

# Our Man in Egypt

by Warren Wiersbe

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*God has His purposes, methods, and timing, and we must learn to trust and obey Him in all things.*

**Duration:** 40:30

**Scripture:** Psalm 105:16-23, Matthew 1:23, Matthew 28:20

**Topics:** "Gods Sovereignty", "Faith And Trust"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the story of Joseph from the Bible and draws practical lessons from his life. Joseph was pampered by his father and separated from his brothers, which led to them selling him as a slave. He faced further hardships, including being falsely accused and imprisoned. However, at the age of 30, Joseph was exalted to be the second ruler of Egypt. The speaker emphasizes that God has his purposes, methods, times, and resources in our lives, and encourages listeners to trust in God's plan and rely on his promises, presence, and grace.

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## Transcript

We open the word of God to 105th Psalm. Psalm 105 and I'm beginning at verse 16 and we'll read through verse 23. Psalm 105 verses 16 through 23.

Speaking about our Lord, and moreover, he called for a famine upon the land. That's of course the land of Egypt. He broke the whole staff of bread.

He sent a man before them. That man happened to be 17 years old when God sent him. Even Joseph, who was sold for a servant, whose feet they hurt with fetters, he was laid in iron.

Until the time that his word came, the word of the Lord tested him. The king sent and loosed him, even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house and ruler of all his substance, to bind his princes at his pleasure, and to teach his elders wisdom.

Israel also came into Egypt and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham. And so the psalmist gives us eight verses to tell us the story of Joseph. In the book of Genesis, Moses took 419 verses to tell us the story of Joseph.

Joseph is one of the greatest and most famous prisoners of all history. I once had to testify at a child custody hearing. It so happened that the father in the case had been in prison, but had gotten saved.

I believe genuinely born again. He was doing his utmost with the Lord's help to live a good life. I recall sitting on that witness stand and the attorney on the other side looked at me and said, Reverend, do you believe that you could trust a man who was a prisoner? And no one told me you're supposed to answer yes or no.

And I said, well, sir, many great men have been prisoners. And I began to tick them off. John Bunyan and Adoniram Judson and Joseph and Jesus.

And at that point I heard, answer the question. And I understood why Jesus said, woe unto you lawyers. Now you all know the story of Joseph.

You learned it in Sunday school. The first 17 years of his life, he was a pampered son. His aged father, Jacob, was ruining the boy by pampering him, separating him from the rest of his brethren and making him somebody special.

And then his brethren who hated him sold him as a slave. And for 10 years in Egypt, he was a faithful servant. And then because of a lying woman, he ended up in prison for three years.

And at the age of 30, Joseph was exalted to be the second ruler of the land. Now all of this is wrapped up in these few verses in Psalm 105. But from these verses and from the life of Joseph, we can learn at least four, if not more, but at least four very practical lessons to help us in our own daily living.

Lesson number one, God has his purposes. Now Joseph didn't understand these purposes. His brothers didn't understand them.

What they did, they did because they were envious of him. Joseph himself later said, you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. Joseph is one man in the Old Testament who lived in Romans 8, 28.

And we know that all things are working together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. Now God has a number of purposes wrapped up in the life of Joseph. For one thing, he wanted to make a man.

That's the way God always operates. He chooses a man, chooses a woman, and then he works in that person's life. I've been a student of Christian biography for many years, have some, oh, five or six hundred volumes of Christian biography in my library, and I've noticed this.

When God wants to do a work, he calls a worker. And then God works on the worker. And having worked on the worker, he gets him or her where that person ought to be.

Then comes the work. And so God has his purposes. And his first purpose was to build a man.

Had Joseph been left in the hands of his pampering father Jacob, Joseph would have ended up without much character, without much ministry, humanly speaking. And so God had to arrange a rather devious way, a rather circuitous way, to get Joseph out from under Jacob's leadership and put him where life was difficult. God wanted to make a man.

It's rather interesting that when the story comes to an end, Joseph stands there, the greatest type of Jesus Christ anywhere in the Old Testament. Joseph was a beautiful picture of our Lord Jesus. That's what Romans 8, 28, and 29 are all about.

Who are called according to his purpose. Now, what is his purpose? That we might be conformed to the image of his son. And so God has his purposes.

And his first purpose is to build our lives. You see, when difficulties come, and they do, when there are trials and problems, family problems, economic problems, job problems, when difficulties come, they will either be weapons to beat us down or tools to build us up. So God has his purposes, and his first purpose was to build the man.

