

# THE STORY OF JOSEPH

The Test of Suffering and the Test of Success



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The story of Joseph is well-known, even outside of the Christian circle. So I don't think I would do a verse by verse exposition of his story, which many people would have done better.

Joseph, along with Daniel, is a figure in the Bible whose weakness or sin is not recorded (it does not mean that they are sinless though, for all man sin and need salvation). I think this is what makes Joseph such an interesting study – especially to see how God Himself took him out of his comfort zone and place him in severe tests in order to make him a man whom He will use greatly.

In this day and age where children are over-protected from the slightest suffering, the story of Joseph should be taken into more serious consideration. This is how God disciplines His own children and servants; through tests of suffering and of successes.

Assuming that you have read the story of Joseph on your own (if you have not, read it!), I will instead present to you some of the striking patterns found in his story that will teach us how this young man become such an important figure in the Bible.

## 1. The Test of Suffering

PATTERN 1: IN HIS LIFE, JOSEPH WAS REPEATEDLY BETRAYED (3 TIMES BY THOSE CLOSEST TO HIM):

- **By his own brothers**

In his naivete Joseph had given bad reports about his brother, had shown off the robe of many colors to them; and had even ever-so-bluntly told of his dreams, which disturbed even Jacob. He was just a sincere young man who was not aware of the consequences of his actions.

We can therefore imagine what must have gone through his mind when he was in the cistern, listening to his brothers contemplating to kill him. This was no doubt the most painful experience of his life. His own brothers recounted the experience this way “*we saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen” (Gen 42:21). As any normal person would be, Joseph was petrified for his life! Never would he imagine that his beloved brothers, of the same father with him, would even contemplate to kill him!*

Imagine what kind of trauma we would feel if we were Joseph; trembling at the bottom of the cistern whilst listening our own brothers contemplating to murder us, or to sell us for profit. What kind of hatred would we feel against them? What desire for revenge? This ultimate betrayal would have scarred Joseph for life! Which is why this tale of forgiveness is such a magnificent story to tell. But that will come later; much later.

- **By Potiphar's household**

Despite the fact that Joseph showed the greatest loyalty to Potiphar by refusing to lie with his wife (which was ultimately his utmost faithfulness to God, for the climax of that sin to Joseph would be sinning against his God – Gen 39:9), he was finally trapped into a situation where false witnesses could be erected against him. Now I would think that Joseph's reputation would mean that none of the servants of the house of Potiphar would believe the accusation made against him. And with the intensity of the advances, I would think that at least some of the servants would have caught the lustful glance that Potiphar's wife made at Joseph “*day after day*” (39:10). Nevertheless, they would not have dared say a single defense for Joseph lest they too be implicated into the wife's disapproval. Some commentators also noted that Potiphar himself might not have believed his wife;

as shown by his action of putting him into royal prison rather than executing Joseph right away for atrocity. And the Bible did describe the fact that Potiphar “burned with anger” (39:19) but did not say that the anger was directed at Joseph. Such scandal and accusation forced him to take action against his very trusted and productive assistant; whether or not he believed it. And Joseph was betrayed by the whole of Potiphar’s household.

- **By the chief cupbearer**

“The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him” (Gen 40:23). There was a double emphasis on him forgetting Joseph. But did the event really so conveniently slip his mind? Very unlikely, if we see how distressed he was because of the dream, and how miraculous and significant this event really was to him. The word used for not remembering was the Hebrew zachar<sup>i</sup>, whilst the word used for forget was shakach<sup>ii</sup>. Both carried with it the notion of willful disregard of something with the result of an appropriate action being taken for that remembrance. Zachar, for example, is the word often used about God “remembering” His covenant with His people (Gen. 9:15-16; Exod. 6:5; Lev. 26:42, 45; Ps. 105:8, 42; 106:45; Ezek. 16:60)<sup>iii</sup>. And these two words are again used in reinforcement of one another in **Psalm 9:12** “For He who avenges blood remembers (zachar); He does not ignore (shakach) the cries of the afflicted.” When it is said that God forgets, does that mean that the actual event is wiped from His memory? Of course not! There is a connotation to action here. When God remembers His people and His covenant, He delivers His people from their oppression. When it is said that God forgets sins, He does not take it into our account.

Therefore, the cupbearer’s forgetting Joseph was a willful disregard of what Joseph had done for him. Most probably, he did not feel it worthwhile to defend a mere Hebrew slave in risk of the restoration that he now enjoys. And is it not true? We will remember whatever is of importance to us; and we will forget that which is of less value. Joseph just wasn’t important enough for him.

