

Joseph

The Dream of a Servant Leader

By Jon Byler

The following is a compilation of a biweekly email newsletter series about Joseph. These “Reflections for Servant Leaders” were written for servant leaders around the world to learn from the life of Joseph. The issue number and date used are the dates for the original publication.

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Joseph: The Birth of a Dreamer

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The story of Joseph's life in the final 14 chapters of Genesis gives us more details than almost any other biblical figure. Joseph was certainly not perfect but his story is one of very few that contains no major character flaws or failures. All of us can learn many lessons from his life about work, temptation, perseverance, faith, patience and forgiveness. In this series we will focus on what we can learn from the dreams that are a central part of his story. His own dream is the central focus but the dreams of the butler, baker, and finally the dream of Pharaoh are also key parts of his story. A dream is a vision for the future and all servant leaders learn from Joseph's story how dreams grow and develop over time. Let's look first at the birth of Joseph, the dreamer. *Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." She named him Joseph, and said, "May the LORD add to me another son."* (Genesis 30:22-24). The account of Joseph's birth provides the background for the dreams that he would later have as a young man.

Dreamers are birthed with a background. Joseph was born into a specific family context. He was the 11th son of his father Jacob, born to Rachel, the most loved of Jacob's two wives. His name meant "may he add." This was his identity from birth and the background of the dreams God would give him. There is never a dream without a dreamer and every dreamer comes from a different place. Joseph's dream involved his family and was birthed in the context of who he was. Like Joseph, each of us has a unique family, cultural, economic and religious background. God creates us all with a unique capacity to dream. But sadly, many people never have a dream. Joseph's 11 brothers never had a dream. Physical birth does not always produce a dreamer! But all leadership begins with a dream and every servant leader begins their journey with a unique background.

Dreamers are shaped by their background. Joseph's background was not very nice! It is hard to imagine a family background that is worse than Joseph's. His family history includes jealousy, treachery, deception, cheating, scheming, divination, superstition, incest, idol worship, polygamy, prostitution, and murderers! His mother died when he was a young boy, so he experienced the pain of a deep loss. All these elements shaped the dream that God gave to Joseph. Servant leaders do not ignore their background; they recognize the impact that their family has on who they are and the way they lead. Their dream or vision may sometimes be unconsciously linked to their background. At other times they may be aware of the connection. But servant leaders accept their background as a gift from God and allow it to shape their dream.

Dreamers are released from their background. Joseph's family background made the living out of his dream much more difficult, but he was able to rise up and become the leader of a great nation. One of the most powerful leadership lessons from the life of Joseph is that his background did not keep him from fulfilling his God-given dream. His name became the prominent one in his family although he was nearly the youngest. Servant leaders can learn from Joseph's story that their background does not need to limit their vision. They allow God to place in their hearts dreams that may seem ridiculous when examined by their family. God uses who we are and where we come from to shape the

dream; but He never limits the dream to our background. Servant leaders dream beyond their background.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- Reflect on your personal background. In what way has your life and leadership been impacted by your family? Your siblings? Your parents? Your name? Your nationality?
- Are you a dreamer? If not, why not? If so, what is your vision for your life and leadership? How does your background shape this vision?
- Have you been released to dream beyond your background? If not, what can you learn from Joseph's life that can help you? Are there steps you need to take to be set free from your past? Who can help you move past your past?

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Joseph: The Birth of a Dream

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Joseph's dream was born when he was a young man, 17 years old. *Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: 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." 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. (Genesis 37:5-8).*

Joseph, like every leader, had a dream about the future; he could see what was going to happen. He may have thought *I'll be someone great. I'm going to be a leader and people will follow me!* A dream was born and he was excited! But when he shared it with his brothers and later a second dream with his father it did not go well. Joseph believed that communicating his dream would help others to follow but at this point in his leadership he had many things to learn.

Communicating the dream requires the right heart. It appears at this point that Joseph's dream was all about himself. He could only see his brothers bowing down to him. His dream was about himself. His heart and motives were not yet right. Many leaders have a dream but it is all about themselves and how they will benefit from the dream. Servant leaders learn that God's dreams are always about blessing others and accomplishing His purposes in their world. This happened much later for Joseph when he realized that God's purpose for the dream was not to make him great, but to save his family (Genesis 45:5).

