



# Embrace the Spirit

The Caribbean Initiative

## Praying and Encountering God with the Powers of the World

By: Dr. Oral Thomas

### Day 1: God Rules, not Pharaoh

**Genesis 41:14-16, 25-32**

In circumstances of established human control, God's will breaks through. For all his power, Pharaoh and his administrators are unable to discern the signs of the times that seasons of famine and plenty are about to come upon the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh's power might be on display, but it is God's will that is done. Pharaoh *sent* (v. 14) for Joseph, later renamed and gave him a family (v. 45). Naming and renaming are expressive of the power to dominate and lord it over the inferior, dependent and subordinate.

God rules the world, not Pharaoh. God's will prevails. The working out and working through of God's will may be long delayed, but it cannot stay unrealized.

The size of armies, networks of intelligence, nepotism and corrupt regimes entrenched as ruling governments may cause those working for the transformation of oppressive structures and systems to despair as hope for change is both elusive and farfetched. Yet God's will prevails.

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*This is my Father's world  
O let us never forget  
And though the wrong seems oft so right  
God is the ruler yet*

## Prayer

***Creator God we are assured that through your love.***

***God will judge the world in righteousness; for the world expressed through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ you will never leave nor forsake your created order or abandon it to the devices of your creatures. Amen.***

## Day 2: On Earth as in Heaven

### ***Genesis 41: 33-45***

It could not have been seen, neither by the family of Joseph nor Pharaoh's court, that when Joseph was sold into slavery, he would rise in the governance structure and system of the royal court to be overseer. But God's providence is mysterious; God is sovereign.

The slave is made a member of the ruling class (v. 40) by the ruling class. Remember where Joseph is coming from, being sold as a slave into Egypt. Also, it is Pharaoh who is acknowledging that God has not abandoned Joseph while seemingly in control of what Joseph does and becomes. Further, he renames (v. 45a) Joseph and gave Joseph's hand in marriage, but to a daughter who is a member of the ruling class (v. 45b). Furthermore, Joseph is given authority but not power (v. 44). As a matter of fact, the ruling class does not willingly and readily cede control to anyone. If Joseph speaks in a manner that advocates upending the present power arrangements and relations of and in the court, there would be no possibility of a rise to positions of authority. Pharaoh is not unduly worried that a slave is now overseer as the power arrangements are such that Joseph cannot afflict the comfortable.

But who is in control? For the narrator, God is. God still is, for us. Vast economic resources, military might and the power and means to make cultural imperialism policy by countries with the wherewithal do not wrest control of the world out of the hands of God. God's hand may be difficult to discern but God's purpose for good can always be trusted, though its working out and through can be long delayed.

*God moves in a mysterious way  
God's wonders to perform  
God plants God's footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm*

## Prayer

***Sustaining and patient God however long it may seem to us for your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven may we hold to the faith of your will for good for us all. Amen.***

## Day 3: Do Unto Others

### **Genesis 41:46-57**

In the Caribbean we have a proverb that says *“when you are going up the ladder treat those you meet coming down well because you may meet them going up when you are coming down.”* It is mindless and disturbing when one from humble beginnings or oppressive circumstances “made it” seeks to erase that past.

The slave is now a member of the ruling class, an overseer. As overseer, he ensures that the economy booms and the status quo remains intact. Joseph engineers a surplus economy. The problem is not the grains; the grains are the problem.

The naming of the children is a matter of concern as to what the narrator is up to. The names of the children are *Manasseh (God has let me forget all my troubles)*; is this possible? Should this happen? Why? *Ephraim (God has made me a success)* is Joseph or his family a failure prior to his rise to the rank or office of overseer or he being sold into Egypt as a slave? And now all Egypt is at the feet of Joseph.

The once oppressed slave is now ruler; will the oppressed become the oppressor? Will he liberate, tolerate, and forget? We wait.

In the while, practicing the biblical injunction may redeem one’s past: *do unto others, as you would have them do unto you*. Moreover, one’s past can be redeemed, when in our pomp, by asking God to *“roll back the curtain (of time) now and then/show me where you brought me from/ and where I could have been/remember I am human and humans forget/so remind me, remind me dear Lord”*.

## Prayer

***Liberating God when our hearts are full of glee help us to remember and give you all the praise and glory. Amen.***

## Day 4: Neither Slumber nor Sleep

### **Genesis 42:1-17**

Revenge is a wild form of justice.

In today’s reading a number of questions arise: is Joseph getting his own back? Is this revenge? Or is Joseph showing how dishonest they are? Joseph is determined to be the judge of the claim by his brothers *“we are honest men”* (v. 11) as he intends to pursue *“whether there is truth in you”* (v. 16).

