



GPS GUIDE: OCTOBER 8, 2023 G r o w . P r a y . S t u d y .

Sermon Series: Epic Tales

Sermon: Joseph and the Pit

Monday - Read Genesis 37:2-5, 17b-24, 28

Genesis 37 seemed to blend perhaps three different stories about Joseph, each giving a slightly different reason for why his brothers hated him. But the reasons weren't mutually exclusive. Family therapists know that being a "chosen child" like Joseph often skews relationships and emotional growth. Oldest brother Reuben could only think of an idea that was hardly less than leaving Joseph to die in the empty cistern. Slavery in Egypt seemed like little more than a drawn-out death sentence. Reuben and Judah had just enough moral courage to stand up to their brothers and say, "No, don't kill Joseph. We don't want blood on our hands." On the other hand, they didn't have the courage to tell Jacob, "Dad, Joseph isn't dead. We sold him to traders going to Egypt." How morally courageous are you? In what areas do you want to become braver?

Prayer: *Lord, people betrayed you, but you did not allow that to knock you off course. Help me find in your love the source of strength to move beyond any pain I experience from others. Amen.*

Tuesday – Read Genesis 39: 1-20

Instead of nurturing depression and bitterness, Joseph showed such capable integrity that Potiphar, his Egyptian master, "put everything he had under Joseph's supervision." Yet Genesis didn't say, "Joseph was amazing." It says, "The LORD was with Joseph." Alas, Joseph also greatly impressed Potiphar's wife. He refused to betray his master's trust and rebuffed her advances. But she lied to her husband about it and Potiphar became enraged and sent Joseph to prison.

Partly because it's told in broad brushstrokes, this story makes Joseph's rise in Potiphar's esteem sound almost effortless. Do you think that was the case, or did Joseph need to work hard and wisely in order to make his Egyptian master's household run smoothly? Does God's blessing relieve you of the need for effort and wisdom, or does God tend to work through those qualities in your life?

Joseph, knowing how much Potiphar trusted him, might well have gotten some sensual pleasure and kept his position at the head of the household. But he refused to betray Potiphar's trust, and it cost him—outwardly, at least. Have you ever chosen not to do something wrong, even though you could “get away with it”? As you look back, are you glad you preserved your integrity or not? For what reasons?

Prayer: *O God, free me from the desire for revenge on others. Instead, give me the moral courage to stand for what is right, especially on behalf of those who are powerless. Amen.*

Wednesday – Read Genesis 39:21-23, 41:9-16, 37-41

A Hebrew slave unfairly jailed by a rich Egyptian owner—how could Joseph escape that fix? God helped Joseph explain dreams for two fellow prisoners. After two years, Pharaoh's restored steward finally remembered Joseph (still in jail) when the king had baffling dreams. Pharaoh, impressed by Joseph's discernment, made an unexpected choice. He freed and made Joseph his chief deputy, with power over all of Egypt!

Egypt's ruler said to Joseph, “I heard that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it.” Joseph's answer was prompt and clear: “It's not me. God will give Pharaoh a favorable response” (41:16). Joseph could have easily taken the credit Pharaoh offered him, but his day-by-day choices before this moment had formed an honest character. What choices are you making each day to build the character God desires you to have?

Prayer: *Merciful God, how powerfully Joseph exemplified the spirit of your kingdom as he saved his brothers and his Egyptian captors. Keep growing in me a capacity to embody and act out your mercy. Amen.*

Thursday - Read Psalm 105:16-22, 34:4-6

Psalm 105 poetically recounted Israel's early history, including portions of Joseph's story. Psalm 34 probably grew from a time when David, though already anointed king, still had to use all his wiles to keep jealous King Saul from killing him. Psalm 34's language harked back to Joseph. Notice in verse 6 the use of the words *cry out*. That phrase is used by the Hebrew people who also cry out to God in Egypt. Both Psalms praised, not human ingenuity, but God's guiding providence.

- In the song “Stone the Crows” in the musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, Joseph sings, “Anyone from anywhere can make it if they get a lucky break.” Neither Genesis nor the Psalms said Joseph got a “lucky break.” The Hebrew writers said the real story was that God's people, like Joseph, needed patience to trust God's work, which is sometimes done unseen in the background of life. Which perspective do you find more persuasive to guide your life?
- Psalm 105 answered the question, “What do we have to be grateful for?” John Goldingay, author of *Psalms for Everyone*, says, “It doesn't relate to what God has done for a particular generation...It reminds us to be grateful for the extraordinary sequence of events that lay at the foundation of every century in its life. The story will go on to tell how Yahweh is the one from whom we are to seek help.” How can Joseph's story teach you to trust God, instead of asking, “What have you done for

me lately”?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, especially when things get tough, I find it hard to think beyond the current week or month. Teach me to trust in the long sweep of your work with and for your human servants, from Joseph all the way to now. Amen.*

Friday - Read Acts 7:9-18, 10:34-42

Acts 7 told of an energetic early Christian named Stephen on trial for his life, charged with serious religious offenses (Acts 6). His response was very much like Psalm 105 (which we read part of yesterday)—reciting the history of God and God's people, including Joseph. “God was with him” echoed Genesis 39:2, 21, yet Joseph's brothers rejected him (as the leaders rejected Jesus). In Acts 10, Peter shared Jesus with Roman soldiers, using that same phrase from Joseph's story.

- Stephen's defense in Acts 7 wasn't a set of random Bible stories. “Joseph was rejected by his brothers, but God used him to become the ruler of all Pharaoh's household...When his brothers needed food, the man they had to go to was the man they... rejected...he was gracious to them and gave them what they needed. Were there already some in Stephen's audience who saw where this was going?” How did Joseph's story point to Jesus, who fully lived out God's presence with us?
- N.T. Wright says Acts 10 shows that “the first apostles went on telling and retelling the stories which Jesus himself had told, but they quickly found that they had another epic tale to tell: the story about Jesus himself. It was the story in which the name of Jesus himself was front and center.” How can you, like the apostles, share that the story of Jesus is in the end the most epic tale of all?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, the sacred stories of our biblical ancestor Joseph is a story that led to and continues with you. Let me weave my life, too, into your great saving story. Amen.*

Saturday – Read 1 Timothy 6:3-11

The apostle Paul used one aspect of Joseph's story to shape his counsel to new Christians. “Avoid” is, in Greek, the verb *pheugō*. With his extensive rabbinic Bible knowledge, Paul no doubt knew that Joseph's story used that verb. Genesis 39:12 [LXX or Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament] uses *pheugō* to describe Joseph's escape from Potiphar's wife: “He fled out of her house.” The same Greek verb occurred twice in the letters to guide the young pastor Timothy in leading his churches. In 1 Timothy 6 it is used to refer to avoiding the trap of trusting in material wealth rather than God's provision for our needs.

Sometimes we feel as though Christian living is nothing but negative commands, a long series of “don'ts.” It's important to recognize that the apostle's guidance “contains both negative and positive aspects.” “Pursue” translates another strong but positive Greek verb, sometimes rendered as “strive for” or “try your best to.” As you reflect on Joseph's story, how do you see his life reflecting the positive qualities in 1 Timothy 6:11? How can you keep your life open to pursue all the good qualities God wishes to build into you?

Prayer: *Jesus, I give myself to you. Use who I am to positively bless my circle of influence. Fulfill your promise to keep growing me as I walk with you. Amen.*