

GOD'S MYSTERIOUS WAYS

Part 7 of Foundations 260 - OT. Genesis 39:19-23.

Peter Foxwell. The Cornerstone Church. February 22, 2026.

Dismiss the Middle School

JOSEPH'S BACKGROUND

Last week, in our Foundations 260 readings, we began a journey through the Joseph story.

Joseph is a fascinating character. His life was filled with high highs and low lows. His story illustrates a significant truth:

God's ways may be mysterious, but they always succeed.

We'll talk more about that in a few minutes, but let's take a moment to set the scene for today's teaching.

Joseph's great-grandfather was Abraham. The Lord made a covenant with Abraham to bless him and to bless the nations through him (Genesis 12, 15, 17). He promised to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation, from which would come kings. And we know that the ultimate ruler is Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world (Galatians 3:16).

Joseph's father was Jacob, and he inherited the covenant promises. His twelve sons became the patriarchs of the nation of Israel. And Joseph was his eleventh son. So ... he was an heir to God's promises.

But that did not make Joseph's life a walk in the park.

JOSEPH'S LIFE STORY

Let's take a moment to review Joseph's life story:

- Joseph was Jacob's favorite son.
- God showed Joseph in a dream that he would rule over his brothers.
- Joseph's brothers plotted to kill him, but ended up selling him as a slave.
- He was bought by an Egyptian official named Potiphar, and...

Genesis 39:2-4 (CSB) The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, serving in the household of his Egyptian master. 3 When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made everything he did successful, 4 Joseph found favor with his master and became his personal attendant. Potiphar also put him in charge of his household and placed all that he owned under his authority.

- Potiphar's wife propositioned Joseph, but when he resisted, she falsely accused him of attacking her.
- Potiphar put Joseph in prison.
- After a time, the warden put Joseph in charge of the prisoners.
- Joseph was released and made the prime minister of Egypt.
- Joseph rescued his father and brothers during a famine.

High highs and low lows. That's what I mean by God's mysterious ways.

Let's take a moment to explore those in more detail.

GOD'S MYSTERIOUS WAYS

God's mysterious ways are technically called "providence" or his sovereign oversight of everything. God oversees all things to accomplish his plans.

Joseph's experience in prison is a fascinating illustration of providence.

His reward for integrity when propositioned by Potiphar's wife was a prison sentence. He went from hero to zero in seconds:

Genesis 39:19-23 (CSB) When his master heard the story his wife told him — "These are the things your slave did to me" — he was furious 20 and had him thrown into prison, where the king's prisoners were confined. So Joseph was there in prison.

21 But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him. He granted him favor with the prison warden. 22 The warden put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph's authority, and he was responsible for everything that was done there. 23 The warden did not bother with anything under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him, and the LORD made everything that he did successful.

Joseph's success didn't depend on people, location, or luck, but on God. The Bible tells us, **"The Lord was with him, and the Lord made everything that he did successful"** (verses 3 and 23). This was due to the Lord's **"kindness"** (verse 21), which in Hebrew means his covenant love and loyalty.

Joseph's experience teaches two things about providence that will help us through the twists and turns of life as we follow Jesus:

FIRST, GOOD & BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOD'S PEOPLE.

Life is never a straight line to success. No one has a charmed life. Not even God's people.

God gave Joseph success in Potiphar's house and in prison, but remember why Joseph ended up in a dungeon; it was **BECAUSE** he was a good man. It was unfair and unjust.

God's covenant promises do not shield us from hard knocks. Faithful Christians get beaten up by life. Even Jesus was betrayed, condemned, tortured, and crucified. The apostle Paul wrote about his hardships:

2 Corinthians 11:23-27 (CSB) Are they servants of Christ? I'm talking like a madman – I'm a better one: with far more labors, many more imprisonments, far worse beatings, many times near death. 24 Five times I received the forty lashes minus one from the Jews. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day in the open sea. 26 On frequent journeys, I faced dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, and dangers among false brothers; 27 toil and hardship, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often without food, cold, and without clothing.

Paul's reward for faithful service was rejection, poverty, and pain.

God's mysterious ways mean that we experience the good and the bad. Life is full of pleasure and pain. But life's detours and losses do not mean God has forgotten, abandoned, or rejected us. God is always good to us, present with us, and working his plan for us.

