
Favored.

*“Life can only be understood backwards,
but it must be lived forwards.”*

Søren Kierkegaard¹

Someone needs to cross stitch that phrase on a pillow for me. Or maybe I should tattoo it on my forehead. I want it grafted into the fibers of my being. I guarantee life would be a lot less stressful if I could just remember that hindsight is 20/20.

There are countless characters from the Old Testament who would second that emotion. If we started a Kierkegaard Club of believers, I would nominate a man named Joseph to be our chapter president. There’s a passage in Genesis 50 that speaks directly to this idea.

Joseph is at the end of his life. He’s surrounded by family members who deeply wounded and betrayed him. He utters this powerful thought and then dies:

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good” (Genesis 50:20a).

Joseph was reminiscing. He was looking backwards as he speaks for the last time and he experiences somewhat of an “ah-ha” moment. He finally understands how it was all connected. And as

Joseph approaches the conclusion of his earthly life before he will stand before the Lord face-to-face, the curtain is peeled back and he gets it.

“They” intended to harm him. God turned that right around and used it for good. All of it.

You might be thinking that Joseph had a pretty sweet gig. You remember the headlines of his life from Sunday school and secretly wish you too had an amazing technicolor dreamcoat. His bad days weren’t as bad as your bad days, right?

Wrong.

Let me tell you a little bit about Joseph’s background. He was one of twelve kids and it is written in Scripture that he was the favored son. (Genesis 37:3). It was evident that his father placed him above all of his other brothers. There’s a level of comfort and confidence that comes with such affirmation and Joseph walked tall in this space.

Joseph was also extremely attractive. We’re talking Ryan Gosling multiplied by a thousand with a little Randall Pearson thrown in for good measure. When a man is strikingly handsome, he is distinguished from others. Women wanted to know him. Men wanted to be him.

So there’s Joseph, walking around all favored and physically desirable. He was always being promoted because he was successful at everything he did. To put it bluntly, his life was moving up and to the right. He was living the American Dream.

Now, if that’s all you knew about Joseph, you’d probably think he had an impressive Facebook highlight reel. With a perfect résumé like his, of course Joseph can say that God meant for his life to be good. Because on the surface, it seems like Joseph’s biggest problem was dealing with all the superfluous butterflies and rainbows.

Seriously. I’d like to know how “they” intended to harm him. Was it a bad haircut that threatened Joseph’s social status? Did his

diamond sandals produce blisters? Could mom and dad only afford one camel on his sixteenth birthday?

In our Western culture, to be blessed means that we have Joseph's kind of Facebook life. Thanks to social media, we often choose to post our happy high points. I know I only share precious pictures of myself. If my chins make an appearance, I'm out. I'm not posting it. And I will unfriend you socially and in real life if you tag me on anything that is less than adorable.

Filters are our lifeblood, people. Use them.

Let's get back to Joseph. I want to fill in the blanks of this seemingly perfect guy's highlight reel. We're going to step into Joseph's timeline and explore what it might have been like to live in his trenches.

We know that he was one of twelve siblings and he was the favorite. The problem is that Joseph's brothers hated him for it and that made his home life extremely hard. Raise your hand if you can relate to colorful family dynamics!

When Joseph was seventeen-years-old, he had a dream. This means that teenage Joseph had an encounter with God that marked him for life. Although this was a holy moment, our Abercrombie model didn't soar after his vision. It took one foolish mistake for our boy to crash and burn. Here's what happened:

One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever. "Listen to this dream," he said. "We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!" His brothers responded, "So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them (Genesis 37:5-8).

Be honest. You can see why Joseph's brothers were annoyed, right? I'm not sure if Joseph reported the dream with an arrogant tone, but the fact remains that neither Joseph nor his brothers understood the meaning of the vision. Was it a smart decision for Joseph to blab specific details? I'll give him a pass on this one. He was just a kid excited to share his encounter with God with his family. Was it appropriate for the brothers to act like punks and openly hate him for it? Certainly not. The story continues:

Soon Joseph had another dream, and again he told his brothers about it. "Listen, I have had another dream," he said. "The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!" This time he told the dream to his father as well as to his brothers, but his father scolded him. "What kind of dream is that?" he asked. "Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow to the ground before you?" But while his brothers were jealous of Joseph, his father wondered what the dreams meant (Genesis 37:9-11).

Okay, this time I can't defend Joseph. Did he learn nothing from his family's reaction to the first dream? What was he thinking? This is when Joseph's Instagram profile begins to paint a different picture than what we know to be true.

Did he learn nothing from his family's reaction to the first dream? What was he thinking?

The brothers are so livid with Joseph's arrogant behavior that they literally plot to kill him. Judah steps in and suggests that instead of taking their younger brother's life, why not make a little change and sell him as a slave to a band of Egyptians?

Well, this is a dip in the timeline. Joseph has been betrayed by people he should have been able to trust. Even the Valencia filter can't help this situation.

The good news is that Joseph was sold to a key Egyptian leader named Potiphar. He puts Joseph as second in command and just like that, our dreamer suddenly has power and favor again. Let's post a new update folks! Things are looking good.

When Joseph settles into his new role, celebrating a life that is moving up and to the right, Potiphar's wife enters the picture. She was drawn to handsome Joseph like any human being with functioning eyeballs. Here's the problem: Not only was she married to Joseph's boss, but she is used to getting whatever she wants. And she wants Joseph.

But Joseph is a man of integrity and he denies all of her advances. As a result, Potiphar's wife accuses Joseph of rape and has him thrown in prison. So much for good times.

After spending some time in jail, Joseph is favored again by Pharaoh, who is Egypt's king. Pharaoh puts Joseph in charge and he saves an entire nation (and the family who betrayed him) from famine. Joseph is once again very powerful.

He's always been favored. This time, he has purpose.

Engage.

When was the first time you had a sense that God really saw you?

Think of a moment in your life when you made a mistake and wanted to take it back. (Buying those ugly shoes that one time does not count!)

Have you ever been betrayed by people you trusted? How did it make you feel? Did you reconcile the relationship? If not, what is keeping you from reaching out to make amends?

Read Romans 12:14-21. How would your life be different if you could fully live out this passage?

Jesus, You bless me with such encouragement on this journey of forgiveness. You are my helper and I will have no fear. Speak to me about my life. Enlighten me. Show me what I need to know about You and about me in this process. I trust You.