

Lesson 5 28th May, 2017

Joseph, a Man of Strength

Lesson Scope: Genesis 38 to 40

References in brackets refer to Genesis chapters 38 to 40 unless otherwise noted

Lesson Focus

Joseph was most likely still a teenager when his brothers sold him into Egypt. In a crisis we can hardly comprehend, he was deprived of nearly every aspect of human belonging—family, culture, language, and religion. Only a person of sterling character would retain the things that remained—those things which no man can steal—his tender conscience, his memories of parental teaching, and his faith in God. So many have discarded all these things under far less provocation. How did Joseph retain both his uprightness and his pleasant disposition?

From our perspective, we can see that God was painting on a larger canvas than Joseph could have comprehended. Joseph's patience and faithfulness, apart from any awareness of his role in God's plan, stand as a powerful example to us. God's loving faithfulness to the lonely teenager reassures us that God does not neglect anyone as He accomplishes His superior purposes. May His faithfulness strengthen us the next time we are besieged by temptations.

The righteous constantly face temptations to sin. Only by God's grace and through unwavering personal commitment to Him can they overcome.

The scope and detail we have of Joseph's life gives us a broader glimpse into the workings of God than we can see in many other Bible characters. We are able to trace the sureness of God's work throughout Joseph's life in detail that is awe-inspiring. Joseph's brothers thought they were selling him to sure death by hard labor; God saw to it that Joseph was preserved in the service of an upper-class government officer. Satan sought to destroy him morally or to have him accused of a crime punishable by death. God allowed him to be imprisoned, which removed him from this temptation. This placed him on the path to eventual advancement.

Faithfulness in severe and prolonged temptation is possible, but it requires decisiveness. Hesitation brings sure defeat. Unwavering commitment and trust in God in all circumstances will be rewarded.

Lesson Aim: To see qualities that enable a person to maintain his integrity in wicked surroundings.

Theme Verses: [Ephesians 6:10-11](#). Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Lesson Text

The Peril of Prosperity

[Genesis 39:1-6](#)

And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmaelites, which had brought him down thither. ² And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. ³ And his master saw that the LORD *was* with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴ And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all *that* he had he put into his hand. ⁵ And it came to pass from the time *that* he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. ⁶ And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was *a* goodly *person*, and well favoured.

The Price of Purity

[Genesis 39:7-9](#)

And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. ⁸ But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what *is* with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; ⁹ There *is* none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou *art* his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

[Genesis 37:19-20](#)

And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. ²⁰ Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.

The Practice of Patience

Genesis 39:21-23

But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²² And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that *were* in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer *of it*. ²³ The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing *that was* under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and *that* which he did, the LORD made *it* to prosper.

Genesis 40:1-14

And it came to pass after these things, *that* the butler of the king of Egypt and *his* baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt. ² And Pharaoh was wroth against two *of* his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers. ³ And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph *was* bound. ⁴ And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them: and they continued a season in ward. ⁵ And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which *were* bound in the prison. ⁶ And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and, behold, they *were* sad. ⁷ And he asked Pharaoh's officers that *were* with him in the ward of his lord's house, saying, Wherefore look ye *so* sadly to day? ⁸ And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and *there is* no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, *Do* not interpretations *belong* to God? tell me *them*, I pray you. ⁹ And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, In my dream, behold, a vine *was* before me; ¹⁰ And in the vine *were* three branches: and it *was* as though it budded, *and* her blossoms shot forth; and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes: ¹¹ And Pharaoh's cup *was* in my hand: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand. ¹² And Joseph said unto him, This *is* the interpretation of it: The three branches *are* three days: ¹³ Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place: and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler. ¹⁴ But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house:

Genesis 40:23

Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Questions for Study

The Peril of Prosperity

1. How does 39:1 illustrate God's sovereignty in Joseph's life?
2. Describe how Joseph surmounted his situation and retained his spiritual moorings.
3. How does Joseph's life show the relationship between continued blessing and increased usefulness?

The Price of Purity

4. How might Joseph's circumstances have made his temptations especially severe?
5. On what two principles did Joseph base his response to Potiphar's wife?
6. How far should we go to gain victory over temptation?

