

Lesson 5 – 30 May 2010

Joseph, a Man of Strength

Lesson Scope: [Genesis 38-40](#)

Lesson Focus

Joseph was now thrust into a strange environment, separated from his godly father and all that had been familiar. At home he had been the favored son of a wealthy farmer; in Egypt he was of the lowest rank—a slave. Joseph's new surroundings included unfamiliar language, culture, and religion. Although only seventeen years of age, he maintained his age and a sense of accountability to the God of his fathers. Certainly this lonely young man must have been severely tempted to conform to Egyptian culture and morals, but we have not one recorded lapse in his conduct. God was working on a much larger plan for His people than Joseph could have imagined (Gen.45:7, 8). Joseph may have known about the prophesied sojourn in a strange country (Gen.15:13-16), but his role in this plan was determined by his faithfulness in less-than-ideal circumstances. Had Joseph failed, the history of Israel might read much differently.

Our primary focus should be on the sterling qualities of Joseph's character. Very few of our lives have the dramatic "ups and downs" of Joseph's experience, yet everyone faces similar things to a certain degree. This lesson challenges each of us to be faithful personally. However, Christian parents should also be evaluating whether or not their youth are developing this type of rock-solid conviction.

Perhaps Joseph's earlier dreams encouraged him through this dark period of his life. The years involved (thirteen) would have given him ample time to doubt their authenticity. We see in these scriptures that Joseph had only a couple of short dreams to hold onto. Today we have a more sure Word of prophecy. We certainly have less reason to doubt than Joseph did.

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

Lesson Aim: To see qualities that enable a person to maintain his integrity in an evil world.

Theme Verse: 1 Corinthians 10:13.

There hash no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

Lesson Text

Dependable in Service

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 Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither. ²And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. ³And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴And 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. ⁵And 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. ⁶And 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.

Strong in Temptation

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. ⁸But 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; ⁹There 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 39:19-20

And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled. ²⁰And Joseph's master took him, and put him into

the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.

Patient in Suffering

[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. ²²And 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. ²³The 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

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.

[Genesis 40:4](#)

And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them: and they continued a season in ward.

[Genesis 40:7-8](#)

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? ⁸And 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.

[Genesis 40:12-14](#)

And Joseph said unto him, This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days: ¹³Yet 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. ¹⁴But 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

Dependable in Service

1. How did Joseph transcend his unfavorable circumstances?
2. How can we be assured of God's blessing?

Strong in Temptation

3. What reasons did Joseph give for refusing to sin?
4. Explain how a right view of God helps us resist temptation.
5. Should we expect to be rewarded for doing right? Explain.

Patient in Suffering

6. How did Joseph demonstrate selflessness in prison?"
7. What are some ways we can reach out to the needs of others'!

Analyzing the Passage

God's blessing upon Joseph was such that Potiphar recognized it to be supernatural (Gen.39:3). This prosperity was not unconditional: it sprang from Joseph's faith in God and his proper response to life's circumstances. God takes notice of injustice and has a special blessing for His mistreated children.

Joseph's servant attitude (Gen.39:4) earned his master's confidence (Gen.39:6). Joseph would have had ample opportunity to embezzle, but he was trustworthy. Neither did he try to escape to his home.

Potiphar's immoral, lying wife presented a temptation that has ensnared many mighty men. Joseph distanced himself as much as possible (Gen.39:10) and finally, had to run (Gen.39:12) to preserve his purity. Potiphar apparently put Joseph in prison to languish indefinitely without a trial. But Joseph did not allow humiliation, favor, promotion or suffering to alter his ethics. Even in prison "he served them- (Gen.40:4).

Principles and Applications

Dependable in Service

1. To maintain our integrity we must choose the way of divine (Gen.39:2). Life's circumstances are varied, but divine favor is consistently upon those who deliberately choose to follow God's way. When we choose right, God gives more strength to continue choosing right and to overcome temptation.
2. Approaching, life' with a servant mentality helps us maintain our integrity. (Gen.39:3-4). Many people in Joseph's situation would have turned inward, sullen and resentful. Such people are useless to God and a burden to others. Ultimately they create their own prison from which there is no escape. By contrast, Joseph served his master with such diligence that he made a meteoric rise from being a slave to being overseer of his em-

ployer's estate.

3. Integrity includes taking our responsibilities seriously (Gen.39:3, 4). How we approach the mundane duties of life says much about our integrity. Parents should teach youth the importance of doing a job well. No one should evade an assigned responsibility because it seems below his dignity.

Strong in Temptation

4. Maintaining our integrity requires refusal to yield to temptation (Gen.39:7-8). Joseph's testimony—indeed his whole life would have been marred by yielding. Although he was imprisoned, he retained God's blessing because he was innocent. This in turn was the key factor that eventually propelled him to a position far greater than he had before. When tempted, pined, we should remember the devastating results of a moment's reckless folly.

