

6: THE WAY

Navigating Your Path

The depth and isolation of his cistern and the darkness of his prison cell could easily have caused Joseph to challenge the plans and purposes God had given him. But, though he was rejected and assaulted by his brothers, his character defamed by those he served, and he suffered—long in fetters and a collar of iron (Psalm 105:18), Joseph refused to succumb to his difficulties and, instead, chose to trust God’s choices to bring about the ultimate good for his life (Romans 8:28).

Like Joseph, the Author and Finisher of your story (Hebrews 12:2) has not only determined your steps, He has chosen the methods, means, and experiences that will perfect your character (James 1:4) and purify your faith (1 Peter 1:7). Although you may not understand where He is leading, you can trust that He is guiding you along *right* paths (Psalm 23:3), and that His chief concern is who *you* become in the process (Romans 8:39).

In the end, Joseph would understand that if he had been delivered from the cistern, if he had been spared from fetters and irons, he would have missed what *“God meant... for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive”* (Genesis 50:20, NKJV).

Jeremiah 29:11 says, *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’”* (NIV). *“Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise”* (Hebrew 10:35-36, NKJV).

REJECTED

At the age of seventeen, the trajectory of Joseph’s life changed forever. Through dreams, God revealed his future. What wasn’t communicated was that the path to their fulfillment would be one of pain—judgment, rejection, character defamation, physical pain and long-suffering. Through time and process, Joseph would be made ready to bear his God-sized dream.

Read Romans 8:28-29. What can we confidently expect to result from the hardships God appoints?

While the fulfillment of God-given dreams reveals who *He* is, God’s primary goal is who *you* become in the process. The greater the dream, the greater the humility, dependence, and trust that is required. Judgment, rejection, character slander, physical pain, and long-suffering are

among the means God uses to stir us to self-examination and to develop greater dependency on Him.

Read Genesis 37:1-36.

What observations can be made about Joseph's character? _____

For what reasons did Joseph's brothers despise him? _____

Was their hatred for any fault of his own? Why or why not? _____

Read Psalm 139:23-24 from Joseph's perspective.

Return to Genesis 37. What cutting words might Joseph have heard before he was cast into the pit? (v.20) _____

Oftentimes, God uses the words and actions of others—positive and negative—to guide us along life's path. But just like Joseph's God-given dreams, the words and actions of his family could have negatively altered his character and changed the course of his life.

Although God can use the words and assessments of others to stir us to self-examination, why can't we allow their opinions to define us? _____

If Joseph allowed his brothers to label him, who would he be? _____

If he allowed his parents or his siblings to determine the validity of his dream, what might have occurred? _____

Why must the counsel and criticism of others pass through the filter of prayer and Scripture before it is taken to heart? _____

What was Joseph stripped of in verse 23? What might his coat have represented? _____

Considering the nature of Joseph's dreams, why was the ensuing trial necessary? _____

What must Joseph learn before he could rise to power? Read Matthew 23:11, Mark 9:35, 10:43-45, Luke 22:25-27, and John 13:14-17. _____

Return to Genesis 37. Did God allow Joseph's hardship because he was in sin? Why or why not?

In the darkness of the cistern, his brother's words must have pierced his heart through and through. Although Joseph was placed in the cistern by his brothers, why mustn't he blame them?

Why would holding them responsible only lead to his detriment? _____

Isaiah 45:7 says, *"I send good times and bad times. I, the Lord, am the one who does these things"* (NLT).

What did Joseph's cistern represent? (Consider Job 19:8.) _____

Lamentations 3:52-53, 55-57 says, *"My enemies without cause hunted me down... They silenced my life in the pit and threw stones at me. I called on Your name, O Lord, from the lowest pit. You have heard my voice: 'Do not hide Your ear from my sighing, from my cry for help.' You drew near on the day I called on You, and said, 'Do not fear!'"* (NKJV).

God promises to lead us along the best path to bring about our ultimate good. Why was this the *best* way for Joseph to arrive in Egypt? _____

Read Psalm 139:1-6 from Joseph's perspective.

Joseph was drawn from the cistern's depths and quickly whisked away by traders (Genesis 37:28), but his future usefulness would be determined by his response to the circumstances he would soon encounter.

ACCUSED

Shortly after arriving in Egypt, Joseph was bought by “*Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard*” (Genesis 39:1). Under his authority, “the providential hand of God was working to accomplish His divine purposes”ⁱ.

Read Genesis 39:1-23.

