

JOSEPH: Living with Integrity - PART 1

Dysfunctional Families

By: Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Genesis 29-35
Subject:	What was Joseph's family like?
Complement:	Dysfunctional.
Exegetical idea:	Joseph's family was dysfunctional.
Homiletical idea:	No matter how troubled your past, God has a good plan for your future!
Purpose:	To encourage my hearers to believe that God has a good plan for their lives, no matter what their past or present is like.

Jana grew up in a very dysfunctional family, if you could even call it a family. She only met her father a couple of times. He spent most of his life in prison. Jana's mother was an alcoholic. A steady stream of "visitors" stopped by their little trailer. Many times Jana was left all alone to fend for herself. That's not easy for a small child. Jana's mother always showed favoritism to Jana's brother, but he ended up in jail for accidentally killing his cousin. When Jana was about 9 years old, her mother gave her away to a family traveling to Oklahoma. Yes, you heard me correctly. Her mother gave her away. It's a wonder that her picture didn't show up in the local newspaper: Have you seen this child?

Jana is just one of many children who grew up in dysfunctional families. The individual stories may vary but the trail of tears and trouble is the same. The Bible records the story of another child who grew up in a very dysfunctional family. It might seem rather depressing to study his family history today, but embedded in this story we find a word of hope and a challenge to rise above our troubled circumstances and live with integrity.

Long before Joseph was born, his family was a mess. His father was a liar and a cheat. His

uncle tried to kill his father. When it was time for his father to get married, Joseph's grandfather Laban also practiced deception, and Joseph's mother went along with the deception, though I'm not sure that she had any choice in the matter. We can read the story in Genesis 29:25-28. "When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?' Laban replied, 'It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one.'" If I was Jacob, I would have said, "Fine! Just be honest with me. Just tell me about your custom before you marry me to the wrong woman!" But Laban continued: "Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work." And Scripture records that Jacob did so. "He finished the week with Leah," though I'm not sure what kind of honeymoon week that would have been, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.

Can you imagine how Leah felt all week? It wasn't her fault that her father had deceived Jacob. How would you have felt if the next day after your wedding you were told that your husband was going to marry your sister at the end of the week because she was the one that he really loved?

Apparently, Leah thought to herself, "If only I could have a baby, then my husband would love me!" Have you heard that line before? Let me tell you something. If you have an unhealthy marriage without children, don't complicate the situation by having babies. Having a baby won't make a spouse love you. Leah learned that the hard way. Look at Genesis 29:31-35. "When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, 'It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.'" But that didn't change her dysfunctional relationship with her husband. "She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said,

‘Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.’ So she named him Simeon.’” But that didn’t help either. “Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, ‘Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.’ So he was named Levi.” “She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, ‘This time I will praise the Lord.’ So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.” After four babies, Leah gave up hope that having a baby would improve her relationship with her husband. If you’ve been thinking that way, please don’t have four babies before you figure that out! Go and get some help so that you can have a healthier relationship with your spouse.

Unfortunately, Rachel wasn’t praising the LORD that Leah was having so many babies. Rachel was jealous. She had her husband’s love, but she had no babies. So Rachel came up with a terrible idea. Genesis 30:3-8. “Then Rachel said, ‘Here is Bilhah, my maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and that through her I too can build a family.’ So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife.” Jacob didn’t argue with his wife and say, “That’s a terrible idea.” No. Jacob slept with Rachel’s maidservant Bilhah and she became pregnant and bore him a son. Then Rachel said, ‘God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son.’ Because of this she named him Dan. Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, ‘I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won.’ So she named him Naphtali.”

How did Leah respond? Genesis 30:9-13 “When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her maidservant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.” And Jacob said, “No, no, not another woman to sleep with! I’ve already seen what trouble that can cause!” Right? Wrong! Jacob slept with Leah’s maidservant Zilpah and she got pregnant and bore Jacob a son.

Then Leah said, "What good fortune!" So she named him Gad. Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. Then Leah said, 'How happy I am! The women will call me happy.' So she named him Asher." I told you that this was a dysfunctional family.

We don't know how much time had passed, but Leah's first born, Reuben was growing up. We read in Genesis 30:14, "During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah." The mandrake with its odoriferous fruit was considered by the ancients to be an aphrodisiac that increased sexual desire and fertility. Apparently, Leah had sent her firstborn son on a special mission. When Rachel heard that Leah had some mandrakes, she said to Leah, recorded in Genesis 30:14-16, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." Leah would have none of it. "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" Now they are fighting over aphrodisiacs. "Very well," Rachel said, 'he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes.'" This family is weird.

The story continues in Genesis 30:16, "So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. 'You must sleep with me,' she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes.' And Jacob said, "You don't have to hire me. I'm your husband. I made a commitment to love you and care for you!" Wrong. But he did sleep with her that night.

Leah gave birth to a fifth son, and later a sixth. And finally a daughter, named Dinah. Then we read in Genesis 30:22, "Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb." In the midst of all of this family dysfunction, enter Joseph. You might be interested to learn that Jacob was 91 years old when Joseph was born. Joseph was a child of his old age. But Joseph was born into a family that was full of contention and turmoil.

Joseph was 6 years old when his father decided to leave grandpa Laban. It was on that trip that Joseph's mother Rachel stole the family idols and lied to her father when he tried to find them. We can read the story in Genesis 31:33-35. "So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two maidservants, but he found nothing. After he came out of Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel's saddle and was sitting on them. Laban searched through everything in the tent but found nothing. Rachel said to her father, 'Don't be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence; as I'm in my monthly time.' So he searched but could not find the household gods."

Joseph witnessed that deception too. Can you imagine growing up in a family like that? Your father is a liar and a cheat. Your mother has a similar character trait. Your step brothers hate you. Your mother is always fighting with their mother. Before long, that anger will erupt into violence.

Once Joseph's family arrived in Canaan, they settled on the outskirts of Shechem. We pick up the story in Genesis 34:1-7 "Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and violated her. His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her. And Shechem said to his father Hamor, 'Get me this girl as my wife.' When Jacob heard that his daughter Dinah had been defiled, his sons were in the fields with his livestock; so he kept quiet about it until they came home. Then Shechem's father Hamor went out to talk with Jacob. Now Jacob's sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard what had happened. They were filled with grief and fury, because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter--a thing that should not be done."

Grief and fury were not inappropriate responses to the horrible deed that Shechem son of

Hamor had done to their sister Dinah. But the way that Joseph's brothers handled their anger was very unhealthy. We read on in Genesis 34:13-30 "Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob's sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor. They said to them, 'We can't do such a thing; we can't give our sister to a man who is not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us. We will give our consent to you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males. Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We'll settle among you and become one people with you. But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we'll take our sister and go.' Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. The young man, who was the most honored of his father's entire household, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to their fellow townsmen. 'These men are friendly toward us,' they said. 'Let them live in our land and trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours. [22] But the men will consent to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are. Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us give our consent to them, and they will settle among us.' All the men who went out of the city gate agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male in the city was circumcised. Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem's house and left. The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. They

carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses. Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, ‘You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land.’”

Now Joseph’s brothers were acting like their violent uncle Esau. Out of control! Shechem should have been punished for his terrible crime, but to murder every male in the city and to plunder the entire city and carry off the women and children and slaves? These brothers were out of control.

Joseph witnessed all of that violence. Could he have imagined that some day that out of control rage would be directed toward him?

What impresses me as we begin our study of the life of Joseph is this: even though Joseph came from a terribly dysfunctional family, God still had a good plan for his life! Joseph didn’t have to repeat the sins of the fathers unto the third and fourth generation. Joseph didn’t have to repeat the sins of his step brothers. Even though Joseph came from a terribly dysfunctional family, he could choose to believe that God had a good plan for his life. And we will see that plan unfold in the coming weeks as we continue this series on Joseph.

Perhaps you’re wondering what ever happened to Jana. Through a miraculous sequence of events, Jana ended up in the home of Pastor Patty Hofer, who at the time was a third grade teacher in our Christian elementary school right here in Apopka, Florida. Pastor Hofer loved Jana as her own daughter and watched her blossom and grow. Jana lived in Pastor Hofer’s home for almost 2 years. But Jana missed her mother, or the mother that she never had. When Jana was 11 she moved back home. She hoped that things would change. They didn’t. But through a long road of pain and hardship, Jana chose not to follow in the footsteps of her father. She is not in jail. Jana

chose not to follow in the footsteps of her mother. She is not an alcoholic. Jana graduated from college. She is currently a freelance artist in mid-America. Pastor Hofer talked to Jana this week and they reminisced about old times. Jana gave permission for me to share her story. I wish that I could tell you that Jana is walking with Jesus as a fully devoted disciple. She isn't. But her story is not over. She is still on her journey. Jana told Pastor Hofer that she might join us online today. And so, Jana, if you're listening, remember this: No matter how troubled your past, no matter how turbulent your present, God has a good plan for your future!

