

Introduction

I love a good story! I love to sit back and watch a great movie or TV show or read a great book, or (best of all) to sit with friends and just tell stories. Stories are really important to us! We spend our whole lives with stories. They are the way that we make sense of the world, and to a large extent, we see our lives as stories; “the story of me”. When we get together and catch up, we really want to hear each other’s stories.

There are a lot of great stories in the Bible, and I think that we need to (or at least I need to) relearn how to read and listen to the stories in the Bible as stories. To see what they say as stories and how those stories can speak into our lives. It is all too easy to try to force meaning out of the Bible; to chop it up into bite size bits and one-liners. We (or at least I) have a tendency to try to reduce the stories of the Bible down to bumper sticker sized slogans to make them easier to remember, but I think that does them an injustice.

I am very aware of this because in New Community we are intentionally looking at the story of Jesus as one big story by systematically working our way through the book of Luke—but I end up cutting it up into such small pieces that after almost a year and a half we are barely over half way through the story!

This morning I want to tell you a different story—the story of Joseph (the many colored coat one, not the Nativity set one). I am not going to just read you the story, but I am going to take a good bit of time to tell you the whole story. Do your best to really listen to the story, as a story. Try to imagine it like it is really happening. Get caught up in the story. Don't listen for the bullet points or “spiritual” parts; just let this be a story.

The Story of Joseph is a story about Dreams and this message is about finding and living out God's dreams for your life. In the story of Joseph, dreams are the engine that drive the journey that Joseph takes from shepherd to slave to prisoner to ruler of Egypt.

I believe that God has a dream for your life! God made you on purpose and He has a purpose for you! I also believe that God's dream for your life can be an engine that drives you along the journey of life, moving you ever deeper into God's presence, further from the brokenness of sin and closer to the life He always wanted you to live!

The Story (Gen 37-50 [or *The Prince of Egypt*]) **(Picture)**

- **Act 1**
- Joseph is the great-grandson of Abraham and he had an “Unconventional Family” to say the least. He was the 11th of his

father Jacob's 12 sons—but he was the first from his father's favorite wife (out of 4—sort of) so he was the favorite.

- His father gave him a special coat (many colors/richly ornamented). This made his brothers very jealous.
- Joseph didn't help the matter very much because he had 2 dreams— Binding sheaves of grain in the field when his sheave stood up tall and his brothers' sheaves bowed down to his. In the second dream the sun and moon and 11 stars were bowing down to him. These dreams upset both his brothers and his father.
- One day his father sent him out to check on his brothers who were watching the sheep. When they saw him coming, they decided to kill him, but his brother Ruben talks them into throwing him into a pit instead of killing him outright. (His plan was to come back and rescue Joseph after the brothers left.)
- But along comes a caravan of merchants traveling to Egypt. His brother Judah convinces the brothers that they should at least make a little money off of their dear brother so they drag him out of the pit and sell him as a slave! They take his robe, tear it up and dip it in some sheep's blood. Then they go back to their father and show him the robe with the story that Joseph has been killed by some wild animal. His father is devastated and vows to mourn the death of Joseph as long as he lives!

- (chapter 38 is another story—if you are following along, just skip it for now)
- **Act 2**
- Joseph ends up in Egypt where he is sold to the captain of Pharaoh's guard—a man named Potiphar.
- The LORD was with Joseph and he did well in Potiphar's house. He is promoted to the head of the whole household and was entrusted with everything that Potiphar owned. Because God blessed Joseph, Potiphar is also blessed by God and he prospers greatly.
- Unfortunately, Potiphar's wife takes an interest in Joseph. One day she arranges to be alone in the house with Joseph and she tries to seduce him. Joseph flees, but in his haste he ends up leaving his tunic in her hand. Rejected and shamed, Potiphar's wife makes up a story that Joseph was the one who tried to take advantage of her. When Potiphar gets home, Joseph is thrown in to prison!
- But the LORD is again with Joseph and he prospers in prison. Before too long, Joseph is promoted and put in charge of the whole prison.
- Some time later, the Royal cupbearer and the chief baker had offended the Pharaoh somehow and were put into prison and placed in Joseph's care. One night, each of these men had a dream. When Joseph saw them the next morning and saw how troubled they were they told him their dreams.

- The Cupbearer dreamt about a vine that had 3 branches that grew grapes. He took the grapes and squeezed them into the Pharaoh's cup and put it into Pharaoh's hand.
- Joseph told him that the 3 branches were 3 days. In 3 days he would be restored to his job in Pharaoh's house. (btw-When that happens, could he put in a good word for Joseph?)
- The baker's dream was about 3 baskets of bread that he was carrying on his head. The birds were coming and eating the bread out of the top basket.
- Joseph told him the meaning of his dream. The three baskets were also 3 days. In three days the Pharaoh would have him killed and the birds would eat at his flesh.
- 3 days later was the Pharaoh's birthday and he held a great banquet where he restored the cupbearer and had the baker killed.
- The cupbearer however did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.
- Two years pass and then one night Pharaoh had 2 dreams that none of his wise-men or magicians could interpret.
 - He dreamt that 7 fat healthy cows came up out of the Nile and were grazing by the river. Then 7 skinny, ugly cows came up out of the river and ate up the 7 healthy cows.
 - Then he dreamt that there were 7 healthy and good heads of grain growing on a single stalk. Then there grew 7 shriveled

heads of grain that grew on the same stalk. The shriveled heads of grain swallowed up the healthy heads of grain.

- At the mention of Pharaoh's dreams, the cupbearer remembered Joseph back in prison and told Pharaoh about the dreams that Joseph interpreted.
- Pharaoh calls for Joseph to be brought to him and he tells Joseph the dreams.
- Joseph tells Pharaoh that the dreams have the same meaning. The 7 good cows and the 7 good heads of grain represent 7 years of plenty. The 7 sick cows and the 7 shriveled heads of grain represent 7 years of famine that will follow.
- Joseph advised Pharaoh to find a wise and honest man to take one fifth of all the produce in the 7 good years and store it away so that it can be used during the years of famine.
- Pharaoh is so impressed with Joseph and with his plan that he appoints Joseph to this office on the spot. Joseph is made the second most powerful man in all of Egypt!
- So for 7 years, Joseph collects one fifth of all the grain produced in Egypt. He collected so much grain that they stopped keeping record, because it was beyond measure!
- When the 7 years of famine started, Joseph opened up the storehouses and started selling the grain back to the Egyptians.
- **Act 3**

- The famine did not only affect Egypt. Joseph's father Jacob and his family were also running out of food. When they heard that there was food in Egypt, Jacob sent 10 of his sons to buy some food (He kept Benjamin, his new favorite son—the other son of his favorite wife Rachel home with him.)
- When the 10 sons of Jacob reached Egypt they are taken to Joseph and they bowed down to him, but they did not recognize him. Joseph however recognized his brothers, but he pretended not to know them.
- This starts an elaborate series of tests that Joseph submits his brothers to.
- He accuses them of being spies, sent to see how the land is guarded. They told him that they were just one family of 12 brothers, one of whom was no more.
- Joseph tells them that he will not believe them unless they produce the last brother to prove that they are telling the truth. He has one brother—Simeon—tied up and put in prison while the other brothers go back to retrieve Benjamin.
- Before they leave, he orders that the brothers' sacks be filled with grain, but that the silver that they brought be secretly put back into the bags.

- On the way home the brothers discover the silver in their bags and they are afraid that all of this is God's punishment for what they did to Joseph so many years ago!
- When they get home and tell their father what happened and how they have to bring Benjamin back to Egypt in order to buy any more grain, but he refuses to allow Benjamin to go! He has lost Joseph and now Simeon; he will not lose Benjamin too!
- After the food runs out, Jacob tells his sons to go back to Egypt to buy more, but they will not go without Benjamin. It is only after Judah personally guarantees the safety of Benjamin that he is allowed to go.
- When they get back to Egypt they are invited to eat a meal with Joseph. When they are served their food, they are seated in birth order—from oldest to youngest, and Benjamin's portion of food is 5 times bigger than anyone else's. (They were astonished that this Egyptian could know their birth order!)
- Now Joseph instructed his servants to fill the brothers' sacks with food again, and again they were to return the silver that was paid for the food. But this time they were to put Joseph's silver cup into the sack of Benjamin.
- Shortly after the brothers leave the next morning, Joseph sends his men to overtake and capture his brothers.

- When they are brought back to Joseph he accuses them of stealing from him. When the bags are checked, Joseph’s cup is found in Benjamin’s bag. Joseph pretends to be furious! He threatens to imprison Benjamin, but the brothers know that this will be too much for their grieving father.
- Judah steps up and pleads for the boy to be spared. “Let me remain here as your slave in place of the boy” he says.
- When Joseph sees his brother—the same man who was willing to kill him so many years before—offer himself in place of Benjamin, he can contain himself no longer! He finally reveals his true identity to his brothers.
- “Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here. It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you” he tells them. There were still 5 more years of famine to come.
- Joseph sends his brothers back to get his father and the rest of the family. They are to be reunited and live in Egypt together.
- And so Jacob travels to Egypt and is reunited with his long lost son Joseph. The family is allowed to live in the best lands of Egypt and there they grow into the nation that God promised Joseph’s Great Grandfather Abraham he would become.

The Story of Joseph is a story about Dreams!

I. God has a dream for your life! **(Picture)**

A. God made you on purpose and He has a purpose for you!

1. **Jer. 29:11** *For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*
2. **Eph. 2:10** *For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*
3. God has a plan and a purpose for you. Something that you are uniquely shaped for.
4. **Eph. 4:16** *He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.*
 - a. You have a special part in what God is doing. You have a place.

B. One of the first lessons from the life of Joseph is that God has a dream for you! Find it! Listen for it! Seek it out! Don’t miss out on your purpose in the world!

II. Watch out for Dream Enemies!

A. God’s dream for your life can be assaulted from external enemies!

1. There are **Dream Hooligans (Picture)**—Some people might not get the dream that God has put into your heart!
 - a. Joseph’s brothers were pretty major “Dream Hooligans”!
 - b. I think people try to kill the dreams that God puts in people’s hearts for a couple of reasons.

- c. They may not know about God's dreams for their lives!
 - i. Because they haven't heard God whisper His dreams for them into their hearts, they are quick to try to kill yours!
 - ii. Nobody wants to hear about all the great things that God is doing in you and through you if their life is empty and meaningless! If you are not filled with the great hope of God's dream for your life, all this can be very threatening!
- d. They may not understand that in God's dreams success for you is success for everyone!
 - i. When God puts His dreams into your heart, they are not for you to get rich and famous at the expense of others (like so many of our dreams for ourselves are)!
 - ii. In God's dreams, your success brings benefit for everyone.
 - iii. Because God blessed Joseph, Potiphar is also blessed by God and he prospers greatly.
 - iv. Because Joseph went to Egypt, became a ruler and stored up the grain, his whole family was saved (not to mention the whole nation of Egypt)!
 - v. His brothers could not understand how "bowing down to Joseph" could ever translate into anything good for them, but they were wrong!

1. As a side note—if you find yourself annoyed at God’s dreams for someone else, maybe you should devote a little more time finding God’s dream for you!
- e. People will attack God’s dream for you because they don’t know God has a dream for them yet!
2. There are also Dream Betrayers **(Picture)**
 - a. The story of Joseph is full of betrayal.
 - i. His brothers betray him.
 - ii. Potiphar’s wife betrays him.
 - iii. Potiphar betrays him.
 - iv. The Cupbearer betrays him.
 - b. You will be betrayed or forgotten by those who by all rights should be your allies in reaching God’s dream for your life! It will happen because people are just people. (The truth is that you will forget and betray those you should help too!)
 - c. There are 2 things you need to remember when this happens:
 - i. First, you need to remember that the only person who has the power to stand in the way of God’s dream for your life is you! No one can destroy it or outsmart it or dismantle it. The only way that you miss it is if you choose something else—something less—but more about that in a minute.
 - ii. Second, those others may forget and betray you, but God will Never forget you, or betray you, or leave you, or lose you, or

give up on you, or abandon you, or overlook you, or disown you, or forsake you!

iii. Deut. 31:8 *Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you.*

- B.** God's dream for your life can be drug down by internal enemies!
1. It is the attacks that come on God's dream for your life from inside you that are the most dangerous!
 2. First internal danger is Dream Doubt—not really believing in God's dream for your life!
 - a. Believe in God's dream for your life! If you don't know about it—if you don't believe in God's dream, then you will not be working towards living it out—towards becoming the person God wants you to be so you can fulfill His dream for you.
 - b. What if I don't know what God's Dream for my life is yet?

(Picture)

- i. It can be really frustrating to listen to someone talk about God's Dream for your life when you don't have the foggiest idea about what that dream is. ("It's nice that you 'fully believe that God made me on purpose and He has a purpose for my life' but I sure haven't found it yet!") What do you do if God's Dream for your life is still a mystery?

- ii. God's Dream for your life really come in 2 different flavors. There are some very specific dreams. There are times that God has a specific purpose and specific plans for your life. Moments where God will use your life in specific ways to bring about specific outcomes all orchestrated by His divine plan. (I find that these times are rare.)
1. These may be explicit promptings in the moment or calls to specific vocations or lifestyles.
 2. It is these specific dreams that we so often want to know about and are a frustrating mystery for us.
 3. If you have a specific Dream from God, Do your best, right where you are to live it out! (It is a Dream from God after all!)
- iii. More often, God's Dream for your life is fulfilled in more general terms.
1. It is God's Dream for your life that you are restored to right relationship with Him! **Heb. 10:10** *For God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.*
 2. It is God's Dream for your life that you follow His plan for how to live. **1 Thes. 4:3** *God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin.*

3. It is God's Dream for your life that you learn to trust Him.

1 Thes 5:16-18 ¹⁶ *Always be joyful.* ¹⁷ *Never stop praying.*

¹⁸ *Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.*

iv. In short, God's Dream for your life is that you become more and more like Jesus.

1. If you don't have a specific dream from God about your life (most people don't), then live out God's general dream for your life. Do your best, right where you are to become more and more like Jesus!

2. How can you be a better student? How can you be a better employee? How can you be a better son or daughter? A better friend? A better neighbor? How can you follow Jesus more? Live more like Him? Love more like Him? This is how you live out God's Dream for your life!

c. What if I'm in the wrong place? **(Picture)**

i. First, who says you are in the wrong place?! (If you just assume that something has gone wrong because there is no way that God could ever get you to His dream for your life from here, you need to read the story of Joseph again!)

1. Do you really think that when Joseph's brothers dragged him up from that pit to sell him as a slave he thought "Well, this must be God's dream for my life?"
 2. Or when Potiphar had him thrown in prison Joseph thought "I always wanted to be involved in prison ministry!"
 3. Or as the days turned into weeks and the weeks turned into months without a word from the cupbearer Joseph thought "Just God's dream in God's timing!"
- ii. Sometimes God takes people to strange places to prepare them for what He ultimately has in store for them!
1. In the end, God used all of Joseph's unpleasant circumstances to fulfill His dream for Joseph's life.
3. The second internal danger is Devalued Dreams **(Picture)**—misjudging the value of God's dream for your life and trading it for a life of sin.
- a. **Heb. 12:1** *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.*
 - i. Sin is a weight that slows you down and trips you up in the race to fulfill God's dream for your life!

ii. Sin never plays any part in God's dream for your life!

Because of that, there is no room for sin in your life if you really want to live out God's dream!

b. At its heart, sin is trading God's dream for something else. It is saying "I'm not interested in living your way God—that doesn't seem good enough. I'll try it my way this time."

III. God fulfills dreams in His own time and in His own way! **(Picture)**

A. Before Joseph's dream was fulfilled he was sold by his brothers, lived as a slave, was falsely accused and convicted, lived as a prisoner, and was forgotten by a man who promised to help.

B. Joseph's dream had a rough delivery!

C. I don't know what the condition of God's dream for you is, but remember that it is God's dream and He is able to deliver!

1. **Philippians 1:6** *And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.*

2. **Isaiah 55:8-9** ⁸ *"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord.*

"And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.

⁹ *For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,*

so my ways are higher than your ways

and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

Conclusion

The story of Joseph is a story about dreams; the dream that God put into Joseph and the dreams that moved him along the journey. What are God's dreams for you? What does God want to do in you and through you? How does God want to use you to change the world? Do you know? Have you asked Him about it?

What if the dream of God for your life seems long gone? Broken because of sin or circumstance or betrayal? What if you find yourself in the dungeon instead of the palace? Don't lose your hold on God's dream! His ways are higher than ours! His plans see further and clearer than ours! He can finish what He starts, no matter where the journey takes you!

PRAY