

# WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM JOSEPH?

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There are many interesting stories in the Bible. Biographies of some great men ... and also some of the “losers”! Much we can learn — that’s why they’re recorded for us.

All of God’s men and women had flaws — but they seem to share some key characteristics.

Even though they all made mistakes at times ... they were loyal to God. Faithful to Him ... even if times were difficult. That’s a vital characteristic!

It’s a bit like marriage vows — “for better ... for worse ... for richer ... for poorer ... in sickness and in health”. Commitment whatever the circumstances — that’s our relationship with God.

We’ll all face various trials and tribulations in life — “common to all men” — our task is to remain loyal and faithful throughout.

Today ... I’d like to review the life of Joseph ... and see his example — a good example — of loyalty and faithfulness ... even when life was difficult.

Experience can be a good teacher — but often a hard one? It is best to learn lessons if can from other people’s lives or the illustrations in the Bible.

Joseph was one of 12 brothers. They were from 4 mothers (Leah ... Rachel ... Bilhah and Zilpah). They were a fairly carnal group of individuals. And their father ... Jacob ... hadn’t set the best of examples with a history of cheating and deception.

## Genesis 37:1-4

1 Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan.

2 This is the history of Jacob. 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.

3 **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 colours.**

4 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.

Jacob was not wise to show favouritism of one boy out of twelve. The tunic set Joseph apart — marked him out. This led to jealousy. (Parents take note!).

### **Genesis 37: 5-11**

5 **Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers;** and they hated him even more.

6 **So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed:**

7 "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."

8 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.**

9 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."

10 **So he told it to his father and his brothers;** **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?"

11 **And his brothers envied him,** but his father kept the matter in mind.

Joseph's dreams were accurate. They clearly came from God. That would have motivated Joseph in hard times? He would be aware that God had a purpose for him.

But ... Joseph lacked tact!! He wasn't very sensitive.

**All of us — all of the time — need to learn the value of controlling our tongues.**

### **Proverbs 13:3**

3 **He who guards his mouth preserves his life,**  
But **he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.**

There is “a time to keep silence and a time to speak”. Silence comes first. Be careful with your words. They can get us into trouble.

“The art of **Diplomacy is: thinking twice — before saying NOTHING!**”

### **Genesis 37:12-36**

12 Then his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem.

13 **And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them."** So he said to him, "Here I am."

14 Then he said to him, "Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me." So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem.

15 Now a certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying, "What are you seeking?"

16 So he said, "I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding their flocks."

17 And the man said, "They have departed from here, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.' " **So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.**

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

19 Then they said to one another, "Look, this dreamer is coming!

20 "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!"

21 **But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him." (Reuben lacked courage. He had the authority of the first born).**

22 **And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"--that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.**

23 **So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colours that was on him.**

24 **Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it.**

25 And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt.

26 **So Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?"**

27 **"Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh."** And his brothers listened.

28 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.

29 Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph was not in the pit; and he tore his clothes.

30 And he returned to his brothers and said, "The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go?"

31 **So they took Joseph's tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood.**

32 **Then they sent the tunic of many colours, 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?"**

33 **And he recognised it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces."**

34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days.

35 And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, "For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning." Thus his father wept for him.

36 Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard.

**A carnal bunch!**

The bloody tunic was cruel on an old man and their father (Jacob was around 100 years old). Jacob is deceived by the tunic. Poetic justice?

So. Here's young Joseph — with dreams of being someone important — and a privileged life so far — sold into slavery! How will he react? How would we?

We can expect “challenges”. 😊

### **Psalm 34:15-19**

15 **The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,  
And His ears are open to their cry.**

16 The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,  
To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

17 **The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears,  
And delivers them out of all their troubles.**

18 The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart,  
And saves such as have a contrite spirit.

19 **Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
But the LORD delivers him out of them all.**

**Many are the afflictions of the righteous — but he will be delivered.**

### **Genesis 39:1-6**

1 **Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt.** And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. (*Potiphar was “Head of State Security” ... an important man*)

2 **The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful 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 he did to prosper in his hand.**

4 **So Joseph found favour in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority.**

5 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.

