

Where are you headed?

Do you have a destiny?

While I can't answer the first question for you I can answer the second. Everyone has a destiny! Destiny is all about God's story. It's a story that began at Creation and will one day be unfolded in all of its incredible splendor.

There are two great days in a person's life -- the day we are born and the day we discover why.

We are not accidents. We are not here without a purpose to our lives. Believe it or not you are an essential component of God's purpose in the world. For this reason it is critical that we understand our place in God's story.

Most people, even Christians, blunder their way through life without recognizing their divine destinies. It is tragic to do this and it is unnecessary since God is actively calling and empowering people who are willing to follow His ways. Too many of us just push through life with our heads down allowing life to shape our purposes on its own terms. This will absolutely frustrate your destiny. God's way is often the opposite of what we might envision but you can find it if you search for it.

But you have to listen.

When Jesus told stories or parables he would often say to His disciples, "Are you listening?" or "Do you understand what I am saying to you?" To fulfill your destiny in God's story you have to be listening closely to hear His voice.

Destiny is:

Progressive: God reveals His will for us in pieces

It never comes in one lump deposit. God tells us what we need to know when we need to know it. It is critical that we act on what we know God wants us to do. Psalm 119:105 says that God's word will light our path. God's word is spoken not only through the inspiration of the Bible but we can also hear him through people, situations, music, books, spiritual leaders etc.

Communal: God rarely speaks to an isolated heart. Destiny should be discovered and interpreted within a spiritual community. Destiny will also be lived out within that community. When people talk to me about calling one of the first affirmations of that is seeing them do it. When God uses you others will see it and will affirm you. Destinies are lived out in community. Wisdom, discernment, courage and partnering will all be available within the core relationships of family and faith. We have to build these relationships intentionally by making time for and extending grace to others.

Includes strategic pauses: It will always include periods silence and waiting

These moments in our journey can be frustrating and discouraging. Waiting has always been a part of God's discipline. It is those moments and days that we lean toward him in our hearts instead of away from him. The important thing is to stay with what we can see and wait on the rest to unfold.

Today we will take a macro look at some of Joseph's life. His story is found in Genesis 37-50.

From his life we can make these three observations about destiny:

1. Joseph rejected the temptation to be bitter

He was the 12 son and because of that no one expected much from him. He was a bit cocky and liked to share his dreams with his older brothers which bothered them greatly. He shared with them how he was pretty sure he would be raised to prominence and how they would bow before him some day. On top of that his dad liked him best. And then it happened.

¹⁸ When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him. ¹⁹ "Here comes the dreamer!" they said. ²⁰ "Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, 'A wild animal has eaten him.' Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!"

²¹ But when Reuben heard of their scheme, he came to Joseph's rescue. "Let's not kill him," he said. ²² "Why should we shed any blood? Let's just throw him into this empty cistern here in the wilderness. Then he'll die without our laying a hand on him." Reuben was secretly planning to rescue Joseph and return him to his father.

²³ So when Joseph arrived, his brothers ripped off the beautiful robe he was wearing. ²⁴ Then they grabbed him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. ²⁵ Then, just as they were sitting down to eat, they looked up and saw a caravan of camels in the distance coming toward them. It was a group of Ishmaelite traders taking a load of gum, balm, and aromatic resin from Gilead down to Egypt.

²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain by killing our brother? We'd have to cover up the crime."^[c] ²⁷ Instead of hurting him, let's sell him to those Ishmaelite traders. After all, he is our brother—our own flesh and blood!" And his brothers agreed. ²⁸ So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces^[d] of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt. Genesis 37:18-28 NLT

For the next thirteen years Joseph had several opportunities to wallow in bitterness and self-pity but we find no indication that he did. He was convinced of a destiny that God had mapped out for him but there were obstacles. There were roadblocks. There were things that couldn't be explained in our view of God's will.

2. Joseph remained faithful in his character

When Joseph was taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelite traders, he was purchased by Potiphar, an Egyptian officer. Potiphar was captain of the guard for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.

² The LORD was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master. ³ Potiphar noticed this and realized that the LORD was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did. ⁴ This pleased Potiphar, so he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned. ⁵ From the day Joseph was put in charge of his master's household and property, the LORD began to bless Potiphar's household for Joseph's sake. All his household affairs ran smoothly, and his crops and livestock flourished. ⁶ So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn't worry about a thing—except what kind of food to eat Genesis 39:1-6 NLT

Sound perfect right? In many ways it was and yet he wasn't at home. No one knew where he was. His father was told he had been killed by wild animals. He was alone except for his faith in God. And then it happened again.

Joseph was a very handsome and well-built young man, ⁷ and Potiphar's wife soon began to look at him lustfully. "Come and sleep with me," she demanded.

⁸ But Joseph refused. "Look," he told her, "my master trusts me with everything in his entire household. ⁹ No one here has more authority than I do. He has held back nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God." Genesis 39: 6-8 NLT

Joseph was afforded an opportunity to break one of God's Ten Commandments. They are not suggestions and they are not optional. They are commandments. You know what amazes me the most about Joseph's faithfulness? He had nothing to build up his faith but stories handed down through his family. He had no bible. He had no church. He had no bible studies or Christian bookstores. He didn't have fifty versions of the bible on his smart phone. He had no spiritual teacher or pastor. He didn't have a life group, a small group or an accountability group. He didn't have a three step program or a ten step program.

You know what he had? He had the word of God passed down from generation to generation in his heart and he had a respect for God that made him obedient to God's word. That's it. That's all. Nothing more.

You just need to think about that a little bit. And you don't think we will be held accountable for all the knowledge that we have been given and what we have accessible to us?

