

Using Your Gifts (Part 2) | Phil Lauder | Genesis 40:1-23

Sunday 22nd June 2025

We're talking about trusting God in unanswered dreams, and having opportunities to see how God uses us with his gifts.

- Who does God bring to you?
- How do we look for God - the Kingdom of God - in each day?

Being on this series with Joseph is so helpful for us. The Old Testament gives us stories of people who saw the Kingdom of God the way Jesus described it. And this was before Jesus came down to be with us. We can see through the whole story the kind of life we can live, because now we live in this time. Jesus has made that type of life available to everyone.

Joseph was able to see these two worlds,

1. The Kingdom of Man (and its trap).
2. The Kingdom of God (where it was good, and a real life).

This allowed him to stay out of trouble, not being enslaved by the world and potentially killed.

We are now at the position where Joseph is in prison due to a lie. As we know, Potiphar's wife tried to get him to sleep with her.

We can look back and work out how he was able to do this.

The New Testament tells us that we live in two worlds. We live in *this* world, and for those who call on him, we have the Kingdom of God. To put it another way...

- we have our worldly soul, and it's doing life,
- and our spirit is trying to reconnect back to God.

It is a constant fight that Paul talks about during his books in the Bible. Remember, Jesus is always in the midst. The unchanging God who we serve today is the same God that Joseph was living by and working with day by day.

Other than Joseph hearing God in his dreams, there was no audible conversation. It was the first time in the Bible that this had happened. Up until now, God had spoken to everyone. We can start to see how much Joseph has grown in trusting God. He was onto a good thing in Egypt. Wealth, power, abundance of food, hot baths, servants. In the world's view, what he did was a bit stupid. A beautiful man, a beautiful woman – “Seize the moment!”; “Take control!”; “Have what you want!”; “No one's watching, who's to know?”; But what does he do? He flees. He's not scared. He just knows the ounce of trust he has in the Lord. At that moment, the adrenaline system's kicking in, the sweat's beading, his heart is pounding. The empty house, no servants, no one, just the two of them. But the Lord says, "Joseph, run!" It was such good advice.

Paul reminds us of this in his teachings directly in **Timothy 2:22** –

"So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."

We have a choice to use those two powers that are at hand to shape us. The powers of the World and the powers of the Kingdom of God are both in equal opposition. We can read about this in Galatians 5. The natural fruit, the fruits of the spirits that grow, and please note the word “grow.” This is not something we can just muster up. We will fail. It is only by time, spending with God, with Jesus, that these fruits really grow, and exciting things start to happen when one is connected and led by the Spirit. And if we look at the previous verses in Galatians, read about the opposite stuff, the “man stuff” (the flesh) - sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discourse, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, disharmony, factions, envy, drunkenness, and the like. Paul said in **Galatians 5:21** -

"I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Joseph ran away from these things because of his growing trust in the Lord and the sense of destiny from his God-given dreams.

And remember - grace. He gives us grace because we do not get it right. Every day, we get it wrong. Some days, we don't even bother at all. But that's grace, because each day, all his mercies are new. His grace is sufficient for us. His power is made perfect in our weakness. Going back to **Genesis 39:19** -

"As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, 'This is the way your servant treated me,' his anger was kindled."

This is how Joseph ended up in prison. Now, I'm going to make some assumptions here. I don't think Potiphar was just angry at Joseph, but also at his own situation. I mean, he's going to have to go back to work. With the potential loss of his most trusted servant, his week is starting off with a recruitment drive. Perhaps he didn't fully believe his wife, bearing in mind in those days, punishment for adultery was death by stoning (particularly for a slave). We can see this when a woman was challenged in **John 8:1-11**, when Christ was presented with a lady that was literally caught in the act of adultery. If we think of a person that we know, we know their character. Are they good, bad, honest, trustworthy, reliable? I'm sure he knew of his wife's character but had to do something. He didn't want to lose his beautiful wife. Remember, Potiphar is only looking at his worldly possessions (his wife being one of them). We need to remember that Joseph wasn't some amazing, incredible man who knew what to do in every moment. He knew the Lord was with him. And with God, he could tackle this world. He, like her, and most of the characters in the Bible are broken, dysfunctional, and pretty messed up.

Each story in the Bible is intentionally there to remind us that it was the same for them as it is for us. We are flawed and broken. We don't know Potiphar's wife's backstory. It's not for us to judge. We only know a person in as much as they choose to let us in and see who they want us to see. We're all broken. We all need God's grace. We all need Jesus.

In **Matthew 7:5**, God reminds us not to judge others, but rather:

"First, take the plank out of your own eye, and then you'll clearly be able to remove the speck from your brothers."