Someone listening to me today might be thinking, "Pastor, I don't have a troubled past. I was blessed with a wonderful family, loving parents, healthy relationships. And I don't have a turbulent present. So how does this message relate to my life?" I would say to you, "If you don't have a troubled past, give thanks to the LORD!" If you don't have a turbulent present, praise God from whom all blessings flow. But I would also tell you that you know someone who has a troubled past, don't you? You know someone who has a turbulent present, don't you? Tell them a lesson that you've learned today from the life of Joseph. No matter how troubled your past, no matter how turbulent your present, God has a good plan for your future.

You can also invite them to join us week by week for this new series. If they live locally, invite them to church next week! If they live far away, invite them to log on to www.forestlakechurch.org. We'll all be changed as we study the life of Joseph. And we can all rejoice today that no matter how troubled our past, or how turbulent our present, God has a good plan for our future!

JOSEPH: Living with Integrity - PART 2

Dangerous Dreams

By: Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Genesis 37:2-11
Subject:	How Joseph reacted when he received two dreams from God about his brothers bowing down to him, even though they were acting in a hostile way toward him.
Complement:	He shared his dreams with them.
Exegetical idea:	Even though Joseph's brothers were acting in a hostile way toward him, when Joseph received two dreams from God about his brothers bowing down to him he shared those dreams with his brothers.
Homiletical idea:	There is a time to be silent and there is a time to speak the truth in love.
Purpose:	To convince my hearers that there is a time to speak the truth in love and there is a time to be silent.

I am so thankful this morning for the Word of God. The joyful exclamation of the psalmist is true: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path..." Psalm 119:105. The holy Scriptures are not just human words about God. They are the word of God to humanity. The apostle Peter testified in 2 Peter 1:19-21, "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

That is why I'm so thankful for the Word of God today! And I'm thankful to be part of a church that teaches the Word of God. This past week, as I continued my study of the life of Joseph, I was impressed by the fact that Joseph had no written Scriptures to guide his path. Joseph lived hundreds of years before Moses, the great prophet of God who wrote the first books

of the Bible. All that Joseph had available to him were the oral accounts passed down from generation to generation.

I thought of some wise counsel in the Word of God that would have been especially helpful for Joseph as a young man growing up in a very dysfunctional family. That inspired counsel is found in Ecclesiastes 3. The wise man Solomon prefaces his comments with these words in Eccles. 3:1 “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.” This whole section from verses 2-8 would be worthy of your careful consideration but I want you to focus with me on the second half of Ecclesiastes 3:7. “...a time to be silent and a time to speak.”

A time to be silent and a time to speak - that wise counsel would have been very helpful to the young man Joseph. By the time Joseph was a teenager, his older brothers hated him, and in their minds at least, they had good reason. Their father Jacob showed open favoritism to Joseph. He was Rachel’s firstborn, and all of Joseph’s brothers knew that Rachel was the only woman that their father truly loved. Leah’s sons, and Zilpah’s sons, and Bilhah’s sons were clearly in second or third place. Showing open favoritism to one child is still damaging today. Jacob is partly to blame for the anger and hatred that his sons felt toward their younger brother Joseph.

Their father Jacob displayed his favoritism openly and publically by giving Joseph an unusual coat. The meaning of the Hebrew word used to describe this coat is unclear. The NIV translators have described this coat in Genesis 37:3 as “a richly ornamented robe.” The KJV translators described this garment as “a coat of many colors.” Some scholars believe that the Hebrew word is related to the word for extremities, as in hands and ankles, and so describes this

garment as “a long robe with sleeves.”

Whatever this garment looked like, it is clear that Joseph proudly wore it as a constant reminder to his older brothers that Joseph was the favored son. We read in Genesis 37:4, “When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.”

Growing up in this hostile environment, Joseph would have been blessed if he had known and followed the counsel found in Ecclesiastes 3:7: There is a time to be silent and a time to speak. Today we want to consider three incidents in Joseph’s early life where this counsel would have been helpful to him.

Incident #1. Genesis 37:2, “Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.” Joseph’s age is specifically mentioned—seventeen. He was a young man, not just an immature boy. Also notice that the sons of Leah are not mentioned. They were particularly hostile toward Joseph. But as a result of this bad report that Joseph brought back to their father Jacob, even the sons of Rachel’s maid Bilhah and the sons of Leah’s maid Zilpah became angry with Joseph.

Was this bad report truth or fiction? From everything else that we have learned about Joseph’s dysfunctional family, there’s a good chance that the bad report was true. If his brothers were stealing sheep or neglecting their responsibilities, then we might conclude that it was only right for Joseph to speak up, no matter what the personal cost. But if his brothers were getting drunk or acting inappropriately, it would have been better for Joseph to just keep silent. After all, Joseph was not his brothers’ parent or guardian. He was their spoiled baby brother. They

were already angry with him. Certainly, it would have been wise to carefully consider whether to be silent or whether to speak.

Incident #2. A second incident in Joseph's early life involved two dreams. We are not told explicitly that these dreams were from God, but the history of Joseph seems to clearly confirm that these dreams were not of Joseph's own making. The content of Joseph's first dream is recorded in Genesis 37:6-7. Joseph was working in the fields with his brothers and this is what he saw: "We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

I'm sure that this was a very vivid dream! Joseph had no problem remembering it. But let me ask you a question: If you had this dream about your angry brothers, is this a time to be silent or a time to speak? I would suggest that this is a time to be silent. Unfortunately, Joseph did not keep the content of this dream to himself. He just had to share it with his brothers! We read in Genesis 37:5 "Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more." Read on in Genesis 37:8. "His brothers said to him, 'Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?' And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said." We might add, "They hated him all the more because of his dream, what he said, and how he said it." There seems to be a problem for Joseph here. Maybe he sees this as a chance to gain a little advantage over his mean older brothers. You know, "Na na na na na!" I had a dream and you all bowed down to me!

I'm convinced that sharing the content of that dream with his brothers was a foolish mistake. He was just pouring fuel on the fire. Joseph was increasing his brothers' hostility. Why did Joseph do that? There is no indication that God instructed him to share the content of

the dream. So why did Joseph share the content of his dream with his brothers? Didn't Joseph realize how his brothers would react? Was he just naive or stupid?

When Joseph had a second dream, he also shared the content of that dream with his angry brothers. We can read that part of Joseph's story in Genesis 37:9. "Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. 'Listen,' he said, 'I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' Joseph even told his father this dream, we read in Genesis 37:10-11, "When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, 'What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?'

I'm personally convinced that Jacob misinterpreted Joseph's second dream. He assumed that he was the sun and Joseph's mother was the moon. Listen again. 'Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?' But Joseph's mother Rachel was already dead. She died in childbirth when Joseph's younger brother Benjamin was born. And there is no record that Jacob ever bowed down to Joseph. When Jacob eventually arrived in Egypt, Joseph hugged his father around the neck and kissed him.

So what is the meaning of this second dream? Could it be even more amazing than even Joseph's father recognized? In Egypt, the Pharaoh was considered to be a god, an embodiment of Horus, god of the sky. Have you ever seen an Egyptian picture of a man with a falcon's head? That is Horus. I was startled to learn this week that it was taught that one of Horus' eyes was the sun and the other eye was the moon. In Joseph's dream, both the sun and the moon bowed down to him. Could this portion of Joseph's dream have been fulfilled in the unusual honor bestowed upon Joseph by the god king Pharaoh? We'll study that amazing narrative in a later message in

this series.

Whatever the interpretation of Joseph's second dream, he insisted on telling its content to his brothers and that was like fanning the flames of their anger. Now they were even more jealous of him. Again, we wonder what was gained by sharing the content of this dream. Was this a time to speak or a time to be silent?

Incident #3. Then there is a third incident in Joseph's early life when he would have been wise to remember the counsel that there is a time to be silent and a time to speak. The story is recorded in Genesis 37:12. "Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem." If you remember from last week's message, Jacob had purchased some land on the outskirts of Shechem to graze his flocks (Gen 33:19). Jacob continues: "'as you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them.' 'Very well,' he replied. So he said to him, 'Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.'"

Didn't Jacob realize that this would be a dangerous mission for Joseph? Had his brothers concealed their anger so carefully that their father was oblivious to their evil intent? The story continues in Genesis 37:14. "Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron." It was about 50 miles due north to Shechem—60 miles by road. After several days journey Joseph arrived at his father's parcel of land on the outskirts of Shechem. A man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?" Now remember that Shechem was dangerous territory for the sons of Jacob. Years earlier Simeon and Levi had killed every male in the city because Shechem, son of Hamor, had violated their sister Dinah. Maybe that's the reason that they chose not to go on this trip! I can imagine that Joseph may have been a little uneasy when

he came to the grazing areas that his father owned near Shechem and his brothers were nowhere to be found. Joseph replied to the stranger, 'I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?' 'They have moved on from here,' the man answered. 'I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.' That was another 15-16 miles farther north. "So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him."

