

**COME CLOSER TO ME**  
**Genesis 37:3-8; 45:4**

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He was a 17-year-old smart aleck. Can't you see him now, strutting back and forth, chin cocked high, shoulders set square, mouth always loaded with a braggadocios boasting?

His daddy played favorites. He loved this 17-year-old bragging brat more than he loved any of his other sons, and he had 12 of them. This lad was spoiled rotten — you could smell him coming, like a caravan of camels.

Can't you imagine the jealousy? A father with 12 boys. He shops for ten or eleven of the sons at the Dollar General Store, buys generic tennis shoes, the goofy sort with big rubber toes, no-name jeans and shirts that are on blue light special. But his favorite son, Joe, he takes to Foot Locker and buys Nikes, and to Neiman Marcus to buy Tom Ford jeans and a Polo shirt.

The other brothers look down at their clothes and then up at Joe's. "Hey, what's going on here?" The brat smiles, brushes them away. "Easy on the threads, man. Easy on the threads."

Jacob was not a very fair father. But he had been raised by Isaac and Rebekah and they played favorites with their sons, too. What was he thinking? Joseph's colorful coat was enough to bring out the worst of envy and hatred from the other brothers. And the way Joseph wore that coat — strutting like a peacock on display at the San Diego Zoo. To make matters worse, his mouth was unbearable.

"Hey, Judah, Reuben, Simeon. All of you come here. I had a dream last night. Can you help me figure out what it means? We were working in the field, binding sheaves, and low and behold my sheaf all of a sudden stood straight and your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

"Oh yeah, Joseph. You're actually going to rule over us? Oh really?"

The more he talked the more they hated him. He didn't know when to let well enough alone.

"I had another dream. The sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

His father even became furious. "What? Shall I and your brothers and your mother actually bow ourselves down to you?"

Jacob sent Joe's brothers to shepherd the flock at Shechem. Eventually, Jacob sent Joseph to check on them. He was daddy's tattle tale. No one had to tell them who he was. Even at a great distance they could see the prancing peacock, Joseph in his coat of colors, coming to give his brothers the inspection for father.

"Here comes the dreamer." "Let's kill him and say a beast devoured him. Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams."

They ripped his coat off and threw him into a dry well. As they ate, they enjoyed Joseph's persistent pleas more than his previous boasting. Judah suggested that instead of killing Joseph they ought to sell him to the Ishmaelites who were passing by on their way to peddle their balm and myrrh in Egypt. So, his brothers sopped his coat in the blood of a goat.

"Father, we found this." They thrust out the blood-covered coat with sly satisfaction. Now the bright color was all dulled by the deep, dark blood.

"Please tell us," asking as if they didn't have the answer, "is this your son's coat?"

"It is Joseph's. A wild beast has torn my boy to pieces. I will go to the grave mourning for my son."

Meanwhile, back in Egypt the Midianites sold Joseph to the house of one of Pharaoh's officers, Potiphar.

Joseph began to excel in Egypt, so much so that Potiphar placed Joseph in charge of everything in his household. But Potiphar's wife had her eye on him. He was young and handsome; she wondered if she could still attract someone like him. Besides, Potiphar, her husband, hardly even noticed her anymore.

"Joseph, I'm available."

"I'm not interested."

"Joseph, I'm available."

"But your husband has trusted me with his whole household."

"Joseph."

He runs. She grabs – he flees. She screams. He goes to the pit again. This time it is not a dry well, but this time it is a prison in Egypt, and he is an innocent man.

How do we get Joseph from being a bragging brat to a gracious governor?

God allows him to lose his coat. Two times. God allows young Joseph, the braggadocios boy, to lose his coat and be cast into the pit. First a dry well and then a prison. Sometimes God shapes us

by sending us to the pit. I don't know why God chose to use, as we will see, this bragging brat in such a mighty way. If I were God, I would have chosen to skip him altogether.

