

Joseph: The Good Cows Have a Job

Genesis 37-50

Students, tonight we come to Joseph, and I think Joseph is one of those people in Scripture that almost everybody connects with because his story feels incredibly human. Joseph is not standing on the mountaintop the whole story with everything going right. Joseph knows what it feels like to be hurt. He knows what it feels like to be betrayed. He knows what it feels like to be misunderstood. He knows what it feels like to be forgotten. He knows what it feels like when the people who should love you become the source of your pain.

And honestly, some of us already know what that feels like.

Maybe not getting sold into slavery by our siblings, but some of us know what it feels like when friendships fall apart. Some of us know what it feels like to be left out. Some of us know what it feels like when family gets messy. Some of us know what it feels like when people say things that stick with us longer than they should. Some of us know what it feels like to wonder if we matter, if we belong, if anybody actually sees us.

Joseph's story is not just about a guy with a coat. Joseph's story is about identity, wounds, forgiveness, and what kind of people we become after life hurts us.

Before we jump into the heart of the story, let me give the overview because Joseph's story is a huge section of Genesis. We are talking Genesis 37 through Genesis 50. Moses slows way down here because Joseph is moving the story somewhere important. Joseph becomes the bridge that carries God's people into Egypt and prepares the way for Exodus. Genesis is basically standing up and saying, "Pay attention. This matters."

Joseph comes from a family that is honestly kind of a mess. Jacob has multiple wives. There is jealousy, comparison, favoritism, competition, all of it. Jacob loves Rachel more than Leah, and Joseph is Rachel's first son.

Then Jacob gives Joseph the coat.

But remember, the coat is not just a coat.

We think of it like Joseph got the expensive version while the brothers got hand-me-downs. But the coat means something deeper.

The coat is identity.

The coat is Jacob saying, "This is the one."

In Hebrew thought this connects to the *bekhor*, the firstborn. The firstborn carried the mission and values of the family. If you wanted to know what a family stood for, you looked at the firstborn son.

But Joseph is number eleven.

He is not first.

Yet Jacob places the mantle on him anyway.

And the brothers hate him for it.

I think there is something here students need to hear because comparison is everywhere now. Joseph's brothers spend all their time looking at Joseph's coat. Looking at his favor. Looking at his dreams. Looking at what he has.

And we do the same thing. We spend all day looking at everybody else's coat. Their followers. Their relationships. Their friend group. Their success. Their image. Their life.

Comparison starts whispering lies. "Why not me?" "Why them?" "Why do they get that?"

The brothers never ask, "What is God doing in my story?" They only ask, "Why is Joseph getting this?"

Comparison still does that today. It pulls our eyes off what God is doing in us and places them on everybody else.

Then Joseph starts having dreams. In one dream the brothers bow to him. In another dream the whole family bows to him. Joseph tells everybody.

Now if your goal is making friends, this is probably not the strategy.

Imagine showing up at school tomorrow and saying, “Hey everybody, God showed me all of you serving me someday.”

That would not go great.

The brothers already have jealousy. The dreams just push everything over the edge.

Genesis 37 becomes the turning point.

Joseph goes to check on his brothers.

They see him coming and say, “Here comes that dreamer.”

And they throw him into a pit.

Eventually they sell him.

And here is where I really want us to slow down because they do not just take Joseph’s coat.

They take his identity.

They reject him.

They remove him from the family.

It is almost like they are saying, “You are not one of us anymore.”

That is a deep wound because every one of us wants belonging.

Every one of us wants somebody to choose us.

Every one of us wants to know we matter.

I think one of the hardest parts of being a teenager is trying to answer identity questions.

Who am I? Where do I belong? Why do I matter?

And the world is more than happy to answer.

The world says your identity comes from performance.

Popularity. Relationships. Achievements. Attention.

But Joseph loses all of that. The coat is gone. Home is gone. Family is gone. Position is gone. Everything that said who he was gets stripped away.

And yet God never leaves him. Which means Joseph's identity was never really in the coat.

Students, hear me. If somebody can take it from you, it was never your identity. Sports can end. Grades change. Relationships break. Popularity fades. But being loved by God cannot be taken.