Dreams do come true as the brothers do bow down to Joseph, literally (vv. 6-8, 10 compare Genesis 37:8). The spy’s theory is developed to counter the claim made by the brothers that Joseph is “dead” (v. 13). What do they know; Joseph is far from dead.

Noticeably, in this episode, God drops out of the story, as there is no reference or mention of the activity of God. Life goes on. The story drifts on. What are the thoughts of the mysterious ways of God’s providence? Is there really drift? On closer examination, we see God working God’s purposes out in the

fulfilment of dreams, Joseph's rise to position of authority and the painstaking revelation of the truth that Joseph is not dead.

We can find assurance in the claim of the Psalmist to Israel: "...he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." (Psalm 121:3, 4; NRSV).

## Prayer

***Keeping God we are comforted in the faith that you neither slumber nor sleep. Amen***

## Day 5: What's Going on

### ***Genesis 42:18-28***

"What's going on"? Is a question that reflects lack of knowledge, uncertainty, and the inability to draw conclusions on the information presently available? For Joseph's brothers, "what's going on" is that they are being punished for the crime of selling their brother Joseph into slavery. As such, they are asking "why this probing and testing of our character? Why is it that our transaction is not according to the usual business practices? Why us? Is something afoot?"

For Joseph, "what's going on"? Is a process of bringing to the light of day the mysterious ways of God's providence, a process that must be quite painful for Joseph as his own flesh and blood are involved?

Now it is the brothers in their confusion and uncertainty, in the form of a question (v. 28) that brought God back into the story. With that question, though, one is left to work out and through whether the question is expressive of guilt, intends to lay blame or make sense of their confusion. His pain, notwithstanding, Joseph is not simply keeping his head but faith in God.

*Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs,  
And works His sovereign will.*

## Prayer

***Faithful God in our times of confusion, uncertainty and anxiety we thank you for keeping faith with and in us.***

## Day 6: Up Against It

### ***Genesis 42:29-38***

When you are "up against it" nothing seems to work and work out, hope for better seems a distant reality and one is too confused and de-energised to think clearly and act.

"What's going on"? Is still unclear to Joseph's brothers. Their confusion is turning to anger as they hold to their integrity and pedigree, and the view that Joseph is dead. But was the placing of the money in their sacks honesty test or clue? The plot thickens. Panic is setting in.

For Jacob, the forces are against him. He, too, holds to the view that Joseph is dead and is finding it unbearable to grieve over the loss of two sons. Joseph is pushing the family to the limit.

When in life we find ourselves “up against it” thoughts and prayers turn to God as we attempt to spiritualise the experiences. Escape seems the easier option. Confronting the forces and working through issues are more difficult and daunting to undertake. Yet it may well be the way to well-being and liberation.

## Prayer

***God of and in our difficulties may our faith in you be such that in our experiences of untried pain we will hold firmly to the faith that the bruised reed. You will not break but strengthen and sustain. Amen.***

## Day 7: Pushed to Act

### ***Genesis 43:1-10***

In the Caribbean we have the saying “*force makes water go up hill*”. In other words, the gravity or force of circumstances pushes one to act, fast. Yesterday’s scripture reading ended with Jacob’s defiance and deep sorrow. Today’s begins with Judah’s intransigence (vv. 8-10). Joseph’s questions are asked from a position of knowledge but the mystery surrounding “what’s going on”? deepens for the rest of the family. Eventually, they will all bend and bow, and be enlightened.

As the famine worsens and with it the possible loss of lives and livelihoods, there is increasing pressure for the family to act fast. Money is not the problem. Time is. The family’s predicament is driving their actions. What remains a dilemma for them is but the ripening of God’s purposes.

While God is sovereign, God is not a bully. God’s modus operandi is to stand at the door and knock. God may appear to be moving slowly but God is sure.

*Though the cause of evil prosper,  
Yet 'tis truth alone is strong  
Though her portion be the scaffold,  
And upon the throne be wrong –  
Yet the scaffold sways the future,  
And, behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow,  
Keeping watch above God’s own.*

## Prayer

***God of solidarity our faith and hope in you increase to know with and in You we may be down but never out, perplexed but never driven to despair, that we can triumph in defeat and right will win the day.***

## Questions for reflection

1. Joseph starts as a slave in the Pharaoh's court and ends up as an overseer. As an overseer, was Joseph an oppressor or liberator?
2. Is revenge a wild form of justice?
3. What are the portrayals of God in the passages? Is this the God you worship and serve?