

# Week Three

*Living in the Shelter of a Sovereign God . . .*

## *When Your Hopes are Dashed*

I once heard that the gap between our expectations and our reality is our “MISERY FACTOR.” We have a picture in our minds of what our lives – and the people in them – ought to look like and act like. But when that picture doesn’t actually happen, we end up in the McDonalds drive-through ordering a super-sized Big Mac extra value meal, washing it down with a triple-shot caramel macchiato, and then attempting to override the guilty feeling with a trip to Ann Taylor Loft. And why not indulge in one of those big, buttery mall pretzels on the way out?

Okay, so maybe you don’t medicate your misery with food and shopping, but you get the idea. Things don’t always work out the way we want them to and we all have our ways of dealing with the disappointment. Unfortunately, most of our coping methods are powerless to protect us from the anger, bitterness, anxiety, and depression that can overwhelm our hearts when our hopes are dashed. If we aren’t careful, that “misery factor” can become the driving force of our lives.

If anybody knows what it’s like to live in the midst of an ever widening gap between expectation and reality, it’s Joseph. This week we will stand by and watch as his heart is filled with the hope of release from his undeserved imprisonment. Then we will watch as the unexpected forgetfulness of a thankless cupbearer shatters that hope and confronts Joseph with yet another crisis of faith. It won’t be hard for us to imagine how Joseph felt, because most of us have been there ourselves. The challenge this week (and for the rest of our lives!) will be to emulate Joseph’s response.

If Joseph has anything to teach us this week, it’s this: Disappointment is inevitable, but misery is optional. So put down that Big Mac and indulge yourself in the much needed reminder of God’s perfect faithfulness in *every* situation.

# Day 1

Are you ready for some “who, what, when, where, why” again? I know some of you love this sort of thing. But if you are like me, it’s not your favorite and you are tempted to jump ahead to the questions. Please know that I’m not just filling space with this exercise. Think of it as taking a really good look at the picture on the box before starting to piece together a jigsaw puzzle. It’s going to help you – I promise! Remember, your answers can be as general or detailed as you have time for them to be.

Read **Genesis 40:1-23** and complete the following exercise.

**WHO?** (List each character and jot down what the passages reveals about him or her.)

**WHAT?** (Briefly summarize what happens in the chapter.)

**WHEN?** (Write down any time clues given in the passage. What happened before? After?)

**WHERE?** (Where do the events of the chapter take place?)

**WHY?** (Why do you think the events of this chapter happened to Joseph? Why are they recorded in the Bible for us to study?)

# Day 2

Read **Genesis 40:1-4** and answer the following questions.

- 1) Refer back to 39:21-23 and describe Joseph's situation at the time of these events.

**A closer look:** We aren't told exactly how long Joseph had been in prison at this point, but it had probably been a decent amount of time considering that the chief jailor had come to trust him completely.

- 2) List everything this passage (vv. 1-4) tells us about the cupbearer and the baker?

**A closer look:** Their titles don't sound all that important, but the chief cupbearer and the chief baker held a significant amount of authority and responsibility in Pharaoh's court. They were personally responsible for everything that Pharaoh ate and drank. Among other things, it was their job to thwart the schemes of potential assassins who might seek to poison the king.

- 3) Why do you think the captain of the guard put Joseph in charge of the cupbearer and baker? What does this reveal about Joseph's character?
- 4) How do verses 3 and 4 convey the sovereign work of God in Joseph's circumstances?
- 5) What time clue are we given in verse 4?

- 6) While it's not specifically stated, the narrator of these events gives us every indication that while Joseph was not happy about his circumstances, he went about his work diligently, willingly, and without complaint. Why do you think he was able to maintain such a positive attitude?
  
- 7) What is your typical attitude when called on to serve in less-than-ideal and maybe even unfair circumstances?

What insights do Ephesians **6:5-8** and **Colossians 3:22-24** provide concerning how to overcome the natural tendency to complain in these situations?

## Day 3

Read **Genesis 40:5-8** and answer the following questions.

- 1) What significant thing happened to the cupbearer and baker according to verse 5?

**A closer look:** In ancient thinking, dreams were the prime vehicle of divine revelations.

- 2) What did Joseph observe the next morning? (v. 6)

How did he respond? (v. 7)

What does this reveal about Joseph?

- 3) Why were the cupbearer and baker so distraught? (v. 8)

**A closer look:** One of my commentaries offers this interesting insight: “In the ancient Near East, dream interpretations were sought from experts who had been trained in techniques and methods of the day. Both the Egyptians and Babylonians compiled what are called ‘dream books,’ which contain sample dreams along with a key to their interpretation. Though some of the interpretations in the biblical accounts may seem transparent or self-evident, dreams often depended on symbolism, and the symbols might not stand for what was most logical. The dream books preserved the empirical data concerning past dreams and interpretations and therefore offered the security of scientific documentation. It was believed that the gods communicated generally through dreams but that they revealed the meanings of dreams by giving wisdom in the expert’s research.”<sup>1</sup>

- 4) What was Joseph’s immediate response in verse 8?

