

Living the Dream

By David Feddes

Genesis 37:1-11 begins a new section of the book of Genesis. It focuses on things that happen in Jacob's family, especially in the life of his son Joseph and also of Joseph's brothers.

¹ Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.

² This is the account of Jacob's family line.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

³ Now Israel [Jacob] 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.

Dreamers

"Living the dream." We sometimes say that when things are going our way, but sometimes we say it sarcastically when things aren't going our way. Somebody asks how you're doing, and you say, "Oh, living the dream."

When we think about dreams and read about a story like this in the Bible, we might think that this is a story from more than 3,000 years ago, and it might not have a lot to do with us because we're not like Joseph, where we dream and know from that dream something of what the future holds. But before we dismiss that too quickly, we need to remember that the whole Bible is written to help us, and we need to remember that Joseph is not the last of the dreamers.

The Bible says in the prophecy of Joel—and then it is repeated on the day of Pentecost when God gave his Holy Spirit—"I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, ^[L]_[SEP]I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29; see Acts 2:17-18).

So it is possible that God will use a dream or an insight. Much more commonly, of course, he will give inklings of the future through the Word of God and through the sense of his Holy Spirit's work in our hearts and lives. Most dreams are dreams that you could just as well forget about, but some dreams can set the direction of your life.

That was true in Joseph's case. If he never had those dreams, things might have been very different. If he never had the dreams and told them to his brothers, they would never have done to him what they ended up doing. His life would have turned out very differently if he had not had that dream all along and knew, "There are some strange paths I'm on, but I have an idea where that path is going to lead."

I have mentioned before that I had a dream that, in many ways, set the direction of my life. Shortly after I asked the Lord Jesus to live in me—in fact, the next night—I had a dream of heaven. That dream has set the rest of my life on a course for eternity and has made me think of eternity a lot, even as a boy and certainly throughout my time of ministry.

The Lord will work in different lives in different ways, but the Lord will give his people a sense of his purposes. Especially as we read God's Word, we're going to get a clearer and clearer sense of his purposes. But it's one thing to know those purposes; it's another thing to live them out. It's one thing to read the story of Genesis or other stories in the Bible, but it was probably quite another thing to be in the middle of that, living out the dream.

We read of Joseph's dreams, and here's a spoiler alert: the dreams come true. His brothers and his father and stepmother end up bowing down to him. But it was not just a straight, simple path to get there. So let's think a little bit about that path and what it was like to live toward that dream. I want to emphasize four main areas as we think about it.

Living the dream

- Great God
- Big barriers
- Small starts
- Rescuer-ruler

We learn something about a **great God**. It's always important when you're reading the Bible not to just say, "Well, that was an interesting story," but to ask, "What am I discovering about God in this?" In this story, when you think about a God who knows the future and can reveal the future and direct the future, it is showing us a lot about his greatness.

Another thing is that there were some **big barriers** between Joseph and the fulfillment of his dream. Many obstacles and problems arose. There were many times when it seemed like that dream was dead and like Joseph was dead—like there was never any possibility his dream could come true. But it was a dream that had come from God, and so it was bound to come true.

On the path toward that dream, where many are bowing down to him, Joseph makes **small starts**. Even in hard circumstances, he is already becoming, in miniature and through small opportunities of leadership, what he is someday going to be as one of the most powerful men in the world. But he starts small. As Jesus says, "Those who have been faithful in little things will be entrusted with big things."

The final thing, as we consider the dreamer living out the dream, is what it reveals about God in Jesus Christ as the great **rescuer and ruler**. The dream and all the things associated with it were given by God so that Joseph might save the people of God, and he might be a lord and a savior. As in so many cases in the Old Testament, you're not just reading a story about some people and events. God is giving hints—he's giving previews—of his plan for what he would do in Jesus. You might say, "Well, yeah, but now that Jesus has come, why even bother looking at the previews?" Well, for one thing, it's great to realize again that God's plans always come true. What's more, you learn a lot about Jesus just by looking at the previews. Those things come at you from a slightly different angle, and you appreciate even more who Jesus is and what he's done.

