

**WHEN LIFE GETS
INTERRUPTED**

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For the sake of clarity, all Scripture quotations and parenthesized Scripture references have been placed in italics.

Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to my brother, Joel, who has always encouraged me to “look on the bright side” whenever my life has been interrupted. He usually has a broader perspective of situations and circumstances than I do, and that perspective has helped me to search for the “greater purpose” that God often has in mind when He allows our lives to be interrupted.

I love you, Joel. You were fun to grow up with, and you’ve been a blessing to my life every step of the way. There’s no way I could have had a better brother. I thank God greatly for you and for your influence on my life.

Introduction

Interruptions are part of life. Some interruptions are minor and only annoying. Other interruptions, though, are major and can be devastating.

The dictionary defines an interruption as “a stoppage or hindering of an activity for a time.”¹ Another definition describes an interruption as “a break in the continuity of something.”² We’ve all experienced that. Our lives have been hindered, or even stopped, by abrupt and unexpected interruptions.

The best example I have of an interruption that hindered, stopped, and broke the continuity of all of our lives is Covid-19. At the time I am writing this, we are still experiencing the pandemic. Millions of people have died worldwide. Think of all the people whose lives have been forever changed by the deaths of their loved ones. Additionally, think of all the people who have lost their jobs, been forced to close their businesses, missed precious time in school, been separated from their family members and friends, and experienced anxiety and even depression because of the pandemic.

It’s rare, almost unprecedented in human history, that everyone’s life on the planet

would be interrupted by the same thing at the same time. Interruptions don't usually work that way. Interruptions typically take place individually, not collectively. A person loses his job, for example, but the rest of the world doesn't feel it. A person is diagnosed with cancer, but everyone else's life goes on as normal. A person's heart gets broken, but everyone else seems to be not only unaffected by the situation but also completely oblivious to the pain. That's how "life interruptions" normally happen. We go through something we would rather have avoided. Our progress is hindered. Our lives are stopped. And the future is uncertain.

In addition to what has happened globally with Covid-19, perhaps you are experiencing some other type of "life interruption" right now. Something has happened to you that has hindered your ability to move forward. It has broken the continuity of your daily life rhythm. It has stopped you in your tracks. You may still be going through the motions physically, but mentally and emotionally you are spent. Your nerves are frayed, and your energy is gone. You are asking: "What should I do? What *can* I do? What happened to my life, and will I ever feel normal again?" Those are the types of questions I want us to think about in the pages that follow.

I want us to begin by thinking about a man in the Old Testament named Joseph. If anyone's life was ever interrupted, it was his. In fact, he experienced several major-life interruptions at an early age. From a human perspective, we would say that each interruption hindered Joseph's progress and stopped him from moving forward. From a heavenly perspective, though, just the opposite happened. As we read Joseph's story in Genesis 37-50, we discover that each interruption was actually an *opportunity in disguise*. They were opportunities for Joseph to trust God. They were opportunities for him to grow spiritually. And they were opportunities for God to demonstrate that He is always in control of every aspect of our existence and that no interruption can alter our lives unless God first allows it to happen. Joseph's journey is filled with betrayal, injustice, disappointment, and years of seemingly going around in circles. But by the end of it all, it was clear to Joseph (and to everyone close to him) that God was using every interruption to Joseph's advantage. Each interruption was a *part* of Joseph's story, but they weren't the *end* of his story. And your interruption isn't the end of your story either. Instead, it's an opportunity for you to trust God. It's an opportunity for you to grow. It's an opportunity for a new beginning. And it's an

opportunity for God to make the next season of your life all that He wants it to be. Your life may have been interrupted, but it hasn't ended. God never leads us backwards. He always leads us forward. That means the best is yet to be! You've got to believe that.

Joseph's Interruptions

Joseph grew up in a large, dysfunctional family. His father, Jacob, had two wives. Each of his wives had what we might call an assistant or personal helper. From those four women, Jacob became the father of twelve sons and we're not exactly sure how many daughters. We know that one of his daughters was named Dinah, but we also know that he had more than one daughter because the Bible mentions "*all his sons and all his daughters*" (*Genesis 37:35*).

Nonetheless, Joseph was Jacob's eleventh son and also his favorite. It's never good when parents play favorites because the partiality that Jacob showed to Joseph created jealousy in Joseph's brothers and nearly cost Joseph his life. Benjamin, Jacob's youngest son, appears to have been too young (and of a different spirit) to have been a part of what Joseph's older brothers did, but let me just say that

Joseph's ten older brothers greatly resented him.

Their hatred for Joseph (resulting from jealousy) all started when their father gave him a beautiful coat made of many different colors. Since he was the only child to receive such a gift, his older brothers "*hated him and could not speak peaceably to him*" (*Genesis 37:4*).

