

Homework - Week 3

Day 1

Read Genesis 40

God often works through relationships. He places people in exactly the right place at the right time as part of His overall plan. We see it time and time again throughout Scripture, including in Joseph's life. In verses 1-3, we see that Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and baker are imprisoned in the very same place where Joseph is being held. It quickly becomes evident that this was not chance or coincidence. In fact, I don't think the word "coincidence" is part of God's vocabulary. He is always working behind the scenes!



Can you think of relationships in your life, that you might not have understood at the time, but looking back you can see God's hand on it? Explain.

It was divine intervention that Joseph ended up in the same prison as the cupbearer and baker. They had a crucial role to play in Joseph's destiny, as evidenced later in the story. Yet, here in chapter 40, they are all simply prisoners together in an Egyptian jail.

Read the verses below, and underline the word repeated 3 times to describe their condition:

"So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, in the jail, the same place where Joseph was imprisoned. ⁴ The captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time. ⁵ Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in jail..." (Genesis 40:3-5) NASB

Confined. The very word makes me uncomfortable. Just typing it out causes me to squirm in my chair, with a sudden urge to get up and take a walk outside. I don't like to be confined, restricted or bound. There is something deep in my soul that longs for freedom; and yet, for Joseph and these two royal officials, freedom was not a luxury they had. They were bound in prison, and their freedom had been stripped away.

In fact, Joseph had seen his freedom stripped away little by little starting with the moment his older brothers violently stripped his beloved coat from his body. That started a sequence of events that saw Joseph lose his privilege, homeland, and family. When he arrived in Egypt and was sold as a slave, he lost the freedom of choice. He was at the mercy of his master. As if that wasn't enough, he was then falsely accused and thrown into prison, losing even the basic freedom to go where he pleased. He was quickly becoming more confined than ever before.

Yet the last verse of Genesis 39 tells us that God was with Joseph in prison. God never left Joseph's side, and he continued to have favor everywhere he went.

Have you been, or are you currently, in a situation where you feel restricted or confined? What does that look like? Explain.

What emotions do you struggle with in seasons of restriction or confinement? Do you question God's presence, activity, or plan?

When we find ourselves in seasons where the restrictions and confinement only seem to increase, it can be hard to see God at work. Those times often don't feel very fruitful. Yet, it tells us that Joseph was prospering during this time of confinement.

What does prospering look like for you in times of confinement or restriction?

When we read the story of Joseph, it doesn't give us much insight into his feelings and emotions. All we can do is take an educated guess at the emotions he must have been experiencing. However, what we do see is how he reacted and responded in the various situations. Despite what his emotions and feelings might have been telling him, he continued to make godly decisions and walk in integrity. This prison season was no different.

Tomorrow we are going to look at some of the responses that Joseph had during this season. For now, **I want you to close out today's homework by asking God to give you a new perspective on your current season. If there is an area where you are feeling restricted or confined, take it the Lord. Ask Him to give you a peace that comes from knowing He is intimately involved even during those seasons.**

Day 2

There is no question that Joseph was in a very difficult place. Confined to prison for something he didn't do, he must have felt his youth slipping away in that cold, dark prison cell. I'm sure he cried out to God, wondering what in the world the plan could possibly be for this. Yet, once again we see Joseph's character on display.

Look at Genesis 40:4. What does it say Joseph did for the cupbearer and baker?

Joseph was put in charge of these two new prisoners, yet he still served and ministered to them. This is the same Hebrew word that we looked at in Week 2. As a reminder, this word in the Hebrew is *sharat* and it means "to wait on, to serve, to minister, to attend." It conveys yieldedness, servanthood, and obedience. It is more than just doing what is required and serving out of obligation.

In last week's reading, we saw Joseph serving his master, Potiphar, and not just because it was his job, but out of a heart to minister. In this chapter, we see Joseph serving those underneath him. There is a powerful lesson here for us!

Leadership is not about lording our position of authority over others. Despite the world's obsession with power and authority, God's idea of leadership looks strikingly different. A godly leader is one who puts others first and leads through serving. Joseph is a beautiful example of this.

Before you start thinking you can skip over this part because you aren't a leader, let me remind you that leadership is not reserved only for those with an official title. The truth is that everyone is leading in one way or another. If you have people that you influence, then you are leading. Whether it be children, friends, co-workers, or neighbors, we are all leading and influencing someone.

Have you experienced a leader in your life that served well? How did that affect his/her leadership and your response to them?

Why do you think we often resist serving those we lead?

Who are the people in your life that you are leading/influencing?

How can you better serve them?