Great God

- Omniscient
- Omnipotent
- Communicative
- Caring
- Gracious

First of all, let's look at what the giving of a dream reveals about God. How can you reveal a dream that shows the future? Well, in order to do that, you've got to know everything. You can't know the future unless you know all the events that lead up to it, which are interlocked and will bring about that future. God not only knows that the brothers are going to bow down to Joseph, but he knows all the events that are going to lead up to that moment. That means he knows the future completely, as well as the present and the past. The theologians' word for that is **omniscient**—he knows everything.

And he not only knows it; he is directing it. He is running the show. God is almighty. He is **omnipotent**, the one who has all power. In the small act of giving a dream about the future, you cannot give a dream that's going to come true unless you direct the future. So God knows all, directs all, and has power over all.

God doesn't just run everything secretly. He is a God who is also **communicative**, who speaks, who reveals himself. He made known to Joseph, and through Joseph to his father and brothers, something of what his plan was. God did not just keep it all to himself. God keeps quite a bit to

himself, but he drops hints along the way, showing something of his plans and something of himself. We can thank God that he doesn't just keep himself hidden from us. He could. Certainly, when it comes to the consequences of sin that have blinded us and given us no right to know God, it is a great blessing that God does make himself known.

Another thing that we see about God is that he is a God who is **caring**. He cares in the sense that he loves and provides, looking out for you. And that's true even when things have gotten very bad in your life, when circumstances have become terrible and overwhelming. The dream still stands; God has something wonderful in mind for you. Even if you can't see how it's going to happen, it will happen. In God's providence, he works all things for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28).

In all this, God is **gracious**. Look at who he's working with. He's working with Jacob the Grabber. This family of twelve brothers is very, very messed up. You have a father with four different women that he has children by. One daughter—perhaps the only daughter (we don't know for sure if there were others)—is raped. A couple of the sons massacre the rapist and the entire town associated with him. It's a disaster. Then you have Judah, the son willing to visit a prostitute, only to discover later it was his daughter-in-law in disguise.

These are the chosen people. I guess you could call them "The Dirty Dozen," these brothers. Joseph seems to stand out from them, but really, do you need to tell your brothers the dream you had? They already hate you, and you just have to tell them, "I had the greatest dream, dudes. You were bowing down to me." That is really going to endear you to your jealous brothers!

But my point here is not just how messed up the family is. The fact is that this particular mess of a family with kids by four different women and all the murders, sexual immoralities, hatreds, envies, and jealousies, is the group that God is working with and redeeming to carry out his purposes in the world. This means one thing: God is gracious. Amazing grace—how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like Jacob... and a wretch like me too.

These are just a few things that lie on the surface of the story and reveal truths about our great God. But let's hasten on and consider some of the other things.

Big barriers

- Toxic family
- Long absence
- Slave job
- Unjust charge
- Gloomy prison

Let's look at some of the barriers that lay between Joseph and the realization of the dream. Part of it may have been his own doing. "I am Dad's favorite—aren't you guys happy about that? In fact, I'm not just Dad's favorite; I'm God's favorite. God gave me these dreams about ruling over you all. Aren't you going to rejoice with me?" Well, the brothers hadn't gotten the memo that you're supposed to rejoice with those who rejoice. They hated Joseph's guts.

It's a long family history of dysfunction. I've mentioned some of the things that happened in that immediate family. In the family of Isaac and Rebekah, where Jacob grew up, Jacob was Mom's favorite, and his brother Esau was Dad's favorite. So you had this history of favoritism, producing a very toxic mix. Like his parents, Jacob had a favorite, his beloved Joseph.

Then you had these brothers. Maybe Joseph shouldn't have revealed the dream or bragged about himself, but let's face it—Joseph did stand head and shoulders above the rest of that crew. When you see how their lives unfolded, Joseph really was exceptional, and some of them were far from having those same qualities. He had a toxic family.

