

**Campus Church of Christ Jail Ministry**  
**Series 2, Lesson #2,**  
**“God’s Sovereignty and the Problem of Human Suffering”**

**The story of Joseph (paraphrased from Genesis 37-50)**

Joseph was the favored son of Jacob who was the grandson of Abraham, father of the Israelites. Because of Jacob’s favoritism towards Joseph, his brother hated him. One day when Joseph was about seventeen years old, his brothers seized him and sold him to a caravan of nomads who carried him away and sold him as a slave to Potiphar, captain of the body guards of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

God was with Joseph and blessed him, including Potiphar and his household because of Joseph. Because of the upright and worthy servant Joseph was, Potiphar placed him in charge of his house and entrusted all that he had to Joseph’s care. One day, when Joseph was alone in the house with her, Potiphar’s wife attempted to seduce Joseph. When Joseph refused her, she lied to her husband, accusing Joseph of attempting to seduce her. Upon hearing this, Potiphar became enraged and had Joseph thrown into prison.

Even in prison, God was with Joseph and blessed him. Soon, he was placed in charge of all the prisoners. Two of Pharaoh’s servants, who had displeased Pharaoh, had also been thrown into prison. One night both had disturbing and strange dreams, which God through Joseph interpreted. Joseph told the baker that his dream meant that in three days he would be hanged. He told the cupbearer that his dream meant that his position would be restored in three days and asked him to please remember and mention him to Pharaoh when he returned to his position, but the cupbearer forgot Joseph.

After two years had passed, Pharaoh had a very troublesome dream that none of his magicians or wise men could interpret. Because of that, the cupbearer remembered Joseph, and he told Pharaoh how he had been able to interpret his dream when he was in prison. Joseph was brought before Pharaoh. As before, God was with Joseph and gave him the interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream – God had revealed to Pharaoh that Egypt would have seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. When Pharaoh saw that God was with Joseph, he appointed him second in command over all of Egypt with the responsibility to oversee the collection of food during the seven abundant years in preparation for the seven years of famine during which time he would be in charge of the distribution of the stored food.

During the years of famine, Jacob’s family, who still lived in the land of Canaan, was in need of food. Jacob had heard that there was food in Egypt, so he sent his sons, except for the youngest, Benjamin, to Egypt to buy food. Since Joseph was the authority in charge of food distributions, his brothers had to go before him with their request. However, they did not recognize Joseph, and he did not reveal himself to them until after he had tricked them into bringing his youngest brother, Benjamin, back with them for him to see. Because of Joseph’s position and his favor with Pharaoh, Jacob and all of

his entire family were reunited and welcomed into Egypt where they were provided for with Pharaoh's blessings.

From this account of Joseph's life, list the all the types of suffering that he experienced.

What does *sovereignty* mean?

[\***sovereign** means *having supreme rank or power; paramount (one that has the highest rank, power, or authority); supreme; autonomous (not controlled by others or by outside forces)*]

What does "God is sovereign" mean?

Why can the concept of God's sovereignty become a problem for believers and non-believers?

Why are all religious beliefs not necessarily truth?

How can we be certain of which "truths" are really THE TRUTH?

**John 14:6**

What sets the God of the Bible apart from other gods?

**Isaiah 44:6-8**

**Psalms 103:19**

**Romans 11:33-36**

How do we know that God is sovereign?

Scriptures that support God's claim to sovereignty<sup>1</sup> (p. 79)

- He is **before** all things – **Psalm 90:2, Colossians 1:17, 1 Timothy 6:16, Revelation 1:8**
- He **created** all things – **Genesis 1:1, John 1:3, Colossians 1:16**
- He **upholds** all things – **Colossians 1:17, Hebrews 1:3**
- He is **above** all things – **Isaiah 45:5-12, Ephesians 4:6**

- He **knows** all things – **Psalm 139:4, 6; Isaiah 46:10**
- He **can do** all things – **Jeremiah 32:27, Luke 1:37**
- He **accomplishes** all things – **Isaiah 14:24; 46:10; Ephesians 1:11**
- He **rules over** all things – **1 Chronicles 29:11-12, Daniel 4:34-35**
- He is **in control** of all things – **Job 4:2, Romans 8:28**

What else does the Bible tell us about God’s sovereignty?

