

West Valley Church
10/30/11

Engage The Word
Part Two: Genesis 39-41

There are all kinds of warnings in life.

Most products we purchase have labels warning about improper use. I found a great list of these kinds of warnings. Believe it or not, these are all real:

- A label on a snow sled says: "Beware: sled may develop high speed under certain snow conditions."
- On a fishing lure, there's a warning that reads: "Harmful if swallowed."
- A warning on an electric router made for carpenters: "This product not intended for use as a dental drill."
- A warning label found on a baby stroller cautions the user to "Remove child before folding"
- A container of underarm deodorant says, "Caution: Do not spray in eyes"
- A cartridge for a laser printer warns, "Do not eat toner."
- A cardboard car sunshield that keeps sun off the dashboard warns, "Do not drive with sunshield in place"

We can laugh about these, and think, who would be foolish enough to need such warnings?

But apparently someone did, or some lawyer thinks somebody will be foolish enough to fold up their child in a stroller or perform self-dentistry with a power router. Despite the clear instructions, sometimes people still don't pay attention.

The Old Testament also contains some very clear instructions for life, if we would be willing to read it. Unfortunately, many people think it's just an ancient document that is too boring and out of date to read. Many Christians think that since it's called the Old Testament it must not apply to them because we have the New Testament; as if the Old Testament is like Windows 95 or something. Today is day seven in our forty days of reading from the Bible together, called "Engage the Word." How has your reading gone so far—are you able to keep up? If you weren't with us last week, be sure to pick up your copy of this book that is our guide for this journey through the Bible that we are all taking together. If you lost your copy or need another one, please donate at least \$5 for another one—these cost us quite a bit to produce, and while we are happy to provide you with your first, we could use your help if you need more.

Please know that if you are just joining us, we'd love to have you jump in right where we are; that's why the days have dates on them—so you can join in anytime and then keep up with us as we read together—you don't have to catch up.

So far we have been reading from the Old Testament—we'll be in the New Testament in a couple of weeks. But maybe you wonder why we are reading out of the Old Testament—after all, don't we follow Jesus, and didn't he come along in the New Testament? Well, let me give you a couple of important things to remember about the Old Testament. Did you realize that **The OT is the Bible that Jesus read!** Jesus grew up learning the Old Testament, He often quoted the Old Testament and He taught from the Old Testament. If He felt it was that valuable, then so should we.

Jesus always asked people if they had read the OT.

In Matthew 12:3 Jesus said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he became hungry?”

Matthew 12:5—”Have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?” Matthew 19:4—And (Jesus) answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female . . .”

Mark 12:26—Jesus said, “Regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?”

What will *you* do when you are faced with a decision, and you pray, and Jesus asks you, “Have you not read this from the Old Testament. . .”?

There's something else I want you to see: **Jesus referred to the Old Testament to prove who He was.**

Let me give you some examples: in Luke 24 it says that on the road to Emmaus, after His resurrection Jesus appeared to two of His disciples who didn't recognize Him right away. So He began to explain to them who He was and why He would rise from the dead by using the Old Testament scriptures: “beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.” Later it says, “Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’”

“The Old Testament contains over three hundred prophetic passages that refer to the first coming of Jesus the Messiah. Forty-eight of these prophecies refer

specifically to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. All of them published during and eleven-hundred year period that ended four centuries before Jesus was born in Bethlehem.” Grant R. Jeffrey, *Jesus, the Great Debate* (Toronto, Ontario: Frontier Research Pub. Inc., 1999), 229 This is why it’s valuable for us to read the Old Testament. Now, let me take a minute and break down for you the major components of the Old Testament, and why they’re important. There are four major sections of the Old Testament. The first is the **Law**. The Law is the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. They’re called the “Pentateuch” which means the five books. These are the books that were written by Moses, who is called the Lawgiver because it was through Moses that God gave the Ten Commandments and all the laws for the community of God and right living.

The second is the **History** books. These are the next twelve books of the Old Testament—Joshua to Esther. These deal obviously with the history of the nation of Israel. It starts with their entrance into the Promised Land and records their successes and their failures, their faith and their disobedience, through 800 years of their story as God’s people.

The next section is the **Poetry**. This has also been called the Poetic and wisdom books, because it contains Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon, or the next five books of the Old Testament. These five as well as the next group were all written during the time recorded in the historical books. The previous books are historical, the Poetic books are experiential. The previous have to do with the human race; these have to do with the human heart. They portray real human experience, they grapple with profound problems, they express big realities from the deepest pains to the greatest joys. The final section of the Old Testament is the section of **Prophecy**. These are the remaining 17 books of the Old Testament, and they are usually broken down into two categories—the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. They’re not called that because any of them are more important, only because of the size of the books. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel all are significantly larger in size than the other 12 prophets’ books.