To make matters even more tense, Joseph shared with his family a couple of dreams he had dreamed in which he had seen that God had great things planned for him (*see Genesis 37:1-11*). That only increased their feelings of resentment and jealousy. Maybe he should have kept those dreams to himself. Maybe not. The Bible doesn't comment on that part of the story. But we do know this: His brothers were unwilling to deal with, or at least control, their feelings of hostility. They proceeded to take Joseph by force and throw him "*into a pit*" (*Genesis 37:24*). Their intention was to kill him in the process, but one of the brothers, Judah, convinced the others to pull Joseph out of the pit and sell him to a group of slave traders who were on their way to Egypt. That they did. So Joseph was Egypt-bound. His dreams of greatness were interrupted to say the least. His brothers had stripped Joseph of his beautiful coat before throwing him into the pit.

They now dipped that coat into the blood of a freshly killed young goat and took it back to their father and tricked him into believing that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. What...a...mess!

When Joseph arrived in Egypt, he became a slave for one of Pharaoh's officers, a man named Potiphar. Amazingly, the Lord blessed Joseph in this less-than-ideal circumstance. The Bible says that "*the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand*" (*Genesis 39:3*). We learn from this verse that life's interruptions can be times when we sense God's presence in an even greater way and when His blessings are unusually real. I say that now to make this point: If your life has been interrupted, don't try to rush through the process to get on to what's next. Instead, *embrace the process* and focus on what you have now...*God's presence* and *His provision*.

While Joseph was experiencing the goodness of God in a very difficult and ungodly environment (and about the time Potiphar "*made him overseer of his house*"), the bottom completely fell out of Joseph's life (*Genesis 39:4*). Potiphar's wife developed a crush on Joseph. That's putting it mildly. She actually tried to seduce him. When Joseph resisted, she became infuriated. She felt

scorned. His rejection of her created an anger in her heart that led her to falsely accuse Joseph of rape. As a result, Joseph was thrown into prison (*see Genesis 39:20*). But even there, *“the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (Genesis 39:21)*.

Eventually, through a providential series of events, Joseph was released from the prison. His release occurred because he had accurately interpreted the dreams of two of his fellow inmates. One man’s dream (the baker) was a prediction of his own death. Joseph explained that to him, and he was indeed killed. The other man’s dream (the butler) foreshadowed his release from prison and his return to the service of Pharaoh. Joseph explained that to him, and he was indeed released. After considerable time passed (two years to be exact), Pharaoh himself had a couple of dreams and needed someone to interpret them. The butler, who had promised but forgotten to speak a good word to Pharaoh about Joseph, remembered Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams and told Pharaoh about him. Pharaoh summoned Joseph from prison and asked him to interpret his dreams. Joseph explained that only God could enable him to do that and then listened to and interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams. He explained to Pharaoh that his dreams meant

that there would be seven years of plenty in Egypt followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh was so impressed that he made Joseph the Prime Minister of Egypt. He was second in power only to Pharaoh himself (*see Genesis 41*). His job was to oversee the gathering and storing of food during the seven years of plenty so there would be ample food for the people during the seven years of famine.

What an amazing turn of events. As a seventeen-year-old young man, Joseph had dreamed of greatness. Now, thirteen years later, when Joseph was thirty years old, his dreams had become a reality (*see Genesis 41:46*). Thirteen years of waiting. Thirteen years of interruptions. The betrayal by his brothers. The pit. The trip to Egypt with the slave traders and his subsequent slavery there. The false accusation. The prison. Being forgotten. One interruption after another. Through the entire story of Joseph's life (more of which we'll discuss later), we learn some valuable lessons that will help us to persevere and press on in faith when life's interruptions halt our progress. In the remainder of this booklet, I want us to focus on *ten practical steps* we can take when our lives are interrupted. From Joseph's example, we learn how to *respond appropriately* when the unthinkable happens.

What To Do When Life Gets Interrupted

1. Keep your faith.

When our lives are interrupted by a difficult and unexpected circumstance, our first response is absolutely crucial. We can either panic, or we can choose to trust God. The second option is the better option. When we make a decision to trust Him, we put ourselves on the road to victory. Faith always leads to victory. The Bible says, *“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith”* (1 John 5:4). During a major-life interruption, it is possible to actually “be overcome” by the difficulty. It can consume and even control us. But it is also possible to “overcome” the painful circumstance by trusting God. Faith does for a Christian what a chin-up does for an athlete. It lifts us up. It lifts us higher. It puts us above it all (at least in our hearts and in our minds). Faith is the secret to surviving the initial shock of whatever it is that has interrupted our lives, and it is also the one thing God has given us to sustain us in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead. I cannot stress strongly enough how imperative it is for us to trust God completely when something bad

happens. Faith is our lifeline. It keeps our heads above water, spiritually speaking.

As we think about the importance of faith, we must remember that faith always requires an object. You have to have faith *in* something. When you fly in an airplane, you have faith in the pilot. When you eat in a restaurant, you have faith in the people preparing the meal. When you take a prescription medication, you have faith in your doctor and pharmacist. And for those of us who are Christians, we have faith in God. Let's develop that a little bit...

We need faith, first of all, in *God's sovereignty*. That's a big word that simply means God is in control. He is still *reigning* (the root word of *sovereign* is *reign*) when our lives are interrupted. He doesn't cause accidents, tragedies, cancer, or injustices of any kind. But sometimes, for reasons currently unknown to us, He allows those things to happen. Our first response must always be, "God is in control, and I choose to trust Him." If you will do that, the panic will disappear.

