

Living in Color: Who Do You Think You Are?

Today we begin a multi-week journey through the story of Joseph. It is the longest story in the Book of Genesis. It goes all the way from chapter 37-50.

Let's begin by asking the Lord to guide us along the way:
Prayer.

But this week, I want to start with the roots to the story. Those go back quite a bit further in the book. We really need to start with Joseph's father, Jacob.

You will recall that Jacob was the one who came out just after Esau, the hairier one. He had his twin brother by the heel. And we remember Jacob getting Esau to give up his birthright for "a mess of porridge." Jacob didn't start out as perfect. He was a schemer and he found a way to catapult himself to the front of the line.

It is really just after that episode, while he is going into dangerous territory, that he has a life changing dream:

11 When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. 12 He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 14 Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the

north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

16 When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” 17 He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.”...

20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear 21 so that I return safely to my father’s household, then the Lord will be my God 22 and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.”

This is about as close as Genesis gets to a conversion story. What happened was that Jacob realized there was another dimension to life, that God was not only there, but that he held his future. So Jacob made his commitment, then and there, to live right. That *had to be* a story that he told young Joseph. Later, as a nine year old, that old conflict between Jacob and Esau reared its ugly head again. In fact, Esau sent a contingent of 400 soldiers against Jacob and his family. That was the night that Jacob famously wrestled with the angel. Was it a dream or was it an actual match? I don’t know. I don’t think it matters. But that struggle with the angel, with the forces of God, gives him the name “Israel.” *That is what Israel means: one who struggles with or one who contends with God.* That had to be another lesson Joseph took in: life would not always be easy or clear. But hang on and hang in there.

The next day, Jacob arranged his family to meet Esau and those armed men. The Bible says, “He put the female servants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear.”

Where would you rather be? At the point, or in the rear? I have a feeling they all knew who was his favorite in that moment. A few years later, Joseph would lose his mother, Rachel, as she gave birth to his little brother, Benjamin.

So let’s pause here and examine the legacy that Joseph had received as a young man. Because so many of us are creating a legacy in our own homes. We are building things into our kids, or if we are lucky, into our grand kids. We are shaping the viewpoints of those we love, helping them to see that other dimension that Jacob saw with his ladder.

In one sense, the legacy Jacob passed along was exceptional. Joseph received the legacy of faith. His father had come face to face in his own life with God.

At our now-halted Confirmation class, one of the first assignments I gave was for the young person to ask questions of their parent’s faith. Here was the first question: **How did you come to believe in God?** Our kids don’t realize that we were once like them. We had our questions. We didn’t have it all figured out. But the Lord came to us in some way. I think our kids and anyone we want to influence can benefit from hearing our story of coming to faith.

Here was the second question: **Can you think of a specific time where God or your faith was a help to you in a difficult situation?** Then I added: **Tell me about it.**

Here I want to be sure that the young person knows it is not just intellectual assent but that it makes a difference to us. It is hanging in there in the tough times. I have always liked that saying, “*There is no testimony without the test.*” Well, how did your faith make a difference in that test? If we can give some examples, our kids can apply it. They will think, if it worked for you, maybe it would work for me.

Joseph received that from his father. He saw that his was a real faith, a faith that wrestled with hard things and that he had become a changed man in his maturity.

What he had not passed along, and we can all see this in the opening verses of the story, is humility. He had not passed along much of an understand of how to get along better with others. His was a place of privilege, and in the opening scene he literally wears it on his sleeve. Genesis 37, the first 11 verses:

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. 4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. 6 He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: 7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.”

8 His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

9 Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

10 When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" 11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

I think we all know what "I.Q" is. The letters stand for "intelligence quotient." We have created a rough measurement of just how smart a person is. But have you also heard of "E.Q."? That stands for "emotional quotient." In other words, how good are you at reading a room, at understanding what people are feeling without them even saying? When you see The Big Bang on television, the joke of the entire series is that those characters have a sky-high iq, but are very low when it comes to eq. Sheldon can only make wild guesses as to what others are feeling.

Joseph, our hero, has so much going for him! He is a handsome young man, no doubt. He has the world by the tail. We have already established that he was considered the most precious to Jacob by where he was when Esau came calling.

Now our story begins with Joe telling his dad about how mean those other brothers are. Jacob does not win an award for parenting in his next move. He didn't challenge his boy to

figure out how to work with those guys. He didn't ask him what he could do differently. No.

