

THE 'WAITING – ROOM' SERIES

Tan Sin Liang

2. JOSEPH'S 'WAITING-ROOM' EXPERIENCE

**Theme: Forgetting Your Troubles & Be
Fruitful In Times Of Adversity**

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Joseph – Father's Pet, Brothers' Pest

- Jacob (Israel) had 12 sons but his favourite son was Joseph (because he was born to Jacob at old age).
- What do you do if you have a favourite child? You give him/her the best (better than the other children).
- So Jacob went to the most expensive tailor in town and made Joseph a very special coat.
 - a multi-coloured coat. It was the type of coat meant for the royalty. His brothers' coats were drabby, meant for ordinary working class.
- Perhaps Jacob had intended Joseph to wear it only for special occasions (like weddings). Joseph loved his multi-coloured coat so much, to him every day was a 'special occasion'.
- He wore it for breakfast, for dinner, marketing and even working in the fields with his brothers.
- The multi-coloured coat was a symbol of Jacob's special love for Joseph. However, to the brothers, it was a ugly symbol of 'favouritism'. Each time they saw Joseph wearing his favourite coat, it was a sore reminder to the brothers that their father loved them less.
- As in all cases where parents play 'favouritism', it breeds jealousy and contempt. So Joseph's brothers hated him.

"His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms"

(Gen 37:4)

- When the 11 brothers went to 'chill-out' in town, they never invited him. So Joseph also bore a grudge against his brothers
- Since he was the father's 'pet', he soon had a favourite 'past-time'
 - 'telling tales' about his brothers (like lazying in the fields, not working)
 - you can imagine the smile on Joseph's face when his brothers got reprimanded by their father.

"And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to the father." (Gen 37:2)

- So Joseph, the father's 'pet', became the brothers' pest.
- What do you do with a 'pest'? You get rid of them.

Joseph The Dreamer

- One day, while the brothers were working in the fields, they saw this 'upstart' running to them in his familiar shiny multi-coloured coat. They thought the father had 'summoned' them.
- In a very excited voice he told them he had a wonderful dream the night before. No one was interested. But he told them anyway.

1st Dream (Bundle of Grain) (Gen 37:7, 8)

- He told them he dreamt that they were all binding grain stalks together in the field. Suddenly his bundle of grain stood upright and all the other bundles of grain bowed down to his bundle.
- His brothers understood exactly what Joseph's message meant. So they retorted: "So, does that mean you're going to rule over us?" Joseph smiled.

2nd Dream (Sun, moon and the stars) (Gen 37: 9-10)

- As if that was not enough, Joseph told the brothers that he had another dream which was more 'interesting'
- He told his disinterested brothers that in his dream he saw the sun, the moon and the stars all bowed to him.
- This 2nd Dream was even worse than the 1st.
 - the 'sun' here represented the 'father' (Jacob)
 - the 'moon' here represented the mother
 - the 11 stars obviously refer to the 11 brothers.
- The 2nd Dream implied that the entire family (including his father and mother) will 'kow-tow' to Joseph (one day).
- Not only the 11 brothers were angered, his father too was infuriated when Joseph told the father this dream.
- From that day onwards, the brothers hated this 'dreamer' (Gen 37:19) even more.
- They longed for a chance to teach this 'upstart' a lesson he will never forget

Joseph Survived Murder Conspiracy, Sold As A Slave

- It did not take very long for that chance to come.
- One day Joseph was sent by the father to 'check out' on his brothers herding the flock in a nearby town.
- From afar they spotted the Dreamer in his unmistakable 'coat of many colours' shinning under the blazing sun.
- They said to one another, "Here comes the dreamer" (V.19)
- **What do you do if you don't like the message? You kill the messenger.** That was exactly what the brothers conspired to do.
- They caught hold of Joseph, stripped him of his multi-coloured coat and threw him into a deep hole to die.
- Then they realised that **'crime can pay' after all.**
 - so they sold Joseph to some slave traders passing by for 20 shekels of silver.
- They thought they had finally got rid of the 'pest' (the 'Dreamer') for good.
- Joseph ended up in the slave market in Egypt. He was sold to a man named 'Potiphar'.
- Joseph was 17 years old.

