

The Upward Spiral of a God Centered Life

Good morning! If you're just joining us, I'm Allen Snapp, pastor of Grace Community Church and we're glad you're with us. If you'd like to find out more about Grace Community Church you can go to gracecornering.org.

So we are in a series called, Spiraling Upward: Life Lessons from the Story of Joseph. Over the past several weeks we've seen Joseph endure being rejected and betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused, unjustly imprisoned, and forgotten by the one person who could have helped him get out.

Now in chap. 41 Joseph faces his biggest challenge so far (I think there's a bigger one coming): prosperity. Power. Things going well, life turning a corner.

That may sound crazy, we tend to think if things are going well, what's the problem? The truth is, the only thing harder on our souls than things going bad, is things going good. As one thinker put it over 100 years ago: **Adversity is sometimes hard upon a man; but for one man who can stand prosperity, there are a hundred that will stand adversity.**

Joseph is that man who can stand prosperity. He spirals upward when his life is spiraling downward, and he will spiral upward when his life is spiraling upward. No matter what life throws at Joseph, he thrives! How does he do it?

As I was reading Gen. 41 I saw two statements Joseph makes that, I believe, give us the key into how Joseph thrives no matter what. The secret to how he is buoyant in hard times and grounded in good times.

It's not complicated: Joseph is, simply and sincerely, a God-centered man. At Joseph's core is God. His core beliefs are centered on God. His core values are centered on God. Joseph's life is centered on God.

I love this illustration so bear with me if you've heard me share it before but our solar system revolves around the sun. All the planets, moons, and asteroids in our solar system orbit around the sun. And it does that because the sun has this powerful gravitational pull that literally holds everything in its proper orbit. What qualifies the sun to be at the center of the solar system is its mass. Nearly 99% of all the mass of our solar system is in the sun. All the other planets, moons, etc account for only about 1% of the mass. So even the largest planet in the solar system wouldn't have anywhere near enough mass to take the place of the sun. Replace the sun with Jupiter or Saturn, and our solar system would blow apart as planets went flying off in different directions into space.

Only God is big enough – only God has enough mass – to hold our lives in proper order. God alone is the Creator of all things. God alone is eternal both backward and forward – He has always been and He will always be. Only God is infinite – He is omnipresent (everywhere at once), He is all-powerful, He is perfect in wisdom, justice, righteousness.

God is faithful – He doesn't schitz out, He doesn't break His promises, He doesn't neglect His creation. God is true – He never lies, he never deceives. He isn't just true, He is Truth.

But all this wouldn't help us much, if God weren't also good. And God IS good! Full of compassion, mercy, kindness, and love. God doesn't just love, the Bible says He *is* love. All of this put together is

God's glory. Only God is big enough to be at the center of our lives and have the gravitational pull to hold everything else in its right orbit.

I want to point out the two statements in Gen. 41 that I believe reveal Joseph's God-centeredness, and then next week we'll at Pharaoh's two dreams and Joseph's plan and rise to power in more detail.

Pharaoh has two dreams, and none of his wise men know how to interpret them. This reminds the cupbearer of Joseph and he tells Pharaoh, "I met this guy in prison who can interpret dreams". Let's pick up in Gen. 41:14

¹⁴ So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh.

¹⁵ 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." Gen. 41:14-15

Now we come to the first statement that reveals Joseph's God-centeredness. Verse 16:

¹⁶ "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." Vs. 16

I can't do it. But God can. Now let's jump down to verse 25:

²⁵ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream. ²⁷ The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterward are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine.

²⁸ "It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹ Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, ³⁰ but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. ³¹ The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe. Gen. 41:25-31

Joseph could have stopped there – he's told Pharaoh what his dreams mean. But there's another question that needs to be answered. Why two dreams? In fact, why do all the dream sequences in Joseph come in twos? The answer to that question brings us to the second place where Joseph's God-centeredness comes out. Verse 32:

³² The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon. Vs 32

In these two statements Joseph makes it clear that God gets total credit and God has total control. These two statement can help us ask ourselves two important questions:

- 1. Is God at the center of my life, or is my ego?**

Pharaoh lobbed a softball at Joseph: I hear you're pretty good at interpreting dreams. Joseph could have said, "yeah, yes, I am." He could have promoted himself, marketed himself to Pharaoh. A lot was riding on this – it was his opportunity to earn Pharaoh's gratitude and his freedom. Joseph answers:

16 "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." Vs. 16

I cannot do it, but God can. Joseph had the opportunity to exalt his ego, he chose to exalt God.

Is God at the center of my life, or is my ego?

