

Main Idea: In Genesis 41 we learn that the Almighty is the God who lifts up those who humbly trust in Him. We learn three reasons why we can trust Him as we watch the way He worked in Joseph's life.

When the Story Begins: Joseph was down...

1. He was betrayed by his brothers (ch 37).
 2. He was falsely framed by Potiphar's wife (ch 39).
 3. He was unjustly sent to prison by Potiphar (ch 39).
 4. He was forgotten by the Cupbearer (ch 40).
- I. We serve the God who reveals (1-32).
 - A. Pharaoh had a dream.
 - B. Pharaoh called for Joseph.
 - C. Joseph pointed Pharaoh's attention to God.
 - II. We serve the God who reverses (33-44).
 - A. When Joseph woke up that morning, he was a forgotten felon.
 - B. When Joseph lay down that night, he was the number two man in Egypt.
 - C. God made the difference.
 - III. We serve the God who rewards (45-57).
 - A. He rewarded Joseph with favor.
 - B. He rewarded Joseph with a family.
 1. Manasseh (51) = "forgetting"
 2. Ephraim (52) = "fruitful"

Make It Personal: Some questions to determine if I am humbly trusting the Lord

1. Is God Himself enough for me (and can others see evidence of it)?
2. What do I do when I start becoming anxious?
3. How do I respond when something good happens to me?

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 5:5-11

In Genesis 41 we learn that the Almighty is the God who lifts up those who humbly trust in Him. We learn three things about Him as we watch the way He worked in Joseph's life.

Why do bad things happen to good people?

Elie Wiesel was a man who suffered unjustly in a horrid, Nazi concentration camp. We today can not fathom the hellish experience he endured. It reduced what faith he had to a scorched cinder. Here's what he said in his book entitled *Night*:

“Never shall I forget that night, the first night in the camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget

*** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This message is adapted from two series at WBC in 1992 and 2002.

that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

“Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

“Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.”²

None of us is exempt from pain. We live in world of pain. Chuck Swindoll is right when he observes that every day children are stolen, abused, and aborted. Every day wives are battered. Every day spouses are abandoned by unfaithful partners. Drunk drivers maim and kill. Gossip and slander ruin reputations.³

We can't escape pain in life. But the greatest test is how we respond to it.

Viktor Frankl wrote, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing; the last of the human freedoms--to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."⁴

I hurt when I listen to people who have been victimized—both Christians and non-Christians. The accounts are incredible. There are a lot of hurting people around us. Their pain is intense. They can't escape from it. Perhaps I'm describing you.

How can we have the right attitude when our lives are inflicted by pain? There's no easy answer. I will not offer to you trite clichés. But having said that, I am convinced God gives us firm guidance for this delicate question. Where? In His Word, namely in the true account of the life of Joseph. Let's turn to Genesis 41.

Why is Joseph qualified to answer that question for us? We need to go back to our previous studies to answer that. Joseph had been hurt badly.

When the Story Begins: Joseph was down...

The pain came from several sources...

1. *He was betrayed by his brothers (ch 37).*
2. *He was falsely framed by Potiphar's wife (ch 39).*
3. *He was unjustly sent to prison by Potiphar (ch 39).*
4. *He was forgotten by the Cupbearer (ch 40).*

That's where we left off the last time. Genesis 40:23, “The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.”

Joseph's pain was excruciating. People had wounded him time and time again. He'd been forgotten by men. No doubt he wondered if he'd been forgotten by God.

He could have grown bitter and despondent. After all, two whole years from the prime of his youth were wasted in prison. He could have become cynical and sarcastic. But he didn't.

What kept Joseph going when he was in the pits? God was real to him. His relationship with God was his #1 priority in life.

We're going to see in this study that God's ways are not always our ways. But God's ways are always good.

² Elie Wiesel, *Night*, p. 32. (taken from C. Swindoll, *Joseph*).

³ C. Swindoll, p. 19.

⁴ From Swindoll, p. 20

When it seemed as though God had forgotten Joseph, He was still at work. God was still at the controls. Let's zero in on three steps that God controlled in Genesis 41.

I. We serve the God who reveals (1-32).

V 1a “When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream.”

Those words strike like a dagger--TWO FULL YEARS. For Joseph, those were two years of waiting, wondering, wishing, wanting, and working. There he was, locked up against his will, far away from the only person in his life who really loved him, his father. The days passed, the weeks, then the months, even years. Two years earlier a glimmer of hope flickered for Joseph when he interpreted the cupbearer's dream, and pleaded his case with him. But now the flicker was gone. Or was it?

