Surviving in Egypt

The Life of Joseph

Dr. Joseph Davis

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Foreword

Thirty-three years ago, Dr. Joseph Davis and I were in the same classroom. I was behind the lectern, and he was sitting at one of the desks. This was my first introduction to him. He was young, energetic, fun-loving, and athletic. (And he wasn’t quiet!) How could I not notice him? And how could I not like him? Over the next couple years, we shared the same classroom several times. You can really get to know someone that way. We became more than professor and student. We became friends.

Years passed, and we pretty much lost contact. But God in His providence (through social media) brought us together again. When Clearwater Christian College (where I was a Bible professor for 38 years) suddenly closed in 2015, Joe was one of the first to contact me to see if there was anything he could do to assist me. That meant a lot to me, to say the least.

In the intervening years, God has placed Joe into many different ministry roles. As he served in various locales, he was further molded by those experiences and those people into the pastor he is today at GraceLife Church in Sarasota, Florida.

Speaking of Joseph, surely one of the most fascinating and beloved characters in Scripture is Joseph the son of Jacob, in Genesis. Many of us were first introduced to his story when we were young children in Sunday school. Not a few books have been written and sermons preached about him. Why has Joe Davis written another one, which was born out of his preaching ministry at GraceLife?

Having just finished reading the book myself, I would say that his book was born out of two things. *First*, out of many years of living life and doing ministry. Living life is not always easy, as I am sure you are well aware, Joe has had to deal with personal tragedy in his life. Nor is doing ministry always easy. Ministry involves an imperfect pastor ministering to imperfect people. We are all sinners. *Second*, out of many years of studying God’s Word. This book has not come from a cursory consideration of the passage being taught. It is the result of digging deep into the sacred text and seeking to be a part of that story.

As you read this book, you will have to deal with issues that you may have heard about but never seriously thought about, especially as they relate to you. You will read about dysfunction, providence, depravity, chêsêd, repentance, and more. These issues were real for surviving in the Egypt of the Old Testament for Joseph, but they are just as relevant for us surviving in our own Egypt. You will also perhaps be entertained (as I was) with certain phrases which the author uses to plant concepts vividly in the minds of his readers. A couple examples: “we expect our obedience to result in *tribulation liposuction*”; “like a *heavenly dog whistle* for your soul”; “stuck in your head like a commercial jingle.” (I’ll let you discover them for yourselves as you read.)

I strongly urge you to take the time to answer the questions at the end of each chapter. If you can’t answer the questions right away, pray about it. Make your reading and your meditation on it personal. You will not regret the effort you have made to personalize the truth.

Surely one of the most beloved Bible verses for many Christians is Romans 8:28: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” The story of Joseph in Genesis is perhaps the greatest illustration of this truth. Joseph himself wrote the Old Testament equivalent of Romans 8:28 in Genesis 50:20: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

Thank you, Joe, for your life and for your book. May God bless you and those who read it.

Professor Robert W. Carver (retired)

Clearwater, Florida

INTRODUCTION

Our Whole Hope

The story of Joseph may be the best-known biblical narrative in the world. It has been adapted into various artistic forms, in both religious and secular circles. The secular entertainment industry has done more on the story of Joseph than on almost any other biblical story It’s been on Broadway, on the movie screen, in ancient and modern literature, and in songs. Yet even with all that familiarity, is it possible we still don’t understand the magnitude of everything contained in this story from the book of Genesis?

This book will explore the life of Joseph through the lens of redemption. We will pinpoint inspirational examples of God’s grace, which preserved Egypt, Joseph, his family, and consequently, our hope for redemption.

We will unpack this story verse by verse, breaking down historical details of each passage to learn what was happening in the world at that time. We will also highlight spiritual components of what God was doing. Then, we will develop personal, practical applications to teach us how we should live in our world today.

Through our study of the life of Joseph and his family, we will use Egypt as an apt metaphor for our modern world. There are remarkable similarities between their dysfunction and our own. But, like Joseph, we will learn how to survive in this world through God’s grace.

I hope, in the course of this book, you will be inspired by how God used flawed people then and how He can use them now. My goal is to inspire you with confidence to survive our own travails in our “Egypt.” The reward will be a life of purpose, meaning, and *promise.*

**Part One:
Dysfunction**

CHAPTER ONE

Intro to Dysfunction

**Read: Genesis 37:1–11**

It’s natural to look at certain people in the Bible and assume they were something special. We often assume they were spiritual giants with only a few shortcomings. However, a closer look at Abraham’s family line reveals one example of outrageous dysfunction after another. In fact, we find *generations* of dysfunction so twisted, it makes you wonder: how did God come to choose them in the first place?

History: One Messed-Up Family

Based on nothing other than grace, God chose Abraham and his family as recipients of an underserved promise. He told Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

God didn’t make this incredible promise to Abraham because he deserved it. God didn’t visit Abraham and say, “You know, I am looking for somebody special, and you’re doing a really great job at life! I’m going to make you the Father of many nations. I’m going to choose your seed to be the line of Messiah, Jesus Christ. People of all nations will receive redemption through your family because you are the most outstanding shepherd of all time. You are just killing it at life, Abraham—congrats!” No, that isn’t what happened at all.

Abraham and his family were as far from deserving as you could imagine. They had done nothing to warrant God’s favor. Instead, God chose Abraham and his family precisely because they did not deserve it. That’s how God works.

**The Suffering of Abraham’s Family**

God choosing Abraham’s family didn’t mean things were going to be easy from that point forward. God made it clear, there would be suffering in this world. Life would be a long, hard process. This is the burden that comes with being God’s chosen in a world that opposes God’s ways—and by extension, us.

Part of Abraham’s suffering was revealed in Genesis 15:12–13, which says, “As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.’”

Can you imagine being told your children and children’s children would face hardship for centuries to come? That’s the reality Abraham faced. I can’t imagine Abraham’s anguish. It’s one thing to be told your descendants are a chosen people, but another thing entirely to be told they will suffer as a result. Yet, this story of suffering will lead us to the story of Joseph, which will be our object lesson on how God’s children are strangers in a land not their own, a lesson certainly applicable to us in today’s world.

**Deep, Deep Dysfunction**

To understand Joseph’s family history, we must first understand the level of dysfunction in Abraham’s family: it was a daytime talk show type of dysfunction. In this instance, God chose some seriously messed-up people, as He so often does.

Let’s start with the story of Abraham’s sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Despite their old age, God promised Abraham and his wife Sarah they would become parents. However, Sarah was so old, she didn’t believe God could keep His promise, so she encouraged Abraham to have a child with her handmaid, Hagar, instead. What if your spouse told you to have a baby with someone else, because she believed she was too old to have any more children? Ancient cultural norms aside, that was tenth-level dysfunction right there, and it was only the beginning.

Though Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, God said, “Guys, that wasn’t the way it was supposed to work. You were supposed to trust and wait on Me for a miracle.” In His timing, God kept His promise and Isaac was born. For a while, it seemed everyone was happy, but eventually a sibling rivalry developed between Isaac and Ishmael over who had the right to be considered the first born of Abraham, and to reap all the benefits that came with that title. Now Abraham had a serious family squabble on his hands, between his two sons—and their respective mothers. The resentment between Sarah and Hagar became unmanageable. I’m sure family dinner was a hot mess! The only solution was to banish Ishmael and his mother Hagar from the family. In essence, Abraham chose Isaac and Sarah over Ishmael and Hagar.

Later, Isaac had two sons, Jacob (Joseph’s father) and Esau. These two sons also had a bitter sibling rivalry over the same issue of inheritance, which you can read about in Genesis 25. From there, Jacob would carry on the family tradition of dysfunction.

Jacob was quite the interesting character. He was in love with a woman named Rachel, but Rachel’s dad said Jacob couldn’t marry her because Rachel’s older sister, Leah, wasn’t married yet. Of course, Rachel’s father was manipulating Jacob, but Jacob didn’t care. To get to Rachel, Jacob agreed to marry her older sister Leah first. I’m sure you can already imagine the kinds of trouble lying in store.

Jacob had ten children with Leah and two children—Joseph and Benjamin, the youngest of the group—with Rachel. Though Joseph was Jacob’s eleventh son, he was Jacob’s favorite son because he was Rachel’s first child. You see, Rachel was Jacob’s favorite wife, while Leah was the wife Jacob merely tolerated. All of Joseph’s half-brothers knew this, and accordingly, they deeply resented their father’s favorite:

1Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. 2These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. 3Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. 4But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

5Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. 6He said to them, “Hear this dream that I have dreamed: 7Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.” 8His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?” So, they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

9Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” 10But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?” 11And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

**—Genesis 37:1–11**

To make the dynamic even more combustible, Joseph knew he was Jacob’s favorite, too, and just like any annoying little brother, he couldn’t resist rubbing it in. One day, while out shepherding the flock with his half-brothers and his dad, Joseph told Jacob his brothers weren’t doing a good job (Genesis 37:2). The phrase translated as “bad report” is a Hebrew phrase meaning “an evil report.”[[[1]](#endnote-2)](#Source1) The word translated as “report” is the Hebrew word *dibâ*, which can also be translated as “slander” or “defamation.”[[[2]](#endnote-3)](#Source2) Based on this, it’s possible Joseph might, in fact, have been lying about his brothers.

So, there was Joseph, the irritating tattletale trying to make his brothers look bad. He was already Jacob’s favorite son. It’s safe to assume he embraced this distinction and would do everything he could to maintain it. Later, exacerbating the situation further, Jacob gave Joseph the “robe of many colors.” A robe like this was a special display of a father’s affection. It gave honor to Joseph, and everyone knew what it meant: Joseph was first, while the rest of them played second fiddle.

At this point, Jacob was every bit as much to blame as anyone else for the family dysfunction. He went out of his way to show favoritism, and most of his family resented it. This resentment became the genesis for a string of sordid tales to come.

Spiritual: Unconditional Election

This dysfunctional family represented God’s chosen people, destined to be the foundation for a great nation? I doubt it was the family any of us would choose to launch a religion. Even if we did choose them, the last thing we would do is allow these sordid tales to be recorded for everyone to read for centuries to come.

From Adam and Eve to Cain and Abel to King David, on and on, dysfunction was a recurring pandemic among God’s chosen people. Yet all this dysfunction was a testament to God’s grace and mercy. There is no doubt God’s choice had nothing to do with their merit, but everything to do with undeserved favor.

Deuteronomy is clear about this. Here’s what God said:

6For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

**—Deuteronomy 7:6–8**

Abraham’s family was chosen without merit; so, too, Joseph’s father, Jacob, was chosen over his brother, Esau, without merit. Romans 9:10–13 says, “And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ As it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’” In this story, we will see, Joseph didn’t make himself special. *God* made Joseph special.

**Life in Egypt**

I’ll add a warning here about life in Egypt. Remember, throughout this book, we are using Egypt as a metaphor for the world we live in today. As God warned Abraham and Joseph, being chosen by Him did not mean life would be easy. It never is.

Pursuing a life of ease and comfort is a fool’s errand—but we try hard, don’t we? We labor to keep our ducks in a row, yet somehow, someone or something always comes in and scatters our ducks. Egyptian Dysfunction shows its head and wreaks havoc on our earthly plans. Even those who receive God’s grace live in a world of depravity, both their own and everyone else’s. Jesus told His disciples, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

**The Perseverance of God’s Dysfunctional Chosen**

The good news is, no matter how dysfunctional life in Egypt gets, God’s plan for His people will always win out in the end. The Bible says, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12). God’s calling can overcome even our deepest dysfunction.

***Personal: Embracing Dysfunction***

It would be easy to glorify Joseph, especially when you consider all the incredible things he accomplished later in his life. He is often referred to as a picture of Jesus. In some ways, I can see how Joseph is a picture of Jesus, but I believe Joseph is much better picture of *us*! Joseph was a dysfunctional person from a dysfunctional family, yet God chose and used him, anyway.

I find great comfort in how God chooses dysfunctional people. He picks the messy, the imperfect, and the undeserving, because His sovereign grace can override any level of human dysfunction. Thank You, God, for picking messed-up people!

**We Are All Dysfunctional**

Have you ever been shocked by bad behavior from God’s people? If so, you lack a full understanding of why God had to take the drastic step of sending His Son to die for us.

When we deny or cover up our dysfunction, we’re committing an injustice against God—disregarding what He did to save us from ourselves. I’m not saying we should glorify our dysfunction; however, we certainly should be willing to confess and acknowledge it.

In addition, we tend to grade our own dysfunction on a curve. We judge the dysfunction of others with ruthless efficiency, by the letter of the law! Yet, when we come face to face with our own depravity, our first reaction is often denial or justification. Ironically, there can be great peace in acknowledging our dysfunction in a healthy way. In fact, doing so gives God the glory His grace deserves!

The acknowledgement of our own dysfunction can also inspire others. By lifting the veil of perfection, stripping away self-righteousness, we can become living, firsthand witnesses to the transforming power of grace. A dear friend and fellow pastor shared this story with me:

For years, when I first became a pastor, I was often very judgmental of other families. “How can you not have a good marriage? And how can you have kids that you can’t control?” After a while, I had a terrible marriage that ended in a divorce and children I couldn’t control. I was embarrassed by my dysfunction. I was burdened and disheartened by it. I thought, “Maybe I can’t be a pastor anymore.” It was at that moment that I began to realize God’s sovereign grace is all I need. Joe, I got to tell you, the time I grew the most is when I realized my family is just as dysfunctional as anyone else’s.

Something wonderful happens when we embrace our dysfunction in a vulnerable way: it inspires others to embrace the freedom to acknowledge their need for Jesus, just as we have. That’s why so much of the Old Testament chronicles the dysfunctional sins and shortfalls of God’s chosen people. It shows us, even in the story of Joseph, sovereign grace is the only hope for a connection to Heavenly Dad.

In that vein, I am so grateful for the dysfunction we see in Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. I am comforted by how their family was an absolute mess. I am glad these people were far from perfect. I am so happy God made sure all the painful details were documented so we could read about them, and be inspired by the power of God’s grace, thousands of years later!

Let’s face it: the way these people behaved could be ridiculous at times—and yes, the same is true of us. This truth helps us understand how we can be connected to Heavenly Dad despite our modern-day dysfunction. In the coming chapters, we’ll dive into more stories of dysfunction, as practical examples of how God’s grace can intervene to overcome even the worst possible human dysfunction in Egypt.

WORKBOOK

Chapter One Questions

**Question:** What type of people did God consistently use throughout the Bible? Why is this important for us today?

**Prayer Journal:** In a journal or notebook, write a prayer of confession to God about some of the ways you can relate to the dysfunction described in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Alone in a Pit

**Read: Genesis 37:12–24**

Some of the most painful moments in life are marked by betrayal, especially betrayal at the hands of those closest to us. Just reading these words may bring up painful memories for you. Betrayal by loved ones is so common, even Jesus experienced it.

We take a dim view of betrayers. Isn’t it ironic, the way we naturally tend to identify and empathize with the betrayed? We comfort ourselves by casting betrayers as villains, shaking our heads in disbelief at their behavior. To appreciate God’s grace, we must learn to recognize, we are the betrayers more often than we want to admit. Realizing the depth of our hypocrisy in the betrayal business should open our eyes to how desperately we need redemption and, accordingly, help us appreciate God’s grace (more on this concept later).

History: Walking into a Trap

12Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. 13And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” And he said to him, “Here I am.” 14So he said to him, “Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word.” So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. 15And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, “What are you seeking?” 16“I am seeking my brothers,” he said. “Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.” 17And the man said, “They have gone away, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

18They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. 19They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. 20Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.” 21But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” 22And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. 23So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. 24And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

**—Genesis 37:12–24**

Joseph’s father, Jacob, apparently had no idea the level of animosity and dysfunction between Joseph and his brothers. This lack of self-awareness caused him to send Joseph into a volatile situation. Joseph was now isolated, vulnerable, and wandering around the fields looking for his brothers while wearing the very coat that reminded them Joseph was Dad’s favorite son.

Years of envy, rage, anger, and resentment came to a head. The colorful coat made it easy for the brothers to see Joseph coming in the distance. They had time to plan. The speed with which they devised this plan indicated they’d had it in their hearts for a while, simply waiting for the right moment.

Their plan was to take revenge on Joseph and their father by murdering their brother. Joseph had unwittingly walked into a potential deadly trap.

**Split the Difference**

But then, of course, there was the “responsible” oldest brother, Reuben—Mr. Split the Difference, who intervened and saved Joseph’s life. At first glance, Rueben may appear to be a small flicker of love and hope, especially compared to his brothers who had murder in their hearts, but don’t be fooled. As the oldest brother, Reuben would have to answer to their father if something happened to Joseph. In addition, because of several bad choices Reuben had made in the past, he needed to get on his father’s good side (see Genesis 35).

With these ulterior motives in mind, Reuben came up with an alternative plan to “split the difference” between evil and, well, evil. Instead of doing one evil thing (cold-blooded murder), he recommended they do a different, “better” evil thing. What may seem merciful on the surface was still evil, only with whipped cream and a cherry on top. But it seems we all do that, at some point—rationalize the lesser of two evil choices and call it righteousness.

So, what was Reuben’s plan? His lesser of two evils was to throw Joseph, un-murdered, into an empty cistern so deep he couldn’t get out. We shouldn’t pretend there were any righteous souls in this group of brothers. You had arrogant Joseph, a group of brothers conspiring to murder him, and Reuben, Mr. Split the Difference. Honestly, they *all* deserved to be in that pit together!

Spiritual: Defeating the Pit

Yet, we have a God who can turn evil to good. God used the unrighteous dysfunction between Joseph and his brothers to set in motion a series of amazing events that preserved His covenant with Abraham. At the end of it all, when Joseph and his brothers reconciled, Joseph famously said: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20). God used this massive fraternal dysfunction to set in motion a plan to save all of them in two ways:

1. Joseph would be the person God would use to save them all from a coming famine that would have destroyed the entire family and future of Israel.
2. God began His plan of redemption that would eventually save their eternal souls—and our own.

How frustrating this must have been for Satan! Surely, he believed he had the perfect plan to destroy the future of Israel. He was going to destroy the line of Abraham, and Jesus, by pitting brother against brother, perhaps thinking that if the famine didn’t get them, Joseph’s rise to power would give him the opportunity to take revenge on his brothers. But God turned Satan’s plan on its head.

13He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

**—Colossians 1:13–14**

How incredible God is, to take evil and turn it into our salvation! He took something meant to bring death and used it to bring life, instead.

Personal: Who Are We?

Given the choice of identifying with the murderous older brothers or with the irritating little brother, our instinct is to empathize with Joseph and look down on the others. Why do we side with Joseph so readily? Because he was the betrayed; he was the victim. Whether we want to admit it or not, our natural tendency is to see ourselves as a victim. This may sound strange, at first. Being a victim, however, has a perceived advantage: it gives us a way to justify almost any type of behavior or action we deem necessary to right the wrong.

Then, there’s the other person we like to identify with in this story. Reuben seems to be the compassionate one, the guy who didn’t want to murder his little brother. He dared to speak up against what was going to happen. If we had been the brothers, we would at least have been like Reuben—right? We wouldn’t kill Joseph; we would split the difference. That may seem like a glimmer of righteousness, but Reuben’s plan was also evil. It all came from the same dark heart capable of murder.

**We Are the Brothers**

It’s easy to look down on the brothers, but truth be told, we could have a measure of empathy for them, too. Relationships are difficult. Without Jesus in our lives, we will approach relationships like the brothers did. We will find a way to justify tossing people into a pit when we feel their behavior justifies it. Apart from Christ, we can be just as diabolical and hopeless. It was our sin, after all, that required Jesus to be thrown into a pit of death—the tomb.

**Salvation Through the Pit**

This story offers important insight into how salvation through Jesus works. Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” When God has called us to salvation, there is nothing Satan can do to stop it. God’s sovereign plan always works out for His purpose. He took the evil plan of Joseph’s brothers and turned it into a plan for their salvation.

In the same way, even as *we* are the evil brothers, God intervenes through the pit (the grave) to secure our salvation. Once we experience the joy of salvation through the pit, it does something to us. It changes us from evil brothers into loving brothers, working together to pull one another *out* of the pit! We identify with Philippians 2:3–4, which says, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit *[throw them in the pit]*, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves *[help them out of the pit]*. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

This is the transformation God completes in us once we become children of God. We are no longer like Joseph’s brothers, waiting for opportunities to satisfy the evil desire of revenge. We become active in rescuing those we see coming from a long way off, no matter how fancy or ugly their jackets are. Suddenly, the relationship with our spiritual siblings in Christ moves from dysfunctional to functional.

Here’s what John says: “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death *[the pit]*” (1 John 3:14). Take a moment to consider this fact: you were once just like Joseph’s brothers, but Christ, through His willingness to be in the pit on our behalf, has transformed you from an evil sibling into a loving brother or sister, committed to pulling people out of the pit, not throwing them in it.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Two Questions

**Question:** When you read these stories, do you tend to identify with the betrayer or the betrayed? Why is that?

**Question:** Why is it important as Christians to be willing to recognize we are more like the older brothers than we want to admit?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer recognizing yourself as a betrayer instead of a victim.

CHAPTER THREE

Dinner by the Pit

**Read:** **Genesis 37:25–28**

A few years ago, my wife and I went to dinner at a swanky restaurant to celebrate a special occasion. I was looking forward to it all day. In fact, I fasted so I would be ready for the feast!

When we arrived, they checked our reservation and took us to our table—which, to our chagrin, was literally right next to the bathroom. We could hear everything going on in there, and I mean *everything*.

Many of us choose to live life this way, cozied up to our own depravity. Reflect for a moment on how comfortable we become with our own sin. We learn to “live with it,” even though it means settling for the worst seat in the best restaurant. Over time, we become desensitized to our sin, normalizing actions and behaviors that at one time were completely unthinkable to us. This same thing happened to Joseph’s brothers.

25Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. 26Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him. 28Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

**—Genesis 37:25–28**

History: Comfort with Treachery

Gradually, the brothers reconciled themselves to the sin of treachery. The idea of throwing Joseph into the pit became so familiar, they didn’t even think twice about it. In fact, when the time came, they probably enjoyed putting their plan into action. Afterward, they sat down to eat dinner together with incredible callousness, without remorse or concern. There was no “maybe we should go get him.” They enjoyed food and fellowship right in the shadow of their sin, as Scripture tells us they were close enough to the pit, they could hear Joseph cry for mercy (Genesis 42:21). I bet they even mocked him: “You’re not so special now, Joseph! Why don’t you dream your way out of this one?”

What a dark moment for these brothers. Not only did they throw their brother into this pit, but they were also comfortable eating dinner right next to the pit, in no rush to distance themselves from their sin. They were completely comfortable with their actions that day.

**Rationalized Depravity**

When they were children, they never planned on kidnapping their brother, throwing him into a pit, and becoming slave traders. They never had childhood dreams of selling a brother to a caravan of strangers; yet, that’s exactly what happened. At some point along the way, the decision to sell Joseph became an easy one, rational and justifiable. Once the opportunity arose, they leaped at it.

Some may read the story and think Joseph’s brothers showed compassion by selling Joseph into slavery rather than murdering him. I don’t think that’s the case. I think they successfully rationalized their depravity. We already know they were prepared to kill him, but cold-blooded fratricide is a difficult thing to come to terms with. At the end of the day, they knew it would be tough to live with murder, while selling Joseph could be reasoned through more easily. It was just as effective for getting rid of him, and they could make a little money on the side! They could even sell that ridiculous jacket of his.

Rationalized depravity is depravity at its finest. We rationalize our depravity constantly: we take an evil thing and figure out ways to make it seem merciful or necessary. By contrast, God sees the truth of things; He doesn’t deal in rationalizations. After rationalizing mugging and murder, Joseph’s brothers settled on lying and slave trading as the best option. However, stopping short of murder doesn’t mean they showed mercy. Though Joseph might have been a spoiled brat, he did not deserve what his brothers did to him.

Spiritual: Slaves to Sin

Yes, the brothers were depraved beyond belief—and we are no different. We quickly forget our own contributions to this depraved world around us. We do have our limits, and usually don’t go as far as murder. We tend to settle ourselves beside a personal pit of acceptable depravity. Sometimes we peer right over the edge. Sometimes we enjoy dinner right within earshot of it. Sometimes we stay a safer distance from it, but always somehow remain within sight. We’ve grown accustomed to things being this way. Most of us are on quite good terms with our depravity.

**Pit Living**

Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” Sick and deceitful hearts enabled the brothers to decide murder went too far yet slave trading was merciful. That’s the despicable wickedness of the human heart left to its own devices. That same wickedness dwells within each of us.

The scripture is clear, and the evidence is overwhelming: we have the same starting point as Joseph’s brothers. Think about your comfort level with your own pit of depravity. It impacts every area of your life, including how you spend your money and your time, and how you interact with others. We become so adept at living near the pit, we convince ourselves it’s comfortable there. We come to enjoy eating at the worst table at the best restaurant.

**Jesus in the Pit**

Again, Joseph did not deserve to be thrown into a pit and sold into slavery. He had some personality shortcomings, sure, but he was a victim that day. He was innocent of any wrongdoing; it’s one of the ways Joseph is a picture of Jesus. He was betrayed and thrown into a pit (death, the grave) because of the sins of others.

In 1 Peter 2:22–24, Peter described Jesus this way:

22He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 24He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Ironically, the brothers’ depravity and actions toward their innocent brother ended up being the catalyst for their salvation during the coming famine. God used their depravity for His purpose. That is ridiculous grace, isn’t it?

God does the same for us. Just as the brothers’ salvation came from selling Joseph into slavery, our salvation comes from the treachery of Judas, who betrayed Jesus for money; from Peter, who denied Him three times; and from the priests who conspired with the Roman government to crucify Jesus and throw Him into a grave (a pit).

Personal: What Are We Supposed to Do?

It is natural for us to identify with Joseph as a victim in this story, because doing so helps us ignore our own pit and enables us to deal harshly with others when their pit noise disturbs our dinner. “Quiet down, I can’t eat!”

Then there are moments when the Holy Spirit enables us to see the pit through the eyes of Jesus. When we suffer innocently like Joseph did, in someone else’s pit, God can create a unique opportunity to see things from our Savior’s perspective. It’s a glimpse into the love and grace of the innocent Jesus, who suffered because of our depravity. With the eyes of Jesus, our vision zooms out and the lines we have drawn around our own sin and others’ sin begin to blur. We begin to see, it’s not “our” pit or “their” pit; *it’s all one great big pit.* We see how our own depravity put Jesus in the pit to begin with; we were the ones who threw Him in. Once we recognize that, redemption begins.

**Your Pit**

Here’s what the brothers were unable to see: though they had put Joseph in a physical pit, they were in a spiritual pit, with no self-awareness, humility, or brokenness. We are just like them, too often oblivious or tolerant of the depths of our own pit. How precious are those moments of sobriety when we see clearly and say, “Wow, how did I become comfortable living like this? How did I get here? How did I get to this point in life?” Such moments are the genesis of our process of reconciliation with God.

**The Innocent Sufferer**

Have you ever wondered how in the world you got so comfortable with your pit? When we experience a moment like that, Jesus jumps in, pushes us out, and says, “I’ll stay here and clean it up.” When this happens, we find ourselves no longer willing to eat or live comfortably in our own depravity. We realize we are the one crying out for mercy from the pit.

Psalm 30:3 says, “O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Sheol; you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.”

Lamentations 3:55–57 says, “I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit; you heard my plea, ‘Do not close your ear to my cry for help!’ You came near when I called on you; you said, ‘Do not fear!’”

Because of Him, you don’t have to settle for living near your pit anymore. Isn’t that amazing? Are you able to see now, maybe for the first time, how comfortable you’ve become with pit life? Cry out to Him, because He will hear you. He will rescue you and pull you out of the pit, to life more abundant.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Three Questions

**Question:** Describe a time you rationalized your own depravity—justified a sinful action because it wasn’t “as bad as it could be.” What was the result of that action or habit?

**Question:** Is there a pit in your life right now with which you are too comfortable? How can becoming comfortable with even one sin affect your life overall?

**Prayer Journal:** There is great joy that comes from acknowledging where you are and receiving the grace, forgiveness, and transformation Christ has for you. Take a moment to journal a prayer of confession, surrender, and thankfulness.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Family Business

**Read: Genesis 25:29–34**

As a youth pastor, I constantly encountered parents living in fear of the influence the world might have on their children. I don’t dismiss this fear. There is good reason for it. We work overtime to protect them from the depraved culture around us. We strive to shield them by monitoring what they watch, the schools we send them to, the church we attend, how they use the internet, and who they hang out with. We do everything we can to minimize our children’s exposure to Egypt. I guess it’s all part of being a good parent, right?

If we’re honest, we know that sooner or later, no matter how sincere our efforts are, we will lose this battle. The world will creep in. Yet there’s a much bigger problem we don’t discuss as often: the most dangerous exposure to Egyptian depravity our children will face is from us, their parents!

When I titled this chapter, “The Family Business,” I wasn’t referring to the way a family makes its money. To the contrary, I’m talking about the depravity all families struggle with, both seen and unseen.

Of course, we love our kids, so we never want to be detrimental or spiritually harmful to them. However, inevitably, we all end up being just that. Family dysfunction is so well masked, and runs so deep, we often can’t see its impact on our children until it’s too late.

History: Evolution of Dysfunction

29When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes 30and returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?” 31Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. 32And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, “This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not.” 33And he identified it and said, “It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.” 34Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. 35All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” Thus his father wept for him. 36Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

**—Genesis 37:29–36**

For Joseph’s brothers, it all started with jealousy. When they were young, they never thought they would consider killing Joseph. Then, step by step, they became increasingly comfortable with the idea, until one day they came within moments of carrying out a plan to murder their brother. Their depravity culminated in selling Joseph as a slave and lying to their father about his fate.

When Reuben returned to find Joseph gone, he assumed in a panic his brothers had killed him. His self-centered response reveals his own depravity; “What is going to happen to me now? How will this make me look? What will I tell our father?”

**Deceived Father**

The brothers came up with a plan. They took Joseph’s prized jacket and covered it in goat’s blood. They gave it to their father Jacob with this explanation: “We found Joseph’s coat. It’s stained with blood. We are afraid it could it be Joseph blood.”

Let’s unpack the layers of deception here. First, they *knew* it was Joseph’s coat. Second, they didn’t *find* it; they *stole* it. Third, they killed a goat and used the blood to make it seem like Joseph had been attacked. I have to give them credit: this was a solid story they came up with.

Jacob didn’t ask any questions. He didn’t doubt his sons. He assumed Joseph had been torn apart by a wild animal. Jacob was blind to the level of treachery, dysfunction, and deception that had taken hold of his sons.

It got worse. As Jacob mourned the loss of a child, the sociopathic brothers did nothing to comfort him. They knew Joseph was alive. They could have eased their father’s pain instantly. Instead, they left him drowning in grief and anguish, willfully choosing to let him suffer. I am a father who has lost a child, and I can tell you from personal experience, it’s the greatest pain you can suffer on this earth. This is where Jacob found himself, yet his own sons didn’t care!

For years, Jacob and his youngest son, Benjamin, were probably the only people in the whole family who didn’t know Joseph might still be alive somewhere. (Joseph’s mother, Rachel, had died giving birth to Benjamin.) All the older brothers knew. Certainly, those brothers’ mom, Leah, must have known. One way or another, nearly everyone in the family had become accomplices to this heinous act.

**Inherited Dysfunction**

In the boys’ defense, Jacob’s sons were merely continuing the secret family business learned from watching their father. For years, Jacob had modeled a life of deception, lies, and manipulation. In Genesis 27, Jacob’s father Isaac was about to die. It was time for him to pass the birthright to his firstborn son, Esau (Jacob’s older brother). Isaac’s favorite son was Esau, but his wife, Rebekah, preferred Jacob. Rebekah wanted Jacob to get the birthright, so together, they schemed to make it happen. Isaac’s eyesight wasn’t particularly good in his old age, so they exploited this weakness to deceive him.

Scripture tells us, Esau was an exceptionally hairy man, so Jacob killed a goat. (Does this sound familiar?) He used the hair of the goat to cover his arms, making them feel like Esau’s. Then, Jacob went in to see Isaac, pretending to be Esau. To make sure, Isaac asked to feel his son’s arms. As soon as he felt the hair, Isaac was convinced it was Esau in front of him; the deception was successful.

Isaac gave Jacob the birthright, meaning Jacob would have authority over the entire family and all of its assets. Jacob also received two-thirds of Isaac’s life savings. In short, Jacob was now the recipient of the promise of land originally given to Abraham from God. Abraham had passed it to Isaac, and now, through this deception, Jacob has stolen it from his brother Esau.

