SESSION 3

OVERCOME

BEING

FORGOTTEN
The Point
Keep doing what God has gifted you to do.

The Passage
Genesis 39:21-23; 40:5-8,20-23

The Bible Meets Life
We all find ourselves from time to time in less than ideal circumstances. A rainy day at the beach is one thing, but sometimes those circumstances have far greater impact on our lives, such as a dead-end job. We can feel like our dreams are gone or the world has passed us by. The Book of Genesis shows us Joseph, a man whose circumstances were far from ideal—he had been forgotten and left in prison—yet he was not defeated by his circumstances.

The Setting
In return for his purity and integrity in refusing the advances of his master’s wife, Joseph wound up in prison. Even there God blessed him and gave him favor in the warden’s eyes. Two of Pharaoh’s out-of-favor officials were in prison and had disturbing dreams. Joseph, with God’s insight, interpreted the dreams, asking only that one official, about to be restored to Pharaoh’s service, remember Joseph when that day came.
**Genesis 39:21-23; 40:5-8,20-23 (HCSB)**

**39:21** But the **LORD** was with Joseph and extended kindness to him. He granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

**22** The warden put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph’s authority, and he was responsible for everything that was done there.

**23** The warden did not bother with anything under Joseph’s authority, because the **LORD** was with him, and the **LORD** made everything that he did successful.

**40:5** The Egyptian king’s cupbearer and baker, who were confined in the prison, each had a dream. Both had a dream on the same night, and each dream had its own meaning.

**6** When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they looked distraught.

**7** So he asked Pharaoh’s officers who were in custody with him in his master’s house, “Why do you look so sad today?”

**8** “We had dreams,” they said to him, “but there is no one to interpret them.” Then Joseph said to them, “Don’t interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.”

**40:20** On the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, he gave a feast for all his servants. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker.

**21** Pharaoh restored the chief cupbearer to his position as cupbearer, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.

**22** But Pharaoh hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had explained to them.

**23** Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

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**Key Words**

**Cupbearer** (40:5)—A staff supervisor and responsible for tasting the ruler’s wine before serving it to him to ensure it did not contain poison. Often the cupbearer became the ruler’s confidant and adviser.

**Lifted up the heads** (40:20)—The phrase “lifted up the heads” carried a double meaning: restoration for the cupbearer and death for the chief baker.
GET INTO THE STUDY

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 93 of the PSG: “When have you rediscovered something you forgot you had?”

Note: Encourage group members to tell the story of their forgotten object, including why it was important and how it got lost in the first place.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 94 of the PSG. Introduce the topic of being forgotten by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Have fun with the theme of forgetfulness by playing a memory game with your group members. Start by saying a single word of your choice—“Hello,” for example. Then, the person on your right must repeat your word and add a new word. So, if that person’s word was “dogs,” he or she should say, “Hello dogs.” Continue around the circle, adding a new memory word for each participant. The game ends (or starts again) when someone fails to correctly repeat the entire string of words.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” at the top of page 94 of the PSG: “Keep doing what God has gifted you to do.”

ENHANCEMENT: Use Pack Item 7, “Tragedy,” in order to supplement “The Point” of this session.

PRAY: Transition into the Bible study by praying for members of your group who feel forgotten even now. Pray for those who’ve been forgotten by friends or loved ones, and for those who feel “stuck” in life and wonder if they’ve been forgotten by God. Ask the Holy Spirit to prepare your hearts as you approach this subject through His Word.

TIP: If you find yourself running short on time, consider asking your group members to complete the activity at home.
**Genesis 39:21-23**

21 But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him. He granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. 22 The warden put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph’s authority, and he was responsible for everything that was done there. 23 The warden did not bother with anything under Joseph’s authority, because the LORD was with him, and the LORD made everything that he did successful.