We also need to put our faith in *God's presence*. He is right there with us when the worst-case scenario happens. Joseph had God's presence through every challenge he faced. And so do we.

Not long ago, I was praying for an awareness of God's presence in my own life. I know that He's with me, but sometimes I lose my awareness of His presence. As I was praying for that, I sensed the Holy Spirit whisper to my heart, "You don't need to pray for an awareness of My presence. You need to claim it by faith." That was a powerful word to me. God was telling me that I didn't need to pray for something that I already have (His presence) and that I could experience by faith (an awareness of it). That was eye opening and even life changing for me. As soon as He impressed that on my heart, I prayed, "Lord, I know You are here with me because You promised to be. Right here and right now, I claim Your presence by faith." And do you know what happened when I did that? I had an immediate awareness of His presence. I claimed it by faith, and it became real to me. We become aware of God's presence by faith.

We need to trust *God's sovereignty*. We need to claim *His presence*. And we need to have confidence in *His plan*. God used everything Joseph went through to get him to the place where he needed to be. Every interruption was actually a *steppingstone* in disguise. Had Joseph never been sold by his brothers, he never would have ended up in Egypt. Had he never gone to Egypt, he never

would have been falsely accused of rape. Had that not happened, he never would have been sent to prison. Had he never gone to prison, he never would have interpreted the baker's dream and the butler's dream. Had that not happened, he never would have been called in to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Had he never met Pharaoh, he never would have become the Prime Minister of Egypt. And without being placed in that position, he never could have saved so many people's lives during the famine.

God had a plan for Joseph's life, and every interruption moved Joseph one step closer to fulfilling that plan. The same is true for you. So trust God with every interruption you face.

2. *Maintain your convictions.*

When something painful or unfair happens, we become vulnerable. It's easy to think to ourselves: "I was trying to serve God. I was trying to do right. Why would God have allowed this? If this is what happens when I'm trying to please God, what's the point?" Maybe you're asking those types of questions now. Or better said, maybe the devil is putting those questions in your mind.

It's interesting to me that fairly quickly after Joseph ended up in Egypt he was tempted to

commit adultery. Potiphar's wife more than made herself available to him. It would have been easy for him to have rationalized in his own mind: "I'm in Egypt. Nobody knows me here. What difference will it make? And besides, if God really cared anything about me He never would have allowed me to end up here in the first place." That type of thinking would have led Joseph into a disastrous situation. But in the moment of temptation, Joseph said to Potiphar's wife, "*How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*" (*Genesis 39:9*). Joseph's family and friends weren't in Egypt, but he knew God was there. And he knew God was watching. Even in the midst of his confusing and painful saga, he loved God too much to sin against Him by succumbing to that woman's enticement. He didn't stay in that place of temptation for very long either. The Bible records that he "*fled and ran outside*" (*Genesis 39:12*). Good for him. He gave us an example to follow.

Satan knows when we're vulnerable. He knows when we're weak. Joseph was vulnerable in Egypt. At least he was circumstantially vulnerable. But spiritually speaking, he was strong. His faith was in God, and that faith lit a fire in Joseph's heart. It lit a fire of love for God. And it lit a fire of purity and holiness. When he could have given in, he

didn't. He resisted the temptation, and in the process he pleased God.

Ironically enough, the result of his obedience was that Potiphar's wife felt rejected and then became extremely angry. That's when she falsely accused him of rape. That's when he was thrown into prison. His obedience wasn't immediately rewarded. Eventually it was, but not immediately. In the short term, things got worse. The lesson for us is that we need to do what's right no matter where we are and no matter what the consequences may be.

More than likely, the interruption you are now facing was beyond your ability to control. The reason I say that is because if you view the interruption as a negative, and you don't like it, then you would change it if you could. But you can't. Your life has been interrupted by something from the outside...something outside of your ability to control. One thing I've learned in life is this: God holds us responsible for everything we can control, but He doesn't hold us responsible for anything we can't control. So, at this point, the only thing you can really control is your *response* to the interruption. Joseph didn't ask to go to Egypt. He couldn't control that. But he could and did control what he did once he arrived there. He controlled his response. And so can you.

I encourage you to honor God in your “Egypt” wherever your “Egypt” might be. Don’t compromise your convictions. Stay true to who you are. And stay true to the God who has allowed you to be where you are right now and who is closely watching to see if you will do *right* when it would be easier to do *wrong*. Sow good seeds during your time in Egypt. A wonderful harvest will one day come (*see Galatians 6:7-9*).

3. ***Be more concerned with your character than with your reputation.***

Can you imagine what the people in Egypt must have thought of Joseph? Here was this foreigner from Israel who had actually ended up working for Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. So even though Joseph didn’t have a high-ranking position, he was nonetheless working for the administration. Potiphar, as time went by, made Joseph the “*overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority*” (*Genesis 39:4*). About the time Joseph was getting established in his new role, he was accused of rape and sent to prison. A member of the administration now appears to be a criminal. If the Egyptians didn’t resent him already for working for their government, they certainly hated him now for raping Potiphar’s

wife. Or at least they assumed he raped her. After all, he was a prisoner at this point.

