's court, and the **dreams** that are troubling them. The **baker's** dream is a **bad** omen, and sure enough he loses his head. But Joseph predicts that the **wine steward** will be released, and asks the man to mention him to Pharaoh, to get him out of prison. Yet at the end of chapter 40 we're told that the wine steward *did not remember Joseph, but forgot him*.

For two long years Joseph stays stuck in that prison...

Yet, as it turns out, **Pharaoh himself** is plagued by bad dreams, none of which can be interpreted by his advisors. Then one day the wine steward smacks himself on the head and tells the story of his dream in prison and of the man who interpreted it correctly. So Joseph is sent for, meets Pharaoh, hears his dream and:

- predicts 7 good years of harvest followed by 7 years of drought,
- is elevated to the 2nd most powerful position in the country and
- goes about saving the Egyptian people, the Israelite people, and making it possible for God to save all people throughout the world.

Does anyone remember how the story of Joseph ends?

- Famine in Israel, brothers come for food,
- Joseph knows who they are but they don't recognize him,
- he tricks them into confessing their crime of selling their brother
- eventually Joseph reveals himself to his brothers,

-forgives them for their evil intentions,
-and is able to bring his entire extended family down to Egypt. There they thrive in the most desirable part of the nation, and finally, their father dies of old age.

Now listen to this: 17 years have passed since Joseph forgave his brothers, saved their lives, and gave them the opportunity to thrive in a foreign land. All those years later, their father dies, and the brothers worry that maybe Joseph has been **faking** his forgiveness just for the sake of family unity while the old man was alive.

So they come to their powerful brother with a story. They tell him:

‘Your father gave this instruction before he died,¹⁷ “Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him.¹⁸ Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, ‘We are here as your slaves.’¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God?’²⁰ Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.²¹ So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.’ In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

And here we have revealed to us the most amazing aspect of this entire saga: Joseph has come to realize that his sufferings, though caused by others, had been turned by God into opportunities to bless others:

though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good.

This story amazes me for a couple of reasons: I wonder if I could:

- stand back up after so often being knocked down
- forgive betrayal, being falsely accused and forgotten
- endure suffering, trusting that God would turn it to good

But then I think of my mother-in-law, who suddenly became a widow around the age of 52. A traditional marriage, those first couple of years were a hard, lonely journey for Lenore as she learned how to make decisions and make life work as a single person – even as her heart continued to ache.

But learn, she did, and thrive, she did...and on top of all that, she learned to turn her grief into a gift. Before long, she started visiting others in town who had also lost **their** husbands or wives.

There’s a lot of pain in this world, and lots of people who are hurting. But, the good news of God in Jesus for **us** – **and** for the **world** – is that God is always working to turn that pain into good, to turn all who suffer into vehicles of blessing. May God always do that with you and me – take our pain and turn it into a blessing for others. Amen.