5. Recognizing our personal accountability to God motivates us to maintain our integrity. (Gen.39:9). Some areas of life are not readily visible to others. Understanding that God sees all will help us to resist secret sins. We may be especially vulnerable to lustful thoughts. Remember that Jesus equated a lustful look with adultery (Matthew 5:28). Living in God-consciousness will help us to be untarnished even in our thought life.

6. We maintain our integrity as we face unfair treatment patiently (Gen.39:19-20). If Joseph had lashed out against this unfair treatment, others would have concluded he was, in fact, guilty as charged. We will often respond in a wrong way if focus is on securing justice rather than on doing right. Every faithful person will face misunderstanding and unfair treatment. Parents help their children develop integrity by teaching them that life is not always fair.

7. Maintaining our integrity involves making the best of an undesirable situation (Gen.39:21-23). Some of the greatest men of God have conquered some of the worst circumstances. Ultimately, our response to circumstances determines whether they become dungeons of despair or doorways to glory.

Patient in Suffering

8. Taking an active interest in others' welfare can strengthen our own integrity. (Gen.40:4, 7). A person who wallows in self-pity will not notice the needs of those around him. God has designed us to be better off emotionally and spiritually when we reach out to others. Christ-like compas-

sion motivates us to be our best, and it yields great rewards.

9. We maintain integrity as we give proper recognition to God and His work (Gen.40:8). Joseph's ability to interpret dreams was God-given, and he always acknowledged that. God will no longer bless those who draw attention to themselves rather than Him. When we come into contact with distressed people, our answer should be, "God has the solution to your problem."

10. Patient faith in God's providence enables us to maintain our integrity even in seemingly hopeless circumstances (Gen.40:14, 23). Our God is sovereign; therefore He superintends the circumstances of our lives. Finally, at the end of time all injustices will be rectified. Until then we must have a complete trust in the living God who works all things together for good. (Romans 8:28).

Important Teachings

1. To maintain our integrity, we must choose the way of divine favor. (Gen.39:2).

2. Approaching life with a servant mentality helps us maintain our integrity. (Gen.39:3-4).

3. Integrity includes taking our responsibilities seriously (Gen.39:3-4).

4. Maintaining our integrity requires refusal to yield to temptation. (Gen.39:7, 8).

5. Recognizing our personal accountability to God motivates us to maintain our integrity. (Gen.39:9).

6. We maintain our integrity as we face unfair treatment patiently. (Gen.39:19-20).

7. Maintaining our integrity involves making the best of an undesirable situation. (39:21-23).

8. Taking an active interest in others' welfare can strengthen our own integrity. (Gen.40:4, 7).

9. We maintain integrity as we give proper recognition to God and His work. (Gen.40:8).

10. Patient faith in God's providence enables us to maintain our integrity even in seemingly hopeless circumstance. (Gen.40:14, 23).

Answers to Questions

1. How did Joseph transcend his unfavorable circumstances?

Above all, Joseph was true to God. God blessed him and gave him strength to avoid bitterness toward his brothers, the Ishmaelites, or Potiphar. His honesty and diligence earned him his high position in Potiphar's house.

2. How can we be assured of God's blessing?

We dare not become bitter toward God or others. We must make peace with our circumstances, accepting what is beyond our control as being God's will. We should cheerfully and diligently perform the tasks at hand without dwelling on the unfairness of our situation. Comparing ourselves with others brings sure defeat.

3. What reasons did Joseph give for refusing to sin?

Sinning would have betrayed the trust his master had in him. He properly labeled this act as "this great wickedness." Most importantly, God would hold him accountable for this sin.

4. Explain how a right view of God helps us resist temptation.

When we understand God's omniscience, we will understand the futility of hiding anything. God is just; every sin will be properly punished. We also understand that God will empower us to resist in temptation's hour. All of these combined to make Joseph "run for his life" when tempted.

5. Should we expect to be rewarded for doing right? Explain.

In some ways, yes, when we do right, God blesses us with the peace of a clear conscience. But God allows temporary injustice in this fallen world. God's people should expect persecution. In eternity, however, everyone will receive justice in either a positive or a negative way.

6. How did Joseph demonstrate selflessness in prison?

He served others (Gen.40:4). He was still trustworthy (Gen.39:22-23). He noticed the distress of those about him (Gen.40:6-7), indicating he was not focused on his own difficulties.

7. What are some ways we can reach out to the needs of others?

Service often involves a very practical dimension such as physical labor for others when they have disasters or sickness. Notice that Joseph first served these men before he could minister to their deeper problems and point them to God (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). We should be alert for those grappling with rejection, bereavement, mental distress, and financial problems. As we meet the world, we should notice those laboring under guilt,

those going through divorce, and a host of other problems brought on by sinful living. We should ever present God as the answer to all of life's problems.

Summarizing the Lesson

Joseph's life stands as a monument of faithfulness when he could have become embittered by the unfair treatment he received. His rejection of the lust of the flesh also challenges us to deny ourselves rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. God still needs men and women of Joseph's caliber today. How do you measure up?

Research Guide

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