How were Joseph's brothers able to recognize him from a distance? Well, if you look down in Genesis 37:23, you'll discover that Joseph was wearing his richly embroidered coat. Now let me ask you another question. Does that seem wise to you, considering all of the hostility in the family? Does it seem wise to wear that elegant garment as you hike across the fields to meet with your angry brothers? Remember the counsel from the Word of God—there is a time to be silent and a time to speak. Joseph didn't need to open his mouth and say a word. His coat sent a very powerful message to his angry brothers.

Listen to their reaction. Genesis 37:19, "'Here comes that dreamer!' they said to each other. 'Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams.'"

We learn a valuable lesson from this incident. We speak not only with words but also non-verbally, with our body language and even the way that we dress. If Joseph had applied that wise counsel that there is a time to be silent, what would he have done in this situation? Worn something else! Leave that coat of many colors packed up in a bundle in his tent.

But no; Joseph is either totally naive or somewhat stupid. He wears his richly embroidered coat as he walks out in the fields, far from any support or protection, and his

brothers are ready to kill him. But my intention is not be critical of Joseph today. Remember, Joseph grew up in a very dysfunctional family and he had no written Scriptures to provide wise counsel for his life. My intention is to learn a lesson from this story. One simple lesson that we can learn from these three incidents in the early life of Joseph is this: there is a time to be silent and there is a time to speak. Pray to God for wisdom to know when to be silent and when to speak.

Jesus, our Savior, had wisdom from God to know when to be silent and when to speak. Notice the response of Jesus when he was taken before Herod Antipas during the night of his trial. We can read the story in Luke 23:8-9. “When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had wanted to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.” There is a time to be silent. Why was Jesus silent? Because He knew that Herod was not open to truth. He just wanted to be entertained.

But we also learn from Jesus that there is a time to speak. There is a time to speak the truth in love even if we do so at a personal cost. John records the day that Jesus came to the Temple in Jerusalem on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. John clearly tells us at the beginning of John 7 that the Jewish leaders sought to kill Jesus. And yet, in spite of the personal danger to Himself, Jesus cried out in the midst of the crowd. We can read the story in John 7:37-39. “On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus

had not yet been glorified.”

Why did Jesus cry out so boldly in the courts of the Temple, even though the Jewish leaders were seeking to kill Him? Because Jesus had wisdom from God to know when to be silent and when to speak. And this was a time to speak! Why? Because there were people in the crowd whose hearts were open to God. Notice the testimony of John in John 7:40-44. “On hearing his words, some of the people said, ‘Surely this man is the Prophet.’ Others said, ‘He is the Christ.’ Still others asked, ‘How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?’ (which, by the way is where Jesus was born, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Micah, given 700 years before His birth). “Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.”

Jesus is the ultimate example of living with integrity, and He understood the principle of truth from the Word of God: there is a time to be silent and a time to speak. If we take just this one principle of truth with us today, we will have done well. Remember, there is a time to be silent and a time to speak. Ask for wisdom to know which one is most appropriate in any given situation. But the word of God is filled with many words of counsel. We have a resource that wasn't available to Joseph. So read the Word of God. Listen to counsel; receive instruction that you may be wise! This word of God can teach you how to live with integrity. The word of God can be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path.

And when you read the Word of God, you'll discover the most precious truth of all: that God loves you and no matter how troubled your past, no matter how turbulent your present, He has a good plan for your future!

JOSEPH: Living with Integrity - PART 3

How Can I Be free?

By: Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Genesis 37:12-35
Subject:	How Joseph's brothers reacted when he came to meet them in Dothan.
Complement:	They were filled with anger; they threw him into a pit and then sold him as a slave to Midianite traders.
Exegetical idea:	When Joseph came to meet his brothers in Dothan, they were filled with anger, threw him into a pit and then sold him as a slave to Midianite traders.
Homiletical idea:	You don't have to live a life filled with regret!
Purpose:	To encourage my hearers that they don't have to live a life filled with regret but they can find freedom by dealing decisively with the past, living purposefully in the present and planning courageously for the future.

When Joseph finally located his brothers on the outskirts of Dothan, he was probably happy to see them. But Joseph's brothers were not happy to see him. Joseph had been sent by his father to bring supplies to his 10 older brothers who were grazing the flocks several days journey north of their family's encampment. We can read the story in Genesis 37:18-20. "But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. 'Here comes that dreamer!' they said to each other. 'Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams.'"

Joseph's oldest half brother, Reuben tried to save Joseph's life. But instead of rebuking his brothers for their violent intentions and sending Joseph back home in safety, Reuben made this suggestion, recorded in Genesis 37:21. "Let's not take his life," he said. "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him." The inspired record tells us that Reuben's secret intention was to rescue Joseph at a later time and send him

home to their father. “So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the richly ornamented robe he was wearing—and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.”

Apparently, as Joseph’s brothers sat down to eat their meal, Reuben decided to take a walk. He had wanted to speak in Joseph’s defense but he had remained silent. While Reuben was gone, a caravan of Ishmaelite traders passed by. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. One of the other sons of Leah, Judah, said to his brothers, recorded in Genesis 27:26, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.”

That’s a strange logic, isn’t it? If he’s your brother, your own flesh and blood, a more logical response would be not to sell him into slavery! Am I right? But eight of Joseph’s half brothers agreed with Judah. “So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.”

Surely somewhere during that terrible ordeal, Joseph might have asked himself the question which is the title of our message today, “How can I be free?” “How can I get out of this pit?” And after he was sold to the Midianite traders, who were actually also his relatives, descendants of his great uncle Ishmael, I’m sure that he also might have asked the question, “How can I be free?” I doubt if his distant relatives offered him a seat on one of their camels. He was probably dragged behind a camel, his wrists bound and a rope around his neck. Wouldn’t you ask the question, “How can I be free?”

But I don't want to focus primarily on Joseph today. I want to focus on Joseph's brothers and then I want to focus on you and me. I'm sure that when Reuben returned and learned that his brothers had sold Joseph into slavery, big brother Reuben was filled with regret. In fact, Scripture tells us so, in Genesis 37:29-30. "When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes." Perhaps at first he thought that his brothers had killed Joseph. Filled with regret, Reuben went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?" Why was he silent when he should have spoken up in Joseph's defense? After all, he was the oldest son. He was responsible for the well being of his younger brothers. And I also have no doubt that once the intense emotions of the evening wore off, Joseph's other brothers were also filled with regret. What would happen to their brother when he arrived at the slave market in Egypt? Would he even survive the brutal treatment that he might expect from an Egyptian taskmaster?

Joseph's brothers undoubtedly also regretted the impact that their impulsive behavior would have on their father Jacob and on their youngest half brother Benjamin. Young Benjamin had already lost his mother and now he had lost his brother Joseph. Scripture records that Joseph's brothers decided to make a plan of deceit. Genesis 37:31-35. "Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, 'We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe.' He recognized it and said, 'It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.' Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. 'No,' he said, 'in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son.' So his father wept for him."

I am absolutely certain that Joseph's older brothers were filled with regret as they thought about their brother's uncertain future and as they witnessed their father's grief. They probably also asked the question, "How can I be free?" Not free from a pit, or free from slavery, but free from a lifetime of regret.

Have you ever done something that you should not have done, and really regretted it? Or not done something that you should have done and really regretted it? Have you ever been overwhelmed with feelings of regret? Then maybe you have also asked the question, "How can I be free?"

I want to share some very practical counsel with you today as we talk about how we can be free from regret; how we can avoid a lifetime of regret. We want to live with integrity. We want to honor God in our speech and in our actions, but we have all done things and said things that we regret. So how can we avoid a lifetime of regret? I want to share three strategies with you today, and if you would like to take notes, you'll find a sermon outline sheet in your bulletin.

Strategy #1: Deal decisively with your past.

There was nothing that Joseph's brothers could do to change the past. Joseph was gone. They could not bring him back. They could not undo the wrong that they had done. So what could they do, and what can we do when we find ourselves in a place of regret? We can deal decisively with our past. First, ask for forgiveness. If you sinned against God, ask God to forgive you. I'm so thankful for the promise of God's Word found in 1 John 1:9! "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." If you have wronged people, where possible, ask those wronged to forgive you. That isn't always possible. Joseph was gone. His brothers could not ask him to forgive

them at this point in their lives. You may have done something that you regret and you don't even know where the person is that you wronged. But where possible, ask that person to forgive you. Deal decisively with your past. Ask for forgiveness, from God and from those that you have wronged. Second, learn from your mistakes. Why did you end up in the compromising situation? What support would have helped you to live with integrity? How can you avoid repeating the same mistake? Learn from your mistakes. And thirdly, choose not to focus on past mistakes. Perhaps you were expecting me to say, "Forget the past!" I'm not sure that it's possible to forget the past, but you can choose not to focus on past mistakes. One of my favorite words of counsel from the Bible is found in Phil 4:8. I'm quoting from the NKJV."....." That's good counsel! And if it's true, then it is also true that you should not focus on past mistakes.

So what's the first strategy for avoiding a lifetime of regret? Deal decisively with the past. Second, ask for forgiveness, from God and from those you have wronged. Finally, learn from your mistakes, and choose not to focus on past mistakes.

