

How To Serve While Suffering

International Bible Lesson

Genesis 41:37-45, 50-52

Sunday, January 8, 2012

“And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house” (Genesis 41:51—KJV).

“He said, ‘God has made me forget all my sufferings and all my father’s family’; so he named his first son Manasseh” (Genesis 41:51—GNB).

“Joseph named the firstborn son Manasseh, ‘For,’ he said, ‘God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house’” (Genesis 41:51—NRSV).

Throughout the Bible, many parents gave their children names with special meanings, sometimes because God commanded them and sometimes not. Joseph himself named his sons with thanksgiving to God. He named his second son Ephraim, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes” (Genesis 41:52). God chose the name for Jesus, “for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). In the providence of God, when Jacob blessed Joseph’s sons, he gave the special blessing for a firstborn son to the second born son; perhaps he did not want to bless the son with a name that emphasized forgetting “all my father’s house” (see Genesis 48:13-20).

The Bible records some of the ways Joseph suffered; but rather than blame God, Joseph thanked God for saving him through them all. Perhaps Joseph’s faith was similar to the faith of Job, who declared, “Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” (Job 2:10). After Jacob died, Joseph told his brothers, who had sold him into slavery, “Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good” (Genesis 50:20).

If we strive to serve God with faith as Joseph did, we will see all of our misfortunes as opportunities to serve God in ways that we had not thought of before. When we make every effort to serve God in the midst of hardships, we will be able to look back as Joseph did and see how God worked for good and made us fruitful in what appeared to be less than ideal circumstances.

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Thinking Further

1. What qualities in Joseph made Pharaoh recognize that the Spirit of God was within him?

2. What qualities would a person have today for someone to recognize that the Spirit of God was within them?

3. What difference does it make for leaders and people when the leaders are people who are discerning and wise because the Spirit of God is within them?

4. Why was it important for Pharaoh to give Joseph as much authority as he did?

5. Why do you think Joseph’s wife may have looked up to him as a person who could teach her the truth about the true God?

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