



FOCUS[®]
ON
THE FAMILY



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ALEX MCFARLAND

STAND

seeking the WAY of God

Stand: Seeking the Way of God
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Dedicated to
Peace and Caleb

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INTRODUCTION


be a dreamer

We all have dreams. Some are burning passions that define our identities; others are secret yearnings we lock away in our hearts.

I once met a young man who dreamed of becoming an Olympic swimmer. At the age of 10, he pursued the sport with such discipline that he was recruited by one of the nation's best trainers. But after years of diligent preparation, his dream changed. During his teen years he set his sights on the United States Air Force Academy, believing that God was calling him to be a pilot and an officer.

Did he give up his Olympic dreams? Yes. But the Lord had given him a passion for swimming so that he could develop discipline and perseverance. God replaced one dream with an even bigger vision.

I experienced that in my own life. Long before I committed my life to Christ, I wanted to be a rock star. I learned to play the guitar and spent every spare moment practicing. I imagined myself standing onstage with the Beach Boys! During college I performed in bands, and one of my proudest moments was when I earned enough cash playing gigs



to buy my first Rickenbacker guitar—an instrument my musical heroes had mastered.

And my dream to jam with the Beach Boys was fulfilled! When the band performed near my college, I was invited to play a song onstage with them. Then, months later, I was offered a job traveling with the band. Amazingly I turned the offer down. Why? Because an even more incredible thing had happened to me: I committed my life to Jesus Christ.

When I became a Christian, my priorities changed. I decided to go to graduate school and earn a degree in apologetics. Although my love for the guitar and for music didn't go away—I still love jamming with friends or playing alone—God birthed a new dream in me: the passion to become a preacher and a writer. The cool thing is, the countless hours I spent practicing and performing had, almost against my will, built qualities in me that have served me well to this day.

You see, when we're young, we have lots of dreams for our future. Sometimes these dreams are naive and driven by whim. (As a kid I wanted to be an astronaut, a soldier, and a cowboy—often all in the same day!) But the process of growing up involves receiving new dreams from God . . . and discarding old ones.

My goal of becoming a preacher and a writer didn't come easily. There were days when I despaired of it ever coming true. But I learned that it didn't matter how many times I got knocked down,



as long as I stayed faithful to the Lord and kept getting up each time I got knocked down.

Joseph learned this too. As a boy he had dreams of becoming a leader—and even one day ruling over his brothers. That dream was delayed and deferred, but it never went away. The dream, and the promise of its fulfillment, kept Joseph moving forward even during the darkest times. And, interestingly, being the lord of his brothers wasn't even the most important part of the dream. God gave Joseph only a part of the vision. The dream in God's mind (if I may put it that way) wasn't to make Joseph a ruler but to make his family the seed of the Jewish people. God replaced one dream with another, and the second dream was even bigger than the first.

Here are a couple of questions for you: What do you think God wants to accomplish in your life? Is there a particular dream burning in your heart—a passion that seems to define you? Remember, as you grow, some of your goals will fall by the wayside. Like the young swimmer I described, you may replace your dreams with a better one. That's all part of God's plan!

American author Napoleon Hill once said, "Cherish your visions and dreams, as they are the children of your soul. Visions and dreams are the blueprints of your ultimate achievements."¹

We don't always know where our dreams will take us, but we can rest assured that God gives us dreams to move us farther down a road He wants



us to travel. The ultimate destination of this journey is a mystery at times, but hold tight. In light of God's sovereignty, we can . . .

- *follow* God's revealed will with obedience;
- *wait* on God's concealed will with anticipation;
- *believe* in God's righteous nature with assurance; and
- *trust* in God's complete power with confidence.

There's no doubt about it: The Lord's hand of blessing was firmly on Joseph's life. By faith he

*Destiny? Tomorrow?
Truth? All are
questions within
the reach of the
man who knows
his source: Jesus.*

—Max Lucado, *Grace
for the Moment*

overcame tremendous adversity, grew in wisdom, and rose to a position of prominence in Egypt. And through it all he held tightly to his dreams, trusting God's call on his life. Yet Joseph's story is more than a lesson in how to handle hard times. It's an example of

spiritual "wait training." Because Joseph waited on the Lord, never once compromising, God rewarded him—and used him to impact future generations for eternity.

Joseph set an example through his . . .

- *belief* in God's sovereignty,
- *character* in resisting compromise,
- *vision* for his place in God's kingdom,
and
- *leadership* in every circumstance he faced.

