

Best Dressed Brother

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

3rd in a five-part series

July 22, 2018

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[Joseph is the youngest of Jacob's twelve sons and he is Jacob's favorite. The symbol of this favoritism is a coat of many colors that Jacob gave to Joseph. His brothers were very, very envious.]

Genesis 37:15–24, 28 (CEB)

When Joseph approached Shechem,¹⁵ a man found him wandering in the field and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

¹⁶ Joseph said, "I'm looking for my brothers. Tell me, where are they tending the sheep?"

¹⁷ The man said, "They left here. I heard them saying, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.

¹⁸ They saw Joseph in the distance before he got close to them, and they plotted to kill him. ¹⁹ The brothers said to each other, "Here comes the big dreamer. ²⁰ Come on now, let's kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns, and we'll say a wild animal devoured him. Then we will see what becomes of his dreams!"

²¹ When Reuben heard what they said, he saved him from them, telling them, "Let's not take his life." ²² Reuben said to them, "Don't spill his blood! Throw him into this desert cistern, but don't lay a hand on him." He intended to save Joseph from them and take him back to his father.

²³ When Joseph reached his brothers, they stripped off Joseph's long robe, ²⁴ took him, and threw him into the cistern, an empty cistern with no water in it. . . . ²⁸ When some Midianite traders passed by, they pulled Joseph up out of the cistern. They sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver, and they brought Joseph to Egypt.

Matthew 14:22–31 (CEB)

²² Right then, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side of the lake while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ When he sent them away, he went up onto a mountain by himself to pray. Evening came and he was alone. ²⁴ Meanwhile, the boat, fighting a strong headwind, was being battered by the waves and was already far away from land. ²⁵ Very early in the morning he came to his disciples, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified and said, "It's a ghost!" They were so frightened they screamed.

²⁷ Just then Jesus spoke to them, "Be encouraged! It's me. Don't be afraid."

²⁸ Peter replied, "Lord, if it's you, order me to come to you on the water."

²⁹ And Jesus said, "Come."

Then Peter got out of the boat and was walking on the water toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when Peter saw the strong wind, he became frightened. As he began to sink, he shouted, "Lord, rescue me!"

³¹ Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him, saying, "You man of weak faith! Why did you begin to have doubts?"

Perseverance. Purpose. Trust.

These three and more are needed if we are to get out of the boat and stay afloat.

I have always been a fan of roadrunner cartoons. Talk about persevering. Wiley Coyote never gives up. Of course he never succeeds, but he never gives up either. If you too are a fan, you probably can picture those occasions when Wiley Coyote runs off a cliff in hot pursuit. All is well until he looks down. Until he realizes where he is, Wiley stays airborne – and then he falls to earth far below. When my son, Matt, was a small boy he hated crossing a bridge with slats that enabled him to see below. Like Wiley Coyote, Matt was fine until he looked down.

When Peter saw Jesus on the water, with great hope he called out to his Lord and, when commanded, with great trust he climbed out of the boat (Matthew 14:22-33). But then he realized where he was. He was walking on the Sea of Galilee amid rising waves and

wind. Like Wiley Coyote, Peter looked down and sank like a rock. Joseph found himself in the bottom of a hole and, I imagine, thought he had sunk into oblivion. (See the textbox for a summary of Joseph's story. If you've seen the musical, you know the basics!)

Life's storms

In one of his books, John Ortberg¹ spends a lot of time with the story of Joseph, which is one of the longest and most detailed in the Bible. It is a story of resilience and perseverance. Despite being sold into slavery and tossed into prison, Joseph presses on. He doesn't let the storms of his own life overwhelm him, at least not for long. He doesn't compromise his values or give in to temptation. The truth is that we are all confronted with storms. The question is only how we will respond.

Rev. Charles Stokes once passed on to me an e-mail from a member of the congregation containing part of a Rick Warren interview. As you probably know, Rev. Warren is founder of a huge church in California and author of the best-selling book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*. Here is part of what he had to say when interviewed about the success of his book:

"This past year has been the greatest year of my life but also the toughest, with my wife, Kay, getting cancer. I used to think that life was hills and valleys - you go through a dark time, then you got to the mountaintop, back and forth. I don't believe that anymore. Rather than life being hills and valleys, I believe that it's kind of like two rails on a railroad track, and at all times you have something good and something bad in your life. No matter how good things are in your life, there is always something bad that needs to be worked on. And no matter how bad things are in your life, there is always something good you can thank God for. You can focus on your purposes, or . . . you can focus on your problems. If you focus on your problems, you're going into self-centeredness, which is 'my problem, my issues, my pain.' But one of the easiest ways to get rid of pain is to get your focus off yourself and onto God and others. We discovered quickly that in spite of the prayers of hundreds of thousands of people, God was not going to heal Kay or make

Joseph

Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of twelve sons, from whom God would grow the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph was the youngest of the twelve sons. If you've seen the musical, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, you know the basics of the story.

Joseph's life begins with great hope. He has a gift for dreams that reveal much. He is his father's favorite. Jacob gives him a beautiful coat and frees him from the hard work assigned to his eleven brothers. But there is a darkness present as well. Jacob's favoritism and Joseph's dreams create an explosive family situation.

