

**Foundations: Joseph III**  
**Waiting Wisely**  
**Genesis 41:1-16, 39-43 (AFBC 11/19/17)**

**1** When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile, **2** when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. **3** After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. **4** And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

**5** He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. **6** After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted—thin and scorched by the east wind. **7** The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up; it had been a dream.

**8** In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

**9** Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. **10** Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. **11** Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.

**12** Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. **13** And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged."

**14** So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. **15** Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." **16** "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

*(Now, we won't take time to read the whole story, but God gave Joseph the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams: there would be seven years of good harvests, followed by seven years of famine. Joseph proposed a plan to have all the farmers turn in one fifth of their harvest each year for the next seven years and store it for distribution later during the famine—we'll pick up the story now with verse 37:)*

**37 The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. 38 So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" 39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. 40 You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."**

**41 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." 42 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. 43 He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.**

**ANTHEM:** \_\_\_\_\_

Back in October, we spent two Sundays considering the life of the patriarch, Joseph. On each of those occasions, terrible things happened to him. The first week, his brothers threw him in a well and sold him into slavery.

But God brought something good--so it seemed--out of this bad experience. Joseph became the head servant of a man named Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials. Joseph lived in Potiphar's house and was put in charge of everything he owned.

Nothing was off limits to Joseph—except, of course, Potiphar's wife. Joseph got that message; but somehow, the wife didn't.

This resulted in Joseph being falsely accused and sent to prison. Last time, I mentioned that Joseph's story reminds me of the old Hee Haw song, "If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all." But there's certainly more to his story than that.

Joseph's experiences also assure us of God's ability to bring something good out of the bad things that happen. God can accomplish through us things we could never have imagined—unless... God made them known to us in a DREAM.

Dreams play a very prominent role in Joseph's story. We first meet Joseph as a young, somewhat spoiled, seventeen year old who pesters his older brothers and, frankly, worries his father, too, with his outlandish dreams of grandeur.

Two of his dreams involve family members bowing down before him! And Joseph loved telling his family about these dreams!

Genesis 40 tells us about the Pharaoh's baker and his cupbearer who end up in the same jail that Joseph's in--and THEY both have dreams too.

Joseph interprets their dreams, telling the cupbearer that he will soon get his old job back, while breaking the news to the baker that he will soon be toast! And... Joseph was right!

Pharaoh also had dreams. He wanted to know their meaning, so his cupbearer told him that he knew someone who could interpret dreams. After thirteen long years, this got Joseph--not just out of prison, but--into a high position in Pharaoh's government.

This morning, we find Joseph once again rising to a position of prominence. God had put a dream in young Joseph's heart. It sounded proud and presumptuous, but now Joseph's dream is coming true!

Don't you know there were moments when Joseph questioned his dreams. Thirteen years is a long time to wait. Life was passing him by. I wonder--do you ever feel that way?

Waiting can be a bit of a dilemma. Most of us don't like to wait; yet we're often called upon to do it! I often speak to families in hospital waiting rooms who are anxious to receive news concerning their loved one—that's hard... waiting.

It's also hard when your dreams are put on hold. But how much harder to wait while locked away in a prison cell.

And in Joseph's case, he'd been falsely imprisoned. On one hand, he had his dreams. On the other hand, he had no choice but to wait and wonder if those dreams would ever come about.

Joseph's story can teach us about waiting and taking experiences that are negative and turning them into something that's actually positive. Let me share with you a few observations:

**1. THINK OF WAITING AS A TIME OF PREPARATION.** When you find yourself going through difficulties, remember that you really have no idea what God may be preparing you for.

We may be guilty at times of wanting to see our dreams come true before we're ready. Some are blessed with the good sense to know when they're not ready for certain responsibilities:

Charlie Brown and Linus were talking one day. Linus says, **"I don't like to face problems head on. I think the best way to solve problems is to avoid them. In fact, this is a distinct philosophy of mine. No problem is so big or so complicated that it can't be run away from."**

But some problems just won't go away—like the little fellow who hadn't studied as he should. Before going to bed, he prayed: **"Now I lay me down to rest, and hope to pass tomorrow's test. If I should die before I wake, that's one less test I'll have to take."** Chances are, though, he's in some trouble!

Some of us avoid preparation at all costs—and in many different aspects of life. God has to intentionally put some of our dreams on hold so He'll have time to prepare us for what's next--we have to wait for now because... we're just not ready.

When seventeen year old Joseph was talking big about his dreams, he thought he was ready—"Just go ahead and put me in charge, God. I'm ready!" But God said, "No, you're not."

There was a lot of growing and maturing that Joseph needed to do before he would be ready to lead. When we have to wait, we're wise to use our time preparing for whatever is next.

**2. THINK OF WAITING AS A TIME OF OPPORTUNITY.** We can focus on how unfair this is and how much better it would be if

we didn't have to wait, OR... we can seize the opportunities that already exist and make the most of them.