But God sees through the prancing peacock. God sees a gracious governor. Sometimes the darkness of the pit, the confines of a prison, the weeping in desolation become the molding, shaping hand of God. To avoid the pit, to never have our colorful coat ripped from our backs means to remain a bragging brat and never be a gracious governor.

I can't help but wonder. As Joseph sits in prison, accused of doing something that he never did, does he doubt his dreams now? He is in Egypt, so many miles away – away from the father he loved. Did he still think his brothers would one day bow down to him?

But God uses the shadows in Joseph's life, just as he uses the shadows in our life, to shape the character of our spirit.

Joseph begins to excel in prison. Once again he finds himself the manager of it all.

39:23

“Whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper.”

Pharaoh becomes furious with his cupbearer and his baker. They went to Joseph's jail. And both the cupbearer and the baker had a dream. Joseph noticed the frowning, troubled faces. He inquired. “We both had a dream last night and there is no one who can tell us what they mean.”

“God will interpret through me.”

“Well,” said the cupbearer, “I dreamed that there was a vine in front of me. On the vine were three branches. It budded, blossomed and produced ripe grapes. I squeezed the grapes into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup into Pharaoh's hand.”

Joseph said, “In three days Pharaoh will be over his anger and restore you to your position. Only, please remember me when things go well with you, and do me the kindness of telling Pharaoh that I am innocent, but I've been cast into prison. Try to get me out of here. I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews. I haven't done anything, and they've put me into the dungeon.”

Well, the baker saw that Joseph had interpreted, and very favorably, the cupbearer's dream, and so he said, “Tell me about my dream. In my dream there are three baskets of white bread on my head. In the top basket there was some of all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh and the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head.”

Joseph frowned and said, “This is the interpretation. The three baskets are three days. Within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and you will hang on the tree. And the birds will come and eat your flesh.”

Three days pass. It's Pharaoh's birthday. He throws a big feast for all the servants and he, indeed, restores the cupbearer to his position of prominence, but he did hang the chief baker, just as Joseph

had interpreted. Yet, the cupbearer didn't remember Joseph. He forgot about the one who had helped him, despite his promise to do otherwise.

Two years pass in the life of Joseph. He's still in the dungeon. But now Pharaoh has a dream. He's standing by the Nile. And out of the Nile there come up seven cows that are sleek and fat, and they graze on the marsh grass around the Nile. And then seven other ugly and gaunt cows come up and stand beside the other cows of the Nile. And the ugly and gaunt cows gobble down the seven sleek and fat cows. And Pharaoh awoke very troubled.

After he calmed again and reminded himself it was only a dream, he fell asleep again. And the second time, he saw seven heads of grain come from a single stalk, plump and good. And then, behold, seven heads, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them. And the thin heads swallowed up the plump heads. And Pharaoh woke, disturbed by his dream.

He just couldn't get it out of his mind. So he called all of the magicians of Egypt and all of the wise men of his kingdom, and not a one of them could tell Pharaoh what his dreams meant.

The chief cupbearer had the "aha" experience – wow, oh I forgot, oops...Joseph, back in prison, he interpreted my dream. "Pharaoh, when you were angry with me, there was a man in the prison who had the ability to interpret dreams. My dream and the dream of the baker. And each occurred even as he had interpreted."

Pharaoh called for Joseph. They hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon to interpret the dream.

"I've had a dream, Joseph, and no one can tell me what it means. And I've heard you can interpret what it means."

"The power is not within me," said Joseph. "The power is with God."

Pharaoh told Joseph about the seven healthy cows and the seven lean cows. He told him about the seven healthy ears and the seven scrawny ears. Joseph didn't hesitate a moment. "Well, your dreams are one in the same, Pharaoh. God is telling Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows and the seven good ears are seven good years. The dreams, again, mean the same. The seven lean and ugly cows that come after them and the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind are seven years of famine.