For some of you, one of the biggest barriers that lies between you and what God has in mind for you might not be enemies way out there, but your siblings or people closest to you—or even what your parents think of you. Jacob did not like the dream about bowing down to his son Joseph. He kept it in mind, but he didn't like it.

David, when he was a boy, was out tending the sheep when the prophet Samuel came to town to look for a new king. His father Jesse lined up all his boys for the audition—except for one. One boy couldn't possibly be the one Samuel was going to pick, so David was out looking after the sheep while the real candidates were presented. But David was the one. His own father didn't believe in him. And when David wanted to find out what was going on with that giant Goliath, his brothers accused him, saying, "You're just here to watch the battle and get some excitement." His father and brothers did not see him as the anointed next king of Israel. His brothers were not happy when little bro got anointed and they didn't get anointed. Later, when the confrontation with Goliath was brewing, they didn't say, "Yeah, David, we believe in you. Go after that giant!" They didn't believe he could do it.

Jesus himself wasn't believed in by his own brothers until after his resurrection. The Bible plainly says, "Even his own brothers did not believe in him."

There are people with God-given futures, and those around them don't encourage them but hinder them instead. Think about that. Are there parents or siblings who crippled you on your way to where you were meant to be? Sometimes, to follow Jesus and become who you need to be, you have to get those voices out of your head.

But also consider: you might be one of those negative voices. When you think of your own kids, are you the voice telling them what they can't be or can't do? When you think about a brother, sister, or friend with a goal you don't believe in, is that what you tell them? Sometimes we think, "I've got to pursue my dreams, and anyone who gets in the way needs to be shut out." That may be true, but if so, don't be the one getting in someone else's head, crippling them in their calling from God.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, there may be times when people need to be a bit more humble, but there are also times when we need to see each other in light of what God is doing. God is making us into something extraordinary, destined to reign with Christ forever in his eternal kingdom. We need to start seeing and treating each other that way.

Toxic families and churches can really hinder people on their way to the dream God has given them. Joseph continued on. David persevered. Jesus wasn't believed in by his brothers. He was even scolded by his own parents when they lost track of him and found him in the temple. They said, "Son, don't do that again; you scared us." But Jesus was about his Father's business. Even Mary and Joseph—yes, the other Joseph—weren't always supportive. (By the way, I've had people confuse Joseph, the father of Jesus, with Joseph in the Old Testament. They're about 1,800 years apart. Joseph of the Old Testament lived about 3,800 years ago, and Joseph, the father of Jesus, lived about 2,000 years ago.) It's easy in a family not to be boosted, but instead hindered.

Well, among the other barriers was once Joseph gets in a pickle with his brothers, there is a very long absence—being separated from his father and home for at least 13 years total. He gets stuck in the worst kind of job: being a slave. He's sold into slavery, faces unjust accusations, and that lands him in a gloomy prison.

Let's quickly review how things went for Joseph. He was sent out by his father to check on his brothers, and they said, "Hey, here comes dreamer boy! Let's kill him." Now that's a difficult family. But by the time he gets there, they say, "Let's not kill him," and the oldest brother, Reuben, really doesn't want him killed. Reuben says, "Let's throw him in a cistern, a pit," and plans to rescue him later (Genesis 37:21–22). It doesn't work out that way, but they do throw him into the pit. Then they see some Israelite slave traders coming along, and Judah, being a big-hearted, wonderful guy, says, "We really shouldn't kill the kid. Let's sell him. After all, he is our own flesh and blood." What a brother! "Let's not kill him—he is our brother. Let's just sell him into slavery and never see him again" (Genesis 37:26–27).

So that's what they do. They haul him back out of the pit and sell him to the slave traders, who take him down to Egypt. Meanwhile, they take that coat Jacob had given Joseph, throw some animal blood on it—they didn't have DNA testing back then—then show the coat to Jacob. Jacob believes his dear son is dead. For at least 13 years, this old man, whose kid was the light of his life, thinks his favorite son is dead (Genesis 37:28–35).