No. God was still at the controls. Look what happened to Pharaoh...

A. Pharaoh had a dream.

Verse 1 says that Pharaoh dreamed. Pharaoh actually had 2 dreams. Here's the first:

Verses 2-4, “Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile, ² when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. ³ After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. ⁴ And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.”

This is an Egyptian dream. The Hebrew is precise. The cows came up out of THE river, that being the Nile. Pharaoh saw the cows coming up out of the river. In Egypt, cattle would stand almost submerged in the Nile river, for protection from the heat and the flies.

Pharaoh watched as 7 healthy cows left the water and came on the bank of the river. They were followed by 7 sickly cows. Here's the strange part of the dream. The 7 sick cows ate the 7 healthy cows! After seeing that, Pharaoh woke up! We would have too!

When he fell back asleep, he dreamed a second dream:

Verses 5-7, “He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. ⁶ After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted—thin and scorched by the east wind. ⁷ The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up; it had been a dream.”

The "east wind" (6) is a technical term for the desert wind. The Arabs actually distinguished between two "east winds," one that lasted 50 days and usually came in the Springtime, and another that was much shorter. In both cases, hot winds swept in from the desert and scorched and withered all plant life.

Watch what happened when Pharaoh got up in the morning. Verse 8, “In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.”

Pharaoh was the most powerful man in the country, if not in the world at the time. He had wealth and power. He called the shots and people jumped into action. Yet watch him here. He was miserable. His spirit was confused.

A lot of people are shook up these days. The world scene is unstable, that's true. But please remember that God is still on the throne of the universe! (see Isaiah 6)

Pharaoh looked for help. He called on the experts to help him, those trained in magic and witchcraft. His problem was that he looked for help in the wrong place.

We often do that, too, don't we? Where's the right place to look? Remember Jesus' words in Mathew 11:28, "Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Then guess who entered the scene? The cupbearer!

Verses 9-13, "Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. ¹⁰ Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. ¹¹ Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. ¹² Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. ¹³ And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged."

One words catches my attention here. It's in verse 9—*Today*. Just think of the timing, God's timing, in Joseph's life. Just at the right time, God brought the Midianite caravan to transport Joseph to Egypt. Just at the right time, God opened up a need for a slave in Potiphar's household. Just at the right time, God caused Joseph's path to cross with Pharaoh's cupbearer in prison. And just at the right time, God reminded the forgetful cupbearer that the prisoner Joseph could interpret dreams.

God's timing is perfect! There's no such thing as "chance."

What happened next?

B. Pharaoh called for Joseph.

Verse 14, "So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh."

You can imagine Joseph's appearance after 2 years in an Egyptian jail. Notice they shaved him. Hebrews wore facial hair. It was not appropriate in Egyptian etiquette.

How do you think Joseph felt when he heard he was being summoned by Pharaoh? Here was his chance for amnesty. Do you think he was afraid or nervous? Wouldn't you expect him to be intimidated as he stood before the most powerful man in the world, the man who had the power to set him free or send him back to prison?

Listen to the dialogue. In essence, it went as follows:

Pharaoh: "I've heard about you... You can interpret my dream." (15)

Joseph: "It's not me (16). "I can't."

What? Joseph, don't blow you're chance! Toot your own horn, fellow! God helps those who help themselves, right?! Wrong!

Joseph: "*God* will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

Did you see that? Right there is perhaps Joseph's greatest characteristics. *He pointed people to God!*

In chapter 39, he pointed Potiphar's attention to God (39:3). He also pointed the warden's attention to God (39:23). In chapter 40, he pointed the attention of the

Cupbearer and Baker to God (40:8). And here in chapter 41, when standing before Pharaoh, he turned the spotlight on God.

C. Joseph pointed Pharaoh's attention to God.

"God will do it," Joseph said. So Pharaoh proceeded and recounted his dream to Joseph in verses 17-24. Watch what Joseph did next. Once again, he pointed Pharaoh's attention to the true God.

v 25 "Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. *God has revealed* to Pharaoh what he is about to do."

v 28 ""It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do." What's that? Send seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine (described in verses 29-30).

v 32 "The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon."