Of course, Esau was furious when he found out what Jacob did, because his birthright was suddenly gone. As for Jacob, you’d think he would just move on once He got what he was after, right? But Jacob wanted the rest of Esau’s inheritance, too, the final one-third. Instead of being content with the two-thirds he had stolen, he wanted it all for himself.

29Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. 30And Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!” (Therefore his name was called Edom.) 31Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright now.” Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” Jacob said, “Swear to me now.” So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus, Esau despised his birthright.

**—Genesis 25:29–34**

Obviously, irreparable damage was done to their relationship. The brothers ended up going separate ways, so it’s possible Esau never met Reuben, Joseph, or his other nephews. Given the dysfunction in this family’s history, it’s easy to see how Jacob’s sons learned the family business of conspiracy and deceit.

Spiritual: What God Puts Up With

Galatians 6:7 says, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” There are undeniable patterns in our lives that expose our depravity. Those patterns always start with depraved hearts making selfish, sinful choices, which produce the bitter consequences of broken relationships and family dysfunction. Then, this cycle repeats for generations. When we experience the painful “Esau” side of this pattern, we see ourselves as victims. The hypocrisy there is we have all been on both sides of that equation with the people we love.

**The Blessing of Consequences**

Of course, Jacob and his family aren’t the only dysfunctional people in the Bible. King David had his share of dysfunction. He had an affair with a married woman and then, to cover it up, had her husband killed. When confronted, though, David confessed, which led him to say, in Psalm 51:8, “Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have broken rejoice.”

David’s expression “bones you have broken” is a reference to the crushing of his personal pride and arrogance. He was saying, “God, make me glad You have crushed the bones of my pride and arrogance.” David was thanking God for the consequences of His actions because he knew those consequences taught him his desperate need for mercy.

Without the humility the consequences bring, we would never have the chance to appreciate God’s mercy or grace. In that way, the consequences of our dysfunction are a gift from God!

**The Benefits of God’s Grace**

In Romans 5:8, Paul wrote, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Somehow, God still used Jacob’s messy, dysfunctional family to become the line of Christ and a conduit to bless all nations. If our Savior could be born out of this dysfunctional mess, don’t you think God can overcome your dysfunction? The fact is, God can wade through dysfunction with all of its anger, bitterness, resentment, and deception. God can use it to reveal our need for redemption and to save us from the eternal consequences we deserve. Not only that, but He can also turn the lessons from our dysfunction into inspirational stories for others to learn from!

That’s why I tell people, God never works because of us. He always works despite us. It’s amazing how God puts up with our mess and is always ready to lead us out of it.

Personal: Embracing Dysfunction

It’s easy to shake our heads at Jacob, but what if it were your worst sin—your deepest, darkest, most secret dysfunction—recorded in the pages of ancient scripture for all to see? Imagine people studying your behavior and choices for thousands of years. Envision scholars writing commentaries, and preachers writing sermons, on your family dysfunction and your contributions to it. How would your story fare in the light of day?

Now, let’s imagine a different Jacob, who lived in the light. Imagine if Jacob had told his sons, early on, the stories of his own desperate need for grace. What if, when his sons were young boys, Jacob called them together, sat them down, and said, “Boys, we are some messed-up people in this family. We desperately need God’s grace. Let me tell you a story about how I treated your uncle Esau and what I did to deceive your grandad, Isaac. This is why you’ve never met Esau. This is why we don’t have family reunions. It’s all because of my actions, my selfishness, and my deception.” Just imagine how different things would have been had Jacob sat down with his boys and told them, “Sons, don’t treat your brothers the despicable way I treated mine. To this day, I regret it!”

What would it take for you to be this vulnerable and open with your children or family? How hard would it be for you to confess your own dysfunction?

We all have massive dysfunction—every person, every family, every church. Denying or hiding it perpetuates the cycle, and its negative consequences, year after year, generation after generation. Yet this is our natural inclination. We will hide our own family dysfunction for years, living a lie. It could be addiction, manipulation, unresolved conflict, abuse, perfectionism, legalism, bad stewardship, or poor communication. We don’t want to talk about it. As a result, it spreads like a virus to everyone in our family.

By contrast, there is something incredibly beautiful and healing when we admit our dysfunction, exposing our children to our struggles.

**Walk in the Light**

First John 1:7–9 reads, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Failure to walk in the light of our dysfunction will amplify dysfunction’s impact on those we love most. Conversely, when we *do* walk in the light of who we really are, we receive supernatural comfort through acknowledging a desperate need for redemption. Understanding our need for redemption will drive us to dependence upon our Savior, Jesus, whom God decided would be born from the line of this same dysfunctional, sinful family we are studying.

One of the reasons I love recovery ministry so much is that people in recovery know their very lives depend on transparency, vulnerability, and honest relationships. People in recovery know there can be no veil over dysfunction; they sense the urgency of being open and up-front about it. As a result, recovery gives them a strong understanding of redemption.

When I was studying the life of Joseph in my personal time with God for twenty-five years before writing this book, I wrote this in my personal journal:

Realizing how much dysfunction I have and the effects it has on those I love most leaves no confidence in my personal righteousness or public spirituality. I want a new family tradition of living in the light. I want to model for my family how brokenness brings healing. That’s the only hope to rescue my family from the consequences of my dysfunctional family business.

I wrote that when I was twenty-eight years old. I haven’t done a great job of following it perfectly, but I’m constantly reminded I have a life full of dysfunction.

When we suppress the reality of our dysfunction, we will never truly enjoy God’s grace to its fullest extent. How great would it be if you could be set free from all the pain of hidden depravity lurking just beneath the surface, that’s ready to spring up and unleash ugly consequences on those we love? What if we learned the riches of brokenness, vulnerability, transparency, openness, and living in the light of mercy and grace? How much better would that be?

This doesn’t mean a functional family is a sin-free family. Such a group of people does not exist. Some families may seem perfect on the surface, but I promise you, they are simply better at hiding what’s really going on. There’s no such thing as a family without baggage.

A functional family is one with a tradition of confessing a desperate need for grace. This is what we see from the example of Jacob’s clan. Yes, they were truly messed up, yet in the end, we will discover, they didn’t hide it from God. They knew they needed His love and forgiveness. Thankfully, though there is no perfect family, God doesn’t need a perfect family. The deepest, darkest dysfunction doesn’t scare Him. God uses and loves imperfect people—like you and me.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Four Questions

**Question:** Have you ever blamed consequences from your own dysfunction on a family member? Why do you think you responded that way? How can taking personal responsibility for your actions and choices affect how you live moving forward?

**Question:** Have you ever experienced consequences that led you to receive God’s mercy? What does that teach you about God’s nature and the importance of consequences?

**Prayer Journal:** Journal a prayer to God, asking Him to help you break the cycle of dysfunction in your family by developing a new family tradition of transparency, vulnerability, and confession.

**Part Two:
God’s Grace for the
Ones He Loves**

CHAPTER FIVE

Intro to Grace

**Read: Genesis 39:1–6**

Many people live as prisoners to fear, slaves to anxiety, burdened by guilt over their dysfunction. They are overwhelmed by the reality of their own sinfulness.

How do we escape this paralyzing dysfunction? How do we prevent dysfunction from taking over our lives, preventing us from serving God? How can we overcome the emotional and psychological burden of it all? The only way out is an intimate, personal interaction with the power of grace. We must experience its impact and learn how to recognize its presence, even as we suffer consequences of our dysfunction and sinfulness.

1Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. 2The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. 3His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. 4So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. 5From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. 6So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

**—Genesis 39:1–6a**

History: The Lord Was with Him

Having been betrayed by his family, Joseph was at rock bottom. Watch how this all unfolded.

His brothers sold him to the Midianites. Midian was one of Abraham’s estranged sons, and Abraham was Joseph’s great-grandfather; so, you could say Joseph’s brothers sold him to his second cousins. From there, he was sold to his other second cousins, the Ishmaelites. (Ishmael was the first son of Abraham.) Finally, the Ishmaelites sold Joseph to an Egyptian general, in whose service Joseph became forced, slave labor. Now Joseph was far from home, with no money, no way to escape, and no way to contact his father. By this time, Joseph knew his father probably thought he was dead. No one would bother to come looking for him.

Every time Joseph considered his circumstances, it no doubt seemed like the world was screaming, “Joseph, your family hates you! They sold you, and now you are nothing more than a slave in the house of a pagan general. Your God has forsaken you. Your God doesn’t love you. You are a total loser!” Can you imagine Joseph’s sense of despair? Can you comprehend the feelings of isolation and loss? From a worldly perspective, Joseph had no hope for a future.

**“Who Is This Guy?”**

Joseph was clearly a smart, talented man. He quickly excelled in his role in Potiphar’s house. He went above and beyond, and Potiphar noticed; he asked to see Joseph.

The two began to have discussions about God. The Scriptures say Potiphar realized God was with Joseph—that Joseph’s success was a direct result of God’s blessing upon his life. The two formed a strong friendship, in which Joseph became a spiritual mentor to Potiphar and, in turn, Potiphar gave Joseph a position of great honor in the house: he oversaw all of Potiphar’s personal and financial matters. This meant, when General Potiphar left for months at a time on military campaigns, Joseph was in charge.

Think about that. Joseph, once a mere slave, was now running the house of the most powerful general in Egypt! Things were finally looking up for Joseph. Somehow, he had figured out a way to thrive despite horrible circumstances.

**The Benefits to Potiphar**

Because Joseph’s family was so dysfunctional, he had ended up in Potiphar’s house. Then Joseph developed a deep, meaningful relationship with a pagan Egyptian general. God then used this relationship to put Joseph in a position to teach Potiphar about God’s grace and mercy.

Joseph went through hell on earth, but once he came out the other side, he became a tremendous blessing, and his full potential was unleashed. It was Potiphar who was the first beneficiary of this blessing and realized potential.

Spiritual: Undeserved Favor

Genesis 49 tells us Jesus was to be born to the line of Judah, one of Joseph’s brothers. Despite how Judah and the rest of the brothers treated Joseph, Joseph was the instrument God chose to preserve, save, and keep Judah’s line from famine and more. Everything that happened to Joseph transpired to preserve and protect the line of Judah. While Satan was working to destroy salvation, God’s sovereign hand was at work to effect salvation.

Of course, Jacob’s sons were not paragons of righteousness; that’s what makes this story so amazing! This dysfunctional family was the one God spoke of in Genesis 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” God’s words here were both a prophecy of Jesus and a preview of the battle between evil and good, between Christ and the enemy. The entire story of Joseph is interconnected with that promise in Genesis 3:15.

**God’s Hand**

God equipped Joseph with everything he needed to do God’s will, including the ability to run, later on, the greatest empire in the world at the time. But this ability wasn’t just about who Joseph was. It was also about how God’s presence was with Joseph every step of the way. Don’t make the mistake of thinking Joseph deserved God’s presence, because He didn’t. We will learn later, Joseph struggled with bitterness and unforgiveness. Yet Genesis 39 is clear: the Lord was with him. God hand-picked Potiphar as the man who would purchase Joseph. This allowed Potiphar to be blessed by Joseph’s faith, and it changed everything—all of this despite Joseph’s bitterness and the emotional wounds he suffered from his own family.

**Our Feet**

If you could have asked Joseph about his life, do you think he would have said, amid all the pain, everything was going according to plan? Do you think being sold into slavery by his brothers and cousins was part of his five-year plan for success? Do you think he dreamed of one day befriending and serving an Egyptian general, given responsibility for overseeing all of his money? At the lowest points, I bet Joseph probably thought things were going horribly. But amazingly, they were not!

This concept is explained in my favorite New Testament passage:

8For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

**—Ephesians 2:8–10**

The phrase “walk in them” doesn’t do justice to the true meaning of this scripture. We don’t just walk into good works. We *trip over* them. God places unavoidable works in our path, yet we often can’t see them at the time. For example, placing Joseph in Potiphar’s house was a good work God had prepared beforehand for Joseph, but it certainly wasn’t what Joseph would have planned for himself. He tripped over it, and I doubt very seriously he thought it wa*s* a good thing at the time. Regardless, it was good, and God was doing something big.

**His Will**

Hebrews 13:20–21 says, “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

God doesn’t just prepare these opportunities beforehand; He prepares us to be able to take advantage of them. He gives us specific talent, life experiences, and emotional makeup, and He provides us the opportunity not only to trip over the works but also to be effective. Why does God go through all this trouble? It’s part of His plan—His will and desire to do something in, through, and for His chosen people.

Personal: Identifying Grace in Egypt

One thing is for certain: it doesn’t take much to see we are surrounded by depravity in this world. We can see depravity’s impact in our own family dysfunction. We live in a fallen world, just stumbling through as best we can. But God’s grace, His undeserved favor, comes through. Grace has the power to intrude on depravity and dysfunction, disrupting their normal trajectory toward pain and consequences. We see this in Joseph’s story, and we can see it in our own lives as well.

The first step in learning how to survive in Egypt is to do what Joseph did: learn how to identify when grace has intervened in Egypt.

**Distracted by Circumstances**

It can be difficulty to identify grace in a depraved world. For example, with the life of Joseph, our tendency is to focus all our attention on Joseph’s tragedy. We tend to focus on earthly circumstances and outcomes, thereby missing the hand of God in these moments.

A life obsessed with the here and now becomes like wearing blinders; it keeps you from seeing God’s hand and God’s grace at work. This is tough because the world is loud and obnoxious. When we’re successful, the world says: “Look at what you’ve accomplished. You did really well!” When we’re struggling, the world says: “Look at what a failure you have become.” The world’s depravity is like a loudspeaker, right in your face, saying, “Focus on me. Don’t look at anything else.” It distracts us from what’s *really* happening.

**Eyes for the Eternal**

In 2 Corinthians 4:17–18, Paul wrote, “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

In other words, we need to train our eyes to focus on eternal things. That’s the first step in identifying grace in Egypt: recognizing its eternal benefits. We must be able to turn down the world’s volume, in good times and bad, so we can see the eternal nature of what’s going on around us. Then we can take inventory of God’s grace in our own lives—in our own personal Egypt. Colossians 3:2 says, “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

**Eternal Echoes**

Without God’s favor on Joseph and Potiphar, there would have been no line of Judah. Joseph would not have been in a position to save a country from famine later, and Jacob’s whole family would have perished in that coming famine.

Without that line of Judah, there would be no Jesus. Without Jesus, there is no gospel. Without the gospel, there is no salvation. Suddenly, all anyone would have left to live for would be Egypt itself.

To this day, we are experiencing eternal grace-filled echoes from the story of how Joseph ended up in Potiphar’s house. Ephesians 3:11 says, “This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Those events are still having a direct impact on us today. The relationship between Joseph and Potiphar, and everything leading up to it, are linked to this very moment, even as you struggle to survive in your own Egypt—even as you read this book!

We must become people with eyes to see God’s grace and His eternal purpose in good times and bad, in suffering and success, in winning and losing, and even in living and dying. This is a crucial skill to learn if we hope to survive in Egypt.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Five Questions

**Question:** Think of a time when negative circumstances turned out for the good of you and others. How can these memories affect your ability to weather storms you will experience now and in the future?

**Question:** Could you identify, right now, examples of God’s grace at work in your life? What are the things distracting you from spotting grace at work? What steps could you take to become more skilled at identifying these manifestations of grace?

**Prayer Journal:** In your prayer journal, take some time to express faith in God’s plan, His sovereignty, and His ability to work in all things.

CHAPTER SIX

Resisting Temptation

**Read: Genesis 39:6–12**

Temptation is one area every Christian would love to conquer. It’s the hardest part of surviving in Egypt. Imagine if we could master the art of resisting temptation. How much better life in Egypt would be!

Many take the approach of hard work and discipline, hoping to achieve a higher level of spiritual maturity and consistency. Let me give you a dose of reality. No matter how hard you try, you’re going to fail. Sooner or later (most likely sooner), temptation will win. The reason is, living in Egypt puts us in constant, impossibly tempting situations with no path to victory—humanly speaking.

Hopefully, this chapter will give you a fresh look at temptation, teaching you how to survive it. In the next part of our story, we see Joseph tempted by Potiphar’s wife.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. 7And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, “Lie with me.” 8But he refused and said to his master's wife, “Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. 9He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”10 And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

11But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, 12she caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me.” But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house.

**—Genesis 39:6b–12**

History: Battling Darkness

Joseph was always battling darkness. His entire life, the enemy was trying to destroy Joseph, and because Joseph was the one God would use to preserve the line of Jesus, the enemy was simultaneously trying to destroy our salvation as well. Make no mistake: the enemy was extremely motivated and engaged. Satan had targeted Joseph constantly, and now he was about to do it again. This wasn’t about Potiphar’s wife; it was about the enemy’s desire to destroy Joseph.

Since “God was with” Joseph, the enemy needed to find a way to create a chasm between Joseph and God. Satan knew if he failed, there might not be another chance to stop the line of Judah. So he crafted a temptation scenario perfectly suited for a good-looking, successful man with power.

That’s when temptation is most effective: when it’s tailormade for our personal weaknesses and desires. For example, as a man, I would not be tempted to steal a five-thousand-dollar dress. A brand-new, multi-thousand-dollar cell phone, on the other hand—now, *that* is tempting. This is how temptation works; they aren’t temptations unless they appeal to you.

The wicked one pursued Joseph relentlessly, playing the long game. One successful resistance to temptation was not the end of the story. Satan used Potiphar’s wife to tempt Joseph day after day after day. She was endlessly persistent with her pursuit! Isn’t that just like the world around us? Egypt doesn’t take weekends off. But what I love is how Joseph saw right through the enemy’s plot.

**Forceful Conviction**

Remember, Joseph and Potiphar were friends, and Potiphar had blessed Joseph with trust and opportunity, so Joseph knew giving into temptation would break his friend’s heart. Joseph also knew giving into this temptation would dishonor God. These were the things motivating Joseph to resist temptation. Joseph’s primary motivation wasn’t fear of consequences or embarrassment; it was, “I don’t want to hurt my friend Potiphar. I don’t want to disappoint my God who has saved me.”

This faith in God enabled Joseph to flee from the temptation of evil with forceful conviction. He was quick and decisive. He didn’t consider flirting with temptation for one second. Knowing how men dressed in those days, leaving a coat behind was clearly evidence of a forceful, fast resistance. He had to scramble and move! He had to push her away, resist, and run. He left so fast, the coat she was clutching remained in her hand.

Joseph’s example is something all of us should emulate. Wouldn’t it be great if, when we face temptation, we could display the same type of decisiveness Joseph did?

Spiritual: Impossible Situation

However, before we glorify Joseph too much, let’s consider some facts. We are surrounded, even at this very moment, by things tempting us to be lazy, dishonest, and inconsistent. Other things tempt us to be liars and thieves. Still other things tempt us to take shortcuts, love ourselves more than others, and so on. We are constantly in the crosshairs.

Paul said in Ephesians 6:12, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Temptation in Egypt is relentless. It’s a miracle any of us survive! It seems temptation has a homing device locked in on our vulnerabilities. It doesn’t matter how faithful, disciplined, or mature you are; the enemy will relentlessly pursue you.

**God Sympathizes with Us**

Jesus Himself was subjected to a tsunami of temptation. Yet through His perfect resistance, Jesus became empathetic to our impossible situation. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

Resisting temptation seems like a lonely business, but for God’s children, it shouldn’t be. Our God has a full understanding of just how difficult surviving Egypt is. First Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

God is constantly at work in His chosen. He is intervening, providing opportunity to withstand this onslaught as we try to survive in Egypt. The same God who empowered Joseph to survive temptation in Egypt is the same God at work in our lives.

Personal: Humble Resistance

Imagine where would you be, right now if every time you were tempted, you gave in. What if God never intervened to protect you from yourself? What if grace never, ever showed up? You might not be alive to read this today. Egypt is relentless and all around us, attempting to use its influence and temptations to gain a foothold in our lives. That’s why Peter said, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Peter 5:8–9).

From a human perspective, the case is pretty clear: humanly speaking, defeating temptation is impossible. Even if you succeed once or twice, or three times or more, sooner or later, if you’re left on our own, temptation is going to win. But why? What is it about temptation that is so dangerous and so powerful? What are some of the reasons we fail?

**Self-Reliance**

There is arrogant resistance, and then there is humble resistance. Arrogant resistance relies on the idea of self-preparation. This mentality says, “If I work hard enough, I will be rewarded with victory over temptation. All I need to do is get enough Bible and prayer. I must get enough church. If I can do these things, I won’t fail!” It’s the try-really-hard approach some pastors preach, but that’s not really the gospel. I’m not saying it won’t ever work; in fact, it may work for a time. But when Egypt comes after you, day after day, you need so much more than just trying hard. You’re going to get tired. Why? Because your focus is on yourself, not on the power of God’s grace.

**Self-Preservation**

Relying on self-preservation to overcome temptation is born out of a fear of earthly consequences. It is motivation rooted in a desire to preserve your way of life. Though it involves a rightful recognition of potential consequences coming from giving into temptation, the problem with this strategy alone is that sooner or later, rationalization sets in. We begin to hatch schemes to minimize consequences. Maybe we hide the sin or convince ourselves we are victims who deserve a break.

Ultimately, relying only on self-preservation gives way to self-deception. When we believe we can sidestep the natural laws of sin, temptation will win. Proverbs 16:18 says, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” This is the result of those of us who try to resist temptation through arrogant resistance or self-preservation.

What’s worse, each time we succeed in resisting temptation through self-preservation or self-reliance, we become more confident and, thus, more susceptible to failure. Every time we say, “I was able to go right to the edge and recognize the temptation and turn away,” we gain fraudulent confidence, which will eventually end in failure. Surviving in Egypt requires far more than self-preparation or self-preservation. If you’re going to be successful long-term, you will need to tap into something better. You’ll need the same thing that empowered Joseph to defeat temptation.

**Humble Love**

Joseph was successful in resisting temptation day after day not because he was a spiritual giant, or because he was successful, disciplined, intelligent, and talented. It was because he had humble love and gratitude for what Potiphar had done for him.

Have you ever thought about resisting temptation as an expression of love? It most certainly is! Humble love is the ability to see how others are more important than yourself. This is a crucial lesson we can learn from Joseph. His love for Potiphar, and their friendship, inspired Joseph. Love and concern for someone he cared about enabled him to see beyond his own personal pleasure and satisfaction. He understood the risk and consequences weren’t just about him. They would also destroy his friend.

When we begin to see the consequences of our failure from the perspective of the pain it causes our loved ones, we get insight into the true nature of sin. As a pastor, I constantly try to stay aware of the impact my sinfulness can have on others. My love for them is one of the reasons I want to resist temptation. I know my sin has a huge impact, and my love for others helps me to recognize they are more important than my personal temptation.

Learning to love others, putting them before the temporary pleasures of sin, can be a highly effective deterrent. This was one of the resources Joseph had in his toolbox.

**Humble Gratitude**

The most important influencer during temptation is the miraculous intervention of grace into your depravity. Understanding the cost, depths, power, and scope of God’s grace is crucial to surviving temptation in Egypt. Humble gratitude for how God has chosen you, redeemed you, transformed you, blessed you, and saved you is key, especially when temptation surrounds you.

Joy over the intervention of grace into our depravity is far more empowering than self-reliance, self-righteousness, or self-preservation. Can you see that? Joseph did. His mindset was: “Not only do I not want to hurt Potiphar, but I don’t want to sin against my God, either.”

As a matter of fact, King David was confronted with this same truth after he committed his sin with Bathsheba. David said, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Psalm 51:4). David’s heart was broken, and not just by the destruction his sin had wrought on Bathsheba and Uriah. David was also devastated by his blatant disregard for all God had done for him.

When you understand the price Jesus paid for grace, it can help to put each temptation into proper perspective. When temptation comes, humble gratitude for God’s grace and love for His people offer the best ways of escape.

My hope is, as you read this story, you will stop relying on arrogant resistance to temptation. Instead, rely on humble gratitude for God’s grace and humble love for His people.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Six Questions

**Question:** Can you remember a time you were pursued relentlessly by a specific temptation? How did you respond? What was the result?

**Question:** Are you prone to responding to temptation with arrogant resistance—self-reliance or self-preservation? How can you shift your mindset to respond with humble resistance—humble love and humble gratitude?

**Prayer Journal:** Journal a prayer of confession and commitment to face temptation with humble resistance instead of arrogant resistance.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Obedience in Egypt

**Read: Genesis 39:14–20**

What motivates our obedience? In a world that encourages disobedience, what would be the incentive for God’s children to live according to His plan?

If we are honest, we will admit we anticipate some sort of earthly reward from God for our obedience. Subconsciously, we all think, “I hope Dad’s watching.” Therefore, we all develop expectations of what God should do for us when we “live for Him.” Centuries of bad theology have created these expectations that obedience results in earthly blessing. It becomes a major part of our motivation for obedience while we live in Egypt. We believe we are entitled to blessings; after all, we have earned them!

Somewhere along the way, obedience became a kind of genie in the bottle for Christians, especially those of us who are Christians in America. Somehow, if we rub the obedience bottle often enough, we’ll be granted our wish of blessings from God.

When our obedience fails to result in the expected blessings, we can slip into spiritual victimhood. We grow frustrated with our job, our finances, our car breaking down, our relationships, and even our families. We grow frustrated with how God allows Egypt to treat us. It can leave us scratching our heads, questioning God, growing bitter and cynical. “Come on, God, I am trying to serve You. Why can’t You give me a break?” Sooner or later, many come to a point where we ask ourselves, “Why should I bother? If Egypt’s going to keep winning, I might as well do what Egypt wants me to do.”

Joseph was obedient. Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him day after day, yet he was steadfast in rejecting her. If life were fair, it seems like Joseph should have been rewarded for his obedience. After all, that’s how blessing works, right?

Instead, Joseph’s reward for his obedience and faithfulness was more treachery and suffering.

14…she called to the men of her household and said to them, “See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. 15And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house.” 16Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, 17and she told him the same story, saying, “The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. 18But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house.”

19As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, “This is the way your servant treated me,” his anger was kindled. 20And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison.

**—Genesis 39:14–20**

Think about it. Joseph chose loyalty to his master and friend over temptation and betrayal. He was obedient to God. His reward? He was framed for rape and thrown into prison.

History: Obedience Without Reward

Instead of receiving blessing for obedience, Joseph was met with an evil conspiracy.

Do you think Joseph was the first male servant Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce? Potiphar’s wife was used to getting her way. She always got what she wanted, and rejection from Joseph was a severe blow to her ego. She felt the sting of his scorn.

In addition, she could never allow the truth of what really happened to get back to her husband, Potiphar. If he found out she had tried to seduce Joseph, she would be finished. She’d be in jail, at the very least. She needed to have Joseph locked up, and fast.

With so much at stake, Potiphar’s wife came up with an evil scheme. She quickly got other servants to turn on him by pointing out that he was an outsider and a Hebrew. It probably didn’t take much; many of the other servants were likely jealous of Joseph’s relationship with Potiphar and looking for a reason to undermine Joseph. Then she staged an attempted rape, with no concern for the fact that Joseph was an innocent man. The conspiracy was in full effect.

**Injustice for Joseph**

Potiphar came home to this manipulative trap. His wife created a convincing scenario, complete with false witnesses, fabricated evidence, and outright lies, and he fell for it. Knowing he needed to act swiftly to preserve his dignity and prestige, he fired Joseph and threw him into prison.

What were the consequences of Joseph’s righteousness and obedience? To be cast back into a life of suffering, despair, and hopelessness. In this respect, Joseph was unjustly accused, as Jesus would be, too, centuries later. Now Joseph was rotting in an Egyptian prison, his reputation destroyed, branded a rapist. No one felt sorry for him or had mercy on him. All because he chose to be obedient to God.

Spiritual: Expectations of Obedience in Egypt

The first thing to understand about being a Christian is this: Egypt is under no obligation to honor your obedience to God. In fact, you should expect rejection. First John 3:13 says, “Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.”

Obedience to God is different from the world’s version of morality or ethics. It’s an entirely different standard. In fact, obedience to God is often seen by Egypt as irrational, foolish, smug, arrogant, pompous, and self-righteous.

Joseph’s story reveals Egypt (the world) will be in no hurry to reward obedience to God. It’s not set up that way. Egypt prefers we follow its version of morality or ethics. The fact is, obedience to God makes Christians outsiders in Egypt—just like Joseph, and just like Jesus, who said, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18–19).

**Expect Hardship**

Likewise, 1 Peter 4:12 says, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” The Bible is clear: we shouldn’t be surprised when things don’t go well in Egypt, especially when our obedience is neither recognized nor affirmed. In fact, we should expect the opposite, because in reality, enduring tribulation in Egypt while staying obedient is part of God’s command for His children.

John knew quite a bit about tribulation. When he was arrested and put in prison on Patmos, a penal colony[,](#Source3)[[[3]](#endnote-4)](#Source3) he said in Revelation 1:9, “I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”

Whether it be a popular but flawed eschatological doctrine called “the rapture” or the first-century hopes of Jews for a military messiah to rescue their nation from Roman oppression, people have always assumed God’s job is to rescue His children from suffering and tribulation in the world. Even today, many Christian leaders teach if we are obedient and follow Jesus, we will receive earthly blessing and life on earth will be victorious.

But the Bible teaches us the exact opposite lesson: expect tribulation! Jesus Himself taught this over and over again. The bottom line is, living in Egypt is hard, and for Christians who are obedient to Christ, it will get even harder.

**Expect a Cost**

We should not expect obedience to God in Egypt to be free. The examples of Jesus, His disciples, and thousands of years of church history teach an important, antithetical lesson: our obedience should never be motivated by possible earthly blessings. In fact, we should expect obedience in Egypt to come with a cost.

An example of this can be found when Paul wrote about Jesus and His obedience: “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death *[the ultimate cost]*, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). If Jesus’ obedience had a cost and we identify with Jesus, why would we think ours won’t have a cost?

There are dozens of Bible passages that teach us we should expect obedience in Egypt to be costly, painful, inconvenient, and untimely. Yet we still have a natural tendency to expect earthly gratification in exchange for our obedience.

Personal: Motivation for Obedience

So, what expectations should we have of God in return for being obedient?

In early 2020, there was a radical group that killed at least 620 Christians in coordinated attacks throughout northern Nigeria.[[[4]](#endnote-5)](#Source4) A terrorist group, closely aligned with Boko Haram, murdered these Christians, along with destroying their homes and churches. Hundreds of people were slaughtered because they were obedient in identifying with the cross; yet, for the most part, the world said nothing about it. At the time, there was nothing on FOX News or MSNBC, nothing in the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*. Nothing, initially, when these Christians were slaughtered! What do you think these believers did to deserve such treatment?

There are many people who teach, “If you just follow Jesus and do what’s right, the blessings of God will flow to you. Things are going to be great. You’ll tap into the greatest you that you can be!” It’s clearly a very profitable message; they’re preaching it in packed-out mega churches across the country. Yet these precious brothers in Nigeria were slaughtered because they were obedient. Can you imagine the grief, the pain, the crying, the tears, the sorrow, and the questioning?

Surviving in Egypt is never going to be easy, even when you do everything right. The point of surviving in Egypt is perseverance, not comfort. People lose heart because they don’t understand that surviving in Egypt is rarely perfect. Sooner or later, unrealistic expectations of what obedience brings will cause disappointment. Then, that disappointment can become justification for compromising our obedience to God.

When you face tribulation, famine, nakedness, danger, and threats (all the things John listed), do you respond with, “Why, God?”—or are you able to respond with wisdom and understanding? When your car breaks or you lose your job, do you rail against God? Or do you acknowledge, “Life in Egypt is rough”?

**No Instant Gratification**

When you make a new resolve to do the right thing, to make a change in your life, you’ll quickly find the next day, you’re still living in Egypt. It won’t take long for Egypt to remind you where you live.

It’s like wanting immediate results when you first start a diet. It would be great if we could lose ten pounds in the first day, wouldn’t it? But it’s not going to happen.

In that sense, we expect our obedience to result in tribulation liposuction. We think if we’re good, or at least taking the right steps toward obedience, reward and blessing should follow. We want the hardship sucked out of our lives. It’s not going to happen that way.

**Inspired to Obedience by Hope and Gratitude**

John 16:33 says, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

It’s time to remove the expectation of blessing from our motivation to be obedient in Egypt. In fact, we should *expect* tribulation, persecution, and a cost. Our motivation for obedience should begin and end with the gratitude we have for what Christ did on the cross.

