

The Year of The Story
Chapter 3: Get Off the Roller Coaster!
Genesis 37-50
1/25/15

- Pastor Randy Frazee, who played a very significant role in putting together the small group study and other aspects of what we have been using during The Story campaign, tells a story of Jennifer, a young woman who attended the church where he once pastored.
 - o Jennifer had a big dream. She dreamed of going to college to become a nurse. She dreamed of all the people she could help and the difference she could make in the lives of others as she compassionately cared for them. She knew that if she realized her dream, it would be miraculous, since her family was not in a position to help her financially. In fact, if she finished, Jennifer would become the first member of her family to graduate from college.
 - o After completing high school and earning good grades, Jennifer applied to a college with a strong nursing program. Thanks to her grade point average, she was accepted. However, her dream would need to be deferred because she didn't have the money for college tuition. But, she didn't give up.
 - o She got a job and began saving every penny she could from her paycheck. Week by week, dollar by dollar, she saved her money in a special box that she hid in her bedroom.

- To save on living expenses, Jennifer lived with her mom and fourteen year old brother. Her brother had some run-ins with the police for theft and had begun to get into trouble in school. It was no secret that he experimented with drugs as well. Jennifer loved her brother, prayed for him and tried to encourage him when others judged him, she stuck up for him when others saw him as a lost cause.
 - o Despite the turmoil in her family, Jennifer pressed on toward her dream, getting one step closer with every paycheck. One week, she went to put her money into her special savings box in her room. When she opened it, she discovered that all but \$20 was missing.
 - o She was crushed and even more crushed when she confirmed that her own brother, the one she stood by, had stolen from her to support his drug habit. Her dream now seemed further away than ever, all because of her brother's betrayal.

- Personal betrayal cuts us to the core. You love someone, you think they love you, you trust them, you open yourself to them only to be betrayed, played and used.
 - o This morning, we are going to look at the story of someone who understood betrayal well. His name is Joseph.
 - o As most of us know, we are going through the Bible this year in the form of The Story. We have been talking about the Upper Story and Lower Story. The Upper Story is

God's story it is why God is doing what he is doing. We have found that the consistent upper story of God is that he wants us back. He wants a relationship with us. He wants us to be free from sin. He wants reconciliation with us that comes through forgiveness. Whatever he does, he does to get us back.

- The Lower Story is our story – our life experiences and our choices. God's Upper Story often connects with our Lower Story. But, most often, we might not even be aware of it, unless we are looking.
 - This morning, we are going to see how Joseph was looking.
- As we read in The Story this week, Joseph is the great grandson of Abraham and the son of Jacob. God made a covenant with Abraham to build a great nation through him so that all the people of the world would be blessed and would know God.
- However, the family was off to a pretty slow and dysfunctional start. Abraham messed up. His son, Isaac messed up and Isaac's son Jacob messed. They didn't make the best decisions. Sounds a lot like us, huh? Yet, God used them.
 - Plus, Abraham and Isaac didn't have very many children. It wasn't until Jacob had 12 sons that it looked like the nation building business was getting underway. Yet, his sons seemed to follow in the same dysfunction. God's nation building doesn't seem to be getting off to the greatest start.
- That's what it looks like in the lower story of human experience. In fact, as we read the story about Joseph, his lower story could appropriately be labeled the roller coaster with all kinds of ups and downs and twist and turns.
- On your outline, in the back of your bulletin, you will see the ups and downs of Joseph's lower story life. Let's look at this a little closer.
- At first, Joseph is UP. Then, I've listed three things that describe this up time: favorite, coat, dream. Let me explain those a bit
- Scripture begins the story of Joseph in Genesis chapter 37 **when he's around 17**. We find out right up front that he is his father's favorite. This part slays me. His father, Jacob, came from a family where his mother and father played favorites and this favorite playing ended up splitting the family and causing lots of horrible sibling rivalry.
 - Yet, he goes down the very same path, favoring Joseph and giving him the infamous coat of many colors. This incident even became a whole Broadway theatre rendition in Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat.
- Joseph's brothers were upset about the whole coat thing, but what really burned them was Joseph's dreams. Joseph dreamed that his brother and his parents would one day bow down to him.
- Here's a lower story application for us – if you have such dreams, keep them to yourself! Joseph just added fuel to the fire of jealousy his brothers already carried for him.
 - His brothers fanned that flame and they had dreams, too – of getting rid of their

stinking little brother.