After Joseph is sold into Egypt, the story keeps repeating this phrase over and over again: *"The Lord was with Joseph."* And I think that matters because Joseph's circumstances keep getting worse while God's presence stays the same. Joseph goes to Potiphar's house and rises to the top. Potiphar trusts him with everything. Joseph is faithful. Joseph works hard. Joseph honors God. Then Potiphar's wife comes after him. Joseph refuses. She grabs his garment, Joseph runs, and the garment gets left behind.

Now slow down because the robe theme shows up again.

Joseph's brothers already stripped him once. They took the special robe, the robe connected to identity and belonging. Now another garment gets taken from him. The first robe was used to deceive Jacob. This garment is used to deceive Potiphar. Joseph keeps losing robes. He keeps losing identity markers. He keeps losing the things that seem to tell him who he is.

And honestly, students, life can feel like that sometimes. It feels like every season strips something away. You lose a friendship and suddenly you

wonder who you are without that person. A relationship ends and it feels like part of your identity left with it. You leave middle school for high school. You graduate. You move. Sports end. Seasons change. Things get stripped away and you start asking, “Who am I now?”

Joseph loses another garment and gets thrown into prison.

And even there, God is with him.

That wrecked me this week because I think we assume if God is with us then life gets easier. Joseph’s life does not get easier. God’s presence does not remove Joseph from hardship. God’s presence sustains Joseph through hardship. Joseph keeps getting knocked down and yet every time God keeps raising him back up. Potiphar’s house. Prison. Pharaoh’s court. God never leaves.

Then Pharaoh has the dream. Seven beautiful cows come out of the Nile, followed by seven ugly cows. The ugly cows swallow the beautiful cows, but afterward they still look hungry. They still look empty. And I could not stop thinking about that because that is exactly what the world does.

The world promises fulfillment, but it never satisfies.

It says more followers will do it. More attention. More popularity. More success. More approval. More achievement. And people spend their whole lives swallowing more and more and more, and afterward they still feel empty.

The ugly cows consume everything and stay hungry.

Pharaoh brings Joseph up out of the pit and Joseph interprets the dream. Seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine. Then Joseph gives Pharaoh the plan. Store grain. Prepare during abundance. Preserve life during the famine.

Pharaoh is amazed, and then something incredible happens. Pharaoh gives Joseph robes. He gives him a ring. He gives him jewelry. He gives him a new name. He gives him a wife.

Slow down and think about that.

Who does those things?

A father does.

Pharaoh starts acting like a father toward Joseph. It is almost as if Pharaoh is saying, “Everything they took from you, I will restore. You lost belonging? I will give belonging. You lost identity? I will give identity. You lost family? I will give family.”

Everything taken in the pit starts getting restored in Egypt.

And now Joseph has a decision to make.

Who is his father now?

Students, I do not think that question belongs only to Joseph. I think it belongs to us too. Because the world still offers robes. It still says, “Let me define you. Let me tell you who you are. Let me give you value. Let me give you identity.”

Egypt still hands out robes.

The question is whether Pharaoh gets the final word.

Then I think God speaks directly into Joseph’s wounds through the dream itself. The descriptions of the beautiful cows echo Rachel. The descriptions of the ugly cows echo Leah. Seven and seven. Joseph’s whole family story is suddenly replaying in front of him. The beautiful are swallowed by the ugly, and Joseph has to be thinking, “That is my life. My brothers swallowed me. My future disappeared. My story got swallowed.”

But then comes the turn.

How do people survive year three of the famine? How do they make it to year six? How do they live through year seven?

Because of the good years.

The good years preserved life. The good cows had a job. And I think God is speaking directly to Joseph. “Joseph, your pain still has purpose.” “Joseph, your story still matters.” “Joseph, you are not forgotten.”

Students, maybe somebody needs to hear that tonight.

The pit is real. The wound is real. The betrayal is real. But it is not wasted.

Then comes the moment everything has been building toward.

Joseph's brothers come to Egypt. The same brothers who threw him in the pit. The same brothers who sold him. The same brothers who let their father think he was dead. Now they stand before Joseph powerless. Think about that moment.

