

## Pause: Learning To Wait on God Joseph

We are beginning a new series today, "Pause: Learning To Wait on God." The big question of our study is: *"What do you do when there is nothing you can do?"* It is a question of patience.

I love new things. I love possibilities and new ideas. I own hundreds if not thousands of books. Most of them I have read, many of them I have not read. A couple of times a month a new book will catch my eye. It does not matter if I have books on the subject I have not read, I have to have this book.

I order the book from Amazon, and being a Prime member I get free two-day shipping. Those two days are agony. Numerous times each day I check the tracking to make sure it is on schedule. I know. I know. It makes me sound a little crazy. I know that once I place the order, there is nothing I can do to expedite the process. They do not change the delivery schedule because I have checked 15 times today. It is what it is and there is no way to change the way it is.

COVID-19 has forced many changes on us. Some good, many are not. What are those changes that have added to your stress? I encourage you to share with someone around you, right now.

Here are some to get you thinking. Small business owners, did you ask for a significant reduction in revenue? Parents, did you ask for the added stress of homeschool? Kids, what activities have been canceled that you are missing? No one asked for life to be this way. It is what it is and there is no way to change what is.

But let's be honest, it is not just the current crisis. You are facing many circumstances that cannot be changed. Some of you have been given a diagnosis and there is nothing you can do about it. Maybe, you are not enjoying the retirement you hoped for. You were forced into retirement early. The business didn't take off like you thought it would. You thought you made wise investments, but some things were out of your control.

Maybe your child is suffering consequences of decisions you wish they hadn't made. You taught them better. Now that they are old enough for a will of their own, you can't force their hands to do what you want. You can't demand they apologize and make things right. At this moment, it is what it is and it feels as though there is nothing you can do to change the way it is.

You have poured your heart out to God, said the amen. And now like so many people in our Bibles who make a request or are given a vision of the future that is good you have reached the end of you. It seems as though there is nothing you can do. Life is put on pause while you wait on God. What do you do now?

Consider Joseph. He is one of the twelve sons of Jacob. That is not an accurate description. He is the favorite son of Jacob and everyone knows it. *When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. (Genesis 37:4 NIV)*

While this conflict is brewing God ignites a dream in Joseph. In ancient cultures dreams were deeply meaningful. To have a similar dream twice is to suggest that it has been decided or ordained by God. The dream theme continues throughout the story of Joseph.

*He said to [his brothers], “Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.” ...“Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” (Genesis 37:6–7, 9 NIV)*

The implications for his brothers are clear. Joseph intends to keep his privileged position and is claiming it has been ordained by God. Only Joseph seems oblivious to the jealousy that eats away at his brothers. Otherwise, he would have been much more guarded when around his brothers.

Unsuspecting, *So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. And they took him and threw him into a pit. (Genesis 37:23–24 ESV)* The contrast of the vision of God, Joseph exalted above his brothers, and the present reality of Joseph below them in the pit is jarring.

We are given few insights into the mind of Joseph, but as time passes it is reasonable to assume he wrestles with questions of purpose. Sold into slavery, falsely accused of rape, and a two plus year prison sentence appears to move Joseph away from the fulfillment of the vision created by God.

At seventeen, stuck in the pit Joseph cannot see the end of the story. Over the next thirteen years living as a foreigner, a slave, and then a prisoner **Joseph learns no matter the circumstances or others’ actions, God will accomplish his purpose.** But it is a lesson that must be learned through the agony of waiting.

While in prison, Joseph crosses paths with two of the Pharaoh’s servants who have dreams. I told you dreams would play a significant role. By God’s help, he interprets the dreams. The baker will be executed. The cupbearer restored to his position in three days. Joseph makes one request, *“Remember me” (Genesis 40:14 NIV)*. But *The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him. (Genesis 40:23 NIV)*

Throughout the narrative we are told “the Lord was with Joseph,” but does Joseph know this? When the cupbearer forgets, does he wonder if God has forgotten him too? After less than two months of inconvenience, doubts flood our minds. Joseph spends an additional two years in prison. Not because of anything he has done. And there is nothing he can do. It is what it is.

Fast-forwarding a bit, one night Pharaoh has two disturbing dreams. Overhearing Pharaoh’s frustration with anyone’s ability to provide purpose for the dreams, the cupbearer remembers Joseph.

*Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. (Genesis 41:14 ESV)*. The use of “pit” draws a literary connection for us to the “pit” his brothers place him in. For thirteen years Joseph’s life has literally been the pits.

Remarkably, instead of bitterness, Joseph displays faithfulness. Standing before Pharaoh, *“I Cannot Do It,” Joseph Replied to Pharaoh, “but God Will Give Pharaoh the Answer He Desires.” (Genesis 41:16 NIV)* After hearing the interpretation, seven years of abundance followed by seven years of drought, *Then Pharaoh Said to Joseph, “Since God Has Made All This Known to You, There Is no One So Discerning and Wise as You.” (Genesis 41:39 NIV)*

**Even when God's voice seems faint and his presence distant, remain faithful. Faithfulness brings others to faith.**

While there is much that is still unknown about the coronavirus, we are starting to receive some positive news. Doctors are hopeful about some drugs that aid in recovery. Without minimizing the severity of the disease, the death rate appears slightly lower than initial fears. Some take this news and politicize it. Criticizing the extreme measures as an overreaction by groupthink.

As people of faith, as people who have cried out to God for help and healing, Should we not shun bitterness by calling people to the awareness that God is answering our prayers? Our primary response should be one of praise and worship.

I get it. The past few months have been lonely, frustrating, and filled with anxiety. Perhaps there are decisions that we would have made differently if we had the authority. But we didn't. We are here now. It is what it is. So, what does faithfulness look like in this season of physical distancing? What does faithfulness look like when we cannot see God working or feel his presence?

Can we admit God's timing is frustratingly slow? Thirteen years seems like a long time to wait. A lot of births, birthdays, and funerals are missed. But Joseph will reunite with his father and reconcile with his brothers some twenty years after they sold him into slavery.

They threw themselves at his feet offering to be his slave if only he will not seek vengeance. But Joseph said to them, *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."* (Genesis 50:20 NIV)

Joseph has uncovered a great mystery of life. All of life's ups and downs, the pauses, fast-forwards, and rewinds all matter. **Your purpose is not for you. Your purpose is God's purpose.** When life is on pause, the idea of God's goodness and sovereignty seems to mock us. And yet it is true. In time, we may get a glimpse of the big picture.

You are here for more than you, your profit and benefit. *You find purpose and meaning to life in God's purpose.* That is the way of Christ. In explaining the why behind his actions Jesus said, *"...I'm not out to get my own way but only to carry out orders."* (John 5:30 The Message)

Like Joseph, Jesus requested, "Remember me." He spoke those words around a table. The table continues to be a meaning making place for us, informing our decisions and actions. When times are good, and especially when life has been put on pause, we eat to remember.

*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26, NIV)*

The table is a declaration: we are waiting and remembering. The table is a place to cry out "Lord, remember me."