

THINGS UNSEEN

Joseph's Furnace of Affliction

Genesis 39 – 41

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MESSAGE NOTES

What good is all this pain?

1. We can become aware of God at a whole new level.
(We're never in this by ourselves, unless we choose to be. It is pain that often prompts us to seek God.)

The pain of disease, the intermittent and unpredictable destruction of natural disasters, the decay of old age, the imminence of death — takes away a person's satisfactions with himself. It tends to humble him, show him his frailty, make him reflect on the transience of temporal goods, and turn his affections toward other-worldly things, away from the things of this world. —
Eleonore Stump

Isn't it remarkable that from Sudan to China to Cambodia to El Salvador, faith in God grows deepest in places where evil and suffering have been greatest?... This is one of the great paradoxes of suffering. Those who don't suffer much think suffering should keep people from God, while many who suffer a great deal turn to God, not from him.
— Randy Alcorn, *If God is Good*

2. We can realize the countless ways God provides for us.
(It is only in a desolate place of insurmountable obstacles that we ever come to truly realize God's invincible power and current provisions.)

Uncertain times are opportunities for God to show His ability to care for us. Most of the rest of the time we're not paying much attention.

3. We can encounter opportunities that we would never otherwise have discovered.
(If we're willing to adjust to new realities, we discover doorways into significant new experiences).

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved. — Helen Keller

4. We can deepen our genuine compassion for others only through our own experience with pain.
(Suffering can create a new awareness and empathy for others.)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. — 2
Corinthians 1:3 – 4

For a long time, researchers have looked at what enables some people to endure suffering. But over the last decade or so, the focus has shifted from looking only at how some people make it through to how people are able to go through adversity and actually come out the other side stronger than before. ... Much of the outcome depends on how people respond to adversity. —
John Ortberg, *The Me I Want To Be*

5. We can develop humble trust in God when we have no human answers or resources left.
(Waiting for answers creates the space needed to develop faith and patience — which would never occur with a quick resolution.)

What good purpose could possibly come from this pain?

- How has suffering drawn you to God for sheer survival?
- What sort of character qualities have developed through your trials?
- How might God use your struggles to benefit others in the future?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Share what you recall of Joseph's story leading up to him being unfairly thrown in prison.
- Joseph must have asked God why he was languishing in prison since he had honored God. Can you share about a time when you felt as though you were suffering for doing good in some way?
- What are some common ways that Christians today might suffer as a result of their faith?
- The prison warden elevated Joseph to be a guard over the other prisoners. What does that indicate about how Joseph's character was developing?
- In what ways would you say suffering actually brings to the surface so much about who we really are deep down inside?
- The text tells us that Joseph was in prison for at least two years with no real answers. How does waiting on God affect your faith? How might Joseph have grown by waiting those two years rather than by getting released right away?
- Daniel talked about various gifts that can come to us through suffering? Which of the five he mentioned have you experienced in your own life?
- How does 1 Peter 2:9 relate to all this?
- In what ways is Joseph's suffering and response an example to you? How would you like to personalize that example in your own life right now?