Week 5: *Genesis 39:21-40:23*

**Hook**

**Main Point:** God is with us even in difficult times.

The term FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) was validated in the English language in 2013 by its inclusion in the Oxford English Dictionary:

FOMO: Anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening elsewhere, often aroused by posts seen on social media.¹

The allure to compare one’s life on social media to another has caused many to fall prey to FOMO, as many as 56 percent of social media users reported suffering from FOMO.²

**Q:** Have you ever found yourself succumbing to FOMO?

**Q:** How do you protect yourself from comparing your life to the lives of others?

**Q:** What do you think drives individuals to be concerned that they are missing out?

**Transition:** At this point in Joseph’s story, it would be easy for him to be concerned that he has missed his destiny and his future is dashed. However, we will discover that even though his circumstances seem grim, God is moving in Joseph’s life and orchestrating events that will place the young man exactly where God wants him to be.
Week 5: Genesis 39:21-40:23

Book

Main Point: God is with us even in difficult times.

Text Summary: Potiphar threw Joseph into prison, but God was with Joseph and blessed him, even in prison. Just as Potiphar had done, the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of the prison and trusted him completely. God made everything that Joseph did succeed. God orchestrated an unusual plan to get Joseph out of prison and into the Pharaoh’s house, by having Joseph interpret the dreams of two of Pharaoh’s chief servants.

Genesis 39:21-23 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Even in the pits of our lives, God is with us and blesses us.

Q: How does this description of what happened to Joseph in prison sound similar to Potiphar’s house?

Q: How do you think this would have made him feel? Do you think Joseph was happy to be in the prison since he was now in charge? If not, why not?

Last week’s passage landed on a bit of a sour note; Joseph was thrown into prison (v. 20). But the text immediately presents the reader with hope in the form of three words: “but the Lord.” Joseph goes through horrible times, but God is always there.

The Lord showed Joseph “steadfast love” (v. 21). The Hebrew word that is translated as “steadfast love” or “lovingkindness,” chesed, includes both unconditional love and mercy (kindness). Chesed is a love that cannot be sentimentalized—it has the attributes of strength, loyalty and steadfastness that is based in the covenant relationship between God and His people. This word is used of God’s covenant love for His people—His commitment and loyalty to them, His faithfulness to them even when they are unfaithful to them, His unconditional grace and compassion for His people (Isa. 63:7; Ps. 145:8; Ex. 34:6-7).

As we say in our marriage covenant vows – “in sickness and in health,” chesed is a love that stays strong through everything and anything. “For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,’ says the LORD, who has compassion on you” (Isa. 54:10). God has His hand on Joseph and will not let go, no matter what.

God gave Joseph favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison, just as with Potiphar. The keeper of the prison put him in charge of everything that happened there and trusted him completely
From his father’s house to Potiphar’s house, to the prison, to Pharaoh’s house, this seems to be the recurring steps of Joseph’s life:

- God made all that Joseph did succeed
- People saw God’s favor on Joseph
- He was given more responsibility

As we said last week, this doesn’t necessarily mean that we will “succeed” in a physical way if we are faithful to God. This is the way that God blessed Joseph, but God’s blessing can come in different forms. Sometimes, “success” doesn’t look like being made second in command to the most powerful leader in the world. Success isn’t about how much money you have in the bank or how big your house or car is or what job you have. True success is living a life that is pleasing to God, which we can do as the CEO or as the janitor.

In the New Testament, Jesus challenged the idea that success is the accumulation of worldly wealth when He asked, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?” (Matt. 16:24–26). He chastised the rich fool who spent his life accumulating wealth on earth but did not store up treasures in heaven (Luke 12:13–21). For “where your treasure is, there also is your heart” (Matt. 6:21).

God loves to provide good gifts for His children (Matt. 6:25–33), but those focused on worldly success focus on the gifts rather than the giver. True biblical success is a life that sees God’s blessing in the peaks and in the valleys—in Pharaoh’s house and in the prison. A life that remains faithful to God no matter what is going on in life finds contentment and peace and joy in all circumstances—whether “brought low … or abounding … facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need” (Phil. 4:12). A person who is successful in God’s eyes will find joy in all circumstances because his treasure is found in the giver Himself, not the gifts.