6 **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.** Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

Joseph didn't ask to be a slave in Egypt ... but quite clearly ... it looks like he maintained a great attitude.

He did so well ... and was so impressive — he was made overseer — of everything! Joseph was in his late teens and early 20's.

It is fair to assume that Joseph is still trusting that God will work things out. He's being patient — though the years are ticking along.

**And his behaviour is Biblical.**

**Genesis 39:7-20**

7 **And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."**

8 **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.

9 "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?"**

10 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.

11 But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside,

12 that **she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.**

13 And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside,

14 that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, "See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice.

15 "And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside." (**false accusations**)

16 So she kept his garment with her until his master came home.

17 Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, **"The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me;**

18 **"so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside."**

19 So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, "Your servant did to me after this manner," that his anger was aroused.

20 **Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison.**

### **Ephesians 6:5-8**

5 **Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ;**

6 not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but **as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,**

7 **with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men,**

8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

Joseph resists the advances of Potiphar's wife — which is more than David did with Bathsheba.

Adultery is sin —long before Exodus 20!!

Yet what happened? **Joseph resisted temptation** ... tried to do what was right and honourable — yet now ends up in prison — falsely accused.

So much for trying to live right?

Some people have lost jobs ...or family ...or friends over keeping the Sabbath and Holy Days or similar — do we get bitter and resentful? Stop looking to God?

### **1 Peter 2:18-23**

18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

19 **For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.**

20 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But **when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.**

21 **For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:**

22 **"Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth";**

23 **who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;**

We may suffer for doing good. But look what happened (ultimately) to Joseph.

### **Genesis 39:21-23**

21 **But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.**

22 **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.**

23 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.**

It looks like **Joseph has remained positive** — “successful” ... making an impact?

**He has a “good testimony” with “outsiders”. Even though difficult circumstances.**

How about us? Perhaps always murmuring and complaining even when times are good?!



### **Genesis 40:1-8**

1 **It came to pass after these things that the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt.**

2 And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker.

3 So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph was confined.

4 And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while.

5 Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night and each man's dream with its own interpretation.

6 **And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they were sad.**

7 So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in the custody of his lord's house, saying, "Why do you look so sad today?"

8 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."**

Why so sad? Joseph was observant. It also implies that **Joseph had created a positive atmosphere?**

They then tell him their dreams and Joseph gives them the interpretation.

### **Genesis 40:14-15**

14 "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.

15 "For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon."

Help me get free!!

### **Genesis 40:21-23**

21 Then he restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

22 But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them.

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

Joseph was forgotten.

Quite a blow for Joseph? Innocent ... reliable ... doing good ... highly favoured ... correctly explains dreams — yet overlooked. So unfair? He's still in the dungeon.

(Though of course ... Joseph has no doubt learned a lot? Language ... culture ... court customs ... met political prisoners — all will turn out to be great preparation!)

**Two more years pass. Knowing Joseph's character so far ... we can perhaps assume he's remaining positive — though no doubt disappointed.**

Yet ... sometimes it seems the darkest just before the dawn?

**Genesis 41:1-7**

1 **Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream;** and behold, he stood by the river.

2 Suddenly there came up out of the river seven cows, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow.

3 Then behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ugly and gaunt, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the river.

4 And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven fine looking and fat cows. So Pharaoh awoke.

5 **He slept and dreamed a second time;** and suddenly seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good.

6 Then behold, seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them.

7 And the seven thin heads devoured the seven plump and full heads.

**So Pharaoh awoke, and indeed, it was a dream.**

No one can interpret the Pharaoh's dreams. Then the chief butler remembers Joseph.

Joseph is summoned.

### **Genesis 41:14-16**

14 **Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh.**

15 **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."**

16 **So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace."**

### **Genesis 41:25-46**

25 **Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do:**

26 "The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads are seven years; the dreams are one.

27 "And the seven thin and ugly cows which came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty heads blighted by the east wind are seven years of famine.

28 **"This is the thing which I have spoken to Pharaoh. God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do.**

29 "Indeed seven years of great plenty will come throughout all the land of Egypt;

30 "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.