Meanwhile, Joseph is sold in Egypt to a man named Potiphar, an important person in Egypt. There, he works for Potiphar and turns out to be a very skilled and reliable man. He rises in the ranks.

But he's not just noticed by his master for his managing abilities—he's also noticed by Mrs. Potiphar for his looks. She wants to go to bed with him, but Joseph says, "I can't sin against God, and I can't sin against Potiphar" (Genesis 39:7–9). Joseph takes off out of there, but she grabs his outer cloak as he runs off. She reports him to her husband: "Look what that slave tried to do to me!" (Genesis 39:13–18)

Joseph is taken from slavery to an even worse situation—he's locked in Pharaoh's palace prison. You've got that toxic family, the 13-year separation from home and his father, stuck working as a slave owned by someone else, with no personal reward for any of the exceptional things he's accomplishing. Then, on top of that, he faces an unjust accusation. He does the right thing but finds out that no good deed goes unpunished. You might even think he'd have been better off

going to bed with Mrs. Potiphar; he could have had a fling and avoided trouble. But Joseph refuses to do the wrong thing, and doing the right thing brings him even greater suffering. Here is the guy with the dream, now lower than a slave, locked in prison, and on the bad side of some of the most powerful people in Egypt (Genesis 39:19–20).

We need to realize that even when things are at their worst, when it seems like nothing could get any worse and there's no way out, God has not stopped working with you. You may face these big barriers, but what does Joseph do? Does he curl up in a ball and feel sorry for himself? He may have prayed some agonizing prayers and been filled with grief at times, but he did not say, "The dream is dead. I am a goner. All is lost." In whatever situation he was in, he somehow always rose to the top.

Small starts

- Obedient son
- Stellar slave
- Pure devotion
- Model prisoner
- Blessed as slave

When he was among that band of ordinary, hateful, jealous brothers, he was the best of the lot. He was the obedient son. When he got thrown into the pit and then sold as a slave, what did he do? He became the best slave in Potiphar's household and kept doing so well that Potiphar promoted him (Genesis 39:2–6).

And then, when things went south with the attempted seduction and false accusations from Mrs. Potiphar, Joseph showed pure devotion to God. It seems like a small thing—"This woman's after me; I'm out of here"—but it's a big thing because it showed his true devotion to God. It didn't seem like the fate of nations was hanging in the balance—it was just a question of, "Do I go to bed with this woman now, or not?" And he said, "Not." His devotion to God won out. Then, when he got thrown into prison for that, what kind of prisoner was he? One of the resentful, angry, self-pitying ones? No. Before long, Joseph became the top prisoner.

Wherever he was, Joseph seemed to rise. How does that happen? Well, becoming the best in each of those small starts reveals something about Joseph's character, of course, but it also reveals something about the God who was looking out for him.

Blessed

The Bible says that when Joseph was a slave, the Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered (Genesis 39:2).

I have a whole sermon titled "Four Words That Change Everything." Do you know what those four words are? "I am with you." Take your Bible sometime, run a quick search of "I am with you," and look at all the stories in the Bible where those four words appear and how they turn everything around. "

The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered... When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did... Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. The Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph... So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. (Gen 39:2-6)

Each of us may not have reached that glorious destination where we reign with Christ as kings and queens forever. We may be in a situation that seems very undesirable. But when God is with you in the middle of that, you are already on the rise. Joseph was locked up in prison. "But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge ... the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did" (Genesis 39:20-23).

It seems like an oxymoron—a successful slave, a successful prisoner—but Joseph was both. Read the New Testament: the apostle Paul, writing from prison, is a successful prisoner. And when he writes to people in slavery, he says, "Don't think you're just working for your earthly master; it is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:24). Do everything as unto the Lord.

