

INTRODUCTION

Genesis 50 is the last chapter in the book of Genesis. Last week we talked about Joseph’s Mystery, why is it that good, faithful people suffer? Today we are going to talk about Joseph’s Ministry, how he took the mystery of suffering and turned it into a ministry to help other people. The story of Joseph takes up the last 25% of the entire book of Genesis and it’s a great story. Tonight I am going to summarize some of the lessons we learn from the life of Joseph.

Last week we left Joseph in prison. He had been arrested and falsely accused of molesting the wife of Potiphar and while he was in prison he helped a butler and a baker. There he was left and forgotten for two long years. For the next 12 chapters a lot of things happen. I can tell you that story. We have a person in our church who is one of the greatest Bible story tellers in all of America. This person is very talented at taking the Bible and telling it in a way that makes it very interesting. This person just happens to be my wife, Cindy. So Cindy is going to tell you the story of Joseph from the time when he is in prison until what we are going to be talking about tonight. Thank you, sweetheart.

We left Joseph last week in prison. His life has been a total roller coaster. He was the favored son and then his brothers sold him into slavery. He worked his way up until he was running Potiphar’s house and doing all these wonderful things and Mrs. Potiphar has him thrown into jail and that’s where we find him. But the Bible says the Lord was with Joseph even in prison. It wasn’t long before Joseph was running the prison while we find the warden sitting back with his feet propped up reading *Sports Illustrated* and making bets on the next chariot races while Joseph is running the prison. It’s there that he touches two lives, the baker and the butler. Sure enough, just as their dream had foretold, each of their lives became exactly what God meant for them to be. The butler went back to Pharaoh and presented him with wine once again and the baker was killed. Before the butler left, Joseph said to him, “Please don’t forget me. Remember me to Pharaoh for I really haven’t done anything wrong.” The butler’s last words to Joseph were these. “I won’t forget you!” and off he went and he didn’t forget him. Two years later he remembered him.

Joseph bided his time and two years later something happened to Pharaoh that caused the butler to remember Joseph. Pharaoh had two dreams. He woke in the middle of the night after one dream and wondered, “What in the world could that have meant?” He went back to sleep and had another dream and when morning came, he was so disturbed by what he had dreamed he called all his wise men together and said, “Tell me what this means.” No one could tell him. Then, the butler said, “I remember this guy, a Hebrew boy in prison. He could interpret dreams. Pharaoh said, “I want him here right now!”

Suddenly, Joseph’s life takes another turn. He is taken out of prison, bathed, given new clothes and there he stands—a Hebrew boy before the Pharaoh of all of Egypt. Joseph stood there and the Pharaoh said, “I hear you can interpret dreams.” Joseph said, “Not I, but God can interpret dreams. Tell me what your dreams were.” So the Pharaoh described the two dreams. “The first one was this. I was standing by the Nile River when suddenly seven fat cows came up out of the river and began to graze alongside the Nile. Then, right behind them came seven skinny cows. Their ribs were even showing and they came and consumed the seven fat cows.” Joseph said,

“Okay. What was your second dream?” The Pharaoh said, “It was this. Alongside the Nile grew a stalk of wheat and on it came six fat kernels. Then, below them grew six skinny, shriveled kernels. The shriveled kernels consumed the fat ones. Now what do those dreams mean?” Joseph said, “Well, both of those dreams mean the same thing, and because the Lord has given you two dreams this is a double impact. It’s going to happen and it’s going to happen soon. Here’s what they mean. Egypt is going to face seven years of plenty. There will be so much produce she won’t be able to eat it all followed by seven years of the greatest famine this country has ever known. The famine will be so great you will forget the seven years of plenty. You know, Pharaoh, I think if you are a smart man, you will find somebody to develop a plan so your country can be saved. As a matter of fact I would go ahead and divide your nation into five areas and build great storehouses. During those seven years of plenty I would fill those storehouses to the brim! Then, when the famine comes along, you’ll have grain to sell to all of those in need.

