

Sunday 22nd June 2025 Genesis 40 Using Your Gifts

Genesis 40 The Cupbearer and the Baker

40 Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. ² Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³ and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. ⁴ The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them.

After they had been in custody for some time, ⁵ each of the two men—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison—had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.

⁶ When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why do you look so sad today?" ⁸ "We both had dreams," they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them."

Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."

⁹ So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, "In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, ¹⁰ and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and put the cup in his hand."

¹² "This is what it means," Joseph said to him. "The three branches are three days. ¹³ Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. ¹⁵ I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon."

¹⁶ When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favourable interpretation, he said to Joseph, "I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread. ¹⁷ In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head."

¹⁸ "This is what it means," Joseph said. "The three baskets are three days. ¹⁹ Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale your body on a pole. And the birds will eat away your flesh."

²⁰ Now the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials: ²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand— ²² but he impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation.

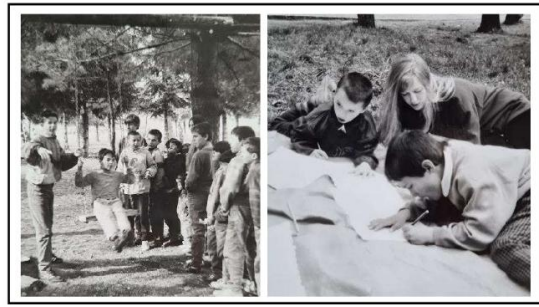
²³ The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

30 years ago in 1995, Mims and I were recently married and living in Cheltenham where Mims was completing her teaching degree and I was working for an Agricultural Engineering firm near Chipping Sodbury.

We somehow got the opportunity to join a short-term mission trip to Slovenia to help build a playground for Bosnian refugees staying in a camp near the town of Črnomelj. I was the engineer in the team and I had prepared some designs for a climbing frame, see-saw and slide and we took all our tools and fixtures with us in a mini-bus. When we arrived it took us several days just to source the timber we needed from a local sawmill. But we placed the order and then went back to the camp to set about sorting the foundations for the climbing frames which were essentially 2 wooden pyramids connected by a wooden bridge. But that is when we hit a major problem. We had taken spades to dig out the holes for the concrete footings, but the ground was so hard and stony we made no progress over several hours. A safe and robust playground was looking more and more unlikely.

Someone in the team suggested that we should pray. I couldn't see what might change but I reluctantly downed tools and came can joined in. And I kid you not, as soon as we finished praying, would you believe it, a digger came trundling along the road nearby. I was gobsmacked. The girls were duly despatched to go and chat to the driver, along with some tins of beer to offer him and within an hour we had eight lovely deep holes ready to build in.

Mims managed to find a few pics of what we built and the miraculous digger that God provided to help us:



For me it was a defining moment, when I realised only God could do that. He is in charge, not me. And when we pray, we see wonderful things happen. Proverbs 16:9 says, 'In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.'

Today's passage from Genesis 40 is the turning point in the life of Joseph, a defining moment when he started using his gifts for the service of God and unlocked a whole new level in his training for leadership.

Last week we saw how Joseph had been falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and thrown into prison. And yet even though Joseph had been rejected by his family, rejected by his boss, and unjustly imprisoned somehow, he kept a positive attitude towards the Lord and gained favour with the prison warden.

So just when he could have let anger and frustration overtake him, he instead chooses to serve and is assigned to attend to Pharaoh's cup-bearer and baker.

We don't know why these two were imprisoned but throughout history, Kings and rulers have had to be very careful of conspiracies to depose or assassinate them. Perhaps he had learned of a poison plot and his drinks checker and baker were in the frame.

I want to look at 3 aspects of his interaction with the prisoners that demonstrate why this is a defining moment in Joseph's ministry, and how God was training him for leadership.

Firstly, Joseph **noticed** his fellow prisoners were more dejected than usual. 'Why do you look so sad today?'

Asking open ended questions is a key for pastoral care and servant leadership that is attentive to the needs of others.

When we are simply full of our own agendas there is a disincentive to ask caring questions that might demand time, attention and listening.

Are we willing to notice other people and how they might be feeling? Community discipleship 101: Notice what others are feeling.

Secondly Joseph gave God the glory: 'don't all interpretations belong to God?'

Instead of saying 'I am good at interpreting dreams' or 'I've had a few dreams myself' he brings the Lord in to the conversation.

Phil Lauder is speaking tonight. If you ever want to learn about evangelism go and talk to Phil. Now he is a bit of a chatterbox (and he does agree with me on this point) but somehow he manages to bring God into the conversation when he is servicing Worcester boilers all around Bath! He reckons 50% of his call-outs end up with a conversation about the Lord. Amazing! If you want to be an evangelist, get a trade, and learn to bring God into the conversation. He'll share more this evening – well worth coming to!