Part of that hope can be the future eternal promise of rescue from tribulation, trouble, and all the baggage of trying to survive in Egypt. But primarily, our obedience should be birthed as an expression of gratitude and hope. It’s an affirmation you trust in something greater than Egypt could ever offer. It’s a sign you believe in a greater plan: God’s plan for your redemption and salvation. It’s proof you know Egypt, this world, is not your home.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Seven Questions

**Question:** Do you ever find yourself believing your obedience should result in earthly blessings? Why is that mindset dangerous for believers?

**Question:** Are you more inclined to expect earthly blessing or tribulation as a result of your obedience to Christ? What does your answer reveal about your motives for obedience to Christ?

**Prayer Journal:** In your prayer journal, surrender your expectations for your obedience to God and express willingness to endure any cost it may bring.

CHAPTER EIGHT

*Chêsêd*

**Read: Genesis 39:21–23**

Have you ever had an experience in which you could truly feel God’s presence?

What were the circumstances? Do you remember? Was it an exceptionally memorable worship service? Maybe you got a specific job you really wanted? Maybe it was on vacation, in a secluded moment with God in someplace beautiful, like the mountains. Maybe it was a precious memory with beloved family. Or a particularly peaceful time with Heavenly Dad and His Word over a nice cup of designer coffee?

It’s easy to “feel God’s presence” in those good times, but what about when you lose your dream job? Where is the presence of God then? What about when an important relationship ends in betrayal? What about a moment when you were falsely accused of something? What about when you lost a loved one or, God forbid, a child? How would you describe the way you feel about God’s presence then? It's certainly not the same as it might be in times of comfort or “blessing,” right?

This chapter is designed to redefine how we describe or experience God’s presence. Frankly, the American church has been conditioned to associate positive circumstances or a positive experience with the presence of God. We live our Christian life seeking one spiritual high after another. It’s time we separate our awareness of God’s presence from contingency, or association with (positive) circumstances.

21But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. 22And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. 23The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.

**—Genesis 39:21–23**

This is fascinating: “steadfast love” is a single word in the original Hebrew text[.](#Source5)[[[5]](#endnote-6)](#Source5) Joseph had been accused of rape and thrown in prison, and yet he ended up running the place. It’s wild! All because “the Lord was with Joseph and showed him *steadfast love*.” Reminder, that’s one word (more on that later).

History: Successful Sufferer

Every time Joseph suffered, it was in stunning fashion. In this story of suffering, he was thrown into prison on false charges. After several years, he was running the prison, but it wasn’t like he was thrown in on a Sunday and running the joint by Tuesday. The timeframe spanning slavery in Potiphar’s house and in prison was a combined thirteen years!

Think about this: over the course of thirteen years, Joseph had been betrayed by his brothers and thrown into a pit, nearly murdered, sold into slavery, unjustly accused of rape, and then tossed into an Egyptian prison. We know for certain he was in prison for at least two years, but it was probably more like eight years total. If God’s presence were tied to blessings, it would mean Joseph had no tangible evidence God’s presence was with him, as he suffered continually through no fault of his own.

How long do you think Joseph had to remain obedient in the eyes of those who ran the prison before the jailer took notice? Years of enduring daily scorn and ridicule, years of being seen as a rapist. It would take much time before Joseph earned any privileges in prison—before the warden would trust him and he could move about somewhat freely—especially considering who put Joseph in jail: a powerful, revered Egyptian general!

Joseph was living under the burden of a horrible situation for a long time. You could understand why he might have given up at some point, assuming his God was against him. He had gone from the favorite son of the patriarch of God’s chosen people, with a secure future, to a falsely convicted rapist in a foreign prison, banished and with no hope of release.

If anyone had reason to feel like a victim and blame God, it would be this guy. Yet Joseph lived in his Egyptian hellhole the only way a child of the covenant could: with supernatural, persevering, faithful obedience. He served his God in prison because the gift of faith God gave him kept him faithful. While a child of Egypt would have turned his or her back on God, a true covenant child of God always perseveres.

**The Grand Plan**

Joseph didn’t have the benefit we do, of being able to read this story or any other in the first five books of the Bible (which had not been written yet). He didn’t have the benefit of all these stories about how God’s hand brought all things together to save a nation and give us our Savior, Jesus. He couldn’t see the big redemptive picture like we can.

He couldn’t see how all the things he went through would end up making him the right man in the right place at the right time, with the right connections and the right skillset to serve Pharaoh, the king of the strongest country on earth. Joseph would be a heaven-sent savior to the nation of Egypt in a few years; but there was no way Joseph could know that at the time.

Joseph didn’t know one day he would be in a position to extend Christlike mercy and compassion to his treacherous, wretched brothers who had betrayed him. All he knew was, once again, he was suffering due to no fault of his own, for something he didn’t do. However, he lived in peace with God. *How?* How could any human endure all Joseph had endured yet remain faithful and obedient to a God who, in human eyes, had abandoned him?

Spiritual: Chêsêd

It’s easy to read this part of Joseph’s story and focus on how Joseph rose to the top in a bad situation. However, this passage, and this chapter, aren’t really about Joseph. They’re about chêsêd, or God’s constant, faithful presence no matter what Egypt brings.

Several theologians have tried to define this rich, majestic Hebrew word *chêsêd*.[[[6]](#endnote-7)](#Source6) We don’t have an English equivalent for it. Some Bible translations, like the English Standard Version in our example from Genesis 39:21, translate it as “steadfast love,” a love that endures no matter what. This is a good starter definition, but it’s not my favorite.

Some people define it as “lovingkindness,” an English word invented about six hundred years ago by a guy named Miles Coverdale, a reformer[.](#Source7)[[[7]](#endnote-8)](#Source7) He was trying to figure out a way to describe this word *chêsêd* as he translated the Old Testament, and the closest he could get in his mind was “lovingkindness.”

Coverdale’s definition became an extremely popular way to translate this Hebrew word, *chêsêd*. It has been used in many English versions, both historic and modern. It’s a decent description pointing to the love and compassion God gives us. It captures the warm, fuzzy part of what we might experience every once in a while, when blessings from God are flowing into our lives, or maybe how we feel when the worship band knocks it out of the park at church.

But I don’t think this definition goes nearly far enough in describing the depths and majesty of chêsêd*.*

**Covenant Loyalty**

After much research, I found a definition I needed to tweak only a little bit. The definition is “covenant loyalty.”[[[8]](#endnote-9)](#Source8) It may seem simple, and maybe unemotional at first glance. However, I think you will see it’s in fact a rich description.

Let me add just a few more components. To me, chêsêdis that constant, loving loyalty God has for His chosen people, based on a promise He made beforehand. All of that is packed into chêsêd, which encompasses the depths of the love God has for His chosen, covenant children. If God is with you, then so is chêsêd, His covenant loyalty. Ephesians 1:3–4 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption.”

He has blessed us—how? In His very choosing of us. He didn’t choose us because we were good Baptists or good Presbyterians or good non-denominationalists. That’s not why we receivechêsêd. We receive chêsêd because “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). Before we had ever done anything that might please or, more importantly, displease Him! Chêsêd is a covenant loyalty to His chosen children based upon a promise He made beforehand.

First John 4:19 says, “We love because he first loved us.” We love—why? Because we earned it? No, because “he first loved us.” It’s that same sovereign chêsêd God has for His chosen people that kept Joseph faithful, even while he suffered in prison!

Whether we are suffering in an Egyptian prison because of our own depravity or as a result of the depravity of others, His covenant loyalty—His chêsêd—is with us. This is what we see displayed in Joseph’s time in prison; it’s a covenant loyalty even an Egyptian prison could not interrupt.

Personal: Successful Suffering

It’s more satisfying to make Heavenly Dad smile while you’re suffering than while you’re blessed or comfortable. Let me explain. It is one thing to be thankful, to celebrate God’s presence, and to trust God when things are going well. You’ve got a job, you’re paying your bills, your car is working fine, you get along with your kids, you have a great church, and you have your health. Things seem just fine!

But in reality, good times can make us delusional. Good times can make us forget we are still in Egypt. They can blind us to the intense spiritual war going on all around us. We confuse positive, temporary circumstances with God’s blessing. We confuse when things are going well in our life with the blessings of God’s faithful covenant love, His chêsêd*.*

Joseph certainly experienced times of comfort in his life, right? He was his father’s favorite, with a coat of many colors to prove it. But that was all just a precursor, a calm before the storm of betrayal, slavery, and false imprisonment. One day, he was walking around, not a care in the world, thinking, “God is good.” Suddenly, before he knew what was happening, he was flung into a pit where he could overhear his brothers plotting his possible murder. Then he was sold as a slave. Then he was falsely accused of rape. Then he became a prisoner with no hope of future freedom.

Do you think he saw any of the bad times coming? Probably not. When life was good, Joseph had no idea how bad it would get.

**The Blessing of Suffering**



You see this photo? I took this picture in upstate New York. I drove up to this corner, on a road I had never been on, and there was this question mark with an arrow. The first time I saw it, I remember having no idea what it meant. Was the sign asking me what was “over there”? Was it asking me if I wanted to go “over there”? It was the most confusing road sign I’d ever come across! I

The point is this: life in Egypt isn’t designed to give us answers, even if we think it should. Yet we keep scouring Egypt, looking for them. Temporary Egyptian comforts deceive us with false signs of hope. Only during suffering in Egypt do God’s covenant children begin to see Egypt for what it really is—a collection of mysterious events and circumstances we can’t possibly understand in the full picture.

Where in this particular story do you think Joseph truly began to grow and flourish spiritually? When he first arrived at the prison, or when he started running it? Think carefully about this question for one moment. It’s easy to assume he was at his best spiritually when his rise to power occurred, but that discounts the power of chêsêdin his life when he was merely being treated like a rapist.

It’s in suffering we are best able to enjoy and experience chêsêd, the blessings of God’s covenant loyalty with us. Suffering in Egypt removes all the blinders of temporary comfort from God’s children. It allows us to feel more connected to Heavenly Dad than ever before.

**ChêsêdAlways Wins**

So, what is the best way to describe this chêsêd for us today? Chêsêd is the big picture; ittakes place over long periods of time. That was the case with Joseph. The thirteen years of his slavery and imprisonment were a long time, but Joseph was successful in that time because of chêsêd*,* God’s covenant love and loyalty for him. It was a covenant God made with Joseph before he was even born.

Whether it was a pit, treacherous brothers, slavery, false imprisonment, or anything else, *Egypt could do nothing to stop chêsêd!* Be sure you get this point. Paul wrote in Romans 8:38–39, “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God ***[chêsêd]***in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

You may be experiencing an Egypt in your life, but the truth of chêsêd can comfort your soul, even while you’re in prison. If you let it, it will heal your heart as you rest in God’s covenant loyalty. Chêsêd wants you to let it in. It is making itself known to you in ways Egyptian comfort never could.

When you experience this kind of satisfaction with God’s presence while suffering in Egypt, you experience what Jesus experienced. Isaiah 53:11 is a prophecy about Jesus: “Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied.” Isn’t that beautiful? Suffering was how Jesus was most satisfied by His Father’s chêsêd*.*

The times in my life I felt as close and connected to God as I possibly could were when I was experiencing the worst pain I could imagine, when my wife and I lost a daughter in a car accident. Those days of suffering were when we both learned that joy is the supernatural satisfaction of the presence of God, over anything else Egypt could ever offer. That supernatural satisfaction manifests itself in its most powerful form when suffering in Egypt is combined with chêsêd

Like Jesus and Joseph, when we get to heaven, we will have the benefit of the kind of hindsight we can now have with Joseph’s life. We won’t be asking, “God, why did You let me suffer like that?” No, when we get to heaven, it will all make sense. We will say, “Ah, now I see. That’s chêsêd!That was all I ever really needed!”

But right now, even if you’re suffering in an Egyptian prison due to no fault of your own, by faith you can trust chêsêd is working to preserve your soul. You can *know* you will be satisfied with the end results. Even when Egypt attempts to blind you with false comfort or unimaginable suffering, chêsêdwill be satisfying your soul. Won’t you allow it to do its work?

Chêsêd is how we endure. Without it, you have no shot at surviving in Egypt!

From now on, whenever you think of God’s covenant love and God’s presence, think about chêsêd: the supernatural, never-changing, never-wavering covenant loyalty God has for those whom He chose before the foundation of the world.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Eight Questions

**Question:** Think about your life experience. Can you recall moments you experienced chêsêd?What are some examples of how God’s covenant loyalty is currently at work in your life?

**Question:** At what points in your life have you flourished spiritually? When do you encounter the times of your greatest spiritual growth? When do you feel closest to God—in times of abundance or calamity? What does this reveal about chêsêd?

**Prayer Journal:** In your prayer journal, write a prayer recognizing God’s loyal covenant with you.

CHAPTER NINE

Serving in Egypt

**Read: Genesis 40:1–8**

They say everyone dreams. Some people remember dreams, and some don’t. Some dreams are scary, some bizarre, and some pleasant. Science has taught us dreams are often a way for our minds to deal with reality. Dreams help us process our life experiences, our fears, our anxieties, our hopes, and our desires.

But in Joseph’s day, they did not understand the science behind dreams. Every culture seemed to consider dreams to be a connection to the supernatural world. They were considered a gift from the gods, a glance into the future.

There are many examples in Scripture of how God took advantage of the cultural misunderstanding of dreams. He used them for revelation. This certainly was the case in Joseph’s life. God gave Joseph a special gift when it came to dreams, but that’s not going to be our primary focus in this chapter.

Instead, we will focus on how Joseph became a humble, compassionate servant—and his ability to interpret dreams was what God utilized to put Joseph in a position to serve others. Despite all of the suffering Joseph went through in Egypt, those experiences helped him mature. Those experiences gave him the mind, heart, and opportunities for selfless, humble service to God and others.

1Sometime after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt. 2And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, 3and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. 4The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody.

5And one night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own interpretation. 6When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. 7So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, “Why are your faces downcast today?” 8They said to him, “We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them.” And Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.”

**—Genesis 40:1–8**

History: Humble Servant

The cupbearer and baker had done something wrong, and both were in big trouble. Maybe they served a bad dish. Maybe they spilled wine. Whatever it was, Pharaoh was upset, and they both found themselves in prison.

Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker were people who would have seen Pharaoh every day. They were some of the most trusted people in Pharaoh’s life. Whatever they did, there’s no doubt God’s sovereign hand had played a role, because out of all the prisons in Egypt, they were sent to the one Joseph was running. This was not a random event. This was the sovereign God intervening, creating circumstances.

These two men were desperate; for them, everything was at stake. Circumstances had put them in a vulnerable yet teachable position. Up to this point in life, they had it made. They had no worry for food, clothing, or housing, and their families were secure. They were not poor people; but now, the comfortable life they knew had been taken from them. They needed help and were willing to take it from whoever could offer it, even a fellow prisoner accused of raping a general’s wife. These men found themselves in a position to be open to anything, including learning about Joseph’s God.

**Prison Nightmares**

Prison was a nightmare on its own, but in addition to that horrific experience, the baker and cupbearer were having frightening dreams. Remember, Egyptians believed dreams were predictive. You can imagine their distress; they had to find out what the dreams meant.

Egyptian culture had a group of specially trained people who were full-time dream interpreters.[[[9]](#endnote-10)](#Source9) As a matter of fact, archaeology has revealed many volumes of literature written by Egyptians on this very topic. It was *that* important.

Of course, there weren’t any trained interpreters in prison, and no way to gain access to one. Clearly, the men were in a bind. And then came Joseph.

**Serving in Egypt**

Imagine: Joseph oversaw these high-profile prisoners, the baker and the cupbearer, yet he treated them with tenderness, compassion, and love. He noticed their worry and asked what was wrong. He knew it was possible the cupbearer had been falsely accused (later on, we learn he was restored, while the baker was not), so Joseph could empathize somewhat with these men who had fallen so far from grace with the king.

Joseph had no reason to expect any reward for helping these men, but because of his own time in prison, Joseph had been given eyes to see their pain. He had a willingness to serve, as well as spiritual humility born out of his own suffering and surviving in Egypt. Only a child of God could understand something like this.

So, what did Joseph do? He boldly declared his ability to interpret their dreams came from his God. After this was established, Joseph asked the men to tell him their dreams.

Spiritual: Joseph Needed Egypt

Think about how far Joseph had come. He’d always had a special ability to understand how God used dreams. He had it back when he was at home with his brothers, but he was too comfortable there. The idea of using it to serve others was foreign to him in the days when he was constantly honored by his father and lived in wealth. He didn’t understand the special talent he had; he didn’t appreciate it. In fact, he used this God-given skill unwisely, arrogantly, and recklessly. Remember how he held it over his brothers’ heads? He told them he would one day rule over them. Their response is in Genesis 37:8–10:

8His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

9Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” 10But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?”

Because Joseph was so comfortable in his prior life, his use of his special talents and gifts was misguided, undeveloped, selfish, and dangerous. But all of that was before Egypt.

God used Joseph’s experiences in Egypt to change his heart and life. Can you imagine where Joseph would have been at this time spiritually without slavery and prison? Joseph needed those experiences to prepare him physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He needed to learn how to use his talents for a higher purpose. As hard as his life was in Egypt, he desperately needed Egypt to teach him what it meant to serve God and to serve others. God used Egypt to mold and shape Joseph’s character. Then, once that was accomplished, God guided his steps to this very moment with the baker and cupbearer.

While comfortable Joseph would never have been ready to be used by God, Egypt-worn Joseph was ready for the call. Surviving in Egypt gave Joseph clear eyes to see how his talents were from God and how they should be used for God. Suffering in Egypt also gave Joseph eyes to see the pain of others. It gave him a passion for God’s plan and purpose instead of just his own. In short, Egypt changed him for the better. Even though, I’m sure, prison had been excruciatingly difficult, it made Joseph a humble, gentle, compassionate servant of God. Bottom line, Joseph needed Egypt.

Personal: Egypt + Faith = \_\_\_

Of course, living in Egypt brings pain. At moments, living in Egypt might seem comfortable, but over the long haul, Egypt is not designed to maintain comfort.

Without the gift of faith, the pain of surviving in Egypt will result in one of two things: it either leads to a life focused on finding selfish comfort or leaves us filled with emotions like anger, bitterness, and guilt. Either of these outcomes results in a life of victimhood, with an inability to see the pain of others We won’t have the ability to serve selflessly; instead, we will be entirely consumed by our own lives.

But with the gift of faith, surviving in Egypt results in children of God who are equipped with the qualities of gratitude and selflessness, with eyes that can trust God’s bigger plan.

**Gratitude**

It seems counterintuitive that faith enables us to transform suffering into gratitude. Yet it’s true, because faith helps us see how suffering makes us more like Christ. Second Corinthians 12:10 says, “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” In other words, “I’m thankful for Egypt.”

James 1:2–4 says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

The first thing “Egypt + faith” brings is gratitude, which enables you to be thankful for those times of suffering. With faith, you know suffering in Egypt becomes an opportunity to experience what we learned about in the previous chapter: chêsêd, the very presence of God in your life.

**Purified Motives**

Suffering in Egypt, combined with the gift of faith, also purifies our motives for serving God and others. Joseph had no way to know serving his fellow prison-mates would result in his eventual elevation to Pharaoh’s house. As far as he knew, serving them would bring him no reward, no thank-you, no acknowledgment. He didn’t care, though, because he knew serving and helping others was what faith-filled people do. He served compassionately because God used Egypt plus faith to create in Joseph a righteous motivation.

Purified motives create motivation far greater than self-preservation and recognition. This kind of motivation goes far beyond earthly reward or the fleeting altruistic feelings you get when you do something nice for someone—because even those are selfish, if you think about it. Purified motives remove your focus from yourself, enabling you to see eternal consequences, making earthly benefits far less important.

**Eyes for God’s Plan**

Faith combined with suffering in Egypt gives us eyes to see beyond our little, limited worlds and into an eternal one, with all of its implications and impacts.

Consider this verse in Ephesians 2:10: “For we are his workmanship *[the survival part]*, created in Christ Jesus for good works *[the prison part]*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Can you see how this truth in Ephesians was at work while Joseph was suffering in Egypt? Faith gives us eyes able to see future redemption, even as Egypt’s hardship, humiliation, and desperation rage around us.

These eyes for God’s plan of redemption enable you to understand survival in Egypt as part of the process in God’s plan. It’s not about your own destiny and desires; it’s about God’s kingdom.

**Are You Serving in Egypt?**

We know God uses Egypt and faith to mold and prepare His children to serve Him to our fullest potential. Combining the gift of faith with the experience of surviving in Egypt will do for us what it did for Joseph.

Faith takes what Egypt dishes out and uses it to transform us into what we need to become for effective Kingdom service to others. Whether it’s surviving cancer, losing a loved one, struggling with addiction and recovery, living with financial burdens, or being victimized by others, when you put faith into the mix, God’s children can survive, and even thrive, in all of it.

*Egypt + faith* enables us to endure seemingly unsurmountable challenges. It brings us to a place of humble service we never could have come to, otherwise. Without suffering in Egypt, combined with faith, we would never be effective at serving others. With suffering and faith, we become effective, skilled, wise, motivated, compassionate, willing servants for the cause of God’s kingdom and God’s plan.

I know I would be a terrible pastor without *Egypt + faith*. God has used them both together to make me and my family better servants—to make me a better pastor. He continues to do this even now.

How is Egypt impacting you? Is your focus primarily extracting as much comfort and enjoyment out of Egypt as possible, for you and your loved ones? Are you clinging to the “good” times you may have in Egypt? Or are you allowing the hard times in Egypt to make you bitter, angry, or obsessed with getting your version of justice for yourself and everyone else around you? That’s Egypt without faith.

But *Egypt + faith* gives you eyes to see redemption, and a heart of compassion, which together transform you into a humble servant despite the suffering and hardship Egypt may cause you. *Egypt + faith* turns mere survival in Egypt into a transformational experience, in which we become humble, compassionate Kingdom servants. We become crucial blessings to those God brings into our lives through His sovereign plans. That’s exactly what happened with Joseph in prison!

I am not going to sugarcoat this: Egypt alone is terrible. It sucks the life out us. But *Egypt + faith* is a powerful combination enabling us to experience our full potential and accomplish everything God has called us to do!

WORKBOOK

Chapter Nine Questions

**Question:** Can you point to any examples of when God used suffering in Egypt, along with the gift of faith, to make you a more humble, gentle, and compassionate servant of God? How can remembering this change your perspective on suffering?

**Question:** What does it look like when someone is walking through Egypt without the gift of faith? How does that differ from someone surviving in Egypt *with* the gift of faith?

**Prayer Journal:** Journal a prayer of commitment to surviving in Egypt empowered by the gift of faith.

CHAPTER TEN

Frustration in Egypt

**Read: Genesis 40:9–23**

Have you ever felt like no matter what you did, you just couldn’t win? Have you ever experienced those times when things seem to be coming together, only to have them fall apart without warning? Have you ever felt stuck in Egypt, abandoned by God? These feelings are the result of our earthly expectations not being met. When we’re doing what we believe God has called us to do, what we’re supposed to do, we assume God’s blessings will come, making life in Egypt just a little easier. Of course, we would never say this out loud, but we certainly all think it from time to time.

When God’s plan doesn’t seem fair, and doesn’t line up with our reasonable expectations, it’s okay to admit we are a frustrated. I’m sure Joseph felt some of this as his relationship with the cupbearer and baker continued to unfold.

9So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, “In my dream there was a vine before me, 10and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes. 11Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.” 12Then Joseph said to him, “This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days. 13In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer. 14Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. 15For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.”

16When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, “I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, 17and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head.” 18And Joseph answered and said, “This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days. 19In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat the flesh from you.”

20On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. 21He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. 22But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. 23Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

**—Genesis 40:9–23**

Imagine this scene. The chief cupbearer heard Joseph’s interpretation of his dream, and it was a good one! Joseph told him in three days, the king would declare the cupbearer restored at the king’s birthday party. However, the news was not so good for the baker. He would not be restored; he would be executed.

Three days later, when all of it played out as Joseph had predicted, you would think the cupbearer would remember and say, “Wow, Joseph was right!” You would think, out of gratitude, he would tell Pharaoh about Joseph’s interpretation of his dream in prison—but he didn’t. He completely forgot Joseph existed.

Historical: Good News and Bad News

These two men were desperate. They had no one else to turn to and no other options. All they had was Joseph, who offered to interpret their dreams.

The baker was hesitant to know what the dreams meant, so the cupbearer, who was anxious and eager, went first. I speculate the cupbearer knew he was innocent, whereas the baker knew he was guilty. Joseph had wonderful news for the cupbearer: in three days, he would be restored. Joseph had absolute confidence in this interpretation because he knew God had revealed it to him.

Joseph then shared his own story with the cupbearer, including how he had been falsely accused of rape. He asked the cupbearer to remember him and plead his case to the king once the cupbearer was restored.

Understand, Joseph didn’t make this request a condition of his help. He didn’t use his insight into the cupbearer’s dreams for leverage. He first helped the cupbearer and *then* asked the favor. It seemed the logical, kind thing to do, to help the man first and ask for a favor second. Joseph must have been thinking God was at work, making a way for him to get out of prison. For the first time in a while, I imagine, Joseph had hope.

The baker, hearing the good news for the cupbearer, now wanted his own interpretation from Joseph, but Joseph didn’t have good news for this man: “While the cupbearer will be restored in three days, you’re going to die in three days. You will be executed for your crimes.” I am sure Joseph didn’t enjoy giving this news, but he also didn’t soften the blow. He was honest and forthcoming.

**Out of Sight, Out of Mind**

Of course, the cupbearer was restored; but then, he forgot about Joseph. He got his old life back while Joseph went back to his dark prison cell, wondering and waiting and no doubt frustrated with God.

It's maddening to read this. It seems unfair for God to treat Joseph this way. I can feel Joseph’s frustration. In my life and ministry, I’ve had my own share of these types of frustrating moments, I remember times I tried to serve people, sacrificing time with my family to help them. Surely those people would recognize my love for them and show some gratitude! Maybe they would stick around and join our church; maybe they would learn to give back and serve others. But the moment things were better, and they got their lives in a good place, they were gone. I never saw them again. This has happened more times than I can count.

There have been moments serving God when I thought to myself, “Surely I’m doing what God wants. He must be smiling upon me.” Then heartbreak and tragedy would come. In these times when I was doing God’s work, my life seemed to be getting worse.

We see this with Joseph. He did a good thing and helped these men, but afterward, he was forgotten, left to rot in prison for two more years. How could God forget Joseph like that? Why would anyone want to serve this kind of God? You can see how it might be tempting to quit when it seems Egypt always wins.

Spiritual: Faith Overcomes Frustration

The Bible is silent on Joseph’s life for the next two years. All we know is, he was in prison for a crime he didn’t commit. During those two years, nothing changed; Joseph was forced to be patient. But he was also forced to be faithful while living in uncertainty. King David captured the emotion of what Joseph must have been feeling for those two long additional prison years:

1How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? 2How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

**—Psalm 13:1–2**

**As Long As It Takes**

So, how long do we wait? How long will God hide His face? How long will He let Egypt continue to win?

God’s answer: as long as it takes.

Eventually, the cupbearer remembered. Genesis 41:9 says, “Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, ‘I remember my offenses today.’” After two years, God moved forward with what Joseph had expected would happen on day one. Yet Joseph’s faith was just as strong now.

How was Joseph able to hold on to faith? Did he achieve a level of spirituality none of us will ever unlock? Deuteronomy 31:8 says, “It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”

This promise in Scripture sounds a little ridiculous when you read it at first. Life is tough, and God sometimes seems so distant. But reading or hearing a verse like this isn’t what helps us remain faithful while surviving in Egypt even when it seems nothing is fair.

However, the combination of *knowing* a promise with the *calling* of God on your life for His purposes can make this truth come alive: *God will never leave* us. That is an unconditional promise; it’s steadfast, no matter what circumstances we face—or how we respond to them! No matter what, God says, “I will be with you.” Joseph was able to endure immense frustration despite how unfairly his life was playing out, because he had faith in the promise of God.

Personal: Enduring Egyptian Frustration

We have no clue what will happen next, and God knows that reality leaves us scratching our head sometimes. This is why God’s sovereign plan allows for human frustration. Isn’t that fact reassuring?

**Egypt Breaks Promises**

We know Joseph was later put in charge of all Egypt, but let’s face it: most of us don’t experience such a happy ending to our story of survival in Egypt. Most of us will never be elevated to a high level of fame, success, and wealth. We are faithful to God and to those we love, yet Egypt spits in our faces. In some ways, many of us will have it worse than Joseph. Our time in Egypt might always be open-ended suffering and unknowns, with no clear, satisfying conclusion in sight.

**God Keeps Promises**

Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” We like to think the “for good” part means a smooth, comfortable, “blessed” life in Egypt. We sometimes think this verse means we will “get out of jail” when we think we should get out. But part of our calling is to endure, even when it seems God’s plan is unfair, burdensome, and frustrating.

R. C. Sproul says it well[:](#Source10)[[[10]](#endnote-11)](#Source10)

In theory it is easy to understand the premise that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose, but to get this into our bloodstreams is another matter. It is one of the most difficult tasks of the practicing Christian. It involves not only believing in God but believing God.

To do what Sproul is talking about, to have faith God is faithful even in our frustration, takes supernatural intervention. Staying faithful while surviving in Egypt only happens when God grants us the miraculous, supernatural gift of faith. This is the faith we learn about in Ephesians 2:8–9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And even that faith is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not by works, or else you’d brag” (paraphrase). That faith is the reason God’s children will survive in Egypt; it is why we won’t quit.

As children of God, you and I aren’t quitters. If we were going to quit, we would’ve done so already. Quitting goes against our spiritual nature. It’s described perfectly by the prophet Isaiah: “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you” (Isaiah 49:15).

In Joseph’s story, we learn his faith enabled him (as it does us) to transcend his circumstances. The gift of faith God gave Joseph enabled him to hang on for two more years in prison. And the faith God gave Joseph is the same faith God has given you! It’s the same faith you experienced the day you embraced the gospel, putting your hope for your redemption in the work of Christ on the cross. It’s not faith in your religion, your accomplishments, or your ability to please God with how hard you work. It’s the faith to recognize that without Jesus, you will never survive this Egypt thing on your own. By faith, you recognize Jesus is your one hope for survival.

When God gives you that kind of faith, you realize the burden for the salvation of your soul is no longer in your hands; it’s in God’s hands. From that day, this verse applies to you: “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls” (Hebrews 10:39). The supernatural gift of faith enables God’s children to endure all the peaks and valleys that inevitably come with surviving in Egypt. This faith empowers us to serve others, relentlessly and with integrity, like Joseph. In fact, we will serve others even when Egyptian circumstances are overwhelming to us. Our faith in God’s promises enables us to overcome the most intense frustration Egypt can throw at us.

We will experience His presence in the darkest of circumstances through the promises found in His Word and through the faith of God’s other children as we serve one another relentlessly.

I know, with great confidence, there is no frustration Egypt can bring that would make me quit. I’m not saying this because I’m such a great guy. I’m a sinner who struggles and gets frustrated. I can promise you this, though: there is nothing Egypt can throw at me that will make me quit. This is *only* possible because of the gift of faith.

It’s time to recognize the power within this gift of faith. It’s time to recognize there is nothing in Egypt able to push you beyond your limits. As you read earlier in Hebrews 10:39, you are not one to shrink back and be destroyed. You and I are those who have faith to persevere when surviving in Egypt seems grossly unfair.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Ten Questions

**Question:** Have you ever been frustrated with God because of your circumstances? Did you ever feel like you deserved better than what Egypt brought you? What do you think was the root cause of that frustration?

**Question:** Can you remember ways you were reminded of God’s presence during your frustrating circumstances? How can these memories change the way you will approach similar situations in the future?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer asking for confidence in God’s ability to sustain you when things become unfair in Egypt.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

When Egypt Has No Answers

**Read: Genesis 41:1–8**

Every human, whether we want to admit it or not, seeks answers to spiritual truth. This quest is at the core of what makes us different from animals. Some look for these answers in organized religion. Others find answers they like in atheism. And some find those answers by faith.

Egypt (the world) is great at providing answers when the stakes are low. However, when everything is on the line, Egypt will leave you in despair, more often than not. Most people don’t recognize their desperate need for spiritual answers in the first place, but what’s worse, until crises hit, they are surprised at Egypt’s inability to provide any hope with its answers.

This desperation creates a thirst in the deepest parts of our heart and soul for transcendent, spiritual answers. If, in our desperation, we continue to seek out Egyptian sources for answers, we come up empty-handed. At that point, people begin to realize they have put their trust in in the wrong sources—and hopelessness ensues.