I have told Pharaoh what God is going to do. There are going to be seven years of abundance in all the land of Egypt. And after that, seven years of famine, with no harvest. The land will be ravaged. Now, God let you have the dream twice because He wants you to know it's going to happen and it's going to happen very quickly.

Now Pharaoh, go find yourself a wise and discerning man and put him over all the land of Egypt. And let the Pharaoh appoint overseers in charge of the land and let them collect a fifth of the produce during each of the seven good years of abundance. And then, when there is no harvest at all, there will be food for the people to eat."

Pharaoh said, "I think I've found my man, Joseph. It's you. Only I, in all the land of Egypt, will be more powerful than you."

Right then and there, Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand – the equivalent of his debit card – and put it on the hand of Joseph, a prisoner, and then clothed him – removed his jailbird stripes – and put fine linen on his back and a gold necklace around his neck. He let him ride in the second greatest chariot in all the land. And they proclaimed before his chariot, "Bow the knee." And he set him over all the land of Egypt.

And Joseph began storing the grain as he had advised Pharaoh.

Meanwhile, back in Israel Jacob's family is going hungry. He looks at Reuben and he looks at Simeon and he looks at Levi. "Why are you just standing there? I hear there's food down in Egypt. Let's go down and buy some. For sure, you go and bring it back."

Ten of them went. Benjamin stayed home. Jacob had already lost Benjamin's blood brother, Joseph. He wasn't about to let them take Benjamin as well.

Well, Joseph's brothers come before him. He's dressed as the ruler over all the land. And they – they act just like his dream at the age of 17 – they bowed down their faces to the ground in homage to him.

Joseph recognized them, but they didn't recognize him. He said to his brothers, "You are spies. You've come to look at the undefended parts of our city."

"Oh no, my Lord," they said. "We're servants, come to buy food. We're all the sons of one man. We're honest men. Your servants are not spies."

"Oh no," said Joseph. "You've come to spy."

"No, we're twelve brothers in all, the sons of a man in the Land of Canaan. And behold, our youngest brother is with our father today, and one is no more."

"Well, we'll see if you're spies or not," said Joseph. "You shall not leave here unless your youngest brother comes back. Then I'll know if you're telling the truth. I'll keep one of you here while the rest of you go and return with the youngest."

As they are leaving, Reuben said, "I told you, years ago, we should have never done any harm against the boy. And you wouldn't listen. And now comes karma."

But Joseph, though they didn't know, Joseph understood every word of the Hebrew tongue.

Simeon is bound before their eyes. Joseph fills their bags with grain, but makes instruction that their money be put back in the top of their sacks. They loaded their donkeys and left. They opened their sacks and found their money. And they began to tremble, wondering why God is punishing them by causing them so much trouble.

They explain to their father that the man in Egypt thought that they were spies, and that he had kept Simeon until Benjamin, the youngest brother, would be brought back to confirm the story. They told him that their monies had been placed back in their sacks. Jacob said, "I can't believe you've bereaved me of my son, Joseph, and now Simeon is no longer. And you want to take Benjamin back. Nothing doing. My young son shall not go down with you. His brother is already dead, and he, alone, is left. If any harm should happen to him, you'll bring my gray head down to death in sorrow."

But finally, they ran out of food, and they had to go back. Jacob said, "What are you doing, just standing there? Go and get us some food."

"Father, we've already told you, we cannot go back unless we take Benjamin with us." Judah spoke up. "Father, I'll be personally responsible for Benjamin if you'll let him go." The old man had little choice. There was no food. They'd all die if he didn't risk Benjamin.

Oddly enough, upon arrival they were invited to come to Joseph's house for a meal. They thought they were really in trouble over retaining their own money at the purchase of grain. "Oh no," said the steward. "We have your money. God must have put extra money in your sack."

Joseph came home. They were brought into the house and they bowed down to him, again. He asked about the father. "How's your father doing?" And then he saw him – Benjamin, his only full-blooded brother (both have Rachel as their mother).