It was only through the daily practices to God that Joseph was able to resist Potiphar's wife. Through God's strength, not Joseph's. All of us face challenges every day, and not necessarily the same ones as Joseph faced. It may be temptation to take money, objects that are not ours, to do things that will be great in the short term, but do us long-term harm. Whether that's sex, drugs, or 'rock & roll.' Overworking, riches, earthly status, food, whatever it is, we all face temptations. Again, it's only through practicing and understanding a) who we are in Jesus Christ, and b) the Spirit that calls us onward, that we are able to walk and choose the Kingdom of God.

Imagine Joseph's thoughts at the time in prison. He would have been given the dream of his brothers bowing before him in that position of power. Locked in that prison cell, I'm sure there was a time it was really getting to him. Many of us are able to recall that time of silence. And if we can't, we should try and wait and hear him. The thing is, it gets worse. Years pass. Imagine being in that cell and thinking of Potiphar's beautiful house, Potiphar's beautiful wife. "Did I hear from God?" he may have thought. We know this is the devil because he makes us question God. "Did you really hear those dreams, Joseph? Are they really going to bow before you? Is God really going to save you? You need to take control. You need to put things in your own hands, you idiot."

It's that same as back in **Genesis 3:1** –

“Now the serpent was the most crafty and all of the world animals. And he said to woman, did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?”

Remember this when you're looking and waiting for God and you hear these questions and the questioning tone in your head. Trust and hold on - waiting is the right thing. It is not easy, but we need to hold on. There are no quick fixes unless God does a miracle. Remember, it's in his timing. Sometimes it's something far from what we expect, like being in a prison cell, like Joseph did for years and years. Keep trusting, even though it's painful.

And remember, we can see different people of the Bible that didn't wait for the Lord and took matters into their own hands. Look at Abraham sleeping with his wife's servant and the generational problems this caused. We look at King David lusting over Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, and the mess that that caused. It's with the story of Joseph where we can actually see what God can do if we wait and listen to him. I'm sure at a low point, Joseph was wondering what on earth was going on. How long was it going to be until he was shown favour, and God reminded him He was in charge?

Always be on the lookout for opportunities to use the gifts God has given you.

Many years ago, I worked for Worcester Bosch. There was a time I was in a home and three women were in the room of the boiler I was fixing. Now, I wasn't eavesdropping. I was just present when they were speaking, literally in the same room as me, working on their boiler. The lady was talking about how her husband had left her. There were children involved, and she was really sad. She was facing life alone.

Now, something in my gut said to me, "Phil, that's a similar story to yours. There's been many times in your life you felt alone." The Lord spoke to me and suggested I could speak up. I shared with this lady that I have a faith. Now, at this point, I could have just looked like a nutter. I had to step out if I'm really trusting this God. I shared that I was married before and that I was left by the person. I shared I had a faith, and I believed that God had a good thing for her like he did for me. I told her I'd met Catherine and that I was remarried. I shared with her that God will look after her. And it was this point, the other two people in her house, her friends, let on that they were both Christians. How could I have known? I couldn't. I risked looking a fool. But God had a good plan and wanted her to know he was on her case.

Remember, I didn't do it blindly. I felt something in my gut and I spoke up. I think we all know when the Spirit is calling on us. And if we don't, I suggest trying silence to listen to him.

Remember, it can work both ways. And in Joseph's case, it was the chief jailer as we read in **Genesis 39:3**. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge because -

"...the Lord was with him and whatever he did, the Lord made succeed."

Joseph would have seen the same pattern and favour when he was in Potiphar's house previously. I'm sure this gave Joseph the lift that he needed to trust and wait. There's many times in my life where I've needed a little lift just to keep me going, and then God speaks and I feel his presence, and I've known that in my gut. "Oh Lord, thank you. You're there for me." I know a friend of mine has this and she has a deep faith. When this happens to her, she jokes "Oh, maybe there is a God."

I can still say “You're still with me.” And he knows all of our humanness. Remember, we can always find God at the end of our rope. Even more waiting is required. Another length of time, and as we know, the king of Egypt takes the cupbearer and the baker and puts them in the prison, as they had grieved him somehow. Perhaps there was a plot to kill him, and there was an investigation happening whilst these two were in prison. The baker and the cupbearer were suspects.

Now, here's the important part of this story. There comes a point in our lives where a decision should be made. As previously said, do we look at what the world offers us or what God has for us? Remember, Joseph had been spending time with these two for a while now, and he understood their characters and who they were. When the time came for Joseph to choose how to react to the cupbearer, when they shared their dreams, Joseph had a choice. He could have reacted due to his worldly circumstance in saying something like this. “Dreams? Don't talk to me about your dreams. I had a dream once. I had a dream I was going to be in a position of power. People were going to bow before me. My whole family. I would have got my own back. Do you know what they did to me? But look at me. I'm in prison. I had everything and now I have nothing. Don't come to me with your dreams.”

But through his seeing, understanding, and the knowledge and the favour of God, trusting in his dreams, Joseph said in **Genesis 40:8** - “Tell me your dreams. I can't interpret them, but the Lord, my God, whom I serve, can.”

Now as Tom said this morning, this was Joseph's moment of transformation. The thing we can think about then is, “who is God bringing to us?” So, as we look at Joseph, we can look at our lives and start to understand that if we trust God, and if we listen to the Holy Spirit, God will help us see opportunities when they come. For instance, the way this thing's happened to me is that I go into people's houses. As I said, I fix boilers. I go into people's homes. They let me in. They trust me to help them. Often, God creates an opportunity for me to share my faith and talk about him.

I remember recently going into someone's house to fix their boiler, discussing parents getting older. This subject, as you may know, is part of my journey, having lost both of my parents at 45. However, for this person, they described the pain and how unkind their parent had been to them, and even in the care home, they were describing how unkind and cross the parent was. I discussed how I was able to care for my mum, knowing all the pain that she went through and possibly similar circumstances to this person's relative. Despite the way my mum was treating me, I shared that God showed me that my mum's anger was because of her pain, and I explained how I started to heal, and also that she found emotional healing all through God's love, through Christ. I felt to offer to send that person my last talk, my first talk I did here in January, when I discussed the part of my journey, how loving my mum had been throughout her last five years, and how I believe the Holy Spirit helped me. I saw that person again after they had visited their parents and they had listened to my talk. They had a glow and a beam on their face, saying they had a lovely visit, just trusting and being kind, and when they went to leave the care home, the parent did not want the person to leave.

Remember, we might not be in prison. It might just be walking down the street, meeting a friend for coffee, someone at work, school, university, walking a dog, if there is someone wants a chat. People want to share something. God creates opportunities for us in his timing, and he will use us however we are, wherever we are, if we let him in. The people I meet every day with my job all have stories of happiness, sadness, grief, despair, and brokenness. Joseph was in prison, and God brought him to people, he was able to share too.

Who is God putting on your heart? It is such an honour and a privilege for me, going into people's homes and working on something that could potentially flood the house, or worse still, kill them. Sometimes it's just enough to do a good job and fix their boiler, but there are many occasions when it's not about the boiler, and it's about opportunities to talk about Jesus, and I feel God lines me up with my jobs on certain days so that conversations happen.

God will show us all the opportunities if we let him in. We all have a story, and God will prompt us when our story will touch someone. He will line you up with a person he has brought you to (or them to you). For this occasion with Joseph, it was two people: a baker and a cupbearer. We know when the cupbearer was out, Joseph was forgotten. And yes, it was another two years until things moved on. But they *did* move on. Trusting and waiting, trusting and waiting.

So, I conclude, I want to be practical. Exactly what can we copy in our own lives from how Joseph dealt with these things that will come to us all? Stop. When we are faced with the trap of the kingdom of man, just stop, run away. Wait. When you don't know what is going on, wait for God to intervene. Wait to hear his voice. Stop, listen. It is so easy for us to try to resolve things ourselves using tools of the kingdom of man, but that is a trap too. Stay calm, avoid bitterness as best we can, and stay open to what God will do. Trust, even though he was in prison, he didn't stop trusting. When the cupbearer and the baker gave them their dreams, he didn't say, "Not going down that road again." Don't let your experience cloud your hope. Some of us may have had dreams that haven't been answered, yet waiting can be painful. I want to encourage you to keep trusting. Obviously, this is hard, and this takes practice, but you are not the first person to go through this, and I found that keeping some verses and some quotes through history that has helped me. In **Lamentations 3:24** - "*The Lord is my portion, therefore I will wait for him.*" Another favourite I've heard recently was John Milton, who once wrote that, "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make Heaven of Hell, and a Hell of Heaven." What has filled my mind, and where am I investing, and what am I prioritising?

Closing Prayer

Come Holy Spirit. Spirit of wisdom, I lay down my striving in my own strength, and my need to be in control. Forgive me for my sin. Help me to trust you, and wait for your guidance. Open my eyes to see the cross, and the path to the fullness of life. Show me your opportunities you have for me. Let me hear your voice, and be your hands, and feet. Amen.