

## Genesis, pt3: Joseph's Character, part 1: Guard Yourself Genesis 40

**MPS** Christians guard their heart to become like Jesus when we remember God's promise to remember us.

**OBJ** Every person should guard our heart to grow our character in Jesus' image because of Five Remembrances.

**INTRO** **When was the last time you got really disappointed, and how did you handle it to make sense of it?** Maybe you were passed over for a promotion; didn't make a high enough grade; felt like where you are makes you "hidden" from being noticed; not enough followers / friends / likes / views. Few people handle disappointment well, at least at first, unless they have learned to do so, because disappointment always means a denial of hope and desire. **How we handle disappointment, and hardships in general, reveals areas of our character that need to grow and mature. And, as we will see today, God often uses our disappointments to reveal where He is working.**

**TRANS** Today, Joseph is in a very disappointing situation, but he guards his heart to not allow it to hinder his faithfulness.

**READ** Genesis 40:1-4

*Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt. <sup>2</sup>And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, <sup>3</sup>and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. <sup>4</sup>The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody.*

*<sup>5</sup>And one night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own interpretation. <sup>6</sup>When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. <sup>7</sup>So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, "Why are your faces downcast today?" <sup>8</sup>They said to him, "We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me." **Genesis 40:1-8***

**Genesis 40 begins by stating that some time passed.** From the end of Genesis 39, where Joseph rose to prominence, to the start of chapter 40, these events are not all compacted in a short period. Time is passing and life moving on, and Joseph has remained faithful and excelled in prison, but he is still in prison.

**Two new characters are introduced, Pharaoh's cupbearer and chief baker.** These were two important roles in a kingdom because while charged to prepare the king's fare, the greater responsibility was to protect the king from poisoning. They made Pharaoh angry, and he put them in prison where they were placed under Joseph's care.

**One night they both had a dream.** When Joseph comes to them in the morning, he recognized that they were troubled. He shows concern by asking what is wrong. They tell him that they both had a dream, but no one to interpret. Joseph tells them that dreams belong to God, and if they will tell it to him God may give them answer.

**Joseph listens to the cupbearer's dream.** He interprets it to show that he will be restored in three days. Joseph requests that the cupbearer remember him and mention him to Pharaoh, to get him out of prison, because he was put there unjustly. He is confident of the dream's interpretation as demonstrated by how he makes this request; he knows it will happen.

**The chief baker is encouraged by the favorable interpretation and tells his dream to Joseph.** He recounts his dream to Joseph but this time the outcome is very different. He too will go back to Pharaoh in three days but will be hung and the birds will eat his flesh. I do not imagine the chief baker saw this going that direction.

**On the third day it was Pharaoh's birthday.** He brought the two out of prison. The cupbearer he restored to his role, and the baker he hanged. And the writer tells us this happened "as Joseph had interpreted". Then, the chapter ends in this way (.23), "Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him." Genesis 40 builds to a high crescendo with Joseph's correct interpretations but ends with a huge disappointment for Joseph and for us in reading of his life; this is not



how we saw this ending. [Life is full of disappointment; circumstances disappoint, people disappoint, and we may even be disappointed by God, but what we can trust is that God will never nor forsake us. Disappointment doesn't mean God is not working or cannot be trusted, but that He is still working out His greater glory.](#)

**TRANS** Genesis 40-41 records Joseph's rise to power, though the path is indirect, "windy and twisty", as one might say in the Ozarks, with many "hills and hollers" of adversity and disappointment.