His second purpose was to build a nation. You see, Israel was made up of Jacob and his sons and their families. It was kind of a motley crew of people.

There were inter-family fightings. You've never had that experience, but they did. There were difficulties, and God was looking at those people and saying, I want to build a nation out of you.

Now, how do you do it? Well, you write a constitution, you elect some officers. No. One day he had to pick up that family, took 70 people, and moved them down to Egypt, and for some time they prospered, and then they were persecuted.

And God sent a man before them, Joseph, that that nation might be built in the land of Egypt. Had it not been for Joseph, there would not have been the nation of Israel. And God had a third purpose.

He built a man who helped to build a nation, and through that nation, God could save a world. That's what Israel was all about to begin with. When you read the book of Genesis, you find all of the Gentiles falling to pieces.

Those of us who are not of Jewish ancestry have to hang our heads in shame when we read the book of Genesis, because God started off with Gentiles. Gentiles made a mess of things. God wiped everything clean, and started off again.

And then men began to rebel against God. They built that tower of Babel, and God said, we can't have this, and He scattered everybody. They said, we're going to make a name for ourselves.

That sounds just like the Gentiles. And then God calls Abraham, and God says to Abraham, I'm going to make a great name for you. This crowd back here wanted to make a great name for themselves, but Abraham, I'm going to make your name great, and through you, all of the nations of the earth are going to be blessed.

And so God called Abraham, and then Isaac, and then Jacob, and now 70 people, now a nation, and through this nation, Jesus was born. God has His purposes. Now God has His purposes for my life, for your life.

He wants to build a person. He wants to build character, integrity, spirituality, courage, faithfulness, honesty, dependability. He wants to build a person.

And then having built that person, He wants to reach out and save a world. God has His purposes. And so you and I never have to look up to heaven and say, Father, are you sure you know what you're doing? You didn't consult with me on this.

I didn't fill out any application forms for this place I'm in. And the Father looks down and says, well, you know what? I made the whole universe without your help. I didn't have to call any consultation with you.

I know what I'm doing. God has His purposes. You say, even when my own brethren give me trouble? Yes.

Even when people lie about me? Yes. Even when I'm going through prison? Yes. God has His purposes.

That's the first lesson. Now, the second lesson that Joseph teaches us is this. God has His methods.

I think it's Isaiah the prophet who says, now, my ways are not your ways. My thoughts are not your thoughts. My thoughts are much higher than yours.

My ways are much more profound than yours. As I read my Bible, I discover that God doesn't do things the way I would have done it. And it's a good thing.

I would have made a mess out of it. The Jewish people cried out and said, we're hungry. We need something to eat.

And so God, very graciously, very generously, every morning early, sent down the manna. First, the dew would arrive to keep the manna clean. And then those little round wafers of angel food cake would fall down to feed the nation of Israel.

I wouldn't have fed that bunch of rebels that way. I would have made one huge loaf of bread and dropped it right in the middle of the camp. But God's ways are not my ways.

When God wanted to deliver the people of Israel from the land of Egypt, He sent a baby. He had a Jewish boy fall in love with a Jewish girl. And they said, you know, we really shouldn't get married because if we have any boy babies, they'll kill them.

They said, let's do God's will. And she did give birth to a baby. I wouldn't have done it that way.

I would have brought down an army. I would have fixed them. But God has better methods.

And God has His methods with Joseph. Now, here is a 17-year-old boy who's having dreams, not because he ate too much pizza before he went to bed. Joseph went to bed, and the only way God could talk to people in those days, or one of the few ways, was through dreams.

And he was dreaming, and he saw the sheaves of his father and his brethren bow down to his sheaf. God was saying, Joseph, someday you're going to be a ruler. And Joseph went and told his brethren the good news.

And they frowned and said this blabbermouth. Then he had another dream. The sun, the moon, and the stars bowed down to him.

That was going too far. That was lifting it to a much higher plane. They said, oh no.

And that's when they decided they were going to kill him. Now, Joseph was a dreamer. And Joseph was a young man.

The Bible says there's nothing wrong with dreaming. Thoreau used to say, and this is one of the few things he said that's worth remembering, Thoreau said that it's good to build your castles in the air, but put a foundation under them. Mr. Moody used to say that some people are so heavenly-minded they're no earthly good.

Joseph wasn't like that. Joseph heard from God, and God said, Joseph, you're going to be a ruler. You're going to be a ruler.

I can't do it. I'm just a young boy, seventeen years old. My father's pampering me.