Communicating the dream requires the right hearers. Joseph's dream involved his brothers and father so he assumed that they were the people who needed to know. He believed others would share his enthusiasm for his vision of the future. But Joseph's brothers already hated him and they could not accept the dream. Servant leaders carefully consider who should hear the dream. They are careful not to share their dream with persons who will kill it but those who will prayerfully help shape it. Servant leaders often choose to share their dream privately with a few before sharing it with others. Servant leaders focus on relationships before they share their dream.

Communicating the dream requires the right hour. Joseph had a dream and shared it quickly with his brothers but the time was not yet right. Joseph shared his dream before he had time to understand the meaning or purpose of the dream. He had not taken time to search his heart for hidden motives or to consider the impact of his dream on others. He shared the dream at a time that family relationships were already difficult and the dream made things worse. Like many leaders he learned that dreams which are shared too quickly often fail to get support from those who will follow. Servant leaders choose to wait for the right time to share the dream. They prayerfully seek God's timing and often need to wait for the right time to communicate their vision.

Joseph's dream was accurate and it was from God but he didn't do well in communicating it to others. Fortunately for him and for us God would keep working with him until the dream came to pass!

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is the purpose of my dream? Have I seen my dream in light of what it will do for me or how I can serve others through it?
- If I have not yet shared this dream with others, who are the persons with whom I should share first? Who should I *not* share with now?
- When is the right time to share my dream? Do I have the level of relationships established with others that can support the dream? If not, what can I do to strengthen those relationships?
- Have I had an experience where I shared a dream but it was not well received by others? What can I learn from Joseph's experience that can help me in the future?
- Joseph made mistakes but God continued working with him. How does this encourage me to keep moving forward and growing?

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Joseph: The Death of a Dream

Issue # 215, September 6, 2017

As a 17-year-old, it was exciting for Joseph to have a dream. He was going to be someone great and do great things! But one day as he went to visit his brothers his dream came crashing down. *But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams" (Genesis 37:18-20).* On this day everything changed dramatically in Joseph's life. He was thrown into a pit and then sold into slavery, walking through the desert with chains on his feet and an iron ring around his neck (see Psalms 105:18). He finally reached Egypt where he was sold as a slave. At this point his dream was dead. Joseph dreamed of being on top, but he ended up in a pit. He dreamed of being in charge but he ended up in slavery. He dreamed of others bowing down to him but instead, he bowed down to an Egyptian master. It seemed that within a very short time everything that could go wrong happened to Joseph. Like many leaders, Joseph needed to learn that often dreams must first die before they can be fulfilled. Servant leaders recognize that the death of a dream is often the way God uses to reveal things about the dream which would otherwise be hidden.

The death of a dream reveals the cost. Dreams are costly and often come with a high cost. Joseph likely thought as a young man that his dream would come true with little sacrifice or cost. He had no idea how many years it would take, nor the crushing and breaking that God needed to first do in his life along the way. God allowed the dream to die so that Joseph would recognize the cost. Many leaders give up when they recognize what the dream will cost. The cost may be financial, but it may also be time, comfort or reputation. The cost may be the pain of being broken or releasing control. Servant leaders allow the death of a dream to help them understand what it will cost. They take time to ask themselves hard questions as they consider if they are willing to pay the price of seeing the dream become a reality.

The death of a dream reveals the motives. The motive of a dream is often not clear at the beginning. The motive is *why* a leader has the dream. Is it to gain power or prestige? Is it to advance oneself? Is it to help and serve others? Maybe Joseph originally saw his dream as a good way to gain power or be in a high position. God allowed the death of his dream so that he would have time to examine his motives. Servant leaders allow the death of a dream to make them stop and ask, "Why do I want this dream? Is it about me or is it about others? What is really in my heart?" Then they ask God to purify their motives.

The death of a dream reveals the source. Joseph may have thought he would be able to accomplish the dream with his own strength. All we know about him as a young man is that he brought his father a bad report about his brothers. Perhaps he felt that this would bring him favor and a way to rule over them. The death of the dream revealed to Joseph that this dream was not about him and he would not do it with his own strength. God allowed the dream to die so that Joseph would recognize that He was the source and not Joseph. It would take God to bring the dream back to life. Servant leaders allow the death of a dream to help them recognize that they cannot fulfill it in their own strength.

