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# INTRODUCTION

As I began writing this book on the amazing life of Joseph, I heard the phrase “trampled to death by ducks” from my pastor. It not only seems fitting for Joseph’s many trials, but it so describes daily life, especially for the Christian—we enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations (Acts 14:22). While it’s easy to imagine a quick demise by elephant, it’s not so easy to imagine dying by duck. It would take a lot of ducks to kill us—probably by knocking us over and trampling us to death in a flurry of webbed feet and flapping wings.

But that is life’s experience for most of us—one little hassle after another, suffocating us until we can hardly see the light of day.

There are unexpected bills, car problems, strained relationships, misunderstandings, nightmares, insomnia, problems with relatives, aging parents, identity theft, stress at work, difficulties with kids, endless minor health issues—such as a sty in the eye, a pulled neck muscle, cold sore on the lip, canker sore in the mouth, sore throat, pounding headache, earache, toothache—to major health problems. The dog threw up on the carpet, the sink is stopped up, the AC is out, the toast is burnt, and the cat brought a dead bird inside. You have cell phone problems, computer viruses, noisy neighbors, a leaking faucet, mold in the shower, rats chewing wiring in the garage, biting fleas, moles in the lawn, termites eating your house, aphids eating the plants, spider in the den, fly on the food, mosquito in the bedroom, cockroach in the pantry. . . and that’s just by 9:00 a.m.

Then things really get bad.

Early in 2020, the unthinkable happened. The entire world was put on hold. A global pandemic put Hollywood, Wall Street, New York, and the rest of the world out of business. Like Joseph, our lives changed overnight, and it was as though we were suddenly living in some foreign land. Millions were forced to stay in their homes, away from loved ones, and our freedoms were curtailed. There were mass deaths, financial collapse, food and supply shortages, and unprecedented unemployment. Just as we had hope things were improving, then the racial tensions, riots, and looting began. For many it became almost unbearable.

It seems as though we make it through one trial, and there are more ducks in a row, waiting to suffocate us. The only way they can do that is if they get us down. And they won't be able to do that if we take a few lessons from the life of Joseph—a leaf from the world's most beloved Book. Through the Scriptures we have the consolation that the ducks of this life are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be ours. They work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.



## Chapter One

# WHEN THINGS ARE HUMMING

“Lie with me . . .” The words of Potiphar’s lusty wife weren’t talking about bearing false witness. Her words echoed in Joseph’s youthful ears. How could this be happening? This was his master’s wife, and day after day she kept whispering that same seductive invitation: “Lie with me . . .” (Genesis 39:7).

For a young man devoid of understanding, it would be a dream come true—to hear the words, “I have spread my bed with tapestry, colored coverings of Egyptian linen. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until morning; let us delight ourselves with love. For my husband is not at home . . .” (Proverbs 7:16–19).

Her husband *wasn’t* at home, and when Potiphar did come back she certainly wouldn’t say anything. *No one would know*. But such thoughts didn’t enter the mind of this Hebrew slave. Unlike the Egyptians who enslaved him, Joseph believed that there was only one God and that His omnis-

cient eyes were in every place. He also knew that to commit adultery was to sin against Him and incur His wrath.

Joseph's conscience whispered,

Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways,

Do not stray into her paths;

For she has cast down many wounded,

And all who were slain by her were strong men.

Her house is the way to hell,

Descending to the chambers of death. (Proverbs 7:25–27)

Yet, the temptress kept tempting him relentlessly, day after day. He was a slave and dared not run away. That was a dead end. One alternative was to be upfront with his master,

*Most of us battle temptations to sin. The world, the flesh, and the devil whisper of its delights.*

but what could he say: "Your wife is a whorish woman"? That wouldn't fly. No matter how he tried to cut it, it sounded bad. Bad for Joseph. His master wouldn't believe the word of a slave over the word of his beloved wife.

Besides, this wouldn't just be a matter of committing adultery. It was more than that. Three times in Genesis 39 Scripture reiterates that Joseph had been trusted with *all* that Potiphar had. *Everything*. Presumably he handled the general finances, staff wages, taxes, upkeep of the buildings, laying out his master's clothes, ordering food for family and staff, organizing the household cleaning, including camel and horse health, chariot maintenance, etc. Joseph had been entrusted with everything; he was allowed access to everything except his master's beloved wife. How then could he do this great wickedness, and sin against God (Genesis 39:9)? Those are the very words Joseph used to try to deter this loose woman. He was appealing to her conscience. This wouldn't be right! But she

had no conscience, no love of righteousness, no fear of God, and also evidently no love for her husband.

Most of us battle temptations to sin. The world, the flesh, and the devil whisper of its delights. We continually fight the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. But how can we give ourselves to sin—in light of everything we have in Christ? God gave us life, knowledge of what is right and wrong, forgiveness through the cross, and the precious gospel with which we've been entrusted. Like Joseph, we say, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Joseph was between a rock and a hard place. The ducks were coming, and they were starting to suffocate him.

Life in Egypt had been going so well, but how complicated this woman was now making it. He thought back to the simplicity of his younger days, and how he'd suddenly been thrown a curveball . . .