**READ:** Genesis 39:21-23 on page 95 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask for a volunteer from the group to do so.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use the following outline to summarize the content from page 96 of the PSG:

- It’s clear once again that God was with Joseph at every turn—even when it may have appeared otherwise.
- Not only that, but Joseph remained faithful to God by continuing to do what God had gifted him to do.
- We also need to be aware of what God has gifted us to do . . . . Even when we face difficulty, we can—and we certainly should—continue to use the gifts God has given us.

**DISCUSS:** Question #2 on page 96 of the PSG: “How do we remain faithful when we find ourselves where we didn’t expect to be?”

**TRANSITION:** Genesis 40:5-8 reveals a plot twist in Joseph’s story—one that came in the form of two additional prisoners.
Genesis 39:21-23 Commentary

When Potiphar heard the words of his wife, he seems to have believed her because his wrath was kindled. As punishment, Potiphar put Joseph into the prison. The Hebrew term literally means “a round house.” In Genesis 40:15 and 41:14 this prison is called a “dungeon.” The Hebrew word can mean a “cistern, pit, well.” Large, empty cisterns were used as prisons. Joseph’s first injustice was when his brothers put him in a cistern in Shechem. Now Potiphar put Joseph in a cistern in Egypt. It was a prison for political prisoners—a place where the king’s prisoners were bound)—but it was still a prison.

Think of all the trials and temptations that young Joseph had been through. His own brothers had thrown him into a pit. Later they sold him to some traders. The traders sold him to Potiphar in Egypt. His master’s wife had tried to seduce him. When he refused, she falsely accused him. His master put him in prison. He was the innocent party, but Potiphar’s scheming wife was still free to continue her evil ways. His time in prison was another test of Joseph’s faith. He must have wondered if this would be his permanent home. Would his dreams end here? A person of less faith than Joseph’s might have complained to or about God. But Joseph continued to trust God. He accepted his new place and set out to be a model prisoner.

Once again the Bible tells us, but the Lord was with Joseph. God showed His presence by His kindness. This is the important Old Testament word hesed. It can be translated “steadfast love,” “unfailing love,” “loyalty,” or “mercy.” This word was used in prayer to describe God’s character (Gen. 24:12,14; 32:10). The word refers to the covenant faithfulness and loving kindness of the Lord. The Lord remained faithful to Joseph. God was faithful in caring for Joseph and enabling him to remain faithful through trials and temptations.

Joseph’s conscience was clear. He had done what was right, and he entrusted himself to God. The Lord granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. After an undisclosed length of time, this man recognized Joseph’s ability and trustworthiness. He followed the example of Potiphar and gave great responsibility to Joseph. He put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph’s authority. Since Joseph was so responsible, the warden did not bother with anything under Joseph’s authority. Joseph’s situation seemed to deteriorate continually. In a period of time he had been reduced from favored son to favored servant to favored prisoner—favored at each step, but on a downward trend. From the privilege of the quarters of one of the top officials in Egypt to the misfortune of imprisonment, Joseph continued to use his God-given abilities. The good news was that the Lord was with him, and the Lord made everything that he did successful.

Keep doing what God has gifted you to do.
Genesis 40:5-8

5 The Egyptian king’s cupbearer and baker, who were confined in the prison, each had a dream. Both had a dream on the same night, and each dream had its own meaning. 6 When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they looked distraught. 7 So he asked Pharaoh’s officers who were in custody with him in his master’s house, “Why do you look so sad today?” 8 “We had dreams,” they said to him, “but there is no one to interpret them.” Then Joseph said to them, “Don’t interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.”

READ: Genesis 40:5-8 on page 95 of the PSG.

SUMMARIZE: Use the first paragraph of the commentary on page 117 of this Leader Guide to help group members understand who the cupbearer and baker were, and why they were temporarily placed in Joseph’s prison.

RECAP: Call attention to the third paragraph on page 97 of the PSG:

Joseph did more than his duty to merely serve these men. He showed genuine concern for them when they became distraught. Noticing their sadness, Joseph asked how he could help. Such compassion surely was beyond his job description.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 97 of the PSG: “What are some little things that allow us to demonstrate God’s concern to others?”

