

What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do / Week 4

“Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined” (Genesis 40:1-3 NIV).

“After they had been in custody for some time, each of the two men—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison—had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. So he asked Pharaoh’s officials who were in custody with him in his master’s house, ‘Why do you look so sad today?’ ‘We both had dreams,’ they answered, ‘but there is no one to interpret them.’ Then Joseph said to them, ‘Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.’” (Genesis 40:4-8 NIV).

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28 NIV).

There are the moments in our real-life stories that make us ask:

- What’s happening?
- What’s the point of me going through this?

For the past few weeks, we’ve been talking about this question: What do you do, when you don’t know what to do? Today, we are talking about what to do when you have heavy painful stuff to deal with. But before we can even ask the question, *what do I do?* We often ask ourselves, *Why? Why is this happening to ME? Why am I going through this? Why is this happening NOW?* Just like a movie that flashes back to a scene that doesn’t seem to make any sense at the moment, difficulties can make us feel the same way. **Difficulties often feel random, pointless, or unnecessary.**

Sometimes we see the point after the fact—when it’s part of our backstory. For example...

- Maybe you have a broken friendship—but looking back, you realize that the friendship led you to make some bad decisions, and you may not have liked that version of yourself very much. So even though it felt bad at the time—you’re now actually glad it happened.

Sometimes we even see the point in the moment—while the difficulties are happening. For example...

- Maybe you found yourself struggling in band. And it was on you: You weren’t putting in the effort. You got called out by your section leader and started doing extra rehearsals. And you got better. It wasn’t fun, but it was for the best.

It’s nice when that happens, but **most of the time, things that don’t feel good seem pointless.**

We’ve all had an experience that hurts AND feels pointless in the moment.

We’re talking about difficulties. Pain. Struggle. Problems. The things that will be part of our backstory one day. But as for now, they’re in our current story, and when we’re in the middle of them, it’s rough. *Just ignore it and leave it. Whoever dropped it will come back to look for it.*

With all these options, the question blaring through my mind would be, “What should I actually do?” We’ve all asked ourselves: *Why me?* When we go through these things (incomplete sentence). And if you’re like me, there’s usually not many good answers in the moment.

And what's worse? **In real life, unlike the movies, our difficult circumstances usually don't get a pretty bow tied on them as we walk through them.** The outcome may not turn out how we want them to. In those times, it can be really difficult for us to see any point behind our pain, to find hope despite the hurt, or to find the determination to keep going despite the difficulties.

But when we find life confusing or difficult, we can actually learn what we can do by looking to people who have handled similar situations—which brings us back to the life of Joseph!

We've been looking at some events in Joseph's life. The account of his journey is found in the Old Testament in the Bible, which basically means he lived long before Jesus. And here's a recap:

- Joseph was sold into slavery by his own *brothers*. (*Yikes, right?*)
- He was taken to a foreign country (Egypt), where he was forced to work for a high-powered official.
- He was falsely accused of doing something he didn't do and was thrown into prison.

From free man to slave to prisoner. If anyone had earned the right to ask: *What's the point? Why is all of this happening to me?* It was Joseph.

And that's where we pick up. Joseph is in jail for a crime he didn't commit and here he makes some new friends. Check it out...

"Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined" (Genesis 40:1-3 NIV).

Pharaoh is the boss of all of Egypt. So, if he got mad at you and wanted you thrown into prison, that's where you'd go—even if you hadn't done anything illegal. And that's what happened to these two guys, they were thrown in prison with Joseph.

The story continues...

"After they had been in custody for some time, each of the two men—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison—had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, 'Why do you look so sad today?' 'We both had dreams,' they answered, 'but there is no one to interpret them.' Then Joseph said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams'" (Genesis 40:4-8 NIV).

There is a lot happening here. Remember, Joseph is in prison for a crime he didn't commit, and even in this really difficult situation, Joseph continues to honor God!

The men told Joseph their dreams. And with God's help, Joseph told them what they meant. And, then, what Joseph said would happen, happened. Based on the dream the chief cupbearer had, Joseph said he would be restored to a favorable position—and he was! As for the chief baker, Joseph said he would not have the same luck—and he didn't. Listen, the rest of the story of what happened here was just as crazy. It's worth the read.

But you would think given what Joseph had done to help the cupbearer out, it would have made sense for the cupbearer to speak up and say: "Thank you, Mr. Pharaoh for helping me out. I just want you to know that I was locked up with this guy who interpreted my dream to perfection! I know you have dreams that need interpretation, so you may want to think about getting this dude on staff ASAP."

But that's not what happened. The story tells us the cupbearer forgot about Joseph. He got out of jail and went on with his life. Ouch.

