

- 3) Unknown to Joseph, God was at work in the background. In God's perfect time, God would use the butler to secure Joseph's release, but not yet.
- 4) Joseph never gave up hope of freedom and thus avoided despair. We, too, must never give up hope.

## 5. Joseph waited patiently (v.23, 41:1)

### a. Joseph anticipated the butler's help.

- 1) As Joseph said, after three days the butler returned to the palace to serve as Pharaoh's butler. His job was to serve drinks to Pharaoh and to taste them before the king drank to insure they were not poisoned. Thus, he was close to the king on a daily basis and well trusted.
- 2) I can imagine Joseph's thoughts were ticking. The butler would again stand before the king, and he would tell Pharaoh all about Joseph and secure his release. In a few days, he would be a free man!

### b. When forgotten, Joseph waited patiently.

- 1) Days turned into weeks. Weeks dragged into months. Months crawled into years. Two full years passed after the butler was restored, with no change in Joseph's miserable situation.
- 2) Joseph had to continue to wait patiently (Ps 27:14).
- 3) During his wait, he did not turn from the Lord. In fact, he stayed close to the Lord the whole time. When God did bring him out, he was spiritually strong and able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams.
- 4) What if he had given up? What if his discouragement had turned into depression, and then to despair? Then he would not have been ready when God needed him.
- 5) No matter how long our trials and burdens drag on, we must continue to wait on the Lord to avoid despair.

**Conclusion:** When you are discouraged by troubles or burdens, you must work diligently to avoid despair. To lose all hope can be disastrous.

Like Joseph, keep busy serving others. Live for others. Stay in close fellowship with the Lord. Never gave up hope. Continue to wait patiently on the Lord. There is always hope in the Lord.

**Song:** Does Jesus Care? 289

# Avoiding Despair

12 December 2021 PM – Genesis 40:1-23 – Gen2021 – Scott Childs

**Introduction:** Hope is the opposite of despair. Despair is the sense that all hope is gone. "There are millions of African women who face despair over their plight at the hands of Islamic invaders who rape them, kill them, or take them as sex slaves. There are many that live in poverty and ghetto like conditions that see no possibility of life becoming different for them. There are parents whose hearts have been so devastated by wayward children that they live in despair. There are children and women who live with daily abuse who feel like their life is a torture chamber. How many people look at their bank account and feel despair as they realize a growing inability to meet their obligations. Despair is real." <https://www.preaching.com/sermons/living-with-hope-in-the-face-of-despair/> edited

**Transition:** Joseph's example in Gen. 40 shows us how to avoid despair.

## 1. Joseph kept busy serving others (v.4)

### a. Idleness leads to self-focus.

- 1) From a human perspective, life had NOT been fair to Joseph. He did not choose to be born to Rachel, Jacob's favourite wife. Nor did he choose to be pampered as a favourite son. It was not his fault that his brothers hated him and sold him into slavery. He did nothing to deserve to be cast into the dungeon.
- 2) Joseph could have sat hour after hour, day after day, in the corner of his cell having a pity party.
- 3) When things go wrong, it is common for our selfish hearts to swell with complaints, resentment, anger, bitterness and revenge. In those moments, we cry out, "It's just not fair". That may be true, but that thinking leads to despair.

### b. Serving keeps us others focused.

- 1) The Lord was with Joseph. Because of his fellowship with God, he was able to be friendly, keep a good attitude, and seek to be helpful (see 39:21-23).
- 2) We do not know how long Joseph had been in prison, but it was long enough that the warden made him his assistant.
- 3) Joseph kept busy there in prison. The warden placed the butler and the baker in Joseph's care, and Joseph served

them (v.4). By serving others, Joseph did not have time to sit around and feel sorry for himself. *Serving others helped him to avoid despair, and it will help us too.*

## 2. Joseph lived for others (v.6)

### a. He noticed when others were down.

- 1) I imagine Joseph to be a cheerful young man. Perhaps he made it his practice to encourage and cheer the downhearted prisoners.
- 2) God's proverb, "*A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones*" (Proverbs 17:22), is certainly true.
- 3) Bright and early one morning as Joseph was making his rounds, he noticed that the butler and baker were both sad (v.6). He noticed because he was living for others.

### b. He genuinely cared about others.

- 1) These men were with Joseph *in the ward of his lord's house* (v.7). Compare (v.3). This *ward* was in his lord, Potiphar's house. Remember, Potiphar was the captain of Pharaoh's guard. This dungeon was in his house.
- 2) Joseph asked these men why they were so sad. He did so because he truly cared.
- 3) One of the best tonics for a burdened soul is to take our eyes off our own troubles and genuinely show empathy for others. (Philippians 2:4) "*Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*"
- 4) *While we are caring for the needs of others, despair will have a difficult time getting a foothold in our hearts.*

## 3. Joseph stayed in close fellowship with God (v.8, 12)

### a. We can tell this from his reply.

- 1) When hearing that these men dreamed and did not know what the dreams meant, Joseph promptly said, "*Do not interpretations belong to God?*" Joseph was close enough to God to know that God was sovereign over dreams.
  - a) It is important for us to remember that God had not yet given any of the Bible to men.
  - b) In those days, God sometimes directed men through dreams.

c) Today, we have the completed Bible. God speaks to us through the Bible rather than through dreams.

- 2) Joseph then said, "*Tell me them, I pray you.*" Now that took boldness. He was confident that God would reveal the meaning of those dreams to him. He had great faith in God, even though God had not given him the full understanding of his **own** youthful dreams.
- 3) Obviously, Joseph was in close fellowship with God.

### b. This is even clearer from his interpretations.

- 1) Did God instantly reveal the interpretations to Joseph or did he go off and pray for a while as Daniel did before God revealed the king's dream to him? (Dan 2:14-23). We do not know.
- 2) We do know that God did reveal the meaning of both dreams to Joseph.
- 3) When these unbelievers needed to know God's words to them, Joseph was close enough to God to give them what they needed to hear.
- 4) *During our own trials, burdens and frustrations, we must stay close to God. This will help us avoid despair, and will be a blessing to others.*

## 4. Joseph never gave up hope (v.14-15)

### a. He looked for the day he would be free.

- 1) Though Joseph was keeping a good attitude and serving others while in prison, he still longed for his freedom. Perhaps he claimed the dreams he had as a youth.
- 2) Joseph's desire for freedom was not wrong. Neither is desiring to get out from under a burden wrong. We ought to pray and work for relief, resolution, forgiveness, and restoration where needed.
- 3) We must never lose hope.

### b. He begged the butler to ask Pharaoh for help.

- 1) Joseph saw this as an opportunity for his release. The butler was a trusted man in the king's court. He could easily put in a good word for Joseph.
- 2) Joseph was not trying to escape deserved punishment. He was innocent and longed for justice.