That is what the life of Joseph shows us—how to do everything as unto the Lord. Whether you're in prison or a slave, if the Lord is with you, he's going to make something out of it. And it's not just a good story because Joseph ends up rising to the very top. It's already a good story because, even when Joseph was in prison, he was serving God, and God was blessing him. It was already a good story when Joseph was a slave, because he was slaving for God, and God was blessing him.

Whatever your situation—if your job feels like slaving away every day, if you feel cut off from opportunities and like you're headed nowhere—do you really think you have it worse than someone in prison? Do you really have a more impossible situation than someone who was a slave? God is with you. "I am with you"—the four words that change everything. When that happens, when you believe it, when you sense God's presence, and when you know that the dream he gave you will come true, it changes everything about you. You never give up—never, never, never—because you know who gave you the dream of reigning with him forever, and you know who is with you right now.

When you suffer for doing the right thing, God is with you. All of God's choicest servants have suffered for doing the right thing. So, welcome to the club!

Joseph's story speaks of a great God, big barriers, and small starts in which Joseph was faithful. Remember the words of Jesus: "If you're faithful in little things, I will entrust you with many things" (Luke 16:10).

Rescuer ruler

Then the final thing to notice—the wonderful thing in this story—is that Joseph is the rescuer-ruler of God's people. He is the preview and the foretaste of a greater one, our Lord Jesus Christ.

As you read the story, you know that the dream he had—the double dream he told his brothers—was not his last dream. It always seemed that dreams came in pairs. Joseph had two dreams about being bowed down to, and then, when he's in prison, other people have dreams. He's not the one having the dreams now; instead, he gives insight from God to interpret them.

Two of the people in the royal prison with Joseph are Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and chief baker. Pharaoh is mad at both of them. We don't know why. Pharaohs get mad; that's what they do. These two officials, both holding important positions, are now in prison, and they each have a dream. They tell them to Joseph.

The cupbearer says, "I had a dream. In it, I saw a vine with three branches, each branch bearing grapes. I took grapes from them, squeezed them into a cup, and gave the wine to Pharaoh." Joseph responds, "God is the one who interprets dreams, and I know what this one means. The three branches represent three days. In three days, you'll be restored to your position, and you will again serve Pharaoh his wine" (Genesis 40:9–13).

The chief baker hears this favorable interpretation and asks Joseph what his dream means. "I had a dream," the baker says. "There were three baskets of bread on my head. In the top basket, birds swooped in, pecking at the bread, and carried it away." Joseph replies, "The three baskets also represent three days. In three days, Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale you on a pole" (Genesis 40:16–19).

Three days later, it is Pharaoh's birthday, and, as Pharaohs do, he acts on whims. He restores the cupbearer to his position and has the baker executed. Joseph's interpretations come true exactly as he said.

When Joseph gave the cupbearer the good news of his restoration, he also said, "Don't forget about me. I'm in this prison unjustly. When you get back to your position, put in a good word with Pharaoh for me" (Genesis 40:20–23). Yeah, good luck with that. The moment the cupbearer gets out, he forgets all about Joseph. It's back to business as usual, and Joseph is left to languish in prison for two more years.

Then, more dreams come. The cupbearer is back in the palace, the baker is dead, and now Pharaoh himself—the most powerful man in the world—has some troubling dreams. Pharaoh dreams of seven fat, healthy cows grazing. Then, seven skinny, emaciated cows come along and devour the fat ones. In another dream—because remember, these dreams always seem to come in pairs—Pharaoh sees seven full, healthy ears of grain, but then seven withered ears appear and swallow up the healthy ones (Genesis 41:1–7).

Pharaoh is deeply puzzled by these dreams, and none of his advisors can explain them. Then the light bulb goes on for the cupbearer. "Oopsie daisy! I was supposed to tell you something, Pharaoh. Back when I was in prison, I met a man who interpreted my dream, and everything happened just as he said. You might want to talk to him" (Genesis 41:9–13).