You see, dreams without disciplines become nightmares. And God had to translate Joseph's dreams into reality. And he had three methods that he used for doing it, three disciplines that he used.

Number one was the discipline of service. Joseph wasn't doing much work at home. His father gave him a very special tailored garment.

Shepherds don't wear special tailored garments when you're working around with dirty animals. You don't dress as though you're going to visit the queen. And Joseph was somewhat pampered, and Joseph was somewhat of a special person.

And the first thing God did was make him a servant. You know why? You can't become a ruler until first you're a servant. That's God's principle.

Well done, thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I'll make thee ruler over many things. And God said to Joseph, I can't trust you on the throne until I can trust you there in the pantry. I can't trust you with a scepter in your hand until first I can trust you with a broom in your hand.

This principle works all through the Bible. God couldn't make Moses a ruler until Moses was first a servant. Nehemiah was first a servant, then a ruler.

My Lord Jesus Christ, when he came to this earth, came as a servant. And now he is exalted above every name as the ruler. And God's first method was the discipline of service.

If Joseph is going to give orders, he has to learn how to take orders. If Joseph is going to share honor, he has to learn how to accept humility. If Joseph is going to exercise authority, he has to be under authority.

When a person exercises authority, but he's not under authority, he's a dictator, not a ruler. The discipline of service. Well, he passed that.

God blessed him in such a wonderful way that Potiphar just gave him everything, gave him all the credit cards, all the bank books, everything. And Joseph was a faithful servant. Then came discipline number two, the discipline of self-control.

God permitted Joseph to be tempted. The story, of course, is given in Genesis chapter 39, where Potiphar's wife tempted him day after day. And Joseph could have done like some young men do.

He'd say, well, I'm away from home and they'll never know what I do. He didn't say that. Or he could have said, well, when in Egypt, do what the Egyptians do.

When in Rome, do what the Romeos do. He didn't say that. He didn't say, well, we can do it secretly and nobody will know.

You know what he said? How can I commit this sin before God? My father's not watching me. He's far away and thinks I'm dead. My brothers aren't watching me.

They think I'm dead. Your husband's not watching and the police aren't watching. And the place is not bugged, but God's watching.

And one day she got so desperate, she lunged at him and she got his coat and he did the smart thing. He just took off his coat and he ran. One of the old Puritan preachers says Joseph lost his coat, but he kept his character.

Paul may have been thinking of this when he wrote to young Timothy, flee youthful lusts, the discipline of self-control. He made no provision for the flesh and he passed that, but ended up in jail. Potiphar must have suspected something was wrong with this story or would have had him killed.

He ended up there where the political prisoners ended up and he gets in jail. And before long, he's the assistant jailer, unofficial, of course. And down there in that Egyptian prison, they put him in irons.

And I can see Joseph, he spent three years as a prisoner. I can just see him during those first months saying, oh God, what's happened to my dreams? You told me I'd be a ruler. Here, look what I am.

I'll never make it now. I'm a prisoner and I've lost my reputation. I've kept my character, but I've lost my reputation.

I'll never make it. God said, no, you're going to make it. Just be patient.

About that time, he met the butler and the baker. Remember, they had dreams too. And he interpreted those dreams for them.

And lo and behold, they came true. And you'd think that the butler would have remembered. He didn't.

He forgot until Pharaoh began to dream and then Joseph was delivered. And so there was the discipline of suffering, the discipline of service, the discipline of self-control, the discipline of suffering. God has his methods.

Now, Joseph teaches us a third lesson. God has his times. The psalmist says, he sent a man before them.

God knows what he's doing. Whose feet they hurt with fetters, he was laid in iron until the time that God's word came. During that waiting period, the word of the Lord tested him.

God has his times. Now, we don't have to go into it, but this begins all the way back with Abraham. Back in Genesis chapter 15, when God spoke to Abraham, He gave Abraham the timetable.

He said, now your seed are going to go into a land that's not theirs. There's going to be a period of 400 years. There's going to be suffering.

And He said, then they're going to come out with great spoil and great victory for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. What was God watching? God was watching two things. The timing of the birth of Joseph.

The timing of the judgment of the nations in Canaan. God, in His grace, was giving those people in Canaan land century after century of patience, withholding His judgment. That's why the Lord Jesus Christ hasn't returned yet.

Because God is long-suffering to us. We're not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. So God had His times.

And God looked at a 17-year-old lad and said, well, let's see, it's going to take us 13 years to get this job done. Now, if He'd told Joseph 13 years from now, you're going to be a man, a man of God and a man of authority, Joseph would have said, 13 years? Wow, I'll never make it. Well, if he had to live a year at a time, you never would make it.

