

When A Dream Dies

1. Warm up: In Sunday's scripture, Joseph ticked off his brothers by telling them about his dream that someday they would fall down and worship him. That, in turn, prompted them to sell him into slavery, raising sibling rivalry to a whole new level. ☺ When you were a kid, what's the meanest thing your siblings ever did to you?
2. The story of Joseph begins with these heady words, "Joseph had a dream." Genesis 37:5. Joseph was one of 11 brothers and, as the youngest, he was his father's favorite. You can almost hear his dad telling Joseph, "You can be anything you want to be. The sky's the limit! Apparently Joseph believed it because his dream was to become a king. Read Genesis 37:1-11, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. All of us can probably identify with Joseph. When you were Joseph's age – in your teens – what was your biggest dream for the future? Did that dream come true? If not, what derailed it?
 - b. Sometimes our youthful dreams can be fanciful. But in our twenties, we start to get more serious. In an episode of "This American Life," Ira Glass tells how he once asked an audience of a hundred people to think back to their young adulthood when they were first formulating a plan for their lives and came up with "Plan A." What was your Plan A? What, if anything, derailed it?
 - c. Dreams aren't just a youthful phenomenon. In every season of life, we have plans and dreams. As you look back over your life, what's a big dream that actually came true for you?
 - d. Unfortunately, many (maybe most) dreams don't come true – at least not in the way we envision. Life's circumstances often steamroll right over our dreams. As you look back over life, what has been your most painful dashed dream? How did you feel? How did you respond in the aftermath?
 - e. Jeff told about a good friend who dreamed of being happily married and of devoting his life to teaching in Christian schools. Both dreams began to come true only to be dashed. Since then, Jeff said, his friend has pretty much given up on life, resigned to his fate, is now just going through the motions. Have you seen that happen to someone close to you? What happened?
3. The way Joseph responded to the death of his dream dramatizes how we, as people of faith, should also respond. Read Genesis 39:1-6, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Imagine if you were Joseph – a pampered child in a prosperous family with grand dreams, but then suddenly your life changed and you were sold into slavery. As best you can imagine, how would you likely have responded to such a devastating turn of fortune?

- b. As we saw in our scripture readings, instead of turning bitter and jaded at his turn of fortune, Joseph defiantly embraced his new circumstance with such gusto, grit, and determination, his master made him overseer of his entire house and put him in charge of all he had. Though technically a slave, Joseph was once again thriving in life, thereby becoming a living, breathing example of a famous anonymous quote, “The most important thing in life is not what happens to you, but how you react to what happens.” Do you buy that? When in your life have you seen someone actually live that principle?
 - c. On Sunday, Jeff reminded us how unpredictable life is. Yes, it’s great to have dreams, but hold your dreams lightly because you never know what’s going to happen. Tell us about something unexpected (large or small) that’s happened in your life recently that reminded you that you are not in control?
 - d. Jeff compared life to surfing. A surfer who thinks they can control the waves is destined to be very disappointed and miserable. The key, Jeff said, is to be like Joseph. **This is Lesson #1 – When a dream dies, remember: accept that you’re not in control. Instead of fighting the waves, ride them!** Tell us about a time you rode a big bad wave instead of fighting it.
 - e. Romans 8:28 reminds us that, “All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to God’s purposes.” Does that verse mean God causes everything, even bad things, to happen to us? If not, what does it mean?
4. Joseph’s response to the death of his dream also dramatizes another critical point. **Lesson # 2 – When a dream dies, remind yourself of the most fundamental pattern of our faith**, which Jesus articulated in John 12:24, “Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.”
- a. What do you think that verse means? What’s the pattern we should internalize?
 - b. Romans 6:5 says, “If we have been united with Christ in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” Joseph’s youthful dream died and got buried when he was sold into slavery. But, as we’ll see in the weeks ahead, his dream eventually did come back to life in a way, and on a scope, he could have never imagined. When in your life have you seen a dead dream (Plan A) come back to life as an even better dream (Plan B)?
 - c. Jeff closed Sunday’s sermon with a story about Wynton Marsalis, a famous jazz musician, doing the musical equivalent of riding the waves. When a cell phone ring tone interrupted a jazz solo, instead of becoming exasperated and giving up, Marsalis embraced the cell phone melody, integrating it into his song, creating an improvisational masterpiece. Tell us about a big disappointment you’re facing right now, then describe what it might look like for you to ride that wave, instead of fighting it. Are you ready to ride or will you keep fighting?

Genesis 37:1-11

Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. ²This is the story of the family of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. ³Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a coat of many colors. ⁴But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

⁵ Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. ⁶He said to them, 'Listen to this dream that I dreamed.

⁷There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf.' ⁸His brothers said to him, 'Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?' So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words.

⁹ He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, 'Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' ¹⁰But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, 'What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?' ¹¹So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Genesis 39:1-6

Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ²The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³His master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. ⁴So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him; he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. ⁵From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. ⁶So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate.