

Lessons from the life of Joseph*

•Joseph was the eleventh of Jacob's twelve sons, the first child of Rachel (Jacob's beloved wife) and therefore his father's favorite.

"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: 2-4

•Joseph had several dreams (from God) that angered his brothers and increased their envy toward him:

"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.

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." 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 37:7-11

•Later, Jacob sends Joseph to find his brothers and their flocks to bring them back home

"Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. 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!"

"So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph *of* his tunic, the tunic of *many* colors that *was* on him. Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit *was* empty; *there was* no water in it."

"Then Midianite traders passed by; so *the brothers* pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt." Genesis 37, 23-28

- Joseph's brothers rejected him and sold him into slavery, in the same way as Christ was rejected by His countrymen and sold for thirty pieces of silver by Judas Iscariot

"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" Genesis 37: 32-35

- Jacob has earlier killed a little goat to deceive his father in order that he might get the blessing, and now his sons were using a goat to deceive Jacob.

"Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" Gal. 6:7

- Though it looked like life was over for Joseph, it was just beginning. The slave traders had sold him to Potiphar who was Pharaoh's head of the military police and royal body guard. He was also the chief executioner.

"The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian" Genesis 39:2

- God blessed Joseph because of his hard work, faithfulness, honesty, and integrity, and success followed him wherever he went.

"And his master saw that the Lord *was* with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all *that* he had he put under his authority. So it was, from the time *that* he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field. Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate." Genesis 39:3-6

- Joseph's life serves as a reminder that Christians should be the hardest workers and do the best work. "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ." Colossian 3:23-24

- If you do your best work for God's glory, He will bless you.

However, sometimes after we have come through adversity, after we have had a little success, we are more vulnerable to sin than we were before. Maybe we're not as dependent upon God. Maybe we've lowered our guard a little bit. Greater success leads to greater times of vulnerability. *But Joseph knew that God was there and God was watching:*

“But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. *There is* no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her *or* to be with her” Genesis 39: 8-10

“Flee youthful lusts” 2 Tim 2:22

- Joseph understood there were consequences to sin, and that God's standards are absolute. He also realized that all sin is against God. The greatest deterrent against sin is loving God. If you love God, you want to do things that honor Him.

“If you love me, keep my commandments” John 14:15

- Joseph was falsely accused of rape and thrown in prison. Potiphar knew his wife all to well. For the alleged crime, he could easily have had Joseph executed.

“But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners who *were* in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. The keeper of the prison did not look into anything *that was* under *Joseph’s* authority, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made *it* prosper.” Genesis 39: 21-23.

- Once again, Joseph was so diligent and hardworking that he was soon running the place. These was a cheerfulness about Joseph such that when the butler and baker were thrown in prison, he asks them “Why do you look so sad” Genesis 40:7

“And they said to him, “We each have had a dream, and *there is* no interpreter of it.” So Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *them* to me, please.”

- The butler was the first to explain his dream to Joseph. When Joseph reveal that within three days he would be restored to his position of serving Pharaoh, Joseph asked: “But Remember me when it is well with you and please show

kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house”
However: “Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot about him”

•Despite the circumstances and the waiting, we never here of Joseph complaining. In everything Joseph went through God was preparing him for his future position, molding him from the spoiled son of Jacob to a leader of Egypt.

“He sent a man before them—
Joseph—*who* was sold as a slave.
They hurt his feet with fetters,
He was laid in irons.
Until the time that his word came to pass,
The word of the Lord tested him.
The king sent and released him,
The ruler of the people let him go free.
He made him lord of his house,
And ruler of all his possessions,
To bind his princes at his pleasure,
And teach his elders wisdom.” Psalm 105: 17-22

•Joseph’s boldness before Pharaoh: no groveling.
And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and *there is* no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you *that* you can understand a dream, to interpret it.” So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, “*It is* not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.”

“This *is* the thing which I have spoken to Pharaoh. God has shown Pharaoh what He *is* about to do. Indeed seven years of great plenty will come throughout all the land of Egypt; but after them seven years of famine will arise, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will deplete the land. So the plenty will not be known in the land because of the famine following, for it *will be* very severe. And the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing *is* established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.” Genesis 41:28-32

•Joseph wasn’t ashamed to tell Pharaoh the truth; he spoke boldly to him and didn’t hold back the less pleasant details.
Pharaoh recognized Joseph wasn’t an ordinary person, because of the spirit of God. Even a pagan ruler was able to see the spirit of God in Joseph.

“So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find *such a one* as this, a man in whom *is* the Spirit of God?” Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, *there is* no one as discerning and wise as you.”
Genesis 41:37-39

- Pharaoh accepted Joseph's plan and made him the second ruler of Egypt.

- Similarities between Joseph and Jesus:

Joseph was sent by his father to his brothers, even as Jesus was sent by the Father to His people. Joseph's brothers despised him and sold him, as was Jesus- rejected by His own and sold by Judas. Joseph's brothers threw him in a pit, even as Jesus descended into Hades. Joseph was brought up out of the dungeon to stand before Pharaoh. Jesus arose from the dead and ascended to the Father. Joseph was then given great authority, even as Jesus has been given great authority.

All of those years, Joseph's brother's were consumed by guilt for what they had done to Joseph, and this becomes apparent when Joseph accuses them of being spies, just as they had viewed Joseph as Jacob's spy on them:

"Then they said to one another, "We *are* truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us." And Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not speak to you, saying, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us." But they did not know that Joseph understood *them*, for he spoke to them through an interpreter." Genesis 42: 21-25; Psalm 32: 3-4: unconfessed sin leads to an alienated relationship with God.

- Joseph tests his brothers to see how they treat his younger brother Benjamin by placing his diviner's cup in Benjamin's knapsack

Confession: "Then Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; here we are, my lord's slaves, both we and *he* also with whom the cup was found." Genesis 44: 16

Judah passed the test: he was unwilling to forsake Benjamin to his fate, and he offered himself as a substitute for Benjamin:

"Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father if the lad *is* not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?" Genesis 44: 33-34

Joseph reveals both himself and God's providence:

"And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now *it was* not you *who* sent me here,

but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.” Genesis 45: 7-8

•But it still was difficult for the brothers to get rid of their guilt/fear of repercussions for their behavior:

“When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him.” So they sent *messengers* to Joseph, saying, “Before your father died he commanded, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to Joseph: “I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.”’ Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.” Genesis 50: 15-16.

Joseph answered:

“Do not be afraid, for *am* I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive.” Genesis 50: 19-20

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28

God’s Sovereignty – He is in control and doesn’t make mistakes. He does what He wants when He wants with whom He wants in any way he wants.

There are things that God allows in life that don’t make sense. But we believe that ultimately in our lives, all things will work together for good.

Important Themes:

•That which a man sows, he reaps – “For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” Galatians 6:8

•Hard work, integrity, honesty for Christians in the workplace.

•The importance of boldness when proclaiming the truth and not holding back on the less pleasant topics.

•Unconfessed sin/guilt and alienation from God can haunt a life, so much so that even when forgiven the shame and regret can paralyze a person from moving forward.

•God’s sovereignty in all of life’s circumstances, good or bad.

Excerpts taken from Pastor Greg Laurie’s Daily Devotional and Pastor Chuck Smith’s *Word for Today Bible*

