



DIGGING DEEPER WEEK 3



The Power of Two

Finding out I was having twins ten days before they were born gave me a crash course in the power of two. All of a sudden we needed two cribs and car seats, and we soon found ourselves changing two diapers quite often. Ask any mother of multiples and she will tell you the vast difference between one and two. Throughout the Joseph saga we find a reoccurrence of pairing in regard to dreams, events, and accounts. Although we do not want to over-emphasize the doubles in Joseph's narrative, they do lead us to question the significance of God's intention in the use of symmetry in the text.

Having read Joseph's story many times since childhood, I must admit I had never noticed the "twos" scattered throughout until recently. Some of the clear instances of pairing include the following:

- Joseph has two dreams as a seventeen-year-old boy (Genesis 37:5-9)
- Joseph interprets two dreams of two fellow inmates (Genesis 40:5-19)
- Joseph is forgotten in prison by the cupbearer for two years (Genesis 40:23, 41:1)
- Pharaoh has two dreams (Genesis 41:1-7)
- Pharaoh's dreams are repeated twice in Genesis 41 (Genesis 41:1-7, 17-24)
- Joseph's brothers make two trips to Egypt in search of grain (Genesis 42:1-2; 43:1-2)

What do these instances of pairing mean as we interpret the text, and what relevance do they have in our lives? Joseph himself sheds some light on this question in Genesis 41:32. In explaining the meaning of Pharaoh's dream, Joseph says, "As for having two similar dreams, it means that these events have been decreed by God, and he will soon make them happen." Joseph assures Pharaoh that the reason he dreamed two separate dreams of both cows and grain, each having the same meaning, is for the purpose of confirmation. God wanted him to know that these things would take place with no delay. One commentator notes, "The point of the narrative is that such symmetry in human events is evidence of a divine work. The writer, along with Joseph, is able to see the handiwork of God in the events that he recounts, and he passes them along to the readers in these subtle interplays within the text itself."¹

Though God should have to give us instructions or information only one time, He seems to know our fragile tendency toward doubt. Psalm 103:14 says, "For he knows how weak we are; / he remembers we are only dust." How many times have we questioned if what we thought we heard from God was real? Is it possible we made up those thoughts or impressions on our own? Maybe it was by chance that we read a verse or heard a sermon or ran into a person. As people we are prone to doubt without the gift of repetition.

Could it be possible that God knew Joseph's humanness might cause him to question the certainty of his dream, especially during the seasons of his slavery and imprisonment? Perhaps giving Joseph a second dream helped him to cling to the truth of God's promise on days when he was prone to doubt. During trying times, we can easily forget God's promises to bless us or wonder if we heard God right.

Pharaoh needed confirmation for his dreams so that he wouldn't forget God's instructions during a time of prosperity. During those amazing years of plenty, he might have been tempted to think that his dream was the result of indigestion. What seems so real in the moment can fade into fiction in our minds over the course of time. Having two separate dreams with similar meanings would confirm the need to

obey and store up as much grain as possible in a land that rarely knew famine because of the Nile River. Not only do we find two dreams, but we also find Pharaoh repeating the dreams. We hear about the dreams of the cows and grain told twice in virtually the same way. "The writer has gone out of his way to present the whole of the narrative in a series of 'pairs,' all fitting within the notion of the emphasis given by means of the repetition: 'the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon' (v. 32)."²

Other biblical characters such as Moses, Gideon, and Thomas asked for signs to confirm God's directions. God didn't shame them for needing confirmation. He wanted to help them believe. God wants to help us grow in faith as well. At times when I have questioned a direction in which God seemed to be leading me, He often has put people, Scripture, or circumstances in front of me to reassure me of His path.

When my husband and I wondered if we should move from Canada to Ohio, we were very unclear about what to do. At times doors would open and at other times they would close. We couldn't seem to sort through what God was doing. Through prayer, Scripture, and wise counsel from a mentor, God mercifully gave us unmistakable clarity. Confirmation is God's mercy toward us humans who are prone to question in the light what God has revealed to us in the dark. Throughout the Genesis account of Joseph's life, we see God's gracious gift of verification in the power of two.

God longs to help us along His divine path just as He did for Joseph. We may not always understand how circumstances will play out, but we can trust that the greatest power of two is the coupling of God and us in close relationship. Apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5), but with Him we can do everything through Christ who gives us strength (Philippians 4:13).

As you look back on your walk with God, how can you see God's gift of repetition? How has confirmation through His Word, circumstances, or people brought you assurance and clarity?

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1. Frank Gaebelin, *The Expositors Bible Commentary Volume 6* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 239.
 2. *Ibid*, 240.