PATTERN 2: JOSEPH NEVER SHOWED BITTERNESS (HOWEVER MUCH THAT WOULD BE UNDERSTANDABLE), AND ALWAYS DOES EVERYTHING IN FAITH, FOR GOD. AND THIS IMPACTED HIS WORK ETHICS.

Despite having every reason to be bitter about all the betrayals that he experienced, Joseph somehow had something in him that caused every one of his superior to place complete trust in him. This is the pattern of what happens whenever Joseph was placed somewhere:

	<b>With Potiphar</b>	<b>With Prison Warden</b>	<b>With Pharaoh</b>
The Lord was with Joseph	39:2	39:21	41:15-36 The Lord interpreted the dream
Joseph had success in everything he does	39:2		41:56-57 Joseph was successful
Joseph found favor in the eyes of his master	39:4	39:21	41:37-38 Joseph found favor in the eyes of Pharaoh
The master puts him in charge of everything	39:4	39:22	41:40-45 Joseph was put in charge of everything
The master does not concern himself with the delegated task	39:6	39:23	41:40 Everything other than the throne

Alright. A side detour for another pattern I will not put into the heading. Do you notice how each time Joseph found favor in his masters' eyes, the masters actually just dumped work to him and totally let go? Aside from the fact that it means Joseph was trustworthy, there is another lesson about work-ethics I want us to consider. We are always jealous of people who never work but gained all the credits. But what we fail to see is how those who work are the ones getting the experience, knowledge and skills needed for more complex tasks. Joseph who was a mere slave gained the wisdom to finally rule a country. How? I believe God trains him through all these work-dumping that he went through. And in God's timing, the opportunities present themselves. Well, just a food for thought.

Have you seen someone who is bitter? How are they like? Would you think they are pleasant? Or someone you would feel comfortable entrusting your whole life to? Well, keep in mind this mental image of what a bitter person is like, and see if Joseph displayed any such signs:

- Despite the fact that he had just been betrayed by his own brothers; despite the fact that this daddy's favorite had just become a worthless slave; Joseph displayed such positive work ethics, and such trustworthiness that he found favor and was delegated with Potiphar's whole household. He did everything in loyalty to his master, but more importantly, as to the Lord. He demonstrated this attitude even when the odds are against him; when he knew he had to offend his master's wife. His comment was as such *"with me in charge, my master does not concern himself with anything in his house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (39:8-9)*. This was the ultimate confession of faith. What he is in fact saying is this:
  - My master has entrusted me with everything, I owe my status to him.
  - But God is the first cause of everything, so I do all things as unto the Lord
  - What you are asking me is wrong, it would not do my master justice
  - What you are asking me is ultimately wrong because it is a sin against God
  - Therefore, despite any risk that might transpire, I refuse to succumb to this temptation

Thousands of year before Paul wrote this, Joseph had already done this, conscience-bound, and out of faith toward his God: *"Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were servicing the Lord, not people, because you know the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether slave or free" (Eph 6:5-8)*.

- Because of that first betrayal, Joseph, who had just gotten his comfort from being sold as slaves by his own brothers, is now imprisoned as a criminal. To put things in perspective, this was the picture given of Joseph in prison by the psalmist: *"They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons" (Ps 105:18)*. Which of us wouldn't have asked, "did I not prove myself faithful? Why then, would I be in this position, misunderstood as a lowly criminal, and bound from my freedom?" Which of us wouldn't sulk in those dungeon, complaining and demanding freedom and justice? Which of us would not become bitter?

True, God was the first cause in granting him favor in the eyes of the prison warden (39:21), but God's leading never meant that human freedom is forsaken – that God had changed the heart of the warden ever so unwillingly. It was Joseph's work ethics and his attitude that earned him that favor; even confined within the walls of the prison.

God disciplined Joseph in stages. He did not immediately make Joseph a prisoner perhaps because He knew Joseph was not ready. From a princely young man to a slave; and then when he is ready, to a prisoner. When looked from Joseph's perspective, it may seem injustice that his faithfulness is rewarded with suffering time and again. But when looked at from God's perspective, this is a Father disciplining His beloved son; not putting him into a trial He knew Joseph was not ready for (compare **1 Cor 10:13**).

