

The Extraordinary Character of Joseph (Genesis 39b)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Genesis

I. Background and Introduction

- a. Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers, is brought to Egypt. There, he serves in the house of Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh. Joseph is faithful, and is entrusted with running the entire household.
- b. Potiphar's wife unsuccessfully tries to seduce Joseph. When Joseph flees, she claims to her husband that Joseph had tried to violate her. Her husband, as a result, has Joseph cast into prison.
- c. One great reason to study the Old Testament is to get to know true heroes of faith, men and women like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Job, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Ruth and Daniel. Real heroes who made great sacrifices, overcame trials and temptations, changed the course of history with their prayers, and demonstrated great character. We can learn a lot from looking at the character of Joseph.
 - i. He is one of a very few Biblical characters whose lives are discussed at length, yet no example of him sinning (unlike Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, etc.).
 - ii. Jesus was fully human, and was tempted just as we are, yet was without sin.
 1. "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (**Hebrews 4:15**, NKJV)
 2. Although I know for a fact that Jesus was fully human, and faced the same temptations that I do, *sometimes* it is easier for me to relate to other men and women of faith. Could be something I can relate to or identify with in their personality or in the particular trials they faced.
 3. Knowing people of faith who went before me, and imitating their faith and way of life, is an upward call for me. "He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed." (**Proverbs 13:20**, NKJV)
 - iii. In this lesson we will look at aspects of Joseph's character revealed in **Genesis 39** that I find very convicting and an upward call.

II. Characteristic No. 1: Joseph's Faithfulness and Integrity

- a. Read **Genesis 39:4-6**
 - i. Joseph is a slave in Egypt. However, his master sees that the Lord is with Joseph, and that Joseph is successful in everything he does.
 - ii. Joseph demonstrated extremely high integrity on the job. His master fully trusted him for his honesty and faithfulness. In **Genesis 39** we learn that he placed Joseph was placed in charge of everything he had, in the house as well as in the field.
- b. Read **Genesis 39:20-23**
 - i. Later, when Joseph is unjustly cast into prison, the same thing happens. The head of the prison sees God blessing whatever Joseph does, and sees how trustworthy he is. Joseph is put in charge of the whole prison, including the other prisoners!
- c. Both Joseph and Daniel are convicting examples to me regarding how I act on the job, when I am working for others.
 - i. The convicting example of Daniel, in serving under Darius the Mede, is presented in **Daniel 6**. "It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. Then these men said, 'We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.'" (**Daniel 6:1-5**, NKJV)
 1. Are Christians known today as being the best workers of all? Maybe they can't be workaholics and spend as much time as unbelievers who are living for their careers. However, honestly, what is our reputation?
 2. If your boss or co-workers wanted to dig up some dirt on your performance at work (working hard, keeping your commitments, letting your 'yes' be 'yes', absolute integrity, timeliness, respect for others, being a joy to work with, use of time and resources at the workplace, highest quality of work, etc.), would they have anything to say?
 3. Only thing they could find against Daniel was that he would take a few moments off 3x/day to pray! (**Daniel 6:10**)
 - ii. Jesus said:

1. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (**Matthew 6:33**, NKJV).
 2. Jesus called his followers to be the light of the world. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (**Matthew 5:16**, NKJV)
 3. “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (**Matthew 5:20**, NKJV)
- iii. Paul calls even servants/ slaves who are Christians to the same high standard.
1. “Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,” (**Colossians 3:22–23**, NKJV)
- iv. Joseph was left in charge of the whole house of Potiphar. Does your home (house, condo, apartment, etc.) reflect that someone with the character of Joseph lives there?
1. Take stock of your own life, and repent. This is one of the hardest things for me, honestly. At the age of 64, I still feel like this is an uphill battle!
 2. In the past: as a Christian, there were times when I saw myself as ‘too busy with more important things’ (reading the Bible, discipling others, teaching, evangelistic outreach, missions, etc.) than to be doing mundane things like doing excellent at my engineering job, cutting the grass, shoveling the snow, taking care of rot and decay on the exterior of my home, etc. At times I justified my unrighteous lifestyle with the ‘spiritual excuse’ that I was too busy with more important things, namely seeking first the kingdom of God.
 3. Also, I was reacting against the ways of much of the world around me: people who were hyper-focused on their career and on having a ‘perfect’ home.
 4. Embracing this challenge, to have the integrity of Joseph on the job and in the neighborhood, will require great wisdom to get our priorities right, great self-control, death to laziness and to excuse-making, hard work, prayer, help from God...and repentance.

III. Characteristic No. 2: Joseph's Uncompromising Commitment to Sexual Purity

- a. Read **Genesis 39:6b-15**
 - i. Joseph is a young, handsome single man.
 - ii. He is far from home; no church, no family, none of his own people there. He is spiritually alone.
 - iii. He has had a lot of discouraging things happen to him recently (sold into slavery by his brothers).
 - iv. Potiphar's wife does not just tempt him once or twice: she approaches him regularly, day by day.
 - v. The ultimate test: the two of them are alone, and she grabs him by the garment he is wearing.
 - vi. Joseph's response: he flees and runs outside, leaving his garment behind.
- b. What does this episode tell us about Joseph's character?
 - i. He does not want to betray his master's trust. "My lord has committed all he has to my hand...nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife".
 - ii. He does not want to displease God. "How could I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"
 - iii. When faced with extreme and pressing temptation, he fled to avoid getting pulled into sin.
 1. Jesus says we should pray (every day): "Give us *this day* our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (**Matthew 6:11-13**, NKJV)
 2. Do you pray every day for God to lead you away from temptation and deliver you from Satan?
 3. Do you steer clear of (or run away from) situations that you know will present you with temptations for lust?
- c. The apostle Paul admonishes us: "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body." (**1 Corinthians 6:18**, NKJV)
 - i. The same Greek word used in **1 Corinthians 6:18** for "flee" is used 4x in the LXX to describe what Joseph did when he *fled* from Potiphar's wife in **Genesis 39:12-18**.
 - ii. Joseph presents a picture of the attitude that Paul calls us to have when being tempted by sexual immorality: flee immediately! Run for your life, and don't worry about what you may leave behind!

- d. Consider the tragic examples of men who did not have Joseph's character in this area: David, Samson, the foolish young man of **Proverbs 7**, and the young men of Israel who committed fornication with the Moabite women in **Numbers 25**.
- i. Consider David. At the time when kings were supposed to go out to war, King David sent others off to the battles and remained in Jerusalem.
1. "Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, 'Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?' Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, 'I am with child.'" (**2 Samuel 11:2-5**, NKJV)
 2. David, who had been selected as the man "after God's own heart" (**1 Samuel 13:14**), by God, failed where Joseph had overcome. David's lust led to adultery, Bathsheba's pregnancy, and the murder of Uriah, one of his loyal mighty men. (**2 Samuel 23:39**)
 3. David's sin had a tragic impact on David's life, his family and the entire nation. Nathan the prophet confronted his sin and told of the massive destruction that would result.
 - a. "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but

I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.” (2 Samuel 12:7–12, NKJV)

- b. This prophecy of Nathan was fulfilled in Absalom’s rebellion and death, dividing his family and the nation.
- ii. Consider the foolish young man of **Proverbs 7** who is tempted by a prostitute on the street.
 1. “With her enticing speech she caused him to yield; with her flattering lips she seduced him. Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, He did not know it would cost his life. Now therefore, listen to me, my children; pay attention to the words of my mouth: Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths; For she has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men. Her house is the way to hell (Hades in LXX), descending to the chambers of death.” (**Proverbs 7:21–27**, NKJV)
- iii. Consider the young men of Israel who committed fornication with the Moabite women in **Numbers 25**. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 10** that their fate is an example for us. Paul points to the story of the Exodus and wandering for 40 years in the Wilderness as foreshadowing our own spiritual journey, as Christians.
 1. As they crossed out of the land of slavery by passing through the water, being “baptized” in the cloud and the sea, we are born again and pass from the slavery to sin when we are baptized, born again of the water and the Spirit.
 2. They all ate the spiritual food and drank the spiritual drink (manna and water for them; the Lord’s supper for us).
 3. Their time in the Wilderness, on the way to the Promised Land, was a time of testing, with temptations along the way to be overcome. (Similar to our own time here, where we are pressing on to heaven, our own Promised Land.)
 4. WARNING for US: God was not pleased with most of them; they fell into four sins on their journey, and most never made it to the destination, the Promised Land!
 - a. “But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as

some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell;” (1 Corinthians 10:5-8, NKJV)

- b. “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” (1 Corinthians 10:11-13, NKJV)
- c. In one day 23,000 were killed and never made it to the promised land; to teach Christians a lesson about the grave dangers of sexual immorality!
- e. How serious is the problem of lust and immorality among Christians today? Let’s look at the plague of pornography.
 - i. My own experience (in churches where discipleship was taken very seriously): I have seen men taken down who were leaders of large churches, powerful gifted Bible teachers, married men and singles, and even Christian missionaries to third world countries. The problem among Christian men is widespread, hidden and deadly.
 - ii. I think of large apple trees in the back yard of the Nauset House Inn (a bed & breakfast on Cape Cod that Alison and I would go to occasionally). Trees were very large, leafy, producing apples. Yet one day we came out to the back yard of the inn after a windy night, and were surprised to see one of the large trees that had always been there was blown over. Looking closely, I saw that while the tree had looked good on the outside, it was rotted out on the inside. That made me wonder about all the other big apple trees in the yard that were of the same vintage!
 - 1. Likewise, in most churches the men are like those apple trees. Look good, but suddenly they are gone. Rotted out on the inside, for a long time, by lust and pornography. They are “dead men walking”.
 - iii. Many studies have been done; statistics vary, but evidence of a massive problem not only in the world, but among Christians as well. Challenges with interpreting the stats (and perhaps why they vary so much) include: what constitutes ‘pornography’; what constitutes a ‘Christian’ man, or even ‘a born-again Christian’; and ‘viewing’ versus ‘seeking’ pornography.

1. Barna Group conducted *The Porn Phenomenon* study (sampling done in 2015). This is one of the more comprehensive studies done recently on this subject among Christians. Findings from that study include:
 - a. Among “*practicing Christian*” men age 13-24, 41% seek pornography at least once a month (compared to 72% for others, who are “*not practicing Christians*”).
 - b. Among “*practicing Christian*” men age 25+, 23% seek pornography at least once a month (compared to 55% for others, who are “*not practicing Christians*”).
 - c. About 2/3 of the Christians using pornography say that they have no sense of guilt regarding that.
 - d. The cavalier attitude toward pornography among the younger generations was deeply disturbing (32 percent say viewing porn is “usually or always wrong” compared to 56 percent who say *not recycling your trash* is “usually or always wrong”).
2. In the *Proven Men* 2014 survey (also conducted by the Barna Group) the following results were reported:
 - a. 79% of men 18-30 view pornography at least once a month
 - b. 67% of men 31-49 view at least once a month
 - c. 49% of men 50-68 view at least once a month
 - d. 55% of married Christian men view at least once a month, and 11% view it at least daily
 - e. 54% of men who identify themselves as ‘born again Christians’ view at least once a month
- iv. Recently I had a *serious talk* with the young man who has started courting my daughter Julia. I asked him directly about whether he had been involved in internet pornography. He said that while most of the people at his job are watching it regularly, he does not do that.
 1. He mentioned that his father had told him to remember that all of those women being exploited in pornography are someone else’s daughter or sister.
 2. We talked about sexual purity very directly, and I let him know that he should be prepared for more questions in the future!
 3. I have asked many young Christian men questions like this. The answers are not always so encouraging; that is why I continue to ask! Unfortunately, the young men I speak with generally

say that virtually no one else is asking them about this area of their lives.

4. We are in a war. Satan is out to destroy the church by destroying the men; rotting them out from the inside, including by the sin of pornography.
- v. To leaders and teachers in the churches:
1. Those who shepherd the flock are admonished to know the condition of the flock.
 - a. “Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds;” (**Proverbs 27:23**, NKJV)
 - b. In the LXX it says, “Know thoroughly the souls of your sheep and set your heart on your flocks.” (**Proverbs 27:25**, LXX, OSB)
 - c. Ask the difficult, uncomfortable, direct questions. You may be shocked at what you find.
 2. Leaders need to lead by example of their own lives, regarding purity as well as openness and honesty. Take inventory of your own life, and then start with those who are leading and teaching in the church. Don’t assume anything without asking.
 - a. “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” (**1 Peter 5:1–4**, NKJV)
 3. Preaching and teaching in the church need to be hard-hitting and practical, like the preaching of Jesus, Peter and Paul. Pulpits need to be filled with spiritual warriors who wield the spear of Phinehas, not intellectual academics. Preach the Word, address sin, and call Christians to repent and to live holy lives.
 - a. Jesus began his ministry as a prophet, calling the people to repent. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (**Matthew 4:17**, NKJV)
 - b. Even after his resurrection, he came back and took up the mantle of the prophet, in **Revelation chapters 2 and 3**. He calls Christians in five of the seven churches (Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Laodicea) *to*

