

Welcome and thanks—greetings from Pastor and Paula

Introduction

We have been working our way through the story of the Bible. It is our plan to take this year and systematically work our way through the Bible so by the end of the year you will have a pretty good idea of the story that God tells us about who He is and who He wants us to be!

Now, the Bible is a rich and nuanced book and in order to fit this series into just one year we had to skip over a whole lot of stories and sections of scripture. So participating in this series will be a good start, but no substitute for reading the Bible on your own! In order to help you with getting a deeper understanding of the stories that we are going to focus on, we have put together a reading plan for you to go through. (If you are keeping up with the reading plan, you are half way through our story for today.)

So far, we have covered the first half of the first book of the Bible—Genesis. We talked about the creation of everything, the Fall of Man, and the great flood. Then we met a man named Abraham and talked about his great faith in God. Last week we talked about when God asked Abraham to offer his long-awaited son Isaac as a burnt offering.

As you know, Isaac is not killed that day, he goes on to have 2 sons, Esau and Jacob. Through a bit of sneakiness, the younger son Jacob acquires the rights of the first born and ends up having 12 sons. Today we are going to look at the story of his 11th son Joseph (the many colored coat one, not the Nativity set one).

I actually preached a sermon about the life of Joseph in June of last year, and I can't tell you how hard it was to convince Pastor Phil to be gone this week so that I could just re-use my notes! (There will be a good bit of overlap, but I feel like God is also telling us something a bit different right now.)

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. At the end, I will make a few observations.

The Story (Gen 37-50 [or *King of Dreams*]) **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 was very vocal about 2 dreams that he had—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!
- But soon, the food runs out again and 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.
- In final section of this story, Joseph’s father Jacob dies and is taken back to land of Canaan to be buried in the same tombs as his wife Leah, his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham.
 - When the family gets back to Egypt, Joseph’s brothers realized that with their father gone, there was nothing keeping Joseph from exacting his revenge on them. So they write a note that says: “These are the last instructions of your father—Please forgive your brothers for all the mean stuff they did to you.—Dad”
 - The Bible says that they “threw themselves down before Joseph” and said “Look, we are your slaves!”
 - When Joseph hears this he tells them that they have nothing to fear and then he utters what is maybe the most well-known line of this whole story “*You intended to harm me,*

but God intended it all for good.” (Genesis 50:20a) Then Joseph acts kindly towards his brothers and lives a full life, finally dying at the ripe old age of 110.

As I think about this story, I keep coming back to that line: *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good.”* What an amazing thing that at the end of this story of separation and betrayal and misfortune, Joseph can say *“God intended it all for good!”*

I believe that God still has “Good things” in store for His people and it is my hope that each of us will be able to look back over our lives and see the Good things that God has been doing all along the journey. This morning I want to make a few observations from this story about **Finding God’s Good** in our lives.

- I. First, if you want to find God’s Good, **Find and Follow God’s Plan!**
 - A. One of the first lessons from the life of Joseph is that God had a plan for Joseph—something special that He wanted to accomplish in Joseph’s life!
 1. I believe that God has a plan for everyone’s life—that means that God has a plan for your life too!
 2. You need to find God’s plan for you! Listen for it! Seek it out! Don’t miss out on your purpose in the world!
 - B. 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.*
 - C. What are God’s plans for you? What does God want to do in you and through you? How does God want to use you to build His Kingdom and change the world?
 1. You will never find God’s Good if you don’t take the time to find and follow God’s plan for your life first! You can’t find God’s Good by following your own plan!
 - D. “What if I don’t know what God’s plan for my life is yet?”

1. It can be really frustrating to listen to someone talk about God's plan for your life when you don't have the foggiest idea about what that plan 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 plan for your life is still a mystery?
2. You say: "Joseph got his start from a dream, so should I start keeping a dream journal? Maybe take a nap right now and give God a chance?"
3. If you don't know what God's plan for your life is yet, start by asking Him!
 - a. Have you ever asked God?
 - b. Have you taken time to listen?
 - c. Have you ever taken inventory of the way God made you and where He put you? How does your life fit into God's plan to rescue the world and build His Kingdom?
4. After that, you need to pursue God's general plan for everyone.

- i. It is God's plan for your life that you are restored to right relationship with Him!

Hebrews 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.*

- ii. It is God's plan for your life that you avoid the destruction and chaos of sin. **1**

Thessalonians 4:3a *God's will is for you to be holy...*

- iii. It is God's plan for your life that you learn to trust Him. **1 Thessalonians 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 plan for your life is that you become more and more like Jesus.

- b. If you don't have a very specific "This is what God is calling me to do" plan from God (actually, even if you do have a "This is what God is calling me to do" plan from God) start with these things!

II. Second, if you want to fine God's Good, **Do Your Best, Right Where You Are.**

- A. You may say: "OK, as soon as I find God's plan for my life I will jump right in, but there's no way I can get on that path right now."
- B. What if I'm just in the wrong place?