Strategy #2 There's a second strategy for avoiding a lifetime of regret. Not only should you deal decisively with the past, but secondly, live purposefully in the present. You don't want to keep repeating the same mistakes over and over again. So what does it mean to live purposefully in the present? Let me offer three practical suggestions. First, make decisions based on principle, not emotions. Emotions can change from moment to moment. When Joseph's brothers were filled with rage, they were out of control. They were ready to tear Joseph limb from limb. Selling their brother to Midianite traders seemed like a good option to them; after all he was their flesh and blood. That was a much better option than killing him wasn't it?

Actually, both of those options were unacceptable. If they had made their decision based on principle rather than emotion, they would have chosen option #3 - send Joseph home and take some time out to cool down. It is always dangerous to make impulsive decisions based on the emotion of the moment. If you are going to live with integrity, if you are going to live without regret, make decisions based on principle, not emotions. We find many principles to live by in the Word of God. We discussed one such principle in part 2 of this series on Joseph: that there is a time to be silent and a time to speak. You can find hundreds of principles in the Word of God that will help you to live with integrity, to live a life without regret. I've had several opportunities in the past few days to follow that principle of truth! But you don't need to know hundreds of principles of truth in order to live with integrity, to live without regret. There are just two foundational principles for life. Do you know what they are? Jesus tells us that there are just two foundational principles for life. Only Matthew records these words of Jesus, and I'm thankful to him for that! Matthew 22:37-39 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself."

Let these two foundational principles be the basis of your decision making. Does this action, do these words, demonstrate a love for God and a love for people? If you want to live a life free from regret, you need not only to deal decisively with the past, but also live purposefully in the present. Make decisions based on principle, not emotions.

But living purposefully in the present involves more than just making decisions based on principle. It also involves building on past successes. Don't sit around making excuses. Don't focus on what you can't do, what you can't accomplish. Build on past successes. Have you

noticed times in your life when you followed God's leading and you experienced great successes? Build on those past successes. Perhaps someone asked you to teach a Bible lesson for the children, and you really enjoyed it. People told you that you really connected with the kids! Build on that success. Or maybe that didn't work out for you, but someone asked you to sing in a quartet and you sounded great! You've even thought about joining the choir! Don't focus on what you can't do. Build on past successes.

Thirdly, as you live purposefully in the present, stay focused on Jesus. I used to think that my final goal was heaven, or eternal life, but I've changed my mind on that. I don't want to live forever just to live forever. I want to see Jesus face to face and be with Jesus! If you are going to live purposefully in the present, you not only need to make decisions based on principle rather than emotions, and build on past successes, but you also need to stay focused on Jesus. Joseph's brothers didn't have the advantage of the wonderful revelation of God in the person of Jesus, but we do! So get to know Jesus. How do you do that? Learn about Jesus in His Word. He told us that the Scriptures testify about Him. So read your Bible and get to know Jesus. Connect with godly mentors who can model what it looks like to stay focused on Jesus. Connect with a Christian community that will encourage you to stay focused on Jesus. Living purposefully in the present involves making decisions based on principle not emotions, building on past successes and staying focused on Jesus.

Strategy #3 There is a third strategy for avoiding a lifetime of regret: Plan courageously for the future. Have you noticed how quickly life slips by? I'm told that as you get older, life slips by at an increasing rate. Is that true? Perhaps you're just busier than you used to be, or perhaps you realize that your days are numbered! In reality, all of our days are numbered, until

this mortal puts on immortality at the return of Jesus. Every day is precious. Every day is an irreplaceable opportunity. If you don't want to look back at the end of your life and be filled with regret, then plan courageously for the future.

How do I do that? First, concentrate on what is most important. Unfortunately, we often give our attention to what is most urgent. But urgent isn't necessarily important. And our lives can be so filled with urgent that we never get around to that which is most important. I remember reading of one businessman who reflected that he spent his whole life climbing the ladder of success only to discover that it was leaning against the wrong wall! What a tragedy! I don't want to look back on my life and be filled with regret, and I know that you don't either. Concentrate on what is most important.

So what really is most important to you? What should be most important to you? Stuff? I don't think so. What is really most important? Relationships; your relationship with God, serving Him with all your strength; and your relationships with those around you; your family, your loved ones. Isn't that really what's most important? So why are you working longer and longer hours, with little or no time for that which is most important? Where will that leave you at the end of your days? Will you be saying, "Oh, I just wish that I had worked more!" Plan courageously for the future. Concentrate on what is most important.

Second, dare to dream. Don't settle for mediocre. Things that are impossible for us are possible for God. In my favorite book on the life of Jesus, I read this comment: "God's ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach." *Desire of Ages*, P. 311. I believe that is true! So as you plan courageously for the future, concentrate on what is important and dare to dream!

And thirdly, identify doable steps to accomplish your dreams. It has been said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. And a dream becomes reality by courageously planning one doable step after another and following those steps until you have fulfilled your dreams. When our youngest son was 18 he decided that he wanted to become a CRNA, a certified registered nurse anesthetist. So we helped him to develop a 5-step plan! (Outline steps) And I'm happy to announce that this past week Jonathan began step #4 of his 5-step plan! Concentrate on what is important, dare to dream, and identify doable steps to fulfill your dreams!

You don't have to live a lifetime of regret! You don't need to get to the end of your life and look back filled with regret. Like Joseph's brothers, we've all done things, or failed to do things, that we later regret. But I'm thankful today that we don't have to get stuck in a place of regret. Joseph's brothers were stuck in a place of regret for 13 years. Some people get stuck in a place of regret for their whole lives. But you can avoid a lifetime of regret. You've learned some practical strategies today that will help you to be free!

- Deal decisively with the past;
- Live purposefully in the present; and
- Plan courageously for the future.

Your life may take some unexpected turns, just like Joseph, but when it's all said and done, it is possible to look back without regret. Deal decisively with the past, live purposefully in the present and plan courageously for the future!

How Can I Be Free?

-Finding freedom from regret:

1. Deal decisively with the past.
 - a. Ask for forgiveness;
 - b. Learn from your mistakes; and
 - c. Choose not to focus on past mistakes.
2. Live purposefully in the present:
 - a. Make decisions based on principle, not emotions;
 - b. Build on past successes; and
 - c. Keep focused on Jesus.
3. Plan courageously for the future:
 - a. Concentrate on what is important;
 - b. Dare to dream; and
 - c. Identify doable steps to fulfill your dreams.

JOSEPH: Living with Integrity - PART 4

The Cost of Integrity

By: Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Genesis 39:1-20
Subject:	What happened to Joseph when he chose to live a life of integrity in Potiphar's house?
Complement:	Even though he was falsely accused of dishonorable behavior by Potiphar's wife, he was still honored by Potiphar and most of all by God.
Exegetical idea:	When Joseph chose to live a life of integrity in Potiphar's house, he was honored by Potiphar and most of all by God even though he was falsely accused of dishonorable behavior by Potiphar's wife.
Homiletical idea:	Choose to live a life of integrity, no matter what the cost.
Purpose:	To encourage my hearers to live a life of integrity even though not everyone agrees with them, knowing that God will honor them and that their lives will be a difference in the world.

We are not told how many weeks it took for the Ishmaelite traders to travel south from Dothan to Egypt, but we do know that after about one week of being dragged behind a camel Joseph would have passed painfully close to his family's encampment in Hebron. Just over the hills to the east, his younger brother Benjamin was running around the family tents. His aged father Jacob was probably wondering how many more days it would be until his favored son Joseph returned. Joseph was so near and yet so far. I have no doubt that there were times when Joseph had to wipe his eyes with his forearm because he was blinded by his tears.

Somewhere between Dothan and Egypt, Joseph had a life-defining choice to make. Would he believe the truth that no matter how troubled your past, no matter how turbulent your present, that God has a good plan for your future? Would he deal decisively with the past, dare to live purposefully in the present and plan courageously for the future? Would he choose to live a life of integrity, a life that honored God, no matter what the cost? The answer is found in Genesis chapter 39.

Let's start reading Genesis 39:1. "Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the

Ishmaelites who had taken him there.” We will learn that Potiphar was an honorable man, a man of integrity, who held an important position in Pharaoh’s court. Potiphar apparently noticed something special about this young Hebrew. Joseph wasn’t whimpering in the corner. Joseph wasn’t cursing and fighting. Joseph stood calmly with the confident assurance that the God of his forefathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob was with him.

Scripture records in Genesis 39:2, “The Lord was with Joseph.” That is a phrase that will be repeated in this story. “The Lord was with Joseph, and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.” Don’t miss that. Joseph quickly earned the trust of his Egyptian master, Potiphar. How did Joseph do that? By dealing decisively with his past, and living purposefully in the present; by living a life of integrity. Not only did Potiphar allow Joseph to live in his own house, but Potiphar trusted Joseph. It would have been customary to castrate any slave who had direct access to the master’s family but Joseph conducted himself with such integrity that Potiphar honored him by not making him a eunuch even though Joseph was privileged to live in his master’s house.