Genesis fast facts

- The book of beginnings: creation, man, the sabbath, marriage, sin, sacrifice, nations, god's covenant, music, art, civilizations, languages, and salvation
- Theme: salvation
- Author: Jews and Christians agree that Moses was the writer-compiler of the first five books of the Old Testament—the Pentateuch—yet some scholars argue that different writers from various periods of Israel's history contributed to these works.
- Genesis is divided into 11 sections, each beginning with the word “account”.
- The numbers 10, 7, 12, and 40 have symbolic significance in Genesis.
- The subjects and themes of the first three chapters of Genesis are reflected in the last three chapters of Revelation.

THE BEGINNING OF MISERY—AND HOPE

The book of Genesis chronicles everything from sin and evil to shame and cover-up, broken fellowship, erected barriers, attacks on God, and flight from God. It's the story of the fall, out of which C. S. Lewis wrote “has come nearly all that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empire, slavery—the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.”² Yet the message of Genesis is also one of grace—God's grace—

God created all things

“YOU ALONE ARE THE LORD. YOU MADE THE HEAVENS, even the highest heavens, and ALL THEIR STARRY host, the earth and ALL THAT IS ON IT, the seas and ALL THAT IS IN THEM. YOU GIVE LIFE TO EVERYTHING, and the MULTITUDES OF HEAVEN WORSHIP YOU” (NEHEMIAH 9:6).

The weight of historical evidence not only makes it possible to believe in God's existence, it makes it very hard to ignore. Regardless, truth is truth, and God is who He is. ALL the arm twisting and eloquent speeches in the world can't convince a nonbelieving friend that creation belongs to God. In fact, arm twisting and eloquent speeches aren't exactly God's style. Transforming a hardened heart is the work of God Himself.

and hope. It's the hope that began when God broke our unholy alliance with the Devil.

LET'S TAKE A JOURNEY THROUGH JOSEPH'S LIFE . . .

And gain some insights about seeking the way of God.

The book you're reading isn't merely an academic exercise; it's also a devotional one. The goal is to have a more intimate relationship with the One who gave us the Bible (not to ace a test on Gene-

sis). In other words, I want you to know not only the book but the Author as well—our Lord God, the Creator of all things.

Joseph knew God intimately. And his attitude toward life reminds me of the story of a man who always wrote “Rom. 8:28” every time he signed his name.

Once while staying in a hotel, the man signed the ticket for his meal. The waitress looked at what the man had written and said, “Sir, did you mean to charge this to your room? You can’t do that, since we don’t have a Room 8:28.”

The man smiled and had the opportunity to explain: “In all things God works for the good . . .”

Thousands of years ago, well before Romans 8:28 was written by the apostle Paul, Joseph understood that truth. It’s a promise that’s available to every Christian today.

Joseph teaches us that even though the glory of this world is fleeting and flawed by strife, true fulfillment can be found by intimately knowing, intensely loving, passionately serving, and completely trusting the God of the universe. Eternal peace is at the core of God’s gift of salvation.

*[God] says, . . .
“Make your requests known to Me.” And so we come in order to know him and to be known by him.
—R. C. Sproul,
Effective Prayer*

What's so special about Joseph? Genesis says this . . .

1. Joseph had God's blessing:

The LORD WAS with Joseph and he prospered.
(Genesis 39:2)

but while Joseph was there in the prison,
the LORD WAS with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. . . . The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD WAS with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. (39:20-21, 23)

2. Joseph had his boss's blessing through God:

“when his master saw that the LORD WAS with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. (Genesis 39:3-4)

so the warden put Joseph in charge of ALL those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for ALL that was done there.
(39:22)

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “since God has made [the dream's interpretation] known to

you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. you shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.” (41:39-40)

3. Joseph was god’s dream interpreter:


now a young Hebrew was there [in prison] with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. we told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us. (Genesis 41:12-13)


“I cannot [interpret your dream],” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.” (41:16)

4. Joseph was god’s servant:

[Joseph said,] “but God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. so then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.” (Genesis 45:7-8)

