

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome,⁷ and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

⁸ But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹ No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

¹¹ One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹² She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

¹⁶ She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. ¹⁷ Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. ¹⁸ But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

¹⁹ When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. ²⁰ Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, ²¹ the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. ²² So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. ²³ The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

In the name of our Savior Jesus, dear friends,

The family's story reveals a great deal of dysfunction. Kids from one wife favored over the kids from the other wife. What was either sinful pride or a lack of caring (or understanding the feelings of others) in one young man. Talking behind a brother's back and plotting and scheming to harm him. Lying to and deceiving the father. Actually selling their 17-year old brother as a slave to a caravan heading for Egypt. What a mess!

It's almost impossible to fathom that this was Jacob's family—one of the great patriarchs of God's people! The favored son who battled arrogance (or an unloving attitude) was Joseph. And it is true, his brothers so despised him and their father's favoritism toward him that they sold him for 8 ounces of silver and faked his death so that their father grieved the loss of his favorite son. Though Joseph was a naïve and imperfect teenager, he did not deserve the horrendous and sinful treatment he received from his brothers.

From early on though, God had plans for this family and for Joseph in particular. The trade merchants ended up selling Joseph to one of Pharaoh's officials, a man named Potiphar, who was the captain of the guard, probably dealing with prison and executions. Joseph would serve in the home of an Egyptian government official.

There is a certain refrain that runs through the story of Joseph's life. Well, there are two, really. The first is that trouble kept finding him—even when he didn't seem to deserve it, even when he was doing the right thing. The other running theme is this: The LORD was with Joseph and gave him success. Chapter 39 of Genesis says that a handful of times and the story of Joseph's life bears it out.

As we consider Joseph today, we'll also talk about some things that make us wonder IS FAITHFULNESS TO GOD WORTH THE TROUBLE IT BRINGS? But first let's look at this event from the life of one of God's faithful people and be assured that the answer to that question is "Yes."

I'm not much of a roller-coaster fan as I know some of you are. The more extreme the heights and the drops, the better for some, but not for me! When it comes to everyday life, I also like things to be relatively smooth. Most of us can probably agree that would be nice, but it's not always the case. Joseph's life sure wasn't smooth. It was absolutely roller-coaster-like!

From the height of receiving dreams from God to the low of being despised for those dreams by your siblings.

From the height of favored-son status to the low of hatred by his brothers.

From the height of living with his family in Canaan to the low of living away from them all in a foreign land.

From the height of being surrounded by God's people to the low of living among the idol-worshipping Egyptians.

From the height of freedom to the low of a servant's life.

From the height of success in Potiphar's house to the low of banishment in prison.

Up and down. Up and down.

After being sold as a slave, the LORD caused Joseph to prosper in Potiphar's house. His master noticed that everything he did was profitable for him, so he allowed him to move into the house from the slave quarters. He then promoted him to personal attendant. Later he put the entire household (including the slaves) under his care. And finally, Potiphar made him manager of all he owned. This is how well it went: **From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate (39:5-6).**

Smart, faithful, effective...and very attractive also. You and I would love to have someone like that working for us. And if we're not every one of those things, we might wish we were! But we may know what comes along with some of those things. Perhaps you or I can relate to the temptation to pride yourself in being smarter than your boss and disrespecting him or her because of it. To cut corners if your faithfulness goes unappreciated. To work only as hard as you need to instead of giving your best. We all know what sexual temptations are like too. And a person gifted with great physical beauty or handsomeness—like Joseph—may be tempted to take advantage of that in a sinful way. It's that last temptation that arose in Joseph's blessed life in Potiphar's home.

Mrs. Potiphar noticed all of this in Joseph as he served in their home and she eventually let her desire for him be known. She wanted a physical relationship with him. Joseph explained that this would be terribly disrespectful of her husband who trusted him AND a sin against God. "No" did not mean "no" to her! She was after him continually, but Joseph refused and tried to avoid her altogether. This sounds like the definition of sexual harassment, doesn't it?

One day she found him alone and again urged him to sleep with her. But Joseph ran off while she was left clutching his outer robe. She was now as angry at him as she was attracted to him. She held onto that cloak of his until Potiphar came home and used it as evidence that Joseph had tried to attack her.

We don't know if Potiphar was angry at his wife, suspecting her of not telling the truth, or at Joseph for what she accused him of. The action Potiphar took is interesting though. He put him in prison where those who committed political crimes would be held. This was by far preferable to what would normally have been the death penalty or sent to a dungeon with no hope of release. Sadly, though, Joseph has to suffer for doing the right thing in God's eyes. I don't know about you, but it might have caused me to wonder if faithfulness to God was worth it because of the trouble that resulted! That's the way my sinful mind might very well have responded.

We don't hear any of that from Joseph. What we hear is that he made the best of the situation by showing himself useful to the warden in charge and that the LORD was with him and blessed him even there. So talented was Joseph and so blessed by God that the same thing happened in the king's prison that happened in Potiphar's house. His skills were noticed and he was given responsibility there among those who awaited their day in the Egyptian court.

There are two ways that Joseph could have viewed all that happened to him—and that would continue to happen to him because this is the way his life would continue to go for a while. He could have cried, *“Unfair! Why should I bother living the way God asks me to if it's just going to get me in trouble anyway?! This isn't worth it!”* OR he could endure suffering for doing the right thing in God's eyes and trust that the LORD was pleased with him and had a plan for his life.

It sure looks and sounds like he did the latter. We don't hear about any whining and complaining. As a sinful human being, he probably struggled with feelings like we would have, but he seems to have held a steady trust in the Lord. You should read the rest of Joseph's life story, but I'll cut to the point at which he is reunited with his brothers and he reveals himself to them as he sits second-in-command to Pharaoh in Egypt and his brothers are in a vulnerable position before him. Listen to what he said then: **“I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt (Genesis 45:3-8).**

What a good example Joseph is for us! He was faithful to God, which at times brought about mental anguish, emotional pain and suffering, and physical discomfort. His faithfulness didn't always seem to be rewarded, although ultimately God did bless him in worldly ways. More importantly, his relationship with the LORD of his life and judge of his soul was kept intact.

This is an important lesson for us because we have our moments where we become angry at God and we're tempted to chuck it all, say *"Forget it"* and walk away from the LORD because faithfulness to him doesn't seem to be worth the trouble we endure.

We too get treated unfairly. Scientists, professors, and fellow students ridicule us for our faith in a God whom we believe created everything. People exclude us when they know we won't behave like they behave because we have morals based on God's Word. I don't know how any Christian is able to serve in politics in our country these days because if you profess faith in the Bible and Jesus as your Savior, you become the butt of jokes and are almost unelectable. And as Christians who trust that the Bible is the Word of God, more trouble is headed our way with the Supreme Court ruling this past week regarding gay marriage. Intolerant and unloving are the accusations made against us by a society that continues its slide into moral decay. The more you properly represent your Lord and Savior in a sinful world, the more suffering you'll endure and the more you'll be tempted to throw in the towel, saying, *"Faithfulness to God is not worth the trouble it brings."*

You and I should keep Joseph in mind. He was a God-fearing man living in a pagan culture. He was faithful to God and the Lord was blessing him even when it wasn't obvious because he had a plan for his child.

You also heard about Moses in our second lesson today. Remember what it said about him? **"He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward (Hebrews 11:25-26).** The example of Moses urges us also to not live for sinful moments and the approval of a sinful world, but keep your eyes on Jesus and the eternal life he holds out for you.

In the face of a world that was confused about who Jesus was, Peter was bold enough to confess that Jesus was the Christ. Will you and I be so bold? God calls us to be. Is it worth it to you to let your faith in Christ be known? In his first letter, Peter wrote this: **But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (3:14-16).**

Joseph, Moses, Peter, other men and women in Scripture—all give us good examples to follow when it comes to living for God, understanding that God has plan for his children, and that ultimately, the goal is not comfort in this world, but eternal life with God in heaven. But none of them are perfect examples because all were tainted with sin like you and me.

The exception is Jesus. He was the perfect example of unjust suffering. He never disobeyed his Father in heaven. He never wilted under pressure to do what was right. When tempted by Satan to show a lack of trust in his Father to provide what he needed and turn stones into bread, Jesus didn't do it, even though he would have felt physically better. When Satan pulled at him in the Garden of Gethsemane and he prayed to his Father about the possibility of another way to pay for the world's sin, he did not give in and avoid suffering for doing his Father's will. You and I and the rest of the world are blessed because he was faithful even when it brought him torture and death. His life, given for you, provides you with forgiveness when you don't hold up as well as Joseph did in the face of temptation, when your sinful mind fights your faith.

Our lives can sometimes be roller-coaster-like as Joseph's was. It can be hard to figure out why God would allow this or that to happen to us when we are living for him and doing the right thing. But the child of God knows what Joseph realized and what the apostle Paul promises us: **I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. And...we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:18, 28).**

And finally, the words of Jesus himself speak of the suffering a faithful follower willingly endures for the Savior: **If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it (Luke 9:23-24).**

Jesus forgives our failures to faithfully live for him. He urges us to live in that forgiveness with complete trust in the Lord's plan for our lives and, with an eye on heaven, remain faithful until the end when our struggles will cease and we will finally realize how very worth it it was to cling to faith in Jesus. Amen.

**Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**