

Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. There in Egypt he was a household slave, and there he was falsely accused, and he was placed in prison. In prison it was learned that he could interpret dreams. And he was called forth to stand before Pharaoh and interpret Pharaoh's dream, and he did. It was that there would be seven years of full harvest, a bounty, and seven years of famine. So Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of all of Egypt of collecting food through the full years to save it for the lean years.

Now, when Jacob -- remember Jacob, Joseph's father? -- learned that there was food in Egypt, he said to his sons, why do you sit around here and look at one another? Why don't you go down to Egypt and get some food? It sounds like a dad, doesn't it? Get your finger out of your ear and do something! (Laughter.) Get up off of the couch and get us some food! Don't sit around here and look at each other!

So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to Egypt. Jacob would not let Benjamin go. Benjamin, the full brother of Joseph, the only reminder he had left of Rachel, his true love. He was afraid.

While the story has been unfolding in Egypt, another story was unfolding on the other side of the Red Sea, on the other side of the mountains. Jacob had mourned the loss of Joseph and feared for Benjamin, so he would not let him go. So the ten brothers who sold Joseph into slavery came down to Egypt, and they were asking for food. So they came right in front of Joseph, and Joseph stood there dressed in the garb of Egypt -- the robes and the hat, probably eyeliner underneath his eyes -- and his brothers did not recognize him. Joseph spoke to them through an interpreter even though he could understand their language. But Joseph recognized them right away.

What were Joseph's feelings? What did he think? Here stood the brothers that the last time he had seen them they had thrown him into a well and then sold him into slavery. Did he have bitterness? Anger?

It said, Joseph remembered the dream he had about them: That the 11 stalks of wheat would bow down to his stalk of wheat; that the sun and the moon, his father and mother, and the 11 stars would bow down and worship one star, him. So he knew God's hand was in this, but yet he was human. Did he wonder what he should do with his brothers? He looked all the way down the line from the oldest to Benjamin, who was missing. What did he think? What did he feel? Did he want to get back at them? He had the power to say no. Did he think to himself, look at me, I have made something of myself? I am a contender. I am somebody. My family is the Beverly Hillbillies. Look at them. (Laughter.) Did he finally realize that he was the

only good-looking person in the Munster family? Was he afraid to say this is my family? Did he want to own them or disown them? When he saw that Benjamin was missing, did he fear that they had done the same to Benjamin that they had done to him?

So he asks them who they are, and they tell him that they are 12 brothers of the same father in the land of Cana, their youngest brother is home with the father, and one brother is no more, they think. Joseph says, you're liars! You're lying! You are spies. You have come down to find our weak spots. They are, like, no, no. We are just brothers. We are just shepherds. We are just here for food. Joseph says, you are liars! You are all spies. You have come to find our weak spots. If you are telling the truth, then produce your youngest brother. You will not get anything until your youngest brother comes here. And he throws them in jail for three days. I love that part because he's just messing with them there I figure. I mean, he was in jail for years, so they could at least take it for three days.

After three days, he pulls them out of jail. He says, I will tell you what. I am a God-fearing man. One of you will stay here as a prisoner, the rest of you will go back with food for your father and your family, if that is true. And until you bring your youngest brother to me, you will not get any more food and your one brother will stay a prisoner.

So they leave Egypt. As they are leaving Egypt, Joseph instructs his servants, his stewards, to put not only the grain in there, but also to return the money that each one of the brothers had brought to pay for the grain. So halfway home, one of the brothers -- that looks like me -- got hungry and decided to eat a little bit on the way home. He opens his bag, and he finds that his money is on top. He says, what is God doing to us? What's going on? Not only have we got the grain, but our money was returned.

They got back to Jacob, their father, hugging Benjamin tight, and they told the whole story of this man in Egypt and what he said. They said, we cannot get our brother freed or we cannot go back and get more food until we take Benjamin back to Egypt. And Jacob says, no way. Benjamin doesn't leave my side. So they stayed there in Cana and ate the food. And what happens to food? It runs out, right? Didn't you just go grocery shopping? Where did it all go? It's always gone, right? And when the food ran out, they said, we need to go get more food. Jacob says, that's right, you got to go get more food. They say, there's one thing, Dad, we got to take Benjamin with us. He says, no way! They said, well, that man in Egypt told us we wouldn't even get to him. We wouldn't get face-to-face to him unless we had our youngest brother.

And then Jacob says (Pastor Allan says in a whining voice), well, go ahead. Take Benjamin. He's all I have. I have lost his mother. I have lost his brother. He's all I have, but go ahead. Take everything I have. Break my heart. I don't care. Put my gray, grieving head in the grave. Don't you love it when parents

do that? (Laughter.) They are just twisting the guilt in. I don't even know when I do it as a parent. The girls say, Dad, you're pouring the guilt on. I'm, like, I am sorry. I don't even know I am doing it. It was done to me, I am doing to it you. I am sorry. You're going to do it someday. It's just the way it is. (Laughter.)

So the brothers leave with Benjamin and head back down to Egypt. And they come before Joseph again. When Joseph looks down the line, all the way down, and sees Benjamin, his full brother, the youngest there, he is overwhelmed. A couple times Joseph has to step out of the room and cry then splash his face with water and get himself back together to come back in the room. He says, take these men. Take them to my house. They are going to eat lunch with me.