So Pharaoh summons Joseph from the prison. Joseph tells him, "The seven fat cows represent seven years of great crops, and the seven skinny cows represent seven years of famine. The

seven ears of grain mean the same thing—seven years of plenty followed by seven years of shortage. God gave you two dreams to emphasize the certainty of what will happen.” Then Joseph advises Pharaoh: “If I were you, I’d store away grain during the good years, so there will be food during the years of famine” (Genesis 41:14–36).

Pharaoh likes the idea. “I like it so much,” Pharaoh says, “I’m putting you in charge.” Suddenly, Joseph rises from being a prisoner to the second most powerful man in the world. He becomes the chief of all Pharaoh’s affairs, running Egypt’s grain program. They build more storage and fill it with the surplus from the tremendous crops of the good years. When the seven years of abundance end, they begin drawing from the stored grain to meet the needs of the people. Hungry people from all over, even from beyond Egypt, come to buy food (Genesis 41:37–57).

Among those who come for food are Joseph’s brothers. They bow down before him, not realizing they are bowing before the very brother they sold into slavery (Genesis 42:6). Joseph plays it tough for a while. He makes them squirm, testing whether they have changed. He finds out if they are still the same people they used to be. At one point, Judah offers himself as a substitute for Benjamin, Joseph’s younger full brother. “I’ll be a slave in his place,” Judah says, “so my little brother doesn’t have to be a slave” (Genesis 44:33–34). This is the same Judah who sold Joseph into slavery, but now offers to become a slave himself. This act overwhelms Joseph, who has already had several tearful episodes. Now he can no longer hold back. He reveals himself to his brothers, saying, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” (Genesis 45:1–3)

His brothers are terrified. Is this good news? The brother they betrayed and sold into slavery, whom they assumed was long gone, is now the second most powerful man in the world. This might not be good news if he holds a grudge. But Joseph embraces them and says, “You meant harm to me, but God meant it for good, to accomplish the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20).

When you read this tremendous story and see the reunion between Joseph and his father, Jacob, it is deeply moving. Jacob thought his beloved son was dead. When they tell Jacob that Joseph is alive, the Bible says, “He would not believe it” (Genesis 45:26).

It’s like the disciples on that Easter morning—they were told that Jesus was alive, and they said, “No way!” But he was. He was back from the dead.

In this great story of Joseph, we see the workings of God in the long-ago history of his people and how he preserved his chosen people. He saved them from famine. You know what? He used the envy of those brothers, their hatred, and all their stupidity. He used Joseph’s bragging. He used all of these things and somehow wove it together so that his people survived one of the worst famines in the world. God was running things the whole time. Even the bad things people were doing—God wasn’t making them do bad things, but he knows how to use even our failures and wickedness for our good (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28).

That’s important to keep in mind for yourself. We’ve already seen that Joseph might have thought at times that his life was at a dead end. But then he realized, “No, God is with me. I’m going to be the best slave. I’m going to be the best prisoner.” He let God worry about the results, and God took care of it.

Now think about our Lord Jesus Christ returning from the dead (Acts 2:24; Romans 6:9). Was that good news? I mentioned already that if you're Joseph's brothers and he says, "Hi, I'm Joseph," that's not such good news. And for Peter, who said of Jesus three times, "I don't know that guy. I've never heard of him. I will swear up and down that I have nothing to do with him," imagine when Jesus returns and says, "I'm back." That might not be such good news for Peter. It might not be such good news for the crowd on Pentecost, many of whom had called for Jesus to be crucified. Peter is preaching to them, saying, "This Jesus, whom you crucified, God has made both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Is that good news? You crucified him, rejected him, and now he is in charge of everything.

The only reason it's good news is because of what kind of Savior he is. It is good news because he is a gracious and merciful savior. You have Joseph, left for dead—his father thought him dead—but he's back from the dead. He is reigning over Egypt, the most powerful empire in the world. In a sense, he is reigning over the world, saving people who would otherwise die of famine, giving them life, forgiving those who attacked, harmed, and rejected him. And in all of this, Joseph is fulfilling the dream that God gave, because when God says something, it always comes true (Genesis 45:4–8; Psalm 105:17–22).