But their assumption was wrong. He hadn't raped anybody. He had actually taken a stand against any sexual misconduct, and his faithfulness to God had caused his would-be seductress to take her anger over being rejected out on Joseph in the form of a malicious accusation. At this point in the story, Joseph could have focused on what others *thought* about him, but he chose instead to focus on what God *knew* about him.

And that leads me to the point I want to make: Your *reputation* is what others *think* about you; your *character* is what God *knows* about you. For that reason, we should focus on our *character*, not on our *reputation*.

Don't get me wrong. We all want to have a good reputation. We all want people to think highly of us. That's normal and natural. If that's our only focus, though, we will spend our energies trying to make people think highly of us by putting our best foot forward in public and trying our best to impress others. Since people tend to believe what they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, we can go a long way in life trying to present the best image of ourselves as possible.

The problem with such an approach is that it isn't real. It's phony. The only way that our reputation has any credibility at all is if it flows *out of* our character. Our character is the real us. It's what God knows about us, and we certainly can't fool God.

Dwight L. Moody, a famous preacher from long ago, defined character as “what a person is in the dark.”³ In other words, your character is what you are when the cameras are off, when you're home alone, when no one is watching. The Bible says, “*The eyes of the LORD are in every place*” (*Proverbs 15:3*). And your true character is determined by what He sees.

Joseph's name was “drug through the mud” in Egypt. His *reputation* took a hit. But his *character* was very much intact. I encourage you to follow his example. Don't be as concerned with what others *think* about you as you are with what God *knows*. It is *His* opinion that matters most.

Use the time your major-life interruption provides to develop your character. Work on that. Commit yourself to putting your best foot forward in private, not just in public. No one is perfect. We all sin. But we should nonetheless strive more than anything to live honorably and holy when no one is watching but God. After

all, He is the only person we should really be concerned with anyway. His opinion, if you think about it, is the only one that really counts. And, if He is truly pleased with our character, He will reveal truth to others and even help them to see us in a more favorable light.

4. *Learn to love God unconditionally.*

We talk a lot about God's unconditional love for us. In other words, God loves us no matter what we do. He doesn't love us less when we lose our temper than He does when we stay calm and cool. He doesn't love us less when we give in to temptation than He does when we resist temptation. He doesn't love us less when we worry and fret than He does when we trust Him completely. God's love is unconditional. He never stops loving us. What a comforting thought.

Here's the question, though: Do we love God with that same unconditional love? Don't misunderstand what I'm saying. Obviously God never sins. So it's not that we could ever get angry with Him because He has done something wrong, because He hasn't. But do we get angry with God when He allows our lives to be interrupted? Do we get angry with Him when He permits pain and sorrow into our lives? Do we only love God when things are

going our way? Or have we learned to love Him unconditionally...regardless of what He lets happen?

I'm afraid that many within the ranks of Christianity have a conditional love for God. If their health is good, their income is steady, their family is harmonious, and their blessings are abundant...they love God. But if any of those things get threatened, they begin to carry a secret, silent grudge against God. They get angry with Him for allowing something they know He could have prevented. We all have to guard against that.

One of the things I admire most about Joseph is that he had an unconditional love for God. Even after being mistreated by his brothers, after being thrown into a pit, after ending up as a slave in Egypt, and while being confined in an Egyptian prison, Joseph continued to love God. His love for God wasn't dependent upon *God's blessings*; it was dependent upon *God's faithfulness*. And that love for God kept Joseph on the right path.

Have you learned to love God like that? Have you learned to love Him unconditionally? That's something we can all work on when our lives have been interrupted. There are several reasons we should love God regardless of what

He allows into our lives. We should love Him because of His nature...He's good. We should love Him because of His forgiveness...He's been patient with us and gracious to us. We should love Him because of His purposes...He has a plan to bring something good out of the worst imaginable situations and circumstances.

I encourage you: Don't just love God for *what He does for you*. Instead, learn to love God for *who He is*. The best thing about God is *God Himself*. We thank Him for His blessings (and we should). We don't (or at least we shouldn't) take them for granted. But *God's presence* is His greatest blessing to us. The wisest thing you could do would be to establish a relationship with God that is rooted in unconditional faith *in* Him and unconditional love *for* Him. He knows what He's doing, and He would never allow anything into your life that He didn't intend to ultimately use for your good. In the meantime, though, learn to love God for who He is...regardless of what happens. Learn to love Him unconditionally.

5. *Let things play out...give it time.*

As I mentioned earlier, it took thirteen years for Joseph's dreams to become a reality. But those weren't wasted years. Those were years of spiritual growth and development. During

those years, Joseph learned an important lesson: Getting to know God in a deeper way is more important than fulfilling your dreams. That's an important thing for all of us to learn.