But it was a day at a time, a day at a time, the only way you can live and the only way I can live. I think I've told you about my pastor friend in Northern Kentucky, whose wife died and the church graciously hired a lady to come into the house, the parsonage, the parsonage and clean it once a week. And one day my friend was talking to this lady and saying, well, how are you today? Oh, she said, Brother Monroe, the trouble with life is it's so daily.

But the more I ponder that, the more sense it makes. I'm glad life is daily. Can't live two days at a time.

God has His times and God works out His schedule a day at a time. And if Joseph is faithful today, he's that much closer to the will of God tomorrow. Now, the butler, it only took three days for the butler's dream to be fulfilled.

The people out in the world, there's no schedule there. But for God's people, it takes time. God can grow poison ivy overnight.

God can grow mushrooms overnight. But when He wants to build Himself a sturdy oak, that takes some time. Some of you students are going to get to a certain point in your preparation for the ministry when someone's going to make a big mistake and tell you how good you are.

What are you doing sitting in school? You ought to be out preaching. The world needs you. Well, the world's been waiting a long time for you to come along.

And you're going to be tempted to interrupt God's preparation for your life. Don't do it. Don't do it.

Being a good student is as much a ministry as being a good preacher. Preparation for ministry is ministry. Now, Joseph could have finagled his way in and out of things.

Joseph could have said, Lord, you're delaying too long. Let me get a hold of this for a while. We're always so impatient.

When the Elsons and my wife and I went to Africa to minister a couple of years ago, we walked into the guest house there in Nairobi, the AIM guest house. And there on the bulletin board was a sign, I cannot forget. It says, Lord, give me patience and do it now.

God has his times. Would you think me to be strange if I told you I don't want to know what's going to happen next week? Did you read Ann Landers the other day? I never cease to marvel at the letters she gets. The lady wrote to her and said, I went to a fortune teller.

That's the first dumb thing. Second dumb thing was to write and tell people about it. I went to a fortune teller and she told me and she just unraveled a whole long list of tragedies.

She said, I can't sleep at night. What should I do? And Ann Landers gave her the only sane answer anybody could give her. Don't believe in fortune tellers.

If that woman could foretell the future, she wouldn't be collecting 10 bucks a head. She'd be on Wall Street. I have to chuckle when I read in the newspapers about a police, about policemen who arrest fortune tellers.

How come they didn't know they were coming? I don't want to know the future. I go along with Joseph Parker who wrote that beautiful hymn that ought to be put back in our hymn book. God holds the key of all unknown and I'm glad.

For if some other held the key or if he trusted it to me, I might be sad. You say, well, I just can't wait. Joseph waited 13 years.

God has his purposes. God has his methods. And God has his time.

There's a fourth lesson. God has his resources. What is going to keep us going while we're waiting? I confess to you and my friends know it, my family knows it, I get impatient.

I have lost my sanctification on Dan Ryan more than once. I know where I want to go and I know what I want to do and I want to get it done. And I think that's one reason the Lord has me going all over to and fro upon the earth because nothing can try your patience like the airlines.

God has his resources. Now, what resources do we draw upon while God's making us, while we're suffering, while we're serving? What resources do we draw upon while we're being tempted? Well, let's look at them in Psalm 105. He tells us, first of all, the Word of God.

Until the time that his Word came, the Word of the Lord tested him. Now, Joseph got his Word through dreams. I wouldn't trust that today if I were you.

Every once in a while in my travels, I meet someone with a rather strange look in his eye who says, God speaks to me in dreams. And I want to back off and say, well, God doesn't speak to me in dreams. And God doesn't speak to me in visions.

I don't hear voices. All I have to do is just open my Bible. And when I open my Bible, God opens his mouth.

God talks to me. The first resource that Joseph had was the promise of God. While he was in Potiphar's house serving, here he is scrubbing the floor, and the devil says, Joseph, Joseph, remember those dreams about being a ruler? Everybody bowing down.

Now who's on his knees? And Joseph said, God promised that I'm going to believe it even though I can't see it. That's the first resource, the promise of God. That's why it's important for you to read your Bible.

That's why it's important to mark the promises of God. That's why it's important to saturate our souls with the Word of God. Because this is our first resource as God is working in our lives, the promise of God.

Now he had a second resource. That's the presence of God. Over in Genesis chapter 39, and you can check it out at your leisure.

