

SESSION #19

We've spent the last 3 sessions looking at Joseph's remarkable story. Now it's time for our response to what God has shown us...

E. Our Response: Patient Perseverance in Faith

- Brueggemann reminds us that we who believe in God live our lives "bracketed between the hint of the dream and the doxology of the disclosure" – and that content may often appear dark, as it was in Joseph's case
- but God calls us to patient perseverance in faith
 - this was Joseph's response in *his* tough times – just as God was *hidden* behind the scenes of Joseph's stories, Joseph's *unspoken* response to the lemons life dealt him was to patiently make lemonade
- *our* ability to persevere in faith like that will begin by recognizing God's dream for us, which Paul articulated in...

Rom 8:29

29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

- or as it is rendered in The Message translation: "God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to *shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son*. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him."

...in other words, God's dream is to make us **like Christ!**

- Joseph's life pointed ultimately to Christ too, and his story mirrors that of Jesus in an amazing number of areas
 - ...but particularly in highlighting the truth that the "glory" of the doxology only comes by passing through the valley of "suffering" first
 - 1 Peter 5:10 – "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal **glory** in Christ, *after you have **suffered** a little while*, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."
- as we move towards the fulfillment (doxology) of God's dream for us there will be disappointments, distresses, doubts and 'even at times despair' ("rocky road" isn't just an ice cream flavor)
 - ...nevertheless we must "let the dream be at work, even when its outcome is less than clear."
 - ...to quote Brueggemann yet again.
- God knows what He's doing and His purposes for us are good

Over a 100 yrs ago in a Scottish seaside inn, a group of fishermen were relaxing after a long day at sea. As a serving maid was walking past the fishermen's table with a pot of tea, one of the men made a sweeping gesture to describe the size of the fish he claimed to have caught. His hand collided with the teapot and sent it crashing against the whitewashed wall, where its contents left an irregular brown splotch.

Standing nearby, the innkeeper surveyed the damage. "That stain will never come out," he said in dismay. "The whole wall will have to be repainted."

“Perhaps not.”

All eyes turned to the stranger who had just spoken. “What do you mean?” asked the innkeeper.

“Let me work with the stain,” said the stranger, standing up from his table in the corner. “If my work meets your approval, you won't need to repaint the wall.”

The stranger picked up a box and went to the wall. Opening the box, he withdrew pencils, brushes, and some glass jars of linseed oil and pigment. He began to sketch lines around the stain and fill it in here and there with dabs of color and swashes of shading. Soon a picture began to emerge. The random splashes of tea had been turned into the image of a stag with a magnificent rack of antlers.

At the bottom of the picture, the man inscribed his signature.

Then he paid for his meal and left. The innkeeper was stunned when he examined the wall. “Do you know who that man was?” he said in amazement. “The signature reads, 'E.H. Landseer!’”

...as it turned out they had been visited by perhaps the greatest painter of wildlife in their day, Sir Edwin Landseer

- God wants to take the stains and disappointments of our lives and not merely erase them, but rather turn them into a thing of beauty.

- in the lives of God's people – like Joseph, like you, like me – *God uses disappointments* for two powerful purposes in particular:

a) to build character

James 1:2-4 (Living Bible translation) “Dear brothers, is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy, for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow, and don't try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, **strong in character**, full and complete.”

- someone said: “*Sorrows come to stretch out spaces in the heart for joy.*”

- Joseph's **character** was built up through the tough trials of hardship & temptation, and times that tested his humility and patience

b) God's second purpose in using disappointments is to enlarge our capacity for service

- Joseph was prepared for his large & significant role in Egypt by all the experiences God brought him through along the way, enabling him to identify with famine-stricken people,

- to understand how the political machinery worked,

- to know what was involved in successful grain farming and crop storage, and

- to exercise management skills honed in one man's household

and in prison for the eventual good of the whole Middle Eastern region

- what is God doing ‘between the brackets’ of your life?

- He is building character and He is enlarging your capacity for service

- in the midst of the tangled threads of disappointment & discouragement we need to remember that God is working on the big picture which we don't see yet

- the Outline Bible says, *“God takes the blessings and trials of everyday life and teaches us the greatest of all lessons: **He and He alone can take care of everything, both now and eternally.**”*

Here’s a poem by an unknown author, which Dr. Ravi Zacharias loves and often quotes (it speaks in terms of a “man” but it is true of a “woman” just as much):

“When God wants to drill a man and thrill a man, and skill a man
When God wants to mold a man to play the noblest part
When He yearns with all His heart to create so great & bold a man
that all the world might be amazed,
Watch His methods, watch His ways:
How He ruthlessly perfects, whom He royally elects.
How He hammers and hurts him, with mighty blows converts him
into trial shapes of clay that only God understands,
While his tortured heart is crying and he lifts beseeching hands.
How He bends but never breaks, when his good He undertakes
How He uses whom He chooses, and with every purpose fuses him
With mighty acts induces him to try His splendor out
God knows what He's about.”