Why am I giving you the Old Testament literature course? Because I want you to see that the Old Testament is worth reading, and today we are going to do that by learning a valuable life lesson from one of the true stories that you’ve read from the Old Testament and from the life of Joseph.

If you’ve been doing your daily reading in the morning, then you’ve already read the passage I want to share from today. I hope you are joining us for our Community Groups on Sunday mornings at 8:45a—if you are, you’ve already begun talking about this so you have a head start. But let me summarize the story first, just in case you are unfamiliar. We are learning from the life of Joseph.

Joseph was the youngest of twelve brothers and was clearly the favorite of his father, Jacob. As a boy, Joseph would report to his father all the bad things his brothers were doing. In other words, he was a tattletale. That didn't go over well with them. Then Joseph started having dreams or visions from God that represented all his brothers bowing down and serving him; which of course he immediately shared with his brothers, which also didn't go over well with them. So one day when they were out in the fields, they devised a plan; they grabbed Joseph to kill him, and were going to make up a story to their dad that a wild animal had killed him. One brother, named Reuben, felt guilty, so he convinced the others to throw him in a well, and leave him to die. Reuben secretly planned to go back and rescue him later. But while Reuben was gone, the other brothers got him out, and sold him as a slave to some Midianite traders. The Midianites then sold Joseph to an Egyptian named Potiphar, who was a high ranking officer of Pharaoh.

That brings us to today's passage. Joseph has been sold into slavery, taken captive a long ways away from home, his father thinks he's dead, and as you will see, he ends up in prison, abandoned and forgotten. What I want you to see from Joseph's life is that

1. Life's not *Fair!*

You can definitely draw that conclusion from Joseph's life, and it makes no difference who we are, life is often not fair to us either. The difference then is entirely in how we respond to it; and that's the lesson we will learn from Joseph. Despite all the egotistical precociousness of his youth, Joseph had developed some great character qualities. Unlike his brothers who reacted to life's circumstances and difficulties and seeming unfairness with pride, jealousy, lust, hatred, violence, irresponsibility and immorality (chapters 34 –38), Joseph reacted differently. He could have easily given in to despair, bitterness, and self-pity, but he refused. He had high moral values, a strong sense of personal responsibility, and a hard-work ethic. In every situation, he demonstrated confidence in God; he dealt with people with kind wisdom, honesty, and trustworthiness.

If you haven't read it yet, let me explain just how unfair life was for Joseph. His new master, Potiphar, quickly recognized that Joseph had all these great qualities, and so he entrusted him with more and more responsibility. Potiphar could tell that the Lord was with Joseph and that he had high moral character and could be trusted, so eventually Joseph was put in charge of the personal affairs of Potiphar's household. Because of Joseph, the Bible says that the Lord blessed Potiphar's house. Let me just ask a quick question here: is God blessing your boss, or the place you work, because you are such a great Christian? Do you have such a high

moral character and sense of responsibility that where you work is a better place? If not, why not? You might say, “Well my boss isn’t a Christian,” or “My boss is a jerk.” Let me kindly ask, “so what? What difference does that make?” Potiphar was that, too.

Anyway, back to our story—so Joseph was a good looking guy, made all the more appealing because he was so kind and nice. So Potiphar’s wife took notice. And she began to pressure Joseph in an attempt to seduce him. Seems she was a pretty loose woman, but very wisely Joseph kept refusing her advances. One day, she was waiting for him. They were alone in the house and she grabbed him by the coat to pull him close to her. He ran away, leaving his coat in her arms. She used his coat to accuse him of attempting to rape her, and Potiphar threw Joseph in jail. No trial, no chance to defend himself. Not fair at all! Still, the fact that he wasn’t immediately killed tells you that Potiphar liked Joseph and probably wasn’t entirely convinced that his wife was telling the truth. So Joseph has that going for him—instead of being killed on the spot, he is abandoned to an Egyptian prison. I can’t imagine in any way that the Egyptian prisons were like ours; probably no television, no weight room or fitness center or library or job training. Granted, it wasn’t as bad as some were—he was placed in the jail that was run by the captain of the guard, but I’m still guessing it was a very bad place to be. Not fair at all for Joseph—he certainly didn’t deserve that!