When the stakes are highest, and Egypt leaves us with no answers or insufficient answers, we flounder in uncertainty, questioning our purpose and the meaning of life. If Egypt’s answers leave you in despair, what good are they? Thankfully, in such moments, God intervenes to provide the answers Egypt cannot.

1After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, 2and behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows, attractive and plump, and they fed in the reed grass. 3And behold, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. 4And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive, plump cows. And Pharaoh awoke. 5And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time. And behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. 6And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind. 7And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump, full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. 8So in the morning his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

**—Genesis 41:1–8**

Historical: A King’s Nightmares

Imagine Pharaoh’s desperation and hopelessness when Egypt had no answers for him. In a culture that revered dreams, he was the Dreamer in Chief. Because Egyptians believed Pharaoh had a connection to the supernatural world, his dreams were considered the most important dreams in the empire, direct messages from the spirit world. His dreams informed and guided the leaders and the whole country.

**Back to Back**

In this passage, Pharaoh had two troubling dreams in a row. One dream involved cows coming out of the Nile River. At face value, this wouldn’t have been out of the ordinary. The Nile was important to the Egyptian culture and economy; among other things, the river provided Egypt with healthy cattle and lush farming fields. The river offered the cattle refuge from heat and insects. However, the other part of that first dream depicted seven healthy cows coming out of the Nile and being consumed by thin, ugly cows. What a disturbing image! Pharaoh must have awoken thinking, “I’m glad that was just a dream!”

In his second dream, he saw seven healthy, plump ears of corn on one stalk. They were swallowed up by thin, rotting ears of corn. So the king had two similarly unpleasant, foreboding dreams, right in a row. The leader of a culture obsessed with the spiritual meaning of dreams would have found these back-to-back dreams troubling. Certainly, Pharaoh knew they were more than random nightmares.

So Pharaoh called together the best interpreters in Egypt—revered, high-status wise men. Much time and many resources had been invested in the education and training of these expert advisors, who represented the best of Egyptian knowledge and science. These scientific, spiritual, and intellectual elites would have been the first people Pharaoh turned to, in situations like this, the most important men on Pharaoh’s staff. Every facet of their society was influenced by their counsel and expertise. Sadly, their knowledge was counterfeit; but of course, they couldn’t see it. Pharaoh and all of Egypt placed their confidence in these men, yet they had no answers for Pharaoh.

**Confirmation Bias**

You can imagine these dream experts searching through their interpretation manuals, thousands of pages long, looking for clues and answers based on their worldview. But in the end, the whole system failed Pharaoh when he needed it most. At the most crucial moments in his reign, with the well-being of the empire in the balance, the Egyptians’ faith in a man-made system yielded no real answers. Pharaoh’s only hope would end up being a Hebrew prisoner, in jail for false accusations of rape.

Spiritual: God Reveals Truth

What was God’s role in all this? He was to be the revealer of truth. The night before Pharaoh went to sleep, he was unaware how desperately he would need truth. Before that night, he believed he had all the truth and understanding he would ever need. He was king of the most powerful empire on earth. He had the most revered counselors on his staff. He had a massive library of information about Egyptian spirituality. Except, there was one problem he was unaware of: it was all fraudulent.

Imagine living your whole life under a cloud of spiritual ignorance, a façade of peace, comfort, understanding, and safety. Imagine how you would feel when suddenly you realized everything you had believed your whole life was a deception.

**Personalized Revelation**

God can use any circumstance or human predisposition to reveal truth in line with His will and His Word. God’s ability to reveal truth is unlimited. He knows how individual people are able to learn, and what they need; so, by grace, He interjects truth in our lives in ways we can embrace and understand.

Now realize, when God does this, it’s uncompromised truth. He doesn’t soft-pedal it or sugarcoat it. However, he does package it in ways flawed, desperate people can digest and comprehend. It’s part of what makes our God so special, so different from religions requiring human effort to discover answers. God does the reverse: He goes to the very heart of His people and reveals truth!

These personalized revelations are a manifestation of grace and mercy. God used Pharaoh’s own dreams to speak to the king in a way he could understand, and God used a flawed, failed man to speak directly to Pharaoh. Recall, God did the same thing with the wise men who visited Jesus: He gave personalized revelations of uncompromised truth using constellations, known science, and old books. They were wise, educated men, and God knew exactly how to break through to reach their hearts and minds. He said, “Listen, I want you to go meet the King of kings, Jesus. He’s lying in a manger. Follow this unusual star.”

*This star* was a specific heavenly manifestation of which they had prior knowledge, because of their extensive reading. God gave them truth they could confirm through their prior knowledge. It was a specialized revelation inspiring them to set out on a journey to find Jesus—a journey that would take them three years to make! Three years? They didn’t make a trip that long to visit a child whose parents they had never met without being convinced of the truth of what God had revealed.

**Perfect Timing**

In addition, the timing of God’s revelation to Pharaoh was perfect. Pharaoh was desperate! For His purposes, God hid the meaning of these dreams from the experts; they were so confounded, they didn’t even try to give Pharaoh an answer! You would think they could’ve at least faked it, right, or might have tried to manipulate Pharaoh? I mean, how hard could it have been? There were seven plump cows. There were seven thin cows. The thin cows eat the plump cows. It didn’t take too much imagination to see a famine coming! Of course, with hindsight, it’s easier; regardless, at that moment, Pharaoh’s best men had no answer. This led to Pharaoh’s desperation. He needed answers, and he needed them now! God brought him to a point where he would be open and teachable.

Jesus explained, spiritual understanding always comes from divine enlightenment, not human effort. He said this in Matthew 13:13 and 3:16–17:

13This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand…

16But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Spiritual truth always comes from God, through His Spirit at work in our hearts and minds. First Corinthians 2:10–11 says, “These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” How exciting! According to Scripture, when we have one of those “aha” moments spiritually, it’s evidence the Spirit of God is working in us at that very moment! Our God brings about these moments at just the right time, at just the right place, using just the right means.

Personal: When Egypt Needs Truth

There will be times in your life when Egypt is desperate and needs truth, and you may be the conduit for the answers it needs. He puts His people in a position to say to Egypt, “You may not have the answers you need, but my God does.” Of course, the world dismisses spiritual truth—until it is faced with questions it cannot answer in its own wisdom and knowledge.

There are different components to truth, like science, philosophy, math, and so on. Those are important, but without spiritual truth, all of those will paint an incomplete picture, leaving the world searching for answers. That’s because truth has implications far beyond this mortal, physical world. Yet as hard as it may search, Egypt has no answers for spiritual things, which it cannot see. Sooner or later, the world will be thirsty for those answers.

At some point, we’ve all been in Pharaoh’s position, in those moments we realize Egypt has no answers. Sure, the world is good at providing some answers via science, and even philosophy. But the world has never been able to answer the most primal, basic questions humans have: What is the purpose of life? What happens after this life?

**Truth Matters**

Each person in the world is in one of these three camps:

* You don’t believe in eternal life.
* You do believe in eternal life, and it’s up to you to earn it.
* You believe in eternal life, and you realize you can do nothing to earn it; you need Christ to do it for you.

Whichever camp you’re in drives your core values. The implications are staggering: we’re talking about eternity, and it’s all or nothing! These are the answers helping determine what’s truly important, so they will impact how you spend your time, talent, and treasures, as well as how you approach all of your relationships.

After all, if you don’t believe in life after death, then this life on earth is all you have. You might as well get as much out of it as possible, because once it’s done, you’re done. *YOLO* (You Only Live Once)!

But if you do believe in life after death, is that outcome contingent upon religion and religious performance? Does it involve a scale of good works versus bad works, creating a life of religious burden trying to earn salvation? Well, that’s not good, either. God’s children know the answers to these questions about eternity are tied to our faith in Christ, His death on the cross, and His resurrection.

**High Stakes**

When it comes to getting the correct answers to these questions, the stakes are so high, it’s imperative we know what God says on the matter.

1Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2For by it the people of old received their commendation. 3By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

**—Hebrews 11:1–3**

Without the gift of faith, Egypt will never understand truth. That’s why spiritual answers in Egypt will always be flawed. Therefore, Egypt desperately needs those of us with faith. Sooner or later, everyone is faced with this reality: Egypt doesn’t have all the answers. Our role as children of God will be critical for those seeking to survive in Egypt. Yes, this means you!

Jesus said this in Matthew 5:13–14: “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” We are the salt and light of what Egypt needs.

I love this verse in 1 Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Egypt has some truth, but unless they can see the things they can’t see through God’s spirit, it is an incomplete truth. We are called to complete that picture.

You probably won’t be in a position to interpret the dreams of kings anytime soon, but your role is just as crucial. At any moment, you might be in a position where someone trying to survive in Egypt desperately needs you to declare the message of grace, love, and mercy through the work of Christ.

We become the conduits by which Egypt might understand how faith and eternity intersect with life. That’s what God has called us to do: to be the source for answers when Egypt’s answers fail.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Eleven Questions

**Question:** Do you remember a time when, like Pharaoh, you first realized Egypt didn’t have all the answers? What events brought about this realization? When did you realize the world didn’t have answers to the most important questions about life and eternity?

**Question:** Are you at times more comforted by the information, knowledge, and answers of this world more than answers found in God’s Word? When and why? How can you shift the source of your sense of security?

**Question:** Are you ready to be a source of spiritual truth to others when Egypt has no answers for them? If not, what are the impediments? How can you overcome them?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer accepting your calling to influence the world around you with the truths that only come from God.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Waiting in Egypt

**Read: Genesis 41:9–16**

I hate waiting. I’ve been out to dinner with my wife, and everything is going fine at first. We get seated; we order. Then someone sits at the table next to us after our order is taken, and they get their food before us. I start to sweat. I look at my near-empty Diet Coke, and I fidget with my napkin. Then *another* table gets their food.

Suddenly, I’m overcome with inexplicable panic. I project the worst-case-scenarios: “Honey, they’ve forgotten about us. They don’t know we’re here. We’re going to be here for days! I don’t know what to do.” I now realize, if I don’t remind the waitstaff I’m there, we may never get our food.

My wife picks up on this behavior right away. I don’t even need to say anything. She sees it in my eyes and says, “Relax.” She prompts me to stop and be quietly thankful. Shortly thereafter, like a blessing from heaven, our food arrives.

A huge part of surviving in Egypt is knowing how to wait. The problem is, waiting goes against human nature. I’ve never met anyone who says, “I get to wait! I love waiting. It’s so much fun!” No, we reject waiting. We want justice *now.* We want results *now.* We want answers *now.*

What if followers of Jesus had the ability to transform waiting into something different and better? What if waiting were something children of God could passionately embrace as our purpose, our duty, and our calling?

What if waiting in Egypt could be more hopeful and more satisfying than what Egypt has to offer? What if waiting is part of what makes salvation so joyful, part of what makes walking with God so satisfying and rich despite the chaos of Egypt around us?

9Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “I remember my offenses today. 10When Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, 11we dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own interpretation. 12A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream. 13And as he interpreted to us, so it came about. I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged.”

14Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. 15And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” 16Joseph answered Pharaoh, “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.”

**—Genesis 41:9–16**

Historical: Finally

The cupbearer promised he would tell Pharaoh about Joseph. Two years later, the cupbearer finally, conveniently remembered to follow through on his promise. Surely after two years, Joseph had lost hope—not in God, but in the cupbearer. Perhaps he had come to the point where he accepted his lot in life: “I’m going to spend my whole life as a falsely accused rapist, here in an Egyptian jail. But if I’m going to be a prisoner, I’m going to be the best prisoner possible!

Joseph became the best second-in-command the jail ever had. He remained faithful because that’s what God’s children do. If God wanted him to serve prisoners and the jail warden the rest of his life, then so be it. He wasn’t going to become a bitter, angry slave to waiting. Even though the cupbearer forgot him, and even though he served in prison for years for a crime he didn’t commit, Joseph chose to serve His God regardless, saying, “I will make waiting my calling.”

**The Cupbearer Remembers**

Finally, the cupbearer saw the benefit of remembering Joseph. Pharaoh had been failed by Egyptian wisdom and was looking for an interpreter for his dreams. The cupbearer remembered Joseph, thinking, “Oh yeah, that Hebrew guy in prison was rather good at interpreting my dreams. I’ll look like a hero if I mention him to Pharaoh.”

Imagine Joseph’s surprise when he came face to face with Pharaoh. For two years, he’d been waiting, hoping, trusting God; then, suddenly, he was “pulled out of the pit” (jail) immediately. Just like that, Joseph left prison for good.

I wonder what menial task Joseph was in the middle of doing when they came and got him. He was probably faithfully carrying out his normal duties. Maybe he was cleaning, or going over some administrative jail stuff. Whatever it was, I’m sure he was being faithful in his calling while waiting for redemption and justice.

Don’t underestimate how hard this was. Waiting in Egypt had taken a toll on Joseph physically. As a matter of fact, he was entirely unpresentable. He needed to be shaved and cleaned up, and needed new clothing. Waiting in prison was hard. However, after so many difficult years of slavery, false accusations, suffering in jail, and being let down by the cupbearer, Joseph at last met Pharaoh.

Pharaoh wasted no time. There were no niceties or apologies for the years spent in prison, of course. Rather, Pharaoh focused at once on his dreams, asking if Joseph could help. Think about waiting years for redemption, enduring injustice at the hands of people who now wanted your help. That kind of waiting would leave most people bitter, angry, and resentful. Yet Joseph’s first words out of prison were about his God. The first thing he said was to clarify exactly who Pharaoh was dealing with. Joseph said, “Nope, it’s not me who can interpret dreams, but my God can.”

This is such an amazing circumstance. Pharaoh had the power to change Joseph’s life, but Joseph’s focus was still on the King of kings, not the king of Egypt. There was no bitterness, no panic. Joseph didn’t complain or whine. He went to the king with the same calm, steady faith he had displayed while in prison. How was this possible? How was Joseph able to be so steadfast after all he had been through? It wasn’t natural; it was not human.

Spiritual: Waiting on God

I know this won’t sound very fun, but we are called to wait. For God’s purposes, Joseph had to wait in Egypt. God had greater plans than Joseph might have wanted. Joseph would have been content going back to his homeland, tending after the sheep his father left him. He didn’t want or ask to be living in a foreign land, serving a foreign master.

But Joseph had to be in this place of waiting so God would use him to save not only his own family (the ones who had betrayed him) but also Egypt (the ones who had enslaved him). In fact, our salvation is tied directly to Joseph being called to wait in a prison for two years. *Right now, we are reaping the benefits of his faithful waiting!*

Imagine if Joseph had not been willing to wait in Egypt. What would have become of God’s chosen people? They would’ve died off in the famine. What would’ve happened to the line of the Savior, Jesus? There would’ve been no King David. There would’ve been no Joseph and Mary.

Joseph Benson wrote:[[[11]](#endnote-12)](#Source11)

If the chief butler had at first used his interest for Joseph's enlargement, and had obtained it, it is probable that upon his release he would have gone back to the land of the Hebrews again … and then he would neither have been so blessed himself, nor such a blessing to his family, as afterwards he proved.

It’s amazing, isn’t it, the significance of waiting? Today, we’re waiting for our Savior—and He is waiting, too. Luke 12:35–37 says:

35Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, 36and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. 37Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.

Right now, as we wait and stay prepared, our Savior is waiting so He can be with us in heaven for eternity. He is waiting for His reunion with us, His beloved church, and the thrill He will get in serving us at the Father’s table. It puts a new perspective on waiting in Egypt, doesn’t it? Waiting is *so worth it.*

Personal: Waiting with Purpose

Yes, waiting can be excruciating; but, for God's children, waiting in Egypt is also a sacred, honored duty within God's transcendent plan of redemption. There’s so much at stake, and so much going on behind the scenes, as we wait in Egypt. For children of God, waiting doesn’t mean we just sit around doing nothing.

**Waiting Can Be Hopeful**

Micah is one of the least-read books in the Bible, but it’s worth reading just for this verse alone: “But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me” (Micah 7:7). What Micah describes is waiting with hope. Imagine living life without hope for redemption, resurrection, eternal life, or being reunited with loved ones we’ve lost. Imagine waiting in Egypt with no expectation of triumph, or of righteousness and eternal justice. It would be a life of waiting for the inevitable end to separate us forever from God and those we love. That’s what waiting in Egypt looks like without faith.

You see, it’s not the waiting that’s the torture; it’s waiting without hope that sucks the life out of you. But when faith provides hope, waiting can be transformed into watching, diligently and expectantly, for what will happen next. This kind of hopeful waiting means there’s something coming you fully expect. This is the reason Joseph could wait two more years, in faithfulness. He had hope in *what would be,* not in what *might* be.

Joseph’s waiting was made bearable by expectation. He didn’t know if the expectation was earthly or eternal—that was up for debate—but he embraced each day as an opportunity to trust and serve His God. He knew God would redeem and deliver him at some point, somehow, some way, and somewhere.

He knew it was going to happen; even if it wasn’t in this life, he knew it would come in the next. This is how God intends us, His children, to live in Egypt: waiting with tremendous, inspirational, confident hope.

**Waiting Can Be Beneficial**

Isaiah 55:9 says, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” It’s hard for us to see past the personal, difficult, often painful consequences of waiting in Egypt. Humanly speaking, it’s impossible for us to understand all the ramifications of our suffering while we are waiting on God’s plan.

But never forget, your waiting matters. There are so many who desperately need you to wait in Egypt. It’s probable their eternal survival depends on it! You can live life chasing an elusive goal of fulfillment, happiness, and satisfaction, or like Joseph, you can pursue a greater purpose through faithful, hopeful waiting.

**Waiting Can Be Satisfying**

Psalm 107:9 says, “For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.” The Hebrew word here for *longing* can actually mean to crave something, or to wait with eagerness or longing.[[[12]](#endnote-13)](#Source12) And Psalm 17:15 says, “As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.”

Waiting is transformed when it is combined with hope and expectation. When God’s plan is finally fulfilled, we won’t say “Well it’s about time, God! What took you so long? It’s gotten ridiculous down here!”

Instead, when our waiting is complete and we see Jesus face to face, we will run to the embrace of the One we have been waiting for all along. We will trip over ourselves with joy, trying to get to His feet first. We will have no words of discontent or recollections of impatience to share. We will have only words of adoration; we will feel only complete satisfaction in God’s grand plan for redemption. We will be amazed, even stunned, by it, and say, “I’m so glad I waited for this! It was so worth it!”

22The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; 23they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 24“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”

25The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. 26It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

**—Lamentations 3:22–26**

This passage is from a book about how hard waiting can be. Right smack in the middle, it says, “It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.” This scripture describes so aptly the day-to-day secret to successful waiting: with each morning comes a new blessed, intimate interaction with our God of hope. This is how God’s children wait in Egypt. No matter the circumstances, each day can be a new understanding of God’s mercy and faithfulness. It’s also a reminder of where our hope really lies—and it’s not in waiting for Egypt. Egypt isn’t going to come through, but our God will!

The gift of faith reminds us, day by day, our hope is in our God. This is what enables us to wait “quietly.” The Hebrew word for *quietly* indicates silent submission,[[[13]](#endnote-14)](#source13) as opposed to rebelliousness or submission with bitterness. Faith enables us to carry out His grand plan with obedient hearts. When it all comes together, and like Joseph we come face to face with the King for the first time, that day will be so amazing, sweet, satisfying, and fulfilling, we will declare to our Savior, “This was sure worth the wait, Jesus!”

WORKBOOK

Chapter Twelve Questions

**Question:** How do you feel about periods of prolonged waiting? How might your perspective on waiting affect your response to God when He calls you into a period of waiting?

**Question:** How can our faith affect waiting? What can you do to allow faith to transform your waiting into something sacred?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer embracing waiting with the hope available to you through God and His promises.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Pharaoh’s Best Day

**Read: Genesis 41:17, 24b–36**

If there were never any tragedy, or even a threat of it, I wonder how often we would be willing to hear from God while living in Egypt. When I was a pastor in Long Island, I remember people in our church telling me how, immediately following 9/11, they observed people who had no previous interest in spiritual truth beginning to ask questions and listen for the answers. They recalled hearing questions like, “Do you think this was predicted in Revelation? Is God punishing our country? Is there more to come?” Obviously, these were questions nobody could truly answer. But one horrific event had affected people in that region in a significant way, on a spiritual level.

I moved to New York in 2005, just four years after 9/11, and I could still see the impact that tragic day had on so many families. In our church, which sat just outside of Queens, I met several survivors of 9/11. Some were near, and even inside, the World Trade Center when it happened. Many who worked in the city had to walk home that day because mass transit was shut down. Roads into the city were closed, so they walked across the Queensboro Bridge, the Brooklyn Bridge, and the Manhattan Bridge to get back to Long Island.

There were people in our church who lost family and friends, some as victims and others as first responders. The impact of the tragedy had huge ripple effects in New York and the surrounding communities.

I would ask, “Tell me what happened after 9/11. What was going on in the suburbs and the city?” They recounted how all the churches in the city and suburbs were full the next few Sundays. Suddenly, life in Egypt had become scary for everyone. People were full of doubt. They wanted to know what God had to say about it. Many people told me living through that tragedy changed their value system forever. How they viewed life on earth had been permanently transformed.

In Pharaoh’s case, he hadn’t actually experienced the pending tragedy, but the mere warning of it caused things to change in his heart and mind.

17Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Behold, in my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile… 24And I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me.”

25Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. 26The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. 27The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine. 28It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. 29There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, 30but after them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land, 31and the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of the famine that will follow, for it will be very severe. 32And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. 33Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land and take one fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years. 35And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. 36That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine.”

**—Genesis 41:17, 24b–36**

Historical: God Spoke to Pharaoh

This was the most important day in Pharaoh’s life—the day God spoke to a pagan king who didn’t even believe God existed. Pharaoh didn’t know this was going to be such a momentous day when he woke up; but, by God’s sovereign design, by the end of the day, he would choose to listen to, and trust in, the words of a stranger and his foreign God.

It’s important to note, Pharaoh considered himself a god. In Egyptian culture, the king was the conduit between mortal men and the spiritual world.[[[14]](#endnote-15)](#Source14) He was king of the longest-standing, most prolific empire in history; for 1,300 years, Egypt was the dominant force in the world.[[[15]](#endnote-16)](#Source15) But now, suddenly this powerful king was at the mercy of a God he knew nothing about.

Initially, Pharaoh thought his problem was a dream, but as Joseph revealed to Pharaoh, his issue was actually with God. “What you need is truth,” Joseph essentially said, “and only God can interpret your dream.”

Pharaoh had never met Joseph before, so all he knew was what the cupbearer had told him. Regardless, Joseph simply and boldly declared what God wanted Pharaoh to hear: “Hey, king, you need truth.”

Think about a man who was the king of the physical world taking advice from a lowly prisoner, accused of rape and in jail after being sold into slavery by his brothers and then forgotten by the cupbearer for two years. In a genuinely miraculous turn of events, the king of a powerful empire that spanned centuries turned to Joseph because he needed to hear from God.

**Egyptian Wisdom Failed**

Let’s make sure we remember the circumstances that brought Pharaoh to this place of desperation. In the first part of verse 24, Pharaoh recounted his vivid dreams to Joseph and confessed to Joseph, in effect, “These mystics and interpreters behind me, the ones I’ve put so much faith and trust in my whole life, are useless.”

This was a desperate Pharaoh! I can imagine the members of his court found their king’s desperation shocking, even scandalous, but if Pharaoh had followed conventional Egyptian wisdom, it would have led to the empire’s demise. Only God could solve the problems Egypt and Pharaoh were about to face, and amazingly, God was going to make that happen; through Joseph, God provided a remedy. The interpretation he offered opened Pharaoh’s eyes immediately—so much so, he was more than willing to listen to God’s direction from Joseph and follow it to the letter. Think about the unlikeliness of this scenario: the most powerful king of the world was ready to follow the advice and counsel of a former slave and prisoner.

God revealed the meaning of Pharaoh’s dreams to Joseph, and through him provided the instructions to preserve the Egyptian ruler for God’s purposes. Salvation was within reach for Pharaoh and his country! All he had to do was listen to God’s words and Joseph’s wise discernment.

Spiritual: How God Speaks

When God speaks, it’s always for a reason, a sovereign purpose. Through Joseph, God shattered the wall of spiritual ignorance, to speak truth to a king who desperately needed to hear it. It was such a surreal, miraculous, whirlwind event, I doubt Joseph himself fully realized all that was happening. Nevertheless, God used circumstances beyond Pharaoh’s control to humble him enough to be willing to hear God’s wisdom from the mouth of Joseph.

This God-ordained interaction between Pharaoh and Joseph had profound implications for the entire ancient world. In fact, it would prove to be one of the key focal points in human history; to this day, we are reaping the benefits of how God used Joseph in Egypt. God had a purpose for this great empire, which He was going to save and use as a tool for the preservation of His chosen people.

**God’s Sovereign Process**

God always uses the exact right circumstances to effect His purposes. Not only did He confound the wise men who had no answers in Egypt, but He also rendered them useless. They were stumped: “We have no idea what the cows and the corn mean!” God used the coming famine and threat of tragedy to leave Pharaoh desperate for truth.

God also used the right person, bringing the only worshiper of Jehovah in the whole country into an audience with Pharaoh to reveal His truth. God used the right person at the right time to be a vessel of His mercy. Joseph had the skills, experience, and charisma to be the solution to this horrible dilemma. First, he warned Pharaoh “a famine is coming”; then, he also provided Pharaoh with a way *through* the famine. He offered a plan of action.

There is purpose in God’s process. Second Peter 1:21 says, “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” This was certainly true of Joseph.

**God’s Sovereign Grace**

The only way Pharaoh could hear and heed the words of a Hebrew prisoner was by divine intervention into Pharaoh’s heart and mind. God orchestrated circumstances that rendered a king helpless, and in that moment, grace came for an entire country. Can you see how the threat of tragedy was a gift from God, not just for Joseph but for Pharaoh and all of Egypt as well?

There was no earthly reason for Joseph to be standing in front of a desperate Pharaoh, yet there he was. The dreams, the inability of wise men even to attempt to interpret them, the fear of a famine, and how God used Joseph all combined to put Pharaoh in a place to hear truth and respond with complete faith in what God was saying.

First Corinthians 2:12–13 says, “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” I believe this is exactly what happened: an act of grace. Wouldn’t you agree? Pharaoh didn’t deserve the warning, yet God offered it anyway.

This is the process God uses again and again throughout the Bible. He uses it in our lives today.

On that morning, Pharaoh didn’t realize his meeting with Joseph would prove to be the most important day of his life. He didn’t know what was happening behind the scenes. He had no idea he was going to get a visit from Almighty God, and this threat of tragedy was simply the conduit for him to receive grace. Neither could Joseph have realized the full magnitude of what was happening—but this is often how God works.

Personal: Our Best Day

Tragedy, or fear of it, can create within us desire to hear from God. Sadly, the human heart is not naturally inclined to seek God’s truth unless it experiences circumstances beyond its control. Tragedy is something we avoid; it’s not something we lean into.

Understanding the nature of tragedy is crucial to our spiritual development and our spiritual discernment. It’s hard to deny, tragedy can humble us, make us desperate, and cultivate a desire to hear from God.

Can you recall moments of looming or realized tragedy in your life? Do you remember how those moments caused you to turn to Heavenly Dad for wisdom and comfort? Maybe, like for Pharaoh, it was a somber early warning of some tragedy you could address beforehand. Perhaps it was the threat of the earthly consequences of sin looming on the horizon. Perhaps the tragedy was financial, legal, or personal circumstances; maybe the tragedy was a frightening medical diagnosis. It might have been a personal tragedy, like Joseph experienced time and again, causing you to be an acute listener. Or maybe it was something affecting everyone, like 9/11. Humility born out of tragedy often drives us from the wisdom of Egypt and toward God for answers.

While we may not have a Joseph who interprets dreams, we have a tool far more personal, accessible, tangible, and miraculous. Hebrews 1:1–2 says, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” Pharaoh had Joseph, but we have God’s Holy Spirit, His Word, His Son, and the cross. The Spirit of God comes to us like Joseph came to Pharaoh, providing the most important interpretation we will ever hear. We have Scripture to reflect on, and the cross to look to, for hope. It’s through these gifts we hear from God.

Hebrews 12:25 says, “See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.” Dear reader, this is the ultimate looming tragedy: life in eternity without connection to Heavenly Dad, the author of truth and salvation.

The most important truth we will ever hear is the day Heavenly Dad reveals to us the depths of our depravity and the tragedy associated with not addressing it through the work of Jesus on the cross. Understanding these ramifications should induce humility, just as it did for Pharaoh. It should spark in us a desire to hear from God. In that moment, we become like Pharaoh, asking, “What does God have to say about it?”

The day we finally understand all of this is the ultimate teachable moment. On that day, we finally learn where to turn for wisdom and truth. Just as for Pharaoh, it’s the greatest day of our lives.

Think about the day it happened for you—when God called you and said, “Turn to Me. Heed My warning. Follow My call to put your trust in the cross of Christ and His resurrection for the forgiveness of sin, and receive the gift of eternal life.”

That was your Pharaoh-like moment; it was a sweet moment amid tragedy, enabling you to see your desperate, eternal need for Christ. You are no longer grasping at air for answers from people and sources unable to provide them, because of that time you heard directly from God. Without a doubt, it was Pharaoh’s best day, and it was certainly your best day, too.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Thirteen Questions

**Question:** Have you experienced tragedy that drew you closer to God? What did you gain spiritually as a result of this tragedy? How did God use tragedy to alter the trajectory of your life?

**Question:** Can you recall a time God showed up with His grace by providing a warning, protection, or intervention? What did (or does) this reveal to you about the nature of God and His heart for you?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer of thankfulness for your best day—the day He revealed Himself, and your need for Him, to you.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Pharaoh “Gets It”

**Read: Genesis 41:37–45**

I was nineteen when I got my first job as a football coach. I worked with the second and third teams on the JV squad of the program at my high school alma mater in Tampa, my hometown. I was styled the “second team offensive coordinator” for a bunch of twelve- and thirteen-year-olds who had never played football before. Each day after stretches and the group fundamental drills, the head coach would send me, the reserve players, and two assistants to a separate, small field to practice.

I took the offense, the other assistants would take the defense, and we would scrimmage the rest of the practice. We’d teach each kid the plays, the signals, how to play defense and offense, and the right way to play each position. At first, it was a complete mess. However, about four weeks into the season, it started to click for the players; suddenly, they “got it.” We as coaches felt so proud.

Then, there was a game in which our first team was playing poorly. The head coach yelled over to me, “Coach Davis, the second team is taking over. You’re calling the plays!”

The kids and other coaches were so excited. We were ready to show what we had learned together, as a team. We were ready to throw everything we had at them! Double reverses, long bombs, and all the fancy plays.

The first play was a penalty for a false start. Okay, no big deal. We lost five yards.

The second play, we lost fifteen yards.

The third play, we fumbled, and the other team returned it for a touchdown.

“Coach Davis, first team is going back in!” The head coach said.

We were certain we were ready; we had practiced hard; yet, we weren’t even close to being game-ready. We still needed to practice.

I see a similar situation in Joseph’s story. Pharaoh heard truth from God, he “got it,” and he was transformed. But Pharaoh also recognized the need to keep Joseph around. He knew he needed to continue to learn about the God of Joseph. In other words, he needed more training.

37This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. 38And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?” 39Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. 40You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.” 41And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” 42Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck. 43And he made him ride in his second chariot. And they called out before him, “Bow the knee!” Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.” 45And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah. And he gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On. So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.

**—Genesis 41:37–45**

Historical: Pharaoh’s New Best Friend

Immediately, Pharaoh recognized there was something different about this Hebrew prisoner. He sensed something supernatural happening between Joseph and his God. In response, Pharaoh believed Joseph and gave him significant trinkets of honor reserved for people in authority equal to the king: his ring, a gold chain, his second chariot, and a wife from a prominent family. He went from ragged prisoner to hand of the king within a matter of moments.

**Dreams Come True**

Get this: as Joseph was riding around in his new chariot, the dream he had told his father and brothers about years earlier was about to come to fruition. Remember, he had told them, “One day, all of you are going to bow a knee to me.” Of course, this didn’t go over well, and it set in motion the series of events that landed Joseph in Egypt. But now, Pharaoh commanded people to bow their knee every time Joseph’s chariot rode by. It was exactly as Joseph had predicted, because God used Pharaoh to follow through on His promise.