Can’t you just see Pharaoh sitting there on the edge of his throne listening to all Joseph has to say? When Joseph finishes, Pharaoh sits back and says, “Wow!” He looks at his wife and says, “Do you realize this man is full of the spirit of God?” Even those who don’t know the Lord can sometimes see him at work. He turns to his wise men and says, “Do you know anybody wiser than this guy to put this plan into a program for our nation?” No one did. He turned back to Joseph and said, “Joseph. I want you to be the man to do that for us!” He took off his signet ring a sign of power and put it on Joseph’s hand. He put a thick, gold chain around Joseph’s neck and gave him new clothes. He said, “Joseph, from this day forward you are second in command in all the nation of Egypt. Only I will be over you.”

Can you believe Joseph’s life? He’s a Hebrew boy who had been enslaved and imprisoned and suddenly God puts him second in command in the whole nation of Egypt. The Pharaoh even gave him a chariot and said, “From now on whenever you ride in this chariot across our country someone will go before you and yell out, “Kneel down. Joseph is coming, second in command in Egypt.” The last thing Pharaoh gave Joseph was a wife. And the seven years of plenty began. Egypt was blessed beyond measure. There was so much grain it wasn’t long before the storehouses were filled to overflowing so much that no one knew how much they even had. Even Joseph’s own life was filled to overflowing during that time, for God blessed him with two sons. The first one he called, “Made to forget” for God has caused me to forget all the things that have happened in my life. The second one he called “Fruitful” for God has made my life so fruitful and blessed me beyond measure, and Joseph’s life truly was blessed.

Just as he had predicted, the seven years of plenty were followed by a great famine. The famine was so great, it wasn’t long before the people were coming to Joseph to buy grain. Joseph’s whole life had been a school. He had been learning all along just for what he was about to do. When Joseph was a slave in Potiphar’s house, he was dealing with the rich and famous. He was dealing with the military, the high and the mighty of the country. Can’t you see him planning parties and having to deal with them and all their ways and means? Then he was in prison and who was he dealing with there? The lowest of the low, the scum of the earth, the criminals, the ignorant, the poor. Joseph had been in training, for now as head of all this grain program who came to Joseph to buy grain? The rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant. Everyone had to come before Joseph and he had to give them what they needed.

The famine wasn’t just in Egypt. It spread beyond Egypt, even into the land of Canaan and guess who got hungry in Canaan? Jacob and all the brothers and their families. Jacob called the ten older brothers together one day and said, “Guys, I hear that Egypt has plenty to eat. I’m going to give you some money and I want you go down there and buy plenty of grain for our family.” So they did. They took the money and off the ten brothers went down to Egypt. When they got there, they learned they had to go before a man whose name was not Joseph, it was an Egyptian name, but that’s who they went before to buy their grain. And so they went they walked into the room and they bowed down before Joseph, himself! Immediately, Joseph recognizes his first dream coming true. Do you remember his first dream as a boy? “My sheaf of wheat stood tall and yours bowed down before me.” Here they were to buy grain. Joseph looked at them and they looked at him, but they didn’t see Joseph. It had been over 20 years since that young boy had been sold into slavery and the man that stood before them was not a Hebrew, he looked like an Egyptian, he talked like an Egyptian, his ways and customs were those of an Egyptian ruler. Joseph immediately knew who they were. Can you imagine the turmoil in his heart? “Here are the guys who sold me into slavery!” Joseph didn’t know what to do. He asked them through an interpreter, “What are you here for?” They said, “We’re here to buy grain.” Joseph said, “No, you’re not. You’re spies!” They said, “We’re not spies. We’ve just come to buy grain.” He said, “Do you have other family? Can you prove you are not spies?” They said, “Yes. We have a father an old man and we have a younger brother.” Joseph began to think, “What am I going to do to find out if their hearts have changed?” So do you know what he did? He turned to the head guard and said, “Take these men and throw them in prison.” Do you know what happened as the brothers were being led off to prison? They said to each other, “This is happening to us because of what we did to Joseph all those years ago” not knowing that Joseph could hear and understand everything they were saying.

