

Empty Space

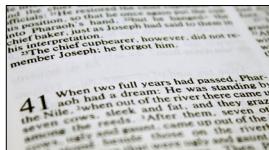
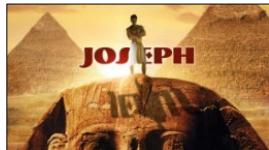
Surviving the Pit of Our Stomach

February 15, 2026



Today we're finishing discussing what to do when it feels like God abandons you.

So the question is: **How do you remain faithful if it seems God isn't?** Just trust. But how? Well, we're *finishing* the *point* we started last Sunday, when we *looked* at Joseph in *Pharaoh's VIP prison*, interpreting the *life-saving dream* of the *royal cup-bearing butler*, and the *incriminating dream* of the *royal baker's guilty conscience*. And *all* Joseph asks of the *grateful cupbearer*, is that:



"When all goes well with you, remember me and [unlike his brothers and Potiphar and Mrs. P.] show me kindness; [just] mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the HEBREWS, [that's critical for later] and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon." ... Now [on] the third day ... [Pharaoh] restored the chief cupbearer to his [trusted] position ... [And on day four, Joseph's trust in the Lord must've soared! But then day by day eroded away in a monotonous marathon of misery. Cuz] [The chief cupbearer] did not remember Joseph; [in fact] he forgot [all about] him.
– Genesis 40:14-23 NIV

And *that's* how *that* chapter of little Joe's life comes to a *close*. *Literally*. **That's how chapter 40 ends.** And on *day 365*, the *anniversary* of Pharaoh's *birthday*, and his *trusted butler's redemption* and *restoration* per Joseph's *interpretation*, **his hope and faith and trust in the Lord must've been sorely tested**. So, *what do we do* if the Lord isn't *living up to His end of the bargain*? Remember that we're *told* we'll be *tested*. Because:

The *testing* of your *faith* develops perseverance. – James 1:3 NIV

And *that's a big deal* to our *Father*. Just *look* how chapter 41 *begins*.

When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream – Genesis 41:1 NIV

Wait. What? Forget Pharaoh's dream, what about those "two full years" that take place in that empty space between 40 and 41?! Because *that blank chapter of Joseph's life* (chapter 40, part B) was obviously the *darkest, dreariest* days of this dreamer's adult *life*. **730 days adrift and abandoned and forgotten.** But just so you know, **the Light of life does His best work in our darkest days.** Cuz it's *in the emptiness*, when it *feels* like He's *least* at *work*, that He's *most* at *work*, *refining*, *testing*, *maturing*, and *guiding*, **preparing you and the timing for your created purpose.** And *how* we *respond* in the *pit of our stomach*, reveals *who* we think God *is*, and *how* we expect Him to *act*. Which is *why* **the same hardship causes one to bow down and one to bow out.**

And as we saw last Sunday, the story of little Joe's journey can be summed up with this:

God opposes the *proud* but gives grace to the *humble*. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may *lift you up* in due time. – 1 Peter 5:5-6 NIV



In our *materialistic, self-indulgent culture of instant gratification*, **we often confuse loving our children with indulging them**. But, *indulgent parents skew our view of God*. And **it's fatal to our faith to see God as an indulgent Dad**, which is what He had to *undo* in *little Joe*, cuz he was the *unintentional victim of a dangerously indulgent dad*.



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



And he *pours fuel on the fire* by *bragging* about *dreaming* about all of *them* (as *sheaves of wheat*) *bowing to him*. Which is *why* a *giant part* of the *giant story* of Joseph's *journey* (30% of Genesis!) tells how **God allows suffering, brutality, cruelty, unjust accusations, oppression, and deprivation to transform him**, from an *overly-indulged, prideful, teenage punk* into a *man of God* so *mature* in *Christlikeness* that he *ultimately overcomes his own revengeful heart* and *open up* to the *very brothers* who *hated him, betrayed him, sold him, and enslaved him*!