Joseph was serving the Cup-bearer and the Baker and his conversation led them to a God-centred conversation.

The third sentence Joseph uses which really shows how much he has grown in maturity and leadership readiness: 'Tell me your dreams.'

Bang. There it is. Instead of saying 'let me tell you *my* dreams' which is where the story started, he starts up his God-given gift: 'tell me *your* dreams'. Joseph has now switched into ministry mode.

At our last Practicing the Way altogether session at the beginning of the month, we looked at Spiritual maturity and the progression that Paul wrote about in Ephesians chapter 4. With love being like the soil we are rooted in, we firstly unite around the seven unique unifying tenets of the faith: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Then Paul lists the fivefold ministry gifts of the Spirit which are in place to help equip the saints: Apostle-Prophet-Evangelist-Shepherd-Teacher. Then the three core values of Christian Spirituality: Upwards, Inwards and Outwards until we all reach unity in the faith and maturity in Christ. Do have a look at our YouTube channel if you want to catch up on that teaching.

But when it comes to using spiritual gifts, especially in leadership, the key thing is to ensure they are being used for the glory of God and to serve others. In other words, if we start using spiritual gifts only to edify ourselves or even, dare I say it to bolster a personal calling or even a church ministry, then actually we can end up abusing others. So be careful of inappropriate prophetic words or even misplaced miraculous powers. Spiritual gifts need to be offered with humility and care. They should glorify God and align with bible teaching. But we need them! Gifts and talents applied for the glory of God are vital for the building up of Gods' people so pray first and check your motivation, then have a go!

On Thursday at staff prayers our churchwarden Rosie shared how when she first pitched up at All Saints Peter Heywood gave her a prophetic word that he probably didn't even know was so important for her future when she went on to live in Belgium. But with kindness he encouraged her and she responded.

So the story of Joseph pivots when he kindly says 'tell me your dreams.' He is now ready to listen, ready to interpret and ready to glorify God.

The world isn't short of information but it is starved of Godly interpretation.

But it is hard if the truth isn't what people want to hear.

The cupbearer shared his dream and Joseph used his gift of prophetic interpretation to say that he would be restored and exonerated. It is worth noting that neither the cup-bearer or the baker purported to be God-fearers. In fact it is very unlikely that they would have worshipped Yahweh the God of the Hebrews. But nevertheless both their dreams contained details of their destiny. For the cup-bearer it was life, for the baker it was death. Perhaps the Baker was plagued by a guilty conscience for conspiring against Pharaoh, which is why his dreams contained birds pecking at the bread from the basket on his head. We don't know except that the cup-bearer was restored, the baker went on to be executed.

Millions of people dream every day. For some this is a window into their subconscious, others sense divine guidance, others see it as merely the brain reorganising itself and filing information ready for a new set of memories. I think all these are true but some dreams are spiritually important. I have had some dreams in my life which have been critical in shaping my ministry. We are designed to be spirit beings - with a soul and a body. When you first cry out to the Lord in humility and repentance, your spirit is made alive to God because of what Jesus has done for us

on the cross. In other words it is our spirit that is made new when we are born. Our spirit is resurrected along with Christ. So from that point forward we can expect to tune in to the Holy Spirit who can discern dreams, and can help us interpret life for the world.

Without the Spirit of God life becomes merely mechanistic rather than sacred. Without the Spirit of God, there is no reason to revere the sanctity of life. This week Parliament voted for both assisted dying and the liberalisation of abortion up to birth. I'm sure there were eloquent and compassionate arguments from both sides on each issue. However, this is a sad turning point for our country. Very few MPs stood up for the sanctity of life from a biblical perspective. Doesn't all life belong to God? All the days ordained for us are written in his book. Woe to us if we legislate to cut God out of our consideration of life and death. We pray for wisdom and courage for the House of Lords in the next round of deliberations – and for patience!

Even after all that he'd been through, learning patience was the final trial Joseph had to endure before his restoration. The cup-bearer forgot to mention Joseph to Pharaoh for another two years. Another two years in prison, waiting, wondering, suffering. But as we will learn next week, his preparation for Godly leadership was nearing completion. He was stripped of everything physical, but God was equipping him with everything spiritual. His gifts were active, he was rooted in humility, his practical wisdom was growing. He was ready to serve the Lord in public.

Are we ready? Perhaps we need to learn patience or humility. Perhaps we need to yield our status and identity to the Lord. Perhaps we need to discern and practice our spiritual gifts for the glory of the Lord. But however we need to respond today, know that God has a plan for your life and whatever has gone before need not be a hinderance to God using you in future. If you don't feel good enough for God, just remember 1 John 1v9 says 'If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' We can get back right where God wants us to be.

Let's pray.