For three days they sat in prison. I’m sure they whined and moaned and groaned and blamed everybody but themselves for what was happening. Can you imagine what was going on in Joseph’s life? I see Joseph spending three days in intense prayer with God. “Lord, just let me leave them in prison. I don’t want to deal with them. Look what they have done to me, Lord. Then, his heart begins to change. The Lord says, “No this is what you need to do.” and a plan unfolds. Three days later the brothers are brought out of prison and before Joseph again and his plan begins. Joseph said, “I have decided not to put all of you in prison. I am going to choose one of you. He will stay in prison and the other nine can buy your grain and take it back to your home but you must get your younger brother and bring him back to me to prove you do have a family and that you are not spies!” Well, the brothers agreed that was great and Joseph chose Simian out of the ten for some reason and had him thrown into prison. Simian was put into prison the other nine gathered their grain and terrified, they left as fast as they could and headed back to Canaan. They stopped that night for a rest and opened their sacks of grain for something to eat. To their horror there sitting in the top of the sacks was the money that they had paid for the grain. “What is God doing to us?” they said. They gathered up all of their sacks and all of their goods and immediately went home. They went before Jacob, their father, and told him the whole story. Jacob too was terrified but Jacob was more afraid of losing Benjamin, the youngest son, than of what was happening to Simian. They must not have liked Simian at all. They just left him there! Jacob said, “We will stay here. We will eat this grain and Benjamin will remain with me. We’re not going to do anything.” and they didn’t until they got hungry again.

The grain didn’t last forever and the brothers came before Jacob and said, “We have to go back and we have to take Benjamin with us. Well, Jacob realized he was up against a wall and he had to do something. Suddenly, Judah, one of the brothers steps forward and says, “Father, I’ll take responsibility for Benjamin and if something happens to him, you place all the blame on me.” So, Jacob relents and sends Benjamin with the other brothers and off they go to Egypt. When they arrive in Egypt, Joseph hears they are coming and that they have Benjamin with them so he says, “Send them to my house and tell them that I am going to serve them dinner.” They were sent to Joseph’s palace and as soon as they walk in the door the brothers are nervous and they immediately go to the housekeeper and say, “Here’s our money for the grain last time and here’s our money for the grain this time and we have brought all kinds of gifts. We’ve brought spices and myrrh and balm to give to your leader.” Two interesting things happen. First, the housekeeper says, “Well, your God must have put that money in your sacks magically because we don’t need your money you paid.” The second thing is this: Do you know the gifts they brought Joseph? Do you know those were exactly the same things that the Ismaelite traders had when they bought Joseph and took him to Egypt?” Well they gave all these gifts to Joseph and when Joseph came out into the room, he looked at the brothers he had Simian brought out and then he turned to Benjamin. He said, “God be gracious to you, youngest brother.” Then Joseph had to leave the room. He was so overcome he began to weep and he had to go back to his room and gather himself together. Here was his brother his only brother that he really loved after twenty years.

Joseph gathered himself together and went back out. He seated everyone for dinner and surprisingly seated the brothers in order of their age. Then he began to feed them but when he came to Benjamin, he served him five times as much food as the rest. Oh, the brothers had a great time! They partied and they ate well and things were going great! When dinner was over they got their sacks of grain and when dinner was over, they headed back to Canaan. They were so happy! Life was so good! But they didn’t know Joseph had another plan. He had taken his silver cup and hidden it in Benjamin’s sack. As soon as the brothers took off Joseph waited a little while and then he turned to the housekeeper and said, “Take some men with you and go and find them. They have stolen my silver cup.” So, they head out. Can’t you see the brothers sitting around the campfire? “Boy, isn’t this great? Everything is going great in our lives. We’ve got all the grain we want. Benjamin is going back home. Dad won’t be mad at us.” Suddenly, they see a little cloud of smoke getting closer and closer until they realize “They are after us!” When the Egyptians get there, they say, “You’ve stolen from our master!” “We have not!” “You have! You’ve stolen his silver cup!” and the brothers said, “I’ll tell you what! If you find that silver cup, you can kill the brother who took it and the rest of us will be your slaves. That’s how sure we are that we did not take anything from your master!” They began to go through the sacks oldest first all the way down and when they opened Benjamin’s sack there was the silver cup! The brothers were distraught. Their lives went from good to bad in an instant! They said, “What are we going to do?” The housekeeper said, “I don’t want you to be our slaves. We don’t want to kill anyone. We’re simply going to take this youngest boy back and he’ll be a slave for our master.” The brothers knew that wouldn’t do and everybody loaded up and headed back to Egypt and were presented before Joseph. Joseph stood there and there stood all his brothers. They began to weep and wail and talk among themselves about what they had done in the past and how God was doing this to them. Suddenly, Judah stepped out again before Joseph and he told Joseph the story of his father and how his father had lost his favorite son and how this youngest

