



## WEEK 2 – Joseph THE DREAMER

### CHECK-IN

**How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... do you have weird or recurring dreams? Maybe you're back in high school giving a presentation and you're suddenly not wearing pants. How about the one where you're being chased but can't run? Maybe you're queen of the world and don't want to wake up, cuz, well, who wouldn't want that?**

### OPENING PRAYER

**Patient God, remind us to praise you in the good times as well as the bad.**

### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to week 2 of our series, "Mike'd Up," where you're just getting three of my favorite stories in the Bible. Last week, we looked at parable of Jesus, the Prodigal Son, which gave us perhaps the best

summary of the good news of Jesus Christ. No matter how far we run, no matter what trouble we find ourselves in, God is always waiting there with open arms to welcome us home. It also reminded us that there might be folks in our lives who are struggling, for whom we need to be a guide to show them the road back to God. Today, we'll back up a thousand years and look at a different story, and a guy who figures out how to see God in both the good times and the bad. His name was Joseph.

**Review Question: Today's story is told in the musical, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. Are you familiar? What are your thoughts? Do you have a favorite musical?**

## SCRIPTURE

We find Joseph's story in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. For a full recap of his life, go back and watch the reflection from Sunday's worship. But for now, here's your summary. Joseph was his father's favorite son. As a teenager, interpreted a dream of his own to mean that his brothers would one day worship him. In a less-than-intelligent move, he tells his brothers about this dream. So, they sell him into slavery in Egypt. (A bit of an overreaction, I feel.) Fast forward a number of years and he finds himself in prison with two members of the Pharaoh's court, who ask him to interpret their dreams. When he accurately predicts what they mean, news of his ability makes it to Pharaoh who is having troubling dreams himself. This is where our Scripture picks up.

## **Read Genesis, chapter 41, verses 14 through 16.**

Joseph interprets the Pharaoh's dreams to mean that Egypt would have 7 years of abundance followed by 7 years of famine. (It's much better told in musical form by Andrew Lloyd Webber, but alas, here we are.) The Pharaoh puts him in charge of managing the country's storehouses for foreseeable future. Joseph saves enough grain over the 7 years of abundance to get Egypt through the famine. But for him, he maintains his relationship with God through it all.

**Question 1: Consider this story. How would you have felt were you Joseph? Could you have been as optimistic as he was through the difficult times? Does anything else stand out to you about this story?**

## **REFLECTION**

Joseph has gone through serious ups and downs. He's his dad's favorite, but then gets sold into slavery. He becomes the head of a slave owner's household, but gets thrown in prison. He rises to 2<sup>nd</sup> in command of all of Egypt with 7 years of bumper crops, then gets hit with 7 years of famine. And so, it got me thinking, when things are going well, do I remember God's faithfulness? Do I do things now in the good times, to get me through the bad times? If I were Joseph, and I just nailed this job interview, would I have credited God, or credited myself and then been completely unprepared when the famine hits? I tend to be the kind where, when things are bad, I pray for God's guidance and direction and mercy. I lean into my faith hard.

But, I have a tendency, when things are going good, when my storehouses are full, and life is just chugging along... to put God up on the shelf, and give the credit to Mike. And so the question becomes, and what I want to talk about today is... what can we do while things are good to keep God off the shelf, and that will help prepare us for when things go bad.

**Question 2: We talk about this tendency occasionally, but it bears revisiting. There seem to be two types of Christians, 1) those whose faith is stronger when life is going well with a tendency to run from God when things go bad, and 2) those who find their reliance on God when things are desperate, but put God on the shelf when things are good. Which are you? Are you the kind of person who leans into your faith when things are going well or when things are going poorly?**

Joseph has learned the secret to maintain your faith through both. And what we learn from Joseph in this scene about how to do that is apparent... a little intentional prep when things are good, can get you through when things are bad. And in this scene, we get two practical ways that I think can help us do that. The first happens soon after Joseph is made "Vice-Pharaoh," in the midst of the good years. He gets married, has a couple kids and names one Manasseh, which means, "God has let me forget all my troubles and my family back home." And the other he names, Ephraim, which means, "God has made me a success in the land where I suffered." (Aren't you glad we don't name kids like that? How hard would it be to yell at them? By

the time you got to the end of the name you'd forget why they were in trouble.) Point is, even in the midst of his success, he still thanks God, to the point of *naming his children* such that he will remember God's faithfulness every time he sees them. *That's* devotion. Through his darkest struggles, but also in his greatest triumphs, he remembers God's faithfulness. So the first thing we can do in the good times, that will help us maintain our relationship with God and that will prepare us for the tough times... is *gratitude*. It's something Joseph does on a regular basis, Joseph is so thankful for God's faithfulness, he names his kids for it. When Pharaoh asks him, "can you interpret my dreams?" he says, "no, but God can." How many of us would have done that? And so, when things are good... put effort into gratitude, look for God's presence in every situation, even in the normal, day-to-day. Because, when you build the habit in the good times, you've already built up the muscle memory to do it in the bad times. And it will help get you through. Start a habit of gratitude now. Keep a gratitude journal... every night, or every morning, write (or heck, just say out loud,) 5 things you're thankful for that day. When you start to do this, not only does it help you see the blessings you have in life, it helps you start looking for them, and see more of them, on a regular basis. Build that habit now, so when things go bad, you have this practice to sustain you in the tough times.

**Question 2: First, do you have a gratitude practice? Maybe you keep a journal, or simply take the time every night to identify a few things for which you are grateful. If not, what would be a practice that could work for you. Second, go ahead and do it now, identify a few**

**things for which you are thankful today. And get specific... (not just “family, friends, life,”) because when you get specific you begin to see God’s hand in your life in the day-to-day.**

There’s one more thing Joseph does that I think helps keep God off the shelf, and preps us for the famine in our lives. What is necessary for Egypt to get through the 7 years of famine? They have to save some during the good years. Joseph has crops from all over Egypt stored up in reserve, for the years of famine. They have to sacrifice a little bit now, in order to have enough later. So, one thing that can help us in the good times is to do some *fasting*... to build a practice of *going without* now, so that when we’re forced into it, life ain’t that bad. So, think about the area of life that occasionally makes your life difficult, and then think about something you can fast from now, to make that easier later. For example, if financial issues are a periodic “famine time” for you, ask yourself, what can you fast from now or when things are good, so that the next time you hit financial famine, it’s not as bad? “Maybe I can go out to eat one time less per week, and put that \$20 into a savings account for rainy day.” Or, if anxiety and overwhelm is a regular stressor for you, build in a time of fasting from devices or social media, so that when the peace-famine hits, it’s a natural thing to take a media break to reset. So, think about the thing that regularly makes your life difficult, and consider now a way to fast, such that when you hit the famine, you’re better prepared.

**Question 3: Go ahead and spend a few moments in silence to do this very exercise. First, identify the topic or area of your life that causes**

**you periods of stress or anxiety. Then, given that area of your life, what might be a good way to prepare for it now, when things are good?**

## **CLOSING**

So, there you go, two ways we can prepare in the abundance time, so that we can keep God off the shelf, and also prepare ourselves for the scarcity time... (without having to rename your kids.) Build in the practices of gratitude and fasting now, while things are good, so that they might sustain you when things get tough.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations  
and close in prayer.**