- This led to a down time in Joseph's life which can be described as brothers' betrayal, pit, sold as a slave.
 - o Joseph's dad asked him to go out to the country and check on his brothers who were caring for the sheep. Joseph did it, not knowing that his brother were going to have a plan to betray him. Originally, they were just going to kill him off. But, the oldest brother, convinced them to throw him in a pit so he could then secretly rescue him.
 - o But, while the oldest brother, went away for a little while, the other brothers saw some Ishmaelites passing through, they decided to sell Joseph to these traveling traders, dip Joseph's colorful coat in animal blood to convince their father he was mauled and eaten by a wild animal.
 - o It's interesting to note that Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelites. You might have noticed that these were the descendants of Ishmael, the son that Abraham had with his wife's maidservant, Hagar. The plot thickens and it shows how God's words about the two nations being in opposition was already at work.
 - o Well, Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, the captain of the guard for Pharaoh.

- But, God was up to something. Immediately after the Bible reports on Joseph's new status as slave, *Genesis 39:2* it says, The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.
 - o God is about to lift Joseph UP – this time can be described as God blessed, household administrator
 - o That one little sentence in scripture opens up everything for Joseph. With God's help, Joseph quickly rises in status and is put in charge of Potiphar's entire house. This would be like the United States president's chief of staff putting a janitor in charge of the West Wing. Joseph was large and in charge!

- But, someone was about to bring him down. Scripture tells us that Joseph is well-built and handsome. In the 2015 translation, that means he was hot and ripped. And someone who wasn't supposed to notice, noticed.
 - o This was the beginning of the next DOWN time described as- Potiphar's wife seduction, jail.
 - o Potiphar's wife developed a big crush on this hot, young servant who probably was around more than her husband was and she doesn't even pretend to be subtle about her intentions. She just demands: Come to bed with me!

- But, check out Joseph's response in *Genesis 39:9* "No one is greater in this house than I am. 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?"
 - o I want us to take note that Joseph's main concern is that doing this wicked thing would make him sin against God.
 - o Now, as a slave, he was supposed to do whatever was commanded of him. But, he

wouldn't because it would be a sin. We are beginning to see the true character of Joseph and it is starting to become obvious why God was with him in the first place. Joseph is a true man of God.

- Potiphar's wife did not like being rejected, so she trapped Joseph alone, but he high-tailed it out of there so fast so that even though she was holding his coat, he ran out of his coat!
 - o Here is something else to note and apply: When you are standing in the face of temptation – get to running! Don't reason with it, don't converse with it, don't try to ignore it: RUN!! Leave whatever you need to leave and RUN! It's better to make someone angry than to sin against God.
 - o The rejected seductress becomes enraged and, with Joseph's coat in hand, accused him of trying to rape her. Joseph ends up in jail.

- While in jail, the Lord is with him again. He finds favor in the warden's eyes and is put in charge of the jail. During that time, after some twist and turns in the story (which weren't in the part that we read, but you might want to read it for yourself in Genesis 40), it is made known that Joseph has a particular gift in interpreting dreams.
 - o Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, has some disturbing dreams and none of his sorcerers were able to interpret his dreams for him. His dreams involved 7 skinny ugly cows eating 7 fat pretty cows. And he also dreamed of withered corn swallowing up big juicy corn.
 - o Word gets out that a certain prisoner is able to interpret dreams and Pharaoh calls for Joseph.

- Check out Joseph's response to Pharaoh when he was asked if he could interpret the dreams in *Genesis 41:16* "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."
 - o Here is another insight into the character of Joseph and his devotion to God. Joseph knew that everything he had, every gift or talent he had, came from the hand of God. He had to make sure he witnessed to Pharaoh about his God.

