

Empty Space

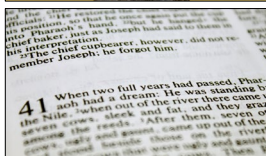
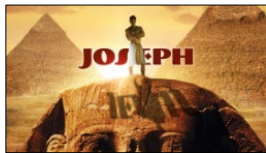
Surviving the Pit of Our Stomach

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!

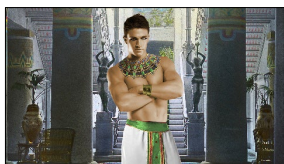
So, *how do we do that?* Remember *where God was* during his *years in the dungeon*. Because:

[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.