Read Genesis 40:5-8. In these verses, we see a very specific way that Joseph served and ministered to the cupbearer and baker. **In verse 6, what does it say that Joseph saw?**



Let's stop right here. The very fact that Joseph was aware and noticed their emotional state tells us something right off the bat. **What can keep us from noticing the emotional state of those around us?**

What I have found in my life is that when I am consumed with my own problems and inward focus, it is very easy for me to completely miss the signs that someone around me is in pain or struggling with something. I'm not looking for it, because I can't get my eyes off myself. If anyone had reason to be consumed with their problems, it was Joseph. **Not only did Joseph notice their emotional state, what does it say he did in verse 7?**




He not only noticed their condition, but he asked them about it. If we are being honest, how many times do we notice someone is hurting or in pain and we act like we don't see it? Or we change the subject and talk about something less threatening? **Why do we sometimes shy away from acknowledging someone's pain and asking about it?**

If you aren't already squirming by this point, just bear with me because it gets even more intense. **Once the men answer Joseph and tell him why they are sad, how does Joseph respond in verse 8?**

OK, I'm just going to say it...I almost skipped right over this rather than including it in the homework. As I read these verses and God began to point out Joseph's sincere concern and care for the people in his life, it challenged me in a way that was very uncomfortable. I mean, surely God doesn't expect me to be like Joseph, right? Come on, this guy has just about achieved super hero status in my book by this point in the story. Who serves and leads like this anyway? Then I felt the Holy Spirit whisper, "I do." You are supposed to look like me. Ouch.

Joseph not only noticed their pain, he asked about it. Once they told him about their problems, he offered to go deeper and walk with them through it. He didn't just empathize with them and offer to pray for the situation. He didn't say some nice, feel-good words and walk away. He was willing to engage on a deeper level and make himself available to them in their time of crisis. Joseph demonstrated a sacrificial level of servanthood that I believe God wants all of us to walk out. I can't help but be reminded of the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus paid for us. Can we sacrifice our time, comfort, and to-do list in order to serve others in a similar way?

 **Who is God calling you to serve today? Is there someone you need to notice and listen to this week? Is there someone God is asking you to go deeper with? Trust that God works through relationships, and He has brought certain people into your life for a reason. Then serve them the way Jesus would.**

"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:12-13)

Day 3

Read Genesis 40:9-19. Here we see the cupbearer and the baker sharing their dreams, and Joseph giving the interpretations.

Do you think this stirred up memories of the dreams that God had given Joseph years earlier? What emotions do you think you might have been feeling if you were Joseph?

At this point, it has been 11 years since Joseph had his dreams about his future. Eleven long, hard, painful years with no sign that God even remembered the dreams much less was working to fulfill them.

Do you have dreams that you have been holding on to for a long time? Write them below.

 **Read Genesis 40:20-22.** How long did it take for the cupbearer and baker's dreams to come to pass?

Once again, I find my heart hurting for Joseph. He has been waiting years to see his dreams fulfilled, and suddenly he finds himself interpreting dreams that come to pass in 3 days. Three, short days! Even though we know that God's timing is not our timing, it doesn't make those situations any easier.

Have you ever struggled when people around you have had their dreams fulfilled sooner than you?

What emotions and feelings did you have to work through? Were you able to rejoice with them without letting bitterness take root in your heart?

In the story of Joseph, the reality was that circumstances and people weren't lined up yet for Joseph's dreams to come to pass. It simply wasn't time. The Bible is full of stories of people who waited for long stretches to see God's purposes fulfilled.

Read the following passage and answer the questions:

Genesis 12:2

Who did God make a promise to?


What was the promise?


How old was Abraham when he received the promise? (see Gen. 12:4)

Read Genesis 21:1-5. How old was Abraham when the promise was fulfilled?

Abraham waited 25 years before he saw God's promise to him fulfilled! This is just one example of many. David waited approximately 15 years from the time Samuel anointed him King of Israel until he finally took the throne. Those weren't easy years by any means! Caleb waited 45 years to receive the promise that God had made to him about entering the Promised Land (see Numbers 14:24). In fact, I want you to **go read Joshua 14:10-13 about Caleb seeing the promise fulfilled**. What an amazing picture of a man whose faith did not waver!

God's timing is never the same as our timing. Some of us will see God's promises come to pass quickly, while others will wait what seems an excruciatingly long time. The test is in how we wait.

 **Are you in a season of waiting right now? If you are, how would you rate your waiting posture? Are you anxious and antsy? Or are you peaceful and trusting?**

 **Look up the following verses on waiting and circle the one that speaks to you today: Habakkuk 2:1-3 // Isaiah 40:31 // Psalm 27:13-14 // Proverbs 3:5-6 // II Peter 3:9**

Spend some time asking God to give you a fresh perspective on those promises you are waiting to see fulfilled. If there are those around you that are seeing their dreams come to fulfillment, ask God to give you a true joy for them that doesn't stir up insecurity and doubts about your dreams and God's involvement.

Day 4

Time and time again, we read in the Bible about the importance of being faithful, even in the little things. **Look up the following verses and summarize what they say about faithfulness:**

Luke 16:10-12

Matthew 25:19-21

Luke 19:17

Proverbs 28:20

Joseph's life is a beautiful picture of faithfulness, his faithfulness to God and God's faithfulness to him. I love the theme of God's continual presence that we see demonstrated throughout the story. Yet, it is crucial that we don't miss the steadfast faithfulness that Joseph walked out day after day, year after year. Even during the incredibly difficult times, he remained faithful. Let's be honest, those are the times that it can be the hardest to faithfully walk out what God has asked us to do. When things aren't going the way we planned, when life is completely unfair and it feels/looks/sounds like God has forgotten about us, those are the times that our faithfulness is put to the test. How will we respond? Will we continue to do the things that we know God wants us to do? Will we remain faithful despite our circumstances?