But the thing to note is that Joseph remained reliant on God. When he interpreted the dreams of the chief baker and cupbearer, he was very careful to attribute this gift to God. *"do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams"* (**40:8**). And he knew very well that this intervention of God could very well mean a turnaround for him, and he requested to the cupbearer *"but when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. I was forcibly carried from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon"* (**40:14-15**).

- But the test is not over yet for Joseph, because he is again betrayed by the cupbearer. He was to remain an uncertain prisoner for yet another 2 years of his life. This would have shattered his only hope of being set free. "Why did God give me the interpretation of the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker, if that could not get me out of this prison?," Joseph might have asked. The cupbearer was supposed to mention me to Pharaoh; and he did not. Was God truly in control? Did the cupbearer resist Him? Is all hope lost? Imagine being haunted with these questions for another two full years after your last hope was shattered. Any other person would have grown cynical.

Again, Joseph proved himself faithful to God and retained his faith in God. How do we know that? By the fact that at the very first opportunity during which he was praised, he immediately returned the glory to God. When Pharaoh praised him saying that he was able to interpret dreams, Joseph immediately refuted that and say that only God can interpret dreams (**Gen 41:15-16**). **So even at the lowest point of his life, Joseph was never bitter, and was in fact able to grow in his faith to God.**

#### THE BIGGEST TEST OF SUFFERING: A LESSON ON FORGIVENESS

Bitterness is the greatest hindrance to forgiveness. When you feel that you have been treated unjustly and against your will especially by those closest to you, the temptation is always there to exact revenge – to get them to experience the hurt you felt. And this is exactly why forgiveness is always easier said than done. When you are on the receiving end experiencing an undeserved suffering, you do not want to just "let it go," you wish to get even.

On this, I think we can learn a great deal from Joseph. Joseph did not try to hide the hurt he felt when he was cruelly betrayed by his own brothers.

- To the cupbearer he said, *"I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon"* (**Gen 40:15**)
- Joseph indeed suffered greatly, and he showed this by how he named his children. Manasseh because *"God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household"* and Ephraim because *"God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering"* (**Gen 41:51-52**). The trouble that Joseph felt because of his father's household was apparently overwhelming before God enabled him to "forget". Again, "forget" here meant neither that Joseph had lost memories of his own family; nor that he had lost the desire to be reunited with his family. We know this because when the opportunity finally comes for reunion, it was Joseph who displayed extreme eagerness. It means,

rather, that when Joseph remembers his family, he does not remember them in bitterness or self-pity. Joseph also admitted that Egypt was the land of his suffering; though it was through that very suffering that God had made him fruitful. The naming of his sons showed that Joseph did struggle progressively with forgiveness.

Therefore, Joseph's apparent immunity to bitterness was not something latent that comes effortlessly to him. It was something learned; in fact something Joseph learned through intense suffering and perhaps doubt. But Joseph was always successful in learning it because of his constant commitment to trust God, and to put his hope in Him.

With regard to forgiveness, I feel that people, Christians included, fall into two wrong extremes.

- The first mistake and the first extreme is to think that it is biblical to forgive and restore an unrepentant person. I have seen some rare persons who keep getting cheated but never getting bitter. They have learned well the meaning of mercy; but not that of justice. They don't become wiser through their experience. They fall to the same pit again, and again. They make people think that Christians are these gullible, unrealistic and even stupid people who are compelled to be nice. And is it not true that we are called to give our other cheek when one is hit (**Mat 5:39**)? Is it also not true that we are called to forgive 70 X 7 times (**Mat 18:22**)? Are we not commanded to just hand ourselves over to the bullies just to maintain our nice image?

The Bible does demand a display of confession and repentance before forgiveness can be released (eg. **1 John 1:9**; **Luk 17:3**; **Luk 24:17**). And forgiveness is also a fruit of salvation; something we strive to do because we have understood the infinitely greater grace that God has lavished upon us (**Mat 18:23-35**).

And this was exactly what Joseph did. He (1) disguised himself and tested the brothers (2) put them in a similar situation which caused them to sin in the first place in an ever-increasing severity <sup>(i)</sup> by immediately accusing them of spying <sup>(ii)</sup> by requesting to bring Benjamin but putting the silver in their sack so that to return would be potentially hazardous <sup>(iii)</sup> by accusing them of theft and demanding Benjamin to be left behind as slaves as they had done to Joseph. (3) made the situation such that it would be harmful (even fatal) not to repeat that sin but (4) looked for signs of repentance.