The brothers' envy and anger eventually boil over. They consider killing the boy. Though they, instead, sell him to some passing Ishmaelites, it is tantamount to killing him.

Joseph ends up a servant to the captain of Pharaoh's guard, Potiphar. Joseph has to reject the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife, who accuses Joseph of trying to rape her and has him tossed into prison. Yet, Joseph presses on, eventually rising to become chief administrator of Pharaoh's empire. Joseph's dreams reveal to him that there will soon be a lengthy famine. Armed with this foreknowledge, Joseph not only saves Egypt from starvation, but, in the end, his own family, who come to Egypt in search of food.

God had made good come from the evil act of the eleven brothers. The twelve tribes of Israel would be preserved through the brothers' treachery.

¹ Ortberg's book, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat* is excellent, as is the one I referenced for the July 8 study on Zacchaeus.

it easy for her. It has been very difficult for her, and yet God has strengthened her character, given her a ministry of helping other people, given her a testimony, drawn her closer to Him and to people.”

If, as Rick Warren suggests, we think of life as two rails of the railroad track, Joseph’s life was busy on both rails. More was thrown at Joseph than will confront most of us, yet Genesis repeatedly tells us that “the LORD was with Joseph.” Through the good and the bad, Joseph never gave in to his fears. He was not focused on his problems, but on his purpose. In this, he was unlike Peter. When Peter stepped out of the boat, “he saw the wind, and was afraid” (Matthew 14:30). Joseph however, pressed on. When he was hauled before Pharaoh and told to interpret Pharaoh’s dream, Joseph knew that he wouldn’t interpret the dream by his own powers, but only through God. By staying focused upon God and not the storms, Joseph was able to rise to prominence, saving Egypt, his own family, and the future of Israel.

Focusing on Jesus

Peter walks on water for a few moments. But when he takes his focus off Jesus, he sinks. Surely, we all see our own story in this. We know that we ought to keep our eyes focused upon Jesus rather than upon the storms of our lives. We all want to. But how? It is all well and good to say, “Stay focused on Jesus!,” but our chaotic and demanding lives so often seem to derail our best intentions. You might ask yourself, “What was the longest time I’ve gone without thinking of Jesus even once?”

Ortberg urges us to use a few concrete reminders or rituals that will help us to focus upon Jesus every day and in all things. For example, he keeps on his desk a nail that is similar to those that might have been used on the cross. I’ve, at times, carried in my pocket a small stone that I got at a baptism remembrance service here at St. Andrew. People memorize Scripture verses that they can bring to mind during the day. Ortberg tells of a business associate who always puts a picture of his family on top of the hotel television when he travels so he doesn’t watch the adult movies. Frank Laubach whispers “God” or “Jesus” as he glances at people so that he might remember that we are all made in God’s image. He even places an empty chair at the dinner table to remind himself of the presence of Christ!

These might seem like crutches or tricks, but we are not strong people. We are like Peter. In the battles of life we forget that God is with us in all things and strengthens us in all that we do (Philippians 4:13). The risks make us timid and unsure. It is all too easy to “see the wind,” to lose focus, to lose hope. The storms seem to blow us away from Jesus. But if they do, it is only because we let them. Christians have always used rituals and practices to help us stay focused upon the LORD. You might try one or two for the next thirty days and then ask yourself again, “When was the longest time I’ve gone without thinking of Jesus in the last month?” I bet you’ll find that it was when you were sleeping!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. We’ve all been through difficult times and events in our lives. You might share a few stories about your relationship with God in those times. Did you feel like God was near or far? Were you angry with God? What advice would you give another Christian about getting through the storms? What do you think of Ortberg’s advice to stay focused on Jesus rather than the storm? Does he seem to urge denial of the difficulty or hardship? Have you ever felt like God let you down because you didn’t get the answer to prayer that you wanted or just because it seemed that God should have lifted the burden from you?
2. What are some practical ways you could go about helping yourself to stay more focused upon Jesus – every day, at work, home, and play? What will you commit to doing differently for thirty days?

3. Where do we find God in the midst of family joys and family concerns? How often do families truly place God first – before all, before anyone? How might we put God back at the center of our families – not just our immediate family but our extended family also. We proclaim to the world that Jesus is Lord, but is he really the Lord of our families? How do we love and live with family members who deny Christ? It is probably helpful to recall the stories from Genesis where God blesses and protects the “outsider,” as with Cain and Ishmael.

Daily Bible Readings

This week: More on the story of Joseph

Monday, Genesis 37 Joseph and his brothers

Tuesday, Genesis 39-41:26 Joseph, God, and success; Joseph and the interpretation of dreams; Joseph’s rise to power

Wednesday, Genesis 41:27 – 42:38 Joseph meets his brothers.

Thursday, Genesis 43-44 The second journey to Egypt; Joseph’s final test

Friday, Genesis 45:1 – 47:26 Joseph makes himself known; The descent into Egypt

Saturday, Genesis 47:27 – 50:26 The emergence of unified Israel

Scott Engle’s Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Acts.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the story of Jonah.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands on its own. This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott’s 10:50 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Starting July 22: Scott will begin a new series on some of the “non-essentials” of the Christian Faith: *Ten things you don’t have to believe to be a Jesus-lovin’, Bible-believin’ Christian.*