Describe Joseph’s understanding of God’s sovereignty working in His life.  
**Genesis 50:20**

How does Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection show us God’s sovereignty?

How was the timing of Jesus’ life an indication of God’s sovereignty?  
**Galatians 4:4**

How can we be confident in what the Bible says about Jesus’ life?

Think about these premises: 1. God is in control. 2. We live in a fallen world filled with pain, suffering, and evil. 3. God has given us free will. How do they relate to why a good and sovereign God would allow suffering?

### **Reason #1: To alert us** <sup>2</sup>

In the story of Joseph how did God use suffering to get someone’s attention or to warn them?

Can you think of a time when God was trying to alert you by causing you some sort of suffering? What kind? How did you respond?

What are some ways that pain can be a good thing?

What is God’s purpose in allowing pain and suffering?  
**Hebrews 12:5-6**

Why has God allowed pain and suffering in the world to continue for so long?

**2 Peter 3:9-15**

What does God want to alert us to?

**Reason #2: To Direct Us <sup>2</sup>**

In the story of Joseph, how did God use suffering to get someone to “see the big picture”?

How has God used suffering in your life to get you to “see the big picture”?

How can pain and suffering change our perspective on life?

What two choices do we have about how we deal with pain and suffering?

What does the Apostle Paul have to teach us about pain and suffering from his own life?

**2 Corinthians 12:9-10**

**2 Corinthians 1:8-9**

What has Jesus promised us about our pain and suffering?

**Matthew 11:28-30**

**Reason #3: To shape us to be like Jesus<sup>2</sup>**

In the story of Joseph give an example of how suffering made someone stronger and more mature?

What does “no pain, no gain” have to do with it?

What is God’s ultimate purpose for us?

In what ways can pain and suffering shape us?

**Romans 5:3-5**

**James 1:2-4**

**Romans 8:26-28**

**Reason #4: To unite us** <sup>2</sup>

In the story of Joseph, how did situations of suffering bring people together to care for and help each other?

How does pain and suffering help us all to become one in Christ?

**1 Corinthians 12:26-27**

**Ephesians 4:16**

**2 Corinthians 1:3-4**

**Galatians 6:2**

**Romans 12:15**

God has never promised us an easy life. What has He promised us with regard to suffering? (**Romans 8:28, 31-39**)

How should we respond to Him when we understand what the sovereignty of God really means?

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**References:**

<sup>1</sup> Ingram, Chip. ***God as He Longs for You to See Him***, Chapters 4 & 5. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> De Haan, Kurt. "Why Would a Good God Allow Suffering?" Grand Rapids: Radio Bible Class / Resources for Biblical Communication, 1990.

All scripture references are from <http://www.biblegateway.com/>  
Definitions are from <http://dictionary.reference.com>

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This lesson was prepared for you and presented by volunteers from Campus Church of Christ. We believe that the Bible is the holy, inspired, Word of God in which He has revealed to us Himself, His love, and His plan for us. We teach no other doctrine than that found in the Bible, and we ask that you examine all teaching from us or anyone else to be sure that it is accurate according to the Bible.

If you are seeking a church family with whom to worship and to grow in your faith, we invite you to Campus Church of Christ, 1525 Indian Trail Rd., Norcross, GA 30093. You may visit us online at [www.campuschurch.org](http://www.campuschurch.org). Sunday morning worship services are at 8:30 and 11:00. We have Bible classes for all ages at 9:45. Sunday evening, we meet at 6:00 and Wednesday evening at 7:00.

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**Additional Notes:**