Having the gentle heart that he had, doing what he did and testing his brothers was actually much more difficult than simply pronouncing the forgiveness. When he listened about how the brothers felt that they were getting their just desserts for what they had done to Joseph, he turned away and wept (**Gen 42:24**). He wept privately the second time when he saw Benjamin, unable to control his emotions (**Gen 43:30**). And when he witnessed how all his brothers especially Judah defended Benjamin with their lives – when he had confirmed their repentance – he could not control himself and “wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it” (**Gen 45:1-2**).

- But there is also a second extreme which is even more sinful. That is when we justify bitterness and desire for revenge; and thinking ourselves justified for it. This would be like executing perverse justice. Revenge is a dish best served cold; and no one who harbor a vengeful heart can escape from bitterness. Joseph did not harbor such bitterness toward anyone. Not to Potiphar, not to Potiphar's wife; and even not to his brothers. And we have discussed this. His work ethics even as a slave showed no bitterness.

And his tests to his brothers showed his willingness; even eagerness to forgive. That he wept 3 times during the 3 tests to his brothers shows how he was actually unwilling to keep playing the horror drama and felt compassionate of the suffering they must be going through.

God commands His people not to take revenge (**Lev 19:18; Rom 12:19**) and the reason is because God says “It is mine to avenge; I will repay.” Why is this so? If the revenge is justified, why take it from the victim’s hand?

Well the reasons have been given. Revenge, when done by a victim, is something done out of bitterness and hurt. That is not justice; that is just getting even. And grudges and bitterness is not something to be entertained in our hearts; that is not part of the Christ-like fruit we are called to bear. And justice is never personal; it is never done to benefit the self. But revenge is always self-centered.

Therefore, a correct view on forgiveness is as such: We are to release forgiveness at the sight of confession and repentance because to do otherwise would not be educative, and it would be gullible. But we should always be ready to release forgiveness, and in fact should strive to desire it. And we do this by purging bitterness and grudges from our hearts.

That is definitely easier said than done. Which is why Joseph is the very best example to quote; because he is the one most suited not to forgive; yet found the strength to do so. How are we to get the strength we need to let bitterness go?

- **By looking at it from a theocentric perspective.** Joseph did this. He said “*you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good*” (**Gen 50:20**). And which one held more significance for Joseph? That God was in control and was working for the good of many people. How are we to forgive? “*Forgive as the Lord forgave you*” (**Col 3:13**). Which one should be more significant for us? That some people hurt us? Or that God had forgiven sins that should have put us in eternal torment? By focusing instead on God’s plan and purpose, we see Him as first cause, working all things for good.

This is the biggest test of suffering. How do we maintain a purity of heart in the harsh reality of the world? This was what we have learned from Joseph from his test of suffering. A young man who kept his heart pure, and whose desire was for the Lord.

## 2. The Test of Success

### PATTERN 3: OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRIDE AND GLORY

Joseph’s test of suffering was perhaps the most visible points that are often taught. But behind the scenes, God was giving Joseph another set of tests – that of success:

- When Joseph was successful in Potiphar’s house; would he forget God? Would he place his success over and above his dedication to God? Would he, like many of us would, compromise to retain his successes? Would he do it if there was a guarantee that nobody would find out?

Joseph remained faithful, because his morality extends far beyond a well-seasoned habit. It came from his heart. He knew that even if nobody would find out, he would still be doing a moral wrong to Potiphar; and would be transgressing to God, who knows all things.

- But the greatest test came when he had the greatest success of all; and we will talk about this in the next section.

## THE BIGGEST TEST

There was something that puzzled me when I first prepared this material. Of all of Joseph's shining achievements, of all of his persistent faithfulness despite suffering – when the writer of Book of Hebrews had to choose one example of Joseph's faith – this was what he chose: *“By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones” (Heb 11:22).*

Why not his faith to resist Potiphar wife's temptation? Why not his gracious forgiveness toward his siblings? Why not his resistance to bitterness? All these would seem to be more suitable testaments of his life. So why would a burial instruction be so significant? Furthermore, it was Jacob who first gave a similar instruction; but this attribution was not given to him.

So here are the factors that made this act of Joseph special:

- **Joseph viewed himself a pilgrim.** Many people do request to be buried in a place they feel “home.” Jacob lived all his life outside of Egypt, so for him to be requested burial in Canaan is expected. But with Joseph it is the other way around. Egypt was the place where he gained his ultimate position. It was where his “career path” was forged, and it was there that many people know him and appreciate his merits. If he is requests burial in Egypt, when the people still remembered him, they would most probably bury him like a royalty. It was the place that he could carve a great name for himself by which he would be remembered. He could easily feel at home in Egypt. But he did not. He knew that though his success was attained when he was in Egypt, God was the one who gave him that success. And though his success was glorious, he knew that it was but God using history to work all things for the good of His people.

We are given people like Joseph, and other heroes in the hall of faith of Hebrews 11, to remember that they were, by their deeds *“admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth... and longing for a better country – a heavenly one” (Heb 11:13-16).* We should not love this world, however much success we have achieved while in the world (see **1 John 2:15-17**). We should view ourselves pilgrims and this life a pilgrimage; one we would need to be held accountable before God. No, our citizenship is in heaven (**Phil 3:20**) and we long for this city of God.

- **Joseph saw God as the Master of history.** I am of the opinion that God will not reveal His heart to you unless you are obedient to Him. Many prophecies remain concealed, and many hearers of the Word are “ever seeing but never perceiving and ever hearing but never understanding” (**Mar 4:12**) because God is not willing to reveal His heart to them. And so the fact that Joseph saw clearly that after his death the Israelites would be in predicament such that God will need to “come to your aid” (**Gen 50:24, 25**) would be because he remembered God's promise to Abraham: *“know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions... in the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure” (Gen 15:13-16).* Joseph had learned from experience how God indeed works everything -the good, the bad and the apparently hopeless included- for the good of those who love God and are called to His purpose (understanding **Rom 8:28** long before it was written). And in his climatic understanding, Joseph was able to pinpoint exactly how the brothers “intended” to harm him but that God had “intended” for it to happen for good (**Gen 50:20**). And God as the first cause wins, every time.

We sometimes fail to appreciate that we readers are given an advantage that are not given to the people in the stories. We know what happens behind the scenes. When Satan made the wager with God regarding Job, we are aware of it. Job wasn't. When we read in chapter 37 of Joseph being betrayed, we readers know that there are 13 more chapters of the story of Joseph. That it is not the end of the line. That the good part is yet to come. Joseph didn't! When he was thrown into that cistern he literally thought his life would end. And this is why we need to understand God as the Master of history. That He is the one and the only one who writes the final chapter. And that everything will make overwhelming sense when seen through that perspective. And that one day, we too shall be readers of this whole book called "history." When things seem hopeless, we can take comfort in the fact that the final chapter hasn't been written. Like a song teaches us, "many things about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand. But I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand."

- **Joseph made divine comparisons.** Human beings can withstand the greatest pain; when the purpose of that pain is given. And they despise the slightest pain, when that pain is unnecessary. A woman who is viewed as the "weaker sex" who may normally scream at the slightest pain will somehow be able to withstand the pain of childbirth (and be actually glad to repeat the experience!) because she has a "joy set before her." Joseph made many comparisons to his suffering. He compared the troubles he had with his household, the betrayal he painfully experienced, with the experience he had with God; which was why he names his firstborn Manasseh (**Gen 41:51**). He compared his suffering to the fruitfulness of his life, which was why he names his second son Ephraim (**Gen 41:52**). He did not belittle his older brothers' sin, but he compared that to what God had achieved through that sin: "*God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives*" (**Gen 50:20**).

But you may ask, "how does this relate to me? I don't have a childhood dream to hold on to." But we do! We have the great and precious promises of God (**2 Pet 1:3**) presented to us through "*the words of the prophets made more certain*" (**v. 19**). It is through these that we are called to "participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (**v. 4**). We always want to have a phenomena. We want to see the parting of our red sea. We want to have our own visions and dreams. Though it remains unsure if we will indeed fare better than the Israelites if we are faced with our own murdering giants after the red sea event; or if we seem to be abandoned by God after two dreams. But the Bible has offered us something greater: "*In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son*" (**Heb 1:1-2**). The Bible that you hold - yes that one book - that is the very word of Christ given to us for life and for godliness.

And we must make our own comparisons. We must count the cost. Paul compares his suffering this way: "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us*" (**Rom 8:18**). The suffering is of meager worth! And Paul's suffering was no child's play, mind you.

