

Nurturing the Soul #12
“The Meaning of Trials”
Message Notes, May 5, 2024

Genesis 41 Joseph interprets the meaning of the Egyptian Pharaoh’s dream (vv.1-36). Joseph become prime minister of Egypt (vv. 37-55).

- ◆ **The Meaning of trials:** Joseph’s trials were not meant to lead to his personal success (training), but rather to prepare him to be a vessel capable of fulfilling God’s purposes.
 - While Joseph’s life is often understood just as a model success story, such thinking is inaccurate. Through Joseph’s growth, God brought about reconciliation in Jacob’s family, saved the world from a great famine, and set up the miracle of the Israelites’ deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Passover), which is the motif for the salvation of humanity through the sacrificial blood of Christ.
Ephesians 4:12 (NIV) “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”
 - Each one of us, without exception, is entrusted with the task of building up the Kingdom of God, a mission which God trains each of us to fulfill.

1. God desires to limit the length of our trials

- “Two years later” (1) meaning two years after the interpretation and fulfillment of the cupbearer’s dream. Why did God leave Joseph in prison for another two years? Was God harassing him?
- While God’s purpose is not made clear, one thing is certain: He is not prolonging Joseph’s suffering unnecessarily. In Hebrew, “two years” is followed by the plural “days,” literally, “two years’ worth of long days were completed,” implying that God was longing for something to be completed. He was mindful of the time that was passing by.
- 13 years had passed since Joseph was sold into slavery at the age of 17 and became prime minister at the age of 30. Another 9 years passed (2 years of famine after the 7 years of plenty) before he was reunited with his brothers. In all, a staggering period of 22 years was required before he was finally reconciled with his brothers. Abraham experienced 25 years of waiting for God’s promise of a son to be fulfilled. Jacob spent 20 years training under his uncle Laban. Learning something (so that it becomes a part of you) requires more than 20 years.

2. The purpose of trials (training) is to nurture the soul

- **Humility:** Joseph’s first words when Pharaoh called him out were, “I cannot do it” (v. 16), demonstrating his humility. Joseph was not trying to impress Pharaoh.
- When he spoke about the prosperity of Pharaoh, Joseph was not speaking for his own gain. This is an excellent political statement spoken purely out of concern for the country. At the time, Egypt was the most influential nation in antiquity, and Joseph was speaking from the perspective of its role and responsibility (leadership).
Romans 13:1 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.
- **Wisdom:** He was not merely foretelling what was to come (vv. 32-33). Joseph’s statement contained a prophetic message and even specific policies that outlined how to prepare for the future. This wisdom from God went far beyond his own knowledge and ideas. Certainly, God revealed them one by one through the Holy Spirit.
- **Approval:** “seemed good” (v. 37) or “looked good” indicates that not only the Pharaoh, but also the dignitaries and wise men present unanimously decided that Joseph was the best man for the job. Selecting such a person (an imprisoned slave) for that position would have been unusual, but the seriousness of the matter and Joseph’s wisdom must have overwhelmed them and convinced even those who had been skeptical at first.
- **The Spirit of God:** The Pharaoh explained that the reason for this is “he is one in whom the spirit of God is (God’s special power) (vv. 38-39). How did Joseph acquire such supernatural

wisdom and humility? It had been nurtured particularly through those “two long years” as well as the entire 13 years of training in Egypt. That was the purpose for the training.

3. The blessings of God received through suffering are of beyond measure

- Verses 40 onward describe Joseph’s unprecedented ascent up the career ladder. He was given the position of number 2 in the kingdom, named Zaphenath-Paneah (meaning one with god-like power over life and death), and given Asenath, daughter of the priest On (the most respected leader in Egypt) as his wife.
- Joseph had wished to be set free, if possible, but God had a plan for him that was far beyond his imagination. Moreover, Joseph’s blessings were not transitory; the seven years of good harvests and the seven years of famine occurred just as he had told them, so the trust the Pharaoh and the other leaders placed in Joseph grew stronger.

Psalm 37:25 I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.

Proverbs 10:22 The blessing of the LORD brings wealth, without painful toil for it.

- While we may not aspire to become the prime minister, God has amazing grace in store for each one of us. What grace have you received so far? Let us remember that the suffering we have experienced is meaningful!
- You are probably heartbroken over a loved one (child, grandchild, family member, friend) who is separated from God. What encouragement does this passage offer to you?

◆ **Summary:** How to receive training correctly

- The pair of names “Manasseh” and “Ephraim” express the way to accept God’s training: through suffering, one comes to understand and receive God’s true blessings (by being made into a usable vessel). Maturity of character does not happen overnight.
- **Manasseh:** for God has made me forget all my labors and all that is in my father’s house.
- **Ephraim:** for God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.
- Through God’s training, we learn that God, who is merciful, is willing to make great use of people like ourselves. Although we must suffer in order to become useful, God is always with us in our daily lives, helping and guiding us so that we can continue to undergo training and not be overwhelmed by suffering.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

◆ **Questions**

1. Do you have any thoughts about the meaning of the trials (training) you are undergoing now?
2. How do you feel about the fact that God wants to shorten the duration of the trials you are undergoing, to the extent that it is possible? Do you agree that He wants to shorten them? If not, why not?
3. Do you truly expect the reward of a soul nurtured through suffering, which we have learned is eternal glory in heaven and grace beyond measure here on earth? If you do not expect such a reward, why not?