So, *how do we do that?* Remember where God was during his years in the *dungeon*. Because:

[Potiphar] threw [Joseph] into the jail where the royal prisoners were confined. But even while he was in prison, the Lord remained with Joseph; [because Joseph remained with the Lord. And unlike Joseph's brothers, Potiphar, Mrs. P, and the butler] [the Lord] showed him kindness by making the chief jailer well-disposed toward him. – Genesis 39:20-21 NAB

Why not *show him kindness* by *getting him out of there*?! Because – and *here's the hardest part of this sermon to hear* – **he needed to be in jail for a few years**. In *hindsight*, the Psalmist says:

[The Lord God] called down *famine* on the *land* and destroyed *all* their supplies of *food*; and prior to that He sent a man before them— Joseph, sold as a slave. [And] They *bruised his feet with shackles*, his neck was put in *irons*, till what he *foretold* [the *baker* and the *butler*] *came to pass*, [which took *three days*; but also] till the Word of the Lord proved him true. [Which took well over two years. But *then in due time and right on time*] The king sent and released him, the *ruler* of peoples set him free. [And not only that] He made him *master* of his *household*, *ruler* over *all* he possessed – Psalm 105:16-21 NIV

Then [well over seven years later] his [humbled and frightened] brothers came and [just as he'd dreamed] bowed low before him. “We are your slaves,” they said. [“You got that right! Get the *shackles* and the *neck irons*!”] But Joseph [actually] told them, “Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, to judge and punish you? [Actually, maybe that's the hardest part to hear] As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. [You see] He brought me to the high position I have today [by sending me as a *slave*] so I could save the *lives* of many people. No, *don't be afraid*. Indeed, I *myself* will take *care* of you and your *families*.” And he spoke very kindly to them – Genesis 50:18-21 NLT



Because, in hindsight, *both* the *pit* and the *prison* accomplished something *nothing else* could've *hoped to do*: they not only *humbled* Joseph and *catalyzed* his *utter dependence* and *loyalty* and *trust* in the *Lord* ...

But *while* Joseph was *there* in the *prison*, the *Lord* ... *granted* him *favor* in the *[eyelinered]* eyes of the *prison warden*. So the *warden* put Joseph *in charge* of *all* those *[royal VIPs]* held in the *[royal]* *prison*, and he was made *responsible* for *all* that was *done* there. ... Because the *Lord* *[really]* was with Joseph and *gave* him *success* – Genesis 39:20-23 NIV

Granted, it's the *kind* of success *only* an *all-seeing* God could *see* as *success* in the *empty space*. But you see, we never *stop* *trusting* the *One* *true* *God*; **we stop trusting an indulgent caricature of God**. But *once* we come to *realize* who He is and *how* He works and *why*, it makes *perfect* *sense* to put *all* *our* *trust* in Him. Which is why **godly parents wisely refine and patiently prime their children** in a way that develops *self-control*, *self-sacrifice*, and *strength* of *character*. So:

Endure hardship as *[lit. for the purpose of]* *discipline*; *[lit. training and education, because]* God is *treating* you *[men and women]* *as sons*. *[Ever wonder why Scripture says there's no male nor female in Christ? (Gal 3:28); and why you ladies are so often referred to as sons? Because sons had all the rights and power and authority, and therefore were often loved more than daughters. So this is a promise from your Father of being equally included, not excluded. Plus, it evens out because men have to contend with being His bride and the daughter of His people!] For what son is not disciplined* *[trained and educated]* *by his father?* *[An illegitimate, unloved one. So] If you are not disciplined ... then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.* – Hebrews 12:7-8 NIV

Like *good parents*, God wants *better* for *us* than we *want* for *ourselves*. So, **the promise isn't an easy life, but a full life**. Purpose-ful. Meaning-ful. Joy-ful. Hope-ful. And peace-ful. And those "ful's" are founded in the empty space. So **don't train your kids to numb or run from pain, but to find its purpose in their purpose**. Feel free to guess what God *might* be *doing*. That's what Joseph does when he *asks* the *butler* to *mention* him to *Pharaoh*. Just *keep* in *mind* that it's a *guess*. And **keep your faith and hope and trust in God, not your guesses**. Because all too often, we *hang* our *hope* on a *person* or *position* or *condition*, and then *blame* *God* when we're *disillusioned*! Another *misconception* and common *assumption* that we *make* in the *empty space* is thinking it's *all* about *us*. But, **our part in God's plan is never just about us**. And quite often God will *appoint* you to *learn* your *lesson* by *serving* in someone *else's* empty space. Just as Joseph served *all* of Egypt's *VIP* *prisoners*. Because **daily devotion in everyday duties best expresses our trust**. And remember this:



The *God of Jacob* *[the indulgent dad]* ... established it *for a testimony in Joseph* when he went throughout the *land of Egypt*. – Psalm 81:5 NAS



And *when* did little Joe go throughout the *land of Egypt*? When Pharaoh *put* him *in charge* of *storing* up *seven-years* worth of *grain* for a coming *seven-year famine* that *only* Joseph *foretold*. Now, Egypt, in Joseph's day, was *divided* into *42 districts*. And each district had a *powerful, royal governor*. And **these officials, and other affluent VIPs, frequented the royal prison** if and whenever they *upset* the *king*.

And depending on Pharaoh's disposition at any given moment, **there could be a lot of traffic getting a royal time out.** This is Governor Djehutynakht. [Je-hoody-nacht] (c. 2010-1961^{BC}) He lived about 100 years before Joseph. You'll have to excuse him for *losing his head* – it's been a rough 4000 years! But he's the type of VIP that Joseph served. And who knows – His grandson could've shared some of Joseph's *empty space!* And if he *did*, then Joseph served in *his* – unable to even *begin to imagine* what, "in due time" only *little Joe* would *see coming*: seven years of *famine*, preceded by seven years of *abundance*, in need of someone *capable of planning, arranging, and managing the feeding* of the *nation*. **Just not a Hebrew.** Cuz, gross! Yuck! **That would be unimaginable.** Because, a Hebrew having *power over an Egyptian, especially to feed them*, would've been *especially repulsive* and *reviled* and *resented* to those *ancient, racist, Egyptians!*

So [even while he was saving them by feeding them] they set him a place by himself ... and the *Egyptians* who ate with him by *themselves*; because the *Egyptians* could not eat food with the *Hebrews*, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. – Genesis 43:32 NKJ

Which is *why* God had to establish a *testimony* (in fact, *hundreds of 'em*) in Joseph, for *when* – in *due time* – it was *high time* for that *little Hebrew jailbird* to get out and go throughout *Egypt*!

You see, after *all* those seemingly *empty* years, bringing a *joyful, selfless light of wisdom and compassion* to *all* those VIPs in *their darkest and dreariest days* in that *dungeon*, **every Egyptian throughout the nation knew an official or two who'll vouch for Joseph!** "Hey, I hate these Hebrews as much as the *next guy*, but this Joseph is somethin' *special* – a *gift from our gods*. And I'll put my sword through anyone who says *different*!" Cuz **that's the type of testimony only God can establish in the empty space.** If you *trust* Him enough to *allow* Him to *train* you.

Imagine day 730. It's Pharaoh's birthday *again*. But he's not *getting* his *hopes up again* ... because of his *distrust* and *disappointment* in that royal cupbearer's *memory* and/or *integrity* to remember him and/or *mention* him to Pharaoh. **"Another year ... another birthday in the dungeon ... forgotten and forsaken."** And *this*, this *moment*, right *here*, like with Jesus in the *wilderness*, is when the *enemy* really goes to *work* in the *pit of your stomach!* Cuz **if he can't get us to curse God, he tells us God has cursed us!** Because *he* knows what *God* and *James* know: **if you persevere in the pit, you're gonna get to the palace!** And *then* you'll see your own seven-year harvest. You see:

Our [earthly] fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God [our heavenly Father] disciplines us for our good, [as only He knows best] that we may share in His holiness. [But remember] No discipline [earthly or heavenly] seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, [in due time] it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace [but only] for those who have been trained by it. – Hebrews 12:10-11 NIV

God's *lessons* take *time*. But **God-given dreams are only truly fulfilling in His timing.** And that's something over-indulgence never teaches or trains. That *white space* is just the *wait space*, where **we wait on others while we wait on God's timing.** All the while **trusting that He's there with us, establishing a powerful testimony in us.** So, what's He establishing in you?

Cuz day 730 wasn't just *another day*. It's just that little Joe *woke up unaware* that Pharaoh had just had *two disturbing dreams*. And *needed a trusted interpreter*. And *turned to his trusted butler* for a *suggestion*. But *now* we're *leaving the empty space*. So we'll *leave it here for today*.