

## Dreams

*The Beginning of the Journey*



*"Joseph had a dream..."*  
*Genesis 37:5*

"I have a dream!"

Martin Luther King, Jr. uttered these words to 250,000 people as he stood at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. on August 28, 1963. With passion and profound conviction, King painted a vivid picture of the future in what many have considered the greatest speech of the 20th century. He described in great detail his vision for a day when people would "not be judged by the color of their skin" and when freedom would ring from the hilltops of New Hampshire to the slopes of California, from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado to Stone Mountain of Georgia.

While we remember his "I Have a Dream" speech, King's civil rights efforts began much earlier. One of his most notable demonstrations was the Montgomery bus boycott that lasted 382 days. It eventually resulted in a decision from the Supreme Court on December 21, 1956, that segregation on buses was unconstitutional. However, King's dream came with a cost. During the boycott, King was arrested, his home was bombed, and he was subjected to abuse.

Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream. But his dream was much more than words in a speech. It was a life calling. In the eleven years between 1957 and 1968, King traveled more than six million miles and spoke over 2,500 times. In 1963, *Time Magazine* named him “Man of the Year” and at the age of 35 he became the youngest man to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. King’s dream was an all consuming belief that offered hope for racial equality and reconciliation until his assassination on April 4, 1968. Though King died an early death, his dream only grew stronger. It was a catalyst that sparked enormous change throughout the United States and ultimately became the dream of millions of Americans.<sup>1</sup>

Most people you come in contact with today possess some form of a dream. Whether they call it a dream, vision, goal, or desire, most everybody envisions a better tomorrow. At their core, dreams offer hope.

## **Connect**

1. When you were a child or a teenager, what was something you always dreamed of doing or becoming? Did your dream come true?

## Grow

The Bible is full of dreamers. Over the next few weeks we are going to study the life of one dreamer in particular—Joseph. Joseph was the favored son of Jacob (also known as Israel) and had eleven brothers. Perhaps you remember the coat of many colors given to Joseph by his father. The details of Joseph’s story begin in Genesis 37. The Bible says:

*Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. (Genesis 37:2-4)*

Joseph lived in a family filled with dissention, anger, and jealousy. And the fact that Jacob showed favoritism to Joseph didn’t help the situation. Into this difficult family situation, God birthed a dream in Joseph.

2. Have someone in the group read Genesis 37:5-11 (refer to the scripture reference section at the end of this session). Joseph’s dream deepened the relational rift between him and his brothers. Can you share a time when your dream (or the dream of somebody close to you) strained a relationship or produced jealousy among others? Why do people sometimes respond this way to people with a dream?

Joseph's dream was significant. The day would come when he would rule as second in command of Egypt and his brothers would one day bow before him, requesting food during a devastating seven-year famine. Ultimately, Joseph's dream was focused on *solving problems, meeting needs, and helping people*. As you read his story you discover that during seven years of harvest, Joseph prepared Egypt for a famine (a problem). When the famine hit, Joseph was prepared to provide food for the entire nation (meeting needs and helping people).

3. Joseph's dream was not about promoting himself but rather serving others. How is this different from many of the dreams people have today?

After Joseph shared his dream with his family, the outcome was not what he anticipated. Genesis 37 records the plan Joseph's brothers had for him.

*"Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams..." So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the richly ornamented robe he was wearing—and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty, there was no water in it... Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our*

*brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed. So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt...Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard. (Genesis 37:19, 20, 23, 24, 27-28, 36)*

Having a dream yet experiencing the rejection of his brothers must have generated an enormous amount of emotion in Joseph’s life—from excitement to discouragement, from anticipation to confusion—but being sold into slavery was the icing on the cake. Joseph was sold for 20 pieces of silver, which is what they would have paid for a handicapped slave during that time in history.<sup>2</sup>

4. How would you have responded if you were in Joseph’s shoes? What emotions have you experienced in the pursuit of your own dreams?

5. Our dreams can change from one season of life to another. The dreams we possess in our early 20s will likely look different from our dreams during our twilight years. How have your dreams changed over the years?

## **Serve**

While God may not frequently give dreams to people in the same way He did Joseph (while sleeping), He does still deposit dreams in the hearts of men and women today. While the method of receiving a dream may differ, all God-inspired dreams will solve a problem, meet a need, or help a group of people. We see this pattern repeated throughout the Bible with people like Moses, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, and others. Whether you call it a dream or simply God speaking to them, each person was focused on helping somebody other than themselves. Today, our dreams are often self-centered and focus on what we can get, how we can acquire more money, or what we can do to increase our status. But God is calling us to look beyond ourselves and embrace a dream that truly makes a difference for others. These are the only dreams that have eternal value.

6. What dreams do you possess right now?

7. What determines if a dream has eternal value? Would you consider your dreams to have eternal value?

8. If a person does not have a God-inspired dream—one that meets needs, solves problems, or helps a group of people outside themselves—what can they do to capture such a dream?

9. What steps do you need to take this week to capture a dream or begin reaching your dream? If you are struggling to capture a dream, be sure to work through the application idea that follows this question. How can our small group pray for you in this process?

## **Make It Personal**

If you are struggling to capture a dream that is bigger than yourself, prayerfully answer the following questions:

- How has God gifted me (abilities, skills, and spiritual gifts)?
- What am I passionate about or deeply interested in?
- What problems in my community, church, job, or world could I help solve?
- What needs in my community, church, job, or world do I feel compelled to do something about?
- What person or group of people could I help? How?
- How can the gifts, abilities, skills, resources, and opportunities God has blessed me with be used to meet a need, solve a problem, or help others?

After prayerfully answering these questions, take a few minutes to write on paper what you sense God is showing. Let this become the first draft for your dream. It doesn't have to be perfect but can serve as a framework for the ideas God is speaking to you. Then determine what your first step needs to be to start pursuing your dream.

# Prayer Requests

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## Scripture References

*(In the order they appear in the session)*

**Genesis 37:5-11** – *Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to 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 said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?” His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.*