Apparently, he said, "There, there, my son. Oh, by the way, son, I have this incredible robe that I thought you might like to try on. What's that? No, none of the other boys get one. Just you. Oldest son of my beloved Rachael. You are so special to me." You can hardly blame Joseph for being a little out of balance if he was raised like that. I'd say Jacob was a little short on eq himself! He laid the groundwork for what would eventually be the heartache of his life. As our text says, the other brothers hated him. They couldn't even speak to him.

But that didn't keep Joseph from talking. No sireebob! If he had a thought, he was glad to share it. And that included the special dreams he had, just like Jacob used to have.

One day, he told them about this great dream he had, this dream where they are all binding these sheaves of grain. "And then, I saw mine just rise up and stand over all of yours. And yours simply bowed down to me. Man, I wonder what that means...I'll have to ask pop."

I'm sure they so appreciated him sharing his gift with them! The Bible says it clearly: "And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said."

Yes, he did need a dose of humility. The Bible is clear on that. But there is something else the Bible is saying: This dream is exactly what God is going to accomplish in Joseph's life, and nothing is going to stop the Lord from doing this, no matter what opposition he runs into. Life for Joseph will be like wrestling with the angel, but he will receive the blessing.

But that is not all! Joseph has yet another dream. Only in this one, the subject is not sheaves being bound. It is made of the elements of the night sky. Even Jacob's beaming smile fades as he hears that second dream: The sun and the moon, along with eleven stars bow down to him. Now mom and dad are involved. Everybody bows to him.

His father rebukes him, the Bible says. Maybe it is the only time he has had a harsh word for Joseph. "We are going to bow down, too?" he asks. But he doesn't simply disregard young Joseph. Our text closes with an interesting line: "...his father kept the matter in mind." His dad was able to rise above being offended by youthful exuberance to see that there is may really something to what this young man was saying.

Some famous sports figures declare themselves to be number one. Its obnoxious. But there is this: "It ain't braggin' if its true." You can think of a dozen names where you think, yeah, they really are the GOAT, the greatest of all time. Someone kept that child's promise in mind. Someone believed in them. Let me speak to parents. We want our kids to play well with others, to know the rules, etc. But sometimes there is something special in them. Scratch that. There is always something special in them. The question is, do we notice it? Do we "keep the matter in mind?" Do you tend and protect the dreams of your children? Do you help them see what is possible and encourage them to follow through on what God has put within their heart? And let's not limit this to our children: how are we encouraging those around us to know they are special in God's eyes? How do we say, "Who do you think you are?" not in the sense that they think too highly of themselves, but that they don't think

highly enough of what God can do in them if they will only submit to him?

And as long as I'm speaking about others, how about ourselves? Most of us have had to learn that, despite our best efforts, we weren't going to be professional athletes. Or we sang our hearts out in the choir, but no one offered us a solo. We just were never going to be great singers. We weren't going to be talented actors or brilliant students. We learned that we were not all that outstanding in a hundred other things.

- But are we so quick to claim that we are average that we squash something that God has put within us?
- Might it be true that there are gifts and there are abilities and there is just a quality about who you are that should not be dismissed so easily?

When I ask, "Who do you think you are?" I invite you to think, "I am the Lord's child. I am treasured. He wants me to wear that beautiful coat. He wants me to know that he has put dreams and visions in my heart."

Yes, life will temper those dreams in Joseph, and it has done so in us. But let's not let life snuff out those dreams! Let's not say, "God decided to make me plain." Sure, in a lot of ways you and I are average. But there is something outstanding about you. God made you for a reason. Let's keep hold of that as well. Let's decide that we are made in living color and we should live our life that way, knowing that we have gifts and abilities poured into us from the Lord. Let's decide, today, that we will be the person God has created us to be. Let's dream again.

Our story is begun. Like each of us, Joseph comes from a lineage of faithfulness and foolishness. He has taken the lessons he could from his father, just as your children and others are taking their lessons from you.

And now it is his time to walk onto life's stage with a many colored coat, an emblem both of his separation from his brothers but also of God's love for him and God's protection over him, a theme that will shine throughout this story.

This week, you have your assignment: Let those who entrust their dreams to you know that you are keeping those dreams and treasuring them and praying for them, even if you have to give them an insight or two into how to raise their own eq.

And look at your own self and ask: where have I let the dream God gave me for my life wither, and perhaps die?

This is the season of resurrection. Let's lift that dream up again. Sure it is tempered. Sure it has matured. But how has God gifted you, and how might he use you in a special way in this season of life? May the Lord use this story to remind us of who we are. Amen.