We would all love for dreams to go from birth straight to fulfillment! But the death of the dream is God's way of revealing the cost, the motives and the source of the dream. Servant leaders accept that dreams must often die before they can be fulfilled.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- Have I experienced the death of a dream? What did I learn from the experience? What might I do differently after learning from Joseph's life?
- Do I have a current dream that has not gone through the stage of death? What do I need to consider about what it may cost? What are my true motives for the dream? Do I believe I can accomplish it on my own or am I convinced that it will take God to bring it to pass?
- Think of other biblical leaders whose vision had to die before it came to pass. Consider at least Abraham, Moses, David and even Jesus. In what way did their dream die? In what way did the death of the dream make it stronger in the end? What does this teach us about dreams?

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Joseph: The Testing of a Dream

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The 17-year-old Joseph traveled to Egypt as a slave and his dream for leadership seemed dead. The next 13 years of Joseph's life were painful and difficult. First, he was sold as a slave and served in Potiphar's house. *Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned (Genesis 39:1-4).* Then Joseph was wrongly accused of sexual assault by Potiphar's wife and was sent to prison. For several years he was a prisoner and again his hard work and integrity helped him become a leader in the prison. In some ways, his dream of being a leader began to happen, but certainly not in the way he expected.

What was God doing during all these difficult years in Joseph's life? Joseph's dream was being severely tested. God used those years of testing to develop leadership qualities in Joseph that would serve him well in the future.

Years of testing developed character. God had a lot of work to do in Joseph's heart. As he learned to serve under an Egyptian leader and later in prison, he learned submission to authority. He learned that serving under authority comes before being in authority. His status as a favorite son was gone and he learned to humbly serve others. The pride of his youthful dream was broken. During these years of testing, he faced a powerful test of sexual purity. His response revealed his character, *"How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9).* Servant leaders welcome times, even long times, of testing. They recognize that character takes years to develop but will impact their leadership for a lifetime. Testing does not make them bitter, it makes them better.

Years of testing developed knowledge. During these years of testing Joseph also gained a lot of knowledge. In Potiphar's household, he learned accounting skills and developed his ability to keep records. He developed a good knowledge of the Egyptian language and culture. He learned about himself and his own gifts and passions. Servant leaders recognize that they need to grow in knowledge. They are passionate about reading, learning and reflecting to develop the knowledge they need to lead effectively.

Years of testing developed skills. Joseph dreamed of becoming a leader to whom others would bow down. But he had a lot he needed to learn about leadership skills. These years of testing taught him many skills of leadership. As he managed Potiphar's home and the prison he learned organizational skills. He learned how to relate well with others and to be sensitive to their needs. He was slowly learning the skills he would soon need to lead a nation. Servant leaders acknowledge that leaders need skillful hands. They welcome feedback from others to identify areas they need to improve. They continually seek to become more skillful so that they can influence more people for the Kingdom of God.

Joseph did not know that these three areas, character, knowledge, and skill, are the places in which God needs to develop all servant leaders. But he allowed God to do this work in times of testing. He did not allow the testing to produce bitterness or to give up on the dream. Instead, the time of testing prepared him to be a leader.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What testing have I gone through in my own leadership journey? In what areas did I pass the test? In what areas did I not do well? What more might God need to do in my own life?
- Consider the three areas that were developed in Joseph's time of testing: character, knowledge and skill. In which of these am I strongest? In which am I weakest? How is my leadership impacted by my strengths and weaknesses in these areas?
- What is my attitude when I am faced with a time of testing? In what ways does Joseph's life and attitude during this time challenge me? (Read the full story in Genesis 39 and look for indications of Joseph's attitude towards work, authority, trials, etc.)

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Joseph: Dreaming with Others

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While in prison, it seemed like Joseph's dream would never happen. But while there, two high officials of the king of Egypt, a cupbearer and baker, were placed under his care. *The captain of the guard assigned them [the officials] to Joseph, and he attended them. After they had been in custody for some time, each of the two men-- the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison-- had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?" "We both had dreams," they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."* (Genesis 40:4-8). The two men shared their dreams with Joseph and he gave them the interpretation which came true three days later. Joseph had no way to know that God would later use the cupbearer to bring him out of prison and into the palace. God used the dreams of these two men to teach Joseph and all servant leaders about dreaming with others.

