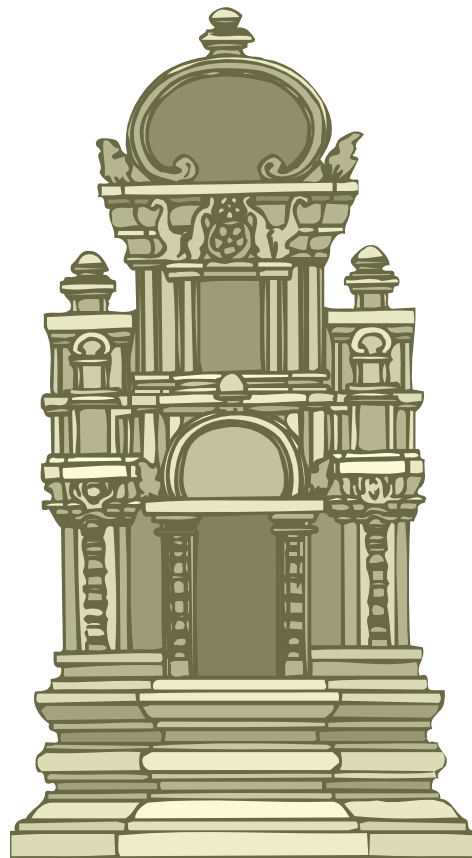


Pits, Prisons and Palaces



Principles of Christian Living from the Life of Joseph

By Rev. Jon Byler

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PART ONE: BACKGROUND

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE LIFE OF JOSEPH.

A. Introduction to Genesis.

1. Genesis, the book of beginnings.

The name Genesis, from the Greek *geneseos*, means Birth or history of origin. In the Hebrew, the book is called *bereshith* meaning, in the beginning. It is the book of the Bible that is concerned with the beginning of things from creation to the dealings of God with man.

The book of Genesis sets the stage for the rest of the O.T. and even the N.T. It is here that we learn how God created the world thru the power of his Word. Here we can read about the establishment of the first home and we learn much about God's original intention for mankind. We also learn in Genesis of the origin of sin and learn how it affected the creation of God.

Here in Genesis we learn also about the beginnings of God's dealings with man. We learn of the necessity of a blood sacrifice, we learn about God's desire to establish covenants with man, we see him beginning to call out a people for himself. In fact the first 11 chapters of the book deal with God's interaction with all mankind; from chapter 12 the focus narrows to the establishment of what would eventually become the Jewish nation. God's plan is always larger than the Jewish nation but his dealings with the Jewish people forms the backbone of the Bible.

The book of Genesis was written by Moses, the leader of God's people during the time of the exodus. He probably wrote it, along with the other first 5 books of the Bible, while they wandered about in the wilderness.

B. Why the life of Joseph?

Why should we look specifically at the life of Joseph? First of all he is a significant character in the book of Genesis. Of the 50 chapters in Genesis, fully 13 (over 1/4) are devoted to his life story.

The story of Joseph is also one of my favorite Bible stories. The story of Joseph is full of suspense, irony, colorful drama and intense emotion. I cannot read the story of Joseph without shedding tears as I place myself in the shoes of Joseph and his family.

The life of Joseph is also a picture of the Lord Jesus. Joseph, like Jesus, was loved by his father but rejected by his brothers, plotted against, sold for silver, suffered unjustly, and finally became the savior of his people.

Joseph's story is a story that everyone can benefit from. The smallest children will love the story and older ones will learn tremendous lessons from his life.

In fact this is the primary reason that I love the life of Joseph: His life is intensely practical and filled with excellent instruction on so many areas of our lives. We will discuss family favoritism, the nature of sin, our response to life's bad

situations, our attitudes towards work, dealing with temptations, healing the hurts from the past, the importance of a clear conscience, the Christians emotions and the sovereignty of God in our lives.

As we go thru the life of Joseph we will see 10 important principles of Christian Life. These are principles that will form the framework of this study.

C. Joseph's family history.

Let's look at Joseph's family history.