There is a lot of talk today about fulfilling our destinies and seeing our dreams become a reality. And while I do believe that God has a destiny (a specific will) for each of our lives and that He places dreams in each of our hearts, if we pursue our destinies and dreams more than we pursue God Himself then we run the risk of either neglecting God altogether or merely using Him for our own purposes.

Let me say it another way: The most important part of your destiny...at the heart of any truly God-given dream...is getting to know God more intimately and becoming increasingly more like Christ. The apostle Paul wrote in his epistle to the Romans: "*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son*" (Romans 8:29). The most important part of our destiny is to grow closer to God and to become more Christlike in our attitudes and in our behaviors. And this doesn't happen overnight. It takes time.

I can vividly remember a prayer I prayed to God when I was several years into a major-life

interruption. I knew that God was bringing much good out of a bad situation. He was teaching me to trust Him. He was deepening my own personal sense of peace and tranquility. I was growing in my relationship with Him. I was beginning to see why God had allowed the problem in the first place. And my prayer to God went something like this: “God, milk this cow dry. Don’t let me miss anything You have for me to learn from this experience. Accomplish Your perfect will in my life through this circumstance that I’m now in.” I was walking across the parking lot of our church when I prayed that prayer. It’s been many years ago now, and yet, I can still remember that prayer time as vividly as if it had happened yesterday.

What was I saying to God? I was saying, “God, help me to grow. Take Your time. Don’t let me waste this experience. Use it to grow me up.” God answered that prayer, and He still is. I’m still growing, and I have a long way to go. But I’m at least a little farther along than I would have been without that and other interruptions I’ve been through in life.

While God is developing us spiritually, He is also working on circumstances and other people behind the scenes. Every interruption Joseph experienced moved him a little bit

closer to meeting Pharaoh. And once that meeting took place, Joseph was immediately promoted to the position God had in mind for him all along. Had he tried to escape prison, he would have missed it all. That's why I'm encouraging you to let things play out... give it time. God is working in ways that you can't see, but He's working nonetheless.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible says this: "*That He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end*" (Deuteronomy 8:16). God humbled Joseph. He tested him, too. But He did Joseph much good in the end! He "did him good" spiritually, personally, and professionally. And He did amazing things *through* Joseph. He'll do the same for you. Just don't rush the process. Give it time. Give *God* time. Be patient.

6. *While you're waiting, be faithful where you are.*

God places a premium on faithfulness. When God looks down from heaven and sees a person being faithful in his or her responsibilities in life, He notices that, and He also begins to give that person more responsibilities. Jesus told a story about a man who said to his diligent employee, "*Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful*

over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things” (Matthew 25:21).

When God looked down from heaven, He saw Joseph being faithful with his responsibilities. He was a faithful and reliable worker for Potiphar. And even in the prison, he was a good inmate. He went by the rules; he did what he was supposed to do; and he stood head and shoulders above the others in that Egyptian dungeon. The Bible says that God “*gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison*” (Genesis 39:21). So much did the “*keeper of the prison*” trust Joseph that he “*committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners who were in the prison*” (Genesis 39:22). It was Joseph’s faithfulness in undesirable settings and in seemingly hopeless situations that touched God’s heart. It was Joseph’s faithfulness in out-of-the-way and solitary places that made him eligible for greater responsibilities. It is true that Joseph went from the *prison* to the *palace*, but it is also true that he never would have made it to the *palace* without his faithfulness in the *prison* first.

If you think about it, the only place where you can be faithful is the place where you currently are. During one of life’s interruptions, we have to learn to excel where we are even if we don’t necessarily want to be

there. We have to be faithful in our daily quiet time with God. If we're not faithful in our daily Bible reading and prayer time, we don't have much of a chance to please God. We have to be faithful to the people God has placed in our lives...our family members, friends, co-workers, and neighbors. We have to be faithful in our jobs and in our other responsibilities. We have to be faithful with our finances... giving God ten percent of our income and living within a budget. We have to be faithful in our church attendance. And, as I've already mentioned, we have to be faithful when faced with temptation. God *expects* and *honors* faithfulness.

When God called my dad into the ministry in the 1960s, a door soon opened for him to preach every Thursday morning at 7:00am to a group of approximately two hundred ladies at the Arrow Shirt Factory in Atlanta, Georgia. He did that for quite a while. He wasn't speaking in a prestigious church to thousands of people. He was speaking to a group of ladies before they began their workday. But he was faithful. He was faithful in his preparation, faithful to show up each week, and faithful to bring them a message of encouragement from God's Word. The people living throughout Atlanta didn't notice that, but God did. And for the last fifty-plus years, God has been trusting

my dad with larger and larger responsibilities in the ministry. That's how it is with God. If we're faithful with the little things, He will trust us with bigger things. I encourage you to be faithful wherever you currently are. Do the best you can with the opportunities you have. That's all a part of the test you are now going through. You can pass that test and move on to what's next if you'll only be faithful in your present responsibilities.

7. *Expect a happy ending.*

When our lives get interrupted by something difficult, it is important that we focus on the fact that there is life on the other side of the interruption. When a devastating event first strikes our lives, we naturally shift into a *survival mode*. We muster up what faith we have and trust God in the initial moments and in the days and weeks that follow.