31 "So the plenty will not be known in the land because of the famine following, for it will be very severe.

32 **"And the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.**

33 **"Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt.**

34 "Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years.

35 "And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities.

36 "Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine."

37 So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants.

38 And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?"

39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "**Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you.**

40 **"You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you."**

41 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "**See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.**"

42 **Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck.**

43 And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, "Bow the knee!" So **he set him over all the land of Egypt.**

44 Pharaoh also said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

45 **And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah. And he gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On. So Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.**

46 **Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt.** And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.

**IN ONE DAY ... Joseph goes from the pit to the palace. He becomes Prime Minister. He marries into nobility.**

**He will be running the world's greatest empire ... ultimately saving the lives of millions.**

Aged 30!! He arrived at 17. So 13 years as a slave and a prisoner.

**Genesis 42:1-4**

1 **When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?"**

2 And he said, "Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; **go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die.**"

**3 So Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt.**

**4 But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "Lest some calamity befall him."**

Joseph's 10 brothers go to Egypt.

Joseph is in charge and recognises them. He accuses them of being spies. As proof that they are not ... they are to bring the missing brother (Benjamin the youngest) to him.

Simeon is kept in custody.

They go back home. Jacob is distraught ... he has lost another son ... and they want to take Benjamin back now.

Eventually ... their food runs out and they head off again — with Benjamin.

Joseph continues to conceal his identity. He makes a big feast for the brothers ... ensuring the Benjamin gets a bumper share.

He then sends them home ... but arranges for his “special cup” to be hidden in Benjamin's sack of grain. He then announces that he is going to keep Benjamin as a slave — but ... the others are free to go.

### **Genesis 44:15-34**

**15 And Joseph said to them, "What deed is this you have done? Did you not know that such a man as I can certainly practice divination?"**

**16 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.**"**

17 But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so; the man in whose hand the cup was found, he shall be my slave. And as for you, go up in peace to your father."

18 Then Judah came near to him and said: "O my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's hearing, and do not let your anger burn against your servant; for you are even like Pharaoh.

19 "My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?'

20 "And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, who is young; his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.'

21 "Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.'

22 "And we said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.'

23 "But you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.'

24 "So it was, when we went up to your servant my father, that we told him the words of my lord.

25 "And our father said, 'Go back and buy us a little food.'

26 "But we said, 'We cannot go down; if our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we may not see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.'

27 "Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons;

28 'and the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he is torn to pieces"; and I have not seen him since.

29 'But if you take this one also from me, and calamity befalls him, you shall bring down my grey hair with sorrow to the grave.'

30 **"Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life,**

31 **"it will happen, when he sees that the lad is not with us, that he will die. So your servants will bring down the grey hair of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave.**

32 **"For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father forever.'**

33 **"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.**

34 **"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?"**

This is probably a test —would the brothers abandon Benjamin as they did Joseph all of those years before? Just look after themselves? Show no care for their aged father?

Judah takes the lead. He is willing to sacrifice himself.

### **Genesis 45:1-15**

1 Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

2 And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it.

3 **Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?"** But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence.

4 And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. **Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt."**

5 "But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for **God sent me before you to preserve life.**

6 "For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.

7 **"And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance."**

8 **"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."**

9 "Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph: **"God has made me lord of all Egypt"**; come down to me, do not tarry.

10 "You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have.

11 "There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine." "

12 "And behold, your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my mouth that speaks to you.

13 "So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hurry and bring my father down here."

14 Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck.

15 Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him.

All goes well! Joseph lives until he is 110.

Many good years of peace and prosperity ... after a slightly rocky start. His God-given dreams came true.

God watched over Joseph ... used him powerfully for the benefit of Israel and even the world in a sense.

It is good to see someone like Joseph in the scriptures. A man who came through some difficult tests and trials ... who could easily have given up to depression and despair.

**Joseph was a faithful and loyal servant — to God and man. He is a great example for us.**

**2 Chronicles 16:9**

**9 "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.**

We may not possess all technical knowledge of doctrine .. etc — we may stumble too often — but **we can all endeavour to be faithful and loyal to our God** ... irrespective of the circumstances and situation!!