1. His family tree.

We can begin the story of Joseph's life by going back in history to **ABRAHAM**, the father of the Jews. It was Abraham whom God called to leave his family and journey to a far place. God gave Abraham his covenant (agreement) and promised to bless him and all nations of the world. (12:1-3). Furthermore, God promised Abraham many descendants (15:5) and finally a son (17:16) thru Sarah. Another son, **Ishmael**, was born thru a maidservant, Hagar but this was not the promised child. Finally, to Abraham was born a firstborn son, **Isaac** (21:1-3). Isaac was the son who was nearly offered as a sacrifice before God provided the lamb. (ch. 22). After the death of his mother Isaac was married to **Rebekah**, his father's grandniece (Study note on 24:15). To them were born twins, **Jacob and Esau**. These were the two who had the issue of the birthright and then by trickery and deception Jacob stole the birthright blessing from his older brother. He fled to his mothers relatives far away. There he wanted to marry **Rachel** but was tricked instead on his wedding day to marry her sister **Leah**. He did not love Leah as he did Rachel but Leah began to bear children to him while Rachel was childless. At long last Rachel had a son, called **Joseph**. Her second born was **Benjamin**. These two were special sons to Jacob. In all Leah had 6 sons, her maidservant (Zilpah) had 2, Rachels maidservant (Bilhah) had 2 also. So these were the 12 sons of Jacob. Jacob returned to the land of Canaan after acquiring these wives and sons.

Jacobs name was changed to Israel and thus we have the 12 tribes of Israel. (Levi was not counted as a tribe and Joseph's position was taken by his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh to make 12). So Joseph was the great-grandson of Abraham.

2. His family character.

We usually think of Biblical characters and families as perfect. But this one was certainly **not!** As I look at the family of Joseph I see all kinds of wickedness and sin.

Joseph was born into a family full of **lying, jealousy, treachery, deception, cheating, scheming, divination, superstition, incest, idol worship, polygamy, prostitution, and murderers**. (See Gen. 31:35; 30:1; 34:1-31; 31:20; 27:5-10; 30:37-43; 31:19; 38:15-18; 34:25; 30:27; 29:28, 30; 25:28; 35:22 for specific examples of these sins.) What a family! Joseph's father was known as a schemer; in fact his name, Jacob, means he deceives (25:26). He cheated, lied, deceived his father, tried to cheat his uncle with a strange sort of magic and finally fled from him

in fear. I don't imagine that you come from a family with that kind of reputation. This leads us to our first principle of Christian life:

PRINCIPLE ONE: CHRISTIAN BACKGROUND IS SURMOUNTABLE.

This is the first exciting principle. No matter what your background, no matter what your family is like, no matter what your parents have done or are doing, no matter what sins you have committed in your past, **GOD CAN MAKE YOU INTO A GODLY MAN OR WOMAN!** Joseph rose up from this terrible family to become a mighty man of God. In fact, he is one of the few men in all of scripture who have no readily discernable faults. (Daniel, Nehemiah and Samuel are others.) God is in the business of making thieves into tithers, drunkards into deacons and prostitutes into preachers, and cheaters into choirmasters.

Does this mean that our background and family relationships do not affect us? Of course they affect us. We cannot help but be affected by those with whom we spend much of our lives. Your family, cultural, educational, and economic background will certainly affect you but the message from the life of Joseph is that you can rise above it with the grace of God!

So when the devil comes to tell you that you will never make it as a Christian because your father was a drunkard or that you will always have a problem with anger because your parents were violent, tell him about Joseph!

PART TWO: IN THE PIT

II. Joseph's early life (37:1-11)

Let us turn our attention to the biblical narrative of the life of Joseph. His story starts when he is a young man of 17 years. There are several things we can notice from this section.

A. Joseph was a favorite son. (v. 1-4)

1. He was born of a favorite wife.

Joseph was a favored son first of all because he was born of a favored wife, Rachel. (The account of his birth is found in ch. 30:22-24) This was the wife that was really loved by Jacob and Joseph was the longed for son. Rachel died while giving birth to the lastborn, Benjamin (35:16-18). Therefore, Joseph grew up without his mother. Joseph always reminded his father of his mother Rachel.

2. He was born in Jacobs's old age.

By the time Joseph was born his father was not a young man any more. He was the 11th son and v. 3 says that he was favored because he had been born to him in his old age. There was a special tenderness on the side of the father towards Joseph. In a family youngest always seem to get special treatment and certainly here it was true for Joseph who was second from the last.

