Erma Bombeck wrote a humorous book entitled “If Life Is A Bowl Of Cherries, What Am I Doing In The Pits?” We can all identify with feeling that way. But for Joseph it was more than a figure of speech.

Last time we began looking at the life of Joseph and we saw how Joseph was a model of faithfulness even though he came from a very dysfunctional family. Tonight I want to look at how Joseph remained faithful even when things got worse. We saw how messed up Joseph’s family was, yet Joseph seems to have turned out ok. He was able to rise above his imperfect family situation. But at the age of seventeen Joseph’s world is about to come apart at the seams.

I want today’s message to encourage you as you face adversity to remain faithful. We need to remain faithful whether the adversity is something fairly minor such as a car problem or maybe a bad test score in school or something major such as the loss of a loved one.

“Many who call themselves Christians today are finding it very easy to scuttle those parts of the faith that call for commitment and to settle into a peaceful coexistence with the thinking and actions of our modern equivalent of Canaanite society, a society that does not know nor honor God.” [Roger Ellsworth. Faithful Under Fire. (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1996) p. 21]

Some things to remember “When Life Has You In The Pits.”

First, Remember that Life Is Not Always Fair (37:12-17)

“Then his brothers went to feed their father’s flock in Shechem. (13) And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” So he said to him, “Here I am.” (14) Then he said to him, “Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me.” So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem. (15) Now a certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying, “What are you seeking?” (16) So he said, “I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding their flocks.” (17) And the man said, “They have departed from here, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.”
If we remember the “bad report” that Joseph had brought to his father (37:2) it is not hard to understand why Jacob would have sent Joseph to check up on his sons and his flocks. He was concerned for their physical welfare and because of their past performance he did not trust them to stay out of trouble. Who knew what kind of trouble they might be up to, particularly in the area where they had created so many enemies as they had with their murderous act against the Shechemites. But whether or not Jacob realized it, he was sending Joseph into a very dangerous situation.

Joseph complies with his father’s wishes and goes to find his brothers. After making the fifty mile trip he finds that his brothers have moved the flocks (v. 17). Finally he finds someone who tells him that his brothers have moved to Dothan. Joseph does not give up but travels another fourteen miles to catch up with his brothers.

Next I want you to see what he gets for all his effort!

**Secondly, Remember That Those Closest To Us Have The Potential To Hurt Us The Most.** (37:18-24)

“Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. (19) Then they said to one another, “Look, this dreamer is coming! (20) Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, ’Some wild beast has devoured him.’ We shall see what will become of his dreams!” (21) But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, “Let us not kill him.” (22) And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him”—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.

His brothers were certainty not glad to see him, at least four of his brothers are most certainly still angry regarding Joseph’s bad report to their father after his last visit with them. They say, **“Look Here Comes The Dreamer.”** (v. 19) “The Hebrew word “dreamer” implies one who is a master at dreaming, perhaps suggesting that he is good for nothing else.” [Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976 ) p. 541]

It is certain that all of the brothers still remembered his dreams that clearly predicted that they would be subservient to him. Perhaps Joseph had shared his dreams (37:5-10) with his brothers trying to gain their acceptance and encouragement concerning his divinely appointed future. Unfortunately, things certainly did not work out that way.

If Joseph’s brother’s had thought that his dreams were merely a product of his own fertile imagination they would have simply dismissed them as such and gone on their way. The fact that they were enraged by these dreams indicates that they detected the voice of God in them. And by rejecting the dreams they were in effect rejecting the will of God. As far
as they were concerned their future happiness depended on finding a way to rid themselves of Joseph and the righteous way of life he represented. They said, “let us now kill him and ….. We shall see what will become of his dreams!” (v.20). Of course what became of his dreams were that they were precisely fulfilled.

At first his brothers discuss killing him (v. 18, 20) but Reuben interceded and talked his brothers into throwing him into a cistern alive. He thought that would be able to return later and free Joseph (v. 22).

I don’t want us to miss that verses twenty-three and twenty-four describe a brutal assault. “So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him. (24) Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it.”

When it says they stripped him it means more than his coat, he was literally stripped and thrown into the pit naked. The word translated “stripped” is a term used to describe skinning an animal (Leviticus 4:6) His brothers fell on him like a pack of wild animals, beating, and clawing at him until they threw him naked, bruised and bleeding down into a pit, with the intention of leaving him there to die.

And then according to verse twenty-five they sat down to eat. There nothing like administrating a good beating to whet your appetite. The worse thing about being in trouble as Joseph was, is to find out that no one cares! According to (42:21) recounted some 22 years later the brothers heard him pleading for his life and would not listen. “Then they said to one another, “We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.” Joseph’s brother laughed and joked and feasted while they listened to Joseph’s pitiful cries for help.

Can you imagine what Joseph must have felt in that pit? Here he was literally in the middle of nowhere with no help. Was his life going to end here, like this? He must have tried to climb the sheer sides of the cistern only find that it was impossible. There was no way out!

Would you have given up? We will find that when faced with adverse circumstances that we are tempted to do just that. Things are not always as they seem on the surface. Joseph could have looked at the walls of the pit and come to the conclusion that his life was over. The God he had trusted and who had tried to live for had proven untrustworthy. The dreams of the future were overwhelmed with the nightmare of the present. But God reminds us to look beyond the outward circum-stances.

The temptation is when trials come in our lives to cry out, “Why me?” But we have no right do so because we never asked God, “Why me?” when we were in the midst of blessing.
Joseph learned some significant things during this time of adversity, lessons that we can apply to our own pit experience.

