

The 31 Special Features documents contain four types of sermon helps: illustrations, special features, upper/lower story, and application. These ideas were extracted from the actual messages preached by Randy Frazee and Max Lucado for the 31 weeks of The Story. The Special Features are provided in Word format so pastors can access the text and use it in building their own sermons.

Chapter 3

Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh

Illustrations (stories, humor)

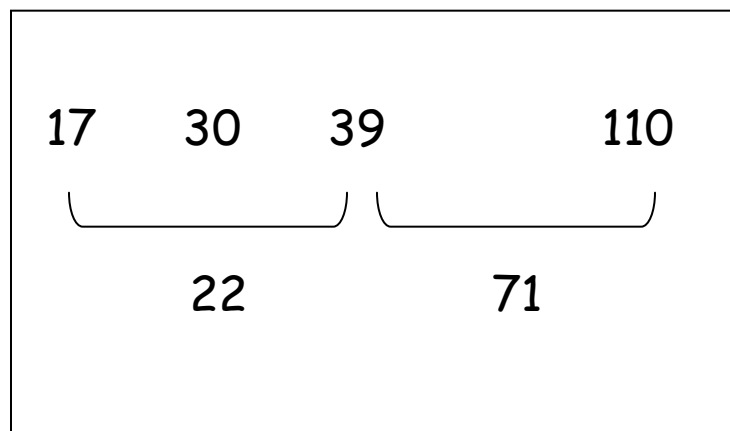
Personal story illustrating upper/lower story: Randy opened by telling how the arrival of his daughter derailed his plans for graduate school, yet, it put him in a position that ultimately led to him being invited to take a senior minister role that, on paper, he was woefully unqualified for. This is an example of how our wrecked plans (the lower story) can help form God’s better plan (the upper story).

“Here’s a lower story application: If you have such dreams (of your brothers bowing down to you) ...keep them to yourself!”

Special Features (visuals, audience engagement)

On a flip chart, as the sermon progresses, write Joseph’s ages at different points in the story.

- 17 was Joseph’s age when he told his brothers about his dream.
- 30 was Joseph’s age when he was made second in command over all of Egypt.
- 39 was his age when his brothers came to ask him for grain.
- 22 years elapsed from when Joseph was given his dream to when it was fulfilled.
- 110 was his age when he died
- Joseph enjoyed 71 years of living in prosperity and peace with his family



Place: On the map in the front inside cover of *The Story*, have the congregation draw a triangle with a J inside it to represent Joseph at Jerusalem where his family lived, and draw an arrow over to Egypt where he is enslaved.

Cross Reference (on screen, read aloud together): Romans 8:28 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and who have been called according to his purposes.*

Upper Story/Lower Story

Recap the principles of lower story and upper story, because this chapter is one of the best examples of this concept in all of scripture.

Joseph was able to forgive his brothers because he saw that God was up to something; he had captured the upper story, God's bigger plan. What the brothers did was wrong, but God used their sin and jealousy to accomplish his overall purpose, his upper story.

The famine would have killed the little fledgling nation of Israel naturally, but supernaturally God made a provision for their salvation by putting Joseph in the right place at the right time.

Why didn't God just thwart the famine? It wasn't time yet for the nation of Israel to take ownership of the land of Canaan. And, they needed to be prevented from intermarrying with Canaanites, so their move to Egypt got them away from the Canaanites and living amongst the Egyptians who thought it was an abomination to marry shepherds. In Egypt they were given the incredibly fertile land of Goshen where they thrived.

Joseph had 22 years of a difficult life, but 71 years of a blessed life. He saw the upper story and it made his life in the lower story richer. It made all the junk that happened to him in the lower story survivable.

Application

Point: The trials we go through test us and cause us to trust God and to see his power in desperate situations, and equip us for the very thing he wants us to do that we're not yet equipped to do, so that others will see not us, but God.

Huge consequences come to us when we do things in the lower story to hurt other people, even though God often uses our sinfulness to accomplish his overall will.

For those whose life isn't turning out like you had envisioned it, you need the perspective of Romans 8:28. But this incredible promise of God is not applied to everyone. First you have to be a Christian, and not only a Christian, but one that loves God, and has aligned their life to the purposes of God, or to the upper story of God. This should invoke one of three responses:

1. If you have never entered into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you would do so today.
2. If you are a Christian and you love God, you would align your life to God's purposes, not your own. Instead of asking God to bless your big ideas in your lower story, turn it around and adjust your entire life to what God is up to so that the Romans 8:28 promise might be yours.
3. If you are a Christian and it is not going well at all for you, things are not making sense in your lower story, get through this by abandoning your will to God's will. Remind yourself daily of God's upper story while enduring the lower story issues. Like the American slaves whose lower story was miserable, they sang songs about the upper story. "Swing low, sweet chariot coming forth to carry me home." Even before you know what it may mean, align your life to God's will so you will be, as Joseph said, in the place of God.