

The Law of Repetition

Genesis 41

INTRODUCTION: Two weeks ago, when we began this section of Genesis, looking at the life of Joseph, we introduced the Law of Proportion. One fourth of the entire book is dedicated to the life of this one man. A man whom many have described as the most Christlike man in the Old Testament. More space is given to Joseph than to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Issac, or Jacob. That in itself is highly significant. It is to say that what happens to Joseph is pivotal in the story of redemption. That is the ***Law of Proportion***.

Another aspect of bible study to be familiar with is the ***Law of Repetition***. ***The Law of Repetition states that repetition in the text acts as a tool for reinforcement, ensures doctrinal accuracy, and emphasizes the importance of God's Word through multiple witnesses or reiterations.***

The languages of antiquity did not have punctuation or markup as modern languages do. Rather, ancient writers would make their points through repetition.

For example, you will read in a straightforward sense in examples like “verily, verily, I say unto thee” or “truly, truly, I say to you” in the New Testament. We see the Angels crying to one another, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts”.

But you will also notice repetition woven through the broader narrative. Such is the case in today's text. You see it with ITEMS -

- Joseph receives a multi-colored tunic in Genesis 37. Then it is torn away from him as his brothers cast him into a pit.
- Another tunic is placed on him by Potipher, then it is torn away by Potipher's wife as he flees temptation.

The Law of Repetition. We also see the Law of Repetition at work in phrases throughout this narrative. As you read the story, watch for the law of repetition.

CONTEXT: Remember, at an early age, Joseph was given revelatory dreams of a marvelous future. His father had shown him favor and bestowed upon him this multicolored tunic. But his brothers were highly opposed to God's revealed plan and sought to end the dream by ending the dreamer. They sold him into slavery and reported to Jacob that he had been killed by wild animals.

From there, Ismaelite Traders sold him in Egypt to Potipher, a man of great authority in Egypt who reported directly to the Pharaoh himself.

Joseph was a handsome man, and Potipher's wife became obsessed with him, ultimately creating the perfect storm of temptation. Yet, Joseph was faithful and fled youthful lusts.

Potipher's wife took hold of his tunic and tore it from him as he was fleeing, then proceeded to accuse this righteous man of forcing himself upon her.

TEXT: Genesis 39:19–20 (ESV)

¹⁹ As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, “This is the way your servant treated me,” his anger was kindled. ²⁰ And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison.

Notice that he isn't thrown into just any prison - he is placed where the King's prisoners were confined. These were prisoners of state. In other words, these are the guys who are forced into hard labor; this is corporate prison. The fact that Joseph was not put to death but rather incarcerated, and not simply incarcerated but placed in a preferred prison, indicated that Potipher likely didn't believe his wife's accusation. He was no fool. He knew how she was. BUT the old saying is true: “happy wife, happy life.” In this particular prison, Joseph would encounter men of great rank and success. Yet, he would excel them all.

Genesis 39:21–22 (ESV)

²¹ But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²² And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it.

Now, Joseph is assistant to the Warden - think of **Andy Dufree** from Shawshank Redemption slowly growing in stature and favor with his supervisors.

Then one day, two new prisoners were processed into the prison. They were on the King's personal staff - his Baker and his Cup Bearer. Both were significant positions in a Kingdom. You see, the Pharaoh lived in constant fear of assassination, and if you wanted to assassinate a Pharaoh, you would typically do so by poison. So these two men were held to an extremely high standard. We see in the book of Nehemiah that it was bad to even be unhappy in the King's presence. It made you look suspicious. Whatever the reason, they are thrown into prison under the oversight of Joseph. Then one night, both the Baker and the Cupbearer received a Revelatory Dream about their future.

Genesis 40:5–8 (ESV)

⁵ And one night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own interpretation. ⁶ When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh’s officers who were with him in custody in his master’s house, “Why are your faces downcast today?” ⁸ They said to him, “We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them.” And Joseph said to them, “Do not

interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me."

The Cupbearer's Dream (40:9–15) The cupbearer goes first. He dreamed of a vine with three branches that budded, blossomed, and produced ripe grapes. He squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed it in Pharaoh's hand. Joseph interprets it: the three branches are three days. Within three days, Pharaoh will restore the cupbearer to his position. Then Joseph makes a personal plea — "Remember me when it is well with you. Mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house." He explains he was stolen from the land of the Hebrews and has done nothing to deserve the pit he's in.

The Baker's Dream (40:16–19) Encouraged by the good interpretation, the baker shares his dream: three baskets of bread on his head, with birds eating from the top basket. The interpretation is grim. The three baskets are also three days, but in three days Pharaoh will lift the baker's head *from him* — he will be executed and hung on a tree, and the birds will eat his flesh. Same number, same timeframe, opposite outcomes.

The Fulfillment and the Forgetting (40:20–23) Three days later, on Pharaoh's birthday, everything happens exactly as Joseph said. The cupbearer is restored. The baker is executed. But the chapter closes with one devastating line: "Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him."