Servant leaders see the dreams of others. Joseph was simply doing his daily duties, perhaps bringing a meal to these two prisoners, when he "saw that they were dejected." Joseph had many reasons that he could have been thinking about himself. He could have been reviewing in his mind the injustice of the past 11 years since he was sold into slavery by his brothers. He could have been reflecting on how wrong it was for him to be in prison. Instead, he noticed the faces of these two men! The focus of servant leaders is on others, not themselves. They are able to see beyond their own dreams and vision to acknowledge that others also have dreams. They don't ignore their own dream but recognize that God also gives dreams to others. Serve others by seeing their dream.

Servant leaders share in the dreams of others. Many leaders say, "Listen to my dream." But remarkably Joseph said, "Tell me your dreams." Then he listened. As far as we know, Joseph never told these two men that he also had a dream. But he was willing to listen to them and to hear their dreams. Servant leaders share in the dreams of others. They give the gift of time and attention to the dreams of others. Good leaders share their dreams; servant leaders listen to the dreams of others! This is an especially valuable gift when a more seasoned leader takes time to listen to the dream of a younger leader. Serve others by listening to their dreams!

Servant leaders support the dreams of others. Joseph did not stop with listening. He went on to interpret their dreams, supporting their dreams to come to pass. God had called Joseph to be a dreamer, and although it seemed that his own dream would never happen, he shares his gift with these two officials. He learned that God wanted to use his gifts to support the dreams of others. Servant leaders are not threatened by promoting the dreams of others. They share their gifts to help others achieve their dreams. Serve others by supporting their dreams.

Joseph learned that dreaming with others is a part of God's plan for leaders. He teaches us that leaders who can't bless the dreams of others should not ask people to bless their own.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- Am I attentive to the dreams of others around me? Do I know what inspires their hearts and fuels their passion?
- Who around me has dreams that I can listen to and support? What do I need to do today to listen to them? How can the gifts God has given me be used to support the dreams of others?
- Is there a younger leader around me that I can bless by listening and supporting? When will I do this?
- Am I threatened in any way by the dreams of others? What does this say about the condition of my heart?

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Joseph: Learning Who to Trust for the Dream

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As Joseph interprets the dream of the cupbearer he sees a glimmer of hope for his own life and asks for a favor in return. *"Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon"* (Genesis 40:13-15). At last something positive seems to be happening and there is a glimmer of hope for Joseph's dream. Finally, there is someone who will soon be in a position to help him! But Joseph's hope was soon crushed. *The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him* (Genesis 40:23). Imagine Joseph's hope on the day the cupbearer left prison. He imagined the cupbearer talking to the king on his behalf and waited for a knock on the prison door. Nothing happened the first day. Joseph probably thought that the cupbearer was waiting for a good moment to tell the king about him. But then a week went by, then a month, six months, a year and finally two years! Joseph learned that he could not trust in others to accomplish his dream; he needed to trust in God. Many dreamers see someone and think, "That's the one! They have the money I need or the ideas I need to make my vision become a reality. They have the influence or the power. They will make my dream come true!" Joseph's story teaches us that servant leaders learn to trust in God, not in others, to accomplish their dream.

Servant leaders learn to trust God's program. Joseph thought something would happen soon! But for two more painful years, he waited. Nothing seemed to be happening. God often seems to operate on a different timetable than we do! His program does not seem to go according to the timing we prefer. But as the author of time, He knows what He is doing and servant leaders learn to trust His timing. All leaders long to see their dream come to pass but servant leaders learn that sometimes God's timing is not the same as theirs.

Servant leaders learn to trust God's people. Joseph thought he had identified the person that God would use to help him out but was soon disappointed. For Joseph, the cupbearer finally would help him. But first Joseph needed to learn to trust God to bring the right person and the right time together. All leaders look for people to help achieve their dream but servant leaders learn to trust God to bring the right people at the right time. They trust in God to bring the people rather than their own wisdom about who should be involved.

Servant leaders learn to trust God's processes. The dream of the cupbearer came to pass in three days but Joseph's dream took years! God had more lessons for Joseph in these two years. God wanted Joseph's trust to shift from men to Himself. He was teaching Joseph perseverance and patience, while strengthening his faith. It must have been difficult for Joseph to accept that God would use a different process for him than with the cupbearer. Through all the years that it took for Joseph's dream to come to reality, God was at work in the process and timing. Servant leaders learn to trust that God is in control of the processes He uses to accomplish the vision.

Joseph teaches all servant leaders to accept His timing and methods as better than their own wisdom. Servant leaders trust God, not others, to bring the dream to pass.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- Have I experienced frustration because my dream was not accomplished as quickly as I thought it would? What does Joseph's story teach me about God's timing?
- Who have I been focused on that I believe can help me accomplish my dream? Have I been putting my trust primarily in this person(s) or in God? What does Joseph teach me about who I am trusting?
- When my dream seems to be delayed, what does God want to teach me? In what ways have I learned the lessons and in what ways have I failed to learn? Is there any step God is inviting me to take this week to trust Him with the process?

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Joseph: A Substitute Dream

Issue #219, November 1, 2017

After 13 years of bitter disappointments everything changes for Joseph when he is called by the king to interpret another dream. In the morning he is a prisoner but by evening he's the prime minister of the most powerful nation on earth! *Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."* So Pharaoh said to Joseph, *"I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt"* (Genesis 41:39-41). Now Joseph was a "real leader" with a position, a title and power! At his word people moved! He had authority. He walked in the halls of the palace. He soon had a chariot with a driver, and a beautiful wife. This was a dream job! But for Joseph this could easily be a substitute dream. His dream was to lead his family, not Egypt. With a new identity and position Joseph could easily settle for less than God's ultimate plan for his life. He could begin to enjoy the prestige of his position, the beautiful wife and children that were a part of his life, and settle for less than the original dream. Servant leaders can learn from Joseph how to avoid substitute dreams.

Acknowledge the past. *Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household"* (Genesis 41:51). Joseph was trying to forget the pain of his past but God wanted to heal the pain from the past! Substitute dreams can cause leaders to ignore the past. They try to forget the painful times but also forget those who helped them on their journey. Servant leaders don't seek to escape the past, they look back to remember where they have come from. They find ways to thank and bless those who helped them with education or in their careers.

Appreciate the present. *The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering"* (Genesis 41:52). Joseph was able to be grateful for the gifts God gave him in the palace. He appreciated God's blessings. Servant leaders are grateful for all of God's blessings. They understand that without God's blessing, their leadership will accomplish nothing. Even when they have not yet accomplished the dream, servant leaders are filled with gratitude for the blessings God has given them.

Anticipate the future. We don't know if Joseph thought often about his dream or if it faded to the background of his life during these 7 years. It would have been easy for Joseph to conclude that leading Egypt was better than leading his family. But the reality was that God was still working to accomplish the dream. And Joseph kept working faithfully, just as he had in Potiphar's home and in the prison. Servant leaders work to keep the dream alive! They are faithful in whatever situation God allows them to serve but they always focus on the dream God has given to them, not current realities.

Many leaders settle for a substitute dream instead of God's dream. Church leaders who began with a sincere dream of helping others now use their position to benefit themselves. Business leaders or professionals who started the journey with a dream of impacting the world settle into a comfortable life focused on self. Servant leaders learn from Joseph not to settle for a substitute dream. They ask God to help them acknowledge the past; they appreciate the blessings of the present, but they always keep their eyes on where God wants to take them in the future.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- Read the entire account of this portion of Joseph's life in Genesis 41. What more do I learn from Joseph about his dream?
- In what ways might I be tempted to settle for a substitute dream? Are there ways that I have allowed the benefits and privileges of my current leadership to make me lose my focus on what God wants me to accomplish? Have I drifted slowly towards focusing on those who help me instead of those whom God called me to help?
- Have I run away from the past or forgotten the past? Who from my past hurt me that I need to forgive? Who from my past helped me that I need to thank?
- Have I been grateful for the blessings God has given to me in my current role? Have the things I currently enjoy caused me to lose sight of God's dream for my life? What needs to change?
- Am I focused on the present realities or the future? What does God have for me that is not yet a reality in my life? What can I do to keep present blessings from causing me to accept a substitute dream?

