

## I. Introduction

- A. Today is week two in a series called, "The Secrets of a Highly Contented Life".
- B. We are using a man named Joseph as a case study in contentment. Last time, we said that the first secret of contentment is the heart of a pilgrim.
- C. Today the second secret of a highly contented life: A PERSONAL SENSE OF DESTINY.
- D. A Christian is a person of destiny. All of the power of heaven conspires in your favor; all the power of God is put at your disposal. The protection of the angels, the provision of resources for every moment, the mystical workings of Christ living in you and the Holy Spirit guiding you and strengthening you, the unparalleled promises and encouragement of God's Word and the unswerving loyalty of God all stand ready to help you achieve your God given dreams. With faith, you cannot lose. You cannot fail. It is impossible.
- E. God has orchestrated the cosmos so all of reality conspires in your favor, to move out of your way and to make clear the path so that you might become the kind of person you can be proud of when you stand, one day, before Jesus, your Maker, Savior and King. You can be proud of who you have become.
- F. A personal sense of destiny is your mental picture of the person you can only hope to become in your wildest dreams.
- G. You are a unique creation. You are here for a reason. You have a destiny to fulfill.
- H. You will only be content if you are aware of that destiny, attuned to the deep dreams and desires that your Maker has hardwired into your personality.
  - I. As I was thinking about and preparing this message, I wondered how it would work for some of our older friends at church. Here we are, talking about the future, destiny (on earth), who you can become and who you will be. I thought, well, a whole lot of the grandmas and grandpas will just laugh. "Bill, dreaming of a destiny belongs to the young. It's too late for us."
  - J. As I thought, God whispered into my heart, Bill tell them one word, Abraham. He thought his destiny had been spoiled because he was well into his 90's and he hadn't achieved his dreams. One day, God told him again, "You will achieve your dreams and you will have a son". He laughed, just like some of you laugh, which is fine because it's never too late to live your destiny. Besides, we worship the Lord of the Last Laugh.
- K. Our topic today is a Personal Sense of Destiny. I want to show you the five laws of destiny as they're being worked out in Joseph's young life.

## II. Five Laws of Destiny

- A. *"Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. This is the history of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him." Genesis 37:1-4, NKJV.*
  1. Our focus is Joseph. At age 17, Joseph is the favorite son of his father. His father is named Jacob, also known as Israel.
  2. Joseph was the poster boy for a dysfunctional family. His dad fathered children by four different women and they all hated each other. The story of Joseph's brothers includes violence, incest, murder, rape, deceit, treachery and hatred.
  3. So, look at Joseph's happy family. Just a teenager, his father sends him to oversee the two sets of half-brothers which, counting Joseph, were from three different moms. These guys already hate each other and then two events happen that make the hatred worse.
  4. One is that Jacob gives Joseph a coat of many colors. I'm not sure what it looked like or how long it was, but we'll stick with a coat of many colors.
  5. Jacob loved Joseph more than all his sons and he wanted all his sons to know it. Nice job, dad. When the brothers saw the coat, they hated him even more.
  6. The other event is that verse 2 states that Joseph brought a bad report of his brothers to his father. Every commentary says Joseph did the right thing because his brothers were bad and Joseph was a good guy. The Bible never says anything bad about him at all. So his brothers did something royally bad and Joseph did the right thing and ratted them out.
  7. Well, let me shatter that illusion and I encourage you to check this out.
  8. The Hebrew word for *report* occurs only 9 times in the entire Old Testament (Numbers 13:32; 14:36, 37; Psalms 31:13; Proverbs 10:18; 25:10; Jeremiah 20:10; Ezekiel 36:3). Check them out for yourself. In every single case this word means to SLANDER somebody. It means to distort the truth in a negative or evil way.
  9. That is what Joseph did to his brothers. I know it's shocking and sorry to disillusion you from the fairy tale that Joseph lived on some moral pedestal above the weaknesses of the rest of us. He didn't. He was a flawed human being, just like the rest of us.
  10. That's comforting to me, because it gives us the first law of destiny:
    - a) *Neither your failures nor your family's dysfunction disqualify you from reaching your destiny.*
  11. Here we have this monumentally messed up family, devoted to one another's destruction, and a young boy who falls right in line with the family dysfunction. Even so, God uses him in mighty ways.

12. He'll use you too. So, you're nothing but a mess and you come from a long line of messes. Okay. *Because what lies behind you is never as important as what lies before you.*
  13. Are you going to be a man or woman, and discover your personal sense of destiny? Tell me how bad your past has been and I'll tell you how great your future can be. You have a destiny and, because of Christ, because of the Cross of Calvary, failure is never fatal. Why don't you prove it? Joseph did, even as messed up as his family was. It gets worse.
- B. *"Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, 'Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.' And his brothers said to him, 'Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?' So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words."* Genesis 37:5-8, NKJV
- C. Joseph was destined to rule. He was destined for a throne. God used dreams to permanently hardwire a vision of greatness into a seventeen year old man's soul. Joseph would never forget these dreams. He could never shake them. He could never run away from them.
1. *Destiny* does not mean to a Christian what it means to others. For others, destiny means fate. Your fate is written in the stars or written in your DNA and you really can't do anything about it. Some believe in Karma, luck or chance.
  2. In ancient mythology, three goddesses controlled the span of every life. They were called the Fates. One goddess spun a thread, the second determined how long it would be and the third cut it at just the right time. The Fates laughed whenever somebody tried to cheat them because everybody knows you can't cheat fate.
  3. How far all that is from the biblical concept of destiny.
  4. When God gave a dream to Joseph, it wasn't a fatalistic doom. It wasn't what will be will be.
  5. It was a gracious invitation into a life so fantastic Joseph couldn't imagine it. So God created the imagination for him and opened the door. For the first time in his life, a young boy who grew up in a harsh, crazy home could HOPE for a future of purpose and meaning and power.
  6. That is exactly the same thing God will do for you.
  7. Because the second law of destiny is this:
    - a) *Your sense of destiny is God's personalized invitation to a life better than your wildest dreams.*
  8. God invites you to something bigger than yourself, something no one else can do. A life that makes you a hero. A life you will be proud of when you look back one day and realize you could have never made it on your own.
  9. God didn't design you to play small, keep a low profile, drift or fail to launch. He designed you to contribute your life to a great cause, a cause bigger than this world and one that transcends time to reach into the ages of eternity.
  10. When he gives you a sense of destiny, God also gives you an itch to get there. Once you taste Lou Malnati's butter crust pepperoni pizza, you can never go back. Once you catch a glimpse of God's vision for your life, you'll never be content with anything less. A personal sense of destiny is God opening a door to you for a highly contented life. Are you going to step through it?
- D. *"Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, 'Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me.' So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, 'What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?' And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind."* Genesis 37:9-11, NKJV
1. So Joseph's second dream confirms his first. He has a dream of royalty. He is destined for the throne. He doesn't come from royal family, but somehow, somewhere he is destined for the throne.
  2. Both times, Joseph told his family his dream. Is he nuts? His brothers already hate him. It's not like they sat around a campfire and shared. They didn't give a flip about his dreams and now they hate him even more.
  3. Even his dad rebukes him (the only time this occurs in the writings of Moses).
  4. Nobody believes in Joseph's dreams. Nobody cares about Joseph's dreams. Nobody wants to hear Joseph's dreams.
  5. But he tells his dreams anyway. Why? Because of the third law of destiny:
    - a) *You'll never achieve your destiny if you wait for other people's approval.*
  6. Wise counsel, yes. Being of one heart with your spouse, yes. But waiting for everybody else to get on board, no. You'll wait forever.
  7. An even worse temptation is the fear of coming across as proud, boastful or superior. You have to get over that fear. Never let the people around you, who have lost their dreams, pull you down to their level. Don't play small. Don't play dumb. Anybody who has a dream is going to stand out. For some of you it's scary, because as soon as you start the journey toward your dreams people in your life will complain. They will hate you. They will envy you. Why? Because you immediately make them aware of just how out of touch they are with their own destiny. Instead of doing the work to discover their destiny, they shoot down you or anybody with any sense of destiny.