Joseph in the household of Potiphar

- Who was Potiphar? He was the security chief of Pharaoh. (like CIA/FBI chief for US President).
 - a very powerful and wealthy man.
- From the favourite son in his father's household, Joseph became a slave to an Egyptian Master.
- What happened to Joseph in Potiphar's household? (*Gen 39*)

- "The Lord was with Joseph and blessed him greatly as he served in the house of his Egyptian master." (V.2)
- "Potiphar noticed this and realised that the Lord was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did." (V.3)
- "So Joseph naturally became quite a favourite with him ("So Joseph found favour in his sight") Potiphar soon put Joseph in charge of his entire household and entrusted him with all his business dealings" (V.4)
- "From the day Joseph was put in charge, the Lord began to bless Potiphar for Joseph's sake. All his household affairs began to run smoothly, and his crops and livestock flourished." (V.5)

- “So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn’t have a worry in the world, except to decide what he wanted to eat!” (v.6)

(Gen 39:2-6)

So this was what happened to Joseph in Potiphar’s household

- 1st: God was with Joseph
- 2nd: Because God was with Joseph, he was successful in everything he did. Potiphar noticed that God was with Joseph.
- 3rd: Joseph found favour in Potiphar’s sight. So he entrusted Joseph with key responsibilities: -
 - he became the head of Potiphar’s household (i.e. Head of Human Resource Dept.)
 - he was in charge of all Potiphar’s business dealings (i.e. Business Manager)
 - he was given complete administrative responsibility over Potiphar’s assets (i.e. Head of Admin & Asset Manager)
 - he managed all his crops (Head of Agriculture Dept.)
 - he managed all his flocks (Head of Animal Husbandry)
- Unknown to Joseph, whatever skills he learned and acquired in Potiphar’s household on a ‘micro’ level, God would later help in to apply these skills on a ‘macro’ level. God was preparing Joseph for ‘bigger things’.
 - Question: Is God preparing you for ‘bigger things’?
- So next to Potiphar, Joseph was the 2nd in command. Can’t get any higher.
- 4th: Potiphar’s vicarious blessings. Potiphar realised that because of Joseph he was blessed by God.

Lesson to learn

- When our lives please God, even our bosses, clients, and colleagues may even find favour in us. (i.e. find us favourable).
- Have you experienced that in your life? I have.
- Do people see God in the way we lead our lives?

Joseph Thrown Into Prison

- Just as when life was looking up for Joseph, it suddenly took a disastrous turn. Isn't life like that sometimes?
- What was the problem? Joseph was described as 'well-built and very handsome' (*Gen 39:6*). His boss' wife was infatuated with him.
- She seduced him but he turned her down. Why?
 - he couldn't do this to his boss (who treated him very well & completely trusted Joseph (*Gen 39:9*).
 - he couldn't do this to God (God had been so good to him so far) (*Gen 39:9*)
- That's '**INTERGRITY**'. Joseph had integrity.

- 'INTEGRITY' is not doing something wrong when no one is looking
 - e.g. chance to steal, cheat (or cheat on your spouse) etc. but didn't do it.

- Because Joseph refused to sleep with Potiphar's wife, he was accused of 'attempted rape' 'cooked' up by the wife.
- Without any fair hearing, Joseph was thrown into jail.

- "After hearing his wife's story, Potiphar was furious". (*V.19*)
 - "He took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the King's prisoners were held". (*V.20*)
- (Gen 39:19-20)*

- What injustice!. If you were Joseph, how would you feel?
- "Life is so unfair. Here I resisted temptation (by honouring my boss and my God) I end up in prison!"

- Sometimes in life we try to do the right thing but end up 'with the wrong' consequences
 - my own experience: helped some people to change their 'religion' status in their legal documents (as a lawyer), end up facing very serious consequences.

God was with Joseph in Prison

- So Joseph landed in a prison (jail).