3. He brought a bad report.

We also learn of the first recorded action of Joseph. While he was tending the sheep with his brothers he brought to his father a bad report. We don't know what it was and as we observe the lives of the brothers it is quite likely that whatever was reported was true! Nevertheless bad reports bring problems. The one who brings the bad report seems to gain favor with the one in authority but pays dearly in relationships with those whom he has reported. No one likes to be reported, esp. if it is by a younger person.

4. He received special status.

Joseph also received a special gift from his father, a richly ornamented robe. It is likely that this robe represented a lot of money from the father but more than that it was a visual representation of his special status. Surely it made Joseph feel important but as you can imagine it did not improve his relationships with his brothers. In fact it says in v. 4, "They hated him and could not speak a kind word to him."

B. Family favoritism

At this point it is appropriate to think about the effects of family favoritism.

1. The effects of favoritism.

a. Bitterness

We have already seen the bitterness which this favoritism produced in the brothers.

Favoritism in families is extremely dangerous and needs to be carefully guarded against. All children are very sensitive to being treated differently than his/her brothers or sisters.

b. Division

Favoritism brings division to families. It is inevitable that there would be a split between Joseph and his brothers because there was favoritism in the family. As we will soon observe the root of bitterness will grow and produce poison in the family.

c. More favoritism

Jacob (Israel) grew up in a family where there was favoritism. (25:28). He was the favored son of his mother while Esau was the favored by the father. In that family also it produced bitterness, hatred, and division. So what Jacob grew up with he passed on to his children. If you grow up in a home where there is favoritism you will be more naturally inclined to also show favoritism to your children.

Favoritism in families is deadly and we need to be on our guard against it. It is especially crucial in families such as Joseph's where not everyone has full blood relations. How can we avoid it?

2. Avoiding favoritism.

Every child has a need for approval and affirmation and we as parents need to meet that need. But we must be very careful how we speak to them. Several things can help:

a. Avoid comparisons.

It is good to praise but devastating to compare. To say, "That is a good job" or "You are a special person" is good but not, "You're my favorite son" or "You do that so much better than your brother."

b. Affirm the worth of all.

Tell each of your children that you love them. And where they have special talents or abilities you can acknowledge that but not in contrast to their siblings.

c. Strive to treat each with fairness.

Do your best to treat all your children with fairness. If you buy sweets for one and not the others it will cause problems, unless sometimes you also reverse the roles. Be sensitive in discipline that you treat them all with the same strictness, allowing for individuality. (A strong-willed child may need different discipline than a mild-mannered one but this is not an issue of favoritism.)

Learn a lesson from the life of Joseph about family favoritism.

C. Joseph's dreams. v. 5-11

1. The dreams made the family situation worse.

Another issue that set Joseph apart from his brothers was his dreams. He was already disliked by his brothers but the dreams only widened the gap between them. The dreams were clearly meant to imply that he would rule over them. The second dream even went so far as to say that even his father and mother would bow before him.

2. Truth must be spoken in love.

As we will see later these dreams were very true, but I suspect that they were not spoken in a loving way! Joseph at this time was a young boy of 17 years who had always been favored by the father. That usually produces an abrasive arrogance. Joseph didn't yet know of the truth spoken of in Eph. 4:15, to speak the truth in love. It is not only *what* we say that is very important but *how* we say it.

To think about: Is there favoritism in my family? Have I learned to speak the truth in Love?

III. Sold into slavery by his own brothers (37:12-36)

As a young man it seemed that things were going pretty well for Joseph. Sure, he had some problems with his brothers but since he was a favorite son he had a pretty smooth life. He enjoyed all the benefits his wealthy father could give to him.

But now his father sends him to go check on his brothers. As they see him coming they plotted to kill him. Murder? This is serious! It is not just a small family disagreement now. There are not talking about beating him or mocking him but killing him. What has happened to bring the brothers to the point that they were willing to kill their own brother? Weren't we just dealing with a small case of jealousy? When it comes to sin there is no small case because of the nature of sin, it is progressive.

