

When Life Passes Me By

1. Warm up: Sunday's sermon began with the words of two songs about lonely people who felt life had passed them by – *Eleanor Rigby* by the Beatles and *All the Lonely People* by America. What's your favorite (or least favorite) Beatles song?
2. In *Eleanor Rigby*, both Eleanor Rigby and Father Mackenzie are simply going through the motions of life, isolated, hopeless, resigned to their fate. *All the Lonely People* challenges us to take a different approach. When we're tempted to think that life has passed us by, it says, "Don't give up until your drink from the silver cup" and to never let anything "take you down" or cause you to give up. That's what this week's story of Joseph is about. Read Genesis 39:20 – 40:23, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. When Joseph learned that his friend, the cupbearer, was going to be restored to his official role, he said to the cupbearer, "Remember me when it goes well for you. Please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place." Genesis 40:14. Imagine yourself in Joseph's position. In those first few days after the cupbearer was released from prison and restored to his position as chief cupbearer to Pharaoh, how would you have felt?
 - b. A month later when nothing had happened to get you out of prison, how do you think you would have felt? What kind of prayers would you have been praying?
 - c. A year later when nothing had happened to get you out of prison, how do you think you would have felt? How do you think this would have affected you emotionally and spiritually?
3. Genesis 40:23 says, "The chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him." His big chance to get out of prison had come and gone. Life had passed him by, and he must have been tempted to give up. Most all of us have been there at some time in our life.
 - a. Think back to when you were younger and a time when you felt forgotten, passed over, or passed by. What happened?
 - b. Right now in your life, is there some area of your life where you're feeling tempted to feel forgotten, passed over, or passed by? Tell us about it.
4. Joseph knew what it's like to feel forgotten. It would have been so easy for him to become just another hopeless Eleanor Rigby or Father Mackenzie. But that's not how Joseph rolled. Despite everything, he believed God was still with him and that, "All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to God's purposes." Romans 8:28. In the next several weeks, we'll see that Joseph's patient endurance will be rewarded. He will end up connecting to Pharaoh in an extraordinary way, be appointed to a senior governing position, and literally end up drinking from a silver cup – the cup of royalty (Genesis 44:5). All of this, Jeff suggested, is meant to

teach us three critical lessons about how we should respond when it seems life is passing us by. **Lesson #1 – Learn how to wait well.**

- a. Some people tend to be optimist, others pessimists, and yet others realists. Which do you have a tendency to be? Is it wrong for us as people of faith to be pessimists? As people of faith, should we always be optimists?
 - b. When Admiral William McRaven was training to be a Navy SEAL, he and his fellow trainees had to spend a night neck deep in wet, freezing-cold mud. The trainers told them that they could get out early if five of them gave up and left training. Instead one trainee began to defiantly sing, then they all did, and each of them made it through the night – the lesson being: When you’re stuck in the mud, don’t give up. Sing while you wait! Tell us about a time when you – or someone you know cultivated a song in your heart despite great hardship.
 - c. Jeff said, “What we’re talking about here is the difference between what I would call ‘power waiting’ versus ‘victim waiting.’” What do you think he meant? How would you describe the difference?
5. Lesson #2 – When you feel forgotten and life is passing you by, remember: **God has a plan for your life.** Psalm 139:15 says, “Your eyes, O God, beheld my unformed substance, and in your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.” Jeremiah 29:11 says, “I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for good and not for harm, plans to give you hope and a future.”
- a. When we hear that God has a plan for every day of our life, we tend to picture a plan that precisely determines every single detail of what will happen. But the Bible doesn’t say that. The Bible teaches that God gives us (and others) free will. That means God’s plan for us, by definition, can’t be set in stone. So God’s plan for us, Jeff suggested, is less like a blueprint and more like a game plan that a coach would draw up. What’s the difference between a blueprint and a game plan? Do you buy the idea that God’s plan for your life is more like a game plan? Why or why not?
 - b. Chuck Colson is a good example of how God’s “game plan” adapts interactively to our life. Colson messed up his life and, like Joseph, ended up in prison. Surely God didn’t want Colson to break the law, but when he did, God used that experience to enable him to launch Prison Fellowship. Tell us about a time when God brought something good out of something bad you did.
6. Lesson #3 – When you feel forgotten and life is passing you by, remember: **God’s not in a hurry; God’s plan takes time.** Jeff said, “God’s plan for your life may not make sense until you get to heaven and can finally see how all the pieces fit together. In fact, your greatest accomplishments may not even occur here on earth, but in eternity. God’s plan maybe to prepare you here for what you’re destined to do in eternity.” How does this last point make you feel? Do you think Jeff’s right? Why or why not?

Genesis 39:20 - 40:23, selected verses

²⁰ Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; he remained there. ²¹ But the LORD was with him and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. ²² So the chief jailer committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison.

¹ Sometime after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt offended his lord the king. ² Pharaoh was angry and put him in the prison where Joseph was confined. ⁵ One night the cupbearer dreamed. ⁶ When Joseph came in the morning, he saw he was troubled. ⁷ So he asked, "Why is your face downcast?" ⁸ He said, "I have had a dream, and there is no one to interpret it." Joseph said, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell the dream to me."

⁹ So the chief cupbearer said, "In my dream there was a vine, and on the vine three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms came out and the clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup." ¹² Joseph said, "This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days; ¹³ within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do."

²⁰ On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants, and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer. ²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

²³ Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.