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Joseph: The Unfolding of the Dream

Issue #220, November 15, 2017

Joseph is leading at last! He's a national leader overseeing the process of collecting and storing grain during the seven years of abundance. In the evening he goes home to a wife and two sons! All seemed well. Joseph had settled for the "dream job" without accomplishing the dream. But as the years of feasting turned to famine and Joseph was in charge of selling grain, people from other nations began to arrive. And then, one day, his brothers were in the line! *Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he asked. "From the land of Canaan," they replied, "to buy food." Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected"* (Genesis 42:6-9). In a moment, as he saw his brothers bowing down, Joseph saw his dream unfolding. His father, mother and one brother were not yet included. But it was clear to Joseph at this point that there were only a few more details to be resolved before his dream from 20 years before would be a reality. But this unfolding of the dream was another time for Joseph's dream to be tested.

Unfolding dreams test focus. Joseph could see some of the dream happening but not yet all. Suddenly he needed to decide where he would focus. For more than 7 years he had focused on leading a nation and perhaps had accepted that as God's fulfillment of his dream. Could he now focus again on the dream that included his family or would he turn away from them and focus on his "dream job?" Servant leaders acknowledge that partial success is not a complete success. They learn to keep focused on the dream until it becomes a reality.

Unfolding dreams test faith. Will Joseph be able to trust God for the fulfillment of the dream? Or would he take revenge and kill his brothers along with the dream? Would he take control of the dream now that he was a seasoned leader doing great things? Or would he continue to trust God to fulfill the dream? Would he step in and 'help' God by speeding up the process? Joseph had to remember that it was God who brought him to this level and it would still take God to accomplish the dream. Those who have succeeded in leadership are always tempted to have faith in their own ability to accomplish their dream. Servant leaders put their faith in the God who gives dreams, not in themselves.

Unfolding dreams test fears. Did you ever wonder why Joseph didn't go home to visit his family during the 7 years that he was free? Maybe he was trying to forget the pain of the past and the memories of how his brothers treated him. Maybe he was afraid that his pain would be released in uncontrolled anger. But God allowed the unfolding of the dream to help him confront the pain and face his fears. Servant leaders learn that as dreams begin to unfold, God often leads them to face their deepest fears. This may be fear of failure or fear of what others may think of them. It may be fear of success and not being sure if they can handle it.

Joseph took three days to wrestle with his unfolding dream. The plan he developed showed that he passed the test. He would keep his focus, strengthen his faith, and face his fears as he waited for the complete fulfillment of his dream.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- When my dream begins to unfold, am I able to keep my eyes on the dream or have I focused elsewhere? Have I become content with seeing only a part of my dream come to pass?
- As I achieve success as a leader, am I able to keep my faith in God or do I trust my own ability to achieve my goals? In what ways am I tempted to 'help' God by speeding up the process?
- What are my greatest fears related to my dream? Is it fear of failure? Is it fear that I may not be able to handle success? How does God help me to face my fears?

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Joseph: The Fulfillment of the Dream

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The fulfillment of Joseph's dream is one of the most dramatic and emotional stories in the Bible. After their first visit, Joseph sends nine of his brothers back home and keeps one in prison. Joseph's father does not want them to return to Egypt but the famine finally forces action. They return to Egypt with Joseph's brother Benjamin. For the first time in over 20 years, the 12 brothers are together in one room. At that moment, Joseph's first dream unfolds before his eyes! *When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground (Genesis 43:26).* I'm sure Joseph replayed the dream in his mind as he watched them bow down. For over 20 years he had worked and waited for his dream to become reality and finally it happened. But Joseph has one more test for the brothers before he can reveal to them who he is. They pass the test and finally, a few days later, Joseph can tell them who he is. *Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you (Genesis 45:3).*

Joseph's interaction with his brothers at this point reveals what God has done in his heart. His response shows us the way servant leaders respond when visions become reality.

Fulfilled dreams do not produce pride. There is not a hint of pride in Joseph's remarks to his brothers. As a 17-year-old he had done nothing as a leader but shared his dream with some pride. But now he demonstrates remarkable humility although he had every reason to be proud. He was the prime minister of the nation and his brothers were bowing down to him! Many leaders become proud when they accomplish their dream and this has been their downfall. Often the greatest test of character is success. When servant leaders succeed they look inside and guard their hearts against pride.