- God, now is about to bring another up-swing to Joseph's life. God gave understanding, 2nd to Pharaoh, brought his family to Egypt & saved them.
 - o Joseph was able to interpret the dream and predict that 7 years of bumper crops was going to happen, followed by 7 years of famine and that they needed to prepare for those 7 famine years or perish.
 - o Pharaoh takes Joseph out of prison, makes him second in charge of the whole land. **Joseph was 30 years old at this time.** Under Joseph's leadership, the Egyptians were able to store tons of food over the next seven years until the famine hit.

- Two years into the famine, who happens to be feeling the pangs of hunger? Joseph's family and his brothers. Their father sends them to Egypt after hearing there is food there.
 - o When they arrive in Egypt, oblivious to them, they bow down to their punk brother, Joseph, (remember, that was Joseph's original dream) who they didn't recognize

- after all those years have passed. **Joseph is now 39 years old.**
 - After several emotional encounters, Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers, assures them that he is not angry with them and makes plans to resettle them in Egypt so they can survive. He is reunited with his father and the whole family is saved.
 - Up and down, up and down, up and down and up...just like our lives.
- As we look at the ups and downs in Joseph's life, we see a pattern emerge - that other people and his own self in the Lower Story brought him down, but the Lord lifted him up in the Upper Story.
 - If you look over Joseph's lower Story, you can see that it was the result of other people and his own self that he was brought down.
 - His father's favoritism and his own blabber mouth spurred his brother's hatred for him. As they focused on that, his brothers' hatred grew until they did something unthinkable. Potiphar's wife also brought him down with her lies.
 - Listen, focusing on other people and what they think or say about you or what they do to you or fail to do for you will bring you down. Likewise, focusing on yourself, will also bring you down because it results in narcissism and thinking too highly of yourself or it results in destructive self-criticism.
 - But, when Joseph trusted in the Lord's Upper Story, he was lifted up. When Joseph focused on God he was lifted up! When Joseph refused to sin, when Joseph gave glory to God – the Lord was always with him. Somewhere along with way, Joseph saw that there was a story larger than his and he made a commitment to God's Upper Story.
 - When Joseph committed to God's Upper Story, some pretty incredible things happened.
- First, his commitment to God's Upper Story kept him from sin. It kept him from the sin of adultery by sleeping with his master's wife. And, it kept him from the sin of revenge when his brothers, the very same brothers who sold him and left him as good as dead, showed up at his door step.
 - Yes, revenge at our hands is a sin. The Lord tells us "Revenge is mine," meaning, "Let me deal with it, not you." But, that's hard! How do we do that? How was Joseph able to make the choice not to seek revenge against his brothers?
 - Because somewhere along the way, he got a glimpse of the Upper Story of God. Joseph is captured by the upper story where God is working his purpose within the ups and downs in Joseph's story.
 - He wasn't able to see the vision in its completeness, yet, but Joseph knew it was there. Because of that faith, he was able to wait on God.
- This commitment of Joseph to God's Upper Story, then, enabled him to see God's vision in God's timing.
 - We see this clearly in *Genesis 45:3-8*. Let's read it together.