Genesis 39:3-4 “When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.” Potiphar realized that Joseph was the recipient of supernatural blessings. Potiphar was almost certainly a polytheist. The Egyptians believed that there were many gods, including the Pharaoh himself, and they prayed to these gods for temporal blessings. It was clear to Potiphar that Joseph was blessed by his God, Yahweh. Now Joseph was not only living in the master’s house, but he was elevated to the position of Potiphar’s personal attendant. Why? Because Potiphar noticed that Joseph was a man of integrity. I’m sure that Joseph’s promotion didn’t make him popular with the other slaves.

I have no doubt that there was jealousy and rivalry. We're not told what happened to Potiphar's previous personal attendant. Did he die? If so, other slaves were hoping for that promotion. Was he executed or demoted? If so, he would certainly have resented Joseph for taking his place. And Joseph was always so "good". Joseph refused to steal from his master's household like some of the other slaves. Joseph worked diligently, even when his master wasn't looking. Joseph chose to live a life of integrity, whether anyone was looking or not. He chose a life of integrity, no matter what the cost.

After Potiphar promoted Joseph to the position of his personal attendant, Potiphar noticed that his household was blessed. Genesis 39:5 "From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So he left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate." Potiphar was a wise man. He saw that the blessings of Joseph's God rested upon the entire household and so Potiphar left everything in Joseph's care. Potiphar trusted Joseph completely because Potiphar knew that Joseph was a person of integrity. Let me pause for a moment to say that we need more men and women of integrity like Joseph today. Don't we? Some of you who are employers, some of you who are managers, supervisors, you would love to hire people of integrity like Joseph, wouldn't you? Then let's be that kind of person ourselves. Let's live a life of integrity, no matter what the cost, and let's see the supernatural blessings of God come down. Wouldn't it be a wonderful testimony if your employer, your boss, came to you and said, "My company is blessed because you work here! The God that you serve is blessing me because of you!" That was the testimony of Potiphar.

At this point, everything seemed to be going well for Joseph, and then he came face to face with

a major challenge. Her name? Mrs. Potiphar. Genesis 39:6. “Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’” There was nothing discreet or timid about this woman. This was a blatant case of sexual harassment. But slaves had no rights. They were considered personal property. And Potiphar’s wife wanted access to her personal property. I am not naive enough to believe that this was her first act of infidelity. There were other slaves in the household and other men in the neighborhood, but now her dishonorable intentions were directed toward Joseph.

This was a defining moment for Joseph. How would he respond? Potiphar’s wife had done everything within her power to make this moment as seductive as possible: her scanty attire, her enticing perfume. How old was Joseph at this time in his life story? In his mid-twenties. In his prime. And he not only had to deal with the sexual temptation; he also had to deal with the temptation to use the situation for his own benefit. Potiphar’s wife might hold the key to his freedom. If ever there was a time to base his decision on principle, rather than the emotions of the moment, it was now! Scripture gives this testimony: “But he refused.” Then he gave this explanation in his defense, recorded in Genesis 39:8-9 “‘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. 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?’”

What a courageous response; and quite amazing when you think about Joseph’s dysfunctional family! His father Jacob slept with four women. His brother Reuben slept with Bilhah, his brother’s mother. His brother Judah slept with his widowed daughter-in-law, though when he was caught he protested that he didn’t know who she was. He thought that she was a prostitute. What a messy family! Now Joseph was facing an intense sexual temptation, but he didn’t make any

excuses. You know, the kind of excuses that people often make: “It’s my dad’s fault that I’m this way.” Or “it’s my brother’s fault that I’m this way.” No, Joseph set clear boundaries in terms of his moral conduct. He refused the bold proposition of his master’s wife.

You would think that after this clear refusal that Potiphar’s wife would have left Joseph alone. Wouldn’t you? But we read in Genesis 39:10 that she continued her sexual harassment. “And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be alone with her.” This woman was a real problem. She was constantly stalking him, trying to lure him. Joseph is wise enough to stay out of her way and especially to avoid being alone with her.

But Potiphar’s wife made a plan. Genesis 39:11-12 “One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants were inside.” I imagine that Potiphar’s wife had intentionally sent the other servants off on a variety of errands. This was no accident. Having created this opportunity, Potiphar’s wife caught Joseph by his cloak and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’ Notice that she is even more aggressive than before. Having failed to talk Joseph into going to bed with her, she now grabs his cloak.

How do you deal with someone like that? If you are an employee, you can quit your job or file a sexual harassment lawsuit. If it’s someone you’re dating, you can choose to walk away and not look back. I know. People today would call you crazy. Some are out looking for people like Potiphar’s wife to go to bed with them. But if you’re dating someone who is willing to sleep with someone who isn’t their spouse, do you really want that pattern to continue after you’re married? You can choose to walk away and not look back.

But Joseph didn’t have any of those options. Joseph was a slave. Yes, he was his master’s personal attendant, in charge of everything that his master owned, but he was still a slave. So when Potiphar’s wife began to forcefully undress him, Joseph had only one option left. He couldn’t

command her to stop. He couldn't call the police. He couldn't quit his job and look for a more honorable employer. Scripture records that Joseph did the only thing that he could do: "he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house."

What happens next shows the despicable character of this woman? She is not only promiscuous. She is a liar and a mean-spirited loser. I'm sorry. I know that sounds harsh, but I genuinely feel sorry for Potiphar, having to live with this woman. We read in Genesis 39:13-15 "When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. 'Look,' she said to them, 'this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.'"

I can imagine some of the servants looking at each other, rolling their eyes and shaking their heads. They did not dare to express their thoughts, but they knew Joseph's integrity and they also knew the reputation of their master's wife. But I'm also sure that some of those servants were probably happy to hear a bad report about Joseph, and the gossip spread like wildfire.

Genesis 39:16 "She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: 'That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.'"

The next verse is an interesting one. Genesis 39:19 "When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, 'This is how your slave treated me,' he burned with anger." A casual reading of this passage might lead you to conclude that Potiphar burned with anger toward Joseph. It is certainly possible that this was his initial reaction, though I doubt it. But even if Potiphar's immediate reaction was to be angry with Joseph, his attitude soon changed. Potiphar thought about his trusted slave Joseph. He reflected on Joseph's life of integrity. Even if Potiphar's first reaction

was to burn with anger toward Joseph, his attitude soon changed. I want to suggest that Potiphar burned with anger not towards Joseph but toward his promiscuous wife who had shamed his family name by trying to seduce their trusted slave Joseph.

You say, “Pastor Derek, how do you come to that conclusion?” Well, look with me at the next verse in Genesis 39. Genesis 39:20 “Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.” There is a great deal of information contained in that one sentence; clear evidence that Potiphar continued to honor Joseph for being a man of integrity. In fact, I'm convinced that Potiphar viewed Joseph more like a son than a slave.

But you say, “Joseph ended up in prison! Isn't that proof that Potiphar thought Joseph was guilty?” Let me ask you a question. What punishment would you have expected if Potiphar believed that Joseph had tried to assault his wife? Instant death! What about a second chance? No way. If Potiphar truly believed that Joseph had assaulted his wife, Joseph would have faced immediate execution. No trial. No delay. Instant death! And if, for some strange reason, Potiphar had allowed this guilty slave to live, perhaps because Joseph's God had blessed the household so much, you can be certain that a beaten and bruised Joseph would have joined the ranks of the eunuchs. Wouldn't you agree? But Potiphar does neither. He doesn't execute Joseph, and he doesn't even castrate him. What does that tell you? Potiphar didn't believe his wife's lies. He wasn't angry with Joseph. He was angry with her.

If you're not sure if you agree with me yet, look a little more closely at Genesis 39:20. Notice that Joseph isn't bound and dragged off to the prison by Potiphar's bodyguards. What does the text tell us? Joseph's master took him and put him in the prison. You have to wonder what conversation occurred between Potiphar and Joseph as they walked out of Potiphar's house. Do you imagine Joseph complaining, whining? No. He has learned that there is a time to be silent. He

didn't need to accuse Potiphar's wife. She had already condemned herself. Some other slave might have been guilty of such a crime, but not Joseph.

Potiphar "took" Joseph to the prison, and notice that it wasn't just any prison. What does the text tell us? It was the place where the king's prisoners were kept. I know - it was still a prison. Joseph didn't want to be there. But we know that even today there are white collar prisons where prisoners are treated quite hospitably and there are stinking dungeons where people are left to rot. Potiphar didn't have Joseph dragged off to a stinking dungeon. He took him to an upscale prison where the king's prisoners were kept. Why? Because Potiphar believed that Joseph was innocent. Potiphar knew that Joseph was a man of integrity. Potiphar wasn't angry with Joseph. He was angry with his own wife, and maybe angry with himself that he hadn't protected Joseph from his wayward wife.

But you say, "Why didn't Potiphar just let Joseph go?" I don't have an answer to that question. Maybe that would have been too great of a public humiliation for his wife. Perhaps Potiphar chose to rebuke his wife privately without humiliating her publicly.

So what can we learn from this chapter in Joseph's life? Several lessons. When you choose to live a life of integrity, you will be blessed. When you live a life of integrity, others around you will be blessed. But you also need to realize that not everyone will love you for choosing to live a life of integrity. In fact, some people will intentionally try to seduce you. Some people will intentionally try to cause you to sin. Some people will despise you. Some people will hate you. When you choose to live a life of integrity there is a cost that you will have to pay. But Jesus reminds us that whatever the price we have to pay, we are also blessed when we suffer for living a life of integrity. We can read the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:11-12. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice

and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Joseph chose to live a life of integrity, no matter what the cost. And in this, Joseph was a type of the Messiah who would come. Joseph was a forerunner of the Deliverer, the Savior. Jesus also chose to live a life of integrity, no matter what the cost. And Jesus says to you and He says to me, “Follow Me.” Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

There may be some drastic changes that you need to make in your life as a result of this message today. There may be some things that you need to throw away. There may be some places that you need to stop going, some relationships that need to end. There may be some things that you need to start doing, not to try to earn God’s favor, but because you are a redeemed child of the King. I pray that you will be inspired and challenged today by the witness of Joseph.

Choose to live a life of integrity, no matter what the cost.

JOSEPH: LIVING WITH INTEGRITY – PART 5

Dreams and more dreams

By: Dr. Derek Morris

- Preaching passage: Genesis 40:1-41:37; Psalm 27:13-14
- Subject: What happens to Joseph during his extended stay in prison?
- Complement: The LORD is with him, showing favor to him and giving him the ability to interpret dreams.
- Exegetical idea: During Joseph's extended stay in prison, the LORD is with him, showing favor to him and giving him the ability to interpret dreams.
- Homiletical idea: **Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart.**
- Purpose: To encourage my hearers to hold on to the Lord no matter what circumstances they find themselves in, with the assurance that the Lord is holding on to them.

The key thought of this message from the life of Joseph is expressed in an ancient Scripture song, written 3,000 years ago. Listen to the words, and then listen to Joseph's story.

I would have lost heart unless I had believed
that I would see the goodness of the LORD

I would have lost heart unless I had believed
that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

Wait on the LORD, be of good courage

And He shall strengthen your heart.

Wait on the LORD, be of good courage,

And He shall strengthen your heart.

Wait, I say, on the LORD, wait, I say, on the LORD.

Joseph was at risk of losing heart. He had just been falsely accused and thrown into prison. Well, perhaps to be more accurate, Potiphar had escorted him to the prison where the king's prisoners were kept. It was obvious to Joseph that Potiphar didn't believe the lying accusations of his promiscuous wife, but Joseph was still in prison, and though the Egyptian prison didn't resemble the dry cistern outside of Dothan, the feelings were the same. Joseph felt abandoned again.

Rejected again. "Where are you, Lord? Deliver me from this place!"

Joseph had to learn to wait on the Lord, and he soon discovered that just as the Lord was with him when he served in Potiphar's house, so the Lord was with him in the prison. We would still see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. We read in Genesis 39:20-23, "....." That's certainly an encouraging report, but even though Joseph prospered in that Egyptian prison, I have no doubt that day after day Joseph cried out to God, "Lord, deliver me from this place!"

We're not told how much time passed, perhaps weeks or months, but Joseph was soon promoted to a position of responsibility in that Egyptian prison. One day some special "guests" arrived. We can read the inspired account in Genesis chapter 40, beginning with verse 1-3. "....." We are left with a lot of questions about what exactly happened in Pharaoh's court. Why was the Pharaoh angry with his cupbearer and his baker? If they had committed a terrible crime, why weren't they put to death? We'll learn in a few minutes that Pharaoh was about to celebrate his birthday. Was his anger related to the preparation for his upcoming birthday celebration? We don't know for sure.

And then there is this term “captain of the guard” in Genesis 40:3. Do you recognize that term from someone else in the story of Joseph? Yes! That is the same term used at the beginning of Genesis 39 for Potiphar. It seems that this prison where the king’s prisoners were confined was actually connected to Potiphar’s house.

That raises another question in my mind. Did Joseph continue to see Potiphar’s wife walking around while he was confined in a prison on the same property? How would that make you feel? The wicked prosper and those who live with integrity suffer. No wonder that Joseph cried out to the Lord, day after day: “Lord, deliver me from this place!”

But now some distinguished “guests” have arrived at the king’s prison, and Scripture records that Joseph was charged by the captain of the guard to care for them. Again, I’m wondering if this is a reference to Potiphar. Was Potiphar hoping that a connection with these two officials might lead to Joseph finding favor in the eyes of the Pharaoh?

The story continues in Genesis 40:5-8. “.....” There is no evidence up to this point in the story that Joseph has been given a special prophetic gift from God. Either he is praying while he is speaking or he surprises himself by his own words! Genesis 40:9-13 “.....”

I want you to notice Joseph’s plea after he interprets the cupbearer’s dream. The plea is recorded in Genesis 40:14-15. “.....” In his mind, Joseph might be thinking, “I’ve been crying out to the Lord to deliver me from this place, and I’m still

here. Maybe I can plead with Pharaoh's official to ask Pharaoh to get me out of this place!

The Pharaoh's baker is encouraged by the favorable interpretation of his colleagues dream, and so he shares his dream with Joseph. Genesis 40:16-17. "....." We can't see Joseph's facial expressions as he hears the baker's dream, but I wonder if he was reticent to give the interpretation. Nevertheless, Joseph answered and said, recorded in Genesis 40:18-19, "....."

Now anyone can speculate about the meaning of a dream, but the events that occurred 3 days later confirmed that Joseph had been given a special prophetic gift by God. Genesis 40:20-22 "....." And then comes that tragic comment in Genesis 40:23, "....."

Have you ever felt totally forgotten, not only by people, but also by God? You cry out day after day and God seems very slow to respond to your prayer? Two full years pass. More than 700 sunrises and sunsets, and Joseph is still confined in prison. Genesis 41:1-8 "....." Then the cupbearer said to the Pharaoh, "Oops! I forget to mention something to you two years ago!" Well, that's my dynamic paraphrase of Genesis 41:9. "....." The cupbearer continues in Genesis 41:10-13. "....." I'm puzzled by the change of pronouns in v.13 of Genesis 41. Instead of saying "You restored me..." the cupbearer says, "He restored me..." It's almost as if the cupbearer is addressing all of the wise men and magicians who are gathered there in Pharaoh's court.

Pharaoh's response is immediate. Genesis 41:14. "....." Was Joseph told why he was being summoned? I can only assume that the captain of the guard, Potiphar, was involved in the transfer of the prisoner from the king's prison to the court of the Pharaoh. One has to wonder what conversation occurred during that trip; perhaps no words at all, but silent messages.

I imagine that Joseph is praying. Remember his earlier confession: "Interpretations belong to God." Perhaps instead of just praying "Lord deliver me from this place," Joseph prays, "Lord, use me in this place!" When he stood before the Pharaoh, the Pharaoh said to Joseph, recorded in Genesis 41:15, "....." And I want you to notice Joseph's response. Genesis 41:16 "....." Joseph chooses to publically honor the God of heaven, regardless of the outcome of this meeting. That, my friends, is living with integrity!

The Pharaoh continues, recorded in Genesis 41:17-24, "....." Joseph's response demonstrated the calm assurance that the Lord was with him in the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream. Genesis 41:25-32 "....." And Joseph doesn't stop with the interpretation of the dream. Inspired by the Spirit of God, Joseph gives the following counsel to the Pharaoh, recorded in Genesis 41:33-36. "....." And Scripture in Genesis 41:37, "....."

Joseph has chosen to boldly speak for God regardless of the consequence. Yes, he would like to be delivered from that prison. But more important than the prayer, "Lord deliver me from this place" is the prayer "Lord, use me in this place!"

Some of you are thinking, “Read on, Pastor Derek! This is where the story gets really good. Joseph gets his big promotion!” But Joseph doesn’t know that yet. He just knows that he has chosen to believe that He will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. He has chosen to wait on the Lord and be of good courage, knowing that the Lord will strengthen his heart. He’s still a prisoner. He still doesn’t know what the future holds. But this much is certain. The Lord is with him. Joseph has chosen to wait on the Lord!

That’s a lesson that we all need to learn. In whatever situation we find ourselves, wait on the Lord! Listen again to that ancient Scripture song and make its promise your own:

I would have lost heart unless I had believed
that I would see the goodness of the LORD
I would have lost heart unless I had believed
that I would see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.

Wait on the LORD, be of good courage

And He shall strengthen your heart.

Wait on the LORD, be of good courage,

And He shall strengthen your heart.

Wait, I say, on the LORD, wait, I say, on the LORD.

Someone of you would have lost heart, given up, if you didn’t know that the Lord was with you, wouldn’t you? You would have lost heart if you didn’t believe that you would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, whether during this life or on the earth made new. Life can be hard, unfair, brutal, but you have

chosen to live a life that honors God, to live with integrity, to hold on to the Lord with the assurance that He is holding on to you. And I'm here to tell you today that He will strengthen your heart. Now, in whatever situation you find yourself, instead of simply saying, "Lord, deliver me from this place," you can pray, "Lord, use me in this place."