Sometimes our destinies will be tested by time, temptation, silence and maybe even suffering.

3. Joseph refused to doubt God's good intentions toward him.

The silence of God must have taunted him in the prison cell. He was falsely accused. His reputation was marred unfairly. His future prospects were zero. But he trusted God still.

¹⁹ Potiphar was furious when he heard his wife's story about how Joseph had treated her. ²⁰ So he took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king's prisoners were held, and there he remained. ²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love. And the LORD made Joseph a favorite with the prison warden. ²² Before long, the warden put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison. ²³ The warden had no more worries, because Joseph took care of everything. The LORD was with him and caused everything he did to succeed. Genesis 39:19-23 NLT

Silence does not mean God's is absent. If you never have experienced God's silence you will and in those moments we learn to trust Him. God will not leave you and He will not throw away your destiny. Only you can do that. You can do it by disobedience, lack of trusting, becoming so discouraged that you can't have faith.

Listen, the choices Joseph made, to not be bitter, to stay faithful to God, eventually paid off when God's ultimate destiny became reality.

It was while in prison that his God-given talent to interpret dreams allowed him to do so for the Pharaoh of Egypt. This set in motion the completion of God's destiny for Joseph's life. This allowed Joseph to eventually revel in the grace and guidance of God in his life.

4. Joseph reveled in the grace and direction of God in his life.

³⁷ Joseph's suggestions were well received by Pharaoh and his officials. ³⁸ So Pharaoh asked his officials, "Can we find anyone else like this man so obviously filled with the spirit of God?" ³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has revealed the meaning of the dreams to you, clearly no one else is as intelligent or wise as you are. ⁴⁰ You will be in charge of my court, and all my people will take orders from you. Only I, sitting on my throne, will have a rank higher than yours." ⁴¹ Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the entire land of Egypt." Genesis 41:37-41 NLT

The story continues: Joseph was warned by God that there would be a horrible famine. Under his leadership as ruler of Egypt he stored grain to prepare for the famine that was coming. Eventually it happened and all of Egypt was spared the devastation because of his planning and wisdom.

Ironically his brothers showed up in Egypt to beg to buy food so their families would not starve. It's a long story but they didn't recognize their brother that they had sold into slavery. And they surely didn't expect him to be in charge of all of Egypt. After several encounters we read that Joseph decided to reveal who he was. There was no bitterness. There was no sarcasm. There was no whining about how mistreated he had been. He loved them. He cared about them and he gave credit to God for his destiny being fulfilled. Look at these incredible words.

Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, "Out, all of you!" So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was. ² Then he broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh's palace.

³ “I am Joseph!” he said to his brothers. “Is my father still alive?” But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them.

⁴ “Please, come closer,” he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, “I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt.” ⁵ But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. ⁶ This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. ⁷ God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors.^[a] ⁸ So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser^[b] to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt. Genesis 45:5-8 NLT

What we have looked at today is the story of a man who trusted God. He didn’t just give God lip service and do whatever he wanted or what would have been easy. He didn’t take the road of least resistance. He followed God with faithfulness. He had no bitterness. He remained faithful in his character. He never gave up on God’s destiny for him. He celebrated and reveled in the destiny that God provided for him to accomplish. Pain and all it appeared worth it in the end.

What about you? What is the destiny God has for your life? Do you even believe that there is such a thing?

I wonder if we ever really process this and see what God wants from us. The bottom line is this: God calls us to be His representatives. He calls us to be ambassadors. Statistically very few are called to full-time ministry within the church but He calls all of us in this room to serve where we are. I must tell you and confess to you that your opportunities to represent Christ are much more critical than the people on the staff of this church. We walk around daily rubbing elbows with each other. We all are called to do and be here to enable the church to be all that you should be but honestly most people that serve in full time ministry have little direct influence in the culture that they live in. You on the other hand are up against it daily. You work with people every day that are far from God. You are the Bible they read. You are the Jesus they know. You are the only shot many of them will ever have to be introduced to Christ.

Do you know how it happens? It happens not so much because of our words but it happens because of our actions. If we don’t live for Christ faithfully our service for Him is really void of any power and His ability to use us is minimized.

This is a call. A call to stand up and do the right thing. A call to find the will of God within your life and fulfill it with all your heart and mind and soul and strength.

Listen, It is never too late to start doing what is right.

January 6, 1850, was bitterly cold in Colchester, England, a hard-biting blizzard keeping most worshippers at home. At the Primitive Methodist Chapel on Artillery Street only about a dozen showed up. When it became apparent that even the pastor would not arrive, a man rose and spoke from Isaiah 45:22, Let all the world look to me for salvation For I am God; there is no other. Then the crowd dispersed, thinking the day’s service a loss, not realizing that a fifteen-year-old boy had ducked into the room to escape the snowstorm, and, hearing the sermon, had

been converted. Years later that boy, Charles Spurgeon, wrote: "Don't hold back because you cannot preach in St. Paul's; be content to talk to one or two in a cottage. You may cook in small pots as well as in big ones. Little pigeons can carry great messages. Even a little dog can bark at a thief, and wake up the master, and save the house. Do what you do right, thoroughly, pray over it heartily, and leave the result to God." D. L. Moody once said that Moses spent 40 years thinking he was somebody, 40 years learning he was nobody, and 40 years discovering what God can do with a nobody.

In Louis Carrol's book *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice comes to a fork in the road and doesn't know which way to turn. She sees the grinning Cheshire Cat and asks which direction she should take. The cat replies, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to."

"Those who walk with God always reach their destination."