TIME LINE OF JOSEPH'S LIFE


- 1770-1764 BC** Jacob completes 14 years of work for his father-in-law, Laban, as payment for his wives, Rachel and Leah. Son Joseph is born to Rachel when Jacob is 91. (Genesis 30:22-43; see also 29:14-30)
- 1764** Jacob and his family return to live in Canaan, to be free of domineering Laban. (Genesis 31)
- 1763** Jacob wrestles with God by a brook called Jabok. God changes his name to Israel. (Genesis 32:22-30)
- 1757** Jacob and his sons move to Bethel, and God renews the covenant there with Jacob. (Genesis 35:1-15)
- 1734** Benjamin is born to Jacob and Rachel, and Rachel dies in childbirth. (Genesis 35:16-21)
- 1727** Joseph, age 17, is his father's favorite. In jealousy, his brothers sell Joseph into Egyptian slavery and convince their father that Joseph is dead. (Genesis 37)
- 1726-1720** Joseph, now a slave of Potiphar, eventually rises to be chief manager over Potiphar's house. (Genesis 39:1-6)
- 1720** Potiphar's wife accuses Joseph of molesting her, and Joseph is imprisoned. (Genesis 39:7-20)
- 1720-1716** Joseph is put in charge over the prisoners in the jail. (Genesis 39:21-23)
- 


- 1716** Pharaoh's baker and cupbearer are imprisoned, and both experience mysterious dreams. Joseph interprets both dreams correctly. (Genesis 40)
- 1714** Pharaoh dreams a disturbing two-part dream, which no one can interpret. Pharaoh's cupbearer remembers Joseph, who is summoned from prison. Joseph interprets the dream and warns of seven years of plenty followed by seven years of severe famine. Pharaoh elevates Joseph to a ruling position as second in command over all of Egypt. Joseph is age 30. (Genesis 41:1-46)
- 1714-1707** Joseph presides over the growth and storage of grain throughout all of Egypt. (Genesis 41:46-49)
- 1707** Harsh famine strikes Egypt and Canaan. Joseph begins to ration out and sell the stored grain. (Genesis 41:53-57)
- 1706** Joseph's 10 older brothers come to buy grain, but they don't recognize Joseph. Joseph accuses them of being a band of spies and of coming to engage in spying. To test their story of an aged father and a younger brother (Benjamin) at home, Joseph says that he will sell them grain, but one brother will have to remain behind as a hostage, or "earnest." When the brothers return with this so-called younger brother, Joseph promises to return the hostage to them. The brothers speak in their native tongue, unaware that Joseph can understand every word they say. Reuben says that these things are coming upon them because of what they had done to
- 

Joseph years before. Joseph is touched by what Reuben is saying but selects Simeon as the hostage to stay behind. Joseph further tests the brothers' honesty by filling their sacks with money, which isn't discovered until the brothers return home. (Genesis 42)

1706 Jacob, who has mourned for years over Joseph, refuses to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt. (Genesis 42:36-38)

1705 Jacob agrees to allow the brothers to return to Egypt with Benjamin, since the family's grain has finally run out. Joseph tests his brothers to determine if they've developed any character since they sold him into slavery. Joseph astonishes his brothers while serving them dinner at his home. He seats the men in correct birth order and also gives Benjamin better food, and a five-times larger portion. As a final test, when his brothers are ready to leave, Joseph again has money put into the grain sacks, and his own silver cup put into Benjamin's sack. After the brothers leave, Joseph sends his steward to catch up with them, search them, and accuse them of theft. The steward is ordered to say that Joseph's silver cup is missing, and sure enough, the evidence is discovered in Benjamin's sack. Judah makes an eloquent plea to be punished and detained instead of Benjamin. Joseph can't bear to hide his identity any longer and finally reveals himself to his brothers in a heart-wrenching scene. (Genesis 43-45)



- 1705** Jacob, now 130 years old, brings his family of 66 descendants, wives, servants, and employees to Egypt. They establish themselves at Goshen, in the Nile Delta. (Genesis 46–47)
- 1704-1700** Following Joseph's plans, starving people buy grain from Egypt, often selling everything they have. Many agree to become slaves in exchange for food. Pharaoh becomes exceedingly rich. (Genesis 47:13-19)
- 1700** The famine ends, and Pharaoh owns most of the land. (Genesis 47:20-26)
- 1689** Jacob adopts Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to Asenath. Jacob considers them as his own; he blesses them and predicts the destiny of their descendants. (Genesis 48–49)
- 1688** Jacob dies in Egypt at 147 years of age. His body is eventually buried in Canaan. (Genesis 49:29–50:14)
- 1643** Joseph dies in Egypt at the age of 110. His body is embalmed and kept in Egypt until the Exodus. (Genesis 50:22-26)
- 1600-1450** The Israelites prosper in Egypt and thrive until a new king, whom Joseph didn't know, rises to power. (Exodus 1:1-8)
- 1450** The contributions of Joseph and the Israelites to Egypt's prosperity are eventually forgotten. Egyptian leaders arise who don't know the Israelites' history, and the Jews begin to be brutalized, forced to work at hard labor. (Exodus 1:11-14)
- 

