

This book effectively walks readers through the low points of Joseph's life and demonstrates the process God uses to lead people to places of greater influence and responsibility offering hope to those facing their own interlopers.

Interlopers: The Difficult People and Life Experiences That Prepare Us for Greater

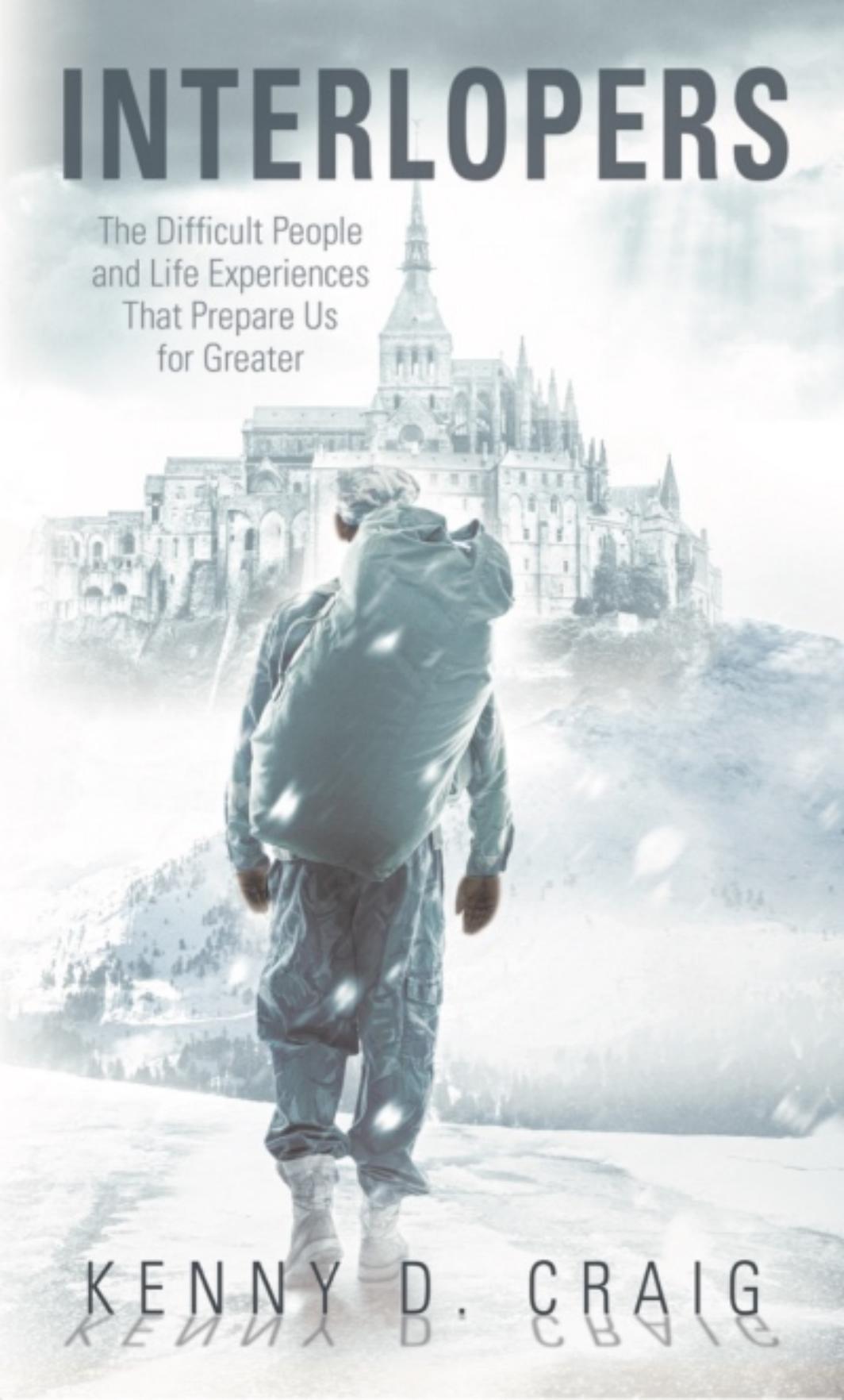
By Kenny D. Craig

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INTERLOPERS



The Difficult People
and Life Experiences
That Prepare Us
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1

Dream Killers

Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more.

—Genesis 37:5

In this day and time, we are constantly driven toward the pursuit of self-improvement and self-empowerment. A variety of tools are available in the form of books, CDs, motivational speakers, and even life coaches whose sole responsibility is to guide and direct us in making the best life decisions to obtain our goals and dreams. Many times, our dreams and hopes for a better tomorrow fuel our passion as we seek to make our lives better. We often share these dreams and goals with those within our circles of influence, including family, friends, and even coworkers, in hopes that they will become supportive and share in our excitement of these life pursuits. But what happens when we cannot find the hoped-for support? What do we do when those who should be excited for us become envious and even discourage us from following our hearts? How do we cope when the people with whom we have shared our dreams become our dream killers?

Dream killers are people who not only offer us no support as we pursue our dreams but also try to discourage us from pursuing, or even contemplating, the achievement of our dreams. Joseph had a dream, and when he shared it with his brothers, they hated him. We must take and understand

a few things from this: First, we must be very careful and selective of whom we share our hopes, goals, desires, aspirations, and dreams with. Revealing our big dreams and our aspirations for greatness can cause our enemies to reveal themselves. People who already don't like us *really* don't like us when we begin to think outside the box and to dream what others deem impossible. The animosity that Joseph's brothers had toward him spawned from jealousy over their father's love of him: "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him" (Genesis 37:3-4). Prior to sharing his dream with his brothers, Joseph was already disliked not because he had done anything to them but because he was favored by their father.

Have you ever met someone who spoke to you in a harsh tone without cause? Have you ever had to deal with a coworker or colleague who seemed to hold some unjustifiable contempt for you? Many times, people dislike us not because of our actions toward them but simply because we are well liked and beloved by others. We have to understand that some people we encounter will dislike us without cause and cannot speak peacefully to us. These types of people, like Joseph's brothers, dislike us even before we share our dreams with them; unlike Joseph, we should be wary of sharing our dreams and expectations with them because, as Joseph found out, doing so will only make them hate us more. We must therefore not deceive ourselves into believing that everybody

will like and appreciate us, because sometimes we are disliked for no reason at all. The challenge for us, then, is to be able to discern between people who genuinely have our best interests at heart and those who do not.

We must also learn from Joseph's encounter with his brothers that dream killers are often not strangers or people foreign to us. Joseph's dream killers were his own flesh-and-blood siblings, who should have been his biggest cheerleaders and support group. It's bad enough when we are mistreated and discouraged by strangers who don't really know us, but when ill will and negative energy come from those whom we classify as family, friends, and loved ones, we can be left scarred for life or severely emotionally damaged. Many times, our biggest hurts and letdowns come from those closest to us. When we understand that blood kinship doesn't automatically equate to loyalty, then the pain and discouragement we feel when our family members become our dream killers won't be so shocking. We may not always admit it, but sometimes, family can be our biggest obstacle to achieving our goals—not because they are inherently evil, but sometimes because their lack of vision and faith can cause them to miss the greatness that resides within their own family. Even Christ was paralyzed by the lack of faith of those from within his own homeland. The potential He had to do great things amongst his own kindred was stymied because of their unbelief: "And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.' And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick

people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching” (Mark 6:4–6). Dream killers from amongst our own family can paralyze us simply by not believing in us, which usually results in a lack of support for us. It can be devastating when we cannot turn to the place we call home and find no word of encouragement and no one to help us should we find ourselves in need of motivation.

The last lesson we must take from Joseph’s encounter is that the size and audacity of the dream can dictate the amount of contempt from our dream killers. When Joseph shared his dream with his brothers, they hated him even more. Let us consider his dream: “He said to them, ‘Hear this dream that I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.’ His brothers said to him, ‘Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?’ So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words” (Genesis 37:6–8).

