

This morning I want to tell you that I've been hearing some really good things from many of you about this new series we've started, called *The Story*.

This week someone told me that she really has enjoyed reading the Bible right from the beginning with all the stories in the sequence they happened. A pastor I know, who has also used this series, shared how one of his high school students yelled his name in the stands at a football game, and came up to him and said,

"Pastor, I'm reading *The Story*, and I've never read my Bible before."

"And I'm understanding it." "For the first time, I'm understanding how God's story and my story fit together."

I hope you feel the same way.

Another person told me this week, that after Sunday School, her daughter brought home the "Parent Page" and not only did she bring it home, when she got home, she didn't throw the page down and forget about it, she showed it to her parents, and said, "let's talk about this." And they went through the questions together, and had a great conversation.

I think that's great!!

If you are in one of our classes that receive this Parent Page bring it home and show your parents the "Trading Card" with the picture on the front of the day's story, and the Bible verse on the back.

And for our 7-12th graders. I don't know if you know this, but they named their class, "The Breakfast Club." And if they keep serving Breakfast on Sunday mornings, I think they are going to have a few adults putting on baseball caps trying to sneak into the Youth Room

Seriously though, I have a challenge for our middle schoolers and high school students This week, I want you to be the one in your family to initiate a conversation about the story of Joseph. Because today, God's story continues with Abraham's great-grandson Joseph.

And out of all the stories in the Old Testament, this is probably my favorite. I remember from when I was a kid, we had a series of Bible story books called Arch books... like this one. Did any of you grow up reading these Arch books?

Well, the story of Joseph didn't fit into just one Arch book. There was "Joseph: Jacob's Favorite Son" and "Joseph the Dreamer" and "Joseph Forgives His Brothers" because the story of Joseph is a monumental story. It stretches from Genesis 37 all the way to chapter 50.

It's a story filled with plots and sub-plots, and enough drama, for even Broadway and Donnie Osmond.

Just like the story of Adam and Eve, and Cain and Abel, and Jacob and Esau there is plenty of family dysfunction in this story. It doesn't get off to a very good start and it goes downhill quickly.

Joseph was the 11th of 12 sons, so he had little to expect as family fortunes were passed down.

And yet, he was his father's favorite. And so Jacob gave him a beautiful coat, which was a sign to rest of the brothers, that Jacob had chosen Joseph as his heir, which of course, filled his brothers with jealousy.

It says in Genesis 37,

When his brothers saw that their father loved Joseph more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Here he was the youngest, until Benjamin was born, he was the baby in the family and according to his brothers, he was getting spoiled rotten. They did all the work, they watched the flocks, while Joseph sat home on the couch and played video games...or whatever couch potatoes did in those days.

Now I hesitate to stir up any bad memories, but just out of curiosity, how many of you are the oldest child in your family? Do you ever remember feeling jealous of a younger brother or sister?

Now multiply that jealousy by about a hundred or a thousand times, because Joseph had a dream one night which he rather unwisely, shared with his brothers. Listen to this dream he said to them:

"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."

Can you see why his brothers were inflamed with hatred?

Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers.

"Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"

So one day, when his father sent him out to the fields to check up on his brothers,

they saw him at a distance, and even before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. His brother Reuben, tries to rescue him, and pleads for his life, but they throw Joseph down into a dry well, and sell him off to some slave traders, traveling to Egypt.

Again, all of this is happening on the human level of the story, the story we call the Lower story, where we only see the world only through our own eyes.

But **right at this point**, in the story, we get the first clue, that God is in control, that Joseph is not alone, and that God has plans for Joseph.

In Genesis 39, verse 2, it says:

“The LORD was with Joseph... so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.”

That’s a key phrase in this story. “The Lord was with Joseph.”

And it comes back again, after Potiphar’s wife falsely accuses him of sexual assault. Potiphar throws him into the Pharaoh’s jail, and for most prisoners that would be the end of the story. Just like being thrown into jail in a third world country, there would be no lawyers, no trial, no due process. You’d be guilty, until proven innocent.

But again, the story takes a turn we don’t expect.

In verse 20, it says:

But while Joseph was there in the prison, ²¹ the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

The warden put Joseph in charge of the other prisoners, and trusted him, because as the writer says, “The Lord was with Joseph! “

When I was a Confirmation student, my youth pastor, Craig Carlson, asked us all to select a Confirmation verse. Sometimes you hear people call it a “Life Verse” a verse you not only to underline, and read on Confirmation Sunday, but a verse that you can come back to again and again, a verse that speaks to you personally.

And the verse I ended up choosing is Deuteronomy 31, verse 8.

⁸The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you;
he will never leave you nor forsake you.
So, do not lose courage or be afraid.”

In a way, that’s my “Joseph” verse.

I’ve never been thrown in jail, (thankfully)

but I’ve had some times when I felt like I was being thrown down into a pit, and abandoned.

And I've come back to that Confirmation verse, time and time again.

⁸The LORD himself goes before me and will be with me;
he will never leave me nor forsake me.
So, do not lose courage; or be afraid."

Have you ever felt like you needed to hear those words?
Have you ever felt like nothing in your life is going well?

Like you've come to the end of yourself,
and you know that the only thing left to do is to throw up your hands and say, "Lord I need you." "I can't do this by myself."
"I need to trust, somehow, that you hear me, and that you are with me.

And that somehow, someday, what others have meant for harm,
you Lord, can use for good."

As you may know, that's how Joseph's story ends.
Even with all the evil that was done to him.
Joseph trusted God, and didn't try to take matters into his own hands.

When Potiphar's wife, tried to seduce him,
Joseph didn't abandon his moral compass. He said to her,
"My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How
then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

Even with all the evil done to him by his brothers,
when they come to him later in the story,
and he's 2nd in command to the Pharaoh in Egypt,
and instead of taking his revenge, he shows mercy.

Instead of being filled with bitterness, and a desire to get even,
he shows kindness, and forgives his brothers.

Joseph saw the Upper Story, the big picture.
He declared to his brothers,
"Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?
"What you intended for evil, God used for good."

Who says you can't find grace in the Old Testament?

Jesus would not come for centuries, yet God's storytelling had already begun.
Joseph's life is a foreshadowing of the coming of Jesus.
reminding us that God takes our sin, and redeems our lives for good.

Beauty for ashes.
Life from death.

In Christ, we are a new Creation.

⁸The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you;
he will never leave you nor forsake you.
So, do not lose courage or be afraid.” Amen