

When Dreams Turn To Doubt

Nearly 20 times in the Scriptures, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are mentioned together. They are the faces of the Patriarchal Age and of the covenant God made with the Hebrews. But have you ever noticed how much space is devoted in the book of Genesis to telling the story of the fourth patriarch, Joseph? There is no effort to merely hit the highlights or skim the headlines of his life. In fact, the only other person who is given more chapters in the first book of the Bible is Abraham, the father of the faithful.

I think there's a reason for that. Many of us have felt what Joseph felt; we've been where Joseph was. That is, we've experienced the bitter disappointments of life. We've had things happen to us where even our own family members were against us. We've been accused of things that were not true and suffered just because we were trying to do the right thing.

But how many of us have endured these things and responded the way Joseph did? Who has taken hit after hit and kept an unflinching faith in God? Perhaps that's why so much space is given to telling his story.

Joseph was called the "dreamer" by his brothers (Gen. 37:19). And he still serves as an example to the spiritual descendants of Abraham when our own dreams appear to be in doubt.

You don't have to be a slave to your circumstances. Joseph's brothers were so filled with hatred and jealousy toward him that they sold him for the equivalency of \$15, the price of a slave. Surely Joseph never dreamed his life would take a turn in that direction. But notice what path he pursued after his hopes seemingly came crashing down. "And the Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man" (Gen. 39:2).

Some people are looking for the perfect life. They want the perfect family who lives in the perfect house and drives the perfect car in the perfect world. But that's not the way it works out. That's not even the way it worked out for the man who holds the second-most amount of space in the book of Genesis. Yet, one of the common reactions when life deals us this way is to throw up our hands and concede defeat. You don't have to do that. You don't have to be a slave to bitterness, discouragement, and selfishness. When the Lord is with you, freedom is always in your future.

When you've been wronged, you still have to act right. Potiphar's wife, the original "Desperate Housewife," was after Joseph. She "looked with desire" (Gen. 39:7) at him and pursued him "day after day" (Gen. 39:10) to lie with her. What was the response of a handsome 17 year-old-boy who was a captive in a foreign land? "How then could I do this great evil and sin against God" (Gen. 39:9). In all that had happened to him, Joseph understood that committing fornication was not going to bring back what he had lost. Such a sin would only serve to make matters worse.

We have a tendency at times to add trouble to trouble. The husband has a bad day at the office, so he comes home and yells at his wife and kids. A teenager thinks his parents are treating him unfairly so he goes out drinking with his friends. A wife has a husband who won't

communicate with her so she confides in another man and commits adultery. What problems do such actions solve? What relationships are repaired? Sin never makes a wrong right. Let our behavior, no matter the circumstances that surround us, be pleasing to our Master in heaven.

Your plans may not always meet with God's purpose. Years later, Joseph made himself known to his brothers having risen to second-in-command of all Egypt. But he did not repay evil for evil or punish them for what they had done. By then, he could see the bigger picture. "For God sent me before you to preserve life...and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Gen. 45:5-8). Surely Joseph had earlier prayed for deliverance from his brothers and for release from prison. But those prayers were answered not according to his timetable but in His time.

We must maintain a similar faith in what God is working in our own lives. Remember, he causes "all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Joseph knew that the same God who brought Him down to Egypt in an Ishmaelite caravan would one day bring his family out of Egypt to inherit the land sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Heb. 11:22). May we have such a confidence in the plans and purposes of God.

How will you respond the next time you encounter various trials? Joseph's example shows us that with God, our dreams really can come true.

—Bubba Garner