And that is the second lesson we learn from Joseph's prison term...

SECOND, GOD'S PLAN ALWAYS SUCCEEDS.

God's plan always succeeds. God's plan was to send a Savior from the nation of Israel, and through that Savior to form a people for his glory.

Joseph and his brothers would become the Patriarchs of Israel. Therefore, Joseph's life was protected and preserved so that he could be in place as Egypt's prime minister and provide grain for his brothers during the famine.

God's plans always succeed because it is *"the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will"* (Ephesians 1:11).

Think about the twists and turns of God's plan illustrated in Joseph's life. He was rescued from the pit his brothers threw him into, he was protected even in the horrors of the slave trade and Potiphar's unjust fury, and finally, he was promoted during a term in prison where execution was a daily possibility.

Eventually, Joseph was put in charge of the royal grain stores, *"coincidentally"* just in time for his brothers' arrival, looking for food to take back to Canaan during a devastating famine. The patriarchs of the nation of Israel were preserved BECAUSE Joseph was preserved by God's providence.

And God's plan for us will succeed...

I often recite a portion of Romans 8 in prayer to remind myself and give thanks to God that his plan for his people - all Christ-followers - will not fail:

Romans 8:28-30 (CSB) We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.

God uses everything we're going through - the good, bad, and ugly - to transform our character and advance his saving, sanctifying plan for us and the world. *"It's all good"* isn't a throwaway phrase. John Piper describes what God is doing:

"God has revealed his purposeful sovereignty over good and evil in order to humble human pride, intensify human worship, shatter human hopelessness, and put ballast in the battered boat of human faith, steel in the spine of human courage, gladness in the groans of affliction, and love in the heart that sees no way forward." (Providence, by John Piper. Crossway, 2021. p. 13)

William Cowper was an English poet and a faithful follower of Jesus who suffered from crippling depression. In the dark days, he clung to the truth that God never abandons his people, and his plans always succeed. In 1773, Cowper wrote a poem that became a popular hymn that still speaks comfort and encouragement today, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way."

God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform; he plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines, of never-failing skill, he fashions up his bright designs, and works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds that you much dread, are big with mercy and will break in blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace; behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan his work in vain; God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain.

REST IN THE GREATNESS OF GOD

When I'm stressed out and anxious, what helps me the most is a reminder that God is great, and his plan for me is good. He never fails.

When the battered, crucified, dead body of our Lord Jesus Christ was laid in the grave, even his closest disciples thought it was all over. He had failed. All their hopes for the Messiah and Savior were crushed.

But then, on the third day, early in the morning before dawn, God worked his plan despite, and actually by, the “failure” of the crucified Christ. Jesus rose from the grave, conquering death and offering salvation to the world.

And on our hardest days, when we might doubt God and his plan for us, remember this: ***“it's Friday but Sunday's a comin'.”***

So, when the darkness of loss, failure, pain, or despair descends, remember that God preserved Joseph to fulfill his plan. And God raised Jesus to fulfill his plan. And God will finish the work he began in you to fulfill his plan. He will never leave you, but he will bring you to eternal glory in Christ.

Jude 1:24-25 (CSB) Now to him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, without blemish and with great joy, 25 to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Review

- Review Peter's February 22nd teaching and study guide.
- What were the main insights of Peter's teaching?
- What questions do you have about the passage or Peter's teaching?
- What were the main applications or takeaways for your life?

Discuss

1. How does it change your view of "success" to see Joseph thriving both in Potiphar's house and in prison, not because of circumstances but because "the Lord was with him"?
2. Joseph ends up in prison precisely because he did the right thing. How does that challenge the idea that "if I obey God, life will go smoothly"? How can we avoid getting mad at God when things don't go the way we want?
3. If you really believed God is using every circumstance to make you more like Christ and to bring you to glory, what is one attitude or habit that would begin to change this week?
4. How does the pattern of cross then resurrection—"it's Friday but Sunday's coming"—shape the way you face present anxiety, grief, or disappointment?

Prayer Focus

- 247: "Lord, please add daily to the Cornerstone those who are being saved."
- Pray for "eyes" to see and a heart to believe that God is working his plan in our lives, even in the highs and lows we experience.