So Joseph put the focus on God. Now answer this. Did Pharaoh catch on? Did his attention turn to Joseph's God? Look ahead in the dialogue to verse 39, "Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, '*Since God has made all this known to you*, there is no one so discerning and wise as you.'"

Look's like he got the point.

There's a lesson here for us. What's your ambition in life? Is it, as with Joseph, to make God great in people's eyes? Or is it to promote your own agenda?

There's step one in Joseph's journey from prison to the palace--God revealed. God revealed His sovereign plan for the world. He used two dreams of Pharaoh. And He gave His man Joseph the ability and opportunity to interpret the dreams.

II. We serve the God who reverses (33-44).

What did God reverse? Joseph's status.

Do you know what catches my attention in this scene? Joseph's confidence. Here he is before the great Pharaoh. He's a slave, worse than that, a slave with a criminal record. Yet you don't see him shaking in his boots. He's confident. Not in himself, but in his God!

Verses 33-36 "And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. ³⁵ They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. ³⁶ This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine."

Wow, what a great plan! Joseph exhibited great ingenuity and wisdom. He was a practical man. And Pharaoh recognized it.

Verses 37-40, "The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. ³⁸ So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" ³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰ You shall be in charge of my palace, and all

my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.”

What a turn of events! Just think of it. In less than an hour, Joseph went from the prison to the palace!

A. When Joseph woke up that morning, he was a forgotten felon.

A nobody. A slave. But...

B. When Joseph lay down that night, he was the number two man in all of Egypt!

What Pharaoh proposed, he performed. Verses 41-43, “So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.”⁴² Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph’s finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck.⁴³ He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, “Make way!” Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.”

Why did this reversal happen? It certainly wasn’t luck.

C. God made the difference.

Yes, God did it. God reversed Joseph's status.

You say, "Why did God wait so long?" I don't know. I doubt Joseph knew either.

That’s one of our great problems. We don't see things from God's perspective.

When we're inflicted by pain, we're tempted to ask: "Why did God let this happen to me? I was trying to live for Him, and look what happened."

Sometimes we act as though we deserve privileged information about God's sovereign plan. J.I. Packer describes that temptation in his outstanding book, *Knowing God*: “People feel that if they were really walking close to God, so that He could impart wisdom to them freely, then they would...discern the real purpose of everything that happened to them, and it would be clear to them every moment how God was making all things work together for good.”

But we don't always know. God's ways ARE higher than our ways.

Here's what Joseph says to us. We may not know WHY God does what He does. But we can be sure that He is in total control, and that He is good.

Our task is this. *Be faithful where you are.* Determine every day that you're going to live for Jesus Christ.

When the bottom falls out of our lives, you may find yourself thinking, “But I deserve better! I deserve a better job, better neighbors, better health...I deserve better!”

Joseph would say, "Leave that up to God. Be faithful where you are. God is totally capable of reversing your circumstances in His time."

Job went through this struggle, didn't he? He was a man who felt forgotten by God. We hear him say in Job 23:3-4, "O that I knew where I might find Him. I would set my cause before Him." And in Job 23:8-9, "Behold I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him..."

But listen to Job's affirmation in Job 23:10, "But He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tested me, I shall come forth as gold."

Notice Job said "WHEN He has tested me," not IF. There's no quick way to refine gold. Neither is there a quick way for God to refine our character.

A.W. Tozer said, "It is necessary for God to use the hammer, the file, and the furnace in His holy work of preparing a saint for true sainthood. It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply."

There's no doubt Joseph had been through the fire. He had been hurt deeply.

How can we have the right attitude when our lives are inflicted by pain? Genesis 41 tells us loud and clear that God is in control. In Joseph's case, God revealed, reversed, and finally...

III. We serve the God who rewards (45-57).

God rewarded Joseph! How? In two ways...

A. God rewarded Joseph with favor.

Verses 46-49, "Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt. ⁴⁷ During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. ⁴⁸ Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. ⁴⁹ Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure."

What a Cinderella story! From rags to riches! But don't lose sight of God! God did it! God promoted Joseph. God granted him favor with Pharaoh. God granted Joseph favor with the Egyptians.

I have a question. Do you think Joseph was "gun shy" after his third promotion? Remember this is the third time he's been promoted. What happened the first two times? The first time was in Potiphar's house. He started as a lowly slave, moved up the ladder to Potiphar's chief executive, and then was thrown into prison. So he started over. He was a prisoner, so he determined to be the best prisoner he could be. He was promoted to be the warden's right hand man. Just when it looked like he would get out, the cupbearer forgot him. His hopes were dashed again. He must have felt like a yo-yo.

