

Study questions:

- **Read Genesis 12:2-3; 15:5; 17:4-8.**
What specific promises did God make to Abraham? In what ways do they relate to us?
- **Read Isaiah 53:** In what ways can Joseph be seen as someone who shows us what Jesus is like?

Application:

- We all need to know we are God's covenant partners & completely loved by Him. How can you remind yourself of this?
- Look through Genesis chapters 37-50 & re-familiarize yourself with the story of Joseph. (It's a long journey but it's well worth the ride!). Reflect on some of the key themes in the story & think of examples in your own & other's lives that are similar.
- Create your own canvas. What or who is at the centre of your universe? Where does God fit in? What things prevent you from making God your priority?

Prayer:

Pray through the Lord's Prayer. Pause after each line and use it as a heading, allowing space to pray around the various sections.

Footprints in the Sand

One night I had a dream...

I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord, and Across the sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; One belonged to me, and the other to the Lord. When the last scene of my life flashed before us, I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that many times along the path of my life, There was only one set of footprints.

I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in my life This really bothered me, and I questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, You would walk with me all the way; But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, There is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why in times when I needed you the most, you should leave me.

The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child. I love you, and I would never, never leave you during your times of trial and suffering. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.

PLEASE PRAY FOR...

- **The ALPHA COURSE, being held at Café Culture on Monday nights until 9th December. Pray for those on the course and for the leaders.**
- **Those attending the Service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving at St Mark's on Saturday 26th October. Please pray for our Bereavement and Pastoral teams.**



St Mark's

Inspiring each other to
love and follow Jesus Christ...
everywhere in everything

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week Beginning:
6th October 2013

KINGDOM AND COVENANT: JOSEPH

WORSHIP:

Read the 'Footprints' poem (on the back of the sheet). Give thanks to God for His unfailing presence in your life, especially during the most difficult and painful times.

READINGS: Gen. 41:1-34; Col. 1:24-29

The story of Joseph is one of my favourites in the Bible. As someone who comes from a particularly dysfunctional family background it gives me comfort that I'm not the only one! Because let's be honest, Jacob and his 12 sons, of which Joseph is the 11th born, is about as dysfunctional a family as we might find! Hated and beaten by his siblings, thrown into a well, sold as a slave to the Ishmaelites, and taken into captivity in Egypt where all manner of difficulty & suffering confronted him, we might be inclined to believe that Joseph's story is one of despair. Yet we would be mistaken. In fact, it is a story which speaks of hope in so many ways.

Having formed a relationship with all of us by the promise of the Covenant between himself & Abraham, God leaves us in no doubt that we are His children, called to be one with Him. What God says to us through the Covenant is that everything He has, we have too. Everything that He has access to, so do we. I don't know about you but the knowledge that the Lord God, Creator of the Universe, maker of Heaven & Earth would do that for me, blows me away. But the Covenant is a two way deal. With relationship comes responsibility, with "being" comes "doing", with "Covenant" comes "Kingdom". And through the story of Joseph we can learn much about the ways in which God seeks to establish His reign in all of our lives in order that we may use the gifts that we have to play our part in bringing about His Kingdom. In other words this is our side of the deal.

God at the Centre

Joseph, we learn is not only handsome & favoured by his father Jacob, a favouritism which affords him the richly ornamented coat of many colours, but also that God has given Him an amazing gift. The ability to interpret dreams, a gift, which he is keen to share with his brothers, and serves only to fuel their disdain for him.

In the early chapters of Genesis, Joseph's words and actions reveal how what he sees is simply everything and everyone bowing down to him & his needs. He knows God's plans for his life yet his main concern is that everything is revolving around him.

Simply put, **at the centre of Joseph's universe, at this point in time, is Joseph.**

When my husband turned 40 at the beginning of this year, some friends of ours gave him a beautiful personalized canvas gift. Its purpose was to celebrate his life & to honour him as a friend in their lives. At the centre of the canvas was his name and all around it were words and phrases particular to him; these were names of people who are special to him, memorable dates, places, achievements, hobbies etc. It's a truly lovely & thoughtful gift. Were we to create our own canvas to represent our own lives I wonder what you or I might put on our canvas. What or who would feature? Who or what would be in the centre? Would God be on our canvas and if so where would He be? Would He feature towards the edge or at the centre?

