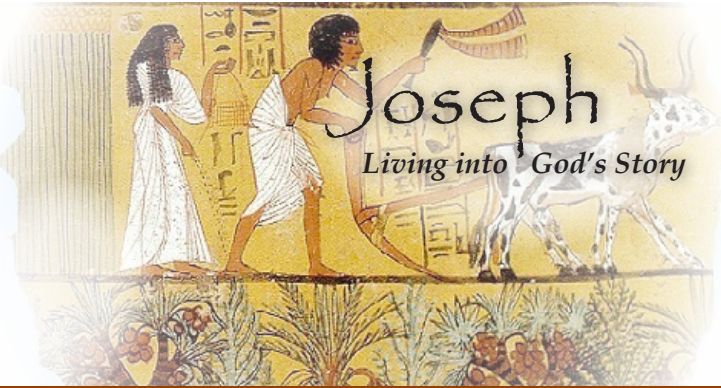


Weekly
Discussion
Guide

February 28,
2010

Genesis 40:
Living in a
Time of
Witness



Where we start . . .

Most people who have walked with God for any length of time end up facing some disappointment. Either what they thought was supposed to happen didn't or what they believed they heard God say didn't come to pass. How do you handle such disappointments?

What we read . . .

Things have gone from bad to worse for Joseph. One-time preferential heir of Jacob, he has gone from being a slave to being a prisoner in a pit. Pick up the story in Genesis 40.

What happened in Joseph's life the last time he had to deal with dreams?

Had you been in Joseph's situation, would you have wanted to have anything to do with the cupbearer's and the baker's dreams? Why or why not?

How does 40:23 add to the thrust of this account? Why tell us that detail?

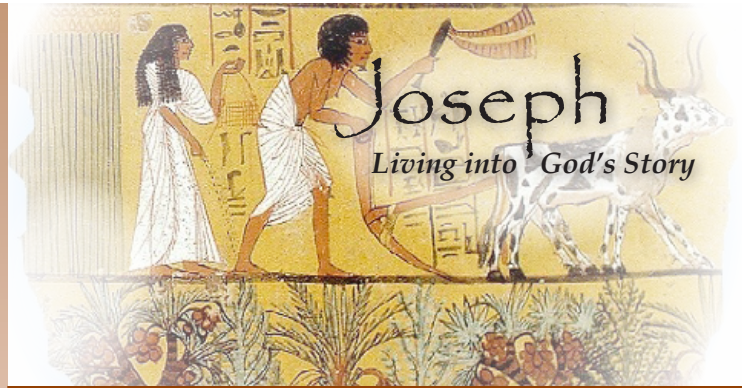
Why this matters . . .

We are not told we *must* respond to life's difficulties the way Joseph did, but he certainly appears to be living into God's story in a healthy way. What challenges you most about how Joseph is doing life? Why?

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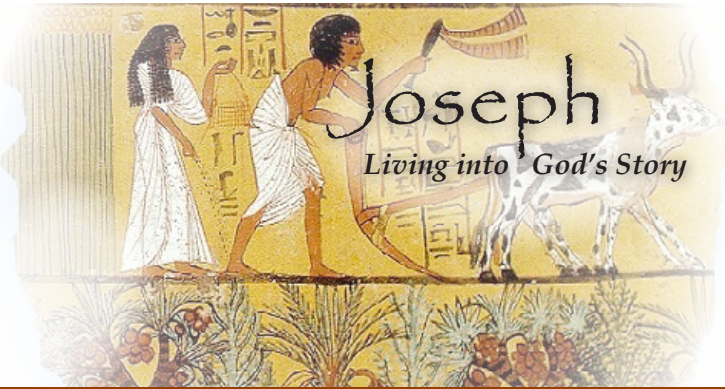
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What are we focusing on?

We've been trying to attentively read Joseph's story and find, in his living, what it means to live into God's story. How do we live our lives--even when facing hard and troubling things--in the reality that God is still *with* us?

In Genesis 40, we read of Joseph's time in prison. He's there falsely accused and wrongly charged. Things are not going well for him, but we are repeatedly told that God is still "with him." And we watch him live in that reality. He gives himself to what he can where he finds himself--apparently secure in the realization that if God is with him then all he has to do is embrace the life he has!

What will we be discussing?

We don't want to turn all of our attention to the troubles those in your group are facing or have faced, but it will be helpful to begin by talking about those times when we face disappointment with God.

That is, after all, what Joseph had to contend with. God had given him dreams; two specific ones are mentioned. He had shared them with the only people he knew who might appreciate God's communication--and they hated him for it. Given the chronology we find in Genesis (37:2; 41:1; 41:46), Joseph may have spent somewhere around a dozen years as a slave and/or prisoner in Egypt! His dreams not only weren't coming true, but even his best intentions and efforts were repaid with distrust, betrayal, and difficulty. Being a man just like us, he had to have wrestled with disappointment.

But just how does he live, in the midst of all of this? That is what we have pictured for us in Genesis 40. Although much of the content of the chapter focuses on the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker who had been in Pharaoh's service, the dreams themselves are not what matter most. What really matters is trying to understand how and why Joseph responds the way that he does in that dark place.

Keep in mind, this prison Joseph was in was no American maximum security prison. He refers to it as "a pit" (40:15); the same word that was used to describe the hole in the ground into which his brothers had thrown him. According to Psalm 105:17-18, he experienced the agony of chains and an iron collar there in the harsh environment.

He has every reason to be bitter. He has good reason to want to be left alone. He has good cause to question whether God, in fact, communicates through dreams or plans to follow through on them if He had, in fact, given the dreams. So how does Joseph live in the reality of God's "witness"?

When the cupbearer and the baker share their dreams, it is easy to imagine that the right response for Joseph to make is something like: "No more! I want no more of dreams. And God? What does God have to do with any of this? I am here in this pit because I thought I was hearing from God!" But, surprisingly, that is *not* how Joseph responds.

Amazingly, he is attentive to what is going on in his world, and gives himself to serving and caring in whatever way he can. Although we are not told what he is thinking or feeling, we are given a snapshot of how he is living. He is seemingly free of bitterness and filled with an appropriate attentiveness to those around him.

He isn't a masochist, simply enjoying the discomfort and injustice. When he interprets the dream of the cupbearer, he asks the cupbearer to "remember him" before Pharaoh and get him out of the prison (40:14-15). But in spite of his desire to get out, he is still living in relationship with the God who is with him and he is still willingly engaged in the lives of those who are there with him in prison. And that is where we see Joseph's understanding of God's "witness" being lived out.

Where is all this going? What are we supposed to glean from Joseph's experience here? We need to remember that this account does not give us "five easy steps to dealing with disappointment with God." But it does picture for us someone who is so convinced and comfortable with God's "witness" that he lives in an engaged and gracious way in the very hardest of circumstances. He is an example . . . although we hardly find ourselves in identical situations. He is a model . . . of what it means to live in the "witness" of God.