

Press On

READING
Genesis 37-50
Romans 8
Mark 10
James 4
Proverbs 16

In his heart a man plans his course, but Yahweh determines his steps.

Joseph thought he was special. He thought God was going to bless him and raise him up to be a very important person. A person that other people, even his own family, would bow down to and worship.

He was right! But he wasn't very tactful when he told his family about it. He was 17. The second youngest in a family of 12 boys and several sisters. How would you think it would go if he said, "I had a dream, and you're all going to bow down and worship me." He was special, but he wouldn't have scored well on an Emotional Intelligence test.

The brothers reacted badly. **Really** badly. They decided to kill him! They threw him into a hole in the ground while they worked out what to do. But they felt bad, because after all, he was their brother. So in the end they **only** sold him into slavery. But told his father that he had been killed by a wild animal.

They sold their own brother for 20 days pay, and broke their own father's heart. All because they were offended by the message - instead of realising that even though it had been poorly delivered. The message was in fact the truth.

So, Joseph. Sold as a slave by his own brothers. Dragged off to a foreign country to be sold to people who didn't even speak his language. Ends up owned by an important person in Pharaoh's household.

He works hard, shows character and integrity, and is given a lot of responsibility. Maybe things have turned out OK for him after all. Then his owner's wife tries to seduce him, and when he refuses, she falsely accuses him of rape and he's thrown into prison. Was it worth it? Should he have just slept with her as she was demanding? Is God out to get him? Is he cursed? What would you think if you were Joseph in this situation?

We don't read of Joseph having these thoughts. He might have had them. But he pressed on. He continued to shine out his character and integrity. And eventually he was again given more responsibility and freedom. But still in the prison.

There he meets two of Pharaoh's close attendants, who have been thrown in prison because Pharaoh was in a bad mood. He interprets a dream for them and one, the cup bearer, is released but the other, the baker, is beheaded. (Pharaoh was in a really bad mood). The cup bearer promises to remember him, and to put in a good word with Pharaoh.

But he forgets. For two years! Joseph has been let down again by people who should have done better. He's been abandoned again, just when it looked like things were turning around. It would have been reasonable for Joseph to start packing. Ready for his release. Maybe he did. We don't know.

How would you have felt if that happened to you? Maybe it has. Maybe someone let you down badly and should have done better? But Joseph. Betrayed again. Presses on. Would you? Would you have ended it in prison? Suicide can be pretty tempting when hope is shattered like that.

Two years later Pharaoh has a dream and the cup bearer suddenly remembers Joseph. They send for him. He interprets Pharaoh's dream. And is finally released! Pharaoh puts him in charge of the palace. Things are looking up.

Years later. Maybe ten? But at least more than 7, because the years of plenty are over and the famine is getting bad. His brothers turn up in Egypt asking to buy grain. And they unknowingly bow down to the brother they sold into slavery. Just like Joseph had dreamed all those years ago.

What would you do to get even? Is it revenge time? Just say, "no grain for you". Have them killed? Take their money and send them away?

But Joseph has a different view of life than most of us today. "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is today, to save many people alive."

Wow. In all of that. In all the things which happened to him. All those unfair and unjust things. He still saw that the hand of God was working for good. Instead of revenge, Joseph repays them with forgiveness and blessing, and he ends up saving his family from the famine which was sweeping the world. If he hadn't, there might have been no Jews today. They might have all died in the famine 3,500 years ago in Canaan. He could have chosen revenge and had them killed. He had that power. But he chose forgiveness. Because he recognised the hand of God when he saw it.

If God asked you, "Do you mind if I make your life totally miserable for 20 years or so, in order to bring about great blessing for others?" How would you react? Would you accept? What if he didn't tell you the last part. Just said, "Do you mind if I make your life totally miserable?" Would that be the same? What if he just did it, and didn't ask you? Would you be willing to trust him, like Joseph did, that he was doing something good. Even when the evidence around you was looking like God had abandoned you?

What if he asked you to be a poor blind beggar for 30 years. Like Bartimaeus. To have to beg for a living every day. To endure people's hatred and abuse, day after day for 30 years, because you, or your parents, **must** have sinned and done something despicable to deserve this life that you have. Would you be willing to endure all that for 30 years, just so Yeshua could reveal that he is really the son of Yahweh, and prove it by healing you?

Who knows what God is doing in your life. Who knows what his goal is in putting you through the things he is allowing to happen to you. We know that he wants to build your character. He wants you to press on. To persevere. Because in persevering you build character. You become more like his son. You bring him glory. And in building character you strengthen your faith. But what else is he bringing about through your life? Who knows. Joseph didn't know what was going on through his life until it finally happened. But he trusted God all the way.

Like the people in James 4, we make our plans to go to this or that city. To make money. To do a particular job. But our plans don't always work out. Sometimes someone else gets the job. Sometimes the job just vanishes because of some global virus pandemic, like COVID19, that we can't even see. Sometimes things totally out of our control smash our dreams and ambitions.

We make our plans. But Yahweh determines our steps. We can choose to get angry and frustrated because things aren't turning out the way we want. We can even choose to walk away from God altogether. Or we can be like Joseph and trust that God loves us, and he knows what he's doing.

We can be like the disciples. Who gave up and went home. They went back to being fishermen as soon as they thought Yeshua's plan had gone wrong. They went from thinking they were going to be sitting on the left and right of Yeshua, king of Israel, back to just being fishermen on a lake in country Galilee. They walked away from their dreams of being significant people in the kingdom of God, to being content with just being insignificant. All because they didn't realise that God unfolds his plans differently than we do. For God, it doesn't have to all go smoothly. It doesn't have to be in accordance with our limited dreams and expectations. For God those "hiccups" and roadblocks along the way are all part of the original plan. Not just to achieve some small purpose, but to pull together a thousand purposes into one story. To change lives, to change people. Permanently. From the inside.

Like Romans 8. God has a long term view of things, and in the end, everything turns out for the benefit of those who love him. Everything.

Let's be like Joseph. Let's press on when things don't go as we expected. Or as we wanted them to. Let's trust Yahweh. That he does love us. That he is in control. And that nothing. Not a single breath. Nothing happens that he wasn't expecting or which wasn't part of his plan right from the beginning. Everything that happens is the only way to achieve what he is doing through us and through our lives as we live for him, no matter what.

Press on.