**A New Name**

Often, people who come to America from other countries will change their names. I have a friend, Roger, who is from India. He wanted to fit in, so he chose an English name. That’s what happened to Joseph.

In addition to fulfilling His promises to Joseph, God erased any obstacles that the burden of Joseph’s questionable past, including the false accusations of rape and his years of slavery and imprisonment, might have posed for his future. Not only did Pharaoh get rid of Joseph’s old name, but he also gave him a new name as a reminder of everything God had done.

This name, spelled out in Hebrew, was *Zaphenath-paneah*. Now, we don’t know exactly what Joseph’s new name meant, but a popular guess is “Revealer of Secrets.”[[[16]](#endnote-17)](#Source16) Practically overnight, Joseph went from Joseph the Accused Rapist to Joseph the Revealer of Secrets. Whatever this name meant, it’s clear Pharaoh gave Joseph a name that wiped away all the old baggage.

**Given a Pagan Priest’s Daughter**

A pagan is someone who worships creation instead of the Creator. Instead of worshiping God, who created the mountains, they worship the mountains. Instead of worshiping the God who created the earth, they worship the earth. The first and most important thing many pagans worship is the sun, because the sun brings warmth and light; it affects weather and every other aspect of life. It makes sense that the high priest of the god of the sun, On, would be an important man.

Pharaoh gave the daughter of this high-profile Egyptian priest to Joseph as a wife. The daughter of the sun god’s priest was given to a Hebrew worshiper of Jehovah. I wonder what the priest and others were thinking when this happened!

But to Pharaoh, it was clear. The sun god couldn’t give him answers when he needed them, yet Joseph’s God had come through. Giving this priest’s daughter to Joseph was a public declaration: Joseph and his God were now a fixture in Egyptian culture and society. Pharaoh was elevating Joseph and his God higher than the pantheon of other, false gods who held sway over Egyptian society.

Joseph made it crystal clear from the beginning, his ability to interpret Pharaoh’s dream came from Jehovah—and Pharaoh’s response was to believe him. Imagine what was going on in Joseph’s heart and mind as he witnessed God working in Pharaoh’s heart.

Spiritual: Pharaoh Trusted God

Everything about Egyptian culture rejected true spiritual understanding. Egyptians relied upon dreams, pagan gods, and magic. Then Joseph came before Pharaoh, was given a few minutes to talk about Jehovah, and *boom!*—Pharaoh put all his trust in what Joseph had to say. He even trusted Joseph’s instructions meant to lead Egypt through the predicted famine. It’s important to understand, Pharoah’s transition to believing in Jehovah wasn’t a result of intelligence; his spiritual epiphany was not his own.

First Corinthians 2:14 says, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” For the most part, people are predisposed to reliance on their own understanding. We go with what we know don’t we? Though the human heart likes to think it knows it all, discerning spiritual truth is not natural for us. Our depravity has caused our hearts to fail to understand spiritual matters instinctively; doing so takes supernatural intervention. It’s like my football team in practice: we thought we were ready, and knew enough, but we didn’t. Game time came and revealed how unprepared we really were.

**Revealer of Secrets**

Joseph made it clear God was speaking to Pharaoh through Joseph. There’s a story like this in the Old Testament book of Daniel: “…he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him” (Daniel 2:21b–22). God is the ultimate Revealer of Secrets, while Joseph was merely God’s conduit, along for the ride. Though Joseph was given the new name, it was God Himself who revealed the truth. Pharaoh “got it”; he understood. In Genesis 41:39, Pharaoh said, “Since God has shown you all this….” Pharaoh said this because he knew who was really at work.

**God Controls the Heart**

Yet, in all this, it’s important to know Pharaoh didn’t “get it” without God’s intervention. Proverbs 21:1 says, “The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.” Isn’t that a vivid image? But God’s authority extends far beyond “the king’s heart,” to our hearts as well. When God wants us to “get it,” we’re going to “get it,” even if we don’t want to “get it.” Pharaoh immediately placed trust in Joseph’s words and his counsel, putting him in charge of famine relief. Through Joseph, God blessed the whole civilized world, thereby confirming His word to Abraham’s family that through them, all the people of the earth would be blessed.

This is one of the most miraculous, stunning events in human history. How did a pagan king with no previous knowledge of Jehovah have one session with a Hebrew prisoner and come out of it with faith in the true God? How was he convinced to entrust his kingdom to someone he barely knew based on a short conversation? It’s amazing.

I am certain this wasn’t the last time Pharaoh heard from Joseph’s God. How many times do you think he went back to Joseph to hear what Jehovah had to say about the way things were going in Egypt? I speculate that over the next twenty years, Pharaoh became reliant upon God’s truth, especially as he saw all of it play out. Why? Because God had enabled Pharaoh to trust Him. What a supernatural event! It seems like Pharaoh should have treated Joseph and his God with at least a little skepticism, but instead, he allowed Joseph to transform Egypt.

Personal: Truth Intervention

I often find my mind wandering when I try to read the Bible or pray. Sometimes I start the same prayer a dozen times over the course of the day, picking it up as if I’m turning on the TV. Do you know why? Yes, I have ADD, but it’s also because Egypt is filled with noise, which makes it difficult to hear from God at times. Egypt has a knack for taking our attention away from what really matters.

However, God’s shows His grace by breaking through all the noise of Egypt. God uses people and circumstances to force us to listen, in what some people might call “God moments.” When they happen, their impact can be widespread, long-lasting, and miraculous, just like with Pharaoh.

Recall that 1 Corinthians 2:12 says, “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.” It’s easy to be astounded at how this pagan king embraced God’s words through Joseph, but I want you to know something: each time any human heart or mind relents to God’s truth, it’s the same miraculous process we see with Pharaoh. It is a supernatural, personalized, intimate interaction between Heavenly Dad and His chosen children. It brings me chills and goosebumps every time I see it or hear a story about it.

“God moments” are times God makes spiritual truth crystal-clear. Words you might have heard a million times suddenly make sense and take on new meaning. Most people in America have heard the story of Jesus; they might have scoffed or ignored it. But then, suddenly, God intervenes and forces a person to listen. The lightbulb goes on, and things he or she has heard for years take on new meaning.

**Open Eyes and Ears**

Ephesians 1:18 says: “…having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.” This enlightenment is the moment the Spirit of God reaches down and flips on a light in your heart to open your eyes. It’s the moment God opens a spiritual frequency you were never able to hear before, with natural ears. Spiritual enlightenment from God is like a heavenly dog whistle for your soul.

Each time a soul trusts the Word of God, it’s a precious miracle from heaven, worthy of jubilation from God’s people. Each time a soul abandons his or her human understanding, it’s a miraculous act of the Holy Spirit. Proverbs 3:5 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.” Whether it’s a king or a baker, a president or a prisoner, the miracle of heart intervention is incredible.

I love these stories. I love hearing about God’s miraculous intervention into the hearts and lives of people once dominated by the wisdom and understanding of Egypt. I love when those people tell me about the moment God dropped in and said, “No, that’s not how you’re going to be anymore.” As a result, they let go of their own ideas about spiritual truth, casting themselves and their hope, without any apprehension, headlong into the arms of the loving God who said, “I have the healing and redemption you are craving. I have the answers you need. I am the one who has the purpose for life your hands have been digging for. I have everything you need. It is time today for you to put your trust in Me.”

When did you began to trust God instead of your own understanding? For each of us, that moment is just as spectacular and impactful as it was for Pharaoh. Do you remember the way you responded, the day you heard about the cross and finally realized how much you needed it? Do you remember the moment everything changed for you—when you suddenly “got it”?

WORKBOOK

Chapter Fourteen Questions

**Question:** Can you remember a moment when God broke through with a truth you had never experienced before? What was that moment like? What was the truth God showed you?

**Question:** Are you in the habit of leaning on your own understanding rather than leaning on the truth of God? What changes can you make to pursue God’s wisdom before your own?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer recognizing God as the source of spiritual wisdom and truth and thanking Him for revealing His truth to you.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“Salt and Light” in Egypt

**Read: Genesis 41:46–57**

Recently, my wife (Laura) and I were fortunate enough to spend a couple of weeks in the UK. We saw some really cool places and had some fun experiences. However, for me, the most memorable place was Winston Churchill’s grave.

Not many people visit his grave. This isn’t because they don’t love Winston Churchill, who is a widely revered, beloved historical figure. But his final resting place is in the middle of nowhere, ten or fifteen miles off the main highway, up a small country road. The road weaves between hills, and then you must pull over to the side of the road since there’s no real parking lot. After this, you walk about thirty yards uphill on a narrow gravel road. At the top of the hill stands an old church, built in the 1300s.

All the land surrounding the church is a graveyard. Most of the grave markers are hundreds of years old and in poor condition, except for one section in the back that’s well maintained. It’s Winston Churchill’s family plot.

In my opinion, Winston Churchill was the most important man of the twentieth century. His courageous leadership saved democracy in Europe. It’s true he was an incredibly flawed man, but he was brilliant. His leadership in the fight against Hitler and Nazism is inspiring.

As I was standing in front of his grave marker, I noticed a hill behind me cascading down into a small valley. There at the bottom of the hill was a small elementary school, or primary school. When I was there, the kids were outside, running and playing and laughing. I remember thinking, “I wonder how many of them have been taught the reason they are able to do that in a free country is because of this incredible man’s leadership during some of the darkest times in modern history.

What if Winston Churchill had never existed? How different would the world be today without all of his contributions to history?

Let’s apply a similar line of questioning elsewhere. What if tomorrow, the church stopped being the church? No more work of God in the hearts of His people, no more serving, no more missionaries, no more preaching the gospel, and no more sacrificial living, loving, and caring for other people.

What if, tomorrow, the Spirit of God stopped its transforming work in the heart of God’s chosen people?

46Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt. 47During the seven plentiful years the earth produced abundantly, 48and he gathered up all the food of these seven years, which occurred in the land of Egypt, and put the food in the cities. He put in every city the food from the fields around it. 49And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.

50Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bore them to him. 51Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.” 52The name of the second he called Ephraim, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

53The seven years of plenty that occurred in the land of Egypt came to an end, 54and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. There was famine in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. 55When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do.”

56So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. 57Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth.

**—Genesis 41:46–57**

Talk about climate change! Imagine the plight of a whole empire, going from plenty to famine because of a massive drought. Yet that’s exactly the challenge Egypt faced. What’s even more astonishing is, God put Joseph in a position to rescue the known world at the time from what otherwise would have been devastating consequences.

Historical: A Distinctive Witness

It’s evident all of Egypt recognized Joseph had a unique, strong connection to his God. Even when he was a slave, his master noticed something special about Joseph and put him in charge of his whole household. Even when Joseph was in prison, the chief jailer put him in charge of the whole prison.

Even in hardship, Joseph’s life was a manifestation of God’s favor and blessing, no matter his circumstances. It was undeniable. People saw it. In a land with no idea who Jehovah was, people knew Joseph had a special connection to his God. When Joseph ultimately found earthly success as the hand of the king, people saw God’s favor on him in a more pronounced way, despite the fact their world seemed to be crumbling around them. Let’s look at some of the evidence of God’s hand on Joseph’s life.

**Joseph’s Wife**

Joseph’s wife was named Asenath. Her name meant “belonging to the goddess Neith,”[[[17]](#endnote-18)](#Source17) an Egyptian goddess. Asenath was a highly respected, well-educated woman from Egyptian aristocracy. She was influential and admired in Egypt, yet she agreed to marry Joseph, a Hebrew who worshiped Jehovah.

Can you imagine the reaction? “You are a woman who’s named after one the highest, most important figures in the pantheon of gods, but you are married to Joseph?” Philo was a Jewish philosopher who lived in Egypt during the first century AD. He wrote a story called “Asenath's Life and Confession,” or “Life and Prayer.”[[[18]](#endnote-19)](#Source18) It’s a story of how she came to be a worshiper of Jehovah. Through her marriage to Joseph, it’s believed, she became a proselyte—someone who was not born Hebrew but became Hebrew in her worship. This certainly seems to make sense, considering what we know.

Asenath witnessed all of Joseph’s prophecies come true. She watched him expertly navigate the country through years of plenty and years of famine. Then she saw him extend generosity to the rest of the world, saving them from starvation.

It would be difficult to see all of these things and still reject Joseph’s God. I am sure she joined Joseph in his faith. How could she not? When God’s greatness is so clearly displayed, it is hard to ignore. Joseph honored God by having a wife who supported him and likely found her faith in Jehovah, too.

**Joseph’s Kids**

Joseph honored God with his children. His sons’ names, Manasseh and Ephraim, point to his continued awareness of the Lord’s presence with him throughout his struggles in Egypt.

The name Manasseh means “causing to forget.”[[[19]](#endnote-20)](#source19) Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh, saying, “God has made me forget all my hardship” (Genesis 41:51). This name was a testament to what God had done to help Joseph overcome the terrible things he experienced. The name of his second son, Ephraim, means “I shall be doubly fruitful.”[[[20]](#endnote-21)](#Source20) When Joseph named him, he said, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction” (Genesis 41:52).

This is significant. Anytime Joseph introduced his boys to people in Egypt, their names were a reminder of Jehovah’s faithfulness. I can imagine Joseph saying, “Oh yes, this is my son named after my God, who helped me forget all my hardship when my brothers sold me into slavery. And this is my younger son, Ephraim. He is named after my God, who has made me fruitful in this land where I was afflicted and suffered.”

On top of this, whenever someone spoke one of the boys’ names, they were speaking of Joseph’s God. They were giving praise to Jehovah, though they probably didn’t realize it.

**Joseph’s Work**

Not only did Joseph serve Egypt well by gathering enough food to survive the famine, but his accomplishments also made him famous throughout the world. People journeyed to see him, to benefit from his stores of food and to seek his wisdom. Through Joseph’s diligence, Egypt fed countless nations during the famine. The way he helped and served others was a clear testament to his God, Jehovah.

**Joseph’s Impact**

People knew who Joseph’s God was; he left no confusion. He was a servant of Jehovah. Joseph’s life was a consistent, constant reminder of God’s presence, glory, and power to everyone who knew him, in the world’s greatest empire.

In every aspect of his life, Joseph became salt and light in Egypt. It’s amazing! I imagine people walked away from meeting him, forever impacted by the mercy and love of the Hebrew God.

Spiritual: “Salt and Light”

Joseph’s example of reflecting the glory of God to everyone he came in contact with is exactly what all believers should be doing with our lives. Jesus said, in Matthew 5:13–14, “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” So, what does that mean, exactly?

**Salt Is Our Work**

When Jesus said that if salt loses its taste, it’s “no longer good for anything,” He was offering us a metaphor for usefulness. Jesus was saying, “You are the most useful thing on the earth. If you lose your usefulness, you’re not worthy or usable.” In other words, we are important!

Joseph’s impact on Egypt was obvious: a faithful, talented man serving relentlessly saved the whole country. Psalm 71:16 says, “With the mighty deeds of the Lord God I will come; I will remind them of your righteousness, yours alone.” God has given each of His children the ability to serve.

**The Light Is Our Words**

Throughout scripture, light and darkness are connected to the concept of truth. An example of this appears in Psalm 119:105: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” In the book of John, Jesus was called the Word of God: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). God cannot say anything untruthful, and so for Jesus to be the Word of God means Jesus was and is truth.

Then, in John 8:12, Jesus referred to Himself as the light of the world. He did this to proclaim He was the source of enlightenment. He was shining light on things that had been dark. He was and is truth and light

When we are *light,* we shine truth on darkness. When we are *salt and light,* we make an incredible impact. Joseph exemplified this beautifully. His God-given talents, life experiences, and gift of faith made him the only person in all of Egypt who could be the *salt and light* Pharaoh needed.

Personal: Egypt Needs Us

Joseph is a wonderful illustration of how Jesus empowers His church. As Joseph was salt and light in Egypt, Jesus makes us salt and light today. The challenge comes when we become distracted by all the toil that comes with trying to survive in Egypt. This striving can cause us to lose sight of how much Egypt actually needs us to be salt and light.

It’s easy to think of our salvation and faith merely as resources for our toil and survival in Egypt. *But survival is not the purpose of our salvation;* we are saved so God can make us salt and light in Egypt, which allows Egypt to learn about the glory and majesty of our God. This makes our role in Egypt crucial. Whether they want to admit it or not, the world will have little trouble identifying when God’s children are faithful—when they have become salt and light.

**What If the Church Stopped?**

In my introduction to this chapter, I posed the hypothetical: what if the church stopped being the church? What if today, the church stopped everything it does, from food pantries to serving third-world countries to marriage counseling to simple neighborly love. What would be the impact for the world, and all who live in it, if everyone in the church suddenly declared, “We’re done”?

Without Joseph, Egypt and the known world would have been crushed during the famine. Today’s world, too, would face catastrophe if we just *stopped*. We are His conduits for salt (our work of compassion and mercy) and light (when we point to the truth of grace, hope, and redemption). Just like in Joseph’s story, Egypt (the world) knows it needs God’s children, even if they won’t ever admit it. Yes, we’re flawed people, far from perfect, but that’s what makes our salt and light so incredible!

It’s not our religious piety the world needs. It’s not our cathedrals or pipe organs. The world needs us to be salt in how we do business, work for an employer, and interact with our neighbors. It needs us to be salt in how we create art, write music, cook food, build houses, and raise our children. No matter what your job is, your work needs to be a product worthy of people who have been redeemed and transformed, because Egypt desperately needs God’s people to do good work.

As the salt draws people in, they start to see the light—the truth of Jesus. We speak words to communicate the joy of redemption and transformation, in undeniable ways, to all who encounter us. That’s why Egypt desperately needs us to be salt and light.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Fifteen Questions

**Question:** Can you think of ways your work gives you opportunities to be salt and light in the world?

**Question:** What would change if tomorrow you went to work understanding how crucial it is for you to be salt and light? Would it change anything about how you operate on a daily basis?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer committing to be salt and light in the world.

**Part Three:
The Process of Healing from Bitterness**

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Prison of Bitterness

**Read: Genesis 42:1–9a**

Why do we humans seem to have an innate ability to live comfortably with bitterness and resentment? We are so efficient with this, we can do it for years, even decades! We won’t admit we’re bitter in the first place, let alone make any effort to resolve the situation. That’s because bitterness blinds us. We don’t see the slow destruction it brings on us and everyone around us.

Usually, bitterness is the result of betrayal. Someone hurts us, abandons us, or breaks our trust—and bitterness takes root. It starts with anger or frustration; then, without healthy resolution, it only grows worse. We successfully pretend we’re fine, we’re tough, we’re okay, and we’re “over it,” yet inside, we’re hurting. Inside, we’re still damaged.

Betrayal is unavoidable when surviving in Egypt. We have all been betrayed, and if we’re honest, we ourselves have been the betrayers. Joseph experienced betrayal constantly; and in this story, we learn we don’t need to act like everything is okay when it really isn’t.

Living with bitterness hinders our ability to enjoy the supernatural satisfaction of God’s presence in our lives. Can you think of personal examples of how the cancer of bitterness has destroyed your relationships? Has it hindered your ability to impact God’s kingdom?

It’s difficult to take an accurate inventory of the damage bitterness has done until after it’s been addressed, after we escape its prison. Once we start cleaning up all the toxic residue bitterness has left behind, we begin to see the painful truth. I know people who wasted twenty years of their life, consumed with bitterness and resentment. Of course, that gives way to another cancer—regret. There must be a better way, right? I believe the story of how Joseph dealt with bitterness gives us valuable insights.

1When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” 2And he said, “Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.” 3So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. 5Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

6Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. 7Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. “Where do you come from?” he said. They said, “From the land of Canaan, to buy food.” 8And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. 9And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them.

**—Genesis 42:1–9a**

History: Family Reunion

Joseph’s old family was starving. They had been hit by this famine just like everyone else, and likely had exhausted all other options. Now, it was literally “do or die,” and their last hope was to travel to Egypt. They heard rumors of a man Pharaoh had placed in charge of the food supply providing relief to those from outside of Egypt who were hungry.

**Residue of Distrust**

The dysfunction among the twelve sons of Joseph is still evident in this passage. Jacob continued to show favoritism to the sons of Rachel (Joseph and Benjamin) while being less kind to his sons with Leah (all the others). Since he still believed Joseph was dead, Joseph’s younger brother Benjamin was Jacob’s new favorite.

Jacob sent Leah’s ten boys to Egypt, keeping Benjamin home for protection. Though he probably continued to believe his older sons’ story of Joseph being attacked by a wild animal, he might not have been one-hundred-percent sure, so he wasn’t taking any chances. He was going to keep Benjamin in his sights.

Now realize, Benjamin wasn’t a boy. It had been as long as twenty-five years since the Joseph incident, putting Benjamin now in his mid-thirties. He was a full-grown man, probably with kids of his own. Jacob probably didn’t trust the sons of Leah fully, and he might even have suspected they had something to do with Joseph’s death, so no way was he going to let Benjamin head off to Egypt in their company.

**Face to Face**

Meanwhile, the brothers had no way of knowing it was Joseph running Pharaoh’s grain stores, overseeing the process of sale and distribution of grain during the famine. He probably had a thousand people working for him.

After twenty-five years, by God’s design, Joseph’s brothers show up. Joseph happened to be the one overseeing the particular store where the brothers went to purchase grain, a task he normally would have delegated to his massive staff. Imagine thousands of people trying to buy food and get back home, yet despite the odds, God orchestrated a face-to-face meeting between Joseph and his brothers!

Imagine the rush of emotion and flashbacks Joseph had. Imagine the pit in his stomach, the moment he saw his ten brothers kneel before him. *“These betrayers! I forgot how much I hated them for what they did to me. I forgot how I wanted to kill them for what they did to me. They sold me, and because of that, I ended up falsely accused and imprisoned. I almost didn’t make it out! They cost me the best years of my youth.”*

Imagine waves of emotion cycling at high speeds through his mind: anger, bitterness, desire for revenge. What an intense moment!

If you recall, Joseph named one of his sons Manasseh, meaning, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house” (Genesis 41:51). In other words, Joseph took all of the bitterness he felt and put it right on the shoulders of his son, who had no understanding of what his father had experienced. He made his son’s name a reminder, even though the meaning of the name itself said he had forgotten! Every time he said, “Manasseh,” it was a reminder of his bitter past. Do you see how bitterness impacted Joseph? Despite his claims, he had never forgotten.

**Unrecognizable**

At this point, Joseph was unrecognizable to his brothers. He wasn’t a teenaged shepherd anymore; he was a full-grown man, with kids of his own. I’m sure by now he looked Egyptian, too, with an Egyptian haircut and robes—not at all like a Hebrew. He likely looked nothing like the Joseph his brothers had known. But while his brothers didn’t recognize Joseph, Joseph certainly recognized them.

I think this was by God’s grace. Can you imagine how intimidated the brothers would have been if they immediately knew they were face to face with the brother they had betrayed? Instead, they were clueless, which allowed Joseph flexibility in navigating the situation. He treated them like strangers, making it clear he was in charge and they were at his mercy.

Spiritual: Joseph Forced to Deal

This should be obvious, yet it can be easy to miss in the biblical account: Joseph was a bitter, angry man. Sure, he used his son’s name to communicate how he had been able to forgive, forget, and move on. Then Joseph’s brothers showed up and it was clear Joseph hadn’t forgotten at all. Despite his success, the cancer of bitterness ate at him, robbing him of the joy of knowing his heavenly Dad.

Joseph had been playing “tough guy” for decades, but he never got over what happened to him. How do we know? Consider, he had been running Egypt for fourteen years. As a powerful man, if he wanted to reconcile with his brothers, he certainly could have sent for them at any time. He had all the resources to make it happen—but he didn’t. He had grown comfortable living in bitterness, anger, resentment, and denial.

**God Forces the Issue**

Joseph had no intention of reconciling with his family because bitterness had become acceptable and comfortable. But after twenty-five years, God said, “Enough. It’s time for My child to get rid of his burden. It’s time to get rid of this cancer eating at him. Today’s the day. I’m going to fix it.” God revealed His hand.

When Joseph saw his brothers bowing down, he remembered his dream from so many years before. He recalled telling them, one day they would bow down and worship him:

6He said to them, “Hear this dream that I have dreamed: 7Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.” 8His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

**—Genesis 37:6–8**

This flashback enabled Joseph to see God at work. The dream had come true by supernatural intervention, and he knew it. There was no denying the incredible circumstances surrounding how God had orchestrated this whole scene. Of course, Joseph would have preferred not to see his brothers, but he recognized this was a God moment.

For the first time since his betrayal all those years ago, Joseph was forced to process the spiritual, emotional, and personal toll his bitterness had taken on him. Previously, he saw it as a problem he really didn’t want to deal with. I believe the reality of this moment must have left Joseph completely overwhelmed.

Personal: Living in the Light

Even when life is smooth and shiny, trust me—you are swimming in dysfunction. You may not realize it, because your job is great, your kids are great, and the roof on the house is fine, but you’re dysfunctional. I promise you are. You just can’t see it yet.

The level of unresolved bitterness and dysfunction we are willing to live with, even as Christians, is stunning. We become numb to it, forgetting it’s there, yet it persists, leaving deep scars in our lives. We’re all full of dysfunction, just like Joseph was; we're all a mess. It’s time we have the courage to admit it.

**Roots of Bitterness**

Scripture talks about roots of bitterness, an illustration of something below the surface poisoning everything above. You can’t see it when you’re walking in the garden, but it’s there, wrapping itself around the roots of healthy plants, slowly sucking the life from them, gradually destroying all life in its grip.

Deuteronomy 29:18b says, “Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit.” The concept is borrowed in Hebrews 12:15: “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it *[not just you, but]* many become defiled.”

Can you imagine what would have happened if Joseph and his family had never been reconciled? If Jacob and his other sons had died in the famine, imagine the impact it would have had on Joseph. *“Why didn’t I look for them? I had the power to save them, and I did nothing, all because of bitterness.”*

Bitterness and its byproducts of resentment and unforgiveness, are long-term poisons the enemy loves to use to destroy people, churches, and families. These roots poison relationships. They lead to destructive habits, isolation, and unwise life-choices. The list of negative effects is long and gruesome.

**Healing Through Humility**

Since he was the number-two man in charge of Egypt, Joseph didn’t need his treacherous family around—right? That’s exactly the stance he took: he was fine without them. But Joseph had no idea the impact of not reconciling with his family would have on God’s plan of salvation for the entire future world. There would be no Jesus, no hope.

You see, bitterness tells us the decision for reconciliation is ours, but that’s not true. There is no *decision* to be made. As children of God, we must *always* pursue reconciliation. But just as it did for Joseph, reconciliation will require humility.

C. S. Lewis said, “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”[[[21]](#endnote-22)](#Source21) When we won’t forgive, it displays an ignorance of how much *we’ve* been forgiven. How arrogant must we be to live in denial and refusal to reconcile? How callous must we be to ignore the impact our bitterness has on others around us? It’s not just *your* bitterness. When you have bitterness, it becomes everyone’s bitterness.

I appreciate what Isaiah 38:17 says about this: “Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back.” Do you see how Isaiah equates bitterness with destruction?

The first step to dealing with bitterness in our life is finding humility, recognizing how desperate we are for God’s mercy toward our own sinfulness. This is when the healing from bitterness begins. Without this humility, we will never be able to escape the prison of bitterness and all of its toxic fallout around us. As Ephesians 4:31–32 says, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander *[Paul likes to make sure he covers all his bases!]* be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

On the day God forces you to face your bitterness, just like He did with Joseph, will you be ready? Are you willing? Will you be open to receive the healing you so desperately need? Will you be ready to be set free from your prison of bitterness? Will you learn to live in a state of forgiveness, as opposed to a state of bitterness?

Let’s go a step further: Are you willing to ask God to force your hand to deal with bitterness, unforgiveness, and resentment?

This is the one of the most important lessons you can learn about surviving in Egypt. Of all the things you must deal with, this one will cause the most damage to your relationship with Christ and those around you if left untended. Take that first step of humility and ask God to reveal the roots of bitterness residing deep within. Resolve to move forward today on the road to reconciliation and forgiveness.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Sixteen Questions

**Question:** Have you ever become, or are you currently, comfortable with bitterness in your life? What impact did (or does) your bitterness have on you and others? How did you, or how can you, move beyond it?

**Question:** Is anyone currently the target of your bitter and resentment? Are you willing to take the steps necessary to move toward reconciliation? How should you approach this situation? What is the first step on the path of reconciliation?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer asking God to bring about circumstances that will force you to deal with bitterness and begin the path to reconciliation. Ask for the humility you will need to start the process of forgiveness.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Egypt Is Only Half the Problem

**Read: Genesis 42:9–25**

Egypt is filled with depravity, selfishness—an assortment of things designed to divert our eyes from God. That’s what Egypt is best at, because Egypt isn’t in the business of reminding us to follow Jesus. Egypt is in the business of convincing us to leave Jesus and follow the crowd.

Yet, it’s easy for Christians to be critical of Egypt; it’s a convenient way to distract ourselves from the undeniable reality of our own depravity. However, Egypt itself is only half our problem. The other half of what makes Egypt difficult is our own darkness—our own depravity.

Some depravity we don’t mind admitting to. I call it the “nobody’s perfect” depravity, which says, “We all lie. We all cuss. Nobody’s perfect.” We willfully admit to these things because we see everyone else doing them, too. We figure we have nothing to hide. This kind of sin seems inevitable in Egypt.

Then there are the depths of our depravity few others know about. They’re the parts we keep hidden until forced otherwise. They’re embarrassing, costly, and in some cases, devastating. We shroud these deep, dark corners of depravity with our religion, accomplishments, service, or social media posts. There are any number of ways we distract ourselves from the inner darkness we don’t want to face. Yet, if we are truly going to survive in Egypt, sooner or later all our depravity, in all forms, must be dealt with.

9And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, “You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land.” 10They said to him, “No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. 11We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies.”

12He said to them, “No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see.” 13And they said, “We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more.” 14But Joseph said to them, “It is as I said to you. You are spies. 15By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. 16Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.” 17And he put them all together in custody for three days.

18On the third day Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: 19if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households,20 and bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” And they did so. 21Then they said to one another, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.” 22And Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.” 23They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. 24Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. 25And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them.

**—Genesis 42:9–25**

Historical: Shame in Egypt

For years, the brothers hid what they had done to Joseph. They lied about it to their father and to Joseph’s younger brother, Benjamin. Their consciences had been eating away at them for twenty-five years. But they were never going to deal with what happened until someone or something forced them to do so.

Then Joseph re-entered the picture—and he was struggling. I’m making some assumptions here, but I think Joseph chose to deal somewhat harshly with his brothers because he knew he had to be cautious. While he wasn’t going to send them to the lions, he *was* going to do his part to ensure his brothers wouldn’t be hurting anyone else this time around.

He started by accusing his brothers of being spies. Though he knew they weren’t spies, he wanted to feel them out. I think this reveals Joseph didn’t truly want reconciliation just yet. He accused them of being there to scout out any weaknesses in Egypt (that’s what “the nakedness of the land” means). Charges of espionage probably would have been common, considering Egypt was in control of the world’s food supply—an attractive target for other countries’ spies and armies.

I wonder what Joseph thought when they said, “Listen, we’re not spies. We are honest men.” If it had been me, they would’ve seen me roll my eyes, but Joseph kept his poise. While he knew they were not honest men, he also knew they were not spies.

**Clinging to the Lie**

Not yet knowing this Egyptian ruler was their brother, they used half-truths to defend themselves against the false accusations. They rightfully stated they had twelve brothers. They said one was “no more” and the youngest was at home. What they didn’t do was confess to their horrible crime against their brother Joseph. Imagine what Joseph felt when his brothers referred to him as dead. I assume he was emotional, because we know he threw his brothers in jail for three days afterward.

Joseph was likely conflicted about what to do next. No doubt he was toying with the idea of revenge; he probably thought about killing them, or maybe shaming them. For three days, he weighed his options. His final decision? To send all the brothers except for one back home to retrieve Benjamin, the youngest.

He delivered the news in Egyptian, requiring a translator—imagine that! He understood everything his brothers said, but they were clueless, believing there was a language barrier between them. Joseph perpetuated that charade with a translator.

Was he being unemotionally shrewd? Not likely. Joseph, being human, must have been thinking back to the day they threw him into the pit. These interactions with his brothers were forcing him to remember, to relive emotional pain and fear. He was grinding, thinking, mulling it over, obsessing, trying to sort it all out: “What do I do with these scoundrels, my brothers?”