Ask the Lord to reveal the little things that He is calling you to be faithful in during this season of life. Pray that He will give you the courage and strength to remain faithful, just as He remains faithful to you.

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Day 5

My middle child has a fear of being forgotten. Anytime we are at the store or out running errands, he will start panicking if he loses sight of me. Despite all my assurances that I am not going to leave him, the fear is still there. Maybe it is part of the middle child syndrome or just his age, but he needs to know that I am not going to forget about him! If we are being truthful, no one likes to be forgotten. We want to matter and know that people care about us, and when we are forgotten it is personal and painful.

Has there been a time recently that you were forgotten in one way or another? How did it make you feel?

Read Genesis 40:23. What does it say about the cupbearer?

Here is yet another hard pill for Joseph to swallow. Not only had he served and ministered to the cupbearer, but he also came alongside him and offered to help with the mysterious dream. Joseph was more than just a fellow prisoner locked up in the cell next door. He was the one that interpreted his dream, giving the good news of his impending release. All Joseph asked was that the cupbearer mention him to Pharaoh, in the hopes that he could escape his wrongful prison sentence. It didn't seem like a lot to ask!

Can you imagine the fresh hope Joseph must have felt as he watched the cupbearer walk out of that prison a free man? The Bible doesn't tell us exactly how long Joseph was in prison, but many scholars estimate it was 10-12 years. That was a long time to be locked up! He must have been thinking that his time had finally come. Maybe now someone would hear his story, and he would get the justice he deserved! But as day after day passed, and then week after week, that hope began to slowly fade away.

Have you ever been in a situation where it looked like things were starting to fall in place, and you began to dream and plan for how you were sure God was going to work things out? Explain. Did God end up working in the way you envisioned?

I am often guilty of the "I'll take it from here" mentality. God begins to stir a dream or vision in my heart, and I get excited and start to figure out how God might want to bring it to pass. All with the good intentions of "helping out" of course! I know it is foolish and crazy, and actually typing it out just confirms the absurdity of that line of thinking, but isn't that just like our human nature? God gives us a promise or dream, and we take off like a race horse from the gate trying to bring it to pass.

Have you ever tried to help God out with the execution of a promise or dream? How did that work out?

God knew exactly where Joseph needed to be and how long he needed to be there. Joseph probably hoped that God was going to use the cupbearer to rescue him; it only made sense! But God had different plans, and as we will see next week, it would be another 2 years before Joseph left that prison. I think sometimes when we are in times of waiting, we find ourselves eagerly looking for anything that might possibly be action on God's part. We end up pouncing like a wound up cat at any sign of movement. Excitement and hope begins to rise, because we think we have identified how God is going to move next! But ultimately our hope needs to be in God, and we have to trust that He has a plan that He will fulfill in His perfect time. The truth is that even if man forgets us, God will never forget us or leave us!

Summarize the following verses:

Isaiah 49:14-15

Joshua 1:9

Psalm 94:14

"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." (Psalm 46:10) NIV

This verse is one that I go back to often during times of waiting. That phrase "Be still," actually means "take your hands off." If we truly trust God, then we must take our hands off and stop trying to control or manipulate situations. We must let God work in His way and in His time.

Is there a situation today that you need to "Be still" and "take your hands off?" Pray and ask the Lord to help you wait well.

Group Discussion - Week 3

These are all the Group Discussion questions from this week's homework compiled onto one page. This page is designed to help facilitate table discussion at the next session. You can record your answers again on this page, or simply look back at your homework...whatever you prefer!

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Look at Genesis 40:1-3. God often works through relationships. He places people in exactly the right places at the right times as part of His overall plan. We see it, time and time again, throughout Scripture, including in Joseph's life. In verses 1-3, we see that Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and baker are imprisoned in the very same place where Joseph is being held. It quickly becomes evident that this was not chance or coincidence. **Can you think of relationships in your life, that you might not have understood at the time, but looking back you can see God's hand on it? Explain. (pg. 33)**

Read Genesis 40:5-8

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What can keep us from noticing the emotional state of those around us? (pg. 36)

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Who is God calling you to serve today? Is there someone you need to notice and listen to this week? Is there someone God is asking you to go deeper with? Trust that God works through relationships, and He has brought certain people into your life for a reason. Then serve them the way Jesus would. (pg. 37)

Read Genesis 40:20-22. God's timing is never the same as our timing. Some of us will see God's promises come to pass quickly, while others will wait what seems an excruciating long time. The test is in how we wait.

Are you in a season of waiting right now? If you are, how would you rate your waiting posture? Are you anxious and antsy? Or are you peaceful and trusting? (pg. 39)

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