"And this is our youngest brother. We told you we are not spies." Joseph looked at him. "May God be gracious to you, my son." Joseph had to flee from the room because he was stirred over seeing Benjamin. He found a place to weep.

After he wept his emotions away through the flood of tears, he washed his face and came out and controlled himself as host. Odd, though. When it came to cutting the roast beef, Benjamin's portion was five times as much as his other brothers.

Joseph instructed that their sacks, once again, be filled with grain. But this time, his own silver cup should be put in the sack of Benjamin, the youngest.

Just as Joseph's brothers had left the city – they weren't very far off – Joseph said to the house steward, "Follow those men and overtake them, and ask them why they have repaid evil for good. Search their bags until you find the one who has stolen my silver cup."

"We've done no such thing," said Jacob's sons. "Examine our sacks." And so they did. The first sack, the second sack, the third sack, the fourth sack. "See, I told you. We would never take the silver cup from your lord."

As they approached the tenth sack – "See, we told you, we're innocent men."

Finally, the last sack – the sack of the youngest, Benjamin – the sack of Joseph’s brother. As they rip open the seam, the sun catches the glistening gleam of the silver cup. The men tore their clothes in grief.

Judah and all the other brothers came to Joseph’s house while he was still there, and they fell on the ground before him. “What have you done,” said Joseph. “The rest of you may go free, but the one in whose sack the cup was found shall become my slave.”

Judah speaks up. “Please, we have an old father, and this is the little child of his old age. His brother is dead, so he, alone, is left from his mother. And my, how our father loves him. When we told him that we had to bring him down to Egypt to get grain, I told him that I would be personally responsible for the lad. Let the lad go. Take me. How can I see my father’s face if I do not have his son with me?”

Perhaps it was talk of his father’s broken heart, perhaps it was the fact that Judah was willing to sacrifice himself for Benjamin. I don’t know what it was, but Joseph couldn’t control himself any longer, and he began to cry. He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it throughout the land. And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am he. I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?”

But his brothers couldn’t even answer him. They were dismayed at his presence. They’d thought he’d been dead so long.

“Come closer to me,” Joseph said, and they came closer (45:4). He said, “I am your brother, Joseph. I’m the one you sold into slavery. But don’t be angry with yourselves because you sold me here. For God has sent me here to be used to preserve your life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five more years of famine. There will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God has sent me before you to preserve His people on earth. Hurry, go and get my father and bring him down to Egypt to live.”

And Joseph fell on Benjamin’s neck, and he wept. And Benjamin wept on his neck.

Can you imagine the old man, when they tell him that his son Joseph, the son whom he had mourned for for so many years, is still alive? Jacob wouldn’t believe them, until he saw the wagons from Egypt coming to move him and his household. And Jacob said, “It’s enough that my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”

From bragging brat to gracious governor. My, how in some real ways he must have wanted to get revenge on his brothers. For as he was in the pit, he was powerless, and they had treated him so wrongly. And now, as they bow before him, he was powerful. And they – they were the ones at his mercy.

I think Joseph went from bragging brat to gracious governor not only because God allowed him to have his coat removed two times, but also because Joseph realized that God was at work in all of life. “Don’t blame yourselves,” he told his brothers. “God has used your disobedience and your evilness for His own good.” That is to say, wherever he was, whether he was in the pit or whether he was in prison or whether he was second in command in the land, sitting next to Pharaoh’s

throne, he was willing to acknowledge the hand of God in all the ways of his life. He learned to have the ability to forgive, to let revenge go, and to move on – working out God’s will in his own life.

From bragging brat to gracious governor. Sometimes the journey takes us through the pit. Sometimes the journey takes us through the prison. Sometimes the journey requires us to see the sovereign work of God. Like Joseph, we, too, can make the journey.

Genesis 45:4

Come closer to me (with a facemask, maintaining six feet of social distancing, and only if we are in the same family unit). No – what Joseph is saying is “Come closer to my heart.”