- repent.* He addresses sexual immorality specifically in two of the seven churches (Pergamum and Thyatira).
- c. What do you think Jesus would say to the churches today? Is that what you are hearing in the pulpits?
- vi. When you find that Christians are enslaved to lust and pornography, use the Scriptures to convict and to bring about repentance and accountability.
1. Start by opening and using the Scriptures to build conviction in others about living a holy and righteous life. Show them what the word of God says, build convictions in them with it, and then call them to obey what they now have convictions about (not just controlling them to do what you want!)
 - a. “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (**Matthew 5:20**, NKJV)
 - b. Then Jesus talks about areas of righteousness, and speaks directly about lust. “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” (**Matthew 5:28–30**, NKJV) Also, a similar sentiment is expressed by Jesus in **Mark 9**.
 - c. “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” (**Hebrews 12:14–17**, NKJV)
 - i. If we do not live a holy life (set apart for God), the writer of Hebrews tells us we will not see God! John Wesley said this was the most unpopular passage in the entire Bible!

- ii. Esau is the example for us to learn from. He was living for some short-term pleasure of the flesh (lentil stew), rather than valuing his inheritance. Afterward, it was too late for him to change his fate. Let us learn from his life.
- 2. Be open with your own life and struggles, and call those who struggle to do likewise: to confess sin and let in the light.
 - a. Jesus said, “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” (**John 3:19-21**, NKJV)
 - b. “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.” (**Proverbs 28:13**, NKJV)
 - c. “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (**James 5:16**, NKJV)
 - i. Importance of confessing sin (voluntarily).
 - ii. Have a relationship with someone you trust, who you choose to hold you accountable. Find someone who has strong convictions about living a pure and holy life. Even if they live far away and you need to reach them by phone or internet connection, do whatever it takes!
 - iii. Ask others how they are doing in this area. They will more likely ask you back!
- 3. Let us call one another to memorize, meditate on and use the word of God in the face of temptation.
 - a. When Jesus, our example was tempted by Satan, he came back with the Word of God, saying “It is written...” three times, quoting from the book of **Deuteronomy**. (**Matthew 4:1-11**, **Luke 4:1-13**)
 - i. Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are. “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all

points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”
(**Hebrews 4:15**, NKJV)

- ii. Let us learn from his great example in facing temptation. Hit back with the most powerful offensive spiritual ammunition we have: the sword of the Spirit, the word of God (**Ephesians 6:17**)
- b. Memorize the word of God.
 - i. “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.” (**Psalm 119:9–11**, NKJV)
 - c. Meditate and reflect on the Word of God day and night. Be like the tree planted by streams of water, of **Psalm 1**.
- 4. Use the Scriptures previously mentioned (**1 Corinthians 10** on sexual immorality, and that all sin is common to man, but our faithful God will provide a way out so that we may stand. **1 Corinthians 6:18** about fleeing sexual immorality, and that this is a more serious sin, being against our bodies as well.)
 - a. 23,000 died in one day just to teach us a lesson here!
 - b. This is a common temptation; you are not alone.
 - c. God is faithful and promises to provide a way out.
- 5. Have heroes to imitate in this area.
 - a. Mine include Joseph, Job (see **Job 31**) and Phinehas, the spiritual warrior who skewered two in immorality and stopped the plague (**Numbers 25**) because he had God’s zeal regarding this sin.
- 6. Realize that our enemy is Satan. Pray to be led away from temptation, then cut off or avoid the pathways to temptation. (Make the radical decisions you need to regarding TV, movies, internet, etc.)
 - a. Peter admonishes us: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” (**1 Peter 5:8–9**, NKJV)