Consider Joseph’s environment. How was God equipping him for his future? _____

How did God reassure Joseph of His presence and favor in verses 2-5? _____

How was Joseph’s integrity “rewarded”? (vv.14-20) _____

Like the *Servant of All*, Joseph didn’t defend himself in the presence of his accusers (Matthew 27:11-14, Romans 12:19). Why? _____

How could a negative reaction have consequently altered his future? _____

How must Joseph have felt after being falsely accused and imprisoned for the second time? _____

What does Psalm 105:17-19 reveal about the difficulty of his circumstances? _____

Return to Genesis 39. Did Joseph *appear* to be any closer to the fulfillment of his dream? Where was he confined? (v.20) _____

How could Joseph’s unjust sufferings have caused him to grow despondent? _____

Consider the following descriptions of despondency: “**Despondent** implies a deep dejection arising from a conviction of the uselessness of further effort. **Despairing** suggests the slipping away of all hope... **Desperate** implies despair that prompts reckless action or violence in the face of defeat or frustration. [And] **hopeless** suggests despair and the cessation of effort or resistance and often implies acceptance or resignation”ⁱⁱ.

According to the synonyms listed above, how do those who have lost hope often react to their circumstances? _____

Hope (*elpis*) is “the confident expectation of future good”. Without it a man will give-up, resort to reckless action, or cease to believe God’s promises altogether. But with hope, a man will endure the most trying of circumstances because he confidently expects “a favorable future under God’s direction”ⁱⁱⁱ. “*All things work together for good...*”

How did Joseph’s actions reflect his continued hope and trust in God? _____

Did Joseph’s character change with his circumstances? How did he serve, even in the dungeon?

How did the Lord assure Joseph of His continued favor? (Genesis 39:21-23) _____

Read Psalm 139:7-12 from Joseph’s perspective.

Once again, Joseph saw God’s hand at work in his life. Warren Wiersbe said, “[Joseph] didn’t know how God would accomplish [His promise] or when it would happen, but he knew that God was faithful”^{iv}.

Read Psalm 27:10-14.

THE WAIT

Continue reading: Genesis 40:1-23.

According to verses 4, 6-7, what had Joseph learned about being in authority? _____

“*Do not interpretations belong to God?*” (Genesis 40:8, NKJV). Perhaps Joseph once had preconceived ideas about the way God would fulfill what He had spoken. What danger lies in this?

At any time in your life, has God failed to work according to your requests or expectations? Explain.

Review Isaiah 55:8-9.

What evidence supports the fact that Joseph did not hold his brothers responsible for his past and present circumstances? (v.15) _____

According to verse 14, where did Joseph place his confidence? _____

The New Living Translation says Psalm 146:3, 5 this way: *“Do not put your confidence in powerful people; there is no help for you there. But joyful are those who have the God of Israel as their helper, whose hope is in the Lord their God”*.

The man who *could have* helped Joseph did not so much as utter his name in Pharaoh’s presence. “Joseph was putting his trust in what a man could do instead of depending on what God could do. He was getting impatient instead of waiting for God’s time”^v. Joseph would soon learn that his circumstances would change at God’s bidding.

Have you ever blamed someone else for the apparent delay in your “progress”? According to Acts 17:26 and Job 14:5 who controls the times? _____

What was being produced in Joseph as he endured confinement? (Review Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:2-4.) _____

Genesis 41:1 continues, *“Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that the Pharaoh had a dream...”* (NKJV). *“God was with [Joseph] and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh...”* (Acts 7:10, NKJV). Joseph’s iron collar was traded for a chain of gold (Genesis 41:42). *“And Pharaoh called Joseph’s name Zaphnath-Paaneah”* (v.45, NKJV), which means **“God speaks and He lives”**! Read Proverbs 22:29.

Now read Psalm 139:13-18 from Joseph’s perspective.

After thirteen years, Joseph had come to believe that God determined his days, numbered his months, and appointed his limits (Job 14:5). He understood that God predetermined his way and his good works, and He purposed from the beginning to *“bring [him] forth as gold”* (Ephesians 2:10, Job 23:10). Joseph trusted that God was guiding him through the story He had written for his life. And that His way was the only way.

In closing, Psalm 23:3 says, *“He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to His name”* (NLT).

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- ⁱ Wiersbe, Warren W. (2001). *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Genesis – Deuteronomy* (143). Colorado Springs, Colorado: Cook Communications.
- ⁱⁱ Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. (Eleventh ed.) Springfield, Mass.: Meriam-Webster, Inc.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row, P., & Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). *Harper's Bible dictionary* (1st ed.) (402). San Francisco, California: Harper & Row.
- ^{iv} Wiersbe, Warren W. (148).
- ^v *ibid*