RIVALRY

broken brotherhood
Genesis 37:1-11

Jacob is a responsible father figure (called a patriarch) over a large household and a thriving livestock business. His 10 oldest sons, on the other hand, are headstrong and quarrelsome. They even inflicted revenge on a whole town because one person raped their sister. Yet despite their disobedience, God plans for Jacob's sons to father the 12 tribes of Israel. He plans for them to be the bearers of His mission of salvation.

To mold the brothers for this role, God selects number 11 for special treatment, the adolescent Joseph, whose 10 older siblings detest him for two reasons. First, he is Jacob's favorite. Second, he dreams about his family bowing down to him as their master.

One day Joseph has a dream. When he tells it to his brothers, they hate him even more. He says to

The patriarchs

genesis records the life stories of ancient biblical leaders—including abraham, isaac, jacob, and joseph—that span was more than 700 years. these individuals, known as the patriarchs, were used by god to unfold his message of salvation. the word “patriarch” is connected to the idea of fatherhood. the people, families, tribes, and nations that are represented by the patriarchs established the line through which the messiah (jesus) came (see acts 7:8; romans 9:5; 15:8; and hebrews 7:4).

them, “Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.”

His brothers bark, “You’re going to rule us? You’re going to boss us around?”

Later, Joseph has yet another dream, and he shares it with his family: “The sun and the moon and 11 stars bowed down to me!”

Jacob rebukes his son: “What’s with all this dreaming? Am I and your mother and your brothers all supposed to bow down to you?”

The brothers burn with jealousy and wonder more and more loudly among themselves: *What’s to be done with this dreamer?*¹



Was Joseph bragging? That’s hard to say. As record-holding baseball player Babe Ruth once said, “No

braggin'—just fact.” You could argue that Joseph should have just kept his mouth shut, that such a dream and its interpretation were bound to inspire envy and jealousy. But, on the other hand, Joseph sincerely believed that this dream came from God.

And when God gives someone a message, it must be proclaimed, no matter how difficult it is to hear.

In the first 10 verses of Genesis 37, we learn that

Joseph was a confident, bold young man, much loved by his father—and envied by his brothers. Neither Joseph nor Jacob understood the depths of the brothers' hatred. That jealousy, and the strange blindness of Joseph and Jacob to it, changed the family's destiny.

What's more, this passage gives us a glimpse into family dysfunction and how God wants us to make life better on the home front.

*Be the living
expression of
God's kindness.
—Mother Teresa*

CAN'T A GUY GET A LITTLE REVENGE?

A woman was driving down a winding road one morning when she encountered a man zooming along in the opposite direction. He veered into her lane, nearly running her off the pavement.

The man leaned out his window and hollered, “Pig!”

The woman thought she had been insulted, so she leaned out her window and yelled, “Hog!”

Joseph's dad: the world's ultimate wrestler?

The competition began in pitch dark and lasted until dawn. It was “Jacob versus God”—a match unlike any the world had ever known. God came to Jacob in a form that Jacob could wrestle with. By morning Jacob’s hip was injured so that he limped, and he had a new name: Israel—“he struggles with God.” The Lord said to the stubborn Hebrew, “You’ve wrestled with God and you’ve come through” (Genesis 32:28, MSG). After 20 years of resistance and a face-to-face encounter with his creator, Jacob had been broken. And even though he limped away from the encounter, he was transformed. He was now a true son of God’s promise. Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared” (verse 30). (Check out Genesis 32:22-32 for the full story.)

Just then, she drove around the corner and had the shock of her life. You guessed it: She ran right into . . . a pig!

The moral of the story is this: Hold your temper and have the good sense to distinguish an *insult* from a *warning*.

When I feel threatened and disrespected, my natural impulse is to behave like the woman: I lash back. As we sometimes say in my home state of North Carolina: “Give as good as you get!”