Then, finally, there was a glimpse of remorse from the brothers. They began to talk amongst themselves in Hebrew about what they did to Joseph, saying they shouldn’t have done it. They should have shown him compassion; they should have helped him out of the pit. Imagine what Joseph was thinking as he heard them discuss this! Since they had no idea Joseph understood every word, to keep up with the charade, Joseph turned away to hide his tears. After all these years, it was clear what had happened to Joseph had caused great pain for his brothers, just as it had caused him pain.

Spiritual: Grace for the Brothers

How do you think the devotional and prayer life of Joseph’s brothers had been for the twenty-five years leading up to this moment? Do you think they’d had a good time walking with God? I wouldn’t be surprised if they hadn’t worshiped in decades. Is it possible this whole sequence of events was the grace of God, giving these brothers a chance to escape the prison of guilt, shame, and remorse—to end the darkness their depravity had caused all these years?

Without the famine and this dramatic scene between Joseph and his brothers, they never would have confessed their sin. Without this moment, they never would have been reconciled with Joseph, and most likely they would not have survived the famine. Jacob, Judah (who was the line of Christ), and the chosen line of Abraham all would have been dead.

John Calvin said, “God, in order to lead the sons of Jacob to repentance, impelled them, as well by the secret instinct of his Spirit as by outward chastisement, to become sensible of that sin which had been too long concealed.”[[[22]](#endnote-23)](#Source22) In other words, God brought about this horrible situation, this embarrassing moment, this difficult time, for one reason: He wanted to bring Jacob’s sons to their senses about who they really were.

**Two Other Brothers**

To understand how and why God works here, let’s look back on the story of Cain and Abel for comparison. They were brothers, but Cain was jealous of Abel because God favored Abel’s sacrifice and rejected Cain’s.

God asked Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it” (Genesis 4:6–7). In other words, God was trying to smooth things over. He asked for Cain to adjust his attitude a bit, to work *with* God and not against Him, and to rise up and take ownership of the situation.

God revealed Cain’s sin because He wanted Cain to be reconciled with his brother Abel and also with Him. The goal wasn’t punishment; it was a chance at repentance and healing. We see this with Joseph’s brothers, too: God gave them a chance at healing and reconciliation. Of course, we find out Cain didn’t confess or repent. Instead of changing, he got even angrier and allowed that anger to take control. He killed Abel in a fit of rage. But as we will learn, Joseph’s brothers turned out to be a precious example of what can happen when we take God up on His offer for reconciliation.

**Punishment or Grace?**

Often, when our secret sins are revealed or when their consequences come, our first reaction is to think of those moments as punishment. Wrong! When God forces us to come face to face with our depravity while we’re living in Egypt, it’s not punishment—it is grace!

God’s true punishment for sin is different from consequences; it’s far worse than embarrassment or discomfort. Here is what Romans says about the real price of sin: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). The opportunity to deal with your depravity in Egypt is an expression of God’s love, not His judgment. That moment of enlightenment is more precious than a new job, a new relationship, or any other experience Egypt has to offer. It’s the moment a child of God begins to experience the greatest blessing by far: the Father’s love.

Proverbs 3:11–12 says, “My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.” When we are forced to confront our depravity, God shows us His true character, wanting redemption and reconciliation with us. We may tend to think of consequences as God’s punishment, but God doesn’t want to hurt us. Far from it, He wants to reconcile us to Him.

Personal: Uncovering Our Depravity

It’s frightening when hidden sins are uncovered, but sometimes it’s necessary. The moments when circumstances bring us face to face with our embarrassing reality are never fun. It’s not enjoyable to dig into the parts of us we’re most ashamed of, but it’s something we all need to do—sooner rather than later, because it’s better to deal with your depravity in Egypt than in eternity. First John 1:8–9 says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Listen, there’s not a chance any of us can get through Egypt unsoiled, no matter how shiny we look. It’s hopeless, delusional, spiritually arrogant, and foolishly blind to think we can traverse Egypt and not have depravity creep in. All of us, at some point, find ourselves in the place of Cain or the evil brothers. If you have not confronted your sin, even if it’s in the past, I promise you it’s still there, lying in wait at the door of your heart and soul.

If God is going to save you, there must be moments, by His grace and love, when you are forced to deal with your deepest depravity. Those things you have denied, and kept well-managed and well-hidden for years, need to be revealed. Though it’s not going to be pleasant at first, I can tell you, there is joy in confession. In your moment of clarity and redemption, Egypt begins to lose its grip on your heart and soul, and you will find joy and peace.

Where do you begin? Start with this prayer: “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Psalm 139:23–24) Ask God to reveal all the darkness you’ve hidden. Ask for Him to shine a light on your secret depravity.

No vacation, meditation, self-medication, new relationship, new purchase, or anything Egypt offers can heal you. The only way you can be healed is to expose your depravity.

Are you ready to make Psalm 139 your prayer? Or will it take a famine to bring you to this point? Once God answers your prayer from Psalm 139 and reveals truth to you, you’ll experience the crucial climax of your life in Egypt: the moment you cry out, “Heavenly Dad, my sin is ever before me! Cleanse me. Forgive me through the cross.”

Pray this and I guarantee, God will come through for you, much like He did with Joseph’s brothers.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Seventeen Questions

**Question:** When your depravity is exposed, do you feel judged or loved? What does your response reveal about your understanding of God’s hand in your life?

**Question:** What sins remain hidden in your life today? Why are you avoiding these sins? How can you move beyond that fear and into freedom?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer confessing how much you need grace—how much you need God. You can pray something like David’s prayer in Psalm 51.

**Part Four:
A Story of Transformation**

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Something’s Different

**Read: Genesis 43:1–14**

Every good movie has one common component in its overall plot: the theme of redemption. The climax often involves some central character moving from darkness to light. Redemption will always be one of the most compelling parts of a good story, and the same thing is true in real life.

Redemption and transformation are where inspiration lives. Transformation is inspiring because, subconsciously, *we all desire to be changed in some way.* Even those who don’t believe in our savior, Jesus, desire to be transformed. Experiencing the power of redemption and its inevitable transformation is when we truly begin to learn what it means to survive in Egypt.

Nobody says, “I want to continue to be somewhere between the average and worst possible version of myself for the rest of my life.” People chase diets, try to form new habits, and immerse themselves in self-improvement disciplines, all of which are fine. But the most enduring, exciting transformation is done by God in the heart of one of His children. Witnessing it in others inspires, motivates, and reminds us we are not alone in our journey to survive in Egypt.

As we pick back up with the story of Joseph, we see him sending his older brothers home to get Benjamin. To guarantee their return, Joseph required one of them to stay behind; they left Simeon. Joseph tested them by putting money belonging to Pharaoh in their sacks. Would they try to keep it or return it? Time would tell.

The brothers knew they would need to convince their father Jacob to let them take Benjamin back to Egypt, but that wasn’t going to be easy. He wasn’t going to let these “second choice” sons take his remaining favorite son, Benjamin, to Egypt—no way, no how.

1Now the famine was severe in the land. 2And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, “Go again, buy us a little food.” 3But Judah said to him, “The man solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’ 4If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. 5But if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, ‘You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.’” 6Israel said, “Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?” 7They replied, “The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, ‘Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother?’ What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, ‘Bring your brother down’?” 8And Judah said to Israel his father, “Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. 9I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. **10**If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice.”

11Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. 12Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. 13Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man. 14May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.”

**—Genesis 43:1–14**

Historical: Desperate Family

Jacob didn’t trust his sons. After all, they’d failed him before when they allowed Joseph to be killed (or so Jacob believed). What if they let him down yet again? Jacob had no reason to trust any of Leah’s sons.

But the brothers desperately needed their father to go along with the plan; they needed him to release Benjamin so they could set everything right and be there for Simeon. Years earlier, they had betrayed Joseph. Now was their chance to come through for another brother who was depending on them. Reuben (the oldest) begged Jacob: “Trust me! I swear on the life of my kids, if we don’t bring Benjamin and Simeon home, you can take your wrath out on my family!” It was a ridiculously dramatic offer, but Jacob rejected it, anyway.

**Out of Options**

Next, Judah tried his hand at convincing their father to release Benjamin. He offered to take the full blame if things didn’t work out. This was Judah, who at one point sold his own brother into slavery; but now, he was willing to save his brother Simeon at the cost of his own life. Something had changed!

Despite Jacob’s personal feelings, the reality of the situation remained: First, without grain, they would all starve. Second, if they showed up without Benjamin, they would all be sent to prison. Jacob saw he had no choice and must risk Benjamin for the sake of Simeon—and to avoid starvation for his family.

**Different Brothers**

This passage reveals green shoots of transformation in the brothers and their family dynamics. Notice this time, the brothers didn’t lie; instead, they told the complete truth. It was a similar situation as before—a brother needed them—but their actions were different. Instead of being committed to themselves, they were so committed to their brother Simeon, two of them were willing to sacrifice their own lives and the lives of their families.

They chose to return to Egypt with the noble intentions of honoring their father, rescuing their brother, and returning all the money that was “accidentally” placed in their sacks. Understand, doing the right thing wasn’t a quick, easy feat. It was probably two hundred miles from Canaan to where they went to buy grain—a trip involving substantial expense and personal risk, especially in the middle of a drought.

This was, without question, the most important task these men had ever undertaken. A lot was riding on their faithfulness and transformed hearts. They didn’t realize it at the time, but they were about to fulfill the ultimate purpose for their lives, one ordained by God before they were even born.

Spiritual: Sovereign Grace in Egypt

28And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

**—Romans 8:28–30**

Usually when we think of the story of Joseph, we only remember the treachery of the brothers. We focus on how wicked they were, but the role they played and the journey they went on were just as important as Joseph’s in terms of God’s plan for salvation.

Though it’s easy to turn all our focus on Joseph, it’s important for us to recognize God was working in the hearts of Joseph’s brothers for the past twenty-five years as well.. God had been working, calling, transforming, molding, and shaping these men, changing their values, and now, God provided an opportunity to display to Joseph and Jacob how these once-scoundrel brothers had been transformed by God’s grace!

God had been cultivating their spiritual transformation just as He had been with Joseph. God used anything and everything necessary, including a famine, to make sure Joseph’s brothers were transformed into what God intended them to be.

**Relentless Repentance**

These brothers weren’t the same fraternal slave traders they had been before. Every conceivable pressure to revert to their selfish, deceptive behavior was still at work, after twenty-five years. They still had every reason to hate Rachel’s sons, Joseph and Benjamin, and they still had every reason to be frustrated with their father. In a sense, Egypt hadn’t changed at all, yet the brothers were no longer ruled by jealousy or selfishness; instead, they desired to do the right thing.

When you compare the brothers of chapter 43 with the brothers of chapter 37, it’s a stunning transformation. They were fully committed to doing whatever it would take to return the money “accidentally” left in their sacks. They were committed to getting Simeon and Benjamin home safely. In addition, they were committed to bringing food to their father’s house. They demonstrate brotherly love , integrity with money, and honor for their dysfunctional father! Jacob might not have been the best dad, but they were determined to be the best kids they could be going forward.

Personal: The Miracle of Transformation

We like to identify with Joseph, but he was sort of a one-in-a-million guy, with his talents and skills. Most of us are closer to the dysfunctional sons of Jacob, which is why we love stories of redemption: we can relate to them as something we desire for ourselves, or something we have experienced already. That’s why for me, this might be the best part of this story: because it reminds me God can transform even the worst of us, no matter what grip Egypt may have on our hearts.

**Egyptian Resistance**

Egypt is not designed to make us more like Jesus; it’s designed to make us more like Egypt. In other words, Egypt has no stake or interest in transforming us to become more Christlike. Egypt wants us to feel comfortable; Egypt doesn’t want us to be transformed. Yet God will call His children out of darkness into light and transformation, regardless.

To truly survive in Egypt, we need to become more aware of what God is doing in our hearts and in the hearts of those around us. There we will find evidence of God’s relentless intervention in our lives. Paul wrote about this in Philippians 1:6: “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Egypt constantly tries to pull you away, but our God will continue relentlessly to complete His work of transformation—and He won’t stop until the day of salvation, no matter how far we try to wander or how strong the pull of Egypt is. And He will use whatever means necessary.

Therefore, we shouldn’t be intimidated by Egypt, or enamored of what it might offer us. We have an all-powerful, personal God intent on bringing each of us to the day of salvation.

**Transformed Hearts**

How exactly does God overcome the influence of Egypt , transform us into faithful children of God? He gives us new hearts, which embrace values and desires in alignment with His.

19And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

**—Ezekiel 11:19–20**

God takes sinful, fallen, unstable, angry, jealous, bitter, selfish, Egypt-loving brothers and sisters like us and transforms us step by step. We become testaments to His power of redemption. He rips right through Egyptian distractions and transforms us into the image of His Son! No matter what Egypt brings, if there is evidence God is working in your heart, you know you’re on the right path and won’t merely survive in Egypt—you will thrive.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Eighteen Questions

**Question:** Can you point to examples of how God has transformed you in the last five years? How did this change come about? How have those changes impacted your life?

**Question:** When you see other Christian brothers and sisters you have known for a while, are you able to see evidence God has been transforming them as well?How can seeing this encourage you and motivate you to continue your journey with God?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer acknowledging evidence of God working in your life and those around you. Then continue by asking God to continue His work relentlessly!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Gratitude in Egypt

**Read: Genesis 43:16–34**

I hate getting on a plane, walking to my seat in coach, and passing by all the first-class passengers. They look so comfortable and relaxed, with their extra leg room, big seats, and doting flight attendants.

And then there’s the rest of us, in coach. We sit, scrunched together, facing the first-class crowd. We watch them get cookies and drinks before the plane has even taken off. They smile and laugh; life is good for them, and it’s not fair! The inequality between the air travel classes seems a shame—that is, until it’s my turn to ride first class. Suddenly, the inequality doesn’t bother me. I like it when the coach passengers walk by and catch a glimpse of my cushy life.

One of the most powerful influences in Egypt is the allure of temporal blessing. Just like flying first-class, Egypt gives us small bits of splendor, just enough to consume us with covetousness and envy. When we are drawn away by these things, it reveals a deficiency in our understanding of grace.

16When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, “Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon.” 17The man did as Joseph told him and brought the men to Joseph's house. 18And the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, “It is because of the money, which was replaced in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may assault us and fall upon us to make us servants and seize our donkeys.” 19So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house and spoke with him at the door of the house, 20and said, “Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food. 21And when we came to the lodging place we opened our sacks, and there was each man's money in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it again with us, 22and we have brought other money down with us to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks.” 23He replied, “Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money.” Then he brought Simeon out to them. 24And when the man had brought the men into Joseph's house and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys fodder, 25they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they should eat bread there.

26When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present that they had with them and bowed down to him to the ground. 27And he inquired about their welfare and said, “Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?” 28They said, “Your servant our father is well; he is still alive.” And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves. 29And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, “Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!” 30Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there. 31Then he washed his face and came out. And controlling himself he said, “Serve the food.” 32They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. 33And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement. 34Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him.

**—Genesis 43:16–34**

Historical: Let’s Do Lunch

The brothers arrived in Egypt with Benjamin and the extra money. They were ready to make the trade, but Joseph had set up yet another test for them: he invited them to lunch. The brothers were terrified. What if this was where they would get busted for having the money in their sacks? It would be like going through a TSA checkpoint knowing you forgot to take that full-size bottle of liquid out of your sack—or realizing you left your pocketknife in your carry-on. (Yes, I have done both recently.) Suddenly, you’re not too excited to pass through security.

The brothers headed reluctantly to Joseph’s house. At first, their fears were calmed since apparently, no one suspected them of taking the money, and they were reunited with Simeon. Everything seemed to be fine, and in fact, they were being treated as honored guests. But Joseph’s plan was to see if the brothers still lived in envy: he wanted to see how they treated Benjamin, Jacob’s (current) favorite son.

The brothers were given an audience with Joseph where they planned to give him the money and show him Benjamin, but Joseph changed the conversation by asking about their father, Jacob. The brothers informed him Jacob was doing well. Joseph was continuing the charade until he saw Benjamin for the first time in many years. Overcome with emotions, Joseph left the room for fear of blowing his cover.

**Blatant Favoritism**

When he returned, Joseph ordered them all to be served, still going out of his way to conceal his identity. He ensured they were cared for and treated with utmost respect, but again, his true intention was to see if they had changed their old ways.

To this end, he showered Benjamin with gifts, extra food, and favoritism—right in front of the brothers who, decades prior, had sold Joseph into slavery out of jealousy. How would they react to seeing Benjamin favored? Instead of envy, the brothers were grateful, even excited! Scripture says they were shocked at what happened with Benjamin, but they were happy for him and rejoiced. What a difference! The brothers passed the test by proving they could celebrate their brother’s good fortune without feeling jealous or left out. These brothers were different than the men who sold Joseph into slavery so many years ago.

Spiritual: The Core of Gratitude

Prior to God’s intervention, Joseph’s brothers couldn’t grasp the concept of celebrating for others—especially when it came to Rachel’s sons. They carried deep resentment for how their father Jacob favored Joseph and Benjamin.

That resentment created anger, jealousy, envy, and worst of all, entitlement. They believed they were entitled to the blessings Jacob gave Joseph. Because they felt entitled, they could justify any type of action against Joseph or Jacob. After all, in their view, they weren’t receiving what they rightfully deserved in Egypt. This attitude was the natural condition of their hearts. They didn’t have to learn this; they didn’t have to go to Resentment Camp when they were kids. These traits were natural, and living in Egypt caused them to fester.

**Brothers After Grace**

However, something had changed: they could celebrate with Benjamin. Somewhere along the way, God intervened and transformed their hearts. Instead of being filled with envy, resentment, and entitlement, they were filled with thankfulness and gratitude. These once-treacherous brothers now lived in the way Paul would later encourage in Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

*Thankfulness*, *thanks*, *gratefulness*, and *gratitude* are all the same word in the New Testament: εὐχαριστία (eucharistía).[[[23]](#endnote-24)](#Source23) In English, we’d use the word *eucharist*, meaning thankfulness and gratitude, for the Lord’s Table. Part of the root of *eucharist* is the Greek word, χάρις (charis), which means grace, or undeserved favor. So, right in the middle of the word for gratitude is grace! When God imparts grace (undeserved favor) upon the human heart, it inspires a life of gratitude. This supernaturally inspired gratitude can endure no matter the circumstances we might face while trying to survive in Egypt.

Personal: Entitlement vs. Gratitude

One of the difficult hurdles in surviving in Egypt is feeling we deserve more than Egypt has given us. Let’s say you’re trying to survive in Egypt and you believe Egypt has treated you unfairly. You don’t have enough money or resources. Your family is a wreck, and you have friends who are sick and who have experienced loss. “Egypt has been horrible to me, and I deserve better!” If living in gratitude is a result of grace, you can see how the opposite of gratitude is the natural human condition. James 4:1–3 explains what life without gratitude (grace) looks like:

1What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Two elements of human nature are constantly at war with living in gratitude, and they happen to be things fueled by Egypt.

**Envy**

Somehow, we buy into this lie: life Egypt will be great if we can just somehow get our fair share of it. I think most of us tend to accept envy as the reality of human nature, but the reality of our depravity goes far deeper than just being envious of others. What we truly want is for Egypt to be envious of *us!* We post our best moments on social media. We like to declare our worldly success because we want everyone to know how much Egypt favors us.

I did some self-evaluation on this, and I did not like what I found: envy can be disguised as thankfulness and gratitude, especially when it’s combined with boasting about your good fortune. It’s like sitting in first class, enjoying how all the coach passengers have to walk by you and see how great you have it—only, as they walk by, you say to them, “I am so grateful to have this seat in first class! Doesn’t it look amazing?” See? We don’t just struggle with envying others; we want to be the object of envy!

**Entitlement**

Entitlement is believing you have a right to something, or deserve something you have not been given—or perhaps something someone took from you. Entitlement is when you feel others don’t deserve the things they have been blessed with as much as you do. The danger of feeling entitled is you can use it to justify almost any behavior or action—believing so passionately you deserve something, you have the right to break any moral code or law to get it.

More than that, entitlement sees other people as obstacles impeding you from what you believe you truly deserve. That’s why entitlement creates jealousy and becomes an excuse to rationalize the following things:

* Lying
* Stealing
* Judgment
* Selfishness
* Immorality
* Hypocrisy
* Laziness

**My Insidious Jealousy**

Let me tell you a few stories about my insidious jealousy.

My wife (Laura) and I had the privilege of going on vacation in London. While there, we visited a church we’d been wanting to attend; we were excited about going. The worship was great—but then the pastor got up and did his thing, and he was horrendous. I sat there thinking, “How in the world does this guy have this platform? That should be me.” Later, I told my friend Jim about it. “The pastor was so bad! How did he get a job like that?” But Jim, having none of it, asked, “Are you jealous of him?” He called me out—and he was right.

Another time I’m not proud of was when I ran into a friend of mine, Arthur, at a community event. Arthur, a true servant in our community, runs a recreation center that uses athletics to guide at-risk young people. I walked up to Arthur, and he gave me a big, welcoming hug. He asked me to wait while he finished helping an older gentleman whose bike was broken. Art pulled out all his tools and got to work. While he was fixing the bike, he was asking this older man how he was doing, how his family was. He was investing a lot of time and passion into a simple bike repair, turning it into an awesome opportunity for ministry.

I started chatting with him while he worked. I reminded him about the time twenty years ago when I was a poor youth pastor and he drove across town to fix the starter on my car when I didn’t have any money to get it fixed myself. He smiled at me and then went on to recount stories about different people in our community who do amazing things for people every day. He talked about people who could be living in a big house but gave it up for other people who needed it more. For ten minutes, Arthur talked about everyone except for himself. Walking away, I felt such conviction: *I am nowhere near as selfless as Art.*

I called him the next morning, “Art, I just want to tell you something. I’ve been writing about gratitude all week, and I thought I had a handle on it, but then I saw you fixing that guy's bike. You could’ve talked about all the things going on at the rec center. You could have focused on numbers and personal achievements. Instead, all you did was talk about the work other people are doing to bless our town. It was inspiring, but also humbling. I felt like a phony. This whole time, I’ve been focused on myself, and you showed me what true gratitude is. I’m kind of envious of you for that.”

Art prayed for me over the phone right then and there. We both knew I had a long way to go.

**Living in Gratitude**

In Philippians 2:3–4, Paul said, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” We all tend to think we’re a pretty big deal, but just like Art showed me how much I am *not* a big deal, Paul drove the same point home in this passage.

He also said, in 2 Thessalonians 1:3–4: “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore, we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.”

True gratitude can celebrate the blessings other people receive. Gratitude has little to do with counting *your* blessings. *As a matter of fact, I would say it has nothing to do with counting your blessings and more to do with counting the blessings of others and celebrating them.* That’s what Paul said gratitude is: when you are so tuned in to what God is doing in the lives of others, you’re not even concerned about what you do and don’t have.

Learning to live in gratitude is some of the best evidence God is transforming your heart. Moving away from envy and toward a life of gratitude, focusing on others before yourself, is a sign of spiritual maturity. That’s what happened to Joseph’s brothers.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Nineteen Questions

**Question:** Is there evidence of gratitude in your life? What is the focus of this gratitude? Is it personal blessings or the blessings others around you receive? If not, what change do you need to make in your perspective?

**Question:** Do you struggle with feelings of envy or entitlement? How do these feelings impact your ability to live with gratitude? What steps should you take to address feelings of envy and entitlement, to extract them from your heart and mind?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer asking God to help you let go of envy and entitlement. Ask God to help you learn to live in gratitude, not just for your own blessings, but also for the blessings of those around you.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Advocates in Egypt

**Read: Genesis 44:16–34**

Christians in America are experts at appearance. We love to look like we know how to survive in Egypt: Big, beautiful, air-conditioned church buildings. Nice seats. Great stage presence and theatrics. We have our Christian music stations, our self-help books, our bumper stickers, and our little Scripture memes on social media. We’ve built an ark (like Noah’s ark) of church culture designed to make us look and feel like we are thriving in Egypt.

Yet none of these things really proves we’re thriving or following Jesus. Books, memes, and Christian radio are all well and good, but they don’t put us face to face with the realities of Egypt. Learning how to survive in Egypt starts with stepping out of our protective Christian counter-culture cocoon. Why? Because real evidence we are surviving in Egypt won’t manifest itself until we learn how to be advocates for others who are struggling to survive, especially when this advocacy might cost us some level of comfort or sacrifice.

When Joseph saw his brother display gratitude for Benjamin’s good fortune, no doubt he was encouraged; but he had to find out if they would do the same thing when their backs were up against a wall. What if their own lives were at stake?

As they prepared to leave, Joseph generously gave them sacks full of grain, food, and more. However, in secret, he commanded his assistant to place Joseph’s personal silver cup in Benjamin’s sack, to make it look as though Benjamin had stolen it. Joseph wanted to find out: would the brothers stand up for Benjamin, or would they abandon him?

Once the brothers had left the city, Joseph ordered his men to chase them down and arrest them on grounds of suspected robbery. The brothers were certain this was all a misunderstanding: “We would never steal anything from you! You’ve been so good to us!” They even suggested, if a thief were discovered, he should be put to death right then and there. That’s how confident they were of their innocence.

When Joseph’s men searched the bags, of course, they found his silver cup in Benjamin’s sack. Scripture says the brothers wept and cried—and no wonder, because they were doubtless confused, heartbroken for Benjamin, and carrying the burden of knowing they had somehow failed their father once again. Certainly Benjamin would be arrested for this crime.

When they were brought before Joseph, he accused them of robbery. But that’s where this story becomes beautiful:

16And Judah said, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord's servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found.” 17But he said, “Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant. But as for you, go up in peace to your father.”

18Then Judah went up to him and said, “Oh, my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like pharaoh himself. 19My lord asked his servants, saying, ‘Have you a father, or a brother?’ 20And we said to my lord, ‘We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.’ 21Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.’ 22We said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.’ 23Then you said to your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.’

24“When we went back to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. 25And when our father said, ‘Go again, buy us a little food,’ 26we said, ‘We cannot go down. If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down. For we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.’ 27Then your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons. 28One left me, and I said, “Surely he has been torn to pieces,” and I have never seen him since. 29If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.’

30“Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, 31as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. 32For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.’ 33Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. 34For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father.”

**—Genesis 44:16–34**

Historical: Judah the Advocate

**A Loyal Brother**

Now the focus of this story in Genesis shifts from Joseph to his brother Judah. The older Judah was not a loyal brother; he was part of the plot to sell Joseph into slavery. But over twenty-five years later, this Judah was a different person, who refused to turn his back on his little brother Benjamin. In fact, Judah tried to take the blame for Benjamin! *Wow!*

Perhaps Judah thought Benjamin stole the cup, or perhaps he suspected one of the other brothers. Maybe he thought it was all a bad misunderstanding. Regardless, Judah didn’t know this was a test. It didn’t matter what happened; all Judah knew was, he wasn’t going to abandon Benjamin. Instead, Judah placed himself squarely in between the wrath of the ruler and his young brother.

Judah begged Joseph, in effect, “Have mercy on Benjamin, oh king! Punish me!” Joseph offered Judah an easy way out: except for Benjamin, the brothers were free to leave. He wasn’t going to hold all of the brothers accountable for a crime one brother allegedly committed. But Judah had made a promise to his dysfunctional dad, and he was not going to leave Benjamin behind in Egypt. Judah explained to Joseph, if they were to return to their father without Benjamin, Jacob would not be able to survive the sorrow. Judah further explained, since he was the oldest son of Jacob, it was his responsibility to make sure Benjamin was returned home safely to his father. Therefore, he could not leave; he would not leave. Judah would do whatever it took to get Benjamin home safely.

I love how John Calvin put it: “He [Judah] wished himself to be put in Benjamin’s place, and to undergo perpetual exile and servitude, rather than convey to the miserable old man tidings which would be the cause of his destruction.”[[[24]](#endnote-25)](#Source24) See what was happening here? Judah’s sole focus was looking out for a father who had done nothing to deserve such honor. He wanted to please Jacob, even if it meant taking Benjamin’s place as a slave.

**A Stunning Transformation**

Matthew Henry said: “…he [Judah] surpassed them all [his brothers] in boldness, wisdom, eloquence, and especially tenderness for their father and family.”[[[25]](#endnote-26)](#Source25) Judah had become the interceder, the advocate, the go-between, and the one speaking in spiritual terms for his family’s well-being.

Can you imagine the mixed emotions Joseph was feeling at this moment? This was his big brother, the mastermind behind the plan to sell Joseph into slavery. It was Judah who found a way to benefit personally from pain and agony he had inflicted upon Joseph.

But God is in the business of transforming people. Think about this: Judah accepted the family dynamics. He knew he would never be his father’s favorite—he stated as much in his impassioned speech to Joseph—and he had accepted it. Yet Judah still assumed his rightful role as advocate and protector of his little brother Benjamin because he was committed to doing what was right while in Egypt, not what was easy or comfortable.

Spiritual: God’s Plan for Judah

Judah’s transformation from disloyal brother to advocate willing to sacrifice his own life for his brother is inspiring, especially considering what the costs could have been. He could have lost everything, including his life. His new character and integrity were evidence he was learning how to survive and thrive in Egypt.

To add further context to the transformation in Judah, Genesis 34 tells a story describing Judah’s character during the time Joseph was sold into slavery. It’s about Tamar, and about Judah’s treachery and debauchery. I’ll let you read the story on your own if you want, but suffice it to say, it wasn’t a pretty picture. When we compare Genesis 34 Judah to Judah in Genesis 44, we see a completely different man. The old Judah didn’t care about Jacob’s feelings, but fast-forward twenty-five years and we see a selfless, caring sacrificial advocate for his youngest brother. Judah had developed compassion for his rotten father and love for his brothers.

Neither guilt nor shame transformed Judah; they are powerless to transform a person’s heart. In fact, they often are a cancer making things worse. So, what happened?

**Jesus and Judah**

Many theologians have weighed in on the similarities between Joseph and Jesus. There is some truth to this comparison, but I believe the clearest picture of Jesus in this story is actually found in Judah. At the end of his life, by God’s plan, Jacob conferred this blessing upon Judah:

8Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. 9Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? 10The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

**—Genesis 49:8–10**

Through this story, you see the role Judah played in Benjamin’s life as a clear symbol of the role Jesus plays in ours. Just look at the connection between Judah and one called the Lion of Judah in Revelation 5:5: “And one of the elders said to me, ‘Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.’” That’s Jesus! And that’s Judah, whose line would ultimately bring forth salvation for the entire world. What an advocate and protector—and what a fascinating God we serve!

Personal: Advocates Like Judah (Jesus)

Our survival in Egypt can’t be inspired by selfishness or self-preservation. If your survival in Egypt is all about preserving your own life, then in fact, you have no shot at surviving. It’s not about saving your skin or protecting your own interests. Instead, effective survival in Egypt begins with learning from the example of Judah—and Jesus. It comes from learning how to be an advocate for those who desperately need one. Advocating for others means putting ourselves out there, taking risks for the sake of others. In James 2:14–17, James wrote:

14What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Becoming an advocate who takes risks may sound intimidating, but it is always a natural manifestation of real transformation. As Christians, if we cannot find the motivation and willingness to advocate for others, as Judah did, in a way that comes with a cost, we aren’t surviving in Egypt. Instead, in this case, Egypt is actually killing us, winning over our hearts, minds, talents, and treasure. When our own personal comfort and survival are more important to us than our brothers and sisters, and we cocoon ourselves in a community of nice, warm, sanctified, cozy things, it’s not a sign of transformation at all. In fact, it’s a sign we still need transformation!

If you are too afraid to step out of your Christian comfort zone because your survival is more important than those around you, then you may not be surviving Egypt. True transformation inspires you to seek out opportunities to advocate for others. But even if you get to that point, don’t expect Egypt to go down without a fight. There are some ways Egypt might try to trick you into thinking you’re being an advocate, when in fact, you’re still stuck in your cocoon.

**Political Advocacy**

Certainly, we should be good citizens; we should vote and engage in civil service. But politics and everything connected to them are inherently Egyptian, not spiritual. There is a place for political involvement, but too many Christians become obsessed with politics. Why? Because it’s the easiest, cheapest, most self-serving and self-righteous form of advocacy. It’s a way to transfer the cost of advocacy onto the shoulders of someone else. Politics also feeds our human desire to be arrogant and judgmental of those who disagree with our opinions. There is a reason Jesus said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17).

I’m not saying politics can’t be part of your story, but if you believe pushing for government to do the work of advocating (so you don’t have to), you don’t know Jesus’ teachings very well. Political advocacy is the cheap way out, in my opinion, because it deflects the cost to others. It demands others sacrifice, time, money, or comforts instead of you doing it yourself.