Q: Do you know anyone whom you would consider successful on a spiritual level? What is that person’s life like? How is he or she spiritually successful?

Q: Do you know anyone who is successful in a worldly sense, but not on a spiritual level? What is missing in that person’s life?

**Genesis 40:1-4 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** If you find yourself thrown back into the pit, that doesn’t mean your story is over.

“Some time after this …” (v. 1) We’re not exactly sure how long Joseph was in prison before this story, but it was long enough for the prison keeper to notice him and give him more and more
responsibility until he trusted him to run the whole prison, so several months or maybe even years.

It can be easy for us to read this story in a few chapters and not really understand how long Joseph spent waiting and being faithful where he was before God brought His plan for His life to fruition. He spent 13 years in Potiphar’s house and in prison before he was made overseer of Pharaoh’s house. Then, the seven years of plenty before the famine (41:53), then a few more years before he saved his brothers and they all moved to Egypt to be with him. But Joseph stayed faithful and trusted in God through every peak and valley.

Q: When we are in the middle of a challenging situation and we can’t see a happy conclusion in sight, how can we stay faithful? How can we have patience and trust in God?

Q: What if your situation doesn’t have the kind of happy conclusion you thought it would? How should you respond?

It would be easy for Joseph to think that this was the end, but it wasn’t. It was just another valley. When we hit a setback, we need to remind ourselves that it’s not the end of our story.

If you are in a place where you can’t see a life beyond your circumstances, if you can’t ever imagine that things will ever be good again . . . don’t quit. Don’t stay stuck. Keep moving forward and focus on the Lord. And one day, things will be good again. A different good, but they will be good. And you will look back and be amazed at how God brought you through that to a new good you never thought would ever be possible.

Not because everyone gets a “happily ever after” as in a movie, with everything tied up neatly in a bow. But because walking with the Lord means we have learned how to be content in whatever circumstances we find ourselves in (Phil. 4:6–7). When we walk with the Lord, our definition of what is “good” changes. We aren’t looking for the sappy movie happy ending; we are looking for God’s supernatural peace in whatever we are going through in life—which we can receive when we give our anxieties to the Lord in prayer (Phil. 4:6–7).

Q: If you have a story about moving beyond something that was earth-shattering and you feel comfortable sharing it, please share it with the group.

Q: How can we encourage people who are in situations such as this without sounding trite or minimizing their pain?

**Genesis 40:5-23 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** You never know how God is orchestrating your future in the here and now. Always be faithful, no matter what situation you are in.
Q: How did God use Joseph’s specific gifts to make an impact in this story? How did it affect the cupbearer, the baker, the Pharaoh and Joseph himself?

Q: How was God laying the groundwork for Joseph’s release from prison and appointment as Pharaoh’s overseer?

Pharaoh’s chief cupbearer and the chief baker were thrown into the same prison as Joseph (vv. 1–4). We know from earlier that this prison was “the place where the king’s prisoners were confined” (39:20). This fits with the title for Potiphar, “chief of the slaughterers” or chief executioner. He was in charge of the prisons of the king.

The chief cupbearer and chief baker were officers of high rank in the ancient Near East. They were the ones Pharaoh trusted to be sure that the wine he drank and the food he ate were safe. They were overseers of hundreds of people who prepared food and ran the vineyards and the kitchens. These were the people the king trusted with his life—some of his greatest confidantes and men of great influence. We don’t know what they did to make the king angry with them, if anything.

These men knew their dreams were significant but they did not know what they meant (v. 7). Their comment “there is no one to interpret them” refers to Pharaoh’s magicians and wise men whose job it was to interpret dreams (41:8). Had they still been in Pharaoh’s household, the men would have sought their council. But now they are forced to look to Joseph … just one more thing God had orchestrated.

So Joseph interpreted their dreams; he did not claim to have this ability himself – he gave credit to God for it (v. 8). This will set the stage for what we will talk about more in the next chapter – God gave Joseph the ability to do what Pharaoh’s magicians and wise men could not. Joseph’s interpretations are that in three days, the cupbearer will be restored to his position, but the baker will be executed (vv. 9–19). And, of course, the dreams came true (vv. 20–22).