Pharaoh's Dream - Two full years after the cupbearer forgot him, Pharaoh had two disturbing dreams — seven fat cows eaten by seven thin cows, and seven good ears of grain swallowed by seven blighted ones. None of Egypt's wise men can explain them. That's when the cupbearer finally remembers Joseph.

Joseph is cleaned up and brought before Pharaoh. Right away, he makes clear: "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer." The two dreams carry one message — seven years of incredible abundance are coming, followed by seven years of devastating famine.

Joseph not only interprets, but also advises Pharaoh to appoint someone to store up grain during the good years so Egypt survives the bad ones.

Promotion - Pharaoh is so impressed he gives Joseph the job. In one day, Joseph goes from prisoner to second-in-command over all of Egypt — a signet ring, fine linen, a gold chain, a new name, and an Egyptian wife. *He's 30 years old, thirteen years removed from the pit his brothers threw him in.*

Joseph spends the next seven years stockpiling grain. During this time he has two sons: Manasseh ("God made me forget my hardship") and Ephraim ("God made me fruitful in my affliction") — names that reveal a heart of gratitude, not bitterness.

When the famine hits, it strikes everywhere — not just Egypt. But Egypt is prepared because of Joseph.

NOW, back to the law of Repetition, what are the words that come up again and again in this narrative? I see three - *With, Remember, and Favor. Understanding those words will be the key to interpreting this passage and applying it to our lives.*

The first is in **Genesis 39:2**

1. With

Genesis 39:2 (ESV)

² The Lord was **with** Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

ILLUSTRATION: I remember, as a young boy, hearing people pray for missionaries; they would pray, “Lord, be with them.” I remember thinking as a little boy, why do you keep asking God for that? Didn’t you say that God is everywhere? That the whole Universe cannot contain the Almighty? Did you say that He promised to “never leave us nor forsake us”? If that is the case, why do you constantly ask God to be with someone? Or what about the Old Greeting - “God be with you”. If God is everywhere, how can He not be with us?

Well, I have come to understand that what is being inferred in that greeting is what theologians call “***the Covenantal Presence***”. You see, there is a sense in which God is everywhere.

David declared in Psalm 139:7–8 (ESV)

⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

Yet, while God is everywhere, God is not everywhere in the same sense. The Covenantal Presence of God is God’s tendency to manifest Himself to or with a particular person, or group of people, in order to accomplish His Divine will.

That is what Moses suggests when he writes, “God was with Joseph.” That is what the Patriarchs of my church were praying for the missionaries. That is what is being wished for when someone sends you away with “God be with you”.

Five times in Genesis, we read that “God was with Joseph.”

- **Genesis 39:2** — ***"The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master."***
- **Genesis 39:3** — ***"His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands."***
- **Genesis 39:21** — ***"But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison."***

- **Genesis 39:23** — "The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because **the LORD was with him**. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed."
- **Genesis 48:21** — (Jacob to Joseph) "Then Israel said to Joseph, 'Behold, I am about to die, **but God will be with you** and will bring you again to the land of your fathers.'"

In the New Testament, in the book of Acts, when Stephen is making his defence, he declares in, **Acts 7:9 (ESV)** ⁹ "And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; **but God was with him**

This is a good time for us to pause and ask, "Is God with you"? Friend, that may be the most important question you are asked all day.

We live in a culture that believes in the doctrine **Haddon Robinson** calls "Sola Bootstrapa"-pull yourself up by your bootstraps and give it the old college try. If it's to be, it's up to me.

Yet, scripture declares over and over again that the Christian life must be lived UPSIDE down. According to Jesus, everything we have ever been told about getting ahead in this world is wrong.

- THE WORLD SAYS Believe in yourself, JESUS SAYS believe in me
- THE WORLD SAYS Strive to be number one, JESUS SAYS the last shall be first and the first last
- THE WORLD SAYS Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing. JESUS SAYS he who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it
- THE WORLD SAYS Don't get mad, get even, JESUS SAYS Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you
- THE WORLD SAYS Stand up for your rights, JESUS SAYS Lay down your life
- THE WORLD TEACHES US to assert ourselves, JESUS TEACHES US TO deny ourselves

You see, it matters not what degrees hang upon your wall, or the letters that follow your name; it matters not if you are wealthy or attractive. The only thing that matters in your life is whether or not GOD IS WITH YOU.

God was with Joseph. This did not mean that life was easy. In fact, it often meant quite the opposite. But it meant that God was Sovereignly ordering both the good days and the bad days in Joseph's life to further His Divine purpose of Redemption.

Another word we see repeated over and over is the word "Remember".

2. Remember

Genesis 40:14 — Joseph's plea to be remembered: "Only **remember me**, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house."

Genesis 40:23 — The cupbearer's failure: "Yet the chief cupbearer *did not remember* Joseph, but forgot him." (The double phrasing is deliberate in the Hebrew — emphasizing the ingratitude.)