**Institutional Advocacy**

We also like to outsource our advocacy at the institutional level. This, too, allows us to claim the role of “advocate” without really getting dirty. Relying on institutions to do the work on the ground while we keep an arm’s length from those who are hurting is not like Judah or Jesus; it’s Egyptian.

Certainly, we can and should support those with a special calling and skillset to be advocates for those we can’t reach. I get that. This is what churches do when we support specially called, gifted missionaries and para-church organizations. However, if all your advocacy is done second-hand through another organization or institution, you aren’t experiencing the fullness of advocacy God intended for you.

Second-hand advocacy through an institution allows you to safely, and perhaps arrogantly and piously, draw a line (a hedge) around what your advocacy might cost you. Your greatest risk comes with writing a check or signing a petition. You remain safe and secure in your Christian cocoon while everyone else does the work.

**Personal Advocacy**

So, what kind of advocacy should you seek? When God is transforming you as He did Judah, the evidence will manifest itself as you are called to become a personal advocate for others. You will know when advocacy is personal because it will come with real costs: time, money, pain, disappointment, and heartbreak.

“Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it” (Luke 17:33). Sit in silence for a minute or two after reading this verse. Let it get real. Let it make you uncomfortable.

This type of advocacy is personal. Jesus didn’t come into the world to talk, to change governments, to write checks, or to build institutions. He came to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10), to pay whatever price necessary to make sure you and I would survive Egypt. If you are truly surviving Egypt, there will be evidence you are following the example set by Judah and our older brother Jesus. You will stand between the wrath of the ruler and your vulnerable brother and say, “Punish me instead.”

You will give it all, risk it all, dare to go, dare to speak. You will be actively engaged in helping others survive. You will routinely step outside the mirage of safety we have built within our American churches as you fulfill your call to be an advocate in Egypt.

That is what it means to truly survive Egypt: being a personal advocate for others who need a Judah in their lives.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Twenty Questions

**Question:** How hard is it for you to step out of your Christian comfort zone? Is your survival, or the survival of your family, more important than those around you? What does your response reveal about your heart?

**Question:** What examples of advocacy are evident in your life today? Are they mostly second-hand advocacy, relying on politics or large institutions? What examples of advocacy have actually cost you personally?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer committing your life to selfless advocacy. Ask God to reveal opportunities for this type of personal advocacy as evidence He is transforming you like He did Judah.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Restoration > Revenge

**Read: Genesis 45:1–15**

We love a good revenge story. When the underdog finds justice for his oppressors, we cheer that! That’s because it’s in our human nature to be able to define justice. Yet as enjoyable as revenge might be, a restoration story is much more powerful and lasting.

Let me tell you an embarrassing personal revenge story. Shortly after our church upgraded to a large new garbage dumpster, I noticed neighbors filling it with bulky junk like lamps and old chairs. It would be emptied in the morning and by the end of the day, it would be completely full. This went on for about two weeks.

I started plotting dumpster revenge, ideas of how to make a passive-aggressive point to our neighbors who were taking advantage of our new church dumpster. But then came a moral conundrum: I had some bulky stuff from my house I needed to throw in *someone else’s* dumpster. Suddenly, this act, previously so repulsive, became acceptable.

What about road revenge? Someone cuts us off in traffic and we want to catch up to them, letting them know how angry we are, but when the time comes for us to do the cutting, we give ourselves a pass. “Oh, sorry! You’ll have to forgive me.”

It was humbling for me to see my own depravity, how revenge blinded me to my own hypocrisy. We see this dynamic playing out in this part of Joseph’s story. He had been so focused on his version of justice and revenge, he wasn’t even considering the possibility of transformation and restoration.

1Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, “Make everyone go out from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

4So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And he said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. 10You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.’ 112And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. 13You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” **14**Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

**—Genesis 45:1–15**

Historical: The Big Reveal

Joseph wasn’t quite ready for restoration. He spent months testing his brothers, sending them back and forth, and setting up secret traps to check their character. While doing this, he was weighing the possibility of revenge. But after months of testing, the evidence was clear: Joseph realized God had transformed his brothers. They were new creations, especially Judah. From returning the planted money to refusing to abandon Benjamin to Judah’s willingness to die for his brother, it was clear Joseph’s brothers had changed. This posed a dilemma for Joseph: would he pursue the short-term pleasure of revenge and justice or embrace redemption and restoration?

**Irresistible Reconciliation**

Ultimately, Joseph succumbed to what I call “irresistible reconciliation.” He could not continue the façade any longer, because love, emotion, compassion, and forgiveness overwhelmed his heart, mind, and soul. God brought Joseph to a place where he could abandon his desire for revenge, replacing his plan for payback with a passion for reconciliation—to become a family of brothers once again.

Joseph emptied the room, except for him and his brothers. In what must have been a dramatic moment, Joseph revealed his identity. The brothers were stunned. At first, they were gripped with fear, struggling to understand the nature of Joseph’s tears. Were they tears of anger? Sadness? Joy? Joseph sensed their anxiety and gave them the greatest gift they had ever received in their life—forgiveness and comfort. Then, something even more amazing happened: intense emotions of joy, repentance, reconciliation, restoration, and redemption fell upon the room as the brother they had betrayed became a comforter to his betrayers!

5And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

**—Genesis 45:5–8**

Spiritual: A Great Ending

In Hollywood, this would have had a different ending. Joseph would’ve thrown them in jail, tortured them for a couple years, and put them to death. He would have gone that route because that’s what we like to see, the bad guys getting what they deserve. Without God working in Joseph, that’s probably what would have happened here: Joseph would have taken revenge, his family would have perished, and the line of Jesus would have disappeared. Instead, through restoration, the victim became a forgiver, a reconciler, and a comforter!

God enabled Joseph to see beyond Egypt to view the bigger picture. He didn’t know all the details, but he knew God was in charge. After twenty-five years of dealing with the pain of betrayal, Joseph began to see how God used that betrayal to save him, his family, and the whole civilized world. God enabled Joseph to desire restoration more than revenge. He gave Joseph eyes to see his desire for vengeance had no place in the plan for redemption and reconciliation.

Romans 8:28–30 says: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

You may have read that passage many times, and might even have it memorized, but has it taken root in your heart? Joseph understood the concepts of this scripture, though it hadn’t been written yet. He knew even the worst things in life cannot derail God’s sovereign plan for reconciliation. In fact, everything in Joseph’s life, including the betrayal he experienced, ended up creating a deeper connection to his Heavenly Dad.

Personal: Redemption Through Betrayal

Betrayal can be a part of God’s plan for redemption; it certainly was for Jesus. This doesn’t make sense to our human minds: how could betrayal be a core ingredient to our survival in Egypt? Yet betrayal and injustice are two of the most common experiences in Egypt. They are unavoidable.

Our natural human response to betrayal and injustice is to surrender to victimhood, justifying revenge, bitterness, and unforgiveness. We all know people who are prisoners to these cancers, and you can probably point to times you have been infected by them yourself. Maybe you are a prisoner to them today. Maybe you have cut off family members, abandoned friendships, or burned bridges, hoping one day your betrayers will experience the kind of the pain they caused you.

47While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. 48Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.” 49And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” And he kissed him. 50Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you came to do.” Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.

**—Matthew 26:47–50**

It’s easy to be angry with Judas, but without his betrayal of Jesus, He wouldn’t have suffered. Without suffering, there wouldn’t have been a cross. Without the cross, He wouldn’t have died. Without His death, there wouldn’t have been a resurrection. Without the resurrection, there would be no salvation, no conquering death and sin—no hope for us. Betrayal was part of the ultimate redemption story.

Jesus could have enacted the justice to which He was entitled. He had the power and the right to take care of business on his own, but instead, just as Joseph did for his brothers, Jesus chose to become the one who provided all of us comfort, forgiveness, and restoration!

Restoration will always be better than revenge; however, living by this principle is not natural. It takes supernatural intervention by God to enable us to embrace the path of restoration over revenge. We must know this, and we must connect with that knowledge emotionally and spiritually in a way that creates action. It’s time to abandon the role of victim and embrace the roles of forgiver, comforter, and restorer.

**Trust God for the Details**

It’s ironic for us to say, “The devil is in the details,” when it’s God who is in the details. He was in the details of Joseph’s story, and He was in the details of Jesus’ betrayal. God isn’t surprised when we are betrayed. Isaiah 55:9 says, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Joseph certainly realized God had a higher plan. He knew God was in control. That is the reason He was inspired and chose restoration over revenge.

**Trust God for Justice**

Without faith, we are prisoners to revenge, wanting others to receive the justice we believe they deserve. Yet we somehow turn a blind eye to the justice we deserve; we see our sins and shortcomings as forgivable, whereas the sins of others need to be punished. This kind of mindset is evidence of being a child of Egypt, not a child of God.

Romans 12:17–19 says, “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’”

God helps us understand none of us could survive the justice we deserve. When God brings you to this understanding, you begin to understand an important truth: “If I really got what I deserve, I would have no chance of surviving in Egypt.” Understanding what you really deserve is where you begin to cultivate a desire for redemption, reconciliation, and restoration over revenge.

As a true child of God, you will ultimately long for reconciliation and forgiveness over revenge. You will desire to get out from under the thumb of bitterness and unforgiveness. Otherwise, you will perish in Egypt, seeking revenge, which will never satisfy you.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Twenty-One Questions

**Question:** Has someone ever offered restoration to you when you expected revenge? How did that affect you?

**Question:** Do you view yourself as a victim or as someone who desires restoration? How does perpetual victimhood keep you from being a source of forgiveness, comfort, and restoration to those around you?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer opening yourself to becoming an instrument of forgiveness, comfort, and restoration as opposed to revenge.

**Part Five:
A Dynamic Relationship**

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Vulnerability in Egypt

**Read: Genesis 45:16–28**

Vulnerability is scary. At first glance, it seems risky, costly, dangerous, even reckless. Many see vulnerability as a liability, especially when we’re trying to survive in Egypt. Our human instinct is to avoid vulnerability. It’s hard to see any benefits from it, not only for ourselves but for anyone we love.

As followers of Jesus, if we can’t embrace genuine vulnerability, we won’t survive in Egypt. Avoiding vulnerability doesn’t help us escape suffering; it just puts us in a place of enduring our suffering alone, discouraged, and isolated.

16When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, “Joseph's brothers have come,” it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. 17And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Say to your brothers, ‘Do this: load your beasts and go back to the land of Canaan, 18and take your father and your households, and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat the fat of the land.’ 19And you, Joseph, are commanded to say, ‘Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. 20Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.’”

21The sons of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. 22To each and all of them he gave a change of clothes, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five changes of clothes. 23To his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. 24Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, “Do not quarrel on the way.”

25So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. 26And they told him, “Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.” And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. 27But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. 28And Israel said, “It is enough; Joseph, my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”

**—Genesis 45:16–28**

Historical: Vulnerable Leaders

Joseph was much more than just another civil servant in Pharaoh’s administration. Reaction to the news about Joseph’s restoration with his brothers shows Pharaoh had great respect and genuine, deep affection for Joseph.

No doubt, Pharaoh vetted Joseph before he made him the most powerful man in his administration. It’s safe to assume they had many personal, vulnerable conversations about their hurts, fears, and experiences. Remember, they became friends because Pharaoh was afraid of a dream he’d had about a coming famine. Pharaoh was vulnerable with Joseph from the beginning, and it paved the way for a strong friendship.

When Joseph cried with joy over restoration with his brothers, Scripture says all of Pharaoh’s house heard Joseph’s tears (Genesis 45:2). This is evidence Joseph lived in very close proximity to Pharaoh, which probably means they saw each other often; they were close on many levels.

**Pharaoh Celebrates**

When Pharaoh heard of the reconciliation, it pleased him, almost as if he’d been rooting for it to happen. Pharaoh was so thrilled, he sanctioned Joseph’s plan to provide for his family. He gave Joseph’s family the best Egypt had to offer and paid to move them to Egypt with all their possessions, livestock, and households. He provided wagons, provisions, laborers to help, lavish gifts, a superior plot of land in Egypt, and everything they needed. In short, Pharaoh treated Jacob and his sons as if they were his own family. I find this fascinating because it gives us insight into the depth of their friendship, a result of years of vulnerability between Joseph and Pharaoh.

Imagine the scene when Joseph’s brothers returned home with all these gifts and provisions from Pharaoh. Imagine them telling Jacob they had a new home in Egypt. Imagine the news: Joseph was alive! What a day it must have been as the family realized true reconciliation was possible.

Spiritual: God Loves Vulnerability

It was never God’s intention for his children to live isolated; He designed us to need close, intimate, vulnerable relationships with one another. Vulnerable, intimate relationships are how we best experience His presence. Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 says:

9Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. 10For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! 11Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? 12And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

God loves real vulnerability, real connections, and real relationships. He’s not into temporary, superficial stuff driven by expediency or selfish gain.

**God Creates Vulnerability**

The relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh is the most under-appreciated part of Joseph’s story. We can clearly see how God built their friendship; we see Him moving in their hearts, drawing them together. We see a vulnerable relationship become a blessing to both men.

I think we can assume Pharaoh knew about the history of Joseph’s family dysfunction. It’s the whole reason Joseph was in Egypt to begin with, so it’s reasonable to suppose Joseph didn’t hide his past from Pharaoh. However, this opportunity didn’t come about because of Joseph. God had a plan to bring these two men together, to pair Joseph with the most powerful man in the world and establish a deep connection between them.

God has a track record all through Scripture of creating deep relationships between His people—for example, David and Jonathan, or Paul and Timothy. Scripture is filled with examples of how God uses vulnerable relationships for His glory, and He orchestrates them from the beginning.

**God Uses Vulnerability**

Together, Joseph and Pharaoh had a huge impact not just in their time, but for all human history. Think of how powerfully God used the story of Joseph’s family dysfunction to forge this important friendship. Then consider the blessings Joseph, his family, and all of us have enjoyed *because* of this vulnerability?

I’m convinced God used this vulnerable friendship to save Pharaoh—that this Egyptian ruler became a believer and worshiper of Joseph’s God. But He also used their vulnerable friendship to preserve the line of Jesus and our salvation.

Personal: The Church Needs Vulnerability

It may seem strange, but vulnerability is crucial to surviving in Egypt, a place designed to chew us up and spit us out. It seems counterintuitive, but it’s true. The fact is that a lack of vulnerability increases the odds Egypt will destroy you.

So, how do we welcome vulnerability into our lives when it’s entirely contrary to what Egypt teaches us is normal?

**Fake Vulnerability**

We must be aware of fake vulnerability, a cancer in many churches. You can see it everywhere, Christians play it safe, keeping one foot in and one foot out. We take a half-step toward vulnerability, look around, and then run back to safety. We allow the fear of betrayal to hinder our willingness to be vulnerable. As a result, we set up barriers and form excuses.

When fake vulnerability sets in, we’re not vulnerable at all. We hide behind it for self-defense, self-service, self-provision, self-promotion, and sympathy-seeking from others. We look to gain something for ourselves instead of seeing vulnerability as something to benefit others. When those selfish expectations aren’t met, we get to play the victim, telling ourselves, “*I tried, and it didn’t work! Why bother to open myself up?”*

This lack of vulnerability is our escape hatch if things get a little tough, making it easier for us to divorce from our church families. People with fake vulnerability run into problems and withdraw; they’re done, and they blame the church for what happened. It’s easy to give up on our church family when we haven’t invested very much to begin with. When we keep our connections cheap, risk-free, and shallow, we can cut things off without a second thought.

Consequently, when famine comes in Egypt, we pay the price. We suffer a life of physical and emotional solitude, and we die alone. Fake vulnerability prevents us from living fully.

**Servant Vulnerability**

I don’t know about you, but personally, I desire a life filled with Joseph–Pharaoh relationships. For that to happen, though, we must be willing to live a life of servant vulnerability. Servant vulnerability provides transparency that inspires others to abandon the fear of betrayal. When servant vulnerability is modeled, it stirs other people to serve and love others more than they love themselves.

Here are a few great examples of servant vulnerability:

*The first is Paul.* (I wrote about this in my book *The GraceLife*). Paul wrote in Philippians 1:7–8, “It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

Paul was quite vulnerable with the Philippians. Remember, he was facing potential execution, but his unrelenting vulnerability inspired the Philippian church, encouraging them to be faithful to Jesus and each other after Paul was gone.

My study of the relationship between Paul and the church at Philippi transformed how I approach my relationships, especially as a pastor. Paul’s love for that church created genuine vulnerability they would need to be successful as a church family.

*The best personal, modern-day example I can think of is the recovery ministry at our church, called GraceLife Recovery.* GraceLife Recovery is a community of people in recovery from addiction and more. We meet for an hour, starting at 7 p.m., but people start showing up at 5.

These precious friends display servant vulnerability in inspiring ways. When they lay their heart out there, getting up in front of a hundred people to say, “Let me tell you what a wreck my life was, why it was a wreck, and how God changed me,” it’s incredibly powerful stuff. It’s one of the most fulfilling experiences I have had in my career as a pastor.

These broken people become vulnerable by confessing to one another all their darkest fears and failures. You know what that does? It draws people in. *“You made it through dark times? That means I can make it, too.”* They have inspired me to be more transparent about my own feelings, my own fears, and my own struggles with sin. I want real, vulnerable connections with my church family—real relationships with others.

I want to thrive in a culture of vulnerability. I want people to know the real me, the man who struggles with sinfulness every day of the week. In return, I want those who know the real me to let me know the real them; otherwise, Egypt will eat us both alive.

*The best example of servant vulnerability is Jesus.*

14And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. 15And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” 17And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves. 18For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

**—Luke 22:14–18**

Here, the Creator of the universe sat down with sinners to explain how He was ready to offer them the ultimate expression of vulnerability. From there, He instructed them on the Lord’s Table—what it was and why it was important.

Often the Lord’s Table becomes a superficial fulfillment of some ecclesiastical expectation. Sometimes it’s just a regularly scheduled calendar event or a part of a church’s comfortable liturgy. Sadly, when we reduce the Table to a mandate or obligation, we cheapen the true intention behind it—the expression of servant vulnerability by Jesus.

Servant vulnerability leads to true relationship, true friendship, and the true power and presence of God in your life. Without it, you will never survive in Egypt.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Twenty-Two Questions

**Question:** Do you have people in your life with whom you can be vulnerable? How do those relationships impact your life and your growth?

**Question:** What is the difference between fake vulnerability and real vulnerability? Are you willing to live your life from a place of servant vulnerability? What is something you can do to start living with true vulnerability?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer expressing and committing to honest, servant vulnerability.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Saving Egypt

**Read: Genesis 47:1–12**

Have you ever been discouraged by how your own choices hindered Kingdom work? Have you ever considered the impact those choices had on your most important relationships? I can think of several pivotal decisions I have made that hinder my ability to serve Heavenly Dad. They have also had a negative impact on my family and my close friends.

I carry the burden of my own bad choices in Egypt, choices resulting in lost opportunities spiritually, personally, professionally, and in ministry. It’s tempting for me to go down a rabbit hole, obsessing over the negative impacts. Could our church be healthier or bigger? Could we be more influential and have more resources? These thoughts run through my head daily. Can you relate?

Sometimes it can feel like God had this beautiful, wonderful plan to use us, to transform Egypt, but somehow we managed to “mess it up.” We begin to think any impact we may have will be a mere shadow of what might have been. But we learn something different from the passage we are studying in this chapter: God is never hindered by our own deficiencies. His plan and His calling in our lives are never derailed by our own sinfulness. Walking by faith in Egypt is extremely complicated—filled with failure, regret, and guilt—yet we continue to strive to live in grace and mercy. We must have confidence our God has designed a plan to use us in Egypt knowing full well we will have lots of failures along the way.

Historical: At Home in Egypt

Genesis 46 tells us Jacob’s family finally settled in Egypt. Jacob was dealing with the fact he had failed in many areas. He was leaving the land promised by God to his father, Abraham, and his sons. I am sure Jacob was filled with regret for the unfulfilled potential for life in the land of promise; you could imagine how he might have felt God was undoing His eternal promise because Jacob hadn’t lived up to the standard.

But Egypt was a way out. There was food there. *Joseph* was there. His family would be protected by Pharaoh. While he was certainly thankful his family would be spared in the famine, no doubt he was struggling to leave the promised land. This is why, halfway to Egypt, Jacob stopped to connect with God. It was there God revealed His plan: “I am God, the God of your father [Abraham]. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation” (Genesis 46:3). In other words, “Go into Egypt, don’t be afraid. I have a purpose for you being there. Egypt needs you and your family. I will use your time there to fulfill My promise to make you great nation, one that will be a blessing to all the world.”

Verses 9 to 27 give an exact accounting of all the people from Jacob’s family who moved to Egypt. It’s clear no one was left behind. Everyone followed the plan God had and abandoned Canaan for Egypt.

Then we come to verses 28 to 30, the moving story of how Jacob and Joseph were finally reunited after twenty-five years. It was emotional, but soon after, they got down to business.

Joseph had a plan for how to present them to Pharaoh (v. 31–34): he told them to present themselves as shepherds. This might seem obvious and a minor detail, but it was a very important and part of God’s plan. In Egypt, a full-blooded Egyptian would never associate himself with an “abominable” shepherd. There was no glamour or beauty in caring for sheep. It was messy. Shepherds lived in tents. In this, God was helping Jacob’s family become a distinct subculture in Egypt—to be in Egypt, but separate from Egypt; to influence, but not to be influenced. It also established an incredible theme we see all throughout the New Testament, of God as the Great Shepherd. John Calvin had a great way of saying this: “They learn … to cherish more fervently mutual union between themselves; and thus the body of the Church, which God had set apart from the whole world, is not dispersed[.”](#Source26)[[[26]](#endnote-27)](#Source26)

7So Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, “My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan. They are now in the land of Goshen.” 2And from among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. 3Pharaoh said to his brothers, “What is your occupation?” And they said to Pharaoh, “Your servants are shepherds, as our fathers were.” 4They said to Pharaoh, “We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen.” 5Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Your father and your brothers have come to you. 6The land of Egypt is before you. Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land. Let them settle in the land of Goshen, and if you know any able men among them, put them in charge of my livestock.”

7Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8And Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How many are the days of the years of your life?” 9And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.” 10And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. 11Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. 12And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

**—Genesis 47:1–12**

**Jacob Meets Pharaoh**

On the surface, it might seem Jacob was blessed with the gift of an audience with the king, but no—it was Pharaoh who was blessed by God’s sovereign grace to meet face to face with the patriarch of His people! Jacob was clearly advanced in age, describing his years as “few and evil.” He was feeling the burden of his own failures. Here was a man who suffered his brother’s wrath (deservedly so), lost his mother after deceiving his father, spent time as an indentured servant to a greedy and filthy uncle, married two jealous sisters, had a daughter who suffered rape, and had sons who, prior to God’s transformation of their hearts, were involved in murder, disrespect, deceit, and slave-trading of their own brother.

By this time, Jacob was a seriously flawed, depressed, humbled, broken man, living with regret and probably guilt for the blessings he had squandered. Even with all of this (and I’m sure Pharaoh knew about all of it), Jacob was about to experience the fulfillment of God’s promise for his life. Despite all this dysfunction, God used Jacob and his family to bless the most powerful king in the most powerful kingdom on earth, and by extension, the entire known world.

**A Blessed King**

To set the scene, Jacob was the patriarch of an undesirable, dysfunctional shepherd family with a sordid past, being used as the conduit for God’s blessing and plan of grace for Egypt. After all the debauchery, dysfunction, and lack of wisdom, God used the relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh to allow an interaction with Joseph’s dad. In my opinion, this was the interaction God used to save Pharaoh, who trusted the God of Jacob and wanted a blessing from this deeply flawed, 130-year-old shepherd patriarch!

In fact, twice in the last three verses, Moses (the author of Genesis) reiterated how Jacob blessed Pharaoh. This suggests Moses knew it was a significant event.

Spiritual: Out of Egypt I Called My Son

Hosea 11:1 says, “When Israel *[another name for Jacob]* was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” Egypt was far more than merely a way to save Jacob and his family: God’s plan was to use Jacob’s family to bless the whole word, even us, through Jesus. When Pharaoh first called on Joseph for help interpreting his frightening dreams, he had no idea the purpose went beyond preparation for a famine. Pharaoh had no clue part of the plan was to save Pharaoh’s soul. Not only did God love Jacob and Joseph, but He also loved Pharaoh!

In spite of a dysfunctional life of sin and failure, God still fulfilled His pledge to use Jacob and his family to bless the world. God used Jacob to influence a spiritually starving country far beyond the borders of the promised land of Canaan. I believe it’s similar to how Paul described the role of the church:

26For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

**—1 Corinthians 1:26–31**

Personal: Egypt Needs Us

The world doesn’t know it yet, but its only hope for survival is God working through His people, even if we are sinful, dysfunctional, and flawed. This is the best part about how God works while we are in Egypt: we don’t need to be special or perfect. All we need to influence Egypt is to be loved, chosen, and called by a sovereign, gracious, merciful, miraculous, forgiving God. And all we need to do to be loved, called, and redeemed is to be dysfunctional (check), unwise (check), broken (check), and in desperate need of transformation and grace (check). God’s glory, power, and majesty shine best through the miraculous transformation of His people. It’s not about us, but about Him and His glory.

Matthew 5:14–16 says:

14You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

**An Audience with the Redeemed**

Today, you might be obsessed with getting an audience with Egypt—its money, power, possessions, relationships, or temporary thrills. You’re working hard, thinking a face-to-face with Egypt will help you survive, when in fact, Egypt desperately needs an audience with you! Egypt needs flawed, undesirable, unwise, dysfunctional, sinful, yet transformed, redeemed, Spirit-filled children of God.

Egypt can’t give you the hope you need. In fact, Egypt can’t even give itself the hope it needs. Egypt’s hope rests in us, which we see in this prayer of Jesus: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (John 6:37).

And John 17:15–18 says:

15I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. 16They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

Essentially, “*I have sent them so Egypt can have an audience with them.”*

Yes, it’s true, just like Jacob and his family, we are all a hot mess. You may not think you’re a mess, but if all your stuff were laid bare, trust me, you’d see it’s a hot mess. Yet we can be confident our flaws won’t stop God’s plan of using us in His process. In fact, our stories of transformation and change are far more powerful than perfection could ever dream of being. The flawed, sinful, once-murderous Paul understood this so well when he wrote to his dearly beloved son in the faith, Timothy. He said in 2 Timothy 2:10, “Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” Essentially, “I endure all the struggles and burdens I have so Egypt can have an audience with me.”

**Egypt’s Lifeline**

Throughout church history, Christians have been a blessing to the world. Despite our own dysfunction, God continues to use His flawed people to bless others, just as He did with Jacob. This is why we continue striving to endure all the burdens of survival in Egypt. I know it’s tough, but Egypt needs us, whether it knows it or not. After all, it needed a dysfunctional, flawed, yet redeemed man named Jacob.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Twenty-Three Questions

**Question:** Do you feel there are opportunities you have missed because of your own dysfunction and bad choices? If so, do you believe God can still use you?

**Question:** Do you think people around you can see God’s love and grace through the way God has worked to transform you? Give some examples.

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer thanking God for using flawed people like you to accomplish His perfect plans.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Wisdom in Egypt

**Read: Genesis 47:23–27**

Wisdom is a crucial element to our survival in Egypt. Wisdom helps us know how to balance the pressures of earthly versus eternal responsibilities. Each day, we are faced with choices that put heavenly and earthly wisdom in conflict with each other Heavenly wisdom helps us balance our desire for Egyptian success against the eternal consequences.

This heavenly wisdom has three components: shrewdness, innocence, and unity. In this chapter, we will attempt to unpack each one—and hopefully, by the end, they’ll be stuck in your head like a commercial jingle, because I want them to be ever present in your thoughts as you go about your daily life. I want to equip you with a practical, working definition of wisdom that will influence every interaction you have with Egypt.

Historical: Wisdom in the Famine

23Then Joseph said to the people, “Behold, I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh. Now here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. 24And at the harvests you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones.” 25And they said, “You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh.” 26So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth; the land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh’s.

27Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen. And they gained possession in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly.

**—Genesis 47:23–27**

In Genesis 47, Joseph and his family were reunited, but then a different kind of hard work began. Joseph carried the responsibility of feeding the known world with a limited supply of resources. Egypt needed Joseph to be a good steward, which was exactly what Joseph intended to be, in a manner that reflected a worshiper of Jehovah.

Egypt had invested a fortune to prepare for the famine; Joseph spent years harvesting, buying, and stockpiling food. Of course, Joseph wanted to be compassionate to those hurting, yet he couldn’t simply give away all the food at once. Instead, he needed to protect Egypt’s investment while also protecting Egypt from financial ruin.

Joseph’s job was to serve Pharaoh’s government, feed the world, and honor God—all at once. His solution? A grain market. Because Joseph spent seven years buying grain from other countries, the peoples surrounding Egypt became wealthy. Once he opened the market, people from those countries were able to travel to Egypt and essentially buy back the grain they had sold to Joseph over the previous several years.

But after a few years of famine, everyone ran out of money. That’s when Joseph changed his plan: instead of selling the grain, he traded for it. He said, “Since you can’t feed your livestock, how about you give them to me, and in exchange, I’ll give you grain.” The people agreed. Since their animals had become a liability—just more mouths to feed—they started trading cattle for food.

After a while, though, there was no more cattle to be traded. Joseph needed yet another plan to feed the people while also protecting Egypt. This time, he offered grain in exchange for land. The surrounding nations couldn’t use their land at this point; nothing was growing because there wasn’t any water for crops. They didn’t have livestock needing to graze. So the deal worked, and people traded their land for food.

Some might say Joseph took advantage of the people in a terrible situation. Wrong! Everyone was contented. These strategies allowed Joseph to reconstruct Egyptian society during a time of severe crisis. It was essentially no different than a system of government taxation or feudal relationships: all are theoretically based on mutual obligation. In this case, Pharaoh had become the benefactor; he was responsible for all the people who depended on him, and those people were grateful to make it through the famine.

Joseph managed all of this with wisdom and integrity. He didn’t skim off the top. He didn’t use treachery or deception. He was shrewd, yet honest and blameless. What’s more, this situation paved the way for Jacob’s family to care for the Egyptians’ newly acquired massive herds of livestock, an essential role.

Spiritual: Wisdom’s Ingredients

Each day, Joseph faced tough decisions. Imagine his internal deliberations while balancing compassion, stewardship, politics, integrity, and loyalty. It would be easy to be impressed with how Joseph did this; after all, the man had many gifts and talents. However, we must keep in mind Joseph would have been an absolute, colossal failure without the ingredients of wisdom in his life.

**Heavenly Connection**

Joseph was dependent on his constant connection with God for his success, something he accomplished through prayer. Knowing God had placed him in this position, Joseph understood his desperate need for God’s guidance. He asked for it when he was in prison, he asked for it when he was a slave, and he no doubt asked for it when he was leading Egypt through the famine. He knew only God could help him to be effective, morally upright, and pleasing to the Father all at the same time.

**Supernatural Innocence**

Joseph’s integrity is one of the most underappreciated miracles of this story. He could have easily skimmed off the top. He could have cheated Pharaoh, keeping some land or livestock for his own purposes. But Joseph was being guided by God’s spirit; therefore, his actions and intentions remained pure.

**Family Unity**

God knew Joseph would need help managing the famine. An easily overlooked part of this story is how God brought Joseph’s family back to Egypt to help him when he needed it most. It wasn’t just a case of Joseph’s family riding on his successful coattails, because even with all of his skills, he desperately needed his family’s skills for success.

Egyptians didn’t want to be shepherds. In fact, because of how the Nile made shepherding so easy in Egypt before the famine, shepherding may have become a lost art. Pharaoh, Joseph, and all of Egypt needed Joseph’s family to fill this role during the famine, or else there wouldn’t have been any livestock left at the end of it.

Personal: Shrewd, Innocent, and United

These are the things God gave Joseph for the task of feeding Egypt and the world during the famine:

* *Shrewdness.* This one may sound pejorative, but it’s a positive attribute. It means “having or showing sharp powers of judgment; astute.”[[[27]](#endnote-28)](#Source27)
* *Innocence.* This means having “lack of guile or corruption; purity.”[[[28]](#endnote-29)](#Source28)
* *United.* This means being “joined together … for a common purpose, or by common feelings.”[[[29]](#endnote-30)](#Source29)

Matthew 10:16 says, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” We won’t survive Egypt without shrewdness, integrity, and unity.

For some, the story of Joseph’s success might be discouraging. It’s so profound, it almost seems unattainable! For years, that’s how I felt when I tried to see, with human eyes, all Joseph accomplished.

