

Digging Deeper Joseph Week 4

We jump in this week just following Joseph’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams. Joseph steps out in boldness by not just interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams but in giving him suggestions on how he should proceed. This is a very bold move for Joseph because we know from our previous week that people who fell out of favor with Pharaoh were thrown into prison – remember the chief cupbearer and the chief baker?

Genesis 41:33-36 Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, 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 plentiful years. ³⁵ And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store 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 occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine.”

What do you think lead Joseph to being so bold as to make suggestions to Pharaoh on how he should handle this situation?

I believe Joseph was able to do this because the Lord was with him. We have seen God’s providential care of Joseph through his slavery in Potiphar’s house, through his time in prison and now in working with Pharaoh. Perhaps the Lord did more than interpret the dreams for Joseph – perhaps He also shared the proposed plan. There are times the Lord wants us to step out in boldness with Him and for Him as well. Can you think of a time when you did just that? Was it praying with someone, sharing your faith or perhaps speaking the truth to someone in love? Is there an area where the Lord is calling you to be more bold?

Genesis 41:37-38 This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. ³⁸ And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?”

Isn’t it interesting that Pharaoh wanted to find someone who had the Spirit of God in him? Pharaoh worshipped pagan gods not the God of the Hebrews but he saw what Yahweh could do in Joseph interpreting his dreams. What has God done in and through you?

Just as God was with Joseph and gave him success, God’s Holy Spirit is with us and helps us to do what He calls us to do. Joseph had to rely and trust the Lord and give the interpretation the Lord gave him. It is like our dependence upon the Lord -look at what Jesus says about us abiding in Him.

John 15:4-5 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. If you think about a vine and a branch – the branch is totally dependent upon the vine for survival. If the branch breaks off or is no longer connected to the vine then it dies. The same is true for us spiritually. We must be connected to the Lord in order to live spiritually. The purpose of the branch is to bear fruit and our purpose is to bear fruit also – the fruit of the Spirit but we cannot do it if we are not connected to the vine – to Jesus.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control...

What areas of your life are you bearing fruit? What area(s) of your life are you struggling to bear fruit – health concerns, financial, relationships? Ask the Lord to show you any area where you are disconnected from the vine – from Jesus. Ask Him to help you reconnect.

Genesis 41:39-40 ³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. ⁴⁰ You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.”

How great for Joseph that he had experience being over a household since he had done it for Potiphar. Remember what we learned about God’s providence – nothing happens by chance. Joseph’s experience in Potiphar’s house will be put to good use running things for Pharaoh. If Joseph had not been sold into slavery he never would have had the experience in Potiphar’s house. God uses everything in our lives as an opportunity to bring glory to His name.

I look back on my own life and see how God has used training I had earlier to help me in what I did later. For example, I worked in children’s ministry, youth ministry and women’s ministry before I was ordained. Those experiences have been invaluable to me as a deacon in the church. I can relate to those who serve in each of those ministries much more fully since I served in them as well. In addition, my counseling background has been so helpful in my role not only as a deacon but also as a chaplain at a fire station. Can you think of an experience or training you had that God used later?

Genesis 41:46 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.

Remember that Joseph was 17 when he was sold into slavery. He spent 13 years between Potiphar's house and prison. We know that he was in prison at least 2 years because it was 2 years before the cupbearer remembered him. It is easy for us when we are reading through his story to think that events happened one right after another but there were a total of 13 years in between Joseph being sold into slavery and when he began serving Pharaoh. Did you realize that so much time had elapsed?

Genesis 41:50-51 ⁵¹ Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house." ⁵² The name of the second he called Ephraim, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

Joseph realized his sons came from the Lord. Both of his sons' names had meanings that represented the hardships and triumphs in his life. Do you know the meaning of your name? If you have children, were they named after someone or because their name had a particular meaning?

When the famine came, Joseph was in charge of selling the grain not only to Egyptians but everyone.

Genesis 49:57 Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth.

Since the famine was throughout the earth, it would have impacted Joseph's father and brothers..

Genesis 42:2 And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." ³ So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt.

Ten brothers went to Egypt. Joseph had 12 so which two were missing?

Genesis 42:4 But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him.

Joseph and Benjamin were both Rachel's sons. Remember how Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, – it looks like Benjamin might have replaced Joseph as the favorite.

Genesis 42:6-11 Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." ⁸ And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. ⁹ And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he

said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land." ¹⁰ They said to him, "No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. ¹¹ We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies."

What do you think it was like for Joseph to see his brothers face to face?

Do you remember what happened the last time he was with his brothers face to face?

What do you think made it easier for Joseph to recognize his brothers than it was for his brothers to recognize him? Why do you think Joseph's brothers didn't recognize him?

How is Joseph's first dream fulfilled in this scenario?

