

## God Providentially Guides Us Through Painful/Difficult Circumstances

Message 2 of 6 in the series: "Providence: The Story of Joseph"

### A. The story of Joseph is a story of providence.

**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

*Note:* God is caring for us and guiding our lives in ways we can't possibly imagine. "Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, **to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.**" Ephesians 3:20 (NLT)

**Life Application:** God wants us to trust that His way is always best even if it means following Him through painful/difficult circumstances. "The Lord says, **'I will guide you along the best pathway for your life.** I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control.'" Psalm 32:8-9 (NLT)

### B. Even though it didn't seem like it at times, God providentially guided Joseph through incredibly difficult and painful circumstances.

1. When he was 17 years old, Joseph was providentially sold into slavery by his brothers.

"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...** When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him. 'Here comes the dreamer!' they said. **'Come on, let's kill him** and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, 'A wild animal has eaten him.' **Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!** '...Instead of hurting him, let's sell him to those Ishmaelite traders. After all, he is our brother—our own flesh and blood!' And his brothers agreed. 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, 18-20, & 27-28 (NLT)

**Life Application:** We need to guard our hearts so we will not indulge envy and bitterness. **"Guard your heart above all else,** for it determines the course of your life." Proverbs 4:23 (NLT)

**Life Application:** "And **we know that God causes everything to work together for the good** of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." Romans 8:28 (NLT)

2. Providentially, an important Egyptian official named Potiphar purchased Joseph to become 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 and realized that the Lord was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did. This pleased Potiphar, so **he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned.** From the day Joseph was put in charge of his master's household and property, the Lord began to bless Potiphar's household for Joseph's sake. All his household affairs ran smoothly, and his crops and livestock flourished. So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn't worry about a thing—except what kind of food to eat!" Genesis 39:1-6a (NLT)

*Note:* The way the Lord develops our character and gives us experience/wisdom works differently than we might expect. **"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,** because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." James 1:2-4 (NIV)

**Life Application:** We must never forget that the Lord is always caring for and guiding us, even when it doesn't look like it. **"The Lord will work out his plans for my life—**for your faithful love, O Lord, endures forever. Don't abandon me, for you made me." Psalm 138:8 (NLT)

3. Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of attempting to rape her, and he was thrown into prison. Providentially, he was incarcerated with the king's prisoners. This allowed him to interact with high-ranking government employees he would otherwise never have met.

"Joseph was a very handsome and well-built young man, and Potiphar's wife soon began to look at him lustfully. 'Come and sleep with me,' she demanded. But Joseph refused. 'Look,' he told her, 'my master trusts me with everything in his entire household. No one here has more authority than I do. He has held back nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. **How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God.**' She kept putting pressure on Joseph day after day, but he refused to sleep with her, and he kept out of her way as much as possible. One day, however, no one else was around when he went in to do his work. She came and grabbed him by his cloak, demanding, 'Come on, sleep with me!' **Joseph tore himself away, but he left his cloak in her hand as he ran from the house.**" Genesis 39:6b-12 (NLT)

*Note:* Joseph was a man of Godly character who recognized adultery for what it is, a wicked betrayal of trust and a great sin against God. "**Marriage should be honored by all**, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." Hebrews 13:4 (NIV)

*Note:* God was with Joseph while he was being tempted and showed him a way out. "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. **But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.**" 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV)

**Life Application:** We should respond to sexual temptation the same way Joseph did. "Run from sexual sin!" 1 Corinthians 6:18a (NLT) "Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, **pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace.** Enjoy the **companionship** of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts." 2 Timothy 2:22 (NLT)

"When she saw that she was holding his cloak and he had fled, she called out to her servants. Soon all the men came running. 'Look!' she said. 'My husband has brought this Hebrew slave here to make fools of us! He came into my room to rape me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream, he ran outside and got away, but he left his cloak behind with me.' She kept the cloak with her until her husband came home. Then she told him her story. 'That Hebrew slave you've brought into our house tried to come in and fool around with me,' she said, 'But when I screamed, he ran outside, leaving his cloak with me!' 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 39:13-21a (NLT)

*Note:* Joseph never gave in to self-pity but trusted that the Lord was with him in every circumstance. "And the Lord made Joseph a favorite with the prison warden. **Before long, the warden put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison.** The warden had no more worries, because Joseph took care of everything. The Lord was with him and caused everything he did to succeed." Genesis 39:21b-23 (NLT)

**Life Application:** We can trust that God is guiding our lives in ways we can't possibly imagine because God is more faithful, loving, wise, and powerful than we can possibly imagine. "**Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge!** How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways! ...For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen." Romans 11:33 & 36 (NLT)

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### Connect Group Discussion Questions:

Read Genesis 39, and then discuss the following questions:

1. What's the difference between trusting the providence of God and wishing for good luck?
2. Read Psalm 32:8-9, Ephesians 3:20-21, and Romans 8:28. Why would anyone be reluctant to follow the Lord's directions? Describe a time in your life when you chose to trust the Lord and things turned out far better than you expected.
3. Why do you think we are often surprised when God uses pain/difficulty to mature us and make us wise? (James 1:2-4)

4. Discuss the following statements:

- Joseph was a man of Godly character who recognized adultery for what it is, a wicked betrayal of trust and a great sin against God. (Genesis 39:6-12, Psalm 51:4, Hebrews 13:4)
- God was with Joseph while he was being tempted and showed him a way out. (1 Corinthians 10:13)
- We should respond to sexual temptation the same way Joseph did. (1 Corinthians 6:18, 2 Timothy 2:22)

5. Since the prison warden put Joseph in charge over everything that happened in the prison, Joseph must have been able to trust God in spite of his unjust circumstances and not give in to self-pity. How do you think this was possible? (Psalm 138:8, Romans 11:33-36, 2 Corinthians 5:7)

6. Quotes worth considering:

"It's always easier to avoid temptation than to resist it." Randy Alcorn

"Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life." Proverbs 4:23 (NLT)

"Self-pity is our worst enemy and if we yield to it, we can never do anything wise in this world."

Helen Keller

"The providence of God is the great protector of our life and usefulness, and under Divine care we are perfectly safe from danger." Charles H. Spurgeon