You may relate, wondering, *“How in the world am I supposed to compete in Egypt? How can I be like Joseph? I don’t have the skills, the money, the resources, or the relationships. How can I get ahead in Egypt?”*

Listen, we have access to all the same tools of success Joseph had. In fact, we have even better tools than Joseph had. We have the completed revelation of God’s Word, as well as our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, all part of God’s holy people—His church. Let’s unpack this concept further:

**Heavenly Shrewdness**

Let me bring some clarity to what I mean by “shrewdness.” We are talking about biblical—not worldly, or Egyptian—shrewdness.

Egyptian, worldly shrewdness asks, “How can I get what I want? How can I win?” But look what Solomon said about shrewdness and wisdom in Proverbs 21:5–6: “The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty. The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death.” That’s a great way to contrast heavenly wisdom with earthly wisdom!

It would be impossible to garner heavenly shrewdness in Egypt without constant communication with God. One advantage we have over Joseph is our access to God’s Word. We can hear from God anytime, anywhere. A simple cell phone app can put God’s words in front of us when we’re hiking in the woods or riding the subway. God has made it so easy for us to connect with Him—no dream interpretation needed!

I love how James expresses this: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5). James is telling us God literally sits on the edge of His seat, ready to give you all the wisdom you will ever need if you just ask Him for it! But it starts with confessing you need His wisdom, followed by a request for God to grant it.

**Supernatural Innocence**

Paul said in Philippians 3:9, “And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”

We must maintain our commitment to making Heavenly Dad smile, but this is not a result of human effort; it happens through the blessing of spiritual intervention, particularly and primarily through the gift of faith. The ability to believe in God is not something you arrive at through your own intelligence, wisdom, and discernment.

Faith is a result of supernatural intervention, in which God interrupts your natural thought processes, as if to say, “No, you’re not going to think that way anymore. You’re going to think heavenly, spiritually, supernaturally, and eternally. Now you will have a new type of wisdom, discernment, and shrewdness.”

**Sovereign Unity**

In Proverbs 15:22, Solomon wrote, “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.” Life wasn’t meant to be figured out alone. We can find safety and wisdom among many counselors. In fact, we will fail miserably if we try to be wise in isolation.

Implementing shrewdness and innocence on your own—whether in business, ministry, romance, or family—is overwhelming, impossible, and sheer foolishness, really. Just like Joseph needed his family, wisdom will tell you we don’t have a chance of surviving in Egypt without the rest of our church family. God unites His redeemed people for a task He has called them to do together, just as He did with Joseph’s family. In God’s family, people with no earthly reason to be connected are brought together for the most important task in human history: to feed a starving Egypt during this time of spiritual famine. That is our calling. The only way we will fulfill it successfully, and thrive in Egypt, is if we remain surrounded in unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Wisdom = Shrewdness, Innocence, and Unity**

Jesus has sent us into the world, together, to operate with shrewdness, innocence, and unity.

You have shrewdness (from your communication with God), innocence (because He has saved you by grace through faith), and unity (all of God’s followers called to a shared, singular task). You need all three. You can’t sacrifice any of these elements of wisdom if you’re going to be successful in Egypt. No matter what temptations arise, you must cling to wisdom.

Of course, Egypt will try to get in the way. Arrogance, greed, isolation, addiction, obsession—these are just a few ways Egypt will try to steal your shrewdness, innocence, and unity. But remember, removing any of the three ingredients of heavenly wisdom from your tasks in Egypt will lead to a lonely life of turmoil, crisis, and shallow purpose. It’s too high of a price to pay.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Twenty-Four Questions

**Question:** Look at the definitions of *shrewdness, innocence,* and *unity.* Is your life characterized by those traits? Which one are you strongest in? Which trait are you weakest in? Why is it important to be equipped by God with all three attributes?

**Question:** Do you have a daily direct-connect with God? If not, what changes can you make to move toward a more consistent, intimate connection with Him?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer inviting God to deepen your connection and to equip you with shrewdness, innocence, and unity.

**Part Six:
An Ongoing Journey**

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Survival Through Diversity

**Read: Genesis 48:15–16, 18–20**

Ironically, sermons about diversity can often be quite divisive. In my experience as a pastor, church member, and Christian, the hardest thing for a church to achieve is diversity. It’s usually listed as a goal or core value in every vision statement, but it’s the most difficult to accomplish.

Many churches talk about diversity, but honestly, we feel safer when everyone looks and sounds just like us. We struggle with diversity because internally, we know it’s risky, uncomfortable, and costly. For example, in our church, we would never say out loud we want our church to be white, middle- to upper-middle-class, with similar experiences to our own—but we don’t have to say it. Regrettably, it manifests itself in our staffing, budgets, programs, and behavior.

Too often in churches, we laud the concept of diversity but manage its costs, defining what we are willing to risk beforehand. Diversity isn’t part of our natural worldview; however, if we are going to thrive in Egypt, it must become an intentional focus and priority.

Historical: Jacob’s Will

In Genesis chapters 48 and 49, Jacob declared his will for his children. While Joseph certainly expected his father to bless his two sons, (Ephraim and Manasseh), it’s unlikely he had any idea to what extent Jacob would include them in his will. After all, Joseph’s kids were only half-Hebrew, having grown up in Egypt, separate from the rest of the family. They had never even been to Canaan! They spoke Egyptian, read Egyptian, and looked Egyptian.

But in the reading of his will, Jacob ignored tradition and comfort, adopting the half-Hebrew boys, Ephraim and Manasseh, giving them equal status to his real sons. Jacob was able to see the big picture—how the promises of Abraham and Isaac went far beyond his own family. These two Hebrew-Egyptian boys would become critical to the future of the nation of Israel.

In Genesis 49:1–27, Jacob listed everything each son would receive. Now, the main prize of a birthright was land; land meant everything. It was how people provided for their families and gained wealth as farmers or shepherds. But Jacob’s three firstborn sons—Reuben, Simeon, and Levi—didn’t receive any birthright or land. Because of past choices, they lost their birthrights.

Reuben was a fool who embarrassed his father with his immorality, while Simeon and Levi were always warring with others. As a consequence, Jacob took the birthright of Reuben and gave it to Joseph, who now had a double portion. The birthrights of Simeon and Levi went to Joseph’s two half-Hebrew, half-Egyptian sons; in effect, Ephraim and Manasseh (Joseph’s sons) replaced Simeon and Levi as sons of Jacob.

**Jacob’s Worldview**

There was wisdom in leaving Reuben, Simeon, and Levi out of the land promise. It was long-term thinking shaped by Jacob’s understanding of redemption.

15And he blessed Joseph and said,

“The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, 16the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys; and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”…

18And Joseph said to his father, “Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head.” 19But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations.” 20So he blessed them that day, saying,

“By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying, ‘God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.’”

**—Genesis 48:15–16, 18–20**

Jacob blessed his sons with customized inheritances suitable to complement the specific, God-given talents of each. These gifts would help shape who each of his sons would become. Out of the type of land he received, and the prayer said for him, each descendant would carve his own special role in the future of the nation of Israel.

Spiritual: God’s Bigger Plan

Jacob knew God’s plan went far beyond Jacob’s family; he saw beyond what was expected. Though Jacob’s sons expected things to follow tradition, wanting a predictable inheritance, by now Jacob had learned to view life through the eyes of redemption.

At the beginning of the passage, Jacob essentially prayed, “You, my God who has been with me from the beginning and has saved me from all kinds of bad things, bless these boys! You, my God who has rescued me from my wretched sinfulness, please bless my adopted half-Egyptian grandsons.”

He saw the picture of what God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob himself when God said, “In your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 26:4). This shaped Jacob’s decisions, as he chose to welcome his Egyptian grandsons and bring them into the blessing, a very “un-Hebrew” thing to do.

I like what Matthew Henry said about this: “Among God’s Israel then is to be found a great variety of dispositions, contrary to each other, yet all contributing to the beauty and strength of the body.”[[[30]](#endnote-31)](#Source30)

**Strength to Survive**

God knew for His people to survive in Egypt and fulfill their role of becoming a blessing to all the rest of the world (including us) in the dark days ahead, they would need groups of people with diverse skills and talents. Hundreds of years later, after God liberated Israel from Egyptian slavery, God’s people would face even more challenges. For centuries to come, they would be a target of many other nations wanting to wipe them out.

Fast-forward to the Holocaust, when an evil Hitler killed Jews (descendants of Jacob and the Hebrews) by the millions. Only a uniquely assembled people could survive—physically, emotionally, and culturally—the greatest attempted genocide in human history, But the Holocaust was merely the latest attempt to wipe out the Jewish people; there have been at least three other attempts of mass genocide on Jews, yet they have survived.

Jacob saw God’s plan to diversify His chosen people to welcome every ethnic group in the world. Paul laid this out in Galatians 3:

27For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

**—Galatians 3:27–29**

Though Jewish culture was no doubt precious to Paul, he also saw the importance of diversity. He said in Colossians 3:11, “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised *[religious or irreligious]*, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.” Somehow, centuries earlier, Jacob supernaturally understood this principle, seeing his family was more than just a particular name or culture. His family was to be the conduit for the *world* to meet God, whose plan all along was to start with Israel and extend the promises of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to every group of people on the planet—adopting followers from every nation, just like Jacob adopted the two half-Hebrew, half-Egyptian sons of Joseph.

Personal: The Gospel of Diversity

The church is not designed to be a fortress of monolithic culture, comfort, and emotional safety, protecting us from the dangers of the world. Rather, the church is a movement to include people from all over the world.

**Narcissistic Christianity**

We tend to pick a church where everyone is like us, more or less. Though we don’t want to admit this, just look around: chances are, most of the people at your church are very similar to you. Geographic factors aside, this homogeneity tends to happen when we see the gospel only through the lens of personal salvation. Our own salvation experience shapes our view of what church should be like, and as a result, we want church to fit within the parameters we have become comfortable with, personally.

Sadly, this turns the gospel into a narcissistic pursuit. Of course, we are thankful for our personal salvation experiences, but the gospel is about far more than just us; it also serves as a lens to view all of human history and culture, like Jacob was doing. We become selfish with church, using attendance and financial giving egotistically to feed our growth. *We will tolerate diversity to a point, but ultimately, we will make others who don’t look or sound like us feel unwanted, unneeded, unimportant, and unwelcome, even if we don’t consciously intend to do this.*

That said, it’s not just the church failing at diversity. The world sings kumbaya songs about diversity yet struggles with it just as much as we do. Most people live life surrounded by people just like them ethnically, financially, politically, and socially. A propensity for narcissistic homogeneity, like a propensity for sin, seems part of our fallen human nature. Collectively speaking, humans are terrible at diversity—all of us—and we have been since the beginning of recorded human history. That’s why, far too often, diversity has become little more than a vision statement, a social media campaign, a bumper sticker, or a t-shirt. The only solution to a problem of human nature like this is the redemption of our hearts and the transformation of our value system.

**Kingdom Christianity**

The gospel gives us opportunity for a better way. Revelation 7:9–10 says, “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

Close your eyes and envision the scene John wrote about. Just like the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the gospel is the *only* true force for diversity in the world today. Every other diversity is temporal, with impure and selfish motives. By contrast, the gospel is about surviving in Egypt to fulfill a calling to take Christ’s message to every race, nationality, and background. That’s why every time we are blessed with a measure of ethnic diversity, it’s a miraculous gift from our sovereign God!

**What Diversity Should Look Like**

We have so far to go. I look at my own church and recognize we’re nowhere near where we need to be. I see our subconscious tendencies short-circuiting diversity, and these tendencies hinder our church from becoming a fellowship of believers filled with people from every background.

So, where do we start?

I believe the best place to start is recognizing and embracing the diversity you *do* have. When we took an inventory of our own church, we discovered we have some uniquely diverse people to embrace, celebrate, and collaborate with, as a starting point for teaching us what diversity looks like:

* People from Wall Street, Main Street, and rural neighborhoods
* People who can swing a hammer and people who write computer code
* People who are good with money, and people who are good with people
* Salespeople, technical people, and people who build houses
* People who fix cars and people who drive cars (and sometimes break cars!)
* People who play guitar, people who wait on tables, people who wash dishes, and people who paint walls
* People in recovery and people who aren’t in recovery but should be (I believe every church needs ministries to help broken people have a place)
* People who love to pass out food to the hungry and people who love to pay for that food
* People who love kids in juvenile detention centers and people who love church kids
* People who love to do administrative work (believe it or not!)
* Young people with lots of free time and no money, and older people with lots of money and no free time
* People with no money and no time, yet somehow efficient enough at managing their lives to find ways to serve (I don’t know how they juggle it all!)
* People who love to make policy and people who love to break policy (me!)

We need every one of these types of people to survive in Egypt and fulfill our calling. I’m convinced this is true of your church, too—and not only your church, but perhaps your life. Your journey through Egypt may not be as diverse as God intended, but it doesn’t have to stay that way. You can build with what you have.

It’s time to start sitting with people you don’t know. It’s time to talk to people who don’t look like you. It’s time to dare to be present in places you don’t usually go. It’s time we celebrate and cherish diversity and begin to live like we truly believe the gospel is for any and every person God blesses our lives with, by His grace. If we can start there, we will begin to unearth the tremendous joy of gospel-centered diversity!

WORKBOOK

Chapter Twenty-Five Questions

**Question:** How much diversity is in your church? How about in your life outside of church? What does this reveal about how you approach the gospel, particularly God’s stated plan for it to go to people of all nations?

**Question:** What is God’s solution for homogeneity? What practical steps can you take to overcome this tendency and start building a more diverse community?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer thanking God for His plan that includes diversity, and commit to pursing more diversity in your community.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Monuments in Egypt

**Read: Genesis 50:15–21**

Washington, D.C. is a collection of symbols and monuments reminding us of important moments, events, and people in American history. It’s a showcase of impressive marble buildings and stone monuments. The purpose for these structures is connect us to our history so we won’t forget the cost of freedom in our country.

Most of these monuments are stirring, impressive, and inspirational. They are a mix of military, ethnic, political, religious, and regional themes. However, some of them are flat-out puzzling and wholly forgettable.

We have spent billions of dollars over the course of our nation’s history building, protecting, maintaining, and treasuring all these monuments, because we believe they are critical reminders of our past, both the good and the bad. Without tangible reminders, over time, humans tend to forget even the most important things we thought were unforgettable.

This is also true when it comes to spiritual things, because it takes intentional effort to remember the things Egypt has no interest in helping us remember. If we are going to survive in Egypt, we must always remember two important concepts: God’s promises and God’s forgiveness.

Historical: Remembering What’s Important

In Genesis 49:29–33, Jacob gave final instructions before his death: he wanted his family to take him back to Canaan after he died. In ancient Egypt, this would have been a massive undertaking. Preparation for such a journey would take months, the trip itself would take up to thirty days, and the cost would be substantial. However, Jacob didn’t want to be buried in Egypt; he wanted to be buried in Canaan.

Upon his passing, the Scripture says all of Egypt mourned the death of Jacob for seventy days (Genesis 50:1–3). Think about it: not too long ago, Egypt was an entirely pagan nation, but something had changed. Now they recognized the God of Jacob—and for a time, Jehovah was also the God of Egypt!

In fact, in Genesis 50:4–14, we learn Pharaoh sanctioned and funded the return of Jacob to Canaan. Not only did all of Jacob’s family make the journey, but all the elders in Egypt and their families made the trek as well! Scripture says it was a “great company” (Genesis 50:9). Imagine one thousand, maybe two thousand Egyptian elites all heading to Canaan along with their servants, camels, and luggage.

Such a massive funeral progression would be noticed by everyone in the region, including those who still lived in Canaan. Remember, just like the rest of the known world, Canaan viewed the empire of Egypt as a great savior because Joseph’s planning and management enabled its inhabitants to survive the famine. Upon seeing this Egyptian funeral procession, the people in Canaan named the place the “Field of Egypt.”

It’s fascinating, isn’t it? Two nations mourned the death of Jacob. On a recent visit to the United Kingdom, I visited the Churchill war museum in London. In one section, they played footage from Churchill’s funeral on a loop, along with video taken from around the country on the national day of mourning. All of the United Kingdom grieved the loss of this great leader, in a way reminiscent of what occurred in Egypt on Jacob’s behalf—except Jacob wasn’t even Egyptian!

Why was it so important to Jacob that he be buried in Canaan? Despite his family’s success in Egypt, Jacob wanted to make sure his sons never forgot the promises of God. Jacob desired a tangible connection to Canaan for his family, as a reminder of God’s faithfulness to their forefathers. John Calvin explained:[[[31]](#endnote-32)](#Source31)

He [Jacob] did not wish to be carried into the land of Canaan, as if he would be the nearer heaven for being buried there: but that, being dead, he might claim possession of a land which he had held during his life…because it was profitable that the memory of the promise should be renewed, by this symbol, among his surviving sons, in order that they might aspire to it.

Jacob knew it was important his sons never abandon the promises of God in favor of Egyptian success. For thousands of years afterward, Jacob’s burial served as an effective reminder to the people of Israel.

**Joseph’s Forgiveness**

In this story, we see remembrance on a massive, corporate scale. Entire nations were remembering Jacob, along with his family and the Egyptian royalty; but it got even more personal:

15When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.” 16So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died: 17‘Say to Joseph, “Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.”’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” 19But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. 21So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

**—Genesis 50:15–21**

What were the brothers afraid of? They still couldn’t comprehend being forgiven by Joseph, so they focused on their wrongdoing, using three different Hebrew words for *iniquity*: “transgression,” “sin,” and “evil.” But this also revealed the transformation in their hearts: they humbly identified with the God of Jacob, saying they were servants of Joseph’s God.

Of course, all of this was extremely emotional for Joseph—dead father, frightened brothers. He assured his brothers he would not punish them, and he reminded them God forgives; the promise of mercy was theirs.

Spiritual: Remembering Promises and Mercy

From a spiritual perspective, here we see God’s promises and God’s mercy in action. Throughout the history of the nation of Israel, their survival was tied to both God’s promises and His mercy. Even in their most rebellious times, they took comfort and inspiration in remembering these things.

**God’s Promises**

Remembering God’s promises was crucial to Israel's survival because it kept their eyes on the future. It kept them from obsession with “now,” even when current circumstances couldn’t seem to be any darker. The promises of God’s Word kept His people focused on hope and moving forward.

That’s why Jacob wanted to be buried in Canaan—to ensure subsequent generations would never forget these precious promises. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the authors reflected on the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I think one of the best explanations of God’s promises comes from the apostle Peter:

3His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

**—2 Peter 1:3–4**

In Psalm 119, David also reflected on God’s promises as the foundation of our connection with Him. This passage is so powerful, impacting me profoundly over the course of my adult life, I spent a year and a half preaching on it and then wrote a book about it: *Growing to Love God’s Word: An In-Depth Study of Psalm 119.*

Outside of the eternal promises of God, there is not much to live for in this world—no hope for loved ones who have died, no motivation for righteousness living, and no reason to love God’s people. Without the eternal promises of God, we would have no church family; we would have no brothers or sisters in Christ.

**God’s Mercy**

Joseph’s brothers needed comfort and reassurance their treachery had been forgiven. Throughout history, God has reminded His people He will not forget His mercy for us on the day of judgment. In the Old Testament, God’s people sometimes created monuments to remember those moments God intervened to display mercy. Even during their most rebellious, wicked times, God kept the message of mercy and redemption alive and well. Yes, there were consequences for sinfulness, frequently at the hands of pagan countries. No, Egypt was not the last “Egypt” Israel would endure. But even as Israel suffered the consequences of their sinfulness, there was always an underlying message of God’s mercy to see them through.

Hosea 14:4 says, “I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.” All throughout the Old Testament prophets, we find pronouncements of judgment, but woven within are threads of mercy, forgiveness, and restoration*.* Remembering the mercy of God was always critical for Israel, especially in the face of personal or national failure.

I believe this is Israel’s most enduring legacy: not the temple, not Judaism, but creating remembrances of God’s promises and mercy, literal and figurative monuments still benefiting us today. Memories of the promises and mercy God manifested in the lives of Joseph, his brothers, Jacob, and the whole nation remind us who God is and the promises available to us now as we seek to survive our own personal Egypt.

Personal: Building Monuments

Of course, Egypt has no interest in reminding us about God’s promises and mercy. Instead, Egypt has a way of making us forget these aspects of God’s character while adeptly reminding us of our failures. Egypt also wants to cloud God’s promises and mercy with shiny objects—success as Egypt defines it.

You know how you can tell when you have started to drift away from His promises and His mercy? You will start to drift away from God’s people. Once you start to drift away from connecting with God’s people on a regular basis, sooner or later, your heart will forget God’s promises and mercy. Before you know it, you find yourself asking questions you’d never really considered before: Is heaven even real? Is God real? Is this all a waste of time?

Today, the monuments we use to remember God’s promises look different than they did in Jacob’s time. We don’t need physical places or a funeral procession. Scripture says God wrote His promises on our hearts, on tablets of flesh (2 Corinthians 3:3). *The Spirit of God transformed His people into the very monuments we need to survive Egypt!* Hebrews 8:10 and 8:12 say: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people…. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”

Through the Holy Spirit, God places His Word, His promises, on our hearts! *That* is how we remember and cling to God’s promises.

**Corporate Monuments**

Even though we have God’s promises written on our hearts, remembering them isn’t meant to be an isolated, lonely endeavor: we are to remember them together, corporately, as we learn from Jacob’s big funeral. Psalm 98:3 shares the benefits of remembering together: “He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel *[that means everyone]*. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.”

In church we celebrate together the Lord’s Table, which we do as commanded by Jesus, in remembrance of Him. We celebrate together at Christmas and Easter, reminding us of His promises. We have memorial services and baptisms, reminders of our shared identity as children of the promise. Even the songs we sing as we worship together are monuments to God’s promises and mercy. We do all of this *together!* Hebrews 10:25 says, “Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” It’s important we continue to meet together and encourage one another.

**Intimate Monuments**

We must also create personal, intimate monuments to remind us of personal experiences with His promises and mercy. This can happen in small groups, in one-on-one relationships, and when we encourage or forgive each other. We also create private, personal monuments when we humble ourselves before God in confession and repentance.

Ultimately, however, our survival in Egypt is contingent upon God remembering. Psalm 25:6–7 says, “Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!” God will not forget us; He will not forget His promises or His mercy toward us.

In Psalm 143:5–6, the psalmist wrote, “I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands. I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah.” The world around us is a thirsty land, but we cannot afford to let it cause us to forget the promises of God or the mercy He has given us. We must live in constant remembrance, corporately and intimately.

The more often we are reminded, the more monuments we can create to help us always remember. What monuments are you building to remember God’s promises and mercy?

WORKBOOK

Chapter Twenty-Six Questions

**Question:** How has experiencing God’s promises and mercy impacted your own life? Take ten minutes to record as many responses as you can think of, creating your own written monument.

**Question:** What has God made available for believers today to keep remembrance of His promises and His mercy? How can you keep these things fresh in your mind without statues and memorials like the Israelites in the Old Testament had?

**Prayer Journal:** In your journal, write a prayer asking God to help you always remember His promises and His mercy.

CONCLUSION

Life After Egypt

The lessons we learn surviving in Egypt don’t mean anything if Egypt is all there is. After all, no matter how hard we fight to survive in Egypt, when it comes to our earthly life, Egypt will ultimately win.

Genesis 3:19 says, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” It’s a stark reality. We can cling tightly to this life in Egypt, grabbing hold with all our might, with no intention of letting go. However, in the end, we return to dust.

Even if we absolutely crush survival in Egypt, our earthly success is meaningless if there’s no life *after* Egypt. Without this hope, survival in Egypt will always end in a tragic story. Without hope for life after Egypt, all we can do on earth is try to smile more than we cry, win more than we lose, and search desperately for good times amidst all the bad. If surviving in Egypt is going to be worth the trouble, there must be more; our hope in Egypt must go beyond Egypt itself.

In that light, I think it’s safe to say, trying to survive in Egypt might be the greatest distraction any of us faces. That drive to survive impacts every area of our existence—our family, our finances, and our friendships. Bottom line, if we spend all our resources and time trying to make the most of Egypt, Egypt will win in the end.

Thankfully, for God’s people, it doesn’t have to be this way. We have the precious gift of hope beyond Egypt, a future place to go and a people to be with:

22So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's house. Joseph lived 110 years. 23And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph's own. 24And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” 25Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.” 26So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

**—Genesis 50:22–26**

8Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.

**—Exodus 1:8–9**

Historical: Hope After Death

With betrayal from family now behind him, Joseph led a great life by all Egyptian standards. He was rich, powerful, loved, and respected, had a big family, and lived a long life. His two sons became the patriarchs of two powerful tribes in the nation of Israel. He had many grandchildren, some of whom he adopted and made his own.

God used Joseph in Egypt in mighty ways. In fact, God’s plan was that Joseph would never actually leave the land of Egypt: Joseph died in Egypt, never realizing the earthly benefits of the covenant with his great-grandfather, Abraham, but Joseph was content in this**.** *He knew Egypt wasn’t his hope; it was his job.*He and his family produced generations of blessings for Egypt through their competence and their faith. Joseph built deep roots in Egypt, but Egypt was never his full hope. Even though Egypt probably seemed like a good enough place, Joseph kept his hope in the promises of God.

Like his father, Jacob, Joseph knew God promised him and his people something much greater than Egypt. As a symbol of his faith and hope in God’s ability to fulfill those promises, Joseph commanded when the time came to restore the nation of Israel back to the promised land, his coffin should be taken with them out of Egypt. Joseph knew God would keep His promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and him. He knew one day his people would return to Canaan, even if Joseph wasn’t alive to see it.

In the meantime, Joseph prophesied God would visit Israel while they lived in Egypt. This prophesy was fulfilled many times throughout the Old Testament, recorded in the books of Exodus through Joshua. In one amazing manifestation after another, God visited His people through plagues in Egypt, the story of Passover, the Red Sea, manna from heaven in the wilderness, the Ten Commandments, and more. Scripture records hundreds of examples of God visiting his people, just as Joseph said.

And sure enough, about four hundred years after Joseph was gone, the nation of Israel remembered Joseph’s request. Exodus 13:19 says, “Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.’” Four hundred years after the fact, people who had never met Joseph fulfilled his request, evidence that the nation of Israel never forgot the hope Joseph wanted them to remember.

Sadly, while Moses and Israel remembered Joseph, Egypt forgot. The Hyksos line of pharaohs during Joseph’s time in Egypt were eventually overthrown by new dynasties. Unlike the Hyksos line that was somewhat Semitic in its background and genealogy, the new lines had no interest in the God of Jacob. We know from archaeology, new pharaohs regularly redacted and removed monuments and references to Egyptian history. They smoothed over carvings on walls so people wouldn’t remember what really happened in the past. When it came to Joseph and his God, the new pharaohs found them to be a threat. They wanted the memory to be gone and for the people to know only about the *new* lines of Egyptian royalty.

Over time, with each regime change, Joseph’s legacy was forgotten among the Pharaohs and Egyptian people. They had no interest in preserving the story of all Jehovah had done through Joseph and his family. Egypt forgot the hope Joseph brought the whole nation when times were dark, during the famine.

In the end, this would cost Egypt dearly. The country would lose its dominant place in the world, becoming a mere shadow of what it once was. In a sense, even Egypt couldn’t survive Egypt!

Spiritual: Motivated by Hope

Hebrews 11:22 says, “By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.” Joseph understood his greatest blessing wasn’t Egypt; it was God’s promises to him. All his success in Egypt couldn’t make Joseph forget Egypt was nothing compared to what was ahead for him and God’s people. The promises of Egypt couldn’t compare to the promises of God.

Through all the ups and downs, Joseph always lived with this supernatural, eternal hope. The evidence of this hope manifested in his actions, values, and choices. God’s Word (His promises) and His Spirit kept Joseph in a heaven-oriented mindset. Paul explained in Romans 5:5: “And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

The fact Joseph didn’t lose sight of the promise is a miracle of faith in itself, something only the power of the Spirit of God could bring about. He knew, ultimately, he would be with God and His people, in the land God had promised. Because Joseph knew his real inheritance was heavenly and spiritual, Joseph was able to remain completely invested in serving God throughout his time in Egypt.

This is how God’s people live in Egypt when they are motivated by a hope for heaven: We don’t live in Egypt *waiting* for heaven. We live in Egypt *inspired* by it! Paul described it beautifully to Timothy:

6For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

**—2 Timothy 4:6–8**

Do you see the difference between living in Egypt waiting for heaven and living in Egypt *inspired* by heaven? Paul didn’t bide his time, waiting around for his number to be called. Rather, God used the promise of an eternal hope to inspire Paul to leave it all on the field, just as God did with Joseph.

Unfortunately, that’s not how many Christians think. We think to be heaven-minded, you can’t care about Egypt, but that’s not what God wants for us. Instead, He intends us to fight for survival here with everything we’ve got, inspired by a hope in something greater, which should enable us to impact Egypt in huge ways.

Throughout history, God has used His people to launch a vast majority of hospitals, universities, and orphanages around the world. When we are focused on our work for God’s kingdom, He does great things. Therefore, we remain fully engaged in Egypt, being used for God’s glory, while living with inspiration from our hope in His heavenly kingdom.

Personal: A People and a Place

Egypt offers only short, shallow hope, no matter how successful or admired you may become. Exodus 1:8–9 tells us Egypt will always break its promises, because Egypt’s hope is not the same as God’s hope. Egypt wants us to forget the promises of God, distracting us from God’s hope and replacing it with Egyptian hope. But God offers the only true hope, driven by our inward yearning to be a part of two things: a people and a place.

**Hope for a People**

Most people identify themselves by race, nationality, profession, or their circle of friends, but children of God have an identity superseding all of those. It’s part of the benefit of being called God’s chosen people.

9But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

**—1 Peter 2:9–10**

Our hope is not in nationality, ethnicity, or occupation; it’s in being among those who have a stake in the promise God made to Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. The promise of a great nation wasn’t just about Israel: God was talking about us—you and me, and the promise of His church.

If Egypt can teach us anything, it’s that we desperately need to cling to each other. The good news is, our connection lasts beyond Egypt, which can never destroy our identity and our relationship with God’s people. Chosen by God’s sovereign grace, His people will be together for all eternity as *His* nation. That sounds good, right? But our hope doesn’t stop there.

**Hope for a Place**

We also live for hope of our return to the promised land, but it’s not Canaan. The land of Canaan is a mere symbol for eternity with God, as Jacob and Joseph both understood. The promised land is heaven, in the presence of God. Here’s what Jesus said about hope for a place:

1Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

**—John 14:1–3**

Now that’s a place! Our inward struggle with feeling out of place in Egypt comes from the fact that Egypt, in many respects, is nothing more than a guest house. We experience emotional tension living and surviving in Egypt while simultaneously longing for our real home Jesus is preparing for us right now.

We feel it when we miss loved ones no longer with us and when it seems like we’re strangers amid our own earthly existence. We may feel pain, rejection, loneliness, and guilt. Sometimes we feel emptiness, a void, as if there’s something missing inside, yet we can’t put our finger on exactly what. Those moments make us wonder, “Is this all there is?”

**Homesick for People and a Place**

If you can relate to yearning for something you struggle to define, you are not alone. It’s hard to reconcile because Egypt has always been your physical home, so it seems we should be content here. But it’s not our home; again, it’s a guesthouse, and what you’re feeling is homesickness for a people and a place, a manifestation of our longing for God’s promises.

Let this clarity drive you. Let it teach you to stop feeling sorry for yourself, inspiring you instead to press toward the goal of surviving Egypt in a way pleasing to your God. The home awaiting you is far greater than what’s in front of you right now. It’s far more satisfying than your deepest earthly desires. It’s far more loving than any of your earthly relationships.

As you look forward to receiving God’s promises, let it drive you to leave a legacy, like Joseph did. May yours be a story of survival motivated by hope in God’s promise of a people and a place.

For all of us whose eyes are set on His promises, it’s time to serve relentlessly as we anticipate God visiting His people—the final return of our big brother, Jesus. What an amazing day that will be, the day we are done with this wretched place called Egypt and all its false hope, pain, and disappointment! What an incredible moment when *together* we all see our Jesus face to face, celebrating our survival story, our salvation, and the fulfillment of His promises.

We live in the hope of life after Egypt: life with our God and His people, in his house. Until then, we will do what Joseph did, serving relentlessly, inspired by the promise God has given us for a people and a place. Let’s write our part of the story so God’s future people can learn, from our example, how to survive in this place we call Egypt.

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About the Author



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