8. I love this quote (incorrectly attributed to Nelson Mandela). I do NOT love the source, which is a misguided book by a tragically misguided author. I don't recommend the book, though this paragraph is brilliant.
- a) "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." [Marianne Williamson]
9. What was the problem when Joseph told his dream? Was it that his dream was too great or that his brothers' dreams were too small? I'm glad he told his dream. I'm glad he didn't wait for his brothers' approval to embrace his God-given vision of who he could become.
10. Although, I'm sure Joseph quickly regretted it.
- E. *"Then his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, 'Are not your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.' So he said to him, 'Here I am.' Then he said to him, 'Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me.' So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem. Now a certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying, 'What are you seeking?' So he said, 'I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding their flocks.' And the man said, 'They have departed from here, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.' So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan."* Genesis 37:12-17, NKJV
1. So, I tell my kids to pick up all the junk on the floor a put it away. A few minutes later, I come back and the job is only half done.
  2. I say, "I told you guys to clean up your junk."
  3. They say, "We did clean up our junk. This stuff isn't junk. It's still good."
  4. Kids are lawyers, which makes Joseph's actions stand out. His father sends him to Shechem to prepare a performance review on the brothers.
  5. Joseph discovers the brothers are now about twelve miles away, not in Shechem but in Dothan. He could have said, "Dad sent me to Shechem. I went to Shechem. They're not in Shechem. To to heck with 'em. I'm going home."
  6. Not Joseph. He rode 12 more miles to Dothan to finish the task his father had given him.
  7. Joseph never let his personal sense of destiny make him unfaithful to his present responsibilities. Which is the fourth law of destiny:
    - a) *God never calls you to neglect today's responsibilities to pursue tomorrow's destiny.*
  8. This is one of the hardest laws to master. Joseph is destined to rule and he's out doing performance reviews on a gang of thugs he called his brothers. He even goes the extra mile.
  9. If you are going to reach your destiny GOD'S WAY, you will not have to sin to do it, nor default on your loans, neglect your marriage, make your kids pay a price, lie, cheat or steal.
  10. Do not take this message, go home to your spouse and say, "Honey, I'm cashing in the kid's college fund to buy a surfboard because my destiny is to search the globe for the perfect wave."
  11. Uhhhh... Your wife might have something to say about that. Unless she's genuinely on board you've missed God's dream for your life.
  12. "Honey, we're going to pull up stakes. We're going to move us and the kids into a pick up with a camper shell. Because you know what? I'm gonna be a rock star."
  13. Right.
  14. Jesus said let your yes be yes and your no be no. When you said yes to a wife and kids or a husband and kids or a mortgage or a contract or a college degree, you gave your word. *Because in God's mysterious ways, KEEPING YOUR WORD IS THE PATH TO YOUR DREAMS, even when it looks like it isn't.*
  15. Joseph was destined to rule. Chasing around a desert in search of his brothers certainly didn't look like his destiny. But, so what, be faithful here, now, in this life, in this marriage, in this church, with these kids, in this city, in this body, with this set of commitments and watch how God orchestrates the next steps in your life.
  16. Or maybe I should say watch out—because of what happens next.
  17. Joseph finds his brothers and...
- F. *"Then they said to one another, 'Look, this dreamer is coming! Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, Some wild beast has devoured him. We shall see what will become of his dreams!'"* Genesis 37:19, 20, NKJV
1. In verse 19, the brothers call Joseph a new nickname, Dreamer. In literal Hebrew they call him the Lord of Dreams or the Master of Dreams. How would you like to play Thanksgiving football with brothers like that?

2. I'm sure that an assassination conspiracy against him was not part of Joseph's master plan. I won't read the whole paragraph—but in the end his brothers sold him to slave traders headed toward Egypt. This is how the chapter ends.
- G. *"So they took Joseph's tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood. Then they sent the tunic of many colors, and they brought it to their father and said, 'We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son's tunic or not?' And he recognized it and said, 'It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces.' Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, 'For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.' Thus his father wept for him. Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard."* Genesis 37:31-36, NKJV
  1. Terrible, deceitful brothers and sons. Hypocrites, liars, just like their dad.
  2. One of my good friends came to me some time ago all upset. He told me how he had planned his life, his career, his finances. He would go to college and have his degree by this time. Then he would launch his career, achieve this level of success, buy a house and save money. Then he would get married and start having kids. He had it all planned out, in detail, with specific goals and a timeline.
  3. He was sharing it with me and crying because his girlfriend, the woman he thought he would marry, had just broken up with him. That wasn't in his plan, Why was God doing this to him?
  4. I think when Moses wrote this story he wanted you to ask a question. Why would God give Joseph a dream of greatness, then throw him into a pit and sell him into slavery? Why lift him to the heights of expectation only to dash him to the depths of disappointment?
  5. Have you ever asked those questions about your own life? Maybe God did something great for you on Monday and on Tuesday it all completely unraveled. Why?
  6. Or you were so sure that God was telling you to start a business or invest in a company and you lost everything. Why?
  7. Or the thing you prayed for so sincerely and were so happy when you got it, and now it's nothing but heartache. Why?
  8. God destined Joseph for royalty and then sold him into slavery. What gives?
  9. Let me ask you a question and then slam you with a couple of Bible verses you might not like. You'll be so glad you came to church today.
  10. QUESTION: Who ever said it was God who sold Joseph into slavery? *His dysfunctional, nasty brothers did that to him. Don't blame God for the fallenness of the world around you.* It wasn't His fault. Never has been, never will be. Instead, we should be thanking God and crediting God, because no matter how fallen our world can be, God can still bring gold out of the ashes.
  11. I think God allowed Joseph to go through what he did so he could learn the fifth law of destiny, summed up in two Bible verses, verses that most of us rebel against most of the time.
    - a) *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."* Isaiah 55:8, 9, NKJV
  12. Translation: It isn't for you to sit in judgment on the ways of God. He possesses the infinite wisdom of deity. By comparison, we have the mind of a gnat. Maybe Joseph thought that he would make himself a somebody by slandering his brothers. God had to show him, you will become a somebody, but not in any way you could ever predict, much less control, much less make happen by your own power.
    - a) *"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," Says the LORD of hosts.* Zechariah 4:6, NKJV
  13. God grants Joseph a personal sense of destiny. Joseph now faces a great danger: the same one we all face. The danger to think that we will achieve the life to which God has called us by our own ingenuity, our own planning, our own intelligence and our own power. As if the will of God were accomplished by the mind and power of mankind.
  14. It is not. It is impossible.
  15. So God has to strip us of every last thought that we can accomplish anything that pleases Him by any power but the power of Christ.
  16. Here is the fifth law... and it's the best of all.
    - a) *You will reach your destiny ONLY in ways that highlight the grace and glory of Jesus Christ who gave you a destiny to begin with.*
  17. I said that what lies behind you is not as important as what lies before you.
  18. But you know what? What lies before you is not as important as what lies within you. What lies within you, if you are a Christian, is Christ. He inhabits your body and soul and will make you what you deeply want to be if you ask him, trust him and obey him.

### III. Conclusion

- A. You might say, I don't have a dream, I don't have a personal sense of destiny. I don't know what God designed me for.
- B. He is the secret of knowing your destiny.
- C. Come back next week.