

Day 10

In this passage, we learn about Joseph's experience in Egypt. A statement that jumped out at me in this passage was the repeated assertion that "The Lord was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did." When I ponder what would life would be like for me if the Lord was with me and I succeeded in everything I did, I am quite confident that being sold by my siblings, enslaved, falsely accused of rape, wrongfully imprisoned, and forgotten by those I helped would not be what I had in mind. In fact, I might argue that these experiences demonstrate that I am not successful and that the Lord has left me, because it would feel lousy to be enslaved and wrongfully accused and imprisoned and forgotten. This is the tricky part about the human experience: things feel bad to us when they aren't necessarily bad. As we read on in the story, we will see how these bad-feeling experiences play a crucial role in saving the entire nation of Israel from famine, revealing that they were both necessary and good.

I don't think I really understood how something could feel bad to me and still be for my benefit until we had kids. When Luke was a baby, I took him into the pediatrician's office for a check up and for his immunizations. One minute he was happily sitting on a table playing with toys, and the next minute he was getting poked with needles and screaming and crying. I will never forget the look of absolute betrayal he gave me, a look that said, "I thought you loved me, how could you let them do this to me?" It was wretched to watch that, but I knew as a parent what Luke could not know as an infant, that vaccinations prevent future suffering, community spread of disease, and possibly even death. The temporary pain of a vaccination was preventative against worse and prolonged suffering later. It wasn't even worthwhile to explain this to Luke at the time; he lacked the capacity to understand the explanation.

And so it is with us sometimes. The Lord has work he plans to do with and for us, and sometimes for that work to be successful, he is with us and we still feel pain and suffering and injustice. Sometimes we do not get an explanation from the Lord for that, maybe because we are simply too limited in intellect and attention and time and space to understand why events are occurring and how they are part of God's good plan for us and for our communities. But God is good! He is SO good. We can trust that he is good and just and that he will be faithful to complete the good work he's started, even if it doesn't feel good at the moment. Joseph's experience of suffering while the Lord was with him is testimony to the fact that injustice and suffering do not necessarily mean that God has left us or is against us. It just might feel that way.