JOSEPH: Living with Integrity - PART 6

The Testing

By: Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Genesis 41:38 - 45:15
Subject:	What Joseph did after he had become a ruler in Egypt.
Complements:	He provided for the needs of his family and revealed his identity to them.
Exegetical idea:	When Joseph became a ruler in Egypt, he provided for the needs of his family and revealed his identity to them.
Homiletical idea:	When you find yourself in a place of prosperity, continue to live with integrity.
Purpose:	To encourage my hearers to continue to live with integrity when they find themselves in a place of prosperity.

Joseph had been tested before. When he served in the house of Potiphar, captain of the guard, Potiphar's wife had repeatedly tried to seduce him. During his years in prison, falsely accused for a crime that he did not commit, Joseph was tested again. Would he allow his heart to be filled with anger and bitterness or would he continue to believe, even in the most difficult circumstances, that God had a good plan for his future?

Now Joseph faced a different test. He had just interpreted the Pharaoh's dreams and counseled the Pharaoh to implement a disaster preparedness plan! We can read the story in Genesis 41:33-36. "And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine."

The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. After careful deliberation with his counselors, the Pharaoh ordered that Joseph be brought back into his audience chamber. Pharaoh's startling declaration is recorded in Genesis 41:38-45a. "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you." So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt." Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah..."

And if that wasn't enough good news for Joseph for one day, we learn in the second half of Genesis 41:45 that "the Pharaoh gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara, priest of On, to be his wife!" Joseph is definitely having a good day.

Now Joseph was facing a different test. Would he continue to live with integrity in times of prosperity and blessing, just as he did during times of adversity? The answer to that question is found in the verses that follow. We read in Genesis 41:46b-49, "Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt. During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much

that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure.”

Joseph was diligent. He continued to believe the word of the Lord even though one year of plenty was followed by another year of plenty. I’m sure that Joseph had his critics. “That Hebrew ex-slave is a fool! He is storing up enough grain to feed the whole world! But Joseph did not waver in his commitment to store 20% of the harvest during each of the seven years of abundance. He believed the Word of God that had been revealed to him.

Then we read in Genesis 41:53, “The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. Now Joseph will be tested again. The severe famine was also affecting people in the land of Canaan. Jacob and his family were facing a crisis. Without emergency assistance, they would soon face starvation. So Jacob said to his sons, recorded in Genesis 42:1-2, “Why do you just keep looking at each other? I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die.”

When Joseph’s ten older brothers arrived in Egypt, Joseph recognized them, but they did not recognize him. As they bowed low before this high-ranking government official, Joseph remembered his dreams from 20 years earlier. But something was missing. What was it? Ah yes, in his dream all 11 brothers bowed down to him. But here there were only 10.

Now Joseph put his brothers to the test. He accused them of being spies and had them all placed in confinement for 3 days. I wonder how he decided on the length of their confinement. He had been confined for 250 times that length of time. But he ordered only 3 days of confinement. On the third day, Joseph came to them again and said, recorded in Genesis 42:18-24, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households.

But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.’ They said to one another, ‘Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come upon us.’ Reuben replied, ‘Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn’t listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.’” They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. He turned away from them and began to weep, but then turned back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.”

Why do you think that Joseph had Simeon taken and bound in front of his brothers? Simeon was the brother with the hot temper. Simeon took his brother Levi and killed the inhabitants of Shechem. Simeon was the one who wanted to kill Joseph. And so Simeon is bound and kept as a ransom until the brothers return with their youngest brother Benjamin.

Scripture records in Genesis 42:25-26, “Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain; to put each man’s silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. After this was done for them, they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left.” Joseph was generous in providing supplies for their journey back to Canaan, but why do you think that Joseph ordered the silver to be put back in his brothers’ sacks? When his brothers found out about it they were troubled. Genesis 42:27-28, “At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack. ‘My silver has been returned,’ he said to his brothers. ‘Here it is in my sack.’ Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, ‘What is this that God has done to us?’

Did Joseph order the silver to be put back in their sacks to trouble them; or to see if they were honest? What do you think? When his brothers had sold him to the Ishmaelite traders 20

years earlier, what did they receive? Twenty pieces of silver! And now the one that they sold is giving them silver!

It would have taken the brothers several weeks, perhaps a month or more to arrive back at their family encampment in Hebron. When they reported the whole story to their father Jacob, he refused to allow his sons to take their brother Benjamin down to Egypt. We read in Genesis 42:38, “My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow.”

But the famine was so severe and so prolonged, Jacob finally agreed that his sons could take their youngest brother with them to Egypt. We read in Genesis 43:15, “So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph.” Why were they in such a hurry? Were they anxious to see Simeon, or were they concerned that their families would starve to death if they took too long?

When they arrived in Egypt and requested an audience with Zaphenath Paneah, they were ushered in to a banquet room. We read in Genesis 43:26-29, “When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground. He asked them how they were, and then he said, ‘How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?’ They replied, ‘Your servant our father is still alive and well.’ And they bowed low to pay him honor.” Now the dream given to Joseph 20 years earlier is fulfilled. All eleven of his brothers are bowing low before him (Verse 29). “As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son, he asked, ‘Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?’ And he said, ‘God be gracious to you, my son.’”

Deeply moved at the sight of his younger brother, Joseph hurried out of the banquet hall and wept. After he had composed himself and washed his face, he returned, and the banquet commenced. The brothers were startled as they were seated in their birth order, and when the food was served, Benjamin was given 5 times as much as anyone else. Either the other ten were given meager portions, or Benjamin was very full at the end of the meal!

As Joseph sends them on their way, he decides to test them again. He orders that the silver be placed in the brothers' sacks but also that his silver cup, which the Egyptians considered sacred, be placed in Benjamin's sack. What is Joseph trying to accomplish here? Not long after the brothers have set off on their homeward journey, Joseph orders that they be apprehended. When the silver cup is found in Benjamin's sack, they were stunned. They tore their clothes, which was a sign in their culture that they were overwhelmed with grief. They were escorted back to Joseph's residence and Scripture records in Genesis 44:14 that they did more than respectfully bow. They threw themselves to the ground before him. Once again, his dream from 20 years earlier is fulfilled.

When Joseph suggests that only Benjamin needs to remain as his slave and the rest can return home, Judah speaks up. Do you remember Judah's role when the brothers were trying to get rid of their despised younger brother? Judah was the one who suggested that they sell Joseph to the Ishmaelite traders. Now he offers to be enslaved himself so that his youngest brother can go free. Listen to his plea, recorded in Genesis 44:18, "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself." And then look down to Genesis 44:32-34, "'your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!' 'Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy,

and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father.’”

What do you notice here? A change of heart! Instead of enslaving his brother, like he did 20 years earlier with Joseph, Judah is willing to enslave himself that his youngest brother might go free. Then comes the startling revelation - Genesis 45:1-3, “Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, ‘Have everyone leave my presence!’ So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph! Is my father still living?’ But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.”

Their terror is understandable. This is their brother whom they sold into slavery. Now he holds their lives in his hands. Again, Joseph is tested. How will he respond? Listen to his words, recorded in Genesis 45:4-8a: “Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come close to me.’ When they had done so, he said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 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 not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.” Verse 15 “And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.”

As I studied the story of Joseph this week, I thought about Jesus. The Son of God was in the highest position of authority and prosperity at the right hand of the Father in heaven. The

Bible tells us that He was our Creator, and when we sin, we sin against Him. The Son of God could have used that position of power to condemn us, to make us suffer for our wrong doing. But praise be to God He didn't. He came down to this sin-ravaged world and embraced us. And more than that; He kissed us! He showed us His love, a perfect revelation of the Father's love.

There is a lesson that each one of us can learn from the portion of Joseph's life that we have studied today. When you find yourself in a place of prosperity, when you find yourself in a place of honor, when you find yourself in a place of power, continue to live with integrity. Continue to honor God. Continue to reveal the love of God. Then your life will also be a blessing to those around you!

JOSEPH: Living with Integrity - PART 7

Mercy and Love

By: Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Genesis 45:25-Genesis 49:32
Subject:	The experience of Jacob as he traveled to Egypt to be reunited with his son Joseph.
Complement:	He was reminded of God's loving kindness.
Exegetical idea:	When Jacob traveled to Egypt to be reunited with his son Joseph he was reminded of God's loving kindness.
Homiletical idea:	Give thanks to the LORD, El Shaddai, for He is good!
Purpose:	To remind my hearers of God's loving kindness to each one of us and to encourage them to give thanks to God.

Shabbat shalom. May El Shaddai, God Almighty, bless you. Shabbat shalom. I am Jacob. I am blessed to be with you today, and I pray that you will also be blessed. I am not here to testify about myself. I am here to give thanks to the LORD El Shaddai for He is good.

