



Week 7: Joseph

Day 1: Genesis 37:3-4, 18-36 (Joseph sold into slavery)

³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

¹⁸ They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. ¹⁹ They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." ²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." ²² Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; ²⁴ and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. ²⁸ When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

²⁹ When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes. ³⁰ He returned to his brothers, and said, "The boy is gone; and I, where can I turn?" ³¹ Then they took Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood. ³² They had the long robe with sleeves taken to their father, and they said, "This we have found; see now whether it is your son's robe or not." ³³ He recognized it, and said, "It is my son's robe! A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to

pieces.”³⁴ Then Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days.³⁵ All his sons and all his daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said, “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” Thus his father bewailed him.³⁶ Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.

Understanding the Passage:

Joseph comes from a long line of family dysfunction. Favoritism has poisoned this family and has produced rotten fruit in Israel’s (Jacob’s) other sons. Jealousy, anger, resentment, and even hatred will sprout up in their hearts. Joseph does not do himself any favors by bringing up his gifts of visions and dreams. He *really* does himself in when he tells his brothers that he had a dream in which he would one day reign over them. Though Joseph has a special relationship with their father who was also a “dreamer,” his dreams often cast the rest of the brothers in an undesirable light.

One of the many themes in Genesis is generational sin. This illustrates for us the communal and long-lasting effects of sin. We may lie to ourselves and believe that our personal sin does not affect others, but the book of Genesis (and others) says otherwise. The effects of sin can be passed down the generations just as blessing can. We can see then and now that family lines have specific “flavors” of sin and brokenness that show up in the generations. Even in the quickest of genograms done on one’s family, patterns of sin like abuse, adultery, and addiction will emerge.

Israel (Jacob) continues in the generational sin of favoritism. The younger son, Joseph becomes the favorite and the blessed one. The other sons might as well be “Esau.” Position and promise are bestowed upon Joseph (his father has him report about the others) and a lavish gift—the coat of many colors.

But just as generational sin is passed down, so can blessing be inherited. There is, of course, *the* blessing and promise God has given to the descendants of Abraham, but we also find the gift of dreams and dream interpretation. Remember a big part of Israel’s (Jacob’s) story is the ladder dream. So it really comes as no surprise that his most beloved son (the youngest) is also a dreamer. However, we get a little more of the journey into this becoming a gift rather than a curse for Joseph. Like any teenager his gift appears to be clunky and awkward, getting him into trouble with his brothers. But later this gift would save his life and secure his future.

Dreams in the ancient world were understood as divine messages and not a psychological process as we do today. The text clearly states that this is a gift from God and that this gift is not for Joseph’s personal gain, but it will drive the blessing forward. But the brothers do not view Joseph’s dreams as from God. Instead, they hate Joseph for the dreams. They are indeed threatened by the prophetic nature of the dream and misplace their hatred on the messenger instead of the one who sent the message. Their actions seem to reflect the mindset that they can somehow thwart God’s plans to bless Israel, the forthcoming people group—God’s chosen people.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. How has favoritism impacted your life? Were you someone's favorite? Perhaps you have a favorite. Reflect on the positives and negative impacts this concept has on human relationships.
2. Have you ever had a gift about which someone was jealous? Or perhaps you were jealous of someone else's fortune or giftings. How did you handle the situation? What role did your faith play (or not)?
3. Have you ever had a gifting or natural talent that has gotten you into trouble? Or perhaps your gifting has brought about blessing and goodness. Maybe it's done a bit of both. Reflect and share.

Day 2: Genesis 38:1-30 (Judah and Tamar)

38 It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and settled near a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah. ² There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her. ³ She conceived and bore a son; and he named him Er. ⁴ Again she conceived and bore a son whom she named Onan. ⁵ Yet again she bore a son, and she named him Shelah. She was in Chezib when she bore him. ⁶ Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn; her name was Tamar. ⁷ But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death. ⁸ Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her; raise up offspring for your brother." ⁹ But since Onan knew that the offspring would not be his, he spilled his semen on the ground whenever he went in to his brother's wife, so that he would not give offspring to his brother. ¹⁰ What he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD, and he put him to death also. ¹¹ Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"—for he feared that he too would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went to live in her father's house.

¹² In course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died; when Judah's time of mourning was over, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. ¹³ When Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," ¹⁴ she put off her widow's garments, put on a veil, wrapped herself up, and sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. She saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him in marriage. ¹⁵ When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a prostitute, for she had covered her face. ¹⁶ He went over to her at the roadside, and said, "Come, let me come in to you," for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" ¹⁷ He answered, "I will send you a kid from the flock." And she said, "Only if you give me a pledge, until you send it." ¹⁸ He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "Your signet and your cord, and the staff that is in your hand." So he gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him. ¹⁹ Then she got up and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood.

²⁰ When Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite, to recover the pledge from the woman, he could not find her. ²¹ He asked the townspeople, "Where is the temple prostitute who was at Enaim by the wayside?" But they said, "No prostitute has been here." ²² So he returned to Judah, and said, "I have not found her; moreover the townspeople said, 'No

prostitute has been here.”²³ Judah replied, “Let her keep the things as her own, otherwise we will be laughed at; you see, I sent this kid, and you could not find her.”

²⁴ About three months later Judah was told, “Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the whore; moreover she is pregnant as a result of whoredom.” And Judah said, “Bring her out, and let her be burned.”²⁵ As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, “It was the owner of these who made me pregnant.” And she said, “Take note, please, whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff.”²⁶ Then Judah acknowledged them and said, “She is more in the right than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.” And he did not lie with her again.

²⁷ When the time of her delivery came, there were twins in her womb.²⁸ While she was in labor, one put out a hand; and the midwife took and bound on his hand a crimson thread, saying, “This one came out first.”²⁹ But just then he drew back his hand, and out came his brother; and she said, “What a breach you have made for yourself!” Therefore he was named Perez.³⁰ Afterward his brother came out with the crimson thread on his hand; and he was named Zerah.

Understanding the Passage:

It’s easy to get caught up in the provocative events of this story arc. In such cases it’s helpful to reread the passage several times in one sitting, aloud if possible. In doing so the elements that shock us will become dull. As the initial shock wears off and the blush leaves our cheeks, a story about a woman trying to survive will surface. Could it be said that this woman—one of only four named in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew—in sacrificing her dignity, morals, and life actually ends up being the hero in this story? How utterly scandalous of God to paint the harlot in such a positive light. But indeed, the kingdom of God is one built by the broken. Good news for us indeed.

In this story Tamar becomes a widow quickly. The text assumes a Levirate practice of marriage from Deuteronomy 25:5-10, which means if a married man dies without an heir, it is the responsibility of the brother of the deceased to marry his wife. He then is responsible for the production of an heir, but that child would not be his own heir, but his late brother’s heir. Essentially, the brother would have to provide for a child that would not be his own heir.

The men in Tamar’s life are running the show as was the custom in that day. A woman without a male in her life would have been moved into the lowest rung of society. Her life would be one of begging, destitution, and all that comes with such a social position. It was important for her to either have a husband or a son. Society’s norms would offer “hope” for a widow in that the deceased husband’s brother could take her in and “help” her bear a son. A woman’s sex life was bound up in her livelihood whether she was a prostitute or a housewife. And God is not pleased that Onan, given the opportunity to see to it that Tamar’s future is secured, intentionally does not.

Judah is indeed caught in a web of his own making, which involves several layers of social failing. He refused to have Tamar married to his son, Selah. He is willing lay with someone

he believed to be a prostitute. And he also dares to express a moment of righteous indignation at the sound of Tamar's harlotry. But Tamar is wise and secures for herself not just one heir but is blessed with two—Perez and Zarah. Judah rightfully declares that she is more righteous (just) than himself.

Even though we may never find ourselves in such a desperate place (although we actually might, as life can throw its worst at us), we must never distance ourselves from Tamar and characters like her. For in doing so we unknowingly exclude ourselves from our story with God. This story harkens the notion that there is nothing that can separate us from God's love and salvation.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Is it difficult for you to suspend modern moral notions when reading this story? How might they be hindering you from seeing God's hand in the midst of the messy in this story as well as your own story?
2. After reading this passage a few times over has something new stuck out to you? Reflect on those new elements.
3. Are there others in our own society whom we would categorize with Tamar in being forced into deception for survival? How might we, as the ambassadors of Jesus, impact their lives for the better?
4. How do you identify with Tamar? Is there another character with whom you can identify? Reflect.

Day 3: Genesis 39:1-23 (Potiphar's wife, Joseph jailed)

39 Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ² The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ His master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. ⁴ So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him; he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. ⁵ From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. ⁶ So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. ⁷ And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." ⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand. ⁹ He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not consent to lie beside her or to be with her. ¹¹ One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work, and while no one else was in the house, ¹² she caught hold of his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. ¹³ When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, ¹⁴ she called out to the members of her household and said to them, "See, my husband has brought

among us a Hebrew to insult us! He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice; ¹⁵ and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside.” ¹⁶ Then she kept his garment by her until his master came home, ¹⁷ and she told him the same story, saying, “The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; ¹⁸ but as soon as I raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside.”

¹⁹ When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, “This is the way your servant treated me,” he became enraged. ²⁰ And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison. ²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. ²² The chief jailer committed to Joseph’s care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. ²³ The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph’s care, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

Understanding the Passage:

Two characters in this passage are held up against one another as examples of lust and integrity or lack thereof, respectively. Up to this point in the Joseph narrative we do not know much about Potiphar’s wife. The text doesn’t tell us what journey brought her to these moments in which she acts so poorly. Regardless of her journey, here she is helping to move this narrative along in the typical Genesis way—messily. She looked upon Joseph and found he was handsome, but also, he was one who would have benefited her greatly had he been in her back pocket. Judging by her actions, lust and power were inextricably tied together.

The word *hand*, used four times in this passage, denotes power and dominion. Potiphar’s wife is not given power, only Joseph. So she resorts to the only power she has. She knows she can accuse him of the one forbidden thing. As she strips him of his clothing, so she also strips him of his power. Sadly, she is the epitome of one who is consumed with lust and power. To add insult to injury, she exposes him and then explicitly names him as a Hebrew. This racist act joins her accusations with a narrative spanning generations. “Yeah, those dirty Hebrews. Of course, he’s trying to rape her. That just how *they* are. He should never have held that position! Get him!”

Joseph is the epitome of integrity in this scene, attempting to remain faithful to God and to the position and favor God has given him. Even when others are not looking, he remains steadfast. When it would benefit him greatly to have had such a close relationship with the only person in the home who was not under his care, he remained true. Yes, this secret relationship may have scratched more than one unhealthy and sinful itch for them both—lust and total dominion from a toxic symbiotic affair. But Joseph did not relent. Ultimately this is what got him into trouble.

Sometimes doing what’s right and good will not end well for us. This piece of our heritage reminds us that just because we do the right thing, it doesn’t guarantee us a happy ending. Everyone at work cuts corners, but you do not, so you have to work longer hours. It

becomes clear to you that sidling up to someone in power would secure your future with the company, but something about that doesn't feel quite right to you. Or it could be as simple as there is a rule we all agreed to follow, but no one really keeps so you don't either. Or maybe like Joseph, favor has been shown to you and things are really great in life, but there's one way it could be made even better and you end up crossing a line you swore you'd never cross.

Life throws it temptations at us. The way we can be ready to remain faithful in such tempting situations is to tend to our hearts constantly through prayer, reflection, confession, accountability, Bible study and more. Uprooting greed, lust, selfishness, control, and more will fortify us against slipping into sinful situations when they arise. Joseph had a rough go of it, and somehow was still not power hungry. He had seen the bottom of a pit, the shackles of slavery, fear of the unknown and more. But he also saw the movement of God in his past and all around him. He gets thrown in jail, but the favor of God follows him and he again rises in the ranks.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Discuss the power dynamics as depicted in this scene. Name the different types of power. Who has what power?
2. Pretend you are on a debate team. First make a defense of Potiphar's wife's actions. Then do the same for Joseph. What insights did you gain from this exercise?
3. Reflect on a situation in which you were faced with a temptation. Did you remain steadfast? Gently examine how this story may inform your actions in the future.

Day 4: Genesis 40:1-23 (Joseph interprets dreams in jail)

40 Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt. ² Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³ and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. ⁴ The captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he waited on them; and they continued for some time in custody. ⁵ One night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own meaning. ⁶ When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh's officers, who were with him in custody in his master's house, "Why are your faces downcast today?" ⁸ They said to him, "We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me."

⁹ So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "In my dream there was a vine before me, ¹⁰ and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms came out and the clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." ¹² Then Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days; ¹³ within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ But remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place. ¹⁵ For in fact I was stolen out of the

land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon.”

16 When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, “I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, 17 and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head.” 18 And Joseph answered, “This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; 19 within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a pole; and the birds will eat the flesh from you.”

20 On the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, he made a feast for all his servants, and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. 21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand; 22 but the chief baker he hanged, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. 23 Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Understanding the Passage:

Joseph is not only a dreamer but is also an interpreter of dreams. This passage illustrates that these gifts from God are again welcomed by some and despised by others. The gift is celebrated by some and condemned by others. After all, weren’t his dreams the cause of his brothers’ plot against him in the first place? After such a life-altering event a wise person would certainly learn to read the room. For once, just lay low, Joseph. But Joseph, being in captivity once more and having been promoted to the supervisor of the prison, uses the gifts God gave him. And he uses them willingly. He will not “lay low.” It seems that it is not in his nature.

The cupbearer and baker both have dreams but are disappointed to not have anyone to interpret the dreams. In those days there were dream interpreters. They were a part of the cultural milieu. Joseph jumps right in and offer his services. These two men held important positions in Pharaoh’s kitchen staff. The cupbearer personally served wine to Pharaoh, but also enjoyed the confidence of the Pharaoh. He would not only hear the Pharaoh’s musings and discussions with others, but he would also be invited to give advice or even be charged to head initiative like Nehemiah with King Artaxerxes (Neh. 2:1). The chief baker certainly held privilege, but not like the cupbearer. Their offenses are not explicitly named, but poisoning was a common accusation, which would be punishable by death even if it were a suspicion. Given the custom of Egyptian burial of keeping corpses completely intact one can assume that the baker’s offenses were severe (left to be eaten by birds).

The cupbearer and baker both have dreams but are disappointed to not have anyone to interpret the dreams. So Joseph finds himself imprisoned, but the Lord is still with him. This is evidenced by the power to interpret these dreams. It’s important to remember (as Joseph states) that interpretation of dreams comes from God. Specialists are not needed, God interprets dreams. God gives gifts to mere mortals, and it is not by their own power that the gifts are utilized. This is countercultural to the realm of dream interpretation in that day. Dream interpretation was seen as a science for professionals. Dream interpreters consulted books of dream compilations for the purposes of hearing from ethereal sources.

However, Joseph defines very clear what these dreams are, who they come from, and who is actually doing the interpreting. It is all God.

It is easy for our focus to settle on the gift instead of the gift giver. When our focus settles on the gift it leads us then to attribute the results from the use of the gift to someone or something else. This process happens very quickly and innocently. However, it is important to be mindful that God is at work in and through us. The book of James tells us that all good and perfect gifts are from the Father of lights and Joseph intuitively knows this. Even when under great pressure and in dire circumstances Joseph is quick to give God credit and praise. Joseph could easily have waltzed around the prison interpreting everyone's dreams and secured a position for himself. But instead, it is the Lord's favor that gets him to where he needs to go.

It's easy to "see" God's presence with us when we have a roof over our heads and food on the table. It's a bit harder to see God's presence when we are held captive by something, wrongfully accused and/or beat down by life. It's easy to see God's presence on Easter Sunday, but for many who live in the darkness of Holy Saturday it's more difficult. However, God's presence does not leave us based on circumstance. Joseph will not be remembered by the chief cupbearer, but things get better. There is hope in the "prisons" of life. There is light in the darkness. There are gifts given. But through it all, God—the one who is worthy to be praised—remains present.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What are your skills and gifts? How has God empowered you to use them in life? What is one way you can give glory to God in reflecting?
2. Where have you seen God's presence in the "prisons" of your life?
3. Reflect on the cupbearer's actions of forgetting Joseph. He did not use his power to right the wrongful imprisonment of Joseph. Have you found yourself in the cupbearer's position? What would you have done if you were him? Is there someone today that you could "remember" and help?

Day 5: Genesis 41:1-46 (Pharaoh's dream, Joseph put in charge)

41 After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, ² and there came up out of the Nile seven sleek and fat cows, and they grazed in the reed grass. ³ Then seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. ⁴ The ugly and thin cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. And Pharaoh awoke. ⁵ Then he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. ⁶ Then seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them. ⁷ The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Pharaoh awoke, and it was a dream. ⁸ In the morning his spirit was troubled; so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

⁹ Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "I remember my faults today. ¹⁰ Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard. ¹¹ We dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own

meaning. ¹² A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each according to his dream. ¹³ As he interpreted to us, so it turned out; I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged.”

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was hurriedly brought out of the dungeon. When he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. ¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” ¹⁶ Joseph answered Pharaoh, “It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.” ¹⁷ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “In my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile; ¹⁸ and seven cows, fat and sleek, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. ¹⁹ Then seven other cows came up after them, poor, very ugly, and thin. Never had I seen such ugly ones in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰ The thin and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows, ²¹ but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had done so, for they were still as ugly as before. Then I awoke. ²² I fell asleep a second time and I saw in my dream seven ears of grain, full and good, growing on one stalk, ²³ and seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouting after them; ²⁴ and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. But when I told it to the magicians, there was no one who could explain it to me.”

²⁵ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. ²⁷ The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, as are the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind. They are seven years of famine. ²⁸ It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹ There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. ³⁰ After them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land. ³¹ The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous. ³² And the doubling of Pharaoh’s dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. ³³ Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years. ³⁵ Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. ³⁶ That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine.”

³⁷ The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. ³⁸ Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?” ³⁹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰ You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you.” ⁴¹ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” ⁴² Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph’s hand; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck. ⁴³ He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command; and they cried out in front of him, “Bow

the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴ Moreover Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." ⁴⁵ Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt.

⁴⁶ Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt.

Understanding the Passage:

The progression of this passage is fairly simple.

1. Pharaoh has a nightmare.
2. Joseph is brought in to interpret it after no one else can do so.
3. The message is clear- there's about to be a big, big problem—famine.
4. Pharaoh makes Joseph the 2nd in command.

In a short 44 verses Joseph moves from prisoner to leader. For the innocent bystander this might feel like Biblical whiplash, but if you know anything about Joseph, it's that he will always rise in the ranks. He may get beaten down a few times, he gets back up. He's favored. He's skilled. He's gifted. He's *that* guy that—the one that you just can't help but like and trust (unless you're his brothers).

This dream creates an interesting opening for Joseph. Once he interprets this nightmare, fear digs even deeper into the heart of Pharaoh. This dream contains an element that would threaten the very existence of Pharaoh. The Nile River was a symbol of Pharaoh's power signifying fertility and abundance. This dream calls into question the future of the Pharaoh. It makes sense then that he moves quickly, almost instantly, to ensure that this dream does not come to full fruition. Joseph was wise in suggesting that someone be appointed to ensure this does not happen. The installation ceremony that consists of the receiving of a new name, a signet ring, a chariot, and a bride is swift.

However, if the reader moves too swiftly through this passage, we will miss something very strange and important. Pharaoh recognizes the validity and power of YHWH, Joseph's god. God can and does work in the life of the unbeliever. God gave Pharaoh a dream, a warning and God provided Joseph to help Pharaoh. Pharaoh's actions give public witness regarding God's involvement in their lives. Pharaoh's actions alone exhibit that he takes the dream very seriously (an act of faith indeed). But God does not only work in the life of just Pharaoh. No, God is moving and acting in order to bring blessing upon the people within the kingdom. This is an interesting notion because God is not just extending blessing to God's chosen one's but is perhaps exhibiting the characteristics we see from Christ—that he came for all. This may not be the center piece of this story or even in the Genesis narrative as a whole, but we do see a glimpse of what will come.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Talk about the character of Joseph as he has been described in all of the chapters we've covered. Why does God continue to bless him?
2. Why is it so strange that Pharaoh recognizes the work of God?
3. Before you were a believer, or owned your faith for yourself, can you look back and see how God was extending love and blessing to you? Do you know of non-believers whom God is blessing and pursuing?

Video Discussion Questions:

1. Do you have recurring dreams? Share with the group.
2. Regarding the story arc of Joseph's life, what is the driving narrative?
3. Discuss the concept of favoritism and how it shows up in Joseph's life.
4. What are the good things and bad things that come from favoritism in Joseph's story?
5. How is Joseph pushing back on the status quo in this story?
6. How do we deal with the consequences of someone else's sin? Have you been there? How did you respond?
7. What does a faithful response look like when someone else's sin impacts us?
8. Are there other places in Scripture in which someone remains faithful in the face of someone else's sin?
9. How is the system harmful to Tamar? How does she find a way to survive?
10. Joseph interprets dreams. What are your spiritual gifts? Discuss the fine line of worshipping the giver vs. the gift itself.

Prayer requests and other notes.