Genesis 41:9 — The cupbearer finally remembers: "Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, '*I remember* my offenses today.'" He then recounts the story of Joseph interpreting his dream in prison. It took Pharaoh's own troubling dreams to jog his memory — two full years later.

Genesis 42:9 — Joseph remembered his own dreams: "And *Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them.*" This is when his brothers bow before him in Egypt, and the dreams from his youth finally come to pass.

Like the word with, the word REMEMBERED means more than it seems at face value.

We saw in **Genesis 8:1 (ESV)** ¹ But *God remembered Noah* and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided.

That does not mean that Noah had slipped the Lord's mind, and suddenly something jogged His memory. Scripture tells us that God is OMNISCIENT. That is, God knows all things, at all times. He doesn't forget in that sense.

Sometimes we will celebrate the fact that when we repent and forsake our sins, we are told, **Hebrews 8:12 (ESV)** ¹² For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

That does not mean that God will not recall that we committed those sins. It means that God will not hold us responsible for those sins, the way he would if we did not repent.

You see, some sins are recorded in the eternal word of God. God cannot forget what David did with Bathsheba. But God does not remember David's sin against him.

In the same way, when we read that "*God remembers Joseph*," it means that God intentionally engages the life of Joseph for Divine Purposes.

This is a good time for us to pause and ask, not only Is God with you?, but has God remembered you? Has God engaged your life circumstances for His Divine purpose?

Is your story about far more than your story? Is the sum total of your life the pursuit of your own happiness and pleasure? Or have you been activated by the Almighty for something more? I think that could be happening for some of you today.

Joseph was ACTIVATED for Divine Purpose. Sometimes, when it seemed as though it could get no worse, God ACTIVATED Joseph.

- He is sold into slavery - God activated Joseph.
- He is thrown into prison - God activated Joseph.

ILLUSTRATION: On the first Lord's day of each month, we celebrate communion "in Remembrance of Him". What does that mean? It means that we recalibrate our story around the story of the Cross. We remember that the cross and empty tomb is the epicenter of all of life.

ILLUSTRATION: This is one of the reasons we practice the discipline of tithing. It is an act of remembrance. The 10% reminds us that God owns 100%. And let's be honest - some of us want God to remember us, but we never remember the tithe.

Perhaps today you are discovering that there must be more to life. There must be some greater purpose, some eternal cause, friend that could be a sign God is activating you.

The word WITH, the word REMEMBERED, the third word is

3. Favored

Genesis 39:4 — Favor with Potiphar: "So Joseph *found favor* in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had."

- Joseph found favor with his father, Jacob
- Joseph found favor with God, who gave him two prophetic dreams
- Joseph found favor with Potiphar as he was promoted among the Servants
- Joseph found favor with the Prison Keeper, as he was made assistant to the warden
- Joseph found favor with his fellow inmates as he was able to interpret their dreams
- Joseph found favor with Pharaoh in being exalted to the Prime Minister of Egypt

We tend to focus on everyone who didn't favor us. Joseph's brothers didn't favor him, and that haunted Joseph. But by the end of the story, *the people who did favor Joseph would enable him to transcend those who did not favor him.*

But it takes time for FAVOR to manifest.

ILLUSTRATION: You get on social media, and you see celebrity Christians, rock stars, influencers, and maybe if you search long and hard enough, you'll see a post reminding us to "pray for the missionaries". Almost without fail, the guy on the Cover will be out of ministry or in jail within a few months. Meanwhile, an army of faceless servants is operating under God's favor in difficult places.

Favor does not equal popularity. Favor does not equal fame. Favor at times is incredibly difficult. But it means that what is taking place is done by God's power and not by man's.

With, Remember, and Favor - we see these words not only powerfully at work in Joseph's life, but we see it again and again throughout the canon of scripture. Let me show you another example:

ILLUSTRATION: MARY, Mother of Jesus -

Luke 1:26–28 (ESV)

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O ***favored*** one, the Lord is ***with*** you!"

Then what does she say in the Magnificant? Luke 1:48 (ESV)

⁴⁸ for he has looked on (***Remembered***) the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

God was WITH Mary, God FAVORED Mary, God REMEMBERED Mary - and she was used as the Earthly vessel that welcomed our Savior into this world. Those three words were key for Joseph, they were key for Mary, and they will be key for you.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: Maybe today God is activating you — just like He activated Joseph. Maybe that restlessness you feel, that sense that there has to be more to life than what you've been chasing, maybe that's the Holy Spirit doing exactly what He did in Joseph's life in yours.

I have found that God invites us to be WITH Him, to FAVOR Him, to REMEMBER Him before He is With Us, Favoring Us, or Remembering Us.

In other words, God invites and reciprocates. **James 4:8 (ESV) says it this way -**

⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

- If you want GOD to be with you - perhaps during this invitation, you need to be with Him. If He leads you to make a decision, are you willing to go with Him?
- If you want GOD to Favor You, perhaps you need to favor Him. But quick to respond, quick to obey.
- If you want God to remember you for good - perhaps you should remember Him for God at this time.