Joseph has every reason to get revenge. Nobody would blame him. He could crush them. He could make them hurt. He could become bitter. And honestly, hurt people usually hurt people.

But Joseph chooses something different. Eventually he reveals himself. "I am Joseph." Can you imagine that moment?

The dreamer is alive. The brother they threw away is standing over them with all the power. Then Joseph says this incredible line:

"God sent me ahead of you to preserve life."

Joseph realizes his calling was never revenge. It was blessing. It was restoration. It was preserving life.

Students, forgiveness is hard because it feels unfair. It feels like letting people off the hook.

Joseph never says what they did was okay.

Genesis 50 says, ***"You intended evil against me."***

He calls it evil. He names the wound. But then he says, ***"God intended it for good."***

Forgiveness is not calling evil good. Forgiveness is refusing to let the wound become your identity. Forgiveness is saying, "I refuse to become what hurt me."

And maybe that is one of the strongest things a follower of Jesus can say. You hurt me. But I will not become you.

And in that moment Joseph redeems the story of Jacob. Jacob grasped. Joseph gives. Jacob fought for blessing. Joseph becomes a blessing. Jacob used position to gain. Joseph uses position to save. And Joseph becomes what the *bekhor* was always supposed to be.

He reflects the Father.

Students, this is our calling too. Romans says we are sons and daughters of God. We carry His name now. We represent Him.

So what story is your life telling? When people hurt you, what story are you telling? When life gets hard, what story are you telling?

Because Egypt still offers identity.

The world still says, "Let me define you." Followers. Popularity. Achievements. Relationships. Egypt still hands out robes. But Pharaoh does not get the final word.

The Father does.

And I love how Joseph points us to Jesus. Because Jesus lives Joseph's story. Jesus is the beloved Son. Jesus is rejected. Jesus is stripped. Jesus is handed over. Jesus goes down into death.

And then He rises.

Only Jesus preserves more than grain. He preserves life itself. Joseph points us forward. The greater Joseph was coming. His name is Jesus.

And maybe tonight some of you still feel like you are sitting in the pit.

Listen to me.

The pit is not the end. God is not done. Joseph proves that. The cross proves that. The resurrection proves that. God tells redemption stories. The question is whether we will let Him tell one through us.

Because the good cows had a job. The blessed years had a job. The people of God have a job. We are blessed to bless. We are forgiven to forgive. We are restored to restore.

And God still wants to tell a good story with your life.

Discussion Questions

Observation / Understanding

1. Why do you think Joseph's coat mattered so much? Why were the brothers so upset by it?
2. What does the *bekhor* (firstborn) idea teach us about identity and responsibility?
3. What parallels do you see between Joseph losing his robes and the different seasons of his life?
4. Why do you think Scripture keeps repeating, "*The Lord was with Joseph*" even when Joseph was suffering?
5. What stood out to you most about Pharaoh acting almost like a father toward Joseph?
6. Why is the phrase "**The good cows had a job**" so important to the story?

Personal Reflection

7. What "coat" or identity marker do teenagers most often put their worth in today?
8. Have you ever experienced a "pit season"? What did it feel like?
9. When life gets hard, what is your first response: trust God, get bitter, isolate, blame, something else?
10. Joseph lost almost everything, yet God stayed with him. How does that challenge the way we think about suffering?
11. Where do you think students today most commonly look for identity instead of God?
12. Have you ever felt like Joseph, where part of your identity was "taken away" (friendship, sport, relationship, reputation, etc.)?

Deeper / Heart Questions

13. Pharaoh offered Joseph identity, belonging, status, and family. What are some “robes” the world offers students today?
14. The sermon asked, “**Who is your father now?**” In other words: *Who gets the final word over who you are?* How would you answer that?
15. Joseph refused to become what hurt him. Why is that difficult?
16. Is there someone you need to forgive, or at least begin praying about forgiving?
17. Joseph said, “*You intended evil against me; God intended it for good.*” How can God redeem pain without calling evil “good”?
18. What might God be preparing in your life right now that you do not understand yet?
- 19.