- “But the Lord was with Joseph there, too, and he granted Joseph favour with the chief jailer”. (V.21)
- “Before long, the jailer put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison.” (V.22)
- “The chief jailer had no more worries after that, because Joseph took care of everything. The Lord was with him, making everything run smoothly and successfully”. (V.23)

(Gen 39: 21:23)

- So what happened to Joseph in the prison? Very much the same as happened in Potiphar’s household.
- 1st: God was with Joseph (even in prison)
- 2nd: God granted Joseph favour with his boss (Chief Jailer). So he put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners. He became the Chief Jailer’s ‘Deputy’ (like Potiphar’s General Manager). In fact he ran the prison for his boss.
- 3rd: Joseph was very successful in everything he did. His boss had no worries.
- So Joseph rose to the 2nd in command in the prison.

Joseph’s interpretation of fellow prisoners’ dreams

- This was no ordinary prison. In fact, it was a ‘royal jail’, meant for the palace servants who offended Pharaoh. So they were locked up in this jail for unspecified periods of time while Pharaoh decided what to do with these unfortunate souls.
- One day this royal jail had 2 new inmates. One was Pharaoh’s cup-bearer and the other Pharaoh’s baker. Perhaps Pharaoh didn’t like the cup-bearers’ choice of wine. Perhaps the baker over-baked Pharaoh’s bread. For whatever reasons, they both ended up in prison waiting for Pharaoh to decide their fates.
- One night both of them had their dreams (nothing unusual). Both felt troubled and Joseph noticed their dejected face. The conversation may have gone something like this: -

Joseph: "Hey guys. Why you both look so sad? Someone in your family died?"

Cupbearer & Baker: "No. We both had these strange dreams. We don't know what it means to us. We're really troubled by our dreams. Here in this prison there's no one to interpret our dreams for us. (Well what did they expect?)

Joseph: "Oh, interpreting dreams is God's business. But I do have some experience. Why don't you tell me anyway?"

(a) The Cup-bearer's Dream

- The cup-bearer volunteered first
- He told Joseph of this strange vine which had 3 branches that began to blossom and budding.
- It means, in 3 days time, you will get your job back and you'll be released from prison.
- The cup-bearer went crazy and he jumped up & down (not in the Bible).
- And Joseph said: "Oh, one more thing. When you get back your job, please remember to put in a good word to Pharaoh for me. Ask him to let me out. My brothers kidnapped me and sold me to as a slave and here I am in jail. I shouldn't be here, you know?"
- Cupbearer: Silent. Was that a 'yes' or a 'no' or non-committal?
 - He probably agreed to help Joseph. In Gen 41:7 we're told that he 'was reminded of his failure'. (which prompted him to recommend Joseph to Pharaoh).

(b) Baker's Dream

- Since the Cup-bearer had such a positive outcome, the baker decided to 'try his luck'.
- He told Joseph that in his dream he was carrying 3 baskets on his head. Suddenly the birds came and ate them.
- Joseph may have explained it along these lines.

- Joseph: "I'm sorry, my man. No good news for you. It means 3 days time you'll be sentenced to death. Your head will be chopped off and put on a pole. Birds will come and eat your dead body".
- Baker: "Are you sure or not? Did you interpret correctly?"
- Joseph: "I'm sorry. I only interpret dreams. I'm not responsible for their outcome".

Out Of Sight Out Of Mind (“OSOM”)

- As predicted by Joseph, the cup-bearer got his job back and the baker had his head chopped-off and was eaten by birds.
- After the cup-bearer was released from prison, he suffered “OSOM” syndrome (a common condition, which means ‘out of sight, out of mind’).
- So Joseph remained in the prison for another 2 years.

Life Is Unfair

- If you were Joseph, how would you feel?
- You would probably said that life is really unfair
- In the 1st episode (sold as a slave), all Joseph did was he told his brothers about his 2 dreams (which they didn’t like, fair enough). Maybe it was the way he spoke about the dreams. But that is no ‘capital offence’ (death penalty)!
- In the 2nd episode (thrown into prison), Joseph was seduced by his boss’ wife. He valiantly resisted temptation and out of respect for his boss, he was thrown into prison!
- In the 3rd episode (baker forgot about Joseph), he correctly interpreted the baker’s dream and he was saved, the baker suffered a lapse of memory and Joseph was left languishing in jail for 2 more years.
- Life is so unfair. Is this your experience? That’s my son’s experience.