boy was the one he loved the most and how it would kill his father if the youngest one didn’t come home. Judah said, “Please, take me as a slave in his place.” That’s a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus. As a matter of fact do you know what tribe the Lord Jesus’ family is through? The tribe of Judah!

Joseph was so overcome by his plea he cleared the room of everybody except the brothers. He stood before them and he said, “Come closer, guys, and look. It’s me. It’s Joseph. I’m your brother!” They couldn’t believe it. They stood there and they looked at him and then they came closer and Joseph said, “It’s really me!” He could see the fear on their faces. Joseph said Romans 8:28, in the Old Testament.” He said, “Guys, what you meant for evil, God meant for good.” He was in control all along. And that’s exactly right. God had a plan and Joseph was the man who was to carry out that plan. Joseph moved his brothers and their families and his father down to the land of Egypt and he fed them and kept them alive. Those small numbers probably less than a hundred grew to over a million people strong as God’s nation grew. Do you know what? It’s just amazing what God can do when a man realizes God has real control of his life and if a man truly trusts and obeys the Lord.

Now you know the story of Joseph. We’re doing “tag team” preaching here, you know. Now, all I want to do is just make the application to the life of Joseph. Read with me Genesis 50:15-20. We want to summarize the life of Joseph by pointing out five applications. This is after Jacob, the father, has died.

“When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, ‘What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?’ So, they sent word to Joseph, saying, ‘Your father left these instructions before he died: [We don’t know whether he really did or not] ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now, please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.’ When their message came to him, Joseph wept. His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. ‘We are your slaves,’ they said. But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.’”

What started out as a terrible life experience of being sold into slavery of being unjustly accused of a crime he never committed and then serving time for it, being forgotten in prison, all the bad things that happened in his life, I’d say Joseph turned out marvelously. What I want to share with you tonight is if you want God’s best for your life, if you want Genesis 50:20 to be true in your life, you need to learn the lessons of the ministry of Joseph and here they are.

Life Principle #1: You can experience God’s best if you will react positively to negative experiences

Number one, you can experience God’s best if you will react positively to negative experiences. I assure you, you are going to have trouble in this life. Things are going to go wrong; things are going to go bad. There are going to be days when you say, “Why did I even get out of bed?” There are going to be times you feel so lousy about the way people are treating you and the way

circumstances are, you just want to throw up your hands and say, “What’s the use?” Negative experiences are going to come. You can’t control that. The only thing you and I can control is how we react to them how we respond to them. If, like Joseph, you will learn to respond positively to negative experiences, God can bless you and use you.

Joseph is sold into slavery, he becomes a slave, a servant in the house of Potiphar, and what does he do? He says, “Well, I’m just going to be positive about this. I’m going to just do what I can do!” He’s in prison. “What am I going to do? Am I going to sit in a cell and have a pity party and say ‘Oh, woe is me! This is terrible! This is awful!?’ No I’m going to make the best of it!” So, if you will learn to react positively to negative experiences you are on your way to being blessed by God. There is a New Testament verse that encourages us to do that. James 1:2 says, “My brothers, consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds.” Do you know what that means? That means when difficulties come into your life, you ought to look at those difficulties and you ought to say, “Hot diggity dog!” You ought to say, “Praise the Lord! I’m going to approach this thing with joy!” and you turn a negative into a positive.

