

Church in the Wild Devotional
June 24, 2018

We're nearing the end of the saga. After "coming out" as their brother, Joseph bore witness to the loving purpose God accomplished through their evil deed: "God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance...it was not you who sent me here, but God." (Genesis 45:7-8a). After tearful reconciliation, Joseph sent his brothers to bring his father Jacob to Egypt. Old Jacob would be thrilled to reunite with his son, but how could moving to Egypt fit God's plan? The Lord had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham his grandfather and Isaac his father. **Read Genesis 46:1-7**

Beersheba was the family's ancestral home. Jacob stopped there to offer sacrifices to honor God in this new chapter of life. The narrator returns to calling him "Israel," the name he received decades previous when he wrestled with an angel. Israel means "he struggles with God." While Jacob/Israel's heart was full of joy to join Joseph, he struggled to understand God's plan. At Beersheba, God provided confirmation in the vision: "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there; I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again."

God still promised to make his family a "great nation." With peace of mind, the aging patriarch moved his seventy-person family to their new home in the pagan empire. Relocation not only solved their present problem (hunger), it would be a stepping stone to their future. But neither Jacob nor Joseph could imagine that Egyptians would enslave their offspring. Neither could they imagine that God's mighty hand would liberate them from Egyptian oppression and bring them back to Canaan. From our perspective, God used this 400 year sojourn and the exodus to shape the Jews into a distinct people. They would emerge with a deeper knowledge of God and a greater awareness of God's plan to use them to save humanity.

After they arrived in Egypt, Joseph introduced his father to Pharaoh. **Read their fascinating conversation in Genesis 47:7-10.**

It's a bizarre encounter. Other than their mutual dependence on Joseph, Jacob/Israel and Pharaoh had nothing in common. One owned the world's richest country; the other simply "owned" God's promise to bless him as he wandered. Remarkably, it is the less impressive of the two who blesses the prosperous and powerful one. When asked his age, the Jewish patriarch described his life as a "pilgrimage" that was "difficult." What a contrast! While Pharaoh played God to exploit people, the true God led Jacob to wrestle with hardships so he would become a blessing to others, the father of a just community. Pharaoh's easy life made him oblivious to injustice; Jacob's struggle would make life better for everyone.

It's natural to prefer comfortable lives with little drama, yet it's undeniable that we learn more about God when life is an unpredictable adventure. Struggle—even struggle with God—can yield a deeper appreciation for how God provides and how God wants to use us to bless others.

I can't help but think of Jerry and Alexandra Gage. While visiting his parents in Dallas last Christmas, Jerry's father died unexpectedly. In addition to grieving their loss, Jerry's family needed him to rescue the family electronics supply business and provide for his mother. Since then he has lived in Dallas. His church family's need for musical leadership provided Jerry the means to visit Alex and stay connected to us. As he and Alex devote this summer to preparing the business to run without Jerry's presence, they are trusting God to work out a plan to provide for their family. I'm confident that God is deepening their faith as He uses them to bless others!

Questions to ponder or discuss:

- Has your life pilgrimage been difficult in the past? In the present?
- How has God provided for you?
- How has God used your "drama" to bless others?