As I look back over my life, it is painfully clear that I have not always honored God. I have not always lived with integrity. But El Shaddai, God Almighty, has been merciful to me. He has shown His unfailing love to me. I give thanks to the LORD, El Shaddai, for He is good!

There is not enough time to retell my whole life story. I have lived more than 140 years. Is there anyone here as old as I am? Ninety seven years? God bless you, my child!

As I said, there is not enough time to retell my whole life story. I cannot even remember all of the events of my life! But there are some seasons that I can never forget.

I remember the day that my son Joseph was born—the firstborn son of my true love, Rachel. I worked seven long years for my uncle Laban in the region of Paddan Aram in Mesopotamia in order to marry his youngest daughter Rachel. I loved Rachel so much that those seven years seemed like only a few days to me. I had loved her since the first day I met her,

watering her flocks. She was the most beautiful shepherdess I had ever seen! Did I tell you that my uncle Laban asked me to work seven years for him as a dowry for his daughter Rachel? I would have gladly worked for twice that number of years in order to marry Rachel! And as it turned out, I had to! My uncle Laban deceived me. Though who am I to complain about deceit? I have also been a deceiver. May El Shaddai have mercy upon me and show me His unfailing love! But my uncle Laban deceived me and when I woke up the next morning, there was Leah, his oldest daughter, lying in my tent! I don't even want to talk about that day! Uncle Laban never did apologize, but after one week he allowed me to marry Rachel as well, if I promised to work for him for another seven years.

Where was I? Ah yes, I was talking about the birth of my son Joseph. Rachel had been barren for many years. That resulted in many family problems, and I must confess that I was part of the problem. But eventually Rachel conceived and gave birth to her firstborn son, Joseph. I knew that there was something special that the LORD El Shaddai would do for Joseph. I just knew it!

Years later when Joseph had his dreams, I knew that they were a message from the LORD, El Shaddai, even though the result was conflict in our encampment! I still vividly remember the day I received news that my son Joseph was dead! None of my sons specifically told me that Joseph was dead. In fact, they seemed strangely silent that day. But the blood stained robe spoke for itself. My heart was broken. Was El Shaddai bringing this calamity upon me? I had dishonored him on many occasions. I had fought with my brother Esau. I had lied to my father Isaac in order to receive the blessing of the firstborn. Covering my hands and the smooth part of my neck with goatskins! And worst of all, when my father asked me how I had

found the game so quickly, I replied, “The LORD your God gave me success!” Those words of deceit stuck in my throat like a piece of broken pottery. “The LORD your God gave me success!”

Where was I? Ah, yes. I was speaking about the news of Joseph’s death. Was this tragedy now a result of my sin? Joseph? Dead? My grief was more than I could bear. Some days I thought that I would die of a broken heart. Other days I just wished that I would die. My sleeping mat was drenched with my tears. I have since learned that even during those times we can give thanks to El Shaddai for He is good. His mercy and love never fail!

I can vividly remember the day when I heard that Joseph was still alive! There was a terrible famine in the land of Canaan. My sons had made a second trip to Egypt to buy grain, taking with them their youngest brother Benjamin. In fact, their brother Simeon was still imprisoned in Egypt as a result of some misunderstanding during their first visit there. I sent my sons off with a blessing: “**May El Shaddai grant you mercy before that man in Egypt.**” I had no idea “that man Zaphenath Paneah” was my long lost son Joseph! It had been 22 long and lonely years since I had seen my son Joseph alive, and I was certain that he was no more.

Weeks passed; one new moon to another. When word finally came to me in my tent that a caravan was approaching our encampment from the south, I was filled with expectation, and with some anxiety. Had that man Zaphenath Paneah released Simeon? Was Benjamin safe? Had my sons quarreled along the way as they usually did? When I came out of my tent to greet the caravan, I was shocked by the news that I heard: “**Joseph is still alive! Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt.**” I was stunned. What did you say? “Joseph is still alive; the ruler of all Egypt?” At first, I must confess, I did not believe the report. Impossible! Joseph?

Alive? But then my sons gave me a complete account of their journey and showed me the carts filled with supplies that Joseph had sent to us. Finally, I said to my sons, “I’m convinced! My son Joseph is still alive.”

That’s when my sons told me about the terrible truth that they had concealed from me for more than 20 years. My own sons had sold their younger brother Joseph as a slave to Ishmaelite traders. And then they had lied to me day after day, year after year. I began to weep. They began to weep. We wept together; tears of repentance and tears of forgiveness. Healing comes when a family weeps together. Did you know that? I gathered my sons around me. I forgave them and blessed them. After all, the LORD, El Shaddai, has shown mercy and love to me. The LORD El Shaddai has forgiven me and blessed me.

Over and over again, I repeated the joyful news—“My son Joseph is still alive! I will go and see him before I die.” My sons told me that according to the revelation of God, the famine would last for another 5 years. Joseph had invited us to take refuge in Egypt. So we dismantled our entire camp and took everything with us: our whole family, with all of our livestock and all of our possessions. We left nothing behind. We were a caravan of about 70 all together. Not a very large company when you think of the promise that El Shaddai made to my grandfather Abraham, that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens. We traveled slowly with our flocks and herds. After several days of traveling to the south, we arrived at Beersheba. That is the southernmost city in Canaan, before entering the Negev and then turning west toward Egypt. My grandfather Abraham and my father Isaac had both lived for some time in Beersheba. In fact, that’s how the city got its name. My grandfather made a treaty here with the Philistines and called the place Beersheba, well of the oath.

There we stopped at Beersheba to offer sacrifices to the God of my father Isaac. It was during our stay at Beersheba, on our way to Egypt, that God appeared to me in a night vision. I had encountered the LORD, El Shaddai, many years earlier as a young man when I was fleeing from my brother Esau. That place was called Luz at the time, but I renamed it Bethel, house of God, because the LORD El Shaddai met me there.

I encountered the LORD El Shaddai another time, though I didn't realize it at first, at a place that I later named Peniel, face of God. That is when He took hold of me in the night, and I started wrestling with Him. What a fool I was to try to wrestle with El Shaddai. I should have been resting in His arms. I still limp as a painful reminder of my great need of El Shaddai's mercy and love.

Years later, when I returned to Bethel, El Shaddai appeared to me again and promised me, **“I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.”**

Where was I? Ah yes. We were on our way to Egypt, and we stopped to offer sacrifices at Beersheba. There the LORD El Shaddai called to me in a vision of the night: **“Jacob! Jacob!”** **“Here I am,”** I replied. **“I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there.”** It was obvious that we were not a great nation yet. The promise made by El Shaddai to my grandfather Abraham was not yet fulfilled. The promise repeated to my father Isaac was not yet fulfilled. But the promise would be fulfilled! **“Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation *there.*”**

With joyful anticipation we continued south into the Negev and then west toward Egypt. When we arrived at the border of Egypt, we made camp and I sent Judah ahead to receive instructions. When Judah finally returned, he urged us to break camp and travel to a region called Goshen. It was there that I was reunited with Joseph. I could hardly recognize him at first. His stately chariot. His numerous attendants. His Egyptian clothes. But as he drew closer and I looked into his eyes, I saw Rachel's firstborn son. Joseph! He threw his arms around my neck and wept. We wept together! There are times when it is a good thing for a family to weep together. I whispered in his ear, **"Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive."**

And I was ready to rest with my fathers, but El Shaddai, God Almighty, had other plans. I was only 130 years old at the time. First, Joseph escorted me to Pharaoh's palace for a personal audience with the Pharaoh. I had heard that the Egyptians despised shepherds, but the Pharaoh received me with kindness. When he saw me, he asked, "How old are you?" Apparently, people don't live as long in Egypt. It must be something to do with the food they eat! I replied, **"The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers."** I did not tell him about all of the times that I had failed to live with integrity. If I had done that, he would have been amazed that Joseph ended up the way that he did. I know the reason: the mercy and love of El Shaddai, God Almighty. No, I didn't share my entire life story with the Pharaoh. I simply blessed him and for his kindness to our family.

I have spent the past 17 years living here in Goshen, and God is making of us a great nation! The famine ended 12 years ago, just as God had revealed to the Pharaoh. Now, we are

prospering even though we are despised by the Egyptians. But my eyes are growing dim and soon I must rest with my fathers. I have given these instructions to my son Joseph: “If I have found favor in your eyes, (put your hand under my thigh and) promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. **Do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried.**”

Until then, I am resting in the arms of El Shaddai. No more wrestling. Did I tell you about the time that I foolishly tried to wrestle with the LORD. No more wrestling. Just resting, and giving thanks. I give thanks to the LORD, El Shaddai, for He is good. His loving kindness endures forever!

I give thanks to the LORD, El Shaddai, for His mercy.

I give thanks to the LORD, El Shaddai, for His love.

I give thanks to the LORD, El Shaddai, for He is good!

I am tired now, and I must rest. May I bless you before I leave?

**May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,
may El Shaddai, God Almighty bless you
and may you always give thanks to El Shaddai for He is good.**