Joseph Interprets Pharaoh’s Dreams

- 2 years later, the cupbearer recovered from his ‘OSOM’ syndrome.
- Pharaoh had bad dreams which troubled him greatly. To make it worse, none of the ‘royal dreamnologists’ could interpret it for him.
- Since Pharaoh had run out of options, the cupbearer decided to step up and recommended Pharaoh to Joseph who correctly interpreted his dreams (and the deceased baker’s dream).
- So on the cupbearer’s recommendation, Pharaoh summoned Joseph (clean shaven and in his new clothes) to his royal palace.
- This is roughly how the conversation might have taken place: (Read *Gen 41*)

Pharaoh: “So you are Joseph, the dreamnologist? I’m told that you are very good in interpreting dreams”

Joseph: “No. No I don’t interpret dreams. It is God who interpret dreams.

Pharaoh: “Ok, ok. Whatever. Now listen carefully. Interpret properly. Remember the baker? So interpret carefully.”

- Pharaoh had 2 dreams
- In the 1st Dream, he told Joseph about 7 thin cows eating up 7 fat cows by the River Nile.
- In the 2nd dream, he told Joseph about 7 thin stalk of grains eating up 7 fat plump grain stalks.

Joseph: "Oh your Excellency, your 2 dreams are the same dream".

Pharaoh: "What do you mean? How can my 2 dreams be the same? One is about cows and the other is about grain stalks.

Joseph: "Your Excellency this 2 dreams are related to each other. What these 2 dreams means is this:

- There'll be 7 years of abundance followed by 7 years of severe famine.
- This famine is very serious, Egypt has never experienced this kind of famine before
- If nothing is done, it will wipe out the entire population of Egypt!