And Paul also compared his worldly successes this way: "*If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes*

*from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil 3:4-11). The gains were losses. The pride, garbage. Compared to what? Compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ! Do you see your Christian life this way? Would you want to be disciplined to such life of purpose?*

And so, Joseph’s final test was no longer the tests of betrayals, of sufferings, of pain. He had passed all that, with flying colors. But His final test will be that of success. He that had forgotten pain when he witnesses fruits, would he now forget God upon the sight of success? Would he regard Egypt home, as many of us regard this world home? Would he forget the promises of God, of a return to the land of promise? Would he be counted amongst the returning, or amongst the ones who stayed behind?

Many people think that sufferings, hardships, injustice are what would ultimately drive people away from God; to curse Him and to despise Him. But they forgot the other side of the coin: That successes, as much as failure, drives people away from God. Successes causes people to forget God, to disregard Him, to stop desiring for Him to exist in His heart. Failures and successes. Deficits and surpluses. Too little or too much. These are tests that God gives, to see if we would react in faith, or in sin. Consider this prayer:

*“Two things I ask of you, Lord; do not refuse me before I die:  
Keep falsehood and lies far from me;  
Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.  
Otherwise, I may have too much and disown You and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’  
Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.”*

#### **Proverbs 30:7-9**

This prayer displays the desire for God above all else. It seems like a persistent prayer at first, not wanting to be refused. But a more careful examination of the motives exposes a desire for God. Why not too much? So that I don’t disown You. Why not too little? Because I may dishonor You. Everything is centered on God, not on self.

To close, the writer of Hebrews chose one thing he thinks most exemplify Joseph’s faith. And he chose Joseph’s faithfulness and constant reliance upon God; not when he was suffering, but when he was honored. Joseph passed with flying colors where the Israelites or the present Western nations failed. Joseph passed the test of **Deuteronomy 8**. The test of remembering and honoring God when success and honor is in our hands. The test of attributing to God as the first cause of our success – not to think that our hands have accomplished all this without Him. We need to remember that God was the one who gave us science so we can explore and explain nature. It was He who gave economics so we could be good stewards. It was He who gave medicines that made it possible for us to treat sickness. Our ability in accomplishing all these should not diminish the fact that God is the one from whom, through whom and to whom are all things. The test of success – can we pass it?

## **Conclusion: Joseph a Typology of Christ**

Every book in the Old Testament points to Christ; and Jesus Himself explained His ministry from every book of the Old Testament (eg. **Luk 24:27; Luk 24: 44**). There are many ways to do this, but I would like to simply pinpoint to one such typology that is significant to the overall theme of this study.

In **Phillipians 2:5-11**, we are given a beautiful writing of Christ’s work on earth:

*“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a Servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”*

#### **Phil 2:6-11**

Now, Joseph went from the favourite son who had everything, even to the point of his father’s favor that would give him even the firstborn birthright. He went from there to being sold as a slave, first as Potiphar’s house. That in itself would have been a great suffering. But then, as if that wasn’t enough, he had to be cast into a prison dungeon. And he would be deprived of his only hope there; perhaps destined to be left to die as a worthless criminal. He went from having everything to having absolutely nothing.

This was typological of Christ, who this time knowingly and willingly emptied Himself (kenosis) of divine glory and was born in human likeness. As if that was not enough, He came not as a King, but as a Servant. And He would be deprived of even the slightest comfort, and would even experience death. And not just any death, but the worst death ever possible! He who not only had everything, but He who created all things, died like a criminal.

But it was because of this faithfulness that God made Joseph great. From one having absolutely nothing, God now grants Joseph the greatest power in all of Egypt; which at that time meant the greatest power in all of civilization. And this was done “for the saving of many lives,” to the glory of God.

And God the Father exalted Jesus to the highest place, to have the name above every other name. And this was done to bring salvation to many, to the glory of God the Father.

Because this is the case, the greatest wonder and amazement is not and should not be Joseph. It should be Christ. Whilst Joseph was taken forcibly, Jesus came willingly. Joseph was a favourite son, Jesus was the only begotten Son of God; Creator of heaven and earth. And the suffering of Christ far surpasses that of Joseph. That God would do this for sinful man must be the ceaseless ponder of His people. And this is why “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Soli Deo Gloria!

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<sup>i</sup> Strong’s Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon Number 02142

<sup>ii</sup> Strong’s Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon Number 07911

<sup>iii</sup> Doug Ward (2002) The Biblical Concept of Remembrance. Taken from <http://graceandknowledge.faithweb.com/zakar.html>