A. The progression of sin.

1. The brothers sin was progressive.

Notice the progression of sin in these verses. This whole thing probably started in v. 2 when Joseph brought a bad report about his brothers. That planted seeds of anger in their hearts. The gift of the coat and the favoritism of the father watered that anger so that by v. 4 they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. Then in v. 8 after the dreams were reported it says, "They hated him all the more." In v. 11 it progresses to jealousy. These attitudes grew in their hearts until now in v. 18 they are plotting to commit murder. They end up selling him to the traders, not because they were afraid of killing but because of their greed for money! Finally they had to devise a lie to tell to the father to cover up their sin.

This sin was not just something that just happened on the spur of the moment, it was something that had developed over time. In fact...

2. All sin is progressive. (Rom. 1; Js. 1:14,15; Lk. 6:45; Heb. 12:15)

Sin is not content to remain passive. It grows. It is like a deadly cancer which if not treated will continue to grow until it destroys the life of the person involved. If the doctor came to you and told you that you had a small tumor on your brain would you say, “Well, since it is small I won’t worry about it?” Of course not! You would tell him, “Take it out before it grows.” Yet when we deal with sin we are tempted to just believe that it is not a big deal. Well, what’s one lustful thought...what is one little word spoken in anger...what is one small lie...? We need to recognize that sin will destroy us.

James 1:14,15 speaks of the progression of sin. James talks of desire leading to enticement, sin conceived and then death. This tells us in no uncertain terms that sin is progressive by nature, it will not stop until it destroys.

Heb. 12:15 also brings out this idea. “See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” Bitterness or any other sin can begin to grow in our lives until it causes trouble and defilement.

3. Sin must be dealt with.

God demands and expects holiness. There is no alternative. Therefore we should not allow even the smallest seed of sin to take root in our lives. As soon as we begin to allow and excuse sin in our lives we are on our way to death. Just as it did in the lives of Joseph’s brothers it will grow and produce its wicked fruit.

Song of Songs 2:15 talks about the “little foxes” that ruin the vineyards. It is the small, small things that seem insignificant that can bring disaster in our spiritual lives. That is why our thoughts are so important. The Bible says in Prov. 23:7 “as a man thinks in his heart...so is he.” (KJV, see NIV alt. reading)

To think about: Is there sin in my life that I have not dealt with? Any little foxes that are spoiling the vineyard?

B. Life in the pit. (37:23,24)

Try to imagine what it was like for Joseph as he comes toward his brothers. He has traveled approximately 100 miles (60 KM) and is hot and dusty. Maybe he is hoping that tonight since he has come they will eat roasted lamb and tell stories by the fire. He has no idea of the plot being formed against him as he comes closer and closer. Suddenly, instead of a warm handshake and water for his feet, he finds himself handled roughly, stripped of his robe and thrown into a pit.

Suddenly everything changes in Joseph’s life. His future is uncertain, his status as a favorite son is less than meaningless and he has time to do some serious thinking. We don’t know how long he was in the pit but it appears only to have been a short time before he was lifted out and sold to a group of passing merchants for 20 shekels (8 oz. or .2 Kg)

Imagine that trip to Egypt. Suddenly he was thrust into another culture, another language, different food. Not only that but now instead of being a favorite son he was a common slave. His future wasn’t looking too good!

I think that somewhere in that whole process God was shaping and molding the character of Joseph into a man of God. At this point in his life Joseph had to do some serious soul-searching; he had to ask himself some hard questions; and maybe he had to repent of his former attitudes towards his brothers. Certainly he must have cried out to God like never before in his life. Somewhere in his life there was a breaking point for in the rest of the story of his life we see a man of absolute integrity, a man of deep humility, and a man who acknowledges God in his life.

What happens to us when we feel like all of life is against us? There are times when things are not going the way we had planned, it seems like everything is a disaster; our whole world is falling apart. Our job may suddenly be terminated; we may be involved in an accident; we may lose a close family member to death; a relationship we really value suddenly turns to hatred, a project we invested a lot of time and energy into suddenly collapses.

At such times we wonder why things have happened this way and feel like saying, "This is the pits." In those kinds of times we have many emotions. We feel crushed, hurt, angry at someone or even at God, bitter, we may feel taken advantage of or have other deep responses. We may want to lash out in retaliation, take revenge or defend ourselves. How do we respond? How will Joseph respond? I believe that the foundation of our response to life's bad situations is the fact that God is in control.