In Genesis chapter 39, over and over again it says, the Lord was with Joseph. Potiphar discovered the Lord was with Joseph. They did this to him, but the Lord was with Joseph.

I love the Gospel of Matthew. I think it's probably the favorite Gospel in my own life. I know many people like John.

That's perfectly alright. But I like when I walk into the Gospel of Matthew, it says, His name is Emmanuel, God with us. Now when I walk out of the Gospel of Matthew, it says, Lo, I am with you always.

So at the beginning of that book, Emmanuel, God with us. At the end of that book, Lo, I'm with you always. But you're leaving, I'm with you always.

You're going to heaven, I'm with you always. When Joseph was on that forced march with the Ishmaelites going down to Egypt where he was a slave, God was with him. When they were buying the slaves and Potiphar came along and said, I could use a nice young man in my home, God was with him.

When he was being tempted with the kind of temptations that would have made others to fall, God was with him. When they shoved him in prison and put his feet in irons, God was with him. The presence of God.

There's a third resource that Joseph had, and I think we need this today. The grace of God in his heart. You say, where do you find that? You just listen.

If your brothers had treated you, or your sisters had treated you the way they treated Joseph, what would you do? What would you do? I think I know what I might have done. All the way down to Egypt, I'd be saying to myself, those brothers of mine, I'll get even. You say, oh you wouldn't.

Well, let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. Scrubbing the floor and cleaning out the garbage and everything, I wouldn't be here if it weren't for those brothers of mine. But Joseph didn't have that attitude.

Joseph had the beautiful gift of the grace of God to be able to look at the past and leave it with God. He carried no malice. He did not have any hardness of heart.

He had no desire for revenge. And when he did see his brothers, he broke down and wept. He knew he couldn't forgive them until they were forgivable.

That's why he put them through all those tests. But oh, what a joyful occasion it was when finally he could say, I am Joseph. And they were scared.

I would have been scared too. Here is this man with all of this authority. All Joseph had to say was, throw him in the river.

You see, the test of a person's real character is how he treats those who have hurt him, over whom he has authority. That's a test. And when Joseph saw his brothers, the past just flooded into his heart and mind.

And the devil was there. The devil said, there they are. There they are.

You've got them now. And God's grace said to Joseph, they meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. And Joseph forgave them.

That's a beautiful grace. What are our resources as we're going through the difficulties of life? Well, the promises of God, the word of God, it won't change. The presence of God, the grace of God, and especially that marvelous grace of forgiveness to be able to look back and say, I can see it now.

You're forgiven. I forgive you. We read the Old Testament and say, my, I wonder if God's doing things like that today.

Yes, He is. Did you know that when Jesus comes back and I am raptured up to heaven with all the rest of God's people and I stand before the Lord Jesus, He's not going to be interested in how many books I wrote or read, or how many sermons I've preached. This right now is the 33rd sermon I've preached in three weeks.

That's not going to impress Him. He's going to say to me, all of this you've done, all of this you've been through, difficulties, blessings, responsibilities, what has it done for your character? Are you standing before me more like the Lord Jesus? God is still building people. God has His purposes.

You don't know them. I don't know them. I don't have to know them.

During World War II, when the blitz in London became so severe, they decided to evacuate the children. And the story is told of a group of children who were standing at a railroad station waiting for the train and a girl was standing with her little brother and the little boy was crying. I think I would have been crying too.

And she said, why are you crying? He said, I don't know where we're going. And she put her arm around him and said, well, don't cry. The King knows.

That was right. There are some times when I get to whimpering and I say, Lord, I don't know where I'm going. And the answer comes from heaven.

The King knows. God has His purposes. God has His methods and God has His times and God has His resources.

And knowing that, we can face anything because God will never fail. Thank you, Father, that there is no prison that can hinder the working out of your purposes. There's no person who can hinder it.

There is no circumstance that is so unchanging or unchangeable that your purposes will be thwarted. We present ourselves to you, Father. You have your purposes.

Work them out in our lives. We are not handing you a contract to sign. We are handing you a blank piece of paper that we have already signed.

You write the contract. Fulfill your purposes. And use whatever methods are best for us, even if they hurt.

For we know that though you may hurt us, you will never harm us. And Father, give us patience with your schedule. Remind us that your delays are not denials or defeats.

And most of all, Father, help us to draw upon the spiritual resources we have in the Word of God and prayer and the grace of God and the presence of God. That one day you might be able to put us in that place prepared for us and for which we have been prepared. May we not settle for anything less.

May we do your will and enjoy it and fulfill it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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