Fulfilled dreams do not promote a person. Joseph didn't see the fulfillment of his dream as a chance to promote himself. His brothers were "terrified at his presence" but Joseph said almost nothing about his position. Instead, he focused on his brothers and their physical and emotional needs. Many leaders in a similar position would have said, "Look at who I have become! Don't you remember the dream I had 20 years ago?" Joseph did not gloat over others when his dream was fulfilled. He teaches servant leaders that success is not a reason to promote oneself but an opportunity to promote others.

Fulfilled dreams do not prevent perseverance. The original dream has come true, but Joseph recognizes that there is still work to be done. Joseph has several more years of leading a nation before his work is completed. More lives need to be saved through his leadership. The accomplishment of a dream may lead some to rest, retire, or sit and enjoy their success. Servant leaders may pause to celebrate their victory and to thank those who helped them on the journey, but after the celebration, they press on. They recognize that when God fulfills one dream, there is still more to be done so they persevere.

Joseph demonstrates that the natural human response to success is not the way for servant leaders to respond. The fulfillment of a dream is a chance for a servant leader to show humility, focus on others, and get back to work!

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- When I have succeeded in the past, how did I respond to the temptation to be proud of what was accomplished? What was the impact of that on my continued leadership?
- How do I respond to those who did not believe in my dream? Do I tell them, “I told you so!” when the dream becomes reality? Or am I able to focus on their needs and use my victory to bless them as well?
- When I achieve success, am I able to see the need to keep going and enlarge the vision? What might God be inviting me to do after my current dream is fulfilled?

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Joseph: Recognizing the Purpose of the Dream

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As Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, he showed that he finally understood the purpose for which God gave him the dream. What he understood about the purpose of his dream as a mature leader was very different from what he thought as a 17-year-old. *And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute' (Genesis 45:5-8).* Joseph understood the purpose for which God had given him a dream. It was not really about him, it was all about God. Joseph teaches servant leaders the reason God gives dreams.

Dreams are to reveal God's plan. Joseph says, *"it was not you who sent me here, but God."* Joseph looked back over the events of his life. It looked like his brothers were in control of his destiny, but he realized that it was actually God at work in his life even in the midst of painful experiences. Every dream from God is to reveal the plan God has for His people. God calls some leaders to work in the business world, in politics, in health care or in the church. God gives a dream. But the dream is not about the leader. It is to reveal God's plan in that arena of life. Servant leaders recognize that it is God who equipped and prepared them to carry out His dream. Their dream reveals God's heart and God's plan.

Dreams are to resource God's people. When Joseph was young, he imagined that the dream was about others bowing down to him. Now he acknowledges, *"it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you."* Joseph sees that God's dream was not about others meeting his needs, but it was about him meeting the needs of others. Most leaders accomplish dreams to provide for themselves but servant leaders recognize that God gave them a dream to provide for the needs of others. They recognize that the measure of success is not how many bow down to them, but how many they can serve.

Dreams are to restore God's relationships. As a young man Joseph thought his dream was about his family bowing down to him. Then his brothers hurt him deeply and for years he tried to forget the pain. But God's plan was for Joseph to be healed from the pain, to forgive them and be restored to his family. Joseph went through the painful process of forgiving his brothers. Now he recognizes that the dream was to bring the family together. He says, *"You shall....be near me."* Later, after his father died, he said to his brothers, *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives"* (Genesis 50:20). Some leaders are so intent on accomplishing their dreams that they ruin relationships in the process. But Joseph teaches us that dreams which divide are not from God. God's dreams bring people back into relationship.

Joseph's life teaches all servant leaders that God has a purpose for the dream. Dream on!

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- Is my understanding of the purpose of my dream closer to Joseph's as a 17-year-old, or closer to his understanding as a mature leader? What is God inviting me to change?
- Is my dream about my own plans or the plans of God? In what way do I need to more clearly see God's plan revealed in my dream?
- Is my dream about others bowing down to me, or about God using me to serve others?
- In what way does God want to use the dream I am currently pursuing to provide for others? How can I increase the way my dream meets their needs?
- Are there any broken relationships as a result of my dream? In what way might God want those relationships to be restored? What is my role in bringing needed healing?
- Has my family impacted my dream positively or negatively? (God's design for families is for them to be places where dreams are nurtured and encouraged. But many crush and ridicule dreams instead, like Joseph's brothers. Joseph's family nearly busted his dream, but God helped him to use his family to build the dream.) What can I learn from Joseph's family relationships that can help me respond appropriately in my family?

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