Joseph did not just dream of being the supervisor on the job; he dreamed of owning the company. When we dream beyond the average and aspire to attain more than mediocrity, it can cause some contempt in those around us the likes of which we have never experienced before. As long as we live beneath our potentials, many of those in our circles of influence are content and say nothing about our neutral existences. It’s when we have epiphanies that we can do so much more with our lives and therefore actively seek to unlock the greatness within us that our true opposition and dream

killers will reveal themselves. You can probably look back over your life to a time when you were not highly motivated and really not doing much. At that time, those in your inner circle probably didn't have much to say about and did not oppose you. The moment you decided to do something better, try something different, and pursue significant change, however, their voices rose in a chorus of naysaying, as they attempted to discourage you from putting much time, effort, or energy into your new goal.

We must be careful of those within our inner circles because, as previously stated, dreaming big and aspiring for greatness can cause the enemies within those circles to reveal themselves. The question Joseph's brothers ask him after he shares his dream is filled with contempt: "Are you indeed to reign and rule over us?" In essence, they are saying, "How dare you say such foolish things! Who do you think you are?" If his dream had been simple and had not elevated him above them, they would not have reacted in such a way and may not have addressed the dream at all.

Joseph also shares with them and their father a second, similar, dream: "Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, 'Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, 'What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?' And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind. And his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem" (Genesis

37: 9–12). His brothers can no longer stomach being in his presence, so they go to another town to be away from him. Like Joseph, when we have the audacity to hope, the ambition to pursue excellence, the vision to see the unimaginable, and the desire to achieve the spectacular, our enemies and dream killers act accordingly. When we dream big, those who cannot stomach the idea of us doing something significant may leave us. We may find ourselves abandoned and deserted solely for the sake of seeking excellence. The sad reality is some people connected to us have no problem with us as long as we are living no better than they, but the moment we begin to live, act, think, and do better, they become our biggest obstacles. So, when we dream big and outside the parameters of the norm, daring to see ourselves doing great things, we must be careful with whom we share these dreams.

Joseph's dream produced dream killers, who were very close to him. Those closest to him hate him because of the audacity of his dream. What's ironic is that they are livid, filled with rage, over a dream that has not yet come to pass. They have no evidence that it will even take place, meaning it was an un-manifested vision. Like Joseph's brothers, many people are angry, bitter, upset, and even outraged over things that have not even taken place. When you share with them something they themselves cannot imagine, ill feelings, even hatred, are produced because deep down inside, your dream exposes their own inadequacies and shortcomings.

The key for us is to not allow other people's negativity and ill feelings toward us to prevent us from pursuing our goals. We must recognize that no matter how bad these

encounters with those opposed to our dreams, the experiences are part of the process that God uses to prepare us for higher callings and greater purposes. Dream killers thus help prepare us for greater destinies.

3

Backstabbers

She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house." Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home.

–Genesis 39:12-16

Suzanne Collins, author of *The Hunger Games*, once stated, "For there to be betrayal, there would have to have been trust first." Betrayal is a violation of trust in some form or another. It's this breach of trust that has caused much devastation and destruction to kinships, friendships, and relationships. Either by intent or without malice, a violation of trust can result in the ultimate separation of bonds between people. Trust that took years to build can be shattered with one violation and in many cases, can never be restored.

Backstabbers betray others, either directly or indirectly, to accomplish their own selfish goals, often leaving others to pay for their actions. They tend to do things behind our backs and without our knowledge. This betrayal can alter

the course of our lives. In most cases, the backstabber violates or misuses a trust that has taken a great length of time to establish, though violation of trust between those who have known each other only briefly can be just as damaging. In either case, back stabbing often has horrific consequences. It's these consequences that can become interlopers in and alter our lives.

Joseph's life course has been drastically altered by the betrayal of his brothers. He was sent to his brothers as a shepherd boy among family but departs from them as a slave among strangers, and was sold a second time to a high-ranking officer of Pharaoh: "Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there" (Genesis 39:1).

It's easy to become discouraged after reading this passage, because it seems as if life has a way of selling us and reselling us again and again, as if after we have suffered one difficult moment, we are subjected to yet another. Many people, after dealing with one mishap after another, asked, *Why me?* Others often utter the cliché *When it rains, it pours.*

The good news is that despite what happened to Joseph, the Lord was with him:

The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. From the

time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

(Genesis 39:2–6)

The first verse of this passage can be difficult for many to understand, yet alone believe. Some people consider the idea that God is with us during our darkest hours laughable, even oxymoronic. Many people have the erroneous mindset that God is with us only during our brightest moments. The question that must be asked, especially of those of us who acknowledge a personal relationship with the Lord, is *Can you see Him when life leaves you, like Joseph, living as a slave among strangers?* It can be a challenge to see Christ in your life when you are living in captivity, but this text clearly demonstrates that God was with Joseph even when Joseph was a slave: God made it so Joseph was living as well as, if not better than, any free man. Potiphar, the officer of Pharaoh, saw that the Lord was with Joseph. This is fascinating because it's a revelation of the attitude and character that Joseph must have displayed during difficult moments. We must understand that sometimes the key to surviving our captivity can be found in our attitude and character rather than in ingenious escape plans. When we allow the Lord to have free rein in our hearts, it is reflected in the way we respond to our crises and will be clear to others, such that they too will acknowledge the presence of God with us, as Joseph's captor, Potiphar, did.

We should take notice of Joseph's humility. The Bible makes no reference to Joseph returning the hate and the venom that his brothers had displayed toward him. He did not become confrontational with his father when he too discounted his dream. Not once did Joseph mistreat, fight, or disrespect the Midianites who purchased him, and when he is sold again to Potiphar, he goes willingly and does humbly what is asked or commanded of him. His spirit, humility, and gentle nature thus lead his captor to conclude that the Lord was with Joseph.

We should note here that the Lord blessed Joseph while he was still a captive. We must therefore not assume that the Lord is using us or doing good with us only when everything is going well for us. The Lord can and will bless you in ways you cannot imagine, even when you are in exigent circumstances. When he was initially sold and resold, Joseph did not foresee himself being placed over all the affairs of a high-ranking official of the king's court, nor that servants would be answering to him. It's thus critical that before we engage in self-loathing and self-pity, we remember that nothing is impossible with God. In fact, our worst times can become our best times when we learn to see God working on our behalf within the confines of our crises. Joseph could have dwelled on the fact that he was still a slave, but instead, he moved forward knowing he was in charge. We can take from this that the way we respond to a crisis can often dictate how free we become. Joseph was not released by Potiphar from his captivity but was placed as overseer of Potiphar's entire household and all that he had. Can you imagine that? A slave was completely in charge of all the affairs of his master!

When we understand that our captivity has a purpose, we, like Joseph, can be free within that captivity. Our circumstances may not change, but when the Lord is with us, we have freedom, nonetheless. You may know someone who has experienced a traumatic event yet who genuinely displays the joy of the Lord and glorifies God in spite of that event. Perhaps you have encountered someone sick to the point of death who left you feeling blessed, encouraged, and uplifted after the encounter. This is the type of freedom Joseph experiences in his captivity under Potiphar.

Now that things are beginning to get better for Joseph and the outlook for his captivity had begun to change for the better, however, another interloper presents itself. Potiphar's wife sets her sights on Joseph and desires to have an illicit adulterous affair with him, but Joseph refuses her attempts to get him to betray God and Potiphar, to whom he is loyal: "And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, 'Lie with me.' But he refused and said to his master's wife, 'Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' " (Genesis 39:7-9). Joseph is in a terrible predicament. Potiphar's wife is intent on getting Joseph to go along with her plan and to thus betray his master.

The relationship between the two is conditional based on the appointment of Joseph over Potiphar's home: Because of his relationship with Potiphar, Joseph must occasionally

come in contact with Potiphar's wife. Like Potiphar's wife, backstabbers tend to be conditional to our relationships and can come into our lives without our permission or choice. For example, we may be assigned relationships by appointment, such as with a new job, school, or relocation. Then there are relationships we select, allowing others to come into our lives as friends, spouses, or professionals, such as doctors and lawyers. Both appointed and selected relationships can be unraveled by an act of betrayal. Backstabbers will use us if it suits their purposes, even if it will cause us to betray others. Potiphar's wife didn't care about Joseph's relationship with her husband or with God and therefore pressured him to accomplish her own goal. Young people often experience this in the form of peer pressure, pressured to try various substances or to perform certain acts, only to betray themselves, their parents, the law, and their God.

The telltale sign of the backstabber is that they couldn't care less about the feelings of those they are pressuring. Even after Joseph explains that he could not betray his master or his God, Potiphar's wife harasses and pressures him daily to reconsider and give in: "And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her" (Genesis 39:10). If we find ourselves pressured by those we think are our friends even after we have expressed our desire not to do what they are asking, we must conclude that they are backstabbers and have betrayed our friendship and we should consider ending this unhealthy relationship. The tragedy is that all too often, people try to remain loyal to backstabbers because they are unwilling to disconnect themselves even from people who would betray them. Thus, the

very ones they seek validation from become the very ones who pressure them to make bad choices.

Potiphar's wife is convinced that if the opportunity is available and the temptation strong enough, Joseph will give in, so she cunningly sends all the servants away so she will have her chance to get what she seeks: "But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house . . ." (Genesis 39:11). It's interesting to note here that no servants or attendants were present in the house, which is vacant except for Mrs. Potiphar. Although it's not stated in the text, we can assume that she has given everyone the day off without Joseph's permission! Joseph is second-in-command to Potiphar, and all the servants and household attendants must report to him, especially on matters dealing with absence, yet on this particular day, He goes to work and finds none of the employees there.

Potiphar's wife immediately grabs Joseph, demanding he sleep with her: "she caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me.' But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house" (Genesis 39:12). Joseph has finally had enough of Potiphar's wife's advances, and he removes himself from an inappropriate moment, leaving the house altogether. He has no choice but to take drastic matters because she has planned for him to fail and to betray those to whom he is loyal.

Like Mrs. Potiphar, backstabbers will seek to find the right opportunity to place us in uncomfortable situations, hoping that we will give in to their wants and desires. The situation can be something as seemingly harmless as them ask-

ing an uncomfortable question in front of others or as serious as threatening to expose a secret. Either way, the intended goal is to force us to do their will without any regard or thought to us.

Joseph flees from his master's wife, leaving his garment behind. Following Joseph's lead, we must not live in denial when dealing with backstabbers and should flee such relationships at all costs, leaving behind anything associated with them. We should not allow anyone to misuse or abuse our relationships.

The sad reality is that when Mrs. Potiphar couldn't get Joseph to betray her husband, she betrays Joseph: "Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, and she told him the same story, saying, 'The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house.' As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, 'This is the way your servant treated me,' his anger was kindled. And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison" (Genesis 39:16–20).

Potiphar's wife has stabbed Joseph in the back by concocting a story alleging that he tried to rape her when, in fact, the exact opposite is true and she is guilty of the allegations she is making against him. When backstabbers turn on you, they will attempt to make the lie a truth and the truth a lie. They revel in hypocrisy, accusing others of the acts they themselves are guilty of, they will use whatever means available to betray those whom they cannot manipulate, often

with severe consequences. Because of his wife's betrayal and lies, Potiphar has Joseph arrested and thrown in prison.