Unlike some of us, Joe was not a pessimist. You don't see him grumbling, "Yea, I've been promoted, but I wonder what bad thing will happen next!"

God rewarded Joseph with favor. In addition...

B. God rewarded Joseph with a family.

Specifically, God gave him a wife, and 2 sons. Verses 50-52, "Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphara, priest of On. ⁵¹ Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." ⁵² The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering."

The Hebrew names of the sons are important:

1. *Manasseh (51) = "forgetting"*

Manasseh means "to take the sting out of a memory." Listen. Had Joseph been hurt in his life? Yes! Badly! Don't minimize his pain. Especially when we see how he

forgave his brothers in chapter 42. Don't ever get the idea forgiveness is easy. It's not. We need supernatural help.

2. *Ephraim (52) = "fruitful"*

I see a contrast here. No one thought of Joseph in 40:23. But everyone came to him in 41:57!

Sometimes you may feel like nobody knows what's going on in your life.

I remember taking a flight a few years ago. We flew to Rapid City, SD to visit my brother and his family. When Sherry and I left Dayton, it was gloomy and overcast. The 737 left the runway and cruised into the thick clouds. Minutes passed. As I peered out the window, I could see nothing but grayish, blah clouds. Until all of the sudden, the plane broke through the foggy blanket, and we were surrounded by bright blue sky and brilliant sunlight! Then something struck me. The sun had been shining all along! I just couldn't perceive it. The clouds blocked the sunlight and blue sky, but they were there nonetheless.

I don't know what's going on in your life right now. Perhaps you're on top of cloud nine, sailing along. Or perhaps your world is gray, and you're wondering if God has forgotten you.

Make It Personal: Some questions to determine if I am humbly trusting the Lord

1. *Is God Himself enough for me (and can others see evidence of it)?*
2. *What do I do when I start becoming anxious?*
3. *How do I respond when something good happens to me?*

I want to be very practical. In his book on the life of Joseph, Chuck Swindoll identifies two important responses that Joseph made that revealed that God was real to him. We need to make the same responses today.

During the waiting period, trust God without panic.

There is an old story of a father who took his young son out and stood him on the railing of the back porch. He then went down, stood on the lawn, and encouraged the little fellow to jump into his arms. "I'll catch you," the father said confidently. After a lot of coaxing, the little boy finally made the leap. When he did, the father stepped back and let the child fall to the ground. He then picked his son up, dusted him off, and dried his tears.

"Let that be a lesson," he said sternly. "Don't ever trust anyone."⁵

And that's the way a lot of people live. They don't trust anyone. Including God.

Listen friend, we can't avoid pain in our lives. Whether it's cancer or a broken relationship or a job termination. All of us will have cupbearers in our lives who will let us down when we need them the most. They'll forget us. And all we can do is wait.

But God isn't like the calloused father in the story I just told. He cares. He cares for us deeply. And we can trust Him totally.

In fact, during the waiting period, we must choose to trust Him. Rather than panic, we must *trust* Him (see also Ps 9:10; 20:7; 37:3, 5; 56:4, 11; 91:2).

⁵ [Bernie May, *Learning to Trust*, Multnomah Press, 1985, p. 4.](#)

A television program preceding the 1988 Winter Olympics featured blind skiers being trained for slalom skiing, impossible as that sounds. Paired with sighted skiers, the blind skiers were taught on the flats how to make right and left turns. When that was mastered, they were taken to the slalom slope, where their sighted partners skied beside them shouting, "Left!" and "Right!" As they obeyed the commands, they were able to negotiate the course and cross the finish line, depending solely on the sighted skiers' word. It was either complete trust or catastrophe.

That's a vivid picture of the Christian life. In this world, we are in reality blind about what course to take. We must rely solely on the Word of the only One who is truly sighted--God Himself. His Word gives us the direction we need to finish the course.⁶

One more response...

During the time of reward, thank God without pride.

During the time of reward, when God does remove the pain, when God does send the showers of blessing, when the sky is blue and the sunshine bright, *thank Him* without pride. Thank Him continually. And serve Him.

Joseph did. May we follow in His steps. If we do it will be evidence that God is real in our lives.

⁶ Robert W. Sutton.