Yet one of the remarkable things about Joseph is that even when he was mistreated, he maintained a humble spirit and a tender heart. He

Joseph means “increaser”

proverbs 22:1 says, “A good name is more desirable than great riches.” Joseph certainly lived up to his name. God took an act of hostility against this Hebrew and used it to preserve life—the lives of the Israelites, the Egyptians, and all the nations that came to Egypt to buy food during a severe famine. God took a life—Joseph’s life—and used it to preserve his people so that one day a savior would be born to save the world.

seemed to have an ability to shine even in the most difficult of circumstances. More than any other figure in Scripture, except for Jesus Himself, Joseph was innocent of the wrongs he was accused of, and not deserving of the punishment he received.

Joseph’s greatest suffering came at the hands of his own family. I firmly believe that families are God’s primary way of shaping and revealing our character. There’s no doubt that what we call a “dysfunctional family” today is the source of many problems in a person’s life. And can you think of any family more dysfunctional than Joseph’s? He had a father who showed blatant favoritism, and brothers who let rivalry go so far that they wanted to kill him.

Yet Joseph never complained. (At least we don’t see a hint of this in Scripture.) Instead, Joseph trusted God. He was convinced that his trials had a

*Don't let failure go
to your heart
or success go to
your head.*

Got a family feud?

AS LONG as you focus only on your family's problems, life probably won't improve. One of the worst things you can get from a less-than-perfect family is a negative attitude toward life. The bottom line is this: with determination and practice, your communication skills will improve. Remember, good communication keeps doors open, but bad communication may end up shutting and locking the door. Here are some things I've learned over time that help keep my family having more fun than fury:

1. Respect family members. If your parents or

divine purpose. He believed that good things would one day come from bad circumstances.

Joseph was right.

STRAIVE TO BE A PEACEMAKER

Get over it! No family is perfect. The Bible makes it clear that everybody messes up, big time: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Messed-up hearts, twisted values, complete moral disorder. That's what sin is—unfaith, unlove, unlife. It's an offense against the God of order, beauty, and justice. All sin is detestable to God—from telling a little white lie to committing murder to having a rebellious attitude. Sin separates God from humans, and that creates a problem for you

siblings tick you off, never—I repeat, never—fire back with an angry remark. This only raises defenses and widens the gap between you. A controlled temper and a respectful tone allow for a better chance at conflict resolution.

2. Focus on static-free communication. Stay away from blanket statements. Phrases like “you never,” “you always,” and “you don’t ever” sound accusatory and cause the listener to become defensive. Instead, stress your particular wants and feelings by using “I.” For example, “I want” or “I feel” are effective places to begin.

and me. Even as Christians, you and I struggle with sin, and we will for the rest of our lives on earth. (The only sinless person is Jesus Christ: God in the flesh.) So what’s the answer? How can sinful men and women have eternal peace with our holy God, let alone peace in our families? Accept Christ’s free gift of forgiveness and then live a life set apart for God to work through you.

Then, in turn, offer this forgiveness to those who live with you. Take this test: Which label best describes your family: (a) “the Brady Bunch,” (b) “Jacob’s Clan,” or (c) “fill in the blank.” Like most people, you probably chose “c” and wrote something like “Wonderfully Bizarre—Sort of ‘The Bradys Meet Jacob’s Clan!’ ”

While every family has its quirks and problems, deep down there are things you wouldn’t change,

right? After all, who else kind of looks like you, knows most of your secrets (like the fact that you still sleep with that crusty teddy bear you've had since your first birthday), puts up with your annoying mood swings, and still enjoys hanging out with you? Hey, there's no place like home.

Joseph's story gives us proof that God can use even an angry family for His good. But make sure you do what you can to keep your family relationships healthy; learn from Joseph. A good dose of forgiveness can work miracles.



Introduction

1. Napoleon Hill, quoted in Max Lucado, *Grace for the Moment* (Nashville: J. Countryman, 2000), 215.
2. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 43.

Chapter 1

1. Biblical accounts of Joseph's life in the opening section of this chapter have been adapted and paraphrased from the *New International Version* and *The Message*.

Chapter 2

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 93.
2. Charles H. Spurgeon, quoted in Calvin Miller, ed., *The Book of Jesus* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 467.
3. Henry Blackaby, Blackaby Ministries International, "Be Anxious for Nothing," February 8, 2009, <http://www.blackaby.org/devarchive.asp> (accessed April 15, 2009).

Chapter 3

1. Story adapted and paraphrased from Genesis 39:1-6, MSG.
- 