To make matters worse, if you read the story, you know that Joseph had an opportunity to get out, but didn’t. Two other servants of the king were imprisoned with him; a cupbearer and a baker. Both had dreams that Joseph interpreted for them, and in both cases the interpretation came true, resulting in one going free and being reinstated, the other died. For the one who went free, Joseph asked him to put in a good word with the king. But in his freedom the man forgot about Joseph, and Joseph continued in prison for two more years.

Here is the man that God gave all these visions to. He was going to be the leader in his family and among his people, and even among the Egyptians and that entire region. Yet here he is, sold as a slave by his brothers, subservient to an Egyptian officer, a falsely accused sex offender and in prison, forgotten, wasting all that promise and potential for years. How fair is that?

Do you think you’ve been treated unfairly? Is life not being good to you? Well you are in good company. So the question is, then,

2. How Can I Cope

When life isn’t fair? Once again, we can learn from Joseph. What did he do that enabled him to keep a positive attitude, to maintain his moral character, to keep growing, and to be used of God in great ways? One thing Joseph did that you and I

can do, too, is *put God in the center of your life*. In both of those instances in Joseph's life, you can see that he had placed God squarely in the center of his life. When faced with the temptation from Potiphar's wife, look what Joseph did: "Potiphar's wife soon began to look at him lustfully. 'Come and sleep with me,' she demanded. But Joseph refused. 'Look,' he told her, 'my master trusts me with everything in his entire household. No one here has more authority than I do. He has held back nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God.'" (Genesis 39:7-9, nlt)

Do you see that last sentence? That's what it boiled down to for Joseph. There were lots of good reasons not to give in to that woman, but the bottom line was that it would be a sin against God. He refused to do anything that would come between him and God. God was in the center of his life. That meant that his thoughts, his decisions, and his actions were all determined by what God wanted. Then again, when he was in prison, he could have been depressed and bitter and crying and whining about how unfair life was. But in his conversation with the two other prisoners about their dreams, once again Joseph reveals who is in the center of his life: "And they replied, 'We both had dreams last night, but no one can tell us what they mean.' 'Interpreting dreams is God's business,' Joseph replied. 'Go ahead and tell me your dreams.'" (Genesis 40:8 nlt)

Here he had the chance to make himself look good—he had been interpreting dreams since he was a kid. This would be easy! He could have played his hand to really work his way out of those unfair circumstances. Instead he reminds them that God is the one in charge. He could have whined and said "how should I know?" He could have been passive aggressive and said, "Well you'll have to ask God, because He abandoned me a long time ago." He could have said "I'll tell you if you promise to let me out." Instead he said, "God is the one in charge. He does what's best."

When you think about your unfair situation, how much are you whining, how angry are you, how much are you nursing your wounds and pouting or whining or complaining? I promise that your response will show who is in the center of your life—you, or God. When God is, then, like Joseph, you can *trust in God's plan and control*. Joseph knew that God could use him even in those unfair situations, so he trusted that God would work it all out. In both those circumstances, there is a very revealing statement that I want you to see: "The LORD was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master." (Genesis 39:2, nlt) "But the LORD was with Joseph in the prison and showed him His faithful love. And the LORD made Joseph a favorite with the prison warden." (Genesis 39:21, nlt)

In both cases, Joseph continued to trust that God had a plan and was in control.

So when life's not fair and you are trying to cope, put God in the center of your life and trust God's plan and control.

Now you might think that Joseph is different—that he was in the Old Testament and what difference does that make today? If you are tempted to ask,

3. Why Should I ***Try***?

Then let me give you the New Testament principal that applies today. The writers of the New Testament were very familiar with the Old Testament—those were the Scriptures that they read as well. So when they wrote what became the New Testament, they were being inspired by the Holy Spirit from the reference of the Old Testament, in light of the grace of God demonstrated in the life of Jesus Christ. So in other words, they could say with confidence what they wrote because of the truth of the Old Testament and the experiences of their own lives. So from the New Testament, here's why you should try: James said, "Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy." (James 1:2, nlt) Your unfair situation is not nearly as bad as Joseph's, and if God could work in his life he can work in yours too. So consider it an opportunity for joy, because God is at work! That's why the Apostle Paul said, "We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love." (Romans 5:3-5, nlt)

So here's the truth: ***unfair situations are spiritual opportunities*** for you to grow in your faith and for God to work. (*repeat*)

Isn't it great to know that out of those Old Testament stories about the heroes of our faith, we can learn the lessons that apply to our lives today so that God can work in us and through us! Is life unfair? Yep. But you can cope if God is in the center of your life and you are trusting in his plan and control, because that very situation—that unfair circumstance—is actually a spiritual opportunity for you to grow and God to work.

Pray

Invite Darcy up to share her story.