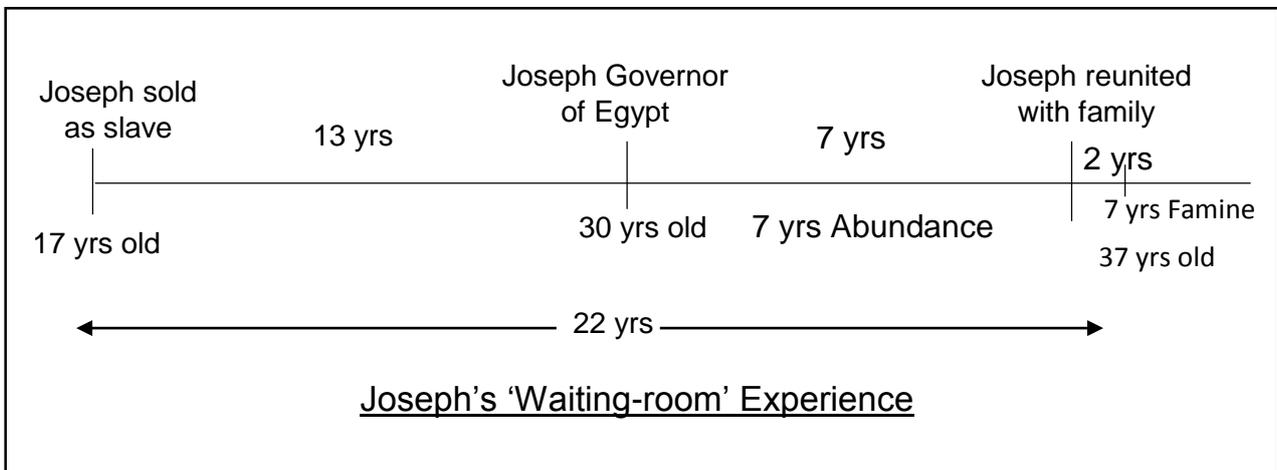
Joseph Became Governor (Ruler) Of Egypt

- However, Joseph did not stop there. He went one step further.
- He recommended to Pharaoh that he should appoint someone to be in charge to conserve the food grain during the 7 years of abundance to prepare for the 7 years of famine by taxing 1/5th of all the grain produced.
- So, Joseph, from a 'dreamnologist', he appointed himself to be the 'Royal Consultant' for that moment.
- Pharaoh was impressed with not just with his ability to interpret of his dreams, but also his practical recommendation.
- Since Joseph seemed to be the only one who knows what to do, Pharaoh immediately appointed Joseph to be the 'Disaster Minister' (no pun intended) to take charge of this National Disaster Rescue Project.
- From this minstral post, Joseph was later promoted to the Governor (Ruler) of Egypt. He was put in charge of Pharaoh's household and the whole of Egypt, More significantly, he was put in charge of selling the grain.
 - so anyone wants to buy grain must see Joseph. See how God works?
- Thus, he became the 2nd in command in Egypt. Can't go any higher.
- Joseph was 30 years old.
- Question: Where did Joseph get all these skills in managing Egypt's agriculture and life-stock at such a critical national crisis of this powerful nation?

- Answer: Remember what Joseph did in Potiphar's household?
- So God was preparing Joseph the past 13 years for this role.
- That's the way how God sometimes prepare our lives.

Joseph reunited with his family

- We all know how the story of Joseph ended. It was during the 7 years of famine, Joseph's family came to buy grain in Egypt (Joseph was in charge).
- but the entire family was re-united in Egypt on 2nd year of the 7 years famine (Gen 45:6)
- According to God's divine plan, Joseph was reunited with his family after 22 years (13+7+2 years). There were 70 of them in the family in Egypt. (Gen 46:27)
- It was from Joseph's family that's how the entire nation of Israelites ended up in Egypt. After 4 generations (400 years), it grew from 70 to 600,000 men (not counting women & children). (Exodus 12:37)
- So Joseph's dreams had come true. His entire family had unknowingly come to him and he saved his whole family.
- So Joseph went through a total of 22 years 'waiting-room' experience



How did Joseph cope with his 22 yrs 'waiting-room' experience

- There is only 1 word to describe Joseph's initial 13 years of 'waiting-room' experience: injustice (13 years of injustice)
- Sometimes we complain that "life is unfair". That was what Joseph endured for 13 years.
- Yet everywhere he ended up (none by choice), he was successful. His boss liked him and he always ended the "2nd In Command" (can't go any higher).

- The question is: How did Joseph manage to cope with his 22 years of 'waiting-room' experience? What was the secret of Joseph's success?

Secret of Joseph's Success

- The secret of Joseph's success is inscribed in the names of his 2 sons.
- What's in a name? In Joseph's case, a lot.
- What were the names of Joseph's 2 sons?

(i) 'Manaseh'

- His older son's name was 'Manesah' which means 'God had made me forget all my troubles and the family of my father' (*Gen 41:51*)
- Because God helped Joseph to forget his troubles. He was able to focus on his work, maintain his nice demeanour and good look (remember Joseph was 'handsome and well-built'). That's why all his bosses liked him and promoted him.

(ii) 'Ephraim'

- His younger son's name was 'Ephraim' which means 'God had make me fruitful in the land of my suffering'.
- Notice 2 things. First, the word is 'fruitful', not 'successful'. The two are not the same.
 - you can be 'successful' without being 'fruitful'
 - also you can also be 'fruitful' without being 'successful'
- We cannot all be successful but we can all be fruitful.
- What is the difference? 'Success' is what society sees you. 'Fruitfulness' is what God sees in you.
- Which would you rather be? 'Fruitful' or 'Successful'?
- Not all of us can be 'successful', but we can all be 'fruitful'
- Secondly, Joseph had a fruitful life even though he lived through adversity of 13 years.
- Through God's help, Joseph succeeded in becoming the best person he could be even in times of adversity.
- His adversity did not prevent him from fulfilling God's will, which was to serve his family and the whole nation of Israel.

Closing

Lessons learned from Joseph's 'waiting-room' experience

(i) Don't focus on your problems

- As we go through our 'waiting-room' experience, don't focus on the problem. Focus on the solution (God).
- Don't let your adversity consume or paralyse you that you can no longer function.
- Ask God to help you to forget about your troubles by learning to surrender your troubles to God.