Note: Encourage group members to think of their own contexts at home, at work, and in the community when brainstorming “little things” that demonstrate God’s care and concern.

TRANSITION: Verses 20-23 reveal that Joseph’s interpretations of each dream were correct. Sadly, the care and excellence he showed to Pharaoh’s servants went largely unremembered.
Genesis 40:5-8 Commentary

While Joseph was the administrator of the prison, Pharaoh’s chief cupbearer (v. 9) and chief baker (v. 16) “offended” the ruler (40:1). The Hebrew verb translated “offended” is often rendered “sinned” and may indicate the two servants had committed some crime against the king or were suspected of doing so. To incur Pharaoh’s disfavor or suspicion for any reason was dangerous. The cupbearer and baker were confined while an investigation proceeded to determine their guilt or innocence.

Although Joseph was in prison, he was its trusted administrator. Then he became an attendant to two high-ranking officials who had incurred Pharaoh’s disfavor. Yet Joseph was consistent in giving his best efforts in his adverse circumstance. He diligently served as attendant to the cupbearer and the baker.

While the cupbearer and baker were in prison awaiting their fates, each had a dream. The dreams occurred on the same night, and each dream was unique; it had its own meaning. In that time, dreams were viewed as important vehicles of revelation about the future; accordingly, dreams play a significant role in Genesis (20:3-7; 28:10-15; 37:5-11). Though God did not generate all dreams, He used some to communicate His plan and purpose. The biblical record implies strongly that the servants’ dreams were part of God’s activity on Joseph’s behalf—and, more broadly, on behalf of the Lord’s covenant purpose.

On the morning following the two men’s dreams, Joseph approached them to begin his daily duties. He immediately noticed they looked distraught. The Hebrew term can mean “sad,” or “vexed.” The two men’s body language indicated they were disturbed, and Joseph picked up on their state of mind. His sensitivity was another mark of his advancing maturity. Even though he was in prison and relegated to a subservient role, he cared about the people he served. Acting on his observation, Joseph asked the reason for the two servants’ sadness.

The two men immediately responded: “We had dreams.” In Hebrew, their response literally is, “A dream we have dreamed,” emphasizing the cause of their downcast faces. That they had no one to interpret the dreams intensified their gloom. Their words lamented their not being free to consult the professional interpreters in Pharaoh’s court. The Hebrew view of dream interpretation differed markedly from that of other nations. Joseph’s question to the two distressed dreamers called for a yes answer: “Don’t interpretations belong to God?” Here God translates the Hebrew word Elohim, which stresses God’s majesty and creative power. The question was a direct challenge to reliance on diviners. To Joseph, God was the originator of dreams that conveyed revelation from Him, and He alone gave people the power to interpret them. Joseph’s request that the officials tell him their dreams expressed his confidence God would interpret them. It also was additional evidence of his care for these officers.

Keep doing what God has gifted you to do.
Genesis 40:20-23

20 On the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, he gave a feast for all his servants. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. 21 Pharaoh restored the chief cupbearer to his position as cupbearer, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand. 22 But Pharaoh hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had explained to them. 23 Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

READ: Genesis 40:20-23 on page 95 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 98 of the PSG: “When have you felt forgotten?”

RECAP: Highlight the final paragraph on page 99 of the PSG:

Joseph surely felt forgotten, but he didn’t quit. Tragedy is not terminal. Disappointment is not the final chapter. Pain is not the ultimate end for a child of God. He gets the final word. Always! When we allow this truth to be hidden in our hearts, quitting isn’t an option—even when we feel forgotten.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 99 of the PSG: “How do we support one another to keep doing what God has gifted us to do?”

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity “Your Gift” on page 99 of the PSG. If time allows, encourage volunteers to share their responses.

