

“Falling Upwards”

Genesis 40-41

Series: Behind the Scenes – the Story of Joseph Week 3. Trusting Through Trials

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September 6, 2026

The subject line of the email proclaimed: We're FAMOUS!!! Our Director of Sharing Lisa Gayle emailed me a link to an 6 ABC News story featuring Lisa, me and Martha Stringer from Woodside. It covered the dedication of the 138th Habitat House in Bucks County. The frames of this house were built by you in our parking lot on June 7, 2025. Now we gathered to present the key to the new homeowner LaToya. It was so momentous a celebration that both candidates for Congress were there. Lisa may have been thrilled to be famous and on TV, but I've been invited to participate in so many of these events, I've hobnobbed with so many VIPs, for me it's just another day in the ministry. Afterall, my name is famous all over Bucks County. So when it was my turn to say the prayer and present the key to the homeowner, the Director of Habitat introduced me by saying, "Please join me in welcoming Pastor DAVE!!!" And she did that twice!

I guess I'm not so famous after all.

Joseph is not famous. By all accounts, Joseph has sunk as low as anyone can go. In chapter 40 of Genesis we find him in Pharaoh's dungeon. Falsely accused of assaulting his master's wife, Joseph is tossed in a dark hole and locked away. As the days pass, however, the warden notices everything Joseph touches is blessed. He elevates him to supervise the prisoners. Soon he meets Pharaoh's Baker and Cupbearer. Using his God given gift for interpreting dreams, Joseph correctly predicts the Baker will be executed and the Cupbearer restored to the court. To the Cupbearer he says, "But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison." (Genesis 40:14) Yet the Cupbearer forgets Joseph. He's still stuck in the dungeon.

Do you feel stuck? Maybe like Joseph...

- You have family members who hurt you, avoid you, won't speak to you, are jealous of you, betray you, abuse you.
- There are people who tempt you, falsely accuse you, unjustly punish you.
- There are people who use you, take advantage of you, take you for granted, forget you.

You're stuck in your own personal dungeon and, right now, you really don't see any way out. How did Joseph face these trials?

He Keeps His Eye on God's Big Picture. In a psychology textbook there is a picture of a man is suffering a sudden heart attack. His wife is desperately trying to help him stand. But if you pull back and see the bigger picture, you realize he is not suffering but celebrating. He just won a million dollars in the lottery!

If you focus on any individual moment in Joseph's story, it will drive you to despair. Joseph is trapped in a cistern, fearing for his life. Joseph is dragged by a camel to a foreign country. Joseph is forced into slavery. Joseph is falsely accused of attempted rape. Joseph is thrown into a dungeon without trial or chance for parole. Each moment looks bad. Together they are tragic – more than anyone can bear.

Yet if you step back and let your eye take in the Big Picture, you may notice a peculiar pattern to Joseph's life. It's not just a sine curve of ups and downs, mountain tops and valleys. Somehow, as his life unfolds, Joseph keeps falling deeper, only to rise higher. You might say he is falling upwards. His father lifts him up over his brothers. So the brothers dump him down a cistern. They lift him out and sell him into slavery. In Potiphar's house he rises from lowly slave to chief steward. At the next turn, he's thrown into prison and becomes the head over all the prisoners. Forgotten and abandoned, Joseph expects to spend the rest of years in that hole. Who can blame him if he burned with rage or indulged in self-pity. Yet he never expresses such strong emotions. Why? He knows he's not alone.

While Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. Genesis 39:20-21

In all these trials, Joseph trusts the Lord. Now please don't assume because Joseph is in the Bible, he can see the Lord better than we can. He walks by faith, not sight, just like us. Joseph keeps falling into some pretty dark pits. If he focuses on only what's in front of him, it will drive him to despair, ignite him with anger or swamp him with self-pity. Instead, Joseph looks at the whole trend and trajectory of his life. He knows the Lord has been working behind the scenes the whole time.

I find Gratitude is one of the best antidotes for self-pity and resentment. You can easily be blinded by all the bad in front of you. Or you can step back, take stock of all the ways the Lord has been with you and blessed you in the past. This helps you trust God will continue to work with you now and in the future.

Joseph also **Keeps Watch on God's Timing**. We can read these chapters in a few minutes. But for Joseph, the journey was agonizingly slow. After the Cupbearer is restored to Pharaoh's service, Joseph anxiously waits for a return of the favor. I imagine him scratching marks on the limestone walls of his cell – one week, six weeks, two months, six months, fourteen months, twenty months. Two full years come and go without a word. He is thirty now. The last thirteen years, nearly half his life, are wasted in Egypt.

It's hard to wait – especially when you see no end. Waiting to get into college. Waiting to get on the team or in the play. Waiting to find someone to love and marry. Waiting to land a job or have a child. Waiting for the test results or the cure. In this gig-speed age, we're not good at waiting. Why does God take so long when Amazon guarantees free next day delivery? I don't know. God rarely tells us the why and when of His timetable.