Over time, as Joseph was waiting in jail for his friend to remember him, he realized that not only did his friend forget him, what he did to help his friend didn't help his situation. I'm sure he was tempted to wonder: *What was the point of all that? It didn't help my life get better at all! Has God forgotten about me? I thought I did what was right, and I am still here in jail!*

But then, two years later, Pharaoh had two dreams that troubled him. He desperately searched for someone on his staff who could interpret them, but no one could. And *that's* when the cupbearer remembered Joseph. Pharaoh called for Joseph, who interpreted the dream with incredible accuracy. And as a result, eventually Joseph was made second in charge *of all of Egypt*. Under Joseph's leadership, Egypt survived a terrible famine, which eventually put Egypt in a position to save Joseph's family and other people from his homeland who were suffering from the famine.

It was two full years before the cupbearer even remembered Joseph! And even when Joseph was promoted to a position of incredible power, he was *still* living in a foreign land. So, it wasn't like Joseph was able to go home as a free man. And Joseph was *still* second in command under Pharaoh, which meant that if Pharaoh was having a bad day and decided he wanted Joseph dead, he could snap his fingers and make it happen.

So, no. This did not make Joseph's life *perfect*. Not even close. But when we see the big picture and understand the context to this backstory, we see that Joseph's challenging circumstances uniquely positioned him to do something great. Joseph still had to wait TWO YEARS. All the good things that happened in Joseph's world didn't make those bad things okay. Being promoted to second in command didn't undue the challenges he faced leading up to that. But, at the same time, **those difficult circumstances positioned him and prepared him for something great—something only he could do.**

And the same is true for you and me. Hard things can happen in your life. And it is important to **remember that just because something happens doesn't mean it was something God did to you or wanted for you.** Because of sin, things happen that aren't fair, that don't make sense. People hurt each other and they create systems of hurt. But, when it seems like it's impossible that *anything* good can come out of a situation, **remember God is really good at doing the impossible.** Check this out...

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28 NIV).

It may not seem to make things all better, and it may not even make sense yet, but God is in the business of taking our hurt, difficulties and pain and *redeeming* them. That means even if it was done in evil and meant for evil in our lives, He can use it for good...not only for us but for others. In other words,...

**WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO,
REMEMBER THAT YOUR PROBLEMS CAN POSITION YOU
FOR A PURPOSE.**

This doesn't mean we can tie a bow on every bad thing. It doesn't mean everything will be fixed and go back to being how it was before everything bad happened. It just means we can leave room for God to tell a new story in our hard circumstances. It means, we can have confidence in God's ability to redeem things, to know that good can come from bad. It means that the bad stuff doesn't get the last word. **The hardest and worst things we experience aren't the end of us or our story, in fact, they could be part of something more.**

So, when we go through pain and we can't see the purpose yet, here are some things that can help us get a bigger perspective:

- 1. Remember that no one else has your life story.** Your difficult circumstances aren't fun, but they are unique to you. They put you in a position to learn, grow, and discover things no one else can. God is using your tough stuff in ways you can't imagine because they have shaped you in ways no one else has been shaped. That may not make it easier—but it may give you a perspective or a way to see it differently.
- 2. Remember that your story can interact with others.** Although no one else has your life story, many people do face similar circumstances and you could be a voice to help them through their own challenges and pain—a help you would not have been able to provide if you hadn't gone through it yourself. So,
 - When you go through family drama... you can help people who are going through family drama.
 - When you go through a hard breakup... you can understand how someone else feels when they are going through a hard breakup
 - When you deal with a sickness, illness, or injury... you can encourage people who are going through the same thing.
 - When you have had big doubts and questions in your faith... you can be a safe place to talk about those for people who are asking questions of their own.

You can become a person who looks around, sees *other people's* struggles, and says, "Oh, you feel that? Me, too! Oh, you've experienced that? I've been there! Can I tell you my experience?" The truth is, the next best thing to having something fixed for us is having someone—who has been through it too—walk alongside our mess with us.

Joseph went through pain that felt pointless. But when we see his backstory, we see that God used his problems and positioned him for a purpose. God took his impossibly bad situation and used it to create unimaginable good down the road. We'll talk more about that next week, but for now imagine if He could do the same with you.

What if God used your painful situation to position you for something amazing that you haven't even imagined yet? And what if the first step is simply asking for His help?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Imagine there was a movie about the origin story of your life. What would be on the movie poster and why?
2. How are our actual origin stories similar or different from the movie poster?
3. How can problems, disappointments, or letdowns affect our relationship with those who are around you?? What about your relationship with God?
4. What is a situation that you hope God can use but you can't see it right now?
5. When someone is hurting, what are some things that people say, or do, that is helpful? What are some things that people say, or do, that is not helpful?
6. How has hearing someone else's difficult situation helped you in your own difficult situation?
7. Read Romans 8:28. It can be tempting to understand this verse as saying God will make all of our problems go away, but we know that isn't always the case. What are some ways God may use a situation for good *without* making it go away?