D. God in control--an underlying theme. (Rom. 8:28)

One of the most beautiful lessons which we can learn from the life of Joseph is that no matter what happens-- God is in control! This is the story of Joseph's life and really, it is the story of the entire Bible; that God the Almighty One is on the throne! Many times it seems like history or our own lives are just happening by chance but the Bible tells us that God is at work in all circumstances to accomplish his will in all of it. We especially need to remind ourselves of this fact during the difficult times in our lives, the times when we are feeling like we are in the pit. We must remember that "The testing of our faith develops perseverance" (Js. 1:3) and "God disciplines those he loves." (Heb. 12:6)

Most of all we need to remember the message of Rom. 8:28, which says, "and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." It doesn't say that all things *are* good, but it says *in all things* God works for good...

We will come back to this principle again and again in the life of Joseph. We will see later how God used a variety of events to bring Joseph to power in Egypt at just the right time to save his own family. Joseph himself will realize that all the events in his life were leading up to the role he was to fulfill.

If God allowed Joseph to remain in the comfortable position of a favored son at home surely his character never would have developed as it did. This great truth is the basis of our second principle.

PRINCIPLE 2: CHRISTIAN EVENTS ARE ACCEPTABLE.

If God is in control of our lives then the events that happen to us are acceptable. We should learn to accept them and live with them. We may not have the privilege of understanding what God is doing but from the life of Joseph we should learn that he knows what he is doing. Someone has compared our lives to a tapestry. On the top side is a beautiful weaving, a marvelous work of art. But on the back side it looks like confusion, threads going in every chaotic direction, clashing colors, etc. We usually see the back side, but God is the weaver and he is looking at the design he is seeking on the front side. When we grasp this truth we will stop fighting God on everything he allows to come to us. We don't know why that disappointment has come, but we know that God is in control.

To think about: Am I able to see God's hand at work in all the events of my life? How has God used difficult experiences to shape me?

Before we go to the next section a few comments are in order from chapter 38. This is the story of one of Joseph's older brothers, Judah. It is a sad story of wickedness. In that chapter Judah loses two sons because of their sinfulness and his wife also dies. He is then involved in prostitution with his daughter-in-law, and a child is conceived from that union.

We can notice two things from that chapter. First of all, it makes a vivid contrast with the life of Joseph again reminding us of the kind of family he came from and of our first principle: Christian background is not insurmountable.

The second thing we can notice is the grace of God. Even in this wickedness God was at work. The child which was born became the ancestor of David and finally of the Lord Jesus! Jesus was called the Lion of Judah! This was the Judah!

In the genealogy of Jesus found in Mt. 1 there are only two women mentioned. One is Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah who conceived a child out of incest and deception! How remarkable that she is mentioned in the history of our Lord Jesus! The grace of God is able to bring good out of any situation and that is our second principle: Christian events are acceptable. This does not mean that these events are healthy, but that God can still work with people who make mistakes.

IV. Joseph in Potiphars house. (39:1-19) read 1-6

The last verse of chapter 36 tells that in Egypt Joseph was traded as a slave and sold to a man named Potiphar. This man was an official of Potiphar, the king of Egypt. He was an important and a wealthy man.

A. The Lord was with Joseph

Notice how many times in these verses "Lord" is mentioned; 5 times in these 6 verses.

This fact made all the difference for Joseph. It didn't matter that he was a slave in a foreign land, God was with him. In the same way God wants us to know that he is with us even in the difficult times of our lives. What a blessing it is to have God with us at all times! Dt. 31:6, reminds us that "The Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." Not only do we have what Joseph had but we have Emmanuel, God with us living in us through the Holy Spirit

of God. (Mt. 1:23, Mt. 28:20; Jn. 14:16)

As Christians we are not free from problems and the disappointments of life but we have a God who is with us! Christianity differs from all other religions in the world in that in all other religions man is seeking God; in Christianity, God is seeking man!

God wants to be with us in every area of our lives: in our jobs, in our homes, in our businesses, in our free time, at all times. Do we live our lives with a sense of his continuous presence?

B. The Christians attitude towards work.

It is also good for us to notice the way that Joseph worked and to think about our attitude towards work.