We see no dialogue take place between the two men, which suggests that Potiphar passes judgment on Joseph without knowing his side of the story. This is a common occurrence in our society today: People will write us off and throw us away based on hearsay and the false accusations of others without ever knowing our side of the story. We can assume that Potiphar never considers having a conversation with Joseph to ascertain, at the very least, the reason behind the alleged betrayal. Potiphar thus keeps himself in the dark about the *real* infidelity and betrayal—that of his wife.

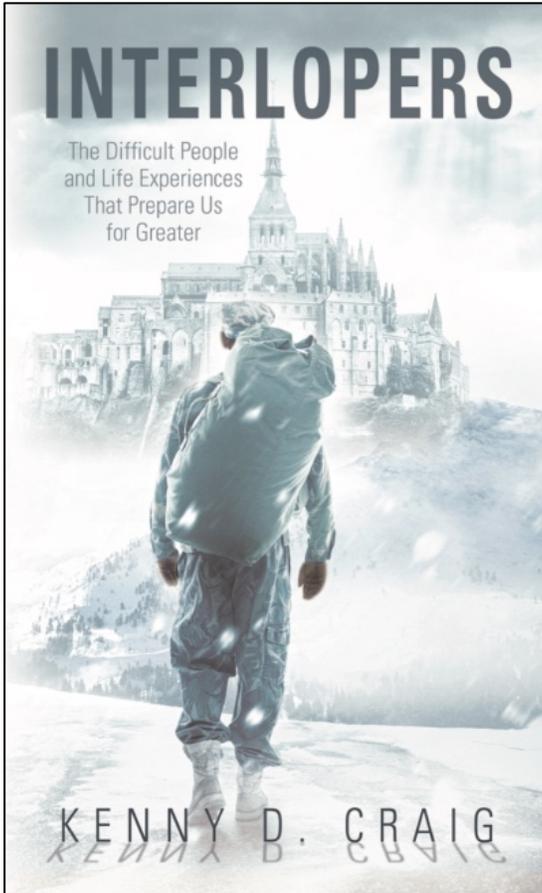
As this story shows us, multiple people are often victims of backstabbers' treachery and, as in this case, are used to injure or mistreat another victim. Unbeknown to him, Potiphar is a victim of his wife's ill intent, and because he chooses not to gather all the facts concerning this incident, he mistreats the very one who has been truly loyal to him and severs that relationship. Backstabbers can and will destroy the relationships of others if it can benefit or protect them. They will always seek to preserve themselves at the expense of others if need be. Years of friendship and trust can thus be instantly destroyed at the hand of a backstabber.

Backstabbers help prepare us for greatness because their works come unannounced and force us in directions we never planned to go—in directions God wants us to travel. So, while it appears that someone else has forced a change in the course of our lives, it's actually by divine design so God's will can be accomplished in us. Those who seek to destroy us or our relationships with others may thus actually lead us

down the path of greatness. For example, Joseph is thrown into prison, his life taking yet another unforeseen turn just when it appears he was doing well. Joseph and Potiphar have become so close and Joseph is so loyal to Potiphar that he has no idea that he needs to be separated from Potiphar. God, however, understands that Joseph will never reach the greatness God has planned for him because Joseph will never leave Potiphar's house on his own.

Many times, we limit ourselves by becoming so close and loyal to people that we can never fully walk into the greater life that God has planned for us, because, like Joseph, we would never leave those people or our places in their lives. God allowed and used the actions of Mrs. Potiphar to cause a breach in the relationship of Joseph and Potiphar so He could continue leading Joseph to the place He intended for Joseph. Joseph could not envision himself in the palace because he was so loyal to Potiphar.

The lesson here: Don't be afraid to lose people on your way to greater things. Sometimes they will have to leave you, and sometimes you will have to leave them, but such loss is necessary and in the end, will be for your good. We must understand that not everyone can or is intended to make the entire journey with us. There will be Potiphars in our lives—people who will discard us and never look back. When we are discarded, we must remind ourselves that they were never intended to enter into our greatness with us, and we should celebrate the idea that God thinks enough of us that he weeds out of our lives the folks who could and would be detrimental to the greater things that await us.



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