There are so many distractions in our everyday lives that demand our focus and attention: our jobs, our children, our spouses, our hobbies, not to mention social media & networking opportunities. And we have to be careful not to let them become more important or more of a priority than our relationship with God. Yet how many of the things that occupy our time, money, thoughts and attention have taken the place of where God is supposed to be? Anything can become a God to us -anything we worship or put an excessive amount of time into. We need to regularly ask ourselves - "Am I bowing down to God and His Word or are other things becoming more important to me." "Am I doing this for God's glory or my own?"

Yet God's early promise applied as much to Joseph as it did to Abraham. In Gen. 12 God said to Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation, & I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing." The fulfillment of God's promise required action from Abraham. This meant leaving his home and his friends and travelling to a new land where God promised to build a great nation from Abraham's family. It required trust, obedience & a God-centred approach. Similarly, Joseph also had to be prepared to move himself from the centre of his universe and allow God to take up residence on the throne, despite the mess he found himself in. In Chapter 41 verses 15 & 16 we finally see him do this:

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no-one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

And Joseph's reply in verse 16 is this: "**I cannot do it...but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.**"

This doesn't mean that Joseph has lost his ability to interpret dreams. But simply that he at last whole-heartedly acknowledges God's supremacy in his life. God is in charge, not Joseph. Only then could Joseph go on to fulfill the plans that God had for him, to be a blessing to others, to show love & grace to the same brothers who wronged him, to save Egypt & to prepare the way for the beginning of the nation Israel.

God's promise applies as much to us too. We may not all be called to be leaders of nations, to interpret dreams for Pharaohs, to move lock, stock and barrel to another country in obedience to God. But as God's chosen ones, as blessed children of the Father, we are all called to use whatever gifts we have to be a blessing to others in all aspects of our life. And I suspect every one of us, in our everyday lives can think of times when we need to remember, "Less of me Lord & more you." Christian author and bible teacher Kasey van Norman says "When our lives become God-centred, His will becomes our heartbeat and begins to align with our deepest desires."

Character building through suffering

What's interesting is that throughout the entire time of Joseph's ordeal, 17 years in total, God's love, his faithfulness and his presence in his life remained constant. In Chapter 39, having been sold into slavery and imprisoned, verse 20 reminds us: "...but while Joseph was in prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden." Joseph's most important opportunity came at a time when he probably least expected it. At what was probably one of the most difficult times of his life, he suddenly found himself pulled from a dungeon & thrust before the Pharaoh. But because he had remained close to God, he was ready for almost anything.

One Saturday night in May 1985 a 19 year old boy was killed by a drunk driver as he crossed the road. It was a tragedy, which devastated a family and the boy's mother in particular suffered greatly. In fact she hated the man who killed her son. As a Christian she despised herself for feeling this way, but such was the extent of her pain. A member of her church gave her a copy of the poem 'Footprints' reminding her of God's unfailing presence in her life even during times of trial & suffering and she strived to remain close to God. Several years later she found out that the man who had killed her son was dying and by the grace of God she chose to visit him in his dying days to hold his hand and talk to & comfort him.

One of this woman's most important opportunities, just like Joseph's, came at one of the most painful episodes in her life and at a time when she probably least expected it. Because of God's covenant with her, the same Covenant that exists for all of us, she was able to use her gifts to bless him, on this occasion with the gift of compassion & forgiveness. This story is an amazing example of Covenant & Kingdom coming together. I witnessed it first hand because the boy was my brother and the woman was my mother.

It's a reminder again that God's Covenant is a two-way deal. With relationship comes responsibility, with "being" comes "doing", with "Covenant" comes "Kingdom". Having a right relationship with God can mean we are ready for all opportunities to reveal more of God's Kingdom on earth, even during some of the most difficult times of our life. This is reiterated in our reading from Colossians. But we have to open up our hearts to accepting God's love for us, and his grace, and affording Him His rightful place at the centre of our lives in order to do so. **How ready to do this are you?**