God has positioned each of our lives in a unique place of influence—it may be our family, job, neighborhood, team or SS Class. Whatever--we all have access to people, situations and resources that are ours alone to affect in some positive way.

Maybe we're not living our dreams at the moment, but if we would simply ask God how He can use us where we are, there might be undreamed of possibilities right in front of us!

Eventually, Joseph would get promoted to his dream job, literally, but only because he first seized his opportunities and made the most of them—yes, even while he was waiting in prison.

A lesser person would have spent his time complaining and feeling sorry for himself—missing the opportunities before him. But Joseph made the most of them.

In Genesis 39, for example, Joseph was working as Potiphar's servant. He gave his best in that role and was elevated to the position of top servant. Later, when falsely imprisoned, the chief jailer saw Joseph's character and put him in charge of all the other prisoners.

This opened the door for him to interpret the dreams of two of his fellow prisoners. In turn, this eventually got him released from jail and placed in a high position of power.

All of this resulted from Joseph's openness to the opportunities that came his way *while he waited* for his "big break." Sometimes "the big breaks" happen because we've faithfully given our best to all the smaller opportunities that have come along—opportunities that others might overlook.

Jesus talked about this. He told us to be faithful in small things and He would make sure we had opportunities to be faithful in greater things. This same principle was at work back in Joseph's time. Joseph was faithful. Good opportunities came his way.

**"Miracle on the Hudson"** is an example of someone taking advantage of very limited opportunities. Refusing to give in to what seemed to be overwhelming odds against him, **Captain**

**"Sully"** seized upon a tiny window of opportunity and successfully ditched his plane in the Hudson River. 155 souls on board that flight are forever grateful to him. We are too.

Joseph's story is every bit as remarkable: because he took advantage of his opportunities--even while in prison--God worked through Joseph to save his own family, as well as the people of Egypt, from famine.

God's Word paints Joseph as a hero. We shouldn't get so caught up in things that may not be as we would like them to be that we miss the opportunities that are right in front of us!

**3.** Now, one other thing: **THINK OF WAITING AS A TIME OF CLARIFICATION.** There's a story about a chicken farmer who was losing a lot of birds. He decided to write a letter to the Department of Agriculture:

**"Gentlemen," he wrote, "Something is wrong with my chickens. Every morning, I find two or three of them lying on the ground cold and stiff with their feet in the air. Can you tell me what's wrong?"**

Several weeks later, he received a very official-looking document with the following reply: **"Dear Sir: Your chickens are dead."**

**A.** I don't know at what point it became clear to Joseph—while waiting in prison or only after taking the reins of power in Egypt—but surely it dawned on him at some point that **God wants to use each of our lives for some purpose.** God has something for us to do, but first He helps us grow into these responsibilities.

**B.** Another clarification: God had to get Joseph away from a father who doted over him and brothers who hated him to **help him arrive at a sense of who he really was** and what God wanted him to be.

How many people have been ruined by power or wealth that came too soon, before they were clear about their lives, values, and motivations--and before they had learned to depend on God. All this had to be clarified in Joseph's life.

**C.** While in prison, Joseph **gained clarity about his gifts and abilities.** He had dreamed dreams before, but he'd not been an interpreter of dreams until approached by the baker and

cupbearer. Interpreting *their* dreams gave him confidence when he was later asked to interpret *Pharaoh's* dreams.

**D.** Now this: the cupbearer had promised to tell Pharaoh about Joseph, but he forgot. Later, though, you don't hear Joseph complaining to Pharaoh about the cupbearer's lousy memory.

**He doesn't waste time trying to get even**—which, when you think about it, is exactly the spiritual quality he would need later in dealing with his brothers who had hated and mistreated him.

Maybe you're waiting for something to happen in your life right now—and you're tired of waiting—but Joseph reminds us that God often has to deal with some things in our lives before we're ready for Him to use us. He may be preparing us for something beyond our dreams.

We don't always know. Joseph didn't know. But as hard as it was to wait in prison, this became "time well spent." It served a purpose. It prepared Joseph for the next chapter in his life.

This is what the Apostle James was getting at when he wrote: **"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." (James 1:2-4)**

We don't understand why we have to wait... or persevere—why life can't always happen on our time tables. We can resist this and complain about it, or we can open our lives to all the possibilities that present themselves... as we wait.

If you feel that your life is in a holding pattern right now—waiting, wondering, worrying about the future—then please consider this:

**1) God may be PREPARING your life** for something that you don't know about yet.

**2) Waiting always holds OPPORTUNITIES** for new insight and growth.

**3) And, finally, as the old song says, "We will understand it better by and by"—CLARITY will come in God's time.**

Yes, such times are a "test of our faith." Be patient. Trust God. Pass your test—and like Joseph, learn and grow and be ready... for whatever God has in store for your life next!