1. 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 plan for your life from where you are right now, you need to read the story of Joseph again!)
 - a. Sometimes God takes people to strange places to prepare them for what He ultimately has in store for them!
 - b. In the end, God used all of Joseph’s unpleasant circumstances to fulfill His plan for Joseph’s life. In the end, God can use all of your unpleasant circumstances to fulfill His plan for your life too!
 - c. Who says that you are in the wrong place? Maybe you are exactly where God needs you to be to learn what you need to know for the next step! So.... **Do Your Best, Right Where You Are!**

C. What if my life is too full of brokenness?

1. God is very good at taking broken things and fixing them—He is doing it to the whole universe—He can do it in your life!
2. Sometimes our lives get off track because of the sinful things that people around us do. (Like if your brothers try to kill you and then just sell you as a slave instead!)
3. If the actions of someone else have derailed your life, the best thing for you to do is to **Do Your Best, Right Where You Are!** Let God figure out the details. He is really good at fixing broken things!

D. What if I am going the wrong way?

1. Sometimes the biggest enemy of God’s plan for your life is your own sin and rebellion against God. When you are getting further and further from God’s Dream for your life because of the way that you are going...you need to **Do Your Best, Right Where You Are** — in this case the best thing that you can do is to stop and turn around! If you are on the wrong path, the best thing that you can do is turn around and go back to the right path!
2. There is NO shortcut! You can NEVER get to where you need to go by sinning “Just a little bit more”!

III. Finally, if you want to find God’s Good **Seek Restoration Rather Than Revenge!**

- A. Just like Joseph, all of us have times when other people hurt or betray us. We have all felt the sting of being wronged by someone who we should have been able to trust. Each of us has faced situations in life that are woefully unfair.

B. But what we learn in the story of Joseph is that God's Good in those situations is more often restoration rather than revenge. But restoration is HARD!

C. Restoration is hard because it is not fair!

1. Because Restoration involves offended people coming back together, there is no room for "Fairness". Fairness only belongs in the world of revenge!
 - a. Restoration starts by tossing the concept of "Fairness" out the window.
2. It wasn't "fair" that Joseph's brothers were treated with forgiveness and grace! It wasn't fair, but it was better!
 - a. It isn't fair that restoration starts with humility and forgiveness.
 - b. It isn't fair that restoration always requires a sacrifice on your part!
 - c. It isn't fair that restoration calls you to take the first step—even if you are not wrong.
 - d. It isn't fair, but it is better!

D. Restoration is hard because it requires risk.

1. Restoration is never a one-sided thing. Revenge you can plan and deliver on your own, but restoration requires the cooperation of the offending party!
2. Joseph had to take the risk that his brothers had changed. He had to let them go in the hopes that they would come back. He had to set them up in the hopes that they would not sacrifice another brother to save their skins!
3. You can't force someone to cooperate with you when you are seeking restoration. As much as you want to—you can never force someone to partner with you in restoring a relationship. (Imagine God's frustration in trying to restore relationship with everyone in the world!)
4. If you can't get to restoration, start with forgiveness!
 - a. You can't achieve restoration on your own, but you can forgive on your own!
 - b. You can give up your claim for repayment on an offence or debt.

E. Restoration is better because it is at the heart of God's plan for your life.

1. Remember earlier we said "It is God's plan for your life that you are restored to right relationship with Him!"

2. The story of Joseph (and the whole story of the Bible) show us that God's plan for all of us is to live restored lives! Lives that are restored in relationship with Him and restored in relationships with each other!
3. We need to remember that restoration was the solution that God choose for dealing with our hurts and offenses against Him.
 - a. God could have dealt with our sins and rebellion in any of thousands of ways. He could have had us live each moment of our lives over and over until we lived them out perfectly. He could have inflicted exactly as much pain on us as we do on others. He could have simply written us off as a loss and started over with a clean slate. But God choose to forgive us and restore us to right relationship with Him.
 - i. God chose to throw "Fairness" out the window and humble Himself to offer us forgiveness!
 - ii. God chose to take the risk that we could still reject Him in spite of His great grace and mercy!
 - iii. God chose to offer complete forgiveness even though some people would reject His offer for restoration!
4. At the heart of God's plan for your life is Restoration! Restoration with God and restoration with others.
 - a. That is what we remember this Lenten season as we prepare our hearts for Eater.
 - b. That is what we celebrated this morning as we took communion together!

Conclusion

The story of Joseph reminds us that God still has Good things for His people.

- Finding God's good starts by finding and following God's good plan for your life!
 - It is God's plan that you are restored to right relationship with Him!
 - It is God's plan that you avoid the destruction and chaos of sin!
 - It is God's plan that you learn to trust and depend on Him!
- Finding God's good means doing your best right where you are!

- If you find yourself in a strange or difficult place, remember God used all of Joseph's unpleasant circumstances to fulfill His plan for Joseph's life and He can do the same for you!
- If the actions of someone else have derailed your life, trust God to work out the details and get you where you need to be.
- If you are going the wrong way, the best thing that you can do is to stop and turn around and start to follow God's plan for your life!
- Finding God's good means seeking restoration rather than revenge!
 - After all, restoration was the solution that God choose for dealing with our hurts and offenses against Him!

PRAY