I think this moment must have been surreal for Joseph. He is face to face with his brothers and this time he is the one in power and the one making decisions. It's almost like the situation is completely reversed. What situation have you experienced that seemed to be reversed or maybe you viewed it as coming full circle?

How do his brothers describe themselves in verse 11? How is this inaccurate?

Genesis 42:12-13 He (Joseph) said to them, "No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see." ¹³ And they said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more."

How do his brother's describe themselves in this verse? How is that ironic?

Genesis 42:14-17 But Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you. You are spies. ¹⁵ By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶ Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies." ¹⁷ And he put them all together in custody for three days.

What a complete reversal here – this time Joseph’s brothers are in custody rather than Joseph – at least they are in custody together. Don’t you wish you could have been a fly on the wall and hear the conversations that the brothers might have had when they were in prison? What do you think some of those conversations might have been?

Genesis 42:18 On the third day Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God:

Don’t you think it must have been odd for them to hear a supposed Egyptian leader claiming to fear God? There were things one could expect from someone who feared Yahweh – they would expect to be treated fairly. Do you think this brought the brother’s any comfort?

Genesis 42:19 if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, ²⁰ and bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” And they did so.

This plan was a way for Joseph to ensure that he would be able to see Benjamin again. Can’t you just hear Joseph’s heart in this – wanting to see Benjamin face to face? His youngest brother and the one he may have been closest too – at least he didn’t have anything to do with selling him into slavery.

The brothers have a discussion about it.

Genesis 42:20-22 Then they said to one another, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.” ²² And Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.”

The guilt of what they had done to Joseph has come upon them full force. We learn more about what happened when they sold him into slavery than we read in the earlier account. Now we know that Joseph was distressed in his soul. That is not just a little fear or a little upset – to be distressed in your soul is to be almost to the point of despair. Can’t you just picture this exchange and the desperation in Joseph’s voice? How heartbreaking it must have been for him that they didn’t listen to his cries. Does this change the way you view that scenario? Can you picture this all happening?

Reuben speaks up and says that he told the others not to sin against Joseph. What was Reuben’s plan for Joseph when he was in the pit?

Genesis 42:23-24 They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.

While the brothers were having their discussion, they didn't realize that Joseph was not only listening but understood everything they were saying. Hearing the guilt of his brothers was overwhelming to Joseph. Sometimes when we realize how bad someone feels for wronging us it can be overwhelming to us too. Have you ever had someone express their guilt over hurting you and if so how did you respond?

Genesis 42:25 And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them.

We don't know why Joseph gave them their money back – perhaps it was to test them, perhaps it was to be kind to them but we will see that it freaked out his brothers.

Genesis 42:26-28 Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. ²⁷ And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack. ²⁸ He said to his brothers, "My money has been put back; here it is in the mouth of my sack!" At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

The brothers are very worried about finding their money returned. Perhaps Joseph did it to be kind but it was not received with kindness. Have you ever done something to be kind and it was not received with kindness – instead it was received with anger or perhaps you were accused of having ulterior motives?

The brothers were worried that they would be accused of stealing and maybe this was God's way of bringing punishment upon them for what they had done to Joseph. It is clear that the brothers are carrying quite a bit of guilt. Guilt can be a good thing – it can help us recognize our wrongdoings and prevent us from repeating it. Guilt can help us confess and repent. But guilt can be dangerous because it can turn into shame which is not healthy. The enemy wants us to live and marinate in our guilt to the point of shame. Healthy guilt motivates us to confess and repent where unhealthy guilt turns to shame and leads to despair. Healthy guilt moves you forward and towards God and unhealthy guilt or shame paralyzes you.

Are you experiencing guilt? Is it healthy or unhealthy? Is it driving you closer to God by confessing or repenting or is it paralyzing you or drawing you away from the Lord in fear and shame?

The brothers return home and tell their father all that has happened and Jacob responds.

Genesis 42:36 And Jacob their father said to them, “You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me.”

Poor Jacob. He is once again overwhelmed by the actions of his sons. He has already lost Joseph, Simeon is being held in Egypt and now they want to take his precious Benjamin.

Genesis 42:37-38 Then Reuben said to his father, “Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you.”³⁸ But he said, “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol.”

Because Jacob lost Joseph when he was sent to check on his brothers, he has no interest in sending Benjamin on a journey where he may not return. His fear is making him cling tightly to Benjamin. Our fear can makes us cling to things as well. What do you cling to when you are fearful?

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

We will pick up next week and see what Jacob ends up doing and if his fear gets the best of him.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your Word and the Holy Spirit to help teach and guide us. We are so thankful that we can turn to You when we are fearful and that we don't have to cling to earthly things. Your love casts out fear and we choose today to love You and allow You to cast out our fears. We love You Lord, Amen.