

— Don't Get Discouraged — He means it for good

Many Old Testament families knew how to put the fun in dysfunctional. Jacob grew up favored by his mom while his dad Isaac loved his bother Esau more. Then Jacob had a favorite wife who was the mother of his favorite son, Joseph. He gave Joseph an iridescent coat and did little to conceal his special love for him. So Joseph's brothers hated him to where they couldn't speak to him.

Then God began communicating with Joseph through dreams and he didn't hesitate to share them with his family. The message was clear — his whole family was going to bow down before him, and the brothers weren't having it. Joseph was sort of a messenger between them and Jacob and the day came when he took provisions and went out to find them where they were tending the flocks. They saw him approaching them and immediately hatched a plan to get rid of him for good. They would kill "that dreamer" and tear up his special coat and stain it with the blood of a goat (seems that was the same kind of blood Jacob had used to deceive Isaac and steal Esau's blessing), and tell Jacob that a lion had killed him. Reuben wanted to save Joseph and insisted they put him in a pit so that he could get him out later. Then Reuben went somewhere and was gone long enough that when some Ishmaelite traders came along the brothers sold Joseph to them for 20 pieces of silver. Reuben was distraught when he found out what had happened, but the stage was now set for an amazing sequence of events that would show God's faithfulness and power like few others in history.

The Ishmaelites took Joseph to Egypt where they sold him to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard. God's favor was on Joseph and he became a successful man to whom Potiphar entrusted all the details of the house. Because of Joseph, God's blessing extended to Potiphar and all his possessions. But a day came when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph. He rebuffed her on the grounds that it would betray Potiphar and be a wicked sin before God. She then grabbed him and he ran from the house leaving his coat in her hands.

To cover her guilt she screamed and told other servants that Joseph had tried to rape her. She repeated the lie when Potiphar got home later. Of course he believed his wife and put Joseph in prison. It seems Joseph would have had good reason to be discouraged at this point — his life was being controlled by people who seemed intent on destroying him. He had done nothing wrong, rather was faithful and free of complaint all along. And of all things, now he's locked up in an Egyptian prison.

Joseph stayed his course and carried out his responsibility to the glory of God. Again God blessed him and it wasn't long before he was promoted to being over all the prisoners. God made him prosper and the jailer trusted him to manage all that happened.

One day the king's cupbearer and baker made him very angry and he threw them in jail. They came under Joseph's care and some time passed. One morning they came to breakfast with sad faces and Joseph found out that they had both had a troubling dream the night before. Joseph offered that God would reveal the meaning of the dreams if they would tell him their story.

The cupbearer told of a grape vine in front of him that had three branches with leaves, blossoms, and grapes on them. He picked grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup. Joseph told him that the dream meant in three days he would be restored to his position in the palace. Joseph encouraged him to remember him before the king and help him get out of jail.

The baker said that he dreamed of having three baskets of assorted breads on his head and as he walked along the birds came and ate bread out his baskets. Joseph told him that the three baskets were three days that would pass before Pharaoh would take him out of jail and hang him in a tree and the birds would eat the flesh from his body.

Sure enough, in three days Pharaoh had a birthday and part of the celebration involved restoring the cupbearer and hanging the baker. I'm sure Joseph was excited that because of the cupbearer he would be out of jail soon. The next verse says, "Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him."

How frustrating! Joseph had a perfect opportunity, he did what he could do, but his guy dropped the ball. He probably didn't realize what was going on instantly, but after a week or two it was obvious that there was no hope.

Genesis 41 opens: "Now it happened at the end of two full years . . ." Two full years? Wow! That's a long time. He had good reason to develop a bad attitude, question God, and let his faith erode. Instead he just handled it and on the day that Pharaoh had two baffling dreams he was ready to get a shave, get cleaned up and come into the throne room.

When none of the magicians and seers could interpret the dreams things were getting a little tense when suddenly the cupbearer said, "Wait a second, I know a Hebrew guy who can interpret dreams. He did mine and that's why I was restored a couple years ago." Pharaoh ordered that Joseph be brought out of jail. As he stood before the king the dreams were told and Pharaoh asked if Joseph could interpret them. He told them that only God could tell the meaning of dreams, but that He would.

So Pharaoh told of the cow dream in which seven beautiful, healthy cows came up out of the Nile River followed by seven diseased, emaciated cows that ate the first seven. Then the corn dream with a healthy stalk growing robustly and bearing seven ears of corn and then seven nearly dead, scraggly ears coming out and eating the good ones.

Joseph told him that God revealed that the seven healthy cows and

ears of corn were seven years of prosperity that would provide food for those years plus seven lean years of famine that would follow. The key was to appoint a wise man to manage the good years and lay up provision for the years of drought. Pharaoh immediately observed that Joseph was the wisest man he knew and he gave him a signet ring and designated him second in command just under the king.

What a turn of events! Joseph was seventeen when his brothers sold him to the slave traders, now at 30 he is no longer a slave, but second only to Pharaoh in authority over Egypt. Have you ever thought what might have happened had he gotten out of jail two years earlier? One thing is for sure — he wouldn't have been given the position, it wasn't needed! With God, timing is everything. We often are impatient and want things to change or work out right now, while God is orchestrating and preparing for things we know nothing about. Joseph did his best in every circumstance and even did what he could to help things along. But ultimately he knew how to wait on God and not get excited.

As the account goes on Joseph did manage things for the seven good years and when the seven years of famine came Egypt was ready and apparently in a position to help other nations as well. Jacob and the family were feeling the famine in Canaan, so he sent the brothers to Egypt to buy grain. They came bowing and prostrating before Joseph having no idea it was him.

He accused them of being spies, which they vigorously denied telling him about the whole family including the brother who was no more and their youngest brother who was at home. Joseph threatened them that they must bring Benjamin back or be locked up. He did lock them up for three days and then allowed them to go home leaving Simeon in jail. He also had the servants put the money they had paid for the grain in the mouth of their sacks. When they stopped to get some grain for the donkeys and found the money, they freaked out. Reuben interpreted it to be the judgment of God for what they had done to Joseph. They got home but soon ran out of food and Jacob sent them back to Egypt to buy more. He was distraught that Benjamin had to go with them this time, but finally agreed, put together a presentation and double the money and off they went.

Those poor guilt-ridden boys. Joseph invited them to dinner in the palace and they assumed they would be killed. They interpreted every event in the worst possible way because of their troubled consciences. Joseph had a little fun pestering them. Eventually they moved to Egypt and Pharaoh gave them the best land and richly provided for them. Jacob died with the family intact and his prophecy spoken over each one. They all took his body back to Canaan and buried him.

Now the brothers are really afraid. They bowed before Joseph. They made up a story about what Jacob told them to tell him. He said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." Genesis 50:19,20

Joseph knew the secret to living in peace with joy — *God is in control and writing my story. I simply need to wait on Him and His timing in every situation. He has revealed His will, given me a dream and he will bring it to pass at the perfect time.*

Is something trying to discourage you today? Are you getting tired as you reflect on a seemingly endless onslaught of delays and disappointments? Take Joseph's story to heart. No matter what has happened or yet comes along, it is always true that your times are in His hands and He is accomplishing what concerns you. Don't let go of

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