What’s one of the primary ways God has gifted you to do His work? ________________________

____________________________________________________________

Record ideas for using that gift in the following spheres of life.
Church: ________________________________
Family: ________________________________
Community: ____________________________
Work: ________________________________

STUDY THE BIBLE
Genesis 40:20-23 Commentary

The third day after Joseph interpreted his fellow prisoners’ two dreams (see 40:9-18), Pharaoh celebrated his birthday. That the dreams’ fulfillment coincided with Pharaoh’s birthday was yet another sign of God’s sovereignty at work. Pharaoh celebrated his birthday by hosting a feast for all his servants. The term referred to Pharaoh’s officers. This feast was planned intentionally. Pharaoh used the occasion as an opportunity to make object lessons of his chief cupbearer and his chief baker. At the celebration, as Joseph had predicted, the ruler lifted up the heads of the two officials who had previously offended him. The phrase lifted up the heads carried a double meaning: restoration for the chief cupbearer and death for the chief baker.

The chief cupbearer not only was exonerated but also was restored to his former position, demonstrating Pharaoh’s trust in this servant and his sense of justice toward all his servants. As Joseph predicted, however, the chief baker was hanged. He was found guilty of a crime against Pharaoh. So, one man lived and prospered; the other was executed. Everything happened exactly as Joseph said.

In the unfolding events, Joseph suffered another setback that left him in another seemingly hopeless situation. The chief cupbearer forgot him. When Joseph’s interpretation of the cupbearer’s dream proved accurate, how could the official not be reminded of the remarkable prisoner who attended him in prison and who predicted his release? Whatever the reason for the official’s failure to follow through, Joseph remained in prison. The cupbearer let Joseph down.

Almost certainly, by the time we have reached adulthood we have had similar experiences. A family member disillusioned us. A trusted friend lets us down. Disappointment with people stirs agony in our hearts. Pain and anger tag along wherever we go. Did Joseph struggle with disappointment as he continued his administration of the prison and doggedly clung to his faith? In our seemingly hopeless situations, some people will let us down, perhaps even forget about us. But even then, we can patiently trust in the Lord as we apply ourselves to the best of our abilities.

We also can salvage something positive from those experiences by refusing to let others down in their need. Hopeless situations happen, but they need not produce hopelessness. Joseph did not see his situation resolved in this passage, nor do we see the evidence of his continuing to overcome. Resolution would not come for some time yet, in fact for two more years (41:1). But the man we see come out on the other side in our next session is the same faithful Joseph we saw go in—reflecting that he did overcome being forgotten!
**LIVE IT OUT**

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to page 100 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following options for remaining engaged with God’s plan:

- **Discover your gifts.** Use a spiritual-gifts assessment to identify the ways God has equipped you to serve.

- **Sharpen your skills.** Use a tool like the Ministry Grid ([MinistryGrid.com](http://MinistryGrid.com)) to gain training for different areas of ministry that connect with your gifts.

- **Make a difference.** Jump in with both feet to serve God and others. Find an area of need in your church or community, and use your gifts to serve with excellence.

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**Wrap It Up**

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the conclusion from page 100 of the PSG: “God loves you and values you deeply as His child. But that doesn’t mean you’ll avoid feeling forgotten at different moments in your life. The good news is that you can choose to make a positive impact during those moments, as Joseph did.”

**PRAY:** Conclude the session by thanking God for His perfect and unwavering plan. Pray that God’s Spirit would guide you and the members of your group in continuing to work for God’s kingdom even when you feel forgotten.
My group’s prayer requests

Additional suggestions for specific groups (women, men, boomers, and singles) are available at BibleStudiesForLife.com/blog.

And for free online training on how to lead a group visit MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife.

Four Simple Words

During the Korean War, I was a gunner on a B-29 bomber. My most memorable experience occurred when two engines went out and we landed amid a brilliant ball of fire. It was an exciting day, but it was not the one that changed my life forever.

To continue reading “Four Simple Words” from Mature Living magazine, visit BibleStudiesforLife.com/articles.