As awful as Joseph’s being thrown into prison was, especially because he was falsely accused, had he not been in that prison, he would never have been there to interpret the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker. If he had not been thrown into the pit by his brothers, he would never have been in Potiphar’s house or even in Egypt at all. He still would have been living in his father’s house in Canaan, and in 10 years, his whole family would have been dead from the famine. You never know what God is doing with your today to prepare you for what is coming tomorrow.

Q: How might this have made Joseph feel about his own dreams from so long ago, when he was 17, that his brothers would bow down to him?
Q: How would this have given Joseph hope?

So Joseph did this amazing thing, and at this point, we, the reader, have renewed hope that he will get out of prison and things will finally end well for him. But the chapter ends on another negative—another pit (v. 23). When Joseph interpreted the cupbearer’s dream, he asked him to—when he got back into Pharaoh’s good graces—mention him to Pharaoh, to get him out of prison (v. 14). Joseph pleaded his innocence. He did not blame Potiphar’s wife or accuse her of lying or blame Potiphar, he only asserted his own innocence (v. 15).

But the cupbearer forgot about Joseph (v. 23), so Joseph stayed in the dungeon. Again, a false start. A hope that things were getting better and then, bam. Back to the pit again. Joseph would be there for two more years until he was given the chance to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams (41:1). In this situation, any of us might have asked, “Does God really have a plan for me? Do I really have any hope for the future?” Yet, Joseph continued to be faithful where he is. Even as a slave, even in prison, even though he is innocent and doesn’t even deserve to be there. As Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, he lived faithfully in “the life that the Lord has assigned to him” (1 Cor. 7:17).

Q: When we live faithfully in less-than-ideal circumstances, how does our perspective change?

Q: What kind of life would you have if you always focused on how your life wasn’t the way you wanted it?

Q: How could it change your life to focus on the good—to live with gratitude for what you do have?

Choose gratitude even in the “pits” of life. No matter what kind of pit you find yourself in, there is something to be thankful to God for. There is good to focus on. If we constantly think about how our lives aren’t where we want them to be, we will never be able to see the good in the here and now. We will never enjoy today. And if we ever get to where we wanted to be, we will look back on our lives before and realize we wasted it being unhappy. Instead, God calls us to live faithfully now. To find peace now. To find contentment now. And let Him worry about our future. He promises that when we give our worries to Him in prayer, He will give us a peace that passes all understanding (Phil. 4:6–7).
**Week 5: Genesis 39:21-40:23**

**Took**

**Main Point:** God is with us even in difficult times.

The loss of one’s peripheral vision, commonly due to glaucoma or *retinitis pigmentosa*, is described as tunnel vision.\(^i\) Peripheral vision is what allows you to see objects around your person without turning your head or moving your eyes; it’s invaluable in traversing the everyday. Tunnel vision presents the challenge of not obtaining a clear and accurate vision of the world around you.

**Q:** In times of distress, how do you avoid focusing only on the problem in front of you?

**Q:** How can we, as a Bible Fellowship, help one another in fighting the urge to focus only on the negative, and in so doing, miss out on all of the blessings God has for us where we are?

**CHALLENGES:**

**THINK: How can I be faithful where I am?** What is God calling you to do right where you are to be faithful? How can you serve and love others where you are? How can you build a better future? How can you live with gratitude even if your life isn’t ideal, even if you aren’t exactly where you want to be?

**PRAY: For God to guide your future** - That God will work out what you are going through now for good. That God will show you the path He has for you. That He will lead you through all of the ups and downs of life. Pray for the trust to let Him guide your present and orchestrate your future.

**ACT: Talk about It** - When someone asks you, “How are you doing” this week, don’t just answer “fine” and move on. Deliberately share at least one positive thing. Answer with something you have been learning, some way God is changing you, or some way you are trying to be faithful.

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\(^i\) https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/fomo

\(^ii\) https://www.fastcompany.com/3016488/yes-fomo-is-now-a-word-in-the-dictionary


\(^vi\) https://www.webmd.com/eye-health/common-causes-peripheral-vision-loss#1