There comes a point in the journey, though, where we need to stop focusing on the *past* and start focusing on the *future*. We need to stop thinking about what we've *lost* and start anticipating what's *next*. We have to come to a place where we stop *looking back* and where we begin to *look forward* to what God has for us in the next season of life.

God had a fantastic future in store for Joseph. As we have already seen, he became the Prime Minister of Egypt. But God had more in mind for Joseph than just that. God wanted him to have a family of his own. He married an Egyptian girl named Asenath, a wife presented to him by Pharaoh himself (*see Genesis 41:45*).

As time went by, this couple had two sons. The name of the first-born son was Manasseh which literally means, “*For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house*” (*Genesis 41:51*). Think about that for a moment. Joseph had been so spiritually, mentally, and emotionally healed of all the betrayal and injustices he had experienced that he gave his first-born son a name that means God had made him forget his brothers’ meanness to him, his trip to Egypt, the false accusation of Potiphar’s wife, his years in prison, and how he had been forgotten by a fellow inmate. He had forgotten all of that.

What did Joseph mean, though, when he said he had forgotten all of his problems? Did he mean that he could no longer remember what had happened to him? Had he developed some sort of amnesia? Well, obviously not because he was still talking about all the “*toil*” he had been through (*Genesis 41:51*). When

Joseph said that God had made him “*forget*” all the difficulties he had been through, he didn’t mean that he couldn’t remember those details anymore; he meant that the pain from those experiences was gone. Those emotional *wounds* had turned into *scars*. What is a scar? A scar is a wound that has healed. Joseph’s wounds were healed, and the scars were reminders of God’s healing touch.

Let me say it this way: Joseph could still remember the experiences he had been through, but he was no longer experiencing the pain associated with what had happened. In fact, he could now *talk about* his pain without *feeling* it anymore. He had been divinely healed and delivered of all of that. So healed, in fact, that the name he gave to his first-born son reflected that healing.

God wants to give you that same healing touch as well. Before we can move on to what God has planned for the next season of our lives, we have to make peace with whatever it is that happened in the last season. One of the reasons Joseph could move forward was that he had so thoroughly trusted God with his life interruptions in the past. He saw God’s hand in everything he had been through. His faith kept him connected to God, and through that divine connection God’s healing grace flowed easily

through Joseph's heart and mind. That same healing power is available to you. Just stay connected to God by trusting Him and by being patient. Emotional healing takes time.

Not only did God give Joseph a wife and a son, but He also gave him a second son...and Joseph named that boy Ephraim which literally means, "*For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction*" (Genesis 41:52). Not only had God made Joseph *forgetful* of all the pain he had experienced, but He also made him *fruitful*. He had given Joseph a wonderful life with meaningful work to do. And notice *where* God did that...right there in Egypt...in the very place where he had experienced such heartache.

Here we get a glimpse into the way God works. He often chooses to bless us and use us in the very place where we have had our greatest struggles, setbacks, and disappointments. I emphasize that here because often times when a person's life has been interrupted by a difficult situation, he or she understandably wants to get out of where they are and go somewhere else. They search for a new relationship, a new job, a new church...a new beginning. And while God is certainly a God of new beginnings, He often chooses to do *new things* in the *same old place*.

In the Book of Isaiah, God said: *“I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert”* (Isaiah 43:19). Notice that God is making a road *“in the wilderness”* and rivers *“in the desert.”* God often does *new things* in the place where we already are. That’s not always the case. Sometimes God does lead us to a new place geographically. The Bible is full of examples like that. But in the life of Joseph, we see God doing something amazing for him in the very place where he had been maligned and mistreated. So before you pack your bags and head for greener pastures, make sure God is leading you there. If He is, get moving. But if He isn’t, stay put. Let God do something *new* right where you are.

8. **Guard your heart against any and all bitterness.**

Bitterness is a big deal. It’s a real problem for a lot of people. No one is immune. If we don’t guard our hearts, any of us could become full of that toxic anger.

As the story of Joseph’s life unfolds in Genesis, we read that the seven years of plenty ended and that the seven years of famine began. The Bible says that *“the famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread”* (Genesis 41:54). The biblical account

goes on to record: “*The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians...So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain*” (Genesis 41:56-57). Joseph had overseen the storing of grain during the bountiful years. Now, he oversaw the distribution of the grain during the famine.

When Jacob, Joseph’s father, heard about the grain in Egypt, he told Joseph’s ten older brothers to leave Israel and travel to Egypt to buy some food for the family so they could survive. They heeded their father’s advice and headed down to Egypt.

When they arrived in Egypt, “*Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him*” (Genesis 42:8). Interestingly, when his brothers approached Joseph to buy the grain, they “*bowed down before him with their faces to the earth*” (Genesis 42:6). The dreams that Joseph had dreamed thirteen years earlier were now becoming a reality. His brothers were literally bowing down before him.