1. Joseph's example

Joseph had every reason not to do a good job. He was away from family and friends, there was no pay, there were no incentives at all to do a good job, no reason to motivate himself other than the fear of punishment. He had been unjustly sold into slavery in Egypt and had no desire to be in his position. Yet, in spite of all this, instead of grumbling and complaining, Joseph applied himself and did a good job. In fact, it appears from the response of his boss that he did even more than was required of him. As a result of his hard work and the Lords blessing, Joseph was promoted to the highest position in Potipher's household. He was responsible for everything that the master owned which was a considerable amount. As he worked there he was learning bookkeeping and management skills which the Lord would use later in life for him. His work points to a third principal:

PRINCIPLE THREE: CHRISTIAN WORK IS HONOURABLE.
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How do you think about your work? Is it a part of the curse which sin brought into the world? Many Christians feel this way and therefore they view work as simply a necessity which must be done to provide food for the family. Work is seen as something to be endured or tolerated because there is no alternative. With that attitude it is little wonder that you can find many Christians joining their workmates in complaining about their boss, caring very little about the quality of their work, relaxing when the boss is not there, and just waiting for their payment.

As Christians we should have a radically different attitude towards our work. Paul says, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him...Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward." (Col. 3:17,23,24) Whatever you do includes work! How does Paul teach us to work?

2. Pauls instruction

a. With thankfulness.

We are to give thanks for our jobs! You may not think that it is the best job, it may not pay as you would like, but we are commanded to be thankful. Many

people are looking for a job; many people are not able to provide for their families. How easily we take our jobs for granted, but we should be thankful. Are you thankful for your job?

b. Wholeheartedly.

The verse says that we should work with all your heart. To work wholeheartedly means to put every effort into your job. You should be the best workman on the job. You should work hard to improve in the areas that you are deficient. Put yourself into the job and God will bless it. It is so easy to work half heartedly; to do just enough to get by, just enough to qualify to be paid. This is especially true in jobs like government jobs where the incentive to excel is not very great. You may work at a lowly job of cleaning or cooking. Do your best and do it with all your heart!

As Christians we should be the most hard-working, most careful with our time and the most honest employees on our jobs. This is the kind of worker Joseph was. How about you?

c. As to the Lord.

This is what really makes the difference in our work. This is what will really help us to be able to work with thankfulness and wholeheartedly. **WE ARE WORKING FOR THE LORD!** Your boss is not your boss; your boss is the Lord. This is tough to apply. But think about how you would work if Jesus was really there on your job. Would you arrive late? Would you take 45 minutes for a break? Would you leave 30 minutes early? Would you do a sloppy job? Would you leave some work undone, thinking no one will notice? Of course not! Well, Jesus is on your job. He is there all the time, watching and observing your work. Be faithful.

d. Looking to the future reward.

The final thing these verses teach us is that there is a future reward. Yes, it is good that we get paid here and now, that is a good reward. But really we should be anticipating that day when the Lord will come down and tell us, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Our motivation for doing a good job should come from our expectation of a future reward.

(Other references applicable to the Christian and work: Eph. 6:5-9; 1 Cor. 4:12, 1 Th. 4:11, 5:12, 2 Thes. 3:10; 1 Tim. 6:1,2)

To think about: What is your attitude towards work? Are you obeying this scripture?

3. The Lord's blessing (Gen. 39:5)

Notice that the Lord blessed Joseph's pagan employer! God was with Joseph and he brought blessing to the home of his employer. Let me suggest that God wants to do the same through you! No matter how ungodly your employer is, you can be a blessing to him/her. Have you prayed for your boss lately, not that he will be transferred, but for God's blessing upon him? God blessed Potiphar so much

that he recognized that God had blessed him thru Joseph. This is a powerful testimony!

But lest we feel that it is just our own effort which can bring us success in the working place notice also from this passage that it is the Lord who brings success. (see v. 3). We may be tempted to feel that it is because of our talent, our training, or our abilities that God is blessing us, but the life of Joseph teaches us that it is the Lord who brings success. Yes, we have a part to play, but remember the words of Ps. 127:1, “Unless the Lord builds the house its builders labor in vain.”

To think about: Am I a blessing to my employer?

C. The Christian and Temptation (vs. 6b-15)

Things were going well for Joseph. In spite of being a slave he was a leader in the household of Potiphar. He was enjoying the blessing of the Lord. Things seemed to be working out well for Joseph. But Joseph was about to face a very serious test in his life, a temptation designed by the evil one to destroy him and God’s plan for his life.

We can have similar times in our own lives. We are on top of things and all is well. We feel totally at peace. During those times, beware! There is a very real danger of pride in such a situation and a temptation to relax spiritually. The devil loves to take advantage of such an opportunity. “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Cor. 10:12) What does the Bible teach about temptation?

1. Temptation and sin (Heb. 4:15, Js. 1:13-15)

First, what is the relationship between temptation and sin? Does the presence of a temptation in my life mean that I have sinned? The Bible clearly teaches that it is *not* a sin to be tempted. Heb. 4:15 says of Jesus, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, --yet was without sin.” (Heb. 2:18 adds that he suffered when he was tempted.) Mt. 4:1-11 gives one account of when Jesus was tempted.

SIN COMES ONLY WHEN WE *YIELD* TO THE TEMPTATION. We can expect temptations to come as a normal part of this life. We should not allow Satan to make us feel guilty because we are tempted; rather, we should learn how to overcome temptation.

2. Temptation and testing (Js. 1:13-15)

There is also a difference between temptation and testing. The Bible tells us that God cannot *tempt* (Js. 1:13), but that he allows *testing* to come to us. (In Gen. 22:1 some versions say that God tempted Abraham; however, a better translation is tested.) The difference between temptation and testing lies in the origin and purpose of the event. Temptations come from the devil and his only plan is to destroy us with them. God allows tests to come to us to strengthen our faith and build our character. Sometimes in our lives the same situation can be a temptation from the

devil but a test from God. God can even turn a bad situation into good in the life of a believer. (See Rom. 8:28 and Js. 1:2-3)

Another thing we need to realize concerning temptation is that God controls all temptations that come our way. “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” (1 Cor. 10:13) This gives us confidence knowing that God will look at each temptation and before he will allow it to come to us it must pass his test! We should not say, “This temptation is too strong for me.” God promises that we will never face one which is too strong for us.

With that foundation, let us look more closely at the temptation of Joseph.

3. The extent of Joseph’s temptation.

Was the temptation that Joseph faced an easy test? No, it was a very difficult one. There were at least four factors which made it a severe test.

a. He was away from home.

Recognize the situation that Joseph was in during the time of this temptation. He was far away from home in a strange land. The food was funny, the language was different and there were no friends around that knew him or his family. He was all alone. There was no human accountability for Joseph. There was no Grandmother there, no brothers, no sisters, no father, no pastor. No one was there to tell him, “Remember our family name.” Being away from home makes temptation very difficult. I once had a sign in my office that said, “Character is revealed by what I do in secret.” When we are around church members it is easy for us to do what is right but what about when you are in a city far from home and no one knows you?

b. The temptation was sexual.

He was still a young man. By this time he was probably in his 20s since he spent a total of 13 years in slavery in Potiphar’s house and in prison. He had a normal sexual drive. He had never been married and had little hope of being married as a slave. He came from a family that was guilty of many sexual sins. The temptation to sin sexually is one of the strongest that a young person can have and one of the most difficult over which to attain victory.

c. The temptation was from an authority.

This temptation was not from one of the workers under Joseph. It was from someone above him, the wife of his boss. When someone above us tells us to do wrong we can always use the excuse, “Well, I was told to do it” and we pass the blame to the other person.

Furthermore, for Joseph to refuse this request from the wife of his boss was a serious decision. He could have thought, “If I just please her, she will always defend me to her husband and my way will be smooth.”

d. The temptation was repeated daily.

This was not a one-time temptation, it was repeated daily. The story says that she spoke to Joseph Day after day. This is like a dripping faucet; it can really wear you out. Sometimes it is easy to say no the first time but when the temptation continues to come to you day after day it can become more and more difficult to resist.

All these factors combined to make this a huge temptation for Joseph. How could he overcome such a temptation like he did? What was the secret of his success?

3. Joseph's keys to success

a. He recognized the nature of sin (v.9)

The first key to Joseph's success in dealing with temptation is that he recognized the nature of sin. In v. 9 Joseph says, "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" Joseph realized that to sleep with this woman was not a personal issue for himself; it was not even an issue with the woman or with her husband, it was an issue with God himself.

All sin is ultimately against God. It is not just against ourselves or the other person involved; sin is against a holy and a righteous God. Satan would like for you to think that the issues involved in that particular sin are not very great, but when you realize that it is against God it is a serious issue.

David recognized this truth in Ps. 51:4, "Against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." But David realized this only *after* he had sinned; Joseph recognized it *before* he sinned.

This factor is what makes us able to withstand sin even when we are alone. Because all sin is against God it doesn't matter the circumstances we are in. Joseph is here to tell us that it doesn't matter where we are at, what language we are speaking, what others are doing around us- a lie is a lie, a bribe is a bribe, dishonesty is dishonesty, impurity is impurity, and compromise is compromise because all sin is against God.

b. He refused. (v. 8)

The Bible says that he "Refused". This is a very strong word--and very powerful! Learn to say "NO." It will take a deliberate decision for you to refuse to sin. You will have to determine in your heart that you will not cheat, you will wait until marriage for sex, or that you will not bribe. Joseph had to make a commitment to remain pure. He made a deliberate and conscious decision that he would not compromise his convictions. His integrity did not just come to him automatically. It took effort, it took a refusal

Job, said, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl." (Job 31:1). Job was concerned about his integrity and he made a conscious commitment concerning his eyes and thoughts. Integrity takes effort.

2 Pet. 3:16 says, "Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him." Purity does not just happen, it takes effort. We must work at it with the grace of God."

Have you made a resolution that you will be a person of integrity?

c. He made a verbal witness (vs. 8,9)

Not only did Joseph refuse, his refusal was verbal. He opened his mouth to say a firm, “No.” He was not muttering under his breath; he was not just thinking no, he put words in his mouth.

He also explained why he was saying no. He gave that lady a testimony. First there was the issue of his faithfulness to his boss and then there was the issue of his faithfulness to his heavenly boss! He explained why he refused.

It is very important that we give others the reason for our actions. Don’t just say, “I don’t drink because I’m saved.” Say, “I don’t drink because I am saved and I want to honor God with my body.” Or, “I’ve given my life to Jesus Christ and I can’t tell a lie.”

Nothing will strengthen your Christian life like a verbal witness; to publicly identify yourself with Jesus Christ. When you do this half of the battle will be won already. When people hear from your mouth why you are taking a certain action they will watch you carefully and this in itself will be an incentive to you to do what is right.

The Bible tells us in Rev. 12:11, “They overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony.”

d. He avoided (v. 10)

Not only did Joseph recognize the nature of sin, refused, and made a verbal witness, he also avoided the temptation. The text tells us in v. 10 that he “refused even to be with her.” Joseph made a deliberate attempt to stay away from the lady that was the source of his temptation. He may not have been able to completely avoid her in the course of his duties, but he refused to even be in her presence more than absolutely necessary.

If we are to be successful in dealing with temptations, we must learn to avoid danger zones. There are areas in which we will feel especially vulnerable to an attack of the evil one and then we need to remove ourselves from the source of the temptation. It may be a **place**, like a magazine rack or a corner near a bar where you used to drink. It may be a **person** as was the case with Joseph. It may be a certain time of the day or the week when you feel a temptation more strongly. It may be when you are all alone in a certain place. We need to avoid the areas of temptation in our lives. A person who is tempted to drink should not stand outside of a bar to see how strong his faith is! If you are tempted to look at magazines with evil pictures, avoid the magazine rack!

Prov. 7:6-27 gives the account of a young man who fell into sexual sin. His fall begins because he was, “going down her street near her corner...at twilight, as the day was fading.” (vs. 8-9) He was in the wrong *place* at the wrong *time*. He was not avoiding temptation; he was walking right into it.

Think about what the devil uses to tempt you and then make a deliberate effort to avoid that person or place.

e. He fled (v. 12)

The temptation continued and finally it was time for a showdown. The woman tried to force Joseph to sin with her. What did Joseph do at this point? Did

he ask for time to give a testimony? Did he try to reason with her? Did he ask for more time? No, did the most spiