

The Story of Joseph

Living the Dream

Part 18 – June 24, 2012



Today we're following Joseph into Potiphar's house, and opening a dark, locked closet in Joseph's heart, to see what keeps him from writing home ... home ... Hebron ... father and brothers ... and dreams that didn't come true. It's all fading into the passing seasons and daily distractions of an Egyptian plantation. And he's so intent on proving his intelligence and loyalty and courage to the great and powerful Potiphar, who had saved him from the slave market, that he's been burning the oil lamp at both ends.



Each blistering day, he toils away, on the farm and in the fields. And in the evenings, he's learning to speak Middle Kingdom Egyptian, and to read and write in hieratic (hieroglyphic shorthand used for most writing). I've been printing my notes on photos of a hieratic *medical manual* from Joseph's time.

It details the diagnosis and treatment of head, neck, and spinal injuries. It's the earliest essay on *neurosurgery*! It speaks of cranial sutures, cerebrospinal fluid, intracranial pulsations, and how the sides of the brain affect the opposite side of the body!

So, for however many seasons it took, Joseph's brain was spinning in a whirlwind of agriculture, social culture, language, business, and politics and *then!* ... he landed in the mansion of his master.

Edwin Smith Papyrus, c. 1600 BC

The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived *in* the house of his Egyptian master. – *Genesis 39:2 NIV*

Imagine his last morning in the farmhand bunkhouse. He washes, shaves, dresses, prays, eyeliner, wig, a few belongings, a last look at his shared room ... and then he heads for the giant gate that guards Potiphar's palace, and opportunities only dreamed of.

There's a new whirlwind in his head: God. Home. Dreams. Promises. Father. Brothers. Traitors. Abuse. Pit. Slavery. Egypt. Faith. Salvation. Potiphar.

The house ... the gate ... the *gateway* ...

“Be careful Joseph. You have dark and deeply hurtful, unresolved issues. You’re very angry inside. And the world is about to offer you a bright and impressive, but incomplete and unfulfilling, counterfeit to everything God has promised.”

And as he approaches, he pauses. In the pit of his stomach is the tempting desire to turn his back on his past and forget his family as he enters that palace.



He has conquered! Triumphed! Darkness into light! What *can't* he accomplish on his own?! He won't just *enter* the house; he's gonna take that house by storm! He's come a long way in a short time since that damp, dark, pit!

Scented bathtubs, embroidered bedspreads, carpets, colognes, and clean underwear! And temptations and persuasions and seductions. If we won't fall through adversity the enemy will try prosperity.

When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. –

Genesis 39:3-4 NIV

This is his dream job! Despised Hebrew rises up to direct and command the very people who despise him! Every slave and servant on Potiphar's property, Egyptian or otherwise, must *bow* to Joseph!

“Oh Lord, if this *isn't* the fulfillment of my dreams – *please let it be!*”

This is a test. This is only a test. For the next several months Joseph's faith will be stretched as it strains to survive success, as the Lord prepares him for the second highest office in Egypt.

Now the story *really* gets interesting! Joseph has the means to send word back to dad, but it seems he doesn't have the desire.

Some say he's afraid of what his *dad* might do. He could be killed if he tried to come to the rescue. But, now at about 111, *he can't*.

Some say he's afraid of what his *brothers* might do. What if they react by murdering their dad or little Benjamin? What if they *already have?! But, Joseph doesn't even* send a spy to find out.

I think Joseph is afraid of what *he* might do! The highpoint of this story is when he decides to *murder his brothers!* Why did *you think* he falsely accuses 'em of being *spies?!*

One thing is clear: the last thing he wants is to be “rescued” and return to the foul-smelling, family goat-farm, where he's far more despised than among the people who despise *his* people!

“Oh Lord, please don’t let those Hebrew hillbillies ruin this good thing!”

But as you know, these are complex, unruly emotions. Adults, who were physically abused as children, usually resent the parent who was *too* negligent or ignorant to protect them.

“Why’d he send me all alone to Shechem, when he knew how much they hated me?”

So instead of dealing with the dysfunction, or confronting his own emotions, he locks it all in that dark little closet in his heart, and convinces himself that that’s what *God* wants. Have you ever noticed what he names his son?



Flash-forward about 12 years ...

Joseph named his firstborn *Manasseh* [i.e. “Forget”] and said, “It is because God has made me forget *all my trouble and all my father’s household.*” [“God has *healed* those wounds?” “Yep! *All healed!*” “And how’d He heal ‘em, exactly?” “Just made me forget ‘em!” “Really? Not how He usually works.” “Well, it’s true. I don’t hold anything ... wait! Is that *them?! Spies! Spies! Lock ‘em up ... er, my bad, false alarm, not them ... oopsie.*”] – *Genesis 41:51 NIV*

Not only is Joseph *not* healed, in about five years, an emotional tornado will rip the door off that closet and clear it out. And one Israel’s tribes will ironically be remembered as, “Forget”.

God will *never* give you a blessing that would fulfill you independent from *Him*, or prevent true healing from taking place. He will *always* be at the center of His intentions for us. But, the wicked ol’ enemy, he will promise just the *opposite!* He’ll offer something to help you *hide* from your hurts, and to bring you fulfillment independent from your loving Father.

True blessings never come to fulfill a selfish desire, or to benefit you alone, but as a tool to use to impact others ... and *especially* those who’ve hurt you *most*. Now *that’s* how He usually works!

This world, like Potiphar’s, is full of incomplete counterfeits to all that God has promised. Question is: Will *you* get comfy in the house and settle for an “acceptable” level of bondage?

Potiphar gives Joseph unprecedented authority. And yet, there’s this incredibly insightful aside mentioned in verse six.

So [Potiphar] left in Joseph’s care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with *anything* except the food he ate. – *Genesis 39:6a NIV*

This isn’t a cute expression. For us, it’s like saying, as much as Joseph was beloved by his master, he wasn’t allowed to drink from the same water fountain ... or even to touch it.

Part of the reason they were so detested was because of how they worshipped. When Moses asks for his people to go into the desert to worship, Pharaoh says they can worship right “here in the land”.



Flash-forward 448 years ...

But Moses said, “That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer the Lord our God would be detestable to the Egyptians. And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes, will they not stone us?” – *Exodus 8:26 NIV*

Even when Joseph becomes second only to Pharaoh, his Egyptian friends and co-workers couldn’t eat with him.

They served [Joseph] by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians. – *Genesis 43:32 NIV*

The enemy would love for you to accept an incomplete counterfeit from a world system that finds your faith detestable, because there’s not really any such thing as *partly enslaved*.

Joseph is living the dream in Potiphar’s palace, but he’s not living *out* the dream that God has promised. Likewise, his family is living *in* the Promised Land but not *in* the promise.

We can be *in* the *place* God has promised, without being *in* the promise itself. You can be husband and wife, yet far from the joyful intimacy that God so desires for your marriage.

You can sing in a worship service and be far from the closeness and confidence God wants to share. Don’t fall for an incomplete counterfeit. Live *in* the promise and live *out* the dream!

You can be healthy, wealthy, and wise, completely successful in this world’s eyes, and yet still have those haunting resentments hiding in that dark, locked closet and “partly” enslaving you.

Don’t settle for an acceptable level of bondage to an endlessly repeating cycle of sin-confess-sin-confess for a specific sin; it indicates there’s something you’re harboring *and* serving.

The Lord will always and only offer *total freedom* in a place where the God-given dreams that you dare to dream *really do* come true.

And this is where we have to close God’s story for today