



Origins: Trusting God Through Suffering

Date: Sunday 10th March 2019

Speakers: Abbi Wells and Becky Stamps

Key Verses: Genesis 37-40

Talk Summary:

Joseph's story stands in contrast to that of his ancestors (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) from previous week's for several reasons. Firstly, this week anyway, it doesn't end well - Joseph struggles and suffers for a long time (although waiting is also a theme of each patriarch's life). He doesn't have any remarkable face-to-face encounters with God and God doesn't speak directly to him in the text at all, yet chapter 39 twice repeats, at what would otherwise be the darkest points in Joseph's story, that God is 'with him'.

God promises hardship and temptation in life. Since the fall, the whole world has been at odds with God's will, so when we try to live for it, we go up against sin, the world (system, culture) that we live in and the devil. Imprisonment, loss, illness, betrayal and even death were all experienced by Jesus and the early Christians and all may at some time be part of our fight against the enemy. We can choose whether we see hard times as a chore to be complained about, a frightening moment where we hide under the covers and shout to someone to turn it off, or we see them as a gift. Job, David, Paul and others in the Bible saw hardship as a gift and even as an open door to blessing.

With hard times often come temptations to sin, perhaps making it a little easier or more fun for ourselves but potentially ruining our career, marriage, relationships, ministry etc. Joseph does not succumb to the same temptations and issues as his father, grandfather and great-grandfather. He does not sleep with Potiphar's wife, even though she asks him over and over again. Temptation often comes in the middle of hard times, and can make us believe that doing the wrong thing will help us - but actually we need to learn to stand firm and do the right thing. We learn this not by waiting for the big temptation but by getting it right as much as possible in the smaller ones. We can plan ahead and decide what we would like our character to be in 10 or 20 years' time, then start to make small changes now that we arrive there.

However, that's not the whole story: Joseph's 10-year plan did not work out! We can trust God because he is ultimately sovereign (ruling, in charge) over everything that happens, even what the devil throws at us. So we trust him with hard times as his gift. We trust him to also bring blessing out of it - again, this happens throughout the Bible, often in unexpected and incredible ways. Joseph experiences blessings of favour with his bosses, and through him everything they have (including people, animals, buildings and crops) are blessed. We need to not be afraid of stepping into positions of authority, as these will help us be part of God's plan to influence the world for good (just as God's plan for Joseph was to bless not just the Israelites but the Egyptians too).

Finally, God promises us his presence, not just in Sundays but wherever we go day-to-day. This is important because as we try to walk to out the good character he has for us and good works he's prepared for us to do to build his Kingdom, we also need to remember that it's him who is working in us, he who is going before us, living in us and going behind us to take care of our mistakes.

Group Discussion Questions:

- What struck you most about the story of Joseph?
- Why do you think the write of Genesis has put Judah and Tamar's story in the middle of Joseph's?
- How could we resist temptation when things are tough?
- Have you ever felt called by God is calling you to a position of authority (whether as an entrepreneur, as head of a department, school or company, or in some other capacity)?
- How could you as a small group encourage one another to good works and to fulfil their callings?

To ponder or pray about this week:

Try spending a day aware of God's presence with you. Set your watch or phone to go off every 2 hours. When it goes off, stop what you're doing and stay silent before God for three minutes. What temptations and dreams (e.g. of authority) are in your head each time? God is there too; chat to him about what you notice and ask him to show you a better dream for your life and character if you need one.