

## Message for Week 3: Create Positive Experiences

*“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom” (Matthew 7:38).*

### Pharaoh’s Dreams

Last week we left Joseph in prison. He was doing the best he could, but he was a slave, then a prisoner. Yet even in jail the Lord was with him and gave him an interpretation of the dreams of the butler and baker. The butler was released from prison and given back his job as Joseph had predicted, but then he promptly forgot about Joseph languishing in prison. Then Pharaoh had two dreams, and the cupbearer remembered that Joseph could tell the meaning of dreams. Joseph was quickly brought to Pharaoh to explain. In Pharaoh’s first dream seven fat, healthy cows came out of the river Nile and grazed in a meadow. Seven thin, gaunt cows followed and ate up the seven fat cows. The thin cows still looked thin. Then Pharaoh had another dream. Seven plump, ripe heads of grain grew on a single stalk. They were followed by seven thin, withered heads of grain. The thin heads ate up the fat heads, but still looked gaunt.

Joseph told Pharaoh that God could show the meaning of the dreams, and then Joseph explained that the seven cows and heads of grain were seven years. There would be seven good years of bountiful harvests followed by seven lean years of famine when nothing would grow. We might wonder how Joseph knew the meaning of the dreams. Certainly God led his thoughts, but I surmise that Joseph was also speaking from experience. He had himself had years of plenty, enjoying his father’s love, dancing in his brilliant coat, at home with his people and productive in his work. He has also experienced some lean years--slavery, prison, isolation and loneliness. Surely during his imprisonment Joseph called up memories of his father and family. He thought of the special gift his father had made him. He knew that the God who had been so good to him in his childhood would not abandon him in prison. Joseph knew both bounty and want, so he was ready to hear God’s warning about the good times and hard years ahead.

### Storing Up for the Future

The story of Joseph is the story of our love. Joseph was the son Jacob loved most of all, and he represents the opportunity that each of us has to experience loving and being loved. When we experience new love it almost always comes with a warning: there will be good and difficult times. “...from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health, to love and to cherish...”

We have a tendency to be near-sighted about our spiritual and emotional states. When we are happy, we think things will always be grand and there is nothing to worry about. When we are depressed, we believe there is no hope at all and we will never see the light at the end of the tunnel. Couples fall in love and believe their love will last forever. They are happy, they communicate and work well together, each thinking only of the other’s happiness. “Why think of onerous times? This love can never fail!” Then years go by and affection fades. They bicker, paying attention to their own pleasure instead of each other’s. He turns away from her and she starts to live a separate life. Good times are forgotten. Lies snake in.

"It's over. We will never be able to love each other again. Probably we never really did love each other." When relationships erode we are duped into believing that they will always be stale and that the laughter may never return.

Pharaoh should appoint someone, Joseph proposed, to collect a fifth of the harvests during the plentiful years so they would have rations to survive on during the famine. Pharaoh took Joseph's advice, putting Joseph in charge of gathering grain. Joseph became second to Pharaoh himself. In fact, Joseph became the actual ruler of Egypt, while Pharaoh reigned in name only. At God's word Joseph stored up grain until it was as abundant as the sand on the shore.

### **Joseph in Charge**

In this story Joseph is gathering grain for Pharaoh. We can put ourselves in Joseph's shoes and see the wisdom of banking up positive experiences for ourselves. Yet on a deeper level Joseph is the Lord working within us, blessing us with the positive experiences we need for our spiritual life. As babies we experience feelings of innocence and trust. In time we accrue feelings of friendship, compassion, courage, and determination. We also learn about God, and heaven, right and wrong. Time passes and our innocence may disperse. We doubt our childhood beliefs, but the Lord protects all those feelings and concepts. With every joyful state we go through more positive feelings and thoughts are squirreled away.

In the Bible prophets predict that when Israel is scattered and Jerusalem is destroyed there will be a remnant of the people left, survivors who can be gathered and brought back into the land. In our individual spiritual life this means that when we go through excruciating conflicts there will always be a remnant of the blessings that helps us get through the strain. Those survivors or remnants (that we used to translate as "remains") gathered up in our inner self are meant by the grain that Joseph stored up to use in times of want.

*"[Joseph's] recommendation here therefore that they should store up food in cities and should guard it means that truths joined to good were to be stored away in the inner parts of the worldly mind. When these truths and forms of good have been stored away there they are called remnants. These remnants are where a person's actual spiritual life resides, and they are what a person is nourished by spiritually whenever need and desire, that is, whenever spiritual famine, arises. (Secrets of Heaven 5297)*

*Remnants are all the states of love and charity, and all the states of innocence and peace, with which a person is endowed. He is endowed with these states from earliest childhood, though that endowment gradually diminishes as he advances into adult life. But while a person is being regenerated he receives, in addition to those he has already, new remnants, and thus new life; for it is from, or by means of, remnants that a person is enabled to be human. In fact, if devoid of the state of love and charity, and if devoid of the state of innocence--states that instill themselves into all the other states of his life--a person is no longer human, but worse than any wild animal. (Secrets of Heaven 1738)*

*The situation with remnants - or forms of good and truth stored away by the Lord in a person interiorly - is this: Goodness and truth are implanted in a person when he seeks*

*them with affection and so in freedom. When this happens angels from heaven draw nearer and link themselves to that person. Their link with him is what causes the forms of good coupled with truths to come to exist in the person interiorly. But when external interests occupy the person's attention, as when he is engaged in worldly and bodily pursuits, the angels depart; and once they have departed not a trace of those forms of good and truth is apparent. Nevertheless because such a link has been effected once, this person now has the capability of being linked to angels and so to the goodness and truth residing with them. But this linking does not take place any more often or fully than the Lord pleases, who controls the situation as is entirely best for that person's life."*  
(*Secrets of Heaven* 5897.11)

When Pharaoh realized what Joseph said, that they would need someone to oversee storing up the grain for the seven years of famine, he said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" On the deepest level Joseph, in whom was the Spirit of God, is a symbol of Jesus, who said of Himself, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." Our Lord Jesus Christ is the source of all love, compassion, tenderness and goodwill. He alone is able to give us all those "remnants" that give us our spiritual life and our humanity. Just as Joseph was the one to gather all the grain into the storehouses, it is the Lord who gathers our remnants and stores up every impulse to show kindness to others and every insight into our purpose in life. The Lord alone stores up these remnants for the most part without any awareness on our part that He is doing so, and He alone knows the amount and quality of states that are stored up.

Nevertheless, our choices greatly affect this store. When we choose to follow the Lord and do as He asks, new states of love, compassion and good will flow into us and the Lord stores them up. When we read His Word for guidance, new ideas about how to love blossom in our minds, and the Lord stores these up as well. The more we cooperate with Him, the more He can store up. Likewise, when the famine came, the people went to Joseph for food. He was the one who could bring each person as much as they needed from the storehouses. In the same way, for us it is the Lord who can help us in times of temptation by bringing back the long-forgotten remnants of childhood truths our parents taught us, or the unconscious memory of being rocked in our mother's arms.

So Joseph's wisdom is important for us today. You will have wonderful periods, and months of aching. Be prudent enough to treasure every sweet moment. Savor the mango colored sunsets above the treeline, and the smiling daffodils that appear unbidden by the road. Enjoy your novel by the snapping fire and the steamy bowl of soup with fragrant bread. And most of all absorb the relationships. Take every opportunity to express to the people you love that you want them, because the time may come when the words are frozen in your throat. Take that walk on the beach with your children. Use that five minutes after church to inquire how your neighbor is doing. And do the same with God. Every whispered prayer, every verse of Scripture that sinks into your heart is something that can nourish you when your belly is empty.

**What Kinds of Things Do We Treasure?**

We all pay attention to and collect things we care about. If we value money, we hoard every dollar. When our reputation takes precedence we stockpile every syllable of praise. If we adore our children, we snap photographs and collect precious mementos. Our love may cross a spectrum, but out of all our affections there is one that dwarfs the others. We call it our “ruling love.” If your ruling love is money, acquiring it will dominate your choices. “What will amass me the most wealth?” When you arrange the moments of your life, it is pivotal who you put in charge. Best advice: put your wise self in charge of those decisions, not your materialistic self. Reflect on what is the loving, compassionate thing to do. Who should I pay attention to? What do I treasure in this moment?

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19-21

If you do this, you will not only be storing up glad memories, but you will be accruing character: courage, patience, wisdom, hope, compassion and joy. These will feed you through starvation.

If right now is one of your challenging times, then the message here is one of hope: good times will return, if you turn to the Lord and do what He says. Joseph had gone through some enormous difficulties, being rejected by his family, then made to work as a slave. Later he had become ruler of Egypt, married the daughter of an Egyptian priest and had two sons. The first he named Manesseh (“Forgetfulness”) because this new son helped him forget his years as a slave and the betrayal of his brothers. “For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house.”

Joseph named his second son Ephraim (Fruitfulness) because he had not only gathered a sea of grain for Egypt, but also had a family of his own. “God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

As the famine continued and people cried out to Pharaoh for bread, Pharaoh said, “Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do.” That should be our direction as well: Let Divine Love direct you--go to Jesus and do whatever He tells you. His love is the key to the storehouse of heaven. It will sustain you.

***Your task for this week is to create positive experiences.*** Treasure every moment. Realize that the most important task in life is to love and be loved, and that every moment is an opportunity to express love or to prepare for it. Make a choice in each moment to put the highest value on people and relationships, on love for God and for each other.