

# The Story of Joseph

## *The White Space*

Part 27 – September 30, 2012

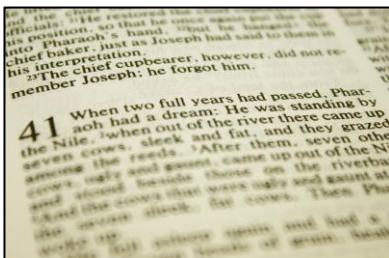


In Pharaoh's VIP prison, three days before Pharaoh's VIP birthday, Joseph interprets a fatal dream for the doomed baker, and a favorable dream of the indebted butler, and he asks to be remembered when he's restored. Three days later, at Pharaoh's VIP birthday banquet, when his prophecies prove true, his hope, faith, and trust in God must've *soared!* Three *hundred* days later, when he awoke in the same dungeon cell, his hope, faith, and trust in God must've been *sorely* tested.

The chief cupbearer, [i.e. butler/wine-taster] however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him. – *Genesis 40:23 NIV*

And so ends chapter 40. How do you trust God when He appears untrustworthy? How do you remain faithful when circumstances suggest that *He isn't?!?* How do you keep from turning your back on God, when it seems He's turned His back on you? Imagine Joseph's excitement on day four, a *bit less* on day five, and on day six, and day seven, and eight, and day by day it erodes away with the monotonous marathon of slow grinding sameness.

When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream ... [The term "two full years" might mean "exactly two years", putting in on Pharaoh's birthday.] – *Genesis 41:1a NIV*



Wait. What? Forget Pharaoh's dream, what about those two years?! We need to do something we've never done before. We have focused on a single verse, we've even focused on a single *word*, but where we're going, we don't need words!

We're gonna focus on the *white space* between the end of chapter 40 and the beginning of 41!

The blackest, bleakest, darkest days of Joseph's adult life are in that white space ... *two full years* ... *730 days* ... adrift in the blank, vacuous, empty space of abandonment and forgottenness. But God is *always* at work in the white space of our darkest hours. It's usually just so impossible to see – so invisible to our human eyes. It's in the white space when it feels like He's *least* at work, that He's *most* at work, refining, priming, drawing, guiding, and preparing you *and* the timing for your uniquely created purpose. The white space is packed with God's intervening activity! And how we respond in the white space, reveals *who* we think God is, and *how* we expect Him to act. That's why the same hardship will cause one believer to bow down and another to bow out.



In our materialistic culture, we often equate *loving* our children with *indulging* them. But, indulgent parents skew our perception of God. And God has to undo this in us because of our culture. And it's fatal to our faith to think of God as an indulgent Father. And it's something God had to undo in Joseph, because he was the victim of a *dangerously* indulgent dad.

Flashback eleven years ...

When [Joseph's] brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. – *Genesis 37:4 NIV*

A big part of this story is how God uses trials and deprivations to transform an overly indulged teenage boy into a mature man of God, who can open his arms to the very brothers who hated him. God *so squeezes* the “brat” out of Joseph, his own brothers don't recognize him!



We don't really stop trusting *God*; we mostly stop trusting an indulgent caricature of God. We create an untrustworthy God, and then stop trusting *that*. Good parents wisely and lovingly refine and prime and guide their children in a way that develops self-control, self-sacrifice, and strength of character. God is no different.

1,900 years later, the writer of Hebrews addresses this.

Endure hardship as [lit. “for the purpose of”] discipline [lit. “the whole training and education of children”]; God is treating you as sons [and daughters]. For what son is not disciplined [trained, educated, corrected, guided, etc.] by his father? If you are not disciplined [if you're indulged] (and everyone [who belongs to God] undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. – *Hebrews 12:7-8 NIV*

Like any great parent, God simply wants better for us than we often want for ourselves. So, the promise isn't for an easy life, but our eternal best. That's why we shouldn't teach our kids that God takes away every pain in *this* life if we pray, but that there's purpose in the pain. Pray for the pain to go away, but if it doesn't, pray for understanding and faithfulness.

Q: Is it okay to guess how God will accomplish what He's promised?

A: Absolutely. Otherwise you might miss an opportunity. This is what Joseph is doing when he asks the butler to remember him. He's guessing that this must be how God is going to deliver him.

