

*Text: Genesis 50:15-21*

**When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead**, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

**His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him.** "We are your slaves," they said. But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

### *Introduction*

**The journey is not what I expected.** When I left for college 37 years ago, I had my life planned out. I would go to college, graduate school, get a job in helping people (in a field like counseling), get married early on, have a big family, and live in a nice house. I thought it would be pretty straightforward process. Little did I realize that God's route in helping me become the person I am meant to be has been much different, much more unpredictable than I ever could have realized. That may have been true in your journey as well. Our dreams get tested and shaped by life. If we are open, they can become tested and shaped by God. This is what Joseph, the dreamer found out.

### *Joseph the Dreamer*

**What do we know about Joseph?** His name means “**the Lord increases**”. He lived about 4,000 years ago in the ancient Middle East. Joseph was the 10<sup>th</sup> of 12 sons born to Jacob. He had only one sister, Dinah. His mother, Rachel, had two of those sons, Joseph and Benjamin. He was also the grandson of Isaac and Rebecca, and great-grandson of Abraham and Sarah.

**Joseph's story spans 14 chapters in Genesis 37-50**, making it one of the longest continuous narratives in the Bible. He was a favored son of father, Jacob, because he was born to him late in age and by his favorite wife, Rachel. He was given a special, ornate robe that had long sleeves denoting royalty. Here is where the problems began. This was not appreciated by his older brothers. They also did not like the fact that Joseph shared his dreams about how someday they all would bow to him. Joseph was a dreamer. He could see the great things God had for him. The journey, though, would be much different than he expected.

### *The Dreamer Takes a Trip*

**The anger of Joseph’s brothers simmered under the surface until one day it exploded out.** Joseph (17 years old at the time) was sent by his father to check up on his brothers. The brothers saw him from afar and plotted to kill him. Reuben, the oldest brother, tried to rescue Joseph by buying time. He suggested to the others that they not kill Joseph, but instead put him in a pit to die of natural causes. Reuben was hoping to pull Joseph out later and take him back to Jacob. But before Reuben could put his plan into action, the other brothers sold Joseph as a slave to a caravan heading to Egypt.

**For about thirty days Joseph travelled, crossing the desert in the hot sun,** with heavy chains hanging on him. He had a lot of time to think. He must have thought to himself, “What is going on? What about those dreams God gave me? Is this the road to being blessed by God?” What did he think about his brothers? It would have been easy for Joseph to dwell in self pity and harbor bitterness against his brothers. The text, however, does not give us any hint that this was the case. **Rather, we see Joseph remaining connected and responsive to God.** Joseph recognized that God was with him wherever he went. Joseph allowed God to work in and through him in each situation.

**I do not where you are today in your journey.** Some of us are in a desert. Our finances may be very tight, our health fragile, or our relationships conflicted. We might be thinking this morning, “Where are you, God? Where are you?” This is a very lonely place to be. If you are there, I am sorry. It is a very hard place to be. Know that God is here with you and me in the desert. Find a quiet place to today and let God join you in your desert.

### *Joseph Goes to School*

**Upon arriving in Egypt, Joseph is sold to Potiphar,** one of Pharaoh’s officials and captain of the guard. Joseph worked hard and God caused him to prosper. Eventually he is in charge of the whole household. Potiphar’s wife had her eye on Joseph and tried to seduce him. Joseph refused her repeatedly and finally had to run from her grasping hands. Insulted, she lied to her husband and Joseph was thrown into jail. One would think Joseph would have become bitter about being unjustly accused and imprisoned, but that is not the way he chose to respond. Joseph chose to remain connected God and teachable.

**Joseph recognized that God was with him wherever he went,** and he allowed God to work in and through him in each situation. In prison Joseph gave his best and again he found favor and was allowed to run the jail. Do we notice a pattern here? Joseph is developing his skills in administration, first, for a household, and now, for a whole prison. Do we see God’s hand in this? Joseph’s heart and mind are being prepared for important work.

**Is God preparing you and me for important work?** I think so! I believe that God will use everything in our past to serve and honor Him, if we will allow it. Little did I know that my training in social work would be put to good use 25 years later in this urban church that has the needs of the city at her doors. God can take the good, the wonderful, the hard, and even the

painful circumstances in our lives, and use it to bless others. We take what we have, offer it to God as a gift, work hard where God has us, and we trust God to work the rest out.

**In a similar way, Joseph kept pursuing his dreams and using his gifts.** Sometime later while in prison, Joseph interpreted the dreams of the Pharaoh's baker and the cupbearer. One would die and the other would return to duty. Though Joseph correctly interpreted both dreams and asked for mercy and help, the surviving cupbearer quickly forgot Joseph once he was back on the job. For two more years, Joseph continued to serve quietly in the prison.

**Our journeys sometimes go underground.** No one really notices us. We just keep doing the thing God wants us doing in the place God has us, even though it may not be the place or activity of our dreams. Though it may appear nothing is happening, something deep and holy is being developed in our hearts. It is in the hidden places where God does his most important work...the renovation of the heart. In this time obscurity, God was working patience, wisdom, forgiveness, discipline, hope, and deep trust in God into the life of Joseph. All these would be needed when Joseph would be put in charge of all the food supplies of Egypt during some very trying years. God knew what he was doing – he was preparing Egypt to be the home of the Jacob and his family, and he was using Joseph to get everything ready. In the midst of all this, Joseph learned to trust God with the dreams he had given him.

#### *Joseph's Dreams Become Reality*

**Finally, Joseph's day in the sun comes.** Pharaoh has a dream no one can understand. The cupbearer at last remembers Joseph and Joseph was given opportunity to interpret the dreams of the Pharaoh. Pharaoh recognizes Joseph's wisdom and abilities and puts him in charge of Egypt's agricultural economy to prepare for the lean years ahead. Soon the famine comes and spreads across the whole region. Joseph's brothers arrive seeking to buy food. Little did they know that what they would discover. What they did out of jealousy and hatred years before, God would use to bless them. After much struggle, Joseph forgives them. He welcomes them to Egypt to live. The whole clan moves and settles in their own special section of Egypt call Goshen.

**After their father Jacob dies, the brothers are still worried** about Joseph getting even with them. They make up a story about Jacob requesting forgiveness for his sons. Joseph is heartbroken that his brothers still live in fear but he said to them, "**Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.** So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. And so Joseph, the dreamer, kept his dreams through difficult times, always listening, learning, and giving his best. The dreamer saw God answer his dreams by becoming a man God could use to bless the world with wisdom, discipline, and forgiveness.

## Reflection Questions:

As you look back over your journey, how has God been working in your life?

What dreams do you carry deep in your heart?

What is God saying to you at this point in your journey?

What do you need to do this week to be faithful to your calling in life?

**Prayer:** God, I want to belong to you. I want to know that I am deeply loved and you will never abandon me. Thank you for sending Jesus to die for me so I can be your child, too. Send your Holy Spirit to comfort and guide me as I follow you. Help me trust you with my journey. Help me to listen and follow you with trust and joy. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## For Further Reflection:

*I watched the Oscar winning movie, "Slum Dog Millionaire" last week. It is an intense, hard movie to view. The brutal poverty and harshness of life for the main character, Jamal, is overwhelming. The questions he answers on the Indian quiz show all tie back to dramatic events in his past. Somehow the hard and terrible was put to a redemptive use in winning this game show. The most powerful theme in the movie, however, is Jamal's love and commitment to his life-long friend, a girl named Latika. They are separated as kids, but Jamal keeps looking for her until they are finally united. Jamal had a sense of destiny with her as his wife and he kept pursuing it. He kept pursuing his dream until they became a reality.*