**Joseph demonstrates that the right decisions are not always rewarded with immediate results.** This can make us want to ask, "[How many times can Joseph get unjustly treated by other people and NOT get angry?!](#)" Keith Mathews puts this in perspective for us when he reminds of what we must never forget for ourselves, "Joseph's greatest setback arose out of his greatest moral victory, when he resisted the advances of Potiphar's wife."<sup>1</sup> God's reward always serves His eternal purposes first, not just our immediate desires. This doesn't mean our desires are unimportant to God. God's plan all along was that Joseph would get out of prison, though he didn't know it, or when it would happen. God holds as highest glory the redemption of His people, not just the immediate victories in this world. And God uses His people as the means through which He will bring His greater glory to fruition. Joseph was God's chosen instrument by which He would save His people, who prefigures the One who would come as Savior, Jesus Christ. Mathews states, "The overriding issue in Joseph's life of humiliation was the purposes of God for the salvation of Israel's forefathers and the nations (e.g., 12:3)."<sup>2</sup> What's most important in this passage is not what happened to these two prisoners, or even to Joseph, but what God is doing in the salvation of His people! [God's perfect plan held a greater glory for Joseph than just fulfilling his immediate desire to get out of jail, and He always holds a greater glory for the Christian's life too.](#)

**It is important to first remember what God is doing.** We do not know all that Joseph thought or felt because we are not told, and we should not put stock in our assumptions or assertions. What we can, and must, do is monitor his actions to trace his faith. Joseph models for us how to stay focused on Jesus and faithful to His Word in the midst of disappointment and achievement, so our heart does not fill with bitterness of self-pity or bloated pride. God IS working; we must trust Him. [In the end, what Joseph DID by his actions proves what he believed, all that he must have thought and felt.](#)

**Joseph's actions also reveal his character and the shape of his heart.** He remained fully surrendered to God's work, even when there is no outward evidence of His working, only the promise of His word, which came through his dream. The Psalmist asks and answers this question as well.

[How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. Psalm 119:9](#)

Keeping our way pure is essential to keeping our heart pure, the source of our life.

[Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life. Proverbs 4:23 \[CSB\]](#)

[Christians guard their heart to become like Jesus when we remember God's promise to remember us.](#)

**Character is always formed by that which fills one's heart.** The only way to ensure that our character is becoming more like Jesus is to guard our heart. Therefore, we must ask, [How did Joseph guard his heart in the midst of doing so much right but with so much disappointment and little immediate reward?](#)

<sup>1</sup> K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 11:27–50:26](#), vol. 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 739. Mathews writes, "The events of chaps. 39–41 demonstrate that a facile explanation of reward and punishment, based on moral choices alone, is not adequate to understand God's relationship with his people (cf. comments on 18:19; 20:4). Joseph is the victim of Potiphar's wife and the negligent cupbearer, but in each case the result proves to be a stepping-stone."

<sup>2</sup> K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 11:27–50:26](#), vol. 1B, 739–740. Mathews goes on to include, "As Waltke remarks, 'The salvation of the world depends on one descendant of the patriarchs.' We do not know Joseph's interpretation of his difficulties, since the narrative does not provide his opinion, other than his pleas of innocence (40:15). Joseph later expressed understanding of the ultimate purpose for his suffering (45:5–8; 50:20). But to conclude that human choice made no difference is to overstate the matter. The muted voice of God in chaps. 40–41 indicates that the Lord works out his deliverance in different ways, both overtly, as in chap. 39, and opaquely, as in chaps. 40–41."



**OBJ Five Remembrances to guard our heart and grow our character in Jesus' image as we follow God.**

**1. Remember: you are never outside of God's sovereign control!**

Joseph was perfectly positioned to display God's sovereign control (39:21-23), but the way he arrived at this "perfect positioning" was anything but desirable. Joseph had plenty of opportunity to think that he was where God could not use him, but he never gave in to that. Joseph held on to God's promise, knowing God would be faithful. Philippians 2 tells us that Jesus descended to the lowest place, all the way to death, in obedience to God. And that is where God worked powerfully to resurrect him. If God can only use you where you are able to get to, then He will never get full glory. God often puts His people in unimaginable situations, so that His work demonstrates His inconceivable and incomparable power! **No matter where you are, you are never outside God's sovereign control and power to work His resurrecting power!**

**2. Remember: we live as faithful stewards because of who we trust, not because of our situation or limitation.**

Joseph accepted / trusted where God placed him to do what was in his control and NOT be consumed by what was beyond his limitation. Life is full of limiting factors, some because of us, but many outside of our control. How we handle our limitations and faithfulness within them will determine whether we grow and mature or become more embittered by them.