The next several chapters in Genesis record a fascinating series of events in which Joseph gave food to his brothers, inquired about his father’s well-being, and demanded to see his younger brother, Benjamin. He did all of this

without ever identifying himself to his brothers. At the end of this long, drawn-out saga, Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers and told them to bring the whole family to Egypt so he could provide for them. The family did just that. They moved to Egypt, and Joseph cared wonderfully for them.

After seventeen years in Egypt, Jacob died. He was one hundred and forty-seven years of age (*see Genesis 47:28*). Upon his death, Joseph and his brothers, along with other family members and a delegation of Pharaoh's representatives, took Jacob's body back to Israel for burial. That was something he had requested just before he died (*see Genesis 49:29-33*).

As soon as they had buried Jacob, the entourage returned to Egypt. Upon their return, Joseph's brothers began to fear for their lives. They assumed that Joseph had only provided for them because their father had been alive. Now that he had died, they thought Joseph would punish them for how they had treated him years earlier. You can *feel* their guilt when you read their words: "*Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him*" (*Genesis 50:15*). They sent messengers to Joseph asking for his forgiveness. Then they "*fell down before his*

face, and they said, ‘Behold, we are your servants’” (Genesis 50:18). Joseph responded by saying to them: “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Genesis 50:19-20).

Joseph’s response was *full of love* and *free of bitterness*. His most insightful words were these: “*God meant it for good*” (Genesis 50:20). In those five words, we discover a major key to living a life free of bitterness. In those five words, we see Joseph’s strong belief in the sovereignty of God. What he was saying to his brothers was this: “You had one thing in mind, but God had something else in mind. He used your evil actions to accomplish His greater good. How could I be angry with you? Look what God did!”

Joseph was free of bitterness because he could see the hand of God in his situation. At the *end* of the story, it was easy to see God’s involvement. But the impression we get is that Joseph was able to see God’s hand in his life at *every step* along the way. He knew that it was God (not his brothers or anyone else) who was calling the shots in his life. He rested in that. And his heart was as pure as gold as a result. Bitterness was never able to take root.

Friend, what was true for Joseph is true for you. Your life isn't at the mercy of circumstances, or another person, or even the devil himself. Your life is at the mercy of God. He had a reason for allowing Joseph to be thrown into a pit, sold to the slave traders going down to Egypt, falsely accused, and wrongly imprisoned. Those were the experiences God used to get Joseph where he needed to be. Similarly, God is in the process of using whatever interruption you may be facing to accomplish His ultimate purpose in your life. If you can look at it that way, you, too, will be free of bitterness. God is in control whether we can understand it or not. He's running things. Keep your eyes on Him and view negative circumstances as the *tools* He is using to fulfill His greater purposes for your life.

9. *Be kind to people...especially to those who may have caused your life to be interrupted.*

One of the things I admire most about Joseph is the fact that he was kind to his brothers even though they had hurt him so deeply. It is true that he "*spoke roughly to them*" when they first arrived in Egypt (*Genesis 42:7*). But even then, we read that on three separate occasions he was so touched by the fact that he was in their presence that he "*wept*" (*Genesis 42:24; 43:30; 45:14-15*). He

evidently spoke harshly to them initially because he was trying to get them to tell him how his father, Jacob, and his younger brother, Benjamin, were doing.⁴ They indeed gave him a report on both of them. Another reason for his firmness with them was probably because he was trying to bring them to a place of repentance for the way they had treated him.⁵ He accomplished that goal, too. We read that his brothers said to one another, “*We are truly guilty concerning our brother*” (Genesis 42:21). So early on in the story of their reunion, even though they didn’t recognize Joseph yet, Joseph showed his brothers a *tough love*. There was no meanness or vindictiveness in it, only a desire to gather information and lead them to repent. The love Joseph initially showed his brothers is not at all unlike the love God shows us. The Bible says that “*God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance*” (Romans 2:4, NIV). Kindness was in Joseph’s heart even though he was outwardly firm with his brothers when they first arrived in Egypt.

As the story progresses, though, Joseph’s tenderness and kindness are more obviously seen. By the end of the story, we read that Joseph told his brothers (who were afraid that he would retaliate against them now that their father had died), “*Do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones*” (Genesis

50:21). And then the Bible adds this additional sentence that summarizes concisely the type of person Joseph was. We read these words: *“And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them”* (Genesis 50:21). He was kind to his brothers...the ones responsible for his life having been so abruptly and painfully interrupted. What an example Joseph provides!

Who is it that has caused your life to be interrupted? Is it a family member? A spouse? A boss? A friend? Who is it that has sent your life going in an unexpected direction that you never would have desired to travel? Well, the Bible makes clear to us, by the example of Joseph, that God expects us to not only trust Him with the broken pieces of our lives, but also to show kindness and love to the person (or people) who may have caused those broken pieces in the first place.

In the New Testament, we read these words: *“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you”* (Ephesians 4:32). We are to be forgiving and kind towards others because God is always forgiving and kind towards us. In the Old Testament, we read these words: *“What is desired in a man is kindness”* (Proverbs 19:22). Kindness is a great quality to have.