Joseph was just seventeen. He was strikingly handsome, young, and vibrant. His entire life stood before him. He had no financial woes—he had a secure job, with the big plus that his father was wealthy and favored him. His life entailed that of a carefree farmhand, tending to his father's sheep. Things were humming for young Joseph.

Perhaps the most dangerous time for us as Christians is when things are humming. There's money in the bank and the family is happy, healthy, wealthy, and wise. That's when we can think that we need not pray or search God's Word. That's when we can think that minute-by-minute trust isn't needed. And that thought should frighten us.

We tend to pray most in a storm. Peace doesn't normally produce passionate prayer. Having the ability to keep control of our lives rarely drives us to our knees. Why should it? Yet our humble knees are our special place of safety.

Still, we naturally long for prosperous and storm-free times. Who doesn't like to be able to pay the rent, buy food and clothing for the family, and now and then help others who are struggling? There's nothing wrong with peace and prosperity, but when they cause us to drift from God, the blessing becomes a curse.

Storms tend to anchor us in God. And so He, in His great love and infinite wisdom, often sends them to those He loves to bring us to the shelter of the harbor.

The way to navigate through all the incoming ducks is to understand the story Jesus gave of the wise and foolish house builders. It's also important to know the context of the story by reading the preceding three verses:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21–23)

There will be many on the Day of Judgment who profess to be Christians and will find that they are not, as evidenced by their lawlessness. Then comes the warning from Jesus about the two house builders, beginning with “therefore” to give context:

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat



on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” (verses 24–27)

The “many” are those who hear the sayings of Jesus and don’t do them. This includes not only the godless world that ignores the gospel warning, but the many who sit in churches—those who are hearers only, and not doers of the Word (James 1:22).

Both house builders encountered the same storms. They are inevitable. We would be wise, therefore, to check our foundation before they arrive.

So before we look closely at the fascinating life of Joseph and his suffocating ducks, let’s ask the question, “Is my life built on the teachings of Jesus?” Scripture says to examine ourselves and see if we’re in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). Here is a checklist of ten questions to see if we’ve passed from death to life, keeping in mind that we don’t do these things to be saved, but *because* we’re saved:

*Storms are inevitable. We would be wise, therefore, to check our foundation before they arrive.*

1. Am I sharing the gospel with the unsaved (Mark 16:15)?
2. Am I reading God’s Word daily?
3. Do I have a heart that longs to do God’s will?
4. Am I bridling my appetites?
5. Am I in regular fellowship?
6. Is God, rather than money, my source of joy and provider of peace for the future?
7. Do I keep my word?
8. Am I confessing and forsaking all sin?
9. Do I have a loving and forgiving attitude toward others?
10. Do I see times of prosperity to be times of danger?

## THE NARRATIVE BEGINS

Our story of Joseph begins to unfold in Genesis 37:

Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. This is the history of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. (verses 1,2)

In Luke 24, after Jesus had risen from the dead, He joined in a conversation between two of His disciples on the road to a village called Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. He asked them what they were discussing, and they replied that the chief priests and rulers handed Jesus over to be crucified, and it was the third day since it took place. Then they said,

Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. (Luke 24:22–24)

After Jesus firmly rebuked them for their lack of faith, the Scriptures say,

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. (verse 27)

His referral to “Moses” was a reference to the books that Moses penned, which included the story of Joseph. Perhaps Jesus, during this conversation, pointed out the parallels and types between His life and the life of Joseph. As we will see in the following pages, there were many. One of them was that Joseph was a shepherd who tended his father’s flock.

In John chapter 10 Jesus is portrayed as the Great Shepherd who tended His Father’s flock. He spoke of an intimate

relationship between Himself and those who follow Him, knowing each of us by name (John 10:2,3).

While the world looks down its proud nose because the Bible likens believers to sheep (atheists mockingly call us “sheeple”), there are only two categories of people. We are either easily led sheep, or applicably stubborn and rebellious goats.

Yet in speaking of the lost state of humanity, Isaiah likens *all* of mankind to sheep:

All we like sheep have gone astray;  
We have turned, every one, to his own way;  
And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.  
(Isaiah 53:6)

There is a sense of safety in a flock of sheep. The shepherd can keep his protective eye on the flock. But when one sheep turns to its own way and goes astray, it becomes easy pickings for a predator with a taste for tenderloin.

As sheep, Christians are willingly led because our soul pants after the Good Shepherd. We are sheep who have been rescued from the mouth of the lion. We were once lost, but now we are found. Jesus left the ninety-nine to seek and save us, and He now leads us by the still waters and into green pastures:

And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.  
(John 10:4)

Things were sweet for young Joseph. But something was about to happen to make things sour. The first of many ducks was getting ready to show its ugly head.

## *Questions*

1. Name several things that Potiphar's wife lacked.
2. Is it true for you that we pray most in a storm? Share an experience.
3. Have the storms of life weakened you or made you stronger? What is it that determines whether we are strengthened or weakened?
4. How will it help us in trials if we believe that they come by God's permissive will? Give some biblical examples.
5. How are Christians like sheep and the unsaved like goats?