- It finally all came together for Joseph! He knew that God had a plan and a purpose. Joseph believed in the covenant that God made with his great-grandfather, Abraham. But, in the middle of Egypt, he didn't know how he was going to play a part. God showed him clearly and fully now.
- He realized that God used him to preserve the nation God was building through whom all the world would know about God. The people of Israel, later to be the nation of Israel, had two threats: famine and intermarriage.
 - The famine would kill them off physically and intermarriage would bring spiritual death as the people of Canaan would introduce the worship of other gods and lead them away from the one true Lord God.
 - This small little family wasn't a nation yet and wasn't ready yet to take Canaan, so God sent them to Egypt where they were given a fertile, uninhabited part of Egyptian land to live on and farm and to use as shepherds, but there wasn't the threat of intermarriage because the Egyptians thought shepherds were the lowest of the low on the social status scale. It was in this place that this growing family would thrive and grow into a nation of over a million people. We'll get to more of that next week.
- Further, Joseph's commitment to seeking God's Upper Story gave him the ability to forgive. Because Joseph's commitment to the Upper Story kept him from sin and enabled him to see God's vision, he was able to forgive the wrong-doing of his brother against him.
 - He, instead, saw the wrong that they did as a way for God to make it incredibly right. Then, he allowed God to heal his heart so that he could provide a healing forgiveness to his brothers, some of whom, were carrying depths of guilt around with them for years about what they did to their brother.
- Listen, God can take the wrong that was done to you and make it incredibly right. He can make beauty from ashes; peace from pain; healing from injury and light from dark.
 - But, even greater than that is he can go a step further give you the peace of forgiving the one who wronged you. Only in forgiveness is there peace. Peace doesn't come from justice. It comes from forgiveness. That's why God's ultimate plan for us involves forgiveness when our sin deserves death.
 - If you are having a hard time forgiving someone who has hurt you, commit to God's Upper Story and allow him to heal you through forgiving the wrong and the wrong-doer.
- Joseph's commitment to God's Upper Story also kept him off the spiritual roller coaster when other aspects of his life were on a ride!
 - Joseph's life circumstances were on a roller coaster – up and down, high and low, mountain tops and pits. Yet, his spiritual life and faith remained consistent because he knew God was going to come through! He knew God was in control.
 - Listen, over the years in ministry, I have seen over and over, people's spiritual lives be determined by the other aspects of their life. When that happens, they get on this spiritual roller coaster where their spiritual life is up and down, high and low,

close to God the ticked with God, faithful attendance in church to sporadic attendance in church.

- In the end, most who get on the spiritual roller coaster end up getting off in a spiritual pit and staying there. They then end up live their lives far from God, doing their own thing, being consumed by their lower story.
 - That is not God's design for you to be on a spiritual roller coaster. It is his desire for you to focus on his Upper Story so that you can experience blessing and peace and purpose even when lower story life doesn't make any sense.
- I want us to notice something interesting about Joseph's life. We see that 17 was Joseph's age when he told his brothers about his dream and when they decided to get rid of him. 30 was Joseph's age when he was made second in command over all of Egypt. 39 was his age when his brothers came to ask him for grain.
- So, 22 years elapsed from when Joseph was given his dream to when it was fulfilled. Those years were a roller coaster ride of life circumstances.
 - Joseph **died at 110 years old**. Between 39 and 110, there are 71 years.
 - Look at this for a second. Because of Joseph's commitment to God's Upper Story, yes there was a roller coaster ride of life problems and people problems that lasted 22 years, but as Joseph remained consistent spiritually and committed to God's Upper Story, God Gave him 71 years of blessing and peace where Joseph prospered and enjoyed a reconciled, loving relationship with his family.
 - Too many people are forfeiting the many years of blessing living in God's Upper Story because they are too busy getting tossed around by the lower story roller coaster of life! Don't be one of them!
- This morning, in addition to some of the things we have already said, I want to leave you with some applications that I pray you can take away with you and apply to your life.
- The first is that Focusing on your Lower Story brings you down, but focusing on God's Upper Story lifts you up.
- Listen, we all have plans and dreams. I dreamt one day of being a Christian rock singer. I had it all planned out for years. It hasn't happened and I am beyond the prime time of being a rock singer now. That boat has probably past.
 - The dreams and plans that we have in our lower story don't always go as planned. But, God still has a plan. And, often where God starts is often were our vision ends. We have a vision that is only this big because that's all we can see, but God has a vision that is this big because he can see it all!
- Likewise, we have people in our life that just might hurt us, even betray us. There are situations we are going to face that will exhaust us and confuse us. If we focus on them, we are going to be brought down. If we focus on people or on ourselves or on situations, it's going to be real tempting to allow our spiritual life and relationship with God to be taken for a ride.
- Look up and look for the Upper Story of God! You might not see it right now, but it's

coming!

- Remember the story of Jennifer from the beginning of the sermon – the young woman whose brother stole her college tuition money? Shortly after the stealing incident, Jennifer attended a church service where Pastor Randy spoke about forgiveness. Right in the service, she forgave her brother.
 - Not only that, but she put the remaining \$20 from her box in the offering plate along with a little letter written to Pastor Randy to let him know how his sermon touched her to forgive her brother and to give back to God what she had left as a declaration to God that she would trust God to accomplish his good plan for her life, whatever that may be. She only signed the letter with her first name.
 - Pastor Randy tried to figure out who this Jennifer was. But, it was a large congregation and all he had to go on was the little bit of her story that she shared and her first name. She obviously wasn't expecting a response. Yet, he couldn't let it go and kept thinking about this young woman.

- The next Sunday at the church's first service, he read the letter to the congregation without revealing any names. After the service, a family came to the front of the church to talk to Pastor Randy. With tears in their eyes, they asked if they could talk to the women in the letter. This family, along with two others, wanted to pay Jennifer's college tuition. Not just the first year, but all four!
 - Pastor Randy read the letter in the second service and stated, "If the person who wrote this letter is here today, please come and see me after the service." A young woman timidly approached him immediately after the service. Before she could say her name, he knew it was Jennifer. He told her about the families who approached him about her and their generous offer. Jennifer wept uncontrollably – tears of disbelief and joy.
 - Jennifer finished college and nursing school in the top of her class. Today, she is an oncology nurse, a loving wife and a devoted mom. Her dream has come true and she blesses many people with her gifts.

- Her Lower Story was all about betrayal, anger and disappointment, but when she came to a place where she could trust God in spite of her circumstances, she discovered that he is indeed trustworthy and has not forgotten or abandoned her.
 - And even so for us, the Lord still promises to be with us:
 - *Romans 8:28* says, in fact, let's read it out loud together, "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them."
 - This is one of those verses that you need to commit to memory so that you can remember to cling to it in times where the roller coaster of life feels like it is going to throw you out of the car to your demise.

- Yet, this promise from God is not a universal promise, meaning that it is not for everyone. There are two stipulations.

- First, it is a promise for Christians. It is a promise for those who love God.
 - However, it is also not just for anyone who has once come to a salvation experience. It is for those who are actively seeking out the purpose of God. It is for those aligned with God's story. It is for those who have made the decision to align their lives with God's story.
 - Let's be honest. Not everyone who calls themselves a Christian and comes and sits in a church pew has aligned themselves with God's purpose or God's story. Any number of justifications can be used, but we all know there are folk and maybe you are one who claim the name Christian, but you know your life isn't aligned fully with God.
 - Too often, we want to believe that every promise in the Bible is for everyone. This one is for Christians who are seeking the purposes of God. If you are not a Christian or if you are wanting to withhold areas of your life from the control and will of God and you're on the spiritual roller coaster, I'm sorry, but God says this promise is not for you.
- Yet, for those who are Christians and who are aligning your life with God's story, this promise is an amazing promise! This promise gives us hope! This promise lets us know that God is working something out and it's gonna be good!!
 - This promise should elicit a response from each of us.
 - First, if you want this promise in our life that God is going to be with you and work things out for good for you and you are not a Christian, you need to respond by becoming a Christian.
 - Second, if you want this promise in our life, and you are a Christian, but you have not completely surrendered our life to God's story, you're riding the fence, you're keeping hold of areas instead of allowing God to control them, you need to respond by getting dead serious about being a fully-devoted, fully sold-out, fully surrendered Christ followers.
 - Third, if you are a Christian and have aligned your life with God's story, but life is currently or will soon send everything spinning, you need to respond by saying "God is a good God! He has made me a good promise! God is with me and with him, I'm going to get through it. This is NOT how it ends for me!"
 - God's Upper Story weaves a tale of relentless pursuit. He doesn't just desire to turn whatever was intended for evil to good in your life. He wants you. He wants to be with you. To have fellowship with you.
 - He refused to allow a famine to destroy the nation he was building, just as he refused to let a brother's selfishness destroy Jennifer's God-given dream.
 - We have no idea what betrayals and injustices await for us today or may confront us tomorrow. Life is filled with disappointments, but when it hits, when we remember God's Upper Story to be with us, we can rise about whatever hits in the strength of God goodness, hearing him whisper that he loves us and will never abandon us, no matter what.

