



WORKTALK WEEKLY

10 MAY 2010

Welcome to WORKTALKweekly

A moving story of survival in the face of trouble and suffering.

In between times 2: From pit to power

It is very risky to take the story of an unusual person, the exceptional success, the highest achiever and hold it up as an aspirational ideal. Part of the intrigue of the extraordinary is simply that it is extraordinary and the fascination of the unusual is contained in its difference to our lives, not its similarity. Even more risky is to hold the unusual ideal up, not as an inspiration, but a guilt-inducing, unattainable and humiliating contrast to the mundane mediocrity where most mortals meet.

So you must approach Joseph with great caution. Very few people ever become vice-regent of the most powerful nation in their region. But with all our caveats in place you can visit with Joseph in his 'in between' time - for here we have an advantage.

He did not know he was heading for high office. He could not see - even with his amazing insight - the end point of his 'in between' time.

To put our boundaries in place, you must join him in what the narrators call a 'cistern'. His 'in between' time starts with an experience which would form the quintessential summary of his journey.

The end point of his 'in between' time arises around 17 years later, when Joseph was in his mid to late thirties. Something was born in him and to him or maybe he was re-born - we will see.

For you to understand this 'cistern' or 'pit experience', I need to describe it - but as I describe it, you will probably know what it is about.

Fuelled by jealousy and hatred, ten of Joseph's brothers throw him into the pit - a dried up, man-made, hole in the ground. One of the brothers later recalled how distressed Joseph was, as he pleaded for his life and they would not listen (Genesis 42:21). Hold the scene and you capture its horror. Joseph was a 17 year old boy. It is family abuse on a grand scale. It is bullying, violence, physical abuse and a hideous invasion of his dignity. As he is thrown, maybe 15 to 20 feet into the pit, it is dark, dry and deep and he is alone, cold, stripped and trapped.

For the next 13 years Joseph is a slave. He endures abuse from his capturers, abuse from his employer, abuse from his fellow prisoners. He is consistently forgotten, isolated and squashed.

Joseph's story is well know - the interpreter of dreams, the one who kept rising to the leadership position, the one who would not compromise.

I want to suggest you that two powerful inner dynamics were forging Joseph's character in this 'in between' time. It is not too difficult to name them because Joseph himself names them. At around his mid thirties, Joseph's wife Asenath gives birth to two sons. Joseph names them Manasseh and Ephraim.

Here is the mystical end point of his 'in between' time. Deep, deep in his soul he has acquired the ability to forget in relation to his trouble and to be fruitful in relation to his suffering. Way before Manasseh (forget) and Ephraim (fruitful) were born, these two characters were born in him. In fact it is not easy to separate whether he gave birth to them or they gave birth to him. Either way, after years of trouble and suffering, of abuse upon abuse, the 17 year old has given birth to the 35 year old who now knows how to forget and to be fruitful.

There is one vital perspective that Joseph gives us. Ever the master interpreter he interpret his journey using the phrase 'God made me'. He could see the craft of the divine in shaping his formation.

A few years later aged around 39, he faced his abusers - not in a spirit of revenge but with the power to remain forgetful, fruitful and seeing the intention of God.

So where are you? You may feel you are in the pit, suffering results of abuse, injustice, jealousy or malice. You may feel alone in the cold, the dry, the dark. Maybe you are in an experience of slavery where your choices are limited by those who own your time and control your hours. Perhaps you feel imprisoned, abandoned, forgotten, ignored and trapped.

I doubt you will become Prime Minister or as famous as Joseph - me either. But there are characters waiting to be born in you and the shock is that the pit and the prison formed a womb. The trouble and the suffering turned out to be the food and out of the 'in between' time, come beginnings as well as endings. For in this birthing, Joseph had learnt to speak the words 'you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done'.

Hold on.

So in between now and the next WORKTALKweekly, do feel free to email us your thoughts to wtw@worktalk.gs or leave a comment on our [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) profile.

Work well
Geoff Shattock

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BIBLE SECTION

Genesis 37:1-2, 23, 36

1 Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. 2 This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe-the richly ornamented robe he was wearing- 24 and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

36 Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

Genesis 41:46, 50-52

46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt.

50 Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphara, priest of On. 51 Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." 52 The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering."

Genesis 50:19-20

19 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

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