I'm purposely using the word ego rather than pride because when Christians hear the word "pride", we have a conditioned response to think "bad", "sin". Of course pride shouldn't be at the center of my life.

But ego...what does that mean? The Latin word *ego* simply means "I". Ego is our sense of importance, our sense of self-worth. Whether we know it or not, we are conditioned to put ourselves, our importance, our self-worth, at the center of our lives and promote ourselves to others.

- I'm smarter than you
- I'm a better athlete than you
- I'm a better musician than you
- I'm better looking than you
- I'm more popular than you
- I make more money than you
- I have a better job than you

You being the people that make up our world at any given time. We have this innate desire to be at the center of our world, and we'd like to be at the center of other people's worlds too.

If you've ever met a narcissist, they're just people in whom this innate desire has run amok. They construct a reality, a world in their minds, where everything really does revolve around them. They find it hard to empathize with other people or feel compassion or care about other people's feelings unless those feelings serve their egos. For many narcissists, their relationships are spinning totally out of control (and we'll look at why in a moment) but they always blame it on the other people, because the most important core value to them is that they be at the center.

We're not all narcissists, but there is a bit of narcissism in all of us!

Here are two truths we need to keep in mind:

- a. You are important. You have worth. Every person is made in the image of God and their life is sacred

- b. You are so, so puny. Sorry to insult you – especially if this is the first time you’re watching, but you are one puny, little dude! And so am I. Most of the world doesn’t know or care that you even exist, and when you die, you will be forgotten in a very short time. And so will I. If we can get out of our egos for just a minute, we see that we are incredibly puny.

We aren’t near big enough to be at the center of our lives, much less our world. It’s like replacing the sun with Pluto - everything starts spinning and careening out of its rightful orbit. Money becomes more important than people. Power becomes more important than love. Our job becomes more important than family. Being right more important than truth. Being loved more important than loving. On and on. Even good things careen out of orbit and get all messed up.

With a simple statement, “I can’t do it, but God can.” Joseph displaced himself from the center and put God at the center. May God give us grace each day to displace ourselves from the center and put God at the center of our lives. When we confess Jesus as Lord, we are confessing him as worthy to be at the center of our lives, to hold our lives together, to rule over our lives.

That can be scary cause moving our egos out of the center can feel like we’re giving up our identity, but the opposite is true: We don’t lose our identity when God is at the center of our lives, we discover who we were created to be! Our ego finds its right place in orbit.

Is God at the center of my life, or is my ego?

2. Is God in control of my life, or am I?

³² The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon. Vs 32

Joseph is saying to the most powerful person on earth, God has firmly decided to do this and you have no power, no say, and no control over it. You can adapt to it or not, but God is in control and you’re not.

Remember, Joseph also had two dreams, so this indicates that Joseph knew all along that God had firmly decided to exalt him over his family one day, and he rested in the knowledge that God was in control.

Is God in control of my life or am I? Not talking theologically – of course God is in control ultimately. Talking functionally: are we living as if He is in control, or are we living as if we are in control? Living as if we are in control can take different forms in our lives such as:

- Anxiety – what I call “fear at the wheel”. It’s holding onto the steering wheel so tightly our knuckles are white. We can’t actually control a lot of what we worry about – losing sleep doesn’t actually change that situation, does it? But it’s one way we try to be in control.
- Anger – trying to get people to do what we want by the force of our anger or punish them when they don’t do what we want.
- Manipulation – whether it’s by guilt, pressure, threats, flattery, or whatever, manipulation attempts to control people and situations by pulling the marionette strings.

- Control freak- that's the person who feels they have to control every aspect of what they're involved in or they don't have peace.

Giving God control doesn't mean we don't plan. We'll talk about Joseph's wise plan next week. We plan, but under the consciousness that God is in control.

Two statements that say, "God gets total credit and God has total control." How can we get there? How can we relinquish the center and the control of our lives to God? What does that look like?

Well, it doesn't look like taking control by trying harder to put God at the center. Looks more like surrendering. Every day. To the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Filling our minds and hearts with the knowledge of God's glory and greatness through reading His word, praying, worshipping – all to see how big our God is. The Bible tells us the more we see His glory and greatness, the more we become what God intends us to be.

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Cor. 3:17-18

Today, right now, there's a situation, a relationship, a thing in your life where God wants to help you let go of the credit and let go of the control and give both to Him. Will you do it right now?

Pray. *Lord help us let go and hold on. Let go of our glory, hold onto Yours. Let go of being in control, and hold on to the truth that You are in control. And You know what You're doing. Jesus, be the center of our lives, be the center of our thoughts, our love, our actions. Put the things that have been spinning out of order back into right order. And we will give you all the glory. In Jesus' name, amen.*