

Good morning everyone, if I was to pick my favourite Old Testament story and bible character it would be **the story and life of Joseph** in the book of Exodus; it is both compelling and inspiring.

I am sure many of you are aware of the story of Joseph and his brothers; it has of course been made popular through musicals and other stage plays. You have heard of 'Joseph and the Technicolor dream coat' for example?

Much of that story is embellished for the stage, but the story in **real life** is amazing, full of intrigue and drama and we can learn many lessons from it for our Christian lives today.

The complete account of Joseph's life can be found beginning in Genesis 39 and concluding in Genesis 50. I would recommend you set aside some time to read it - however here is a potted history.

Joseph was born into a family of 10 half brothers. His father was Jacob who had married Leah somewhat begrudgingly and subsequently had 10 sons.

Leah was the sister of Rachel and Joseph was the first child born to Jacob and Rachel. His father favoured him very much because Rachel was the wife he really loved. Moreover, Joseph's birth came in Jacob's old age.

You could say Joseph was a spoiled child and if you are familiar with the story of Joseph's coat of many colours; this coat given to Joseph by his father was a sign of Jacob's favouritism. It earned the anger and jealousy of his brothers.

To make matters worse, Joseph had two dreams that made not only his brothers angry and resentful towards him but also made his parents uncomfortable. The conclusion of these dreams was that he would one day rule over his parents and sibling brothers.

It was these dreams that really pushed his brothers over the edge. One day when his father sent Joseph to go check on his brothers in the fields, they threw him down a dry well and later sold him as a slave to some passing Ishmaelite traders. Joseph was only 17 years old at the time.

Joseph's brothers covered their tracks by ripping off his coat of many colours, killing an animal and plastering its blood all over the coat. And then lying to their father that Joseph had been mauled by some animal.

Jacob, Joseph's father was so heartbroken about the news of Joseph's likely demise that we learn later in the story that he never recovered from 'losing' his favourite son.

Meanwhile, Joseph ended up as a slave in Egypt. Yet God was with him - He did so well that he was put in charge of Potiphar's house. Potiphar was a high ranking official who worked for the Pharaoh (the king of Egypt).

Unfortunately, Joseph's excellent work, but more so his handsome attractive appearance earned the attention of Potiphar's wife. She tried to seduce him day after day but he refused. His commitment to God was very strong.

However because of Joseph's rejection of her advances she wickedly and falsely lied to her husband and said that Joseph had tried to rape her - that was the end of Joseph's career in Potiphar's house.

We next find Joseph in an Egyptian prison. And there he distinguished himself again with excellent work and was made leader and put in charge of the prisoners. While doing his work, he met two of the Pharaoh's officials who had dreams they could not understand.

Joseph interpreted the dreams for them. His interpretations were spot on and the events of their lives unfolded just as Joseph has explained. He asked them to remember him on their release but they forgot and left him languishing in prison.

2 years later, Pharaoh had a dream he found confusing and troubling. Joseph was remembered by the cupbearer who had been in prison and had had his dream interpreted.

Joseph was summoned by the Pharaoh and sure enough, by God's power, Joseph was able to interpret the dream. The dream meant that a famine was coming. Not only did Joseph have the interpretation of the dream but he also had a solution. Pharaoh made Joseph 2nd in command to him and ruler over all Egypt's affairs.

When the famine started, his brothers had to travel to Egypt to buy food. And At first, they did not recognize Joseph. Through a series of schemes and plots, Joseph tested them to see if they had changed. He eventually revealed his identity and his entire family moved to Egypt.

God blessed Joseph and his family mightily and through Joseph's leadership they increased and prospered in Egypt until he died at a ripe old age.

So this morning I want to look at 3 characteristics of the life of Joseph that stand out and are a lesson to us:

Firstly his integrity It is such a sad thing to hear of a lack of integrity that seems to bring so many leaders and Christians down. We heard another Christian leader falling into sexual temptation this week. And it gives Christianity such a bad name.

But Joseph withstood the 'integrity test' when seduced by Potiphar's wife. Reading from Genesis 39:7-12 of Joseph's experience;

"^{One} day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹² She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹ No one is greater in this house than I am.

My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

For Joseph his integrity showed in that he didn't want to misuse his master's trust "My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing".

How did Joseph deal with this area of temptation? - 3 things stand out;

Firstly "he refused to go to bed with her **or even be with her**". He refused to **even be with her** this is the key area of temptation that we all have to face in one area or another.

By refusing to with her he was **catching temptation at the first frame**. I have told you many times of the comic strip character Cathy who was popular years ago in some newspapers.

Her daily adventures were told in short frames - one day she had decided to give up chocolate however she lost her battle in the very first frame by going out of her way and walking past the sweet shop and having a mouth watering but unhelpful look into the window.

She could have avoided the sweet shop altogether and put temptation out of her path.

How often do we put ourselves in the path of temptation by our lack of resolve, or our carelessness, or just by giving in to our deceptive human nature?

We lose the battle at the first frame.

2 Corinthians 10:5 says;

“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”

Firstly catch things at their source at the first frame – and that’s usually in the mind, a thought.

Secondly it says ‘he ran away’ from Potiphars wife. Sometimes is best not to engage in the battle - but to know our limitations, our weak areas, and run for the hills! Jesus says this in Luke 14:31-

“Or what king on his way to war with another king will not first sit down and consider whether he can engage with ten thousand men the one coming against him with twenty thousand? And if he is unable, he will send a delegation while the other king is still far off, to ask for terms of peace”.

We need to choose our battles; don’t be so proud to feel you can win in every situation. Choose when to step away, to say nothing. To run away from sin, it is not an act of cowardice but wise discernment.

And don’t put yourself into the place of temptation – We pray ‘lead us not into temptation’ but then are stupid enough to do so!

It would be stupid, would it not, to get a job in a bar if you had a problem with drink.

And thirdly (and most importantly) how do we keep our integrity in the face of opposition and temptation? It is to realise when you sin, when you do wrong you are not so much breaking a command **but you are sinning against God.**

Joseph said in response to Potiphar’s wife’s advances ‘How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?’ We have to get it into our heads that any

indiscretion on our part, **first and foremost, it hurts God** and that's because it's a love relationship we have with Him.

It is the same with anyone you love; you don't want to hurt them.

It's that 2 way relationship that should keep us from sin. When we fall we disappoint God, but it doesn't sever the relationship, although it may go cold for a little while.

Just like a child that let's their parents down when they do wrong, he or she doesn't cease to be part of the family - but until that child recognises their wrong, things can be frosty for a bit. But then after a time godly sorrow brings repentance and restoration.

2 Corinthians 7:9-11 "And now I rejoice, not because you were made sorrowful, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you felt the sorrow that God had intended, and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly sorrow brings death".

Secondly what else can we say about the life of Joseph? - **He Held no grudges!**

Joseph said to his brothers in Genesis 35:4 "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.

For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance"

After all they had done to him - right from His birth his brothers had resented Him – they wanted to kill him, they threw him down a well and then sold him into slavery. Every reason you would say for revenge.

But this is the chief reason why Joseph held no grudge and was able to forgive;

It tells us in Genesis 50:19 "Don't be afraid. (Joseph said to his brothers) Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ **You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good"**

You see that Joseph had a grasp of the sovereignty of God. That his life was in God's hands.

“That not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.” (Matthew 10:29-31)
He knew “That all things work together for good for those that love God” (Romans 8:28)

Life for the Christian isn’t a series of random events, one day you’re up next day your down, there is order, a plan for our existence. Sure enough we will go through trials, tough times, Jesus promised us that, but He is changing us, making us more like Him.

This is why Joseph could look back and forgive his brothers, because God had already ordered it all to take place before the foundations of the world **God intended it for good. And when God intends something, He won’t be thwarted.**

We forgive because God first forgave us, but one of the greatest revelations and motivations in our forgiveness is that ‘we are in His hands’ through all the circumstances of life. What a faith we have friends. What A God we serve an all knowing God **‘who works all things for good’.**

Thirdly and finally you have to be amazed **by Joseph’s faithfulness.**

Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." **Joseph was the exception to the rule, to the proverb.** No matter what blow life dealt him he was faithful, always believing, always looking on the bright side of life - he never gave up believing.

It serves as a marvellous example to us Christians - too continue faithful in Gods service no matter what the circumstances

Notice as well that Joseph was mentioned in the hall of fame in Hebrews 11; 22

“By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones” even when he was dying he was faithful.

I think we could say Joseph’s proof of his faith was in his waiting. His ability to be patient and bide his time.

But here’s the interesting thing about Joseph, his waiting was not idle or passive he was ‘busy about his masters business’ diligently working in whatever station God had put him - he didn’t despair or fall into self pity. As Heb. 11: 6 says;

“He continued to believe that God was real and that He is a rewarder of those who **diligently** seek Him”

Biblical faith often means waiting - and patience is not a commodity many of us have, we want it now, and if we don't see answers to our prayers we give up.

Not so with Joseph, he spent years in prison waiting for justice. He must have thought the dreams he had when he was a lad would never come to pass. But they did in God's good time.

So in conclusion; let us pray we will be like Joseph, **a people of integrity** - when people all around are watching us, waiting for us to fail, to say that's Christianity for you - instead let us hold our integrity - there is nothing that recommends our faith more than integrity.

Let us catch temptation at the first frame and ask God 'not to lead us into temptation' and if that means running away from sin let us do so.

Let not hold any grudges and be ready to forgive and recognise that anything that comes our way, good or bad is part of Gods provision for our good.

And finally let us be a people of faith who wait patiently for our deliverance, not in idleness but in diligence knowing that our salvation and redemption is at hand.

Romans 13:11-12

¹And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹²The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.

Amen

Tony Troy