Just be careful not to put your faith or hope or trust in your *own guesses*. The trouble comes when we *expect* God to be something He isn't, or *not something* He is, or to do something He won't. In the story, the butler never promises to “remember” Joseph.

So be discerning when putting faith and trust in your *fellow inmates*.

Joseph awoke with fresh hope on day 365: it was the king's birthday *and* the anniversary of the butler's restoration. This is it, the last holdout of hope. This *has to* bring Joseph to mind ... except it *didn't*.

Now, we don't want to be bitter ol' cynics (right?!), so please, put some faith and hope and trust in people. But, *always* reserve your *highest* hope, *deepest* trust, and *unqualified* faith for the only One infallible ... and *try* not to expect the inmates to be.

All too often, we put our highest hope in a person, a thing, or a circumstance, and blame *God* when we're inevitably disappointed!

Another wrong-headed assumption we make in the white space is thinking it's always all about *us*. If a loved one is in the hospital, *or worse*, it *isn't* because God is teaching *you* a lesson. That's another caricature and corruption of God. Our part in God's story is *never just about us*. And sometimes God directly appoints us to serve in *someone else's* white space.

So Joseph served all of Egypt's VIP prisoners, because daily faithfulness in ordinary duties is how we express our trust.



The nomes of Lower (Northern) Egypt



Governor Djehutynakht c. 2010-1961 BC

He's the type of VIP Joseph served. And who knows? Djehutynakht's great grandson may well have shared some time in Joseph's white space!

Now, imagine Joseph waking on day 730. It's Pharaoh's birthday once *again*. It's also the first anniversary of Joseph's unmitigated distrust and hopelessness in the butler *ever* remembering him to Pharaoh. **"Another birthday ... another year in the dungeon ... another year forsaken and forgotten. This is how it is – and how it's always gonna be!"**

And this, right here, is when the enemy really goes to work in the white space! If he can't get you to curse God in the white space, he'll do his nastiest best, to convince you that the white space is God's curse on *you!* But, there's one last secret about the darkness of the white space: it always produces a huge big, bright blessing for those who keep on trusting.

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace [wisdom, perspective, satisfaction, self-control, self-sacrifice, strength of character, etc.] for those who have been trained by it. – *Hebrews 12:10-11 NIV*

God's lessons take time. And God-given dreams are only fulfilling when accompanied by patience and humility. And *that's* something that over-indulgence *never* teaches. It's not easy, but it's for the eternal best of you, and everyone you know and love!

Joseph is devotedly trusting God and joyfully serving his fellow inmates in the midst of his own hardship; and *still* God makes him wait another *two full years*. But then, they *all* had to wait. Abraham and Sarah had to wait 25 years for Isaac to be born. Moses had to wait 40 years to lead his people out of Egypt. And Hebrews, chapter 11 (often referred to as the "Hall of Faith"), lists Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Samson, Jephthah, David, and Samuel as just a few among the many who had to wait and trust. Sometimes the white space is just the wait space for God's perfect timing for the perfect plans He has perfectly prepared for you.

Day after day, Joseph awoke to the same ol' slow grinding, vacuous space of his hopeless situation, utterly oblivious to the overtly miraculous attainments he was unknowingly achieving on each momentous day in the dungeon.

He's a Hebrew. Egyptians *despised* Hebrews. (Gen 43:32, Ex 8:26) And a Hebrew foreigner, placed in power over *them*, second only to Pharaoh, would be *especially* reviled and resented and loathed. But after *two full years* of bringing a compassionate heart, a listening ear, and a joyful light to all those VIPs in their darkest days in that dungeon, *everyone throughout* the nation of Egypt will know an official who'll vouch for Joseph! **"Hey, I hate Asiatics as much as the next guy, but that Joseph is somethin' special, and Egypt's fortunate to have him. And I'll put my sword through any man who claims different!"**

That's the kind of stuff God does in the white space. God always has you where you need to be. And you're always being prepared for something greater ... unless you give in and bow out. Some of you are on the verge of promotion and don't even know it, because God doesn't announce His appointments in advance. When Joseph awoke on day 730, he was totally unaware that during the night, Pharaoh had had two disturbing nightmares.

But now we're getting out of the white space ... and if you understand graphic design, advertising, or writing, you know that you need an appropriate amount of white space in order to appreciate the words! So, as we leave the white space and return to the words, this is where we'll close God's story for today.