

THE GRATITUDE CHOICE

If you think your circumstances are too tough to warrant trust-filled thanksgiving, take a look at Joseph's life -- betrayed and left for dead at seventeen by his own brothers; relegated to years of slavery in a foreign country; suffering long years of imprisonment for refusing to commit adultery. Against all odds, Joseph lived as a free man for one reason: he chose to look up. He chose to be God-focused instead of self-focused. He didn't see hard circumstances as excuses to complain and feel sorry for himself. He didn't wallow in self-pity, bemoaning life's unfairness and envying others their comparative ease. He chose to see his days from God's perspective and not from his own. He focused on the things that really mattered and not on his momentary happiness. In short, he chose gratitude.

After nearly twenty years in exile in Egypt, he had two sons. He gave them names that say thank you. The first son he named Manasseh (which means "making to forget"), for he said, "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." Gen. 41:51. He was intentionally focusing on how faithful God had been in teaching him to "forget" his painful circumstances and his homeland. It's obvious from the later account of his passionate reunion with his brothers and his father that he hadn't "forgotten" in the sense of blocking out the memory of his family or their acts of betrayal; rather, he had "forgotten" the blame and resentment and anger than could so easily have consumed him.

The second son he named Ephraim (which means "fruitfulness"), for he said, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." Gen. 41:52. He was choosing to focus on how fruitful God had made him in the midst of the pain of rejection and abandonment and loneliness. He saw clearly that God had born fruit in his life, not *despite* all the suffering but *because of it*. That's

why he could accept and even embrace his painful past. With any other perspective, the things he faced over the long years in Egypt would have left him bitter and angry and wizened. His heart would have been a desert instead of a garden. Instead, he saw his circumstances from God's perspective, so that, when he was reunited with his brothers, he was able to say, "[Y]ou meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. . . . So therefore do not be afraid. I will provide for you and your little ones."

Today, I will choose, moment by moment and baby step by baby step, to follow in Joseph's footsteps. For today, at least, I will turn away from all the "if only" thoughts that would lead me into the mire of self-pity. I will look up. I will choose gratitude.