Life Principle #2: You can experience God’s best if you do your best wherever you find yourself

Here’s the second life principle: Do your best wherever you find yourself. The problem with most of us is we want to change our circumstances or change our location or change the situations of our lives. Wherever we are we tend to say, “I’m not real happy here. If I could just do this, if I could just move into this job, if I could just have this financial situation, if these things could just change in my job I’d be a lot happier!” Did you notice one of the things Cindy pointed out about Joseph? Wherever he was he did the very best he could do! When he was a servant, a slave to Potiphar, he did such a great job Potiphar said, “Son, I’m going to put you in charge of my whole family, my whole business, you’re in charge of it!” He goes to prison. What does he do? He becomes the best prisoner in the whole prison. The warden says, “Son, you do such a good job I’m going to put you in charge of the whole prison.” He gets out and he goes to Pharaoh and Pharaoh says, “Son, I’ll tell you what, you’re sharp! I’m going to put you in charge of this entire nation!” What’s the lesson that we learn? Bloom where you are planted! Don’t spend all your time saying, “I want to change my situation!” Instead, make the best of your situation!

Have you ever heard the little story that says, “Life is like a train ride?” Although few of us ever ride trains anymore, it says, “Life is like a long train ride and most of us spend all of our time just wanting to get to our destination and that’s the only thing that really matters! The destination. When am I going to get there?” Life is not the destination. Life is the trip itself. Life is what happens when you are on your way to doing those things you think you ought to be doing. So wherever you find yourself, in whatever condition or situation, make the best of it. Isn’t that what Paul wrote to all those Christians at Colosse. He said, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.” (Colossians 3:23) Some of you instead of trying to change your situation need to concentrate on doing the best you can do in your situation.

Life Principle #3: You can experience God’s best if you see every experience as good

training for something else

Here’s life principle number three: You need to see every experience as good training for something else. Cindy also pointed out in her story that when Joseph was in Potiphar’s house, he dealt with the military. He had to understand Egyptian protocol. When he was in the prison, he dealt with the lowest of their society. Do you know what he was doing? He was saying, “What I am learning about people, whether they are the high and mighty or the low and weak, I am learning so that I can deal with them later.” Every experience of life is school, it’s training. I think one of these days I’m going to write a book called *The University of Affliction*, because every experience we go through in life can be good training for us.

Let me give you a New Testament example. Again the Apostle Paul is in prison. He could give up and say, “This is it! I am ineffective! I can’t preach.” Instead, look what he said to the church at Philippi. “Now, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me” meaning he was arrested and imprisoned, “has really served to advance the gospel. As a result it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.” He was saying, “Some people could look at my prison situation and they could say, ‘You’ve blown it, buddy! You’ve lost your opportunity to preach.’” He said, “You know I don’t think so. I think while I’m in prison I’m going to make the best of it and I’m going to let this be a training experience for me. I’m going to use my situation for the glory of God. I’m chained to a Roman guard, I’m a prisoner.” These Roman guards took three 8-hour shifts and he would be chained to a Roman guard for 8 hours. Don’t you know when one guard would come in, Paul would say, “Hi. My name’s Paul. What’s your name?” “Marcus.” “Marcus, did I ever tell you about the time when I was on the road to Damascus? I was killing Christians and suddenly Jesus appeared in a shining light and said, ‘Paul, why are you persecuting me?’ He just gives his testimony. Eight hours later another guard gets chained to him. He says, “Hi. My name’s Paul. What’s your name?” “Lucius.” “Hi, Lucius. Did I ever tell you about the time I was on the road to Damascus and I was persecuting Christians?” He used a bad situation to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. So whatever you are going through right now consider it good training for other experiences.

