

## #2 – FINDING PURPOSE IN PAIN (Jill Weber)

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?

### Genesis 39:1-2; 20-21

*Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ...*

*Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden. ... The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.*

### James 1:2-5

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

### Romans 5:3-4

*We... glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

1. At 17, Joseph was a young, gifted, dedicated follower of fashion, with a dream of a bright future. But he was also vain, self-focused, with an inflated sense of entitlement, and shielded from reality by his father's affection. He was about to discover that (as Jill put it) 'there is rarely, if ever, an easy, quick or linear path between the dream and the reality.' Things began, it seemed, to go very wrong. Sold into slavery, trafficked to Egypt, accused, and then wrongly imprisoned for attempted sexual assault, we hear the repeated refrain – "The Lord was with Joseph"!
  - *Where have you experienced the disappointment of dreams delayed, derailed, or dashed to pieces?*
  - *In what ways have you been aware of God's presence with you in the middle of delay and disappointment?*
2. George MacDonald (1824-1905), an author who profoundly influenced C. S. Lewis, wrote, "No words can express how much the world owes to sorrow. Most of the Psalms were born in the wilderness. Most of the Epistles were written in a prison. The greatest thoughts of the greatest thinkers have all passed through fire. The greatest poets have 'learned in suffering what they taught in song.' ... Take comfort, afflicted Christian! When God is about to make pre-eminent use of a person, He puts them in the fire." Jill quoted A. W. Tozer (1897-1963), who wrote, "It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply." [The Root of the Righteous, 1955]. And Graham Cooke, who said, "First God calls you, then he kills you."
  - *Why does it all have to be so painful?*
  - *What lessons have you learned through pain, sorrow, failure, trouble, and contradiction?*
  - *Jill said, "What if God is more interested in what he is doing in you than what he might do through you?" If that is true, how might that alter our perspective?*
  - *In Romans 5, Paul traces a process: Suffering → Perseverance → Character → Hope. In your own experience, how has suffering increased your sense of hope? Has it really?*
3. In his book, **The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development**, J. Robert (Bobby) Clinton writes that every leader that God can use always has to learn through Complications, Conflicts and Crises in order to develop maturity, and true dependence on God. The result, he says, is Confidence, Competence, and Character. At the beginning, for Joseph, it was all about his excitement at people bowing down to him. In the end, he learned that it wasn't about him at all – it was all about God's dream of saving the lives of others.
  - *What does Henri Nouwen's statement mean to you, "The great illusion of leadership is to think that man can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there?"*
  - *What is your desert?*
  - *Where might God be at work in you, preparing you for the work he has planned to do through you?*