Kindness is not something we can force and fake, though. At least not for very long. Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit (*see Galatians 5:22-23*). Kindness is something that flows supernaturally out of our hearts when we are walking in unbroken fellowship with Jesus Christ (*see John 15:5*). That doesn't mean that it's always easy to be kind. Remember, we were human beings before we became Christians, and our old sinful, human nature is still very present. The more closely we walk with Jesus, though, the more easily we can express kindness to others. Ask God to help you with that. Ask Him to express His love and kindness to others through you. Forgive them first for whatever they may have done and then be kind to them. That's one of the greatest ways you can honor the Lord.

10. Prepare for what will happen after you die.

Interruptions in life give us an opportunity to think, reflect, and reprioritize things. They have a way of helping us see what's really important in life and what isn't.

At the end of Joseph's life, he did an interesting thing. He prepared for what would happen after he died. He said to his fellow Israelites living in Egypt, "*God will surely visit*

you, and you shall carry up my bones from here” (*Genesis 50:25*). He was telling his brethren that there would come a day when God would bring the Israelites out of Egypt and return them to their homeland. When that happened, Joseph wanted them to bring his body back to Israel so that he could be permanently buried in the land of his birth. Many years later, when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, we read that “*Moses took the bones of Joseph with him*” (*Exodus 13:19*).

It’s interesting to me that as Joseph came to the end of his life he was preparing for what would happen after he died. Again, Joseph gives us a wonderful example to follow.

A major-life interruption is a great time to prepare for what will happen to us after we die. The Bible says, “*Prepare to meet your God*” (*Amos 4:12*). Have you done that? Have you made preparation for eternity? If not, you can now. At the end of life’s journey, people will go to one of two destinations. Some will go to heaven to live with God forever. Others will go to hell to be separated from God forever. The only difference between the people in those two locations is that those in heaven will be the ones who confessed their sins, turned from their sins, asked Jesus to save them, and trusted Him to do so. Those who end up in hell, on the

other hand, will have failed to do that. Those in heaven will have been *saved* by the grace of God. Those in hell will be forever lost because they *rejected* the grace of God.

Let me ask you a question: Which group are you in? If you are not absolutely certain that you have given your heart to Jesus Christ, I encourage you to do that now. Just pray this prayer, and you will have made preparation for life after death:

Dear Jesus,

Maybe the reason You have allowed my life to be interrupted is so that I can get my salvation settled. If so, I'm very thankful for the interruption.

I am truly sorry for my sins. I ask You to forgive me of everything I've done wrong, and I ask You to help me change. Come into my heart and make me a Christian. I ask You to save me, and I trust You to do it. Welcome to my heart, Jesus. Begin now to make me the person You want me to be.

*In Your Name I Pray,
Amen.*

Friend, if you prayed that prayer, God just answered it. The Bible says, "*For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved*"

(Romans 10:13). I encourage you to share your decision with a friend and then to make it public in a good Bible-believing church. Today is literally the first day of the rest of your life. Congratulations on your decision!

Becoming Thankful for Life's Interruptions

I, like you, have had several interruptions along life's way. Some of them have been personal. Some have been medical. Others would fall under some other category. But this I can tell you: God has used every single interruption, without exception, for my good. After one major-life interruption, I came to the full assurance of my salvation. After another interruption, I discovered that God is truly in control of every situation in life. After another interruption, I learned that life is precious and that we shouldn't get upset about the little things. After yet another interruption, I learned to slow down, do less, and not be so uptight. I wish I could have experienced all of those things without having to have had my life interrupted, but life doesn't work that way. That would be like saying, "I wish I could have learned math without having to have gone to school." That's just not how it works. We

learn math in school. And we learn, grow, and experience God in deeper ways when our lives get interrupted...as long as we *respond properly* by turning to Him, trusting Him, and obeying Him completely.

I want to end our time together by sharing a verse that I mentioned earlier. This verse pretty much sums up the way I feel about life's interruptions. The Bible says, "*That He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end*" (Deuteronomy 8:16). Looking back, that's exactly what God has done in my life during every interruption I've experienced. He has humbled me. He has tested me. And He has done me much good in the end. How could I resent any interruption that God has used to help me so much?

We serve a faithful, loving, merciful God. I encourage you to turn to Him and cling to Him whenever your life gets interrupted. And never forget that in the midst of your interruption He always has something good in mind. There's always something good He wants to do *in* you, *for* you, and *through* you. Remember Joseph. Follow his example. And may God give you an equally happy ending!

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- ¹ “Interruption,” *Merriam-Webster.com*, Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interruption> (accessed March 29, 2021).
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Kevin Halloran, “D.L. Moody Quotes: Inspiring Quotations by Dwight L. Moody,” *Anchored in Christ*, February 4, 2013, <https://www.kevinhalloran.net/d-l-moody-quotes/> (accessed March 29, 2021).
- ⁴ J. Vernon McGee, *Through the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, Volume 1, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1981, p. 170.
- ⁵ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible Expanded Edition-New International Version*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1994, p. 71.

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A graduate of Baylor University (B.A.), Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (D.Min.), Jon's desire is to lead people to trust Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord and to help them grow in their relationship with Him.