

## God is Provisionally Preparing Us for His Purposes

Message 3 of 6 in the series: "Providence: The Story of Joseph"

**Providence** = "God's faithful and effective care and guidance of everything which He has made toward the end which He has chosen." Holman Bible Dictionary

### A. Even though it didn't seem like it at times, God was provisionally preparing Joseph to become a great leader by guiding him through difficult circumstances and painful setbacks.

1. In spite of the schemes of his jealous brothers, Joseph was provisionally taken by slave traders to Egypt, where many years later he would become a mighty ruler. "One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever. 'Listen to this dream,' he said. 'We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!' His brothers responded, 'So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?' And **they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them...** 'We can tell our father, 'A wild animal has eaten him.' **Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!**' ... So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. **And the traders took him to Egypt.**" Genesis 37:5-8, 20b, & 28 (NLT)
2. Provisionally, an important Egyptian official named Potiphar made Joseph his personal assistant. This gave Joseph invaluable experience managing resources in Egypt. "When Joseph was taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelite traders, he was purchased by Potiphar, an Egyptian officer. Potiphar was captain of the guard for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. The Lord was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master. Potiphar noticed this... so **he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned.**" Genesis 39:1-4 (NLT)
3. After Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of attempting to rape her, he was provisionally incarcerated with high-ranking government officials whom he would otherwise never have met. "Potiphar was furious when he heard his wife's story about how Joseph had treated her. So he took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king's prisoners were held, and there he remained. **But the Lord was with Joseph in the prison** and showed him his faithful love." Genesis 39:19-21a (NLT)

**Life Application:** Because God is all-knowing, all-powerful, faithful, loving, and kind, He provisionally uses even the most painful circumstances and setbacks for our good. "And we know that **all things work together for good to those who love God**, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

### B. Provisionally, Pharaoh's cup-bearer and baker were placed under Joseph's care in prison.

"Some time later, Pharaoh's chief cup-bearer and chief baker offended their royal master. Pharaoh became angry with these two officials, and he put them in the prison where Joseph was, in the palace of the captain of the guard. They remained in prison for quite some time, and **the captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, who looked after them.**" Genesis 40:1-4 (NLT)

**Life Application:** We should not be surprised when God prepares us for His purposes by placing us in circumstances where we need to serve others. "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. **But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant**, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:42b-45 (NLT)

### C. Provisionally, God enabled Joseph to interpret the dreams of the cup-bearer and baker.

"While they were in prison, Pharaoh's cup-bearer and baker each had a dream one night, and each dream had its own meaning. When Joseph saw them the next morning, he noticed that they both looked upset. 'Why do you look so worried today?' he asked them. And they replied, 'We both had dreams last night, but no one can tell us what they mean.' **'Interpreting dreams is God's business,'** Joseph replied. 'Go ahead and tell me your dreams.'" Genesis 40:5-8 (NLT)

*Note:* God can and does, on occasion, speak through dreams, but not every dream is a message from Him. **“Too much activity gives you restless dreams; too many words make you a fool.”** Ecclesiastes 5:3 (NLT)

*Note:* God’s primary way of speaking to us is through His Word, not dreams. **“For the word of God is alive and powerful.** It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.” Hebrews 4:12 (NLT)

*Note:* God’s Word is our standard for truth so we will pursue His dreams, not false dreams. “I have heard these prophets say, **‘Listen to the dream I had from God last night.’ And then they proceed to tell lies in my name.** How long will this go on? If they are prophets, they are prophets of deceit, inventing everything they say.” Jeremiah 23:25-26 (NLT) “Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. **You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God.** For there are many false prophets in the world.” 1 John 4:1 (NLT)

“So the chief cup-bearer told Joseph his dream first. ‘In my dream,’ he said, ‘I saw a grapevine in front of me. The vine had three branches that began to bud and blossom, and soon it produced clusters of ripe grapes. I was holding Pharaoh’s wine cup in my hand, so I took a cluster of grapes and squeezed the juice into the cup. Then I placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.’ ‘This is what the dream means,’ Joseph said. ‘The three branches represent three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift you up and restore you to your position as his chief cup-bearer. **And please remember me and do me a favor when things go well for you. Mention me to Pharaoh, so he might let me out of this place.** For I was kidnapped from my homeland, the land of the Hebrews, and now I’m here in prison, but I did nothing to deserve it.’ When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given the first dream such a positive interpretation, he said to Joseph, ‘I had a dream, too. In my dream there were three baskets of white pastries stacked on my head. The top basket contained all kinds of pastries for Pharaoh, but the birds came and ate them from the basket on my head.’ ‘This is what the dream means,’ Joseph told him. ‘The three baskets also represent three days. Three days from now Pharaoh will lift you up and impale your body on a pole. Then birds will come and peck away at your flesh.’ Pharaoh’s birthday came three days later, and he prepared a banquet for all his officials and staff. He summoned his chief cup-bearer and chief baker to join the other officials. He then restored the chief cup-bearer to his former position, so he could again hand Pharaoh his cup. But Pharaoh impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had predicted when he interpreted his dream.” Genesis 40:9-22 (NLT)

*Note:* Joseph faithfully delivered the interpretation God gave him whether it was favorable or not.

**Life Application:** One of the purposes God is preparing us for is faithfully proclaiming God’s Word whether the time is favorable or not. “I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he comes to set up his Kingdom: **Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not.** Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. **For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching.** They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths.” 2 Timothy 4:1-4 (NLT)

#### **D. After the cup-bearer was restored to his position, he providentially forgot all about Joseph.**

“Pharaoh’s chief cup-bearer, however, forgot all about Joseph, never giving him another thought.”  
Genesis 40:23 (NLT)

“They bruised his feet with fetters and placed his neck in an iron collar. **Until the time came to fulfill his dreams, the Lord tested Joseph’s character.**” Psalm 105:18-19 (NLT)

**Life Application:** God is providentially working in our lives to refine our character and make us a little more like Jesus every day. “For God knew his people in advance, and **he chose them to become like his Son,** so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” Romans 8:29 (NLT)

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#### **Connect Group Discussion Questions:**

Read Genesis 40, and then discuss the following questions:

1. How does it make you feel to know that God is so intelligent and powerful that He can use even difficult circumstances and painful setbacks to get us exactly where He wants us to be? (Romans 8:28)
2. Why do you think God took Joseph through years of servitude before putting him in a position of great power? (Mark 10:35-45, Philippians 2:3-7)

3. One of our core values at Centerpoint is Biblical authority. Because of this, we often use the phrase, "The Bible is our guide in all matters of faith and practice." How/why is this important? (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12, Jeremiah 23:25-27, 1 John 4:1)
4. Read 2 Timothy 4:1-4. Do you think this passage applies to ordinary people or just preachers? What time in history was Paul talking about?
5. The cup-bearer forgot all about Joseph after he got his job back. (Genesis 40:23) How do you think that made Joseph feel? How could a good God let that happen? (Psalm 105:18-19, Romans 8:28-29)
6. Quotes worth considering:

"Trust the past to God's mercy, the present to God's love, and the future to God's Providence."

Augustine of Hippo

"There are two great certainties about things that shall come to pass. One is that God knows, and the other is that we do not know." Charles H. Spurgeon

"Wherever the Providence of God may dump us down, in a slum, in a shop, in the desert, we have to labor along the line of His direction. Never allow this thought - 'I am of no use where I am,' because you certainly can be of no use where you are not! Wherever he has engineered your circumstances, pray."  
Oswald Chambers