The Practice of Patience

7. Is it possible to see Joseph's imprisonment as a reward for his integrity?
8. How did Joseph remain unchanged even in imprisonment?

Analyzing the Passage

The "captain of the guard" was the head of Pharaoh's bodyguard. In that capacity, he likely was the head of the penal system and the superior of the prison warden where Joseph was imprisoned. In this it becomes evident that Potiphar himself likely did not believe the accusations of his wife against Joseph. It may also partially explain the rapidity of Joseph's rise to privileged position even in prison.

The Lord's presence with Joseph continued because of Joseph's ongoing obedience and faithfulness in every test. While the story does not specifically state this, we can safely assume that Joseph verbally expressed his faith to his master, Potiphar, and to whomever was the keeper of the prison. His words and confirming actions formed a powerful testimony that God used repeatedly.

Joseph honored God by refusing the temptation to "do this great wickedness." In time, God faithfully honored him far beyond human expectations.

Principles and Applications

The Peril of Prosperity

1. We find strength in trusting God's sovereign ordering of the circumstances beyond our control (39:1, 20; 40:23). This story illustrates that events beyond our control are not out of control. Those who seek our destruction are not stronger than God, who works for our advancement. Hindsight makes this easy to see in Joseph's life. May this rich illustration

of God's sovereign ability to accomplish His purposes strengthen our faith so that we can experience serenity even in the most vexing circumstances.

2. Focusing on serving others contributes to spiritual strength (39:4, 22; 40:7-8). We are happiest when we are productively occupied. We are strongest when we are looking for ways to do God's work for the benefit of those around us. Many times we are powerless to change our own situation but retain some ability to improve the condition of others. Our faithfulness in taking these opportunities will be noticed and rewarded.

3. Inner strength becomes evident through a consistent daily walk of faithfulness (39:2-3, 21-22). Life brings challenges and changes. Many men and women have been broken and embittered by their experiences in life. Each of us is susceptible to that. The tests of life reveal whether or not we have been building our character on a changeless foundation. Consistency and faithfulness are not accidents.

The Price of Purity

4. A man of strength responds to temptation with definite refusal (39:8). Hesitancy brings certain defeat. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

5. To maintain integrity, one must think through and understand the issues (39:8-9). The appeal of temptation comes largely from an incomplete portrayal of the consequences. The devil never shows the fleeting nature of the pleasure and the enduring nature of the pain that results from yielding to temptation. We must think that through beforehand. Likewise, the devil never shows the enduring rewards of integrity. We must understand and value those rewards above all temporary costs. Such resolve must be nourished; it cannot be developed in the heat of the battle.

6. Personal accountability to God must outweigh all other considerations (39:8-9). We are prone to two failings—consulting our own desires rather than God's, and considering what everyone else thinks of us rather than what God thinks of us. If we can envision ourselves explaining our actions to God before doing something, then much that is vague becomes clear.

7. The godly are willing to pay whatever price is necessary to maintain integrity (39:19-20). The devil does everything he can to ensure that integrity is punished rather than rewarded. Those who accept this fact in the battle between good and evil place themselves firmly in the path of God's greatest blessing.

The Practice of Patience

8. The man of integrity maintains his humility (40:8). Joseph had experience with dreams, but he never states this here. Whatever our spiritual gift

may be, in whatever circumstances that gift is recognized, the source of that gift is God. Integrity, uprightness, and the strength to maintain those virtues comes from Him.

9. The faithful person points others to God for answers to life's questions (40:8). Life's questions show human shortcomings and reveal glimpses of the conflict between good and evil. As we grow and the experiences of life accumulate, this becomes increasingly clear. Every person is engaged in the conflict between good and evil, whether they are aware of it or not. So whatever the reasons for their imprisonment, the baker and the butler had the same need of encountering God as Joseph did. God may well have given them these dreams because they were in the presence of one who could interpret them, and by this event they would encounter Him.

10. A man of strength waits patiently for God's purpose to unfold (40:14, 23). We would prefer to think that strength enables us to manage affairs for ourselves. Rather, true strength enables patience, which brings perfection. At times it tests our faith to believe it, but God is more capable than we are to chart our life's course.