There are, however, some benefits to waiting. Psalms 27 ends with:

Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. Psalm 27:14

Waiting builds a strong heart. Waiting teaches me I'm not in control – which I'm not in most cases. It trains me to be patient and not push my agenda. It helps me relax because I know God's in control. It gives me time to pray and glimpse how God might be working in my situation. After waiting, I often find what God has in mind is better than the instant plan I want to implement. Waiting on the Lord gives hope and strength for the future.

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31

Joseph waited and waited. When a detachment of Pharaoh's bodyguards appear at his cell he's probably frightened about what awaits him. Instantly they cast aside his worm infested prison tunic and shave his dark Hebrew locks. Are they going to execute him like Pharaoh's Baker? In a matter of minutes, they usher Joseph from the depths of Pharaoh's dungeon to the dizzying heights of Pharaoh's throne room. Beside the royal chair he spies the Cupbearer. On the other side, several frustrated magicians glare at him.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Genesis 41:15

Talk about pressure! If he messes up he'll be toast just like the Baker. You and I might stall for time, boast of our abilities, present our resume of successful dream interpretations.

Instead, Joseph **Keeps His Focus on God's Glory**. At this pressure packed moment, he says the worst thing possible. "I cannot do it." The Cupbearer's mouth drops open, the magicians smirk and laugh, and Pharaoh grimaces.

"I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." Genesis 41:16

Joseph doesn't try to steal the spotlight from God. After a long, tense pause, Pharaoh tells his two dreams. In the first, seven fat cows rise from the Nile to graze on its banks. These, however, are quickly swallowed by seven gaunt, ugly cows which remain just as thin after their meal. The second dream is similar. Seven healthy and full heads of grain are consumed by seven thin and scorched ones. When Pharaoh finishes, all eyes turn on Joseph.

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. Genesis 41:25

Seven years of abundant harvests will be followed by seven years of wasting famine. 'Choose a wise and able leader to travel the land and collect the surplus grain during the plentiful years,' the lowly prisoner tells the powerful king. 'Store it in silos for the lean years. Then you may feed your people and save your kingdom.' Notice Joseph does not apply for the job. But Pharaoh, like Potiphar and the warden, see God is with Joseph.

So Pharaoh asked them, “Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?” Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. 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.” Genesis 41:38-40

From his own hand, Pharaoh takes off his signet ring and places it on Joseph’s finger. Brought to Egypt as a slave, Joseph is now the Prime Minister of all the kingdom.

How did Joseph handle Pharaoh’s dream? The same way he faced the thirteen punishing years that came before. He trusts in God and gives Him the glory. While his life swings from the lowest troughs to the highest peaks, God remains the one constant. The Lord is with him. Whether he is clapped in irons in Pharaoh’s dungeon or patted on the back in Pharaoh’s throne room, Joseph depends on the Lord alone. Now that he is famous and can easily take the credit or take advantage of the situation, Joseph still honors God. I’m convinced that most of us are anxious, discouraged or discontent because we allow circumstances to rule our lives. Contentment comes when we let go of the circumstances and hold onto to God. The Apostle Paul writes,

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through Christ who gives me strength. Philippians 4:11-13

In the ups and downs of life, focus on God’s Big Picture, God’s Timing, God’s Glory.

That’s what LaToya did. She is not famous. It seems she has not gone very far in life. In fact, as the new owner of the Habitat House you framed, she is actually returning to the neighborhood where she grew up in Bristol Township. Yet LaToya has discovered the secret of being content that Paul writes about. LaToya knows how to trust God in all the ups and downs like Joseph. After I handed her the key to her new home she said,

This is nothing but the favor and hand of my Lord Jesus Christ. I come from this neighborhood, so to have my first house in this neighborhood is divinely ordered. I could not do it myself. It’s all because the Glory and the Grace of God and I have been praising him through every moment, the good times, the bad times, I still trust in him. My road has not been easy. But I never stayed there. I let those lessons be teachable moments and I rose above the occasion. I took what I needed to out of the moment. I applied it and moved in another direction. So no matter what you are faced up against never let your faith worry, because God is always with you.

To my children I say: Any and everything is possible, you anchor down in your faith, you stay grounded in your faith, you don’t worry about what the naysayers say and never give up. No matter what I came up against, no matter how many tears you all seen me cry. No matter how many moments I thought about giving up. No matter how many times we thought we was never going to get out of that apartment - I want you to know and understand when God’s timing is in it, it’s always the

right timing. When his will for your life is in it, can't nobody undo it. When he has his favor and his hand on you, can't nobody take it off.

So no matter what it is that you be faced up against, God never said there won't be trouble, what he said is that trouble won't last always. I'm talking about the highs, the lows, the peaks, the valleys, the ups, the downs, the frowns, the smiles, He is there through everything, No matter what. So don't let nothing ever step in your way of achieving your goal because your Mama is a living testimony that it can be done. God is serving everything for your greater good. He is my God, and in Him I will trust. I know that God is the reason I'm standing here.

Latoya may not be famous in the eyes of the world. But in God's eyes she's pure gold!