

GENESIS

Lesson 55

Genesis 39: Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

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.

² The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, ⁴ 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. 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. ⁶ So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, ⁷ and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

⁸ But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹ No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

¹¹ One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹² She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

¹³ When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

¹⁶ She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. ¹⁷ Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. ¹⁸ But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

¹⁹ When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. ²⁰ Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, ²¹ the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. ²² So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. ²³ The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

Genesis 39:1-23 [NIV]

What a fascinating story we have in this lesson. This type of drama is Hollywood-movie material for sure. In the previous lesson, we saw what it was like to be in an Ishmaelite caravan as a slave traveling south to Egypt. Our story today picks up in Egypt where the caravan traders have sold Joseph to Potiphar, the captain of the guard and "one of Pharaoh's officials." From this little piece of knowledge, we know right away that Joseph was special, even as a slave. Potiphar as captain of the guard would have likely been serving in one of two roles as an official of the Pharaoh. The title could indicate that he was responsible for the Pharaoh's security, his bodyguards, much like today's Secret Service. Alternatively, it could mean that he was over the Pharaoh's prison—the prison housing all those who displeased the Pharaoh and would likely be put to death. We know then that Joseph was special, as God was placing him in the home of

someone influential, close to the Pharaoh, and perhaps even associated with the prison that would eventually house Joseph.

Does this sound familiar? God has done this many times in the Bible—positioning people in advance of accomplishing His will. Some names of people immediately come to mind; perhaps you can think of others. How about Daniel, or Esther, or Boaz and Ruth, or Rahab, or of course Moses. These are all excellent examples. Their examples demonstrate to us that sometimes when our world may seem upside down, God is still in control. All we need do is to live each day in His will and for His purpose.

At times, our life may seem to be part of an ongoing struggle that we don't understand. God allows things to happen to us that we either do not like or do not understand, but God knows; God is in control. He is on His throne, and even though we are tossed about, we have a peace that passes all understanding—a peace that brings us through those troubled waters. I believe that such was the case for Joseph, who continued to follow God without complaining.

I have studied fiction writing, and one of the things that I've learned about developing people within a novel is that their character is revealed to the reader by what they say and do. I also heard years ago that character can be defined as "what you are when no one is looking." We read in Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." If we walk with Christ, our character can be defined by these fruits of the Spirit. Observing Joseph's behavior in this story, his true character is revealed.

Reading Genesis 39:2-8, we see a picture of an upright man, Joseph, even at a young age. He was hard-working, honest, and faithful in serving his master Potiphar. His actions reveal to us that he was not like his brothers, i.e., deceiving, lying, and only interested in self. He did not grumble about his circumstances, criticize his brothers' actions, nor complain about anything. Genesis 39:7 adds another dimension to our understanding of Joseph: he "was well-built and handsome." This fact indicates that he was not caught up in his looks or his position in Potiphar's house. He remained a humble servant.

Genesis 39:8-10 reveals something else to us: he was aware of himself and his responsibilities, and he recognized that he didn't just serve Potiphar; he served God. Everything about Joseph—his physical appearance, his character, and his actions—were strictly above-board and indicated that he served God above all else. These were no doubt many of the same attributes that attracted Potiphar's wife to Joseph.

How many of us know of someone, a rock-solid and mature Christian, who strays when a woman or a man is attracted to them? This temptation is strong, especially for a young man; and Joseph was no exception. But again, his actions reflect his devotion and worship of God. Can we always say the same about ourselves? The Bible tells us to "resist the devil and he will flee" (James 4:7), but often we would rather follow after temptation just as Eve did in the Garden of Eden. Joseph chose not to dishonor his earthly master, Potiphar, or God.

The story continues, and we see that Potiphar's wife would not take no for an answer. When she could not get her way, she contrived a situation and a story that painted Joseph in a very bad light. Once again, we see Joseph, innocent of any wrongdoing, being punished; and this time, instead of being thrown into a cistern, he is thrown in prison ("the place where the king's prisoners were confined.") We also should note that this wasn't just any prison. The king's prison was where they confined the enemies of Pharaoh; Potiphar made sure that Joseph's punishment was going to fit the crime. It also made sure that Joseph was now going to be keeping company with the Pharaoh's enemies.

What happened next to Joseph? Reading Genesis 39:20-23, we note that Joseph found "favor in the eyes of the prison warden." The warden was so impressed by Joseph that he put him "in charge of all those held in the prison." Can you believe it?! No matter his circumstance, Joseph was succeeding and being put in leadership positions, both at Potiphar's house as well as in the king's prison.

Respond to the following:

1. Why was Joseph so successful in spite of his circumstances? (See Gen. 39:2, 3, 5, 21 and 23)

2. We know how the story will end, that eventually Joseph will be placed in charge of all of Egypt by the pharaoh in order to save Egypt's people from starvation. Looking back over the life of Joseph up to his point in prison, what signs have we seen that God is preparing Joseph for this great responsibility?
 - a. Genesis 37:1-10

 - b. Genesis 37:14

 - c. Genesis 39:6

 - d. Genesis 39:9

 - e. Genesis 39:22-23

Everything God had brought about in Joseph's life was leading up to Joseph becoming the ruler God planned and the stage was set for Joseph to use those gifts, abilities, talents, and his God-honoring character to serve God—and through God to become a blessing to the Egyptians in their great time of need. Joseph was not aware of any of this; he was simply going through each day honoring God through his work and his actions. Things were about to change—bring on the prison dreamers.

The takeaway from this lesson: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)

What is God preparing you to do today?

In Christ,

Wes