Important Teachings

1. We find strength in trusting God's sovereign ordering of the circumstances beyond our control (39:1, 20; 40:23).

2. Focusing on serving others contributes to spiritual strength (39:4, 22; 40:7-8).

3. Inner strength becomes evident through a consistent daily walk of faithfulness (39:2-3, 21-22).

4. A man of strength responds to temptation with definite refusal (39:8).

5. To maintain integrity, one must think through and understand the issues (39:8-9).

6. Personal accountability to God must outweigh all other considerations (39:8-9).

7. The godly are willing to pay whatever price is necessary to maintain integrity (39:19-20).

8. The man of integrity maintains his humility (40:8).

9. The faithful person points others to God for answers to life's questions (40:8).

10. A man of strength waits patiently for God's purpose to unfold (40:14, 23).

Answers to Questions

1. How does 39:1 illustrate God's sovereignty in Joseph's life?

Joseph's brothers clearly did not expect Joseph to survive what they assumed would be his destiny in Egypt—the hard labor of a slave. Their scheming did not limit God, who was able to acquaint one of Pharaoh's officers with Joseph from the very beginning. Joseph's brothers, and Joseph himself, would never have expected such an outcome.

2. Describe how Joseph surmounted his situation and retained his spiritual moorings.

He clearly understood that the nature of right and wrong remained unchanged despite the circumstances of life, or the person whom he was serving. He served his Egyptian master with the same dependability with which he served his father. He showed that he had learned that it was more important to be the right person in every circumstance than to be concerned about the justness of those circumstances. The

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grace that God extended to him he likewise channeled to his master and fellow servants.

3. How does Joseph's life show the relationship between continued blessing and increased usefulness?

The abilities he possessed and the blessings he received were to be used to render faithful, competent service, with stewardship and honesty. He was faithful without the scrutiny of audits or other forms of oversight. He was content to allow others to notice and to decide the questions of promotions and other advancements.

4. How might Joseph's circumstances have made his temptations especially severe?

Joseph had no way to escape the enticements of Potiphar's wife. He had been ill-treated and deprived of the opportunities of normal life. He was far from home and thus could have felt far from his parental training. The all-encompassing trust of his master could have led him to feel proud and overconfident, which in turn would have moved him to take liberties that were not his to take.

5. On what two principles did Joseph base his response to Potiphar's wife?

Joseph based his explanation on the principle of accountability to his master. He was given a trust that he did not wish to violate. The second principle he recognized was that yielding to her wishes would constitute sin against God.

6. How far should we go to gain victory over temptation?

Joseph was willing to flee temptation and forcibly remove himself from the source. He continued to be willing to flee even as he likely realized that he was increasing the likelihood of suspicion and circumstantial evidence against him. It is better to pay the price of misrepresentation and false accusation than to continue in the presence of intense temptation.

7. Is it possible to see Joseph's imprisonment as a reward for his integrity? In limited human sight, of course not. It was the height of injustice. From an eternal perspective, however, it finally got Joseph beyond the reach of the temptations of Potiphar's wife. For those who value a clean conscience over bodily comforts and lasting approval of God over temporary reputation, even the hardness of imprisonment can be seen as a blessing. God is not limited by injustice. He can accomplish His work on our behalf in spite of setbacks as insurmountable as imprisonment on baseless charges.

8. How did Joseph remain unchanged even in imprisonment?

As outward circumstances changed for the worse, his relationship with God anchored him, so that his character shined even brighter. He had been faithful as a son, as a slave, and then as a prisoner. His interests were pointed outward, toward the needs of his fellow prisoners.

Summarizing the Lesson

The struggles and tests that Joseph grappled with still resonate across the intervening millennia. The same desires and yearnings of heart and the same vulnerabilities and temptations that he experienced remain our lot today. God still needs men and women of Joseph's character. May his example quicken and strengthen us to victory in the temptations we face. May his example give us trust and serenity, knowing that God accomplishes His grand purposes while not forgetting his obedient followers in their varied circumstances of loneliness and despair.

Research Guide

Read the information under "Joseph" in Unger's Bible Dictionary.