

Bible Studies for Life: February 6

The Pitfall of Injustice • Genesis 39:21-23; 40:4-8, 20-23

By Paula Smith



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God was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison... Whatever Joseph did, the Lord made to prosper (Genesis 39:21-23 ESV).

We hear it all the time, don't we? It's so easy to say, "God, You're so good!" when there is a job to be had, kids are doing alright in school, parents are healthy, and no one is sick. Maybe we've unconsciously come to believe that when our experiences and circumstances are positive, we know the Lord's presence is with us.

What about those times when things are not going as planned? COVID has taken the job, one of the kids is not doing well, aging parents need special attention, and suddenly you're diagnosed with a disease. Do we believe then that the Lord's presence is with us?

Joseph's life can teach us a lot about how to separate awareness of God's presence from positive circumstances: *God was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison... Whatever Joseph did, the Lord made to prosper" (Genesis 39:21-23 ESV).*

Joseph had gone from favorite son with a secure future to a falsely convicted rapist in a foreign prison. During a period of thirteen years he was betrayed by his brothers, thrown in a pit, nearly murdered, sold into slavery, unjustly accused of rape, and then put into prison.

If God's presence is tied to blessings, it seems Joseph didn't have any evidence of God's presence with him. He suffered continuously through no fault of his own. How long did Joseph have to be a model prisoner before the jailer noticed him?

He certainly had reason to feel like a victim and blame God. He didn't know the rest of his story as we do today, but he remained faithful. How? Maybe this story is not about how Joseph was able to carry on under such miserable circumstances, but rather about God's love that endures no matter what.

God was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love... (Genesis 39:21 ESV).

As Joseph Davis so aptly stated in his book, *Surviving in Egypt: The Life of Joseph*, "Good times can make us delusional. Good times can make us forget we are still in Egypt. They can blind us to the intense spiritual war going on all around us. We confuse positive, temporary circumstances with God's blessings."

It was through Joseph's hard times that he became humble, compassionate, and selfless. God gave him the ability to interpret dreams. The Lord used this gift to put Joseph in a position to help others and to serve God.

I know there is a lot of rivalry and "totem pole building" inside a prison, just like there is outside one. Two men who were with the king daily, one who baked the king's bread and one who risked his life tasting the king's food, were in prison along with Joseph.

Joseph treated them with compassion. He gifted them by interpreting their dreams. Even though Joseph asked to be remembered to the king when the cupbearer was restored to his old life, it was not a condition for his help. He first interpreted the dream and *then* asked to be remembered to the king.

Yet still there was silence. The Bible doesn't record anything about Joseph's life during those next two years. All we know is that he was in prison for a crime he didn't commit. Nothing had changed. I cannot imagine the frustration.

Someone has told me that the feelings of frustration are the result of my expectations not being met. I'm sure it was Joseph's expectation that the cupbearer would remember him to the king. When I read Joseph's story, that certainly is my expectation for him!

For Joseph, nothing changed. Joseph was forced to be patient. He remained faithful while living in uncertainty.

King David stated this well: *How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hid your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? (Psalm 13:1-2 ESV).*

How long do we wait? As long as it takes. How did Joseph hold on to this faith? *It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 31:8).*

Joseph was able to endure immense frustration even though his life was so unfair, because he had faith in the promise of God. God will never leave us. That is an unconditional promise!

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