Joseph learned that God cared and He was in control. In Acts 7:9 we find out, “And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him” Notice, that it says “but God was with him.” You see we must always remember that God is in control even when it may not seem like it. Even when we find ourselves thrown in the pit by life, God is still there. As the writer of Hebrews has said, “....For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”(6) So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear What can man do to me?” (Heb. 13:5-6) Even when things look bleak we have the Lord’s promise that He will be with us. No matter what the circumstance may look like God is still in control and still working out His plan. That plan for the believer’s life is outlined in Romans 8:28, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” Now notice with me that it does not say that all things are good, instead it says that, “all things work together for good.” He goes on in verse twenty-nine of that same chapter to further elaborate what that plan is when he says we are, “... to be conformed to the image of His Son.” God hammers out the characteristics He desires in our lives on the anvil of adversity.

Joseph learned that God purposes our pain for our good. C.S. Lewis wrote in “The Problem of Pain,” “The problem of reconciling human suffering with existence of God who is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word 'love,' and limit His wisdom by what seems to us to be wise.” Could it be that God had a purpose for putting Joseph’s pit? God has some things that He wants to perfect in Joseph’s life. He is preparing Joseph to be a servant by humbling him. God has some things He wants to purge from the lives of his brothers. He is dealing with their cruelty and deceit. God has a promise that He wants to keep, and through Joseph He will keep His promise to preserve His people, Israel.

Perhaps most important of all, Joseph also learned that God hears our pleas even from the pit. The Psalmist tells us, “The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles.” (Psalm 34:17)

Third, Remember God Does Not Always Deliver Us In The Way We Expect. (37: 25-30) “And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmael-ites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt. (26) So Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? (27) Come and let us sell him to the Ishmael-ites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh.” And his brothers listened. (28) Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up
and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt. (29) Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph was not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. (30) And he returned to his brothers and said, “The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go?”

As they were sitting eating their meal they saw a caravan approaching. Judah advanced the idea that it would be better to sell Joseph as a slave than to kill him (v. 26). So they took Joseph out of the pit and sold him at the bargain price of 20 pieces of silver (thirty pieces was the normal price of a slave – Exodus 21:32).

As Joseph was being carried off into slavery I am sure that he did not see this as God’s hand of deliver-ance. His trials were not over, but through all of these experiences he gained an abiding sense of the God’s presence.

We will find as Joseph did that God does not always change our circumstances. God does not always make everything come out the way we want it to. God does not even answer every prayer the way we want it to be answered. But he did find that the love of God that is deep enough to hold you and never ever let go. As the Apostle Paul so eloquently stated many years later in his Roman letter (8:38-39) “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, (39) nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

Fourth, Remember That Self Punishment is Not the Answer. (37:31-35)

“So they took Joseph’s tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood. (32) Then they sent the tunic of many colors, and they brought it to their father and said, “We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son’s tunic or not?” (33) And he recognized it and said, “It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces.”

The brother’s settled on a convenient lie. They dipped Joseph’s coat in blood (of a goat) and presented it to their father and said, “Look at what we found what do you think it means?” (v. 32) They did not outright lie to their father but rather allowed him to draw his own erroneous conclusion. They asked him if he thought the garment belonged to Joseph and Jacob jumped to the conclusion that Joseph had been attacked and torn to bits by wild beast. Of course none of them bothered to tell him otherwise.

According to verses thirty-four and thirty-five, Jacob’s mourning went past normal grieving he was determined to mourn and punish himself until he died. “Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days.(35) And all his sons
and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, “For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.” Thus his father wept for him.”

Jacob refused to be comforted by anyone because of what had happened to Joseph. He no doubt blamed himself for what had happened. He was determined to mourn and punish himself as long as he lived. Like Jacob, some of us have made mistakes and some of these errors in judgment have helped to create problems that cannot be reversed. But it still does not help to carry these all through our lives as guilt. There is forgiveness available through Christ. We must accept forgiveness and give up our guilt.

**Fifth, Remember that Trials May Only Be The First Step In Preparing Us For the Future.** (37:36)

“Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard.” Joseph went from favorite son to a slave in a foreign land in the space of about three days. What a change. If your life is going smoothly, then stop to praise God and be thankful. If you are struggling, don’t give up, but remain faithful because God is in control. Don’t give in. Facing adversity is hard work. Sometimes we have to really push ourselves to stay faithful, to keep on coming to church, to keep on praying. These things take effort. But remember the promises of God, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.” (Isaiah 43:2)

**Conclusion**

Gary Richmond in “A View From the Zoo” tells about the birth of a giraffe. “The mother giraffe lowers her head long enough to take a quick look. Then she positions herself directly over the calf. She waits for about a minute and then she does the most unreasonable thing. She swings her long swinging leg outward and kicks her baby so that it is sent sprawling head over heels. When it doesn’t get up the violent process is repeated over and over again. The struggle to rise is crucial. As the baby calf grows tired, the mother kicks it again to stimulate its efforts. Finally, the calf stands for the first time. Then the mother does the most remarkable thing. She kicks it off its feet again. Why? She wants it to remember how it got up. In the wild, baby giraffes must be able to get up as quickly as possible in order to stay with the herd, where there is safety. Lions, hyenas, leopards and wild hunting dogs all enjoy young giraffes, and they would get them too if the mother didn’t teach her calf to get up quickly and get with it. There is a parallel in our own lives. There have been times when it seemed that just after we stood up after a trial, we get knocked down again. It was God helping us to remember how it was that we got up and urging us to walk with Him, in His shadow and under His care.” [Leadership, Vol. 11 #3]
“When Life Has You In the Pits”
Genesis 37:12-36

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- God ________ and he is in control. Acts 7:9
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