Life Principle #4: You can experience God’s best if you always try to be a blessing those who don’t know God

Here’s life principle number four: Always try to be a blessing to those who don’t know God. To me that’s one of the greatest things about the story of Joseph. Joseph was the only one for a period of time in Egypt who believed in the one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They had all kinds of gods in Egypt. They had Osiris, Isis, the god of the Nile, the god of the flies, etc. But did you notice when Pharaoh said, “Hey, I hear you can interpret dreams.” Joseph said, “I can’t, but God [singular] can.” Just by being faithful and honoring God, he caused Pharaoh and other people who didn’t even know God to say, “You know. There must be something about your God because you are so honest, you’re full of integrity and you’re such a helper. I want to know more about your God.” Sometimes the only Bible people ever read is your life. At school, in the workplace, some of your friends who never come to church and never read the Bible are looking at your life. Don’t ignore them! Don’t avoid them! Instead, just be a blessing to them. It’s a great opportunity and that’s what Joseph did. Here’s the New Testament admonition. It was the prophet, Zechariah, who tells us about the importance of blessing others.

It says, “As you have been an object of cursing among the nations, O Judah and Israel, so I will save you and you will be a blessing.” In other words God said, “I saved you to be a blessing not just to have a blessing. I saved you to be a blessing to others. Do not be afraid but let your hands be strong.”

Life Principle #5: You can experience God’s best if you realize that God never stops testing you

The final lesson I learned from the life of Joseph is you realize that God never stops testing you. James 1:3 says, “because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” Did you read that passage in Genesis 50, that we looked at a while ago? Do you know why Joseph showed so much kindness and grace and forgiveness to his brothers? For the sake of his father. But now his father is dead. Joseph could have said to these brothers who sold him into slavery and ruined his life, “Hey, now that Daddy’s dead, do you think you’re going to get anything from me? Forget it, buddy!” He could have thrown them all in prison. He could have had them executed. This is talking about forgiveness. Look at Genesis 50:17 again. “I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly. Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” We’re talking forgiveness in the book of Genesis! This is Old Testament where it said “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” Because Joseph was betrayed and sold by his brothers into slavery he had every right to betray his brothers put them in jail and sell them as slaves. I’m so glad Joseph knew the God of forgiveness even though it’s in the Old Testament. What we see is Joseph refusing to be bitter refusing to seek revenge, refusing to get even, and instead showing grace and forgiveness.

This is toward the end of his life. This is after Jacob dies. You would think by this time Joseph had passed all the tests but not so. Here’s one important final test. I don’t care how long you have known the Lord. You might have been a Christian for 50 or 60 years. Don’t ever get so overconfident that you think, “God will never test me anymore. I have passed all the tests that there are.” No. God keeps on testing you to the end so keep on being faithful to the end. Don’t ever stop growing as a Christian! Don’t ever stop being faithful.

The Bible says that the Christian life is a race and there is a finish line. The finish line is Jesus. It’s when we will see Jesus face-to-face; Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. All of us are going to cross this finish line when either one of two things happen. We’re either going to cross this finish line at the Rapture of the Church when Jesus comes back or we’re going to cross that finish line at our death—one or the other. The question I have for you today: How are you going to cross that finish line? Are you going to be dragging and sort of ease your way across the finish line? Did you know athletes that run the best kind of race always reserve a little energy and strength for the end so regardless of how tired they are, when they get about 50, 100 or 200 yards from the finish line, even if they have been running a marathon they pour it on so that at the end they can stretch out and can sprint across that finish line. Don’t you want to cross the finish line sprinting, faithful until the very end? The question I have for you today is: Has there ever been a time in your past that you were more committed to Jesus Christ than you are today? Have you slowed down? God keeps testing you to the end so don’t ever slow down, never quit!

Those are the lessons from the life of Joseph. Be positive in negative experiences. Wherever you

are, you should do your best. Bloom where you are planted. Every experience in life is training and always be a blessing to those around you. Remember this is a test!

OUTLINE

Life Principles:

You can experience God’s best for your life if you:

1. React positively to negative experiences
2. Do your best wherever you find yourself
3. See every experience as good training for something else
4. Always try to be a blessing those who don’t know God
5. Realize that God never stops testing you



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes