

Genesis 39 • Joseph & the Work of Discipline

Introduction

Joseph, Moses & David share something in common in that God planned for them to be great rulers, but they had to be trained up not according to the world's ways but God's. Joseph's father Jacob had tried to spare Joseph from the responsibilities of work and treat him special, but God knew Joseph could never be the kind of ruler God wanted him to be until Joseph first learned to be a servant. God used a series of three types of discipline in Joseph's life to prepare him to become the second ruler over all of Egypt, but according to God's requirements that His leaders have a servant's heart.

¹Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there. ²The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. ³Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. ⁵It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD'S blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. ⁶So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. ⁷It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."

⁸But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. ⁹There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this

[Read v.1-6a]

Q: Why was such a fuss made over the "varicolored tunic" (Gen. 37:3) which Joseph's father had given him?

A: It was a visible sign of rank and privilege, that although he was one of the youngest of all of Jacob's sons, special attention was lavished upon him over the others.

Q: So how would his former appearance contrast quite differently than now?

A: In effect Joseph exchanged his favored coat for a common servant's attire.

Q: Why was such a fuss made over Joseph's dream? (Gen. 37:5)

A: It's meaning revealed that Joseph would become greater than all the rest and that they would serve him.

Q: So how is his present circumstances quite a contrast to his dream?

A: Instead of being served, he is serving.

Point: God not only forced Joseph to learn how to work, but imposed upon him the lessons of humility and the importance of obeying orders. We can never demand from others what we ourselves are not prepared to do personally.

*You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,
1 Peter 5:5-6*

Application: Through the discipline of service Joseph was able to prove himself faithful in the small things so that God could promote him to greater things.

[Read v.6b-18]

Q: What is the stark contrast between Joseph and his master's wife when it comes to their earthly master?

A: The woman cared not for maintaining a faithful relationship, but Joseph did.

Q: What is the stark contrast between Joseph and his master's wife when it comes to their heavenly master?

A: The woman cared only about living to please herself, Joseph lived to please the Lord.

Luke 39 • Joseph & the Work of Discipline, Page 1 of 3

great evil and sin against God?”¹⁰ As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her.

¹¹Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. ¹²She caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me!” And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. ¹³When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, ¹⁴she called to the men of her household and said to them, “See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. ¹⁵When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside.” ¹⁶So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. ¹⁷Then she spoke to him with these words, “The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; ¹⁸and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside.”

¹⁹Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, “This is what your slave did to me,” his anger burned. ²⁰So Joseph’s master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail. ²¹But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. ²²The chief jailer committed to Joseph’s charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it. ²³The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph’s charge because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper.

Point: Faithfulness in earthly relationships is always directly tied to the quality of our faithfulness in spiritual relationships. Biblically we can never claim to love God if we don’t love others. We can never be faithful in our most important relationship with Christ if we’re unfaithful in the course of our earthly relationships with others.

Q: So how would you characterize this test?

A: If Joseph could not control himself, he would never be able to control others. If he could not control others as a servant, he would never be able to control others as a ruler.

Q: How did Joseph pass this test?

A: He lived to please God, specifically making no provision for the flesh.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

Romans 13:14

*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.*

Proverbs 16:32

Application: As the Puritan preacher said, Joseph lost his coat but he kept his character. When people fail to learn the discipline of self-control they find themselves often placed in the background, unable to be used fully by God.

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

[Read v.19-23]

Q: Joseph was obviously in control of his appetites, for he avoided committing sin when there was opportunity. What else is implied as being under Joseph’s control by the manner in which Joseph responded to the false charges against him?

A: Joseph does not appear to argue with anyone about the charges. Realizing the situation for what it is, Joseph’s spiritual discipline extends to being able to control his tongue.

Point: It’s worth noting that the righteous role models such as Joseph throughout all of Scripture have the sense that they’re not serving others but actually serving God. Likewise they have the sense that when hardship comes even in unjust circumstances that God is still sovereign and in control.

Q: So what actually happens to Joseph from a career point of view?

A: Whereas Joseph was overseeing a very large household, he is now actually taking on a much greater responsibility in overseeing an entire prison. God is actually grooming him for greater and greater responsibility. It’s an intermediate step toward ruling an entire kingdom.

Luke 39 • Joseph & the Work of Discipline, Page 2 of 3

Q: Now how do we know for sure that this was all a test from God? Are we reading too much into the text?

A: Actually it's confirmed in Scripture.

*He sent a man before them,
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
They afflicted his feet with fetters,
He himself was laid in irons;
Until the time that his word came to pass,
The word of the LORD tested him.
The king sent and released him,
The ruler of peoples, and set him free.
Psalm 105:17-20*

Point: *The discipline of suffering put iron in Joseph's soul, helping to make the complete man that God wanted him to be. People who avoid suffering have a hard time developing the kind of character God desires.*

Q: Obviously suffering is never enjoyable, but what might be the important lessons learned from it?

1. First and foremost complete spiritual character. "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1:2-4)
2. Second, a deeper faith in God's Word. "so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." (Hebrews 6:12)

Q: What do we know spiritual suffering to eventually turn into?

A: Just as in the case of Joseph, Moses, David, and Christ Himself, God one day turns it into glory.

Application: *What we go through is not just discipline to achieve a right personal relationship with God, but to accomplish His works in the lives of all those around us. Suffering is never actually just about "me".*

Overall Application

How are these things at work/have been at work/still need to work in your life:

- *The discipline of service (v. 1-6)*
- *The discipline of self-control (v. 7-18)*
- *The discipline of suffering (v. 19-23)*

In working with others in the body of Christ, how well do you consider how these works are taking place in others' lives? Do you realize that if you recognize where someone is spiritually along this process that you may best know how to pray for and encourage them?