

Our Place at His Place

The Pits

June 14, 2012

Welcome to where we're learning how to be successful in everything we do!

What good does your goodness do for you?



In our materialistic culture, **we often equate loving our children with indulging them**. But, indulgent parents skew our perception of God. We've **currently** had our indulgences greatly diminished. And **it's fatal** to our faith **to think of God as an indulgent Father**, which is something God had to undo in Joseph, because he was the unintentional victim of a *dangerously* indulgent dad.



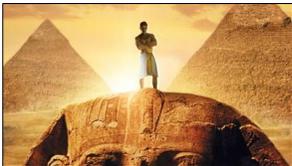
When [Joseph's] brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him – Genesis 37:4 NIV



Joseph's story shows us how **God uses deprivation to transform the overly indulged**. At the beginning of Genesis 39, Joseph is *promoted* into Potiphar's house, and *"The Lord gave him success in everything he did"*. (39:3) At the end of the Genesis 39, he's *demoted* into Pharaoh's prison, and *"The Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did"*. (39:23)



The world defines success by the sheer number of shallow indulgences; whereas God defines success by the depth of **our intimacy with Him**, and **our ministry to others**. And we mostly learn that in the depths of the pits. Eleven years have passed since Joseph was sold by his brothers; he's about 28, and enslaved and imprisoned in a huge silo-shaped-dungeon under Potiphar's house.



The more Joseph obeys God, the worse life gets! The more he does right, the more he's done wrong! Mrs. Potiphar tries to seduce him, fails, and accuses him of attempted rape. And ...

Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, **[lit. round house]** – Genesis 39:20a NIV

It would've resembled this 2,800 year old, underground, grain silo at Megiddo. And, this is where Joseph faces his toughest temptation: **the wymee**. Picture this silo sealed over, lit only by flickering orange flames. A heavy door screams open, and Joseph, in chains, looks down as he descends into despair and says, *"Wymee, Lord? Why me?!"* **We're most tempted to despair when life seems most unfair**. Joseph was the C.O.O. of the second most powerful house in the single most powerful nation!

Every servant bowed to him, like in his God-given dreams. (Gen 37:7, 9)



He'd be tempted right now to think, "I should've just slept with her! **What good has my goodness gotten me?!**" And *that's* the wrestling match we all require, to sort out **who we're really serving ... and why!** He was probably hoping God would reward him, for resisting the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife, with a wife of his own. Instead, he got a ball and chain. Seriously; it's in the Psalms.



They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons – Psalm 105:18 NIV



Who's this "they"? Well, it involves a prominent figure in this pit of despair ... the warden. "*Welcome to the pit of despair. Don't even think don't even think about trying to escape. The chains are far too thick.*" The warden worked directly *under* Potiphar, *literally!*

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him *kindness* and *granted* him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. – Genesis 39:20-21 NIV

Well *there's* a consolation prize, huh? Not really the blessing he was looking for. "**That's all my faith gets me?!**" Yes. That's *what* your faith gets you. But, *no*. That's not *all*. That's not the extent. **The pit is always about something deeper than the pit.** This is our dance with the devil! This is where we find out who we're really serving. **God or self?** God? Why? **To get what you want, or to become what He wants?** What He wants? Good. But, **when is the cost too high?** When do you sell out? **The real tragedy isn't being in the pit – we all got'a go in the pit – it's wasting the moment while you're there!** Don't be confused by early results; and don't sit in your cell and sulk.

The warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. **[When we're imprisoned, why not take charge?]** The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, **[which, as you might recall from the last sentence, was "all those" and "all that"!] because the Lord was with Joseph [guiding and delivering] and gave him success in whatever he did. [Because he didn't have any idea what God was doing; but followed just the same]** – Genesis 39:22-23 NIV



[In fact] He asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?" – Genesis 40:7 NIV



This is what makes Joseph so successful: **even though he's at his lowest, he's more concerned about those in the same predicament!** It's not that we ignore our pain, but that **we comfort others in spite of it.**



Don't waste time demanding relief when God is only offering comfort. Do you know the difference? A marathon is 26 miles. At mile 24, **relief would be a milkshake and a foot massage.** But **comfort is a paper cup of Gatorade and a shout to press on!** And in case you hadn't noticed, we're in a marathon down here! That's why Paul says:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us *in* all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in *any* trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. – 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV

It was obvious that **Joseph's integrity bound him** in a positive sense **far more than chains** could in the negative. You got'a serve *somebody*.

For a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. – 2 Peter 2:19 NIV

You are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness – Romans 6:16 NIV

And if it's the Lord, then, **when life takes your dignity, don't offer your integrity too**. Joseph didn't; just the opposite: **he blessed his warden** and **he blessed his fellow inmates**; and in so doing, **he blessed the Lord**. In his dreams, everything was bowing, but *nothing* was serving! Because, God hadn't yet taught him the great truth of true greatness.

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. – Matthew 20:26-28 NIV



The Lord is the Master Servant! Even the term, “serving God” is a misnomer. All it can really mean is that **we're pleasing God by serving others** in *His* name.



But, when the enemy can't conquer from without, he whispers from within, knowing **if you endure the pit you'll get to the palace**. So, the voice whispers: “Your dreams are dead. Your *own* sin killed 'em. And you're gonna die in this hellhole.” And here's a shocker ... usually it's not the *enemy* whispering words of despair ... *it's you!*

If you spoke to others as you speak to yourself, would you have any friends? Probably not. Know why? You sound too much like the devil! **The only hopeless pit is the one that's self-imposed**. Despair has almost *nothing* to do with circumstances and almost *everything* to do with attitude, perspective, and your definition of success. So, as I exhorted you to do your best to do last week:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, [a.k.a. the pits; a.k.a. opportunities to glorify God and grow] because you know that the *testing* [the *tearing*] of your faith *develops* [the *repairing*] perseverance [the *muscle*]. Perseverance must finish its work [growth] so that you may be mature and complete, [able to fulfill your uniquely created purpose] not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom [in the pit], he should ask God, who gives [insight and perspective] generously to all [who seek it] without finding fault [for confusion or frustration with the pit], and it will be given to him. But when he asks, [for insight and perspective] he must believe and not doubt [that God is with him in the pit, and working through him strategically for an ultimate, eternal, good] ... – James 1:2-6 NIV

God gave him *true success* **outside the house**, then **inside the house**, and now **under the house!**

If you asked Joseph, in the pit, to list what he thought God should do, he would've said something like, "Restore my reputation and my position, and maybe get a place of my own on the plantation with a wife and children."



"Heh-heh, that's pretty good." "What? What's so funny?" "It's just, I've seen God's actual list, and it's just a *tad* more ... *grandiose*. You get the reputation and the wife and kids ... *and* ... you become the second most powerful leader in all of Egypt; you save the entire nation, your father's family, and the known world. you establish the 12 tribes of Israel in the land of Goshen. And, your story inspires Moses, who writes it as he leads them to the Promised Land; and, your story foreshadows the Messiah, who brings salvation to the *world*; and, your pitfalls inspire believers 3,800 years later at His Place – and until the end of time.

You see, **it's never that we want too much**, but that **we're willing to settle for far too little**.

So, **when you feel forsaken and afraid, don't abandon your post in the pit**. Some battles will be lost ... but victory is assured!" Joseph approached his new post in the pit like Job, who said:

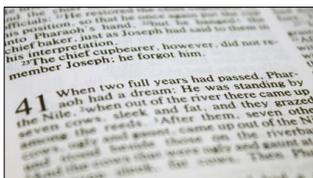
Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him ... – Job 13:15 NIV

And when it's your turn to trudge those stony steps into a deep, dark, pit where despair presses in, and whispers in your ear, and threatens to crush you, I think the Lord would remind you that, **the faithful don't get to choose how they die ... just how they live**. So, while you remain in the pit will you remain in My will? That's what we get to discover together, in the pits. Here's an obvious truth that's easily overlooked: **when you're at the bottom, stop looking down. It's time to look up**. You're called into action!

For it has been *granted* to you on behalf of Christ *not only to believe on him*, but also to *suffer for him* ... – Philippians 1:29 NIV

"Granted"?! Yes. Why? This is your moment to shine! Show the world where to find what they most need: **peace in the storm, comfort in the pain, closeness in the aloneness, joy in the sorrow, and hope in the very pit of despair. On the way down, Joseph may have said, "Why me?" But, now that he's there, **he's looking up and asking, "What now?"****

When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream ... **[Wait. What? Forget Pharaoh's dream. Two years?!]** – Genesis 41:1 NIV



See that little *white space* between chapter 40 and 41? That's two full years passing without a word! **The blackest, bleakest, darkest days** of Joseph's adult life **are in that white space**. 730 days adrift in the blank, vacuous, empty space of abandonment and forgottenness. But **God is always at work in the white space**.

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.

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 causes one to bow down, and another to bow out.**

We don't really stop trusting *God*; **we mostly stop trusting an indulgent caricature of God.** 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.

Endure hardship as discipline **[lit. *the training and education of children*]** ... If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children ... 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 for those who have been *trained* by it. – Hebrews 12:7-11 NIV

The Father 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 pain in *this* life, but that **there's purpose in the pain.**

God's lessons take time. And sometimes the white space is just the wait space. 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.

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.

The last time Joseph looked up, the lock-bolt at the top of the stairs had noisily unfastened, the thick, reinforced doors were thrown open, and bright rays of sunshine pierced the dusty, dead air, and filled that pit with blinding light. Whoever entered caused quite a commotion. And the warden came to Joseph and said, "Pharaoh had a dream."

And *this* ... is where we'll close the story. But, you can keep reading.

It's right after the white space, in Genesis 41.