Jesus says, "*One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.*" [Luke 16:10](#) Faithfulness is not about our situation or a limitation, but what we do with what we have or where we are. Your situation is never your limitation. God will use you where you are! And He can use you in bigger ways than your situation may at first seem possible. God doesn't need a "big situation" for big impact. He IS the Big Impact! (sounds like a professional wrestler)

Life has a way of consuming us with all that we do not like about our current situation, to make us see "greener grass on the other side of the fence". But -sometimes- the greener grass on the other side of the fence is due to a septic issue underneath and out of sight. You're just not close enough to smell it. IF you only sulk, whine and complain in our bad situation, you will only gloat, indulge and inebriate when things go right for you. Whether in good times or bad, Christ-followers remain a faithful witness to bear fruit for the gospel.

**Character is forged and shaped in hard times, difficult situations and challenging circumstances.** How we handle the things that are outside our control determines what kind of character we are forming within. Every disappointment and celebration shapes our heart either for God in praise and thanksgiving, or against God in frustration and bitterness. The final shape of our character will be determined by what fills our heart in those times and situations. [Faithfulness in hard situation and within our limitations fills our heart with the gospel, to form our character into Jesus' likeness.](#)

**APPL** [Have you learned to praise and thank God in every situation and within your limitations, or do they simply make you more frustrated and embittered?](#)

**3. Remember: you stay focused by serving others and pointing them to God.**

Joseph didn't allow the restrictions of his limitations or the frustrations of his situation to cause him to become self-focused, to make everything about him. He showed concern / compassion for others beyond what was only required of him, but more aligned with what had been shown to him (by God). (40:6-7, 8-13, 16-19) [Whining and complaining is always sinful, and always fuels greater sin, confusion and often deception in us.](#)

**Joseph wanted out, but he didn't let his desire to be out drive his decisions of what to do in the meantime.** That he couldn't do everything didn't stop him from doing something. He used the hardships of his situation to change him, instead of embittering him, so he could be used by God to serve others for God as he had been served by God. Our testimony of all God has done for us should never culminate by, "look how blessed I am by God". Rather, our testimony culminates as, "look how great is God – the Blessor! [The one who really gets God's blessing will take the smallest blessing and share it by serving for maximum impact to point others to Jesus.](#)



**4. Remember: Joseph told the truth – as he understood it – in love, both good and bad.** We love to tell the good stuff, like what Joseph told the cupbearer. But we often run from to avoid the hard stuff, like what he had to tell the baker. Christians tell the truth no matter where it leads, even and especially when it is hard. And the harder the truth the greater the compassion we should demonstrate in its telling. Paul says that among the church this is the single strategy for our growth and maturity, “*speaking the truth in love, we...grow up into him*”. When we learn to love truth more than how it makes us feel, we commit to this practice for the good it brings. *Speaking hard truths with exceptional love and compassion will always compound the greatest grace, and often with the fastest return and greatest reward.*

**5. Remember: immediate reward doesn't always follow right action, but it is never forgotten by God.**

Joseph was right – Big Time – but it didn't become his immediate reward.(40:23) Some successes aren't about reward, but demonstration of maturity, which IS its own reward! Delayed gratification is huge catalyst for growth and maturity. Forced gratification / reward, especially when repeated regularly, is a short cut to fumbblings, fallings and failures most every time. The Christian understands that both are found along the path to godliness. *Godliness IS the reward for the godly; righteousness is the reward for the righteous, because the person has learned that walking in Jesus' righteousness brings more of His peace, love and joy as we are made more like Him!*

*Christians guard their heart to become like Jesus when we remember God's promise to remember us.*

**CLOSE** *How are you doing with where you are and what you have? Are you learning to thank God in your heart and glorify God with your life both with 'WHO you are' (limitation) and WHERE you are'(situation)?* You don't have to love your situation / limitation to be faithful. You do have to remain faithful if you want out of it, grow through it (growth), or to learn to glory in it (maturity)!

*Joseph's character was forged in his remembrance of the love and favor that God has bestowed on his whole life. Remember God, Christian, because you know He will NOT FORGET you!*