**A closer look:** Joseph’s statement – “Do not interpretations belong to God?” – was an outright contradiction to the superstitious and idolatrous culture of Egypt. Joseph boldly declared that the interpretation of dreams was not the work of some dream specialist, but a gift that is bestowed by God alone. If the cupbearer and baker weren’t so desperate, they may have laughed Joseph right out of the room.

- 5) Read the following verses and identify the incredibly important quality they reveal about Joseph: 39:9/ 40:8/ 41:16, 51, 52/ 45:8/ 50:20

6) Is your gut-level, automatic response to turn to God and point others to Him?

How do you think a person develops that kind of God-awareness and God-dependence?

7) I find it very interesting that Joseph had not lost confidence in God's ability to reveal His will through dreams even though his own dreams had been on hold for so long and appeared to be a lost cause. What does this reveal about his faith?

How is this consistent with the definition of faith provided in **Hebrews 11:1**?

## Day 4

Read **Genesis 40:8-15** and answer the following questions.

- 1) What was the interpretation of the cupbearer's dream? (v. 12, 13)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) What does Joseph's confidence in his ability to interpret the dream reveal about his confidence in God? (refer back to v. 8)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) What did Joseph ask the cupbearer to do? (v. 14)

- 4) Verse 15 lets us peek into how Joseph felt about his enslavement and imprisonment. What words does he use to describe his departure from his home to Egypt? (v. 15)

What does he call the prison in which he was confined? (v. 15)

What does he make sure the cupbearer knows about his imprisonment? (v. 15)

**A closer look:** K.A. Matthews offers this insight into verse 15: “Joseph’s choice of the word ‘dungeon’ is the same word for the ‘cistern’ in which his brothers confined him (37:20, 22, 24, 28, 29). In effect he was protesting that he had been wrongly incarcerated, from dungeon to dungeon! Such reprehensible mistreatment merited redress, which the cupbearer could facilitate.”<sup>2</sup>

- 5) In light of the kindness Joseph showed the chief cupbearer as well as the cupbearer’s close and soon-to-be restored relationship with the king, what do you think Joseph’s expectations were at this point?
- 6) Describe a time in your life when God allowed you to cross paths with just the right person at just the right time.

How did God use this person to accomplish His will in your life?

Have you thanked God for His faithful provision of that relationship? If appropriate, have you thanked the person He provided?

# Day 5

Read **Genesis 40:16-23** and answer the following questions.

- 1) Why was the chief baker suddenly so eager to have Joseph interpret his dream? (v. 16)
  
- 2) What was the interpretation of the baker's dream? (vv.17-19)
  
- 3) Does Joseph accurately interpret the dreams of the two men? (vv.20-22)

What does this prove?

- 4) Every time I read verse 23, I am flooded with emotion. There is something about it that really gets to me. How about you? How does the information of this verse affect you?
  
- 5) Why do you think the cupbearer forgot to honor his promise to Joseph?
  
- 6) How long would it be before the cupbearer would finally think to mention Joseph to Pharaoh? (look ahead to 41:1)
  
- 7) What insight does **Proverbs 13:12** give concerning how Joseph must have felt as he realized he had been forgotten?

- 8) Can you think of anyone else in the Bible that had to wait a long time for their desire(s) to be fulfilled?
  
- 9) Can you relate in any way to Joseph's situation here? When have your own hopes been dashed? When have your plans and expectations been put on hold for what feels like way too long?
  
- 10) V. Raymond Edmond has written that "Delay never thwarts God's purposes; it only polishes His instrument." In light of the whole story (which you should have read in week 1), how does the life of Joseph demonstrate this principle? In other words, how did God use Joseph's time in prison to prepare Joseph for the future?

How has God used delay to "polish" you?

- 11) So often when we face heart wrenching delays and dashed expectations we wonder what in the world God is doing. Interestingly enough, the Bible tells us exactly what He's doing. Read the following verses and note what they say about the purpose of trials:

**Romans 5:3-5**

**James 1:2-4**

**1 Peter 1:6-7**

12) Read **Psalm 31:12, 14-15**. Write out the first part of verse 15 below.

Complete this sentence: When I feel forgotten, when my hopes are dashed, when my desires go unfulfilled, I can trust that . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Walton, J. H. *Genesis*. The NIV Application Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 672.

<sup>2</sup> Mathews, 749.