



To get a picture of the AA Little League team I coach, the San Carlos Indians, imagine this: in the last 14 innings they have accrued 32 strikeouts. That's an average of almost 2.5 strikeouts every inning. It's almost impossible to win a baseball game with that many strikeouts.

Add to this errors in the field, one broken thumb, one broken finger, games missed due to sickness and five boys, almost half of my team, playing their first year of baseball, and you start to understand why we are not the best team in the league. In fact, we are one of the worst!

But last Saturday, the Indians rose from the ashes.

In the last inning we were behind 4 to 1. The game would end with us at bat. I huddled my team together and gave them a pep talk. Four runs to win boys, four runs to win.

The first batter started the inning off in the right direction by getting a double. And the boys were on fire! Hits were flying off the bats and every play on the field was going our way. The score became 4 to 4. Runners on first and third, one out.

I had a really fast runner at third base and I just knew we were going to win this game. The batter hit a looping fly ball to the short stop. As the ball is in the air, I'm telling the runner to get ready to tag up – that's right, we're going to tag up on an infield fly. He's going to run home to try and win this game. Short stop catches the ball. The runner takes off to home base. The short stop throws the ball and it's off target. The catcher reaches sideways for the ball, fumbles it, drops it. The runner slides across the plate. The Indians win, 5 to 4. Everybody went wild! The underdog Indians won the game!

Genesis 41 is about the rise of an underdog, too—Joseph. For 13 years Joseph has been a slave or a prisoner. For 13 years he's been a nobody. For 13 years he has been completely cut off from his family, friends and homeland. For 13 years he's suffered from the injustice of power-hungry and selfish people. For 13 years he has remained faithful to God. During those 13 years, don't you imagine he's wondered, "why is my life turning out like this?" But in Genesis 41, we see the rise of this underdog. We see God's purpose and glorious intention for these 13 difficult years that Joseph didn't merely endure, but years that Joseph desperately needed on his path.

Is there hope for all of us found in Joseph's story? I believe there is. Hope that at every step of our lives, we are under the sovereign rule of God.

When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up. He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted—thin and scorched by the east wind. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up; it had been a dream. In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him. Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was impaled." So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." (Genesis 41:1–16).

Pharaoh told Joseph about the two dreams he had.

I told this to the magicians, but none of them could explain it to me." Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do." (verses 24–25).

God gives what's needed when God's timing is right.

God gave Joseph the dream interpretation. That's what he needed at that moment, according to God's timing.

Joseph gives a detailed interpretation to Pharaoh's dream. The seven cows and seven plump good ears of grain equal seven years of great abundance in Egypt. The seven skinny cows and seven thin ears of grain equal seven years of horrible famine. The repetition means that God has determined these events will come about.

And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt (v. 33).

Joseph suggests how this discerning and wise person would prepare the nation for the coming famine.

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you." (verses 39–40).

Then Pharaoh gives Joseph a number of formal and outward signs of his new authority: the Pharaoh's signet ring, new clothes, a gold necklace, a parade in his honor where people bow down to him, a new name that is Egyptian, Asenath as a wife (daughter of the Greatest of Seers in Egypt) and then he gets going with his new job.

Before God does a BIG work through you, He will do a DEEP work in you.

The big work was Joseph's amazing position in Egypt and his job. The deeper work was to develop Joseph into a discerning and wise man. For 13 years Joseph waited and wondered. This is the way it works with us as well, right? God uses hardship, suffering and trials to grow us and develop us. "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything*" (James 1:2–4).

Before God does a **big** work through you, He will do a **deep** work in you. Why? Because as it says in James, the testing develops our perseverance. Our perseverance generates maturity. And God wants his great leaders to possess the quality of maturity. This is the process of transformation Joseph went through. Make no mistake, God was in charge of the school of suffering that Joseph endured. God was using the difficulty and hardship to groom and develop Joseph into a man He could use in a great way.

Are you going through some struggles? Is God doing a deep work in you?

Don't give up. Keep your faith in God.

How do you typically respond to hardship and trial in life? For me, it's a tough pill to swallow, on a personal level. I know God uses it to grow me up and potentially bless more people through me later in life. But I grew up in a home that valued comfort. American culture has reinforced the value of comfort. The way I see it, difficulty and hardship should be avoided at all costs. So much so, that when faced with a choice between doing the right thing which will bring some discomfort or fudging a bit and maintaining my personal comfort, I feel the pull of temptation to fudge a bit.

What about you? How do you react to struggles, difficulties, and trials when they come your way? The story of Joseph reminds us that before God does a **big** work through you, He will do a **deep** work in you.

Joseph offers us great encouragement by how he handled his hardship. He never gave up faith in God. He served faithfully wherever he was. God prepared and groomed him through these years so that he was the right man, at the right time.

Let's check in with Joseph and see how he's doing with his **big** job.

Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure (v. 49).

God will empower you for the task before you.

God gave Joseph what he needed, an opportunity to interpret the dream and the interpretation. For 13 years God was developing Joseph into a discerning and wise man. And now, God is empowering Joseph to do an unbelievably difficult and massive job.

Think about how he started small and grew. This is how it works for leaders.

Some sheep. As a teenage boy he learned responsibility shepherding sheep.

One household. In Potiphar's house he bore more responsibility, since he was the boss of all the servants.

One prison. As a prisoner, he was in charge of all the prisoners and what happened there.

One nation. As he gathered and stored grain, he bore responsibility over everyone who lived in Egypt.

Every step along the way, God has been empowering Joseph to lead. Notice the incremental steps and increasing responsibilities: some sheep, one household, one prison and one nation.

There is going to be a point in your life, if you walk faithfully with God, where He will empower you to do something that will stun you because it's not you doing it, but God through you.

What is God empowering you to do right now? As we think about these four categories, which level of leadership and responsibility most closely fits you? Some sheep, one household, one prison or one nation?

Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." (verses 50–52).

When you're the underdog and you're on the rise, remain faithful to God.

Joseph had two sons. He named them Manasseh and Ephraim. Manasseh means "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." We know by the rest of this story that Joseph didn't literally forget everyone in his family. And we know by our own experiences that we can't just sweep the unpleasant memories from our minds.

Instead, I think Manasseh reveals that Joseph has made a healthy refusal to allow memories of injustice to fester within him. His family hurt him badly. It would be natural for Joseph to resent them and punish them repeatedly each time he remembers

them. Instead, he was choosing to forgive them, choosing not to hold their wrong actions against them.

Ephraim means "God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." Joseph's season of suffering has come to an end. Sure, he'll have difficult moments in life, but as a whole, the season is over. Joseph has a wife, two children, a specially appointed job from God, he's walking faithfully with God, and his job is making a big difference in people's lives.

By naming his sons Manasseh and Ephraim, Joseph is honoring God. Joseph is telling everyone that at every step of his life, he has been under the sovereign rule of God.

Conclusion

We should consider our own lives:

Is God giving you unusual insight and knowledge about Him and life?

Are you being transformed by God through hardship and trials?

Are you being empowered by God to do something beyond your natural talents?

Are you honoring God?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1350-28FC

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, May 15, 2011 at Central Peninsula Church
1005 Shell Boulevard | Foster City CA 94404 | 650 349.1132 | www.cpcfc.org. Additional copies available on request.