Janes's Malicious Harassment

- Recently Ethel & I have been encouraging a girl (let's call her 'Jane') who have been maliciously attacked by someone who is extremely jealous about her (she is getting married to her boyfriend). She does not know who is this person.
- This jealous person put up posters of Jane in her church and her workplace accusing her with malicious lies and accusations (which I can't quote here).
- Jane, of course, was very badly hurt because all the allegations were lies. (I happened to know they were not true). She could not eat or sleep for a week.
- As if that was not bad enough, the same attack came a 2nd time!
- Besides advising her as a lawyer what legal action she should take
 - Ethel & I took a lot of pain to encourage her to continue to do all those things that would make her happy (e.g. preparing for her wedding, her sports activities etc.)
- We encourage her not to give in to the devil (through this wicked person) who wants to destroy her. We encourage her to do exactly the opposite
 - go and enjoy her normal life. Don't stop living your normal life.
 - Leave the 'battle' to God. God will deal with it.
 - She agreed.

(ii) Be a blessing to others in time of adversity

- When Joseph's brothers realised that Joseph was the ruler of Egypt, they must have been extremely worried that Joseph would take revenge on them.
- But the Joseph now and the Joseph 22 years ago were different.
- This is what Joseph said this to his frightened brothers (who tried to kill him & later sold him as a slave).

- “But don’t be angry with yourselves that you did this to me, for God did it. He sent me here ahead to preserve your lives (V.5)
- “God has sent me here to keep you and your families alive so that you will become a great nation.” (V.7)
- “Yes, it was God who sent me here, not you!...” (V.8)

(Gen 45: 5-8)

- After 22 years, having suffered 13 years of injustice, Joseph realised it was God who sent him to Egypt (not his brothers) to fulfil God’s plan.
- He finally saw the ‘big picture’ – God’s will
 - God had used Joseph to save his family and the nation Israel.
- Without Joseph, there would be no Israel today.
- So Joseph’s life was a very fruitful one as he went through 13 years of waiting-room experience.
- Likewise, we should not stop to be a blessing to others, even as we go through our waiting-room experiences.

My own experience: God Uses Broken-Vessels

- Ethel and I have been struggling for the past 15 over years dealing with one of our sons. Only God knows the number of times we prayed to the Lord to deliver us out of this 15 over years of ‘waiting room’ situation.
- There were times we felt so helpless (though no hopeless) and I have despaired. All of our friends who tried to help him failed. Not because they didn’t try hard enough. Because my son listens to no one. That’s why his life is getting nowhere.
- While struggling with our ‘waiting-room’ experience, I was invited to preach in various churches and I shared about our struggles while I ministered God’s Word.
- That’s how this ‘waiting-room’ sermons began, 15 over years ago. It was borne out of my own circumstances.
- What I began to see, each time I preached on this topic, was how God used me (a broken vessel) to deliver His messages to touch so many lives (everywhere I preached).

- Sometimes I wondered: wouldn’t it be better to share this after I’ve succeeded in overcoming my ‘waiting-room’ experiences? Then I’ve got a ‘success story’ to tell. That would be nice, wouldn’t it?
- But God told me, “No, That’s not how it works”.
- I realised that my message was more effective while I was going through the doldrums (the pain and agony).

- This same message would not have the same effect if I only preached them after I succeeded in over-coming my 'waiting-room' situation.
- because by then, I would not have understood your pain so well.
- After all these 15-20 years, I realised one thing
- God use 'broken-vessels' to be His perfect instruments to do His perfect will.

Old Farmer's Broken Vessel

- There was an old poor farmer who had a small farm. He had many pots.
 - One of his many old pots was cracked and water leaked from it. But the old farmer did not want to throw it away because he loved this pot very much & it had served him well.
 - The other pots used to laugh at this old cracked pot as a useless pot.
 - Every time when the old farmer used this old cracked pot, water would dripped by the side of the path. So the other pots laughed: "What a waste of water".
 - Through the times, the old farmer realised there was always such fresh beautiful flowers lining along the path he carried the water.
 - He realised that, each time he used this broken pot, the water had leaked out to water the flowers by the side. Without the water, the flowers at the side would not have grown & bloomed.
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- In a way, we're all 'broken' people when we go through our 'waiting-room' situation ('broken' inside)
 - So if you're a father or mother going through a waiting-room experience, be the best father or mother you can be to your children
 - If you're a Sunday school teacher, be the best Sunday school teacher you can be.