So they take them to the fancy house and sit them at the table. As Joseph finishes the morning's business, his brothers feel guilty. They sit there in that room and say, what's going to happen to us? Then they go to the steward -- now they go to the steward -- and say, oh, by the way, when we were here before, we brought money, but it was all returned to us. They didn't mention this before to anybody because they figured they could probably keep the money if it worked out for them. But they were so guilty sitting in this room that Joseph had them just where he wanted. They said, we got this money, and he said, it's okay, it's okay. I was paid in full. He produced their brother, Simian, from prison, and they all sat down, and Joseph came for lunch. When the plates were served, Benjamin's, the youngest, plate was piled three times higher than anyone else's plate, and they ate and they drank and they sat together unknowingly as family. And then Joseph says, take food. Take it back to your father, and he filled their bags with grain once again. And, again, he put the money, both sets of money, on top of the bags of grain, and he told his steward, take my chalice and place it in the bag of the youngest.

When they were a day away from Egypt, Joseph sent out the chariot and the authorities, and he accused them of stealing. How can you return evil for good? Our master gave you hospitality at his house, and you have taken his chalice from him. They go, look, we didn't do it -- these brothers are pretty good at saying that by now, right? I didn't do it. I didn't do it. They figure there are 12 of them, so they are, like, he did it. No, he did it. They said; trust us, if you find this among us, whoever has it you can kill. They opened the bags one after the other from the oldest all the way down to youngest, and there on the top of Benjamin's bag is a chalice. They stand there in the dust and say you can't. You can't kill our brother. It will break our father's heart. We will stand with you. We will all be slaves, but we are not going back to our father without the youngest. Think of that a moment: Those brothers that so quickly were ready to sell Joseph into slavery now stand as one and stand up for Benjamin.

So they are all brought back to Joseph, and they offer anything. They offer to be slaves. Judah says, take me as your slave. Kill me, but please send our younger brother back to our father. Keep all of us. We don't care. So Joseph sees that somehow they are different. We don't know whether Joseph was testing them or

just messing with them the way brothers do, but he could say they were different, that they were no longer willing to sacrifice one for the whole group, that they stood together as family.

Joseph sent all the Egyptians, the servants, the stewards, out of the room, so it was only he and his brothers in the room. He says, it's I, Joseph, your brother. He says, come closer to me. And they came closer. He says, I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery. But don't feel badly. Don't blame yourselves for selling me. God was behind it. God sent me here ahead of you to save lives. There has been a famine in the land now for two years. The famine will continue for five more years, neither plowing or harvesting. God sent me on ahead to pave the way and make sure there was a remnant in the land.

Faithful Joseph could see his life in the light of what God was doing, not on what he had experienced. Can we as people of faith step out of our lives enough to see that God's purposes are larger than ours? That we may be up or we may be down, but God is working in our lives, sometimes when we don't even know it. In fact, it's probably better if we don't know it, right? Imagine if you knew tomorrow was the day God was going to work on you in a mighty way. You would be like me, you would spend so long trying to figure out what to wear, you would be two hours late for what God wanted you to do, right? You would be nervous; you wouldn't be yourself. God works in us even when we don't know He's working, and it's really better that way. Joseph wasn't sure when he was in prison; Joseph wasn't sure when he was sold into slavery that God was somehow with him. And now in his older age, Joseph could see his life, the ups and the downs, in the light of what God was doing, not in the light of what his experience had been, because his experience wasn't pleasant until lately. But he interpreted his life in the light of God.

He says, now, go, take food, and bring my father to me. Bring my father, Jacob, to Egypt to live with us. There will be plenty of food. And Pharaoh found out that Joseph's brothers were found and his family was here. And Pharaoh says, send wagons. Send wagons not only of grain, but of all the riches of Egypt. Send wagons for the mothers and sisters and daughters and all of the children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and bring them back to Egypt in wagons. As they came back, there was a great reunion, not only in Jacob's family, but in Egypt.

Jacob stood before Joseph, his son. And then Joseph took Jacob to meet Pharaoh. And I love this part because here stands Pharaoh in the robes of Egypt; and here stands Pharaoh with the headdress upon his head; and here stands Pharaoh with the gold staff in his hands, and Jacob, the crippled, older shepherd, walks up, and Jacob blesses Pharaoh. You picture Joseph saying, oh, Dad, don't do that here, please. (Laughter.) You don't understand who this is, Dad. Don't do that. But Jacob was the one that was blessed by the strong God. Jacob reached out his hand and blessed Pharaoh. Then Pharaoh said, you are welcome here, and you can live here in the land of Goshen, and Jacob and all of them settled in.

They went through the years of famine, and Joseph was the manager. But pretty soon everybody in Egypt ran out of money. All they could do was pay for grain; they could not grow anything. They could not make any money. And soon the banking system of Egypt broke. They came to Joseph and said, look there is still a famine. We still need food. He said, sell your livestock if you have no money. So all of the money went to Pharaoh; all of the livestock went to Pharaoh. Then they came and said, look, we got no livestock left, but we're still hungry. And he said, sell your land. Then everyone in Egypt became a slave to Pharaoh because they had no money; they had no livestock; they had no land.

Jacob in his old age blessed Joseph and his sons, and he was assembled with his fathers, as they say in the Old Testament. But he made Joseph promise that he would bury him in the threshing floor that was bought, the place of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And Joseph did what Jacob wanted.

Then after Jacob died -- you got to love these brothers -- they said, what are we going to do now? Our father is gone. The only one in charge now is Joseph. What if now he wants to get back at us? They couldn't let it go. They went to Joseph and said, you know, right before dad died, he said you really ought to forgive us. Now, the story didn't say Jacob said anything like that. Can you picture them saying, you know, right before dad died, he whispered to me you really ought to forgive us? And Joseph says, you can live here. Whatever I have is yours. My blessings are your blessings. And they lived in the land.

And Joseph in his old age was assembled with his fathers, and that ends the Book of Genesis, the first book of Moses. Then the Book of Exodus begins with a sentence: A new king, a new pharaoh came to power in Egypt who did not know Joseph. But that's another story. Amen.