"Who is like me?" God says in the book of Isaiah. "Who declares the end from the beginning, from ancient times what is still to come? I am he. I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like me. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 46:9–10; Isaiah 45:22). That's what the Bible reveals, from its first page to its last. There is one God; there is no other. And in his beloved son, Jesus Christ—crucified, rejected by men but chosen and exalted by God—he brings salvation just as surely as Joseph saved the lives of his brothers and all of Egypt (Philippians 2:8–11; 1 Peter 2:4). He brings salvation to those who don't deserve it.

Jesus Christ saves lives. And let's face it, the twelve brothers—the sons of Israel—weren't exactly a choice lot. The twelve disciples of Jesus weren't either. "But God chose the weak things of the world and the despised things to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that we are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Therefore, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:27–31). It's okay to boast, if you boast in the Lord. Don't boast in the spirit of young Joseph saying, "I am the favorite." But by the end, Joseph is boasting in the Lord, saying, "You meant it for harm, but God meant it for good. God has used me to save you" (Genesis 50:20).

All of this points to one much greater than Joseph. In Genesis 41:41, Pharaoh says, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." And everybody comes and bows. We know from the Bible that God exalted Jesus to the highest place, so that every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10–11). In Genesis 47:25, the people of Egypt say to Joseph, "You have saved our lives." We can say, "Surely this is our God. We trusted in him, and he has saved us. This is the Lord. Let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation (Isaiah 25:9).

Living the dream

- Great God
- Big barriers
- Small starts
- Rescuer-ruler

If you, friend, have been through a hard time, keep these four things in mind. God is very great. The barriers may seem big, but if you make a small start of walking with God—even in the middle of your mess—your life is not over. Your prison is not permanent. God has something great in mind for you because he has appointed a rescuer-ruler from before the foundation of the world, one who will continue ruling after this world has passed away (Ephesians 1:4–10; Revelation 11:15). Trust in him.

Prayer

We thank you, Lord, that you are the great ruler of all history and all the events and affairs of humanity. We thank you for the ways in which you have again and again proven your wisdom beyond ours, that your thoughts are not our thoughts, nor your ways our ways, but that your ways are higher and better (Isaiah 55:8–9). And so, Lord, as we've considered this story of Joseph and the greater story of your Son Jesus coming to be our savior, help us to live in that story and live out the dream you have given to your people—a dream of our lives mattering, of reigning with you, and of being cherished by you as beloved sons and daughters, a dream of the world being remade and perfected. Lord, whatever happens between now and the full realization of that dream, let us be faithful. Let us trust that you are with us, that you are blessing and empowering us, and, where necessary, forgiving us and helping us to start afresh. Help anyone who needs a fresh start right now. Help them take heart and know that what matters is not what lies behind but what lies ahead because of the dream you have given. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Living the Dream

David Feddes

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Dreamers

I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. (Joel 2:28-29; see Acts 2:17-18)

Living the dream

- Great God
- Big barriers
- Small starts
- Rescuer-ruler

Great God

- Omniscient
- Omnipotent
- Communicative
- Caring
- Gracious

Big barriers

- Toxic family
- Long absence
- Slave job
- Unjust charge
- Gloomy prison

Small starts

- Obedient son
- Stellar slave
- Pure devotion
- Model prisoner
- Blessed as slave

Blessed as slave

The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered... When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did... Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. The Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph... ^[L]_{SEP}So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. (39:2-6)

Blessed in prison

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge ... the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. (39:20-23)

Rescuer ruler

- Returns from death
- Reigns over all
- Saves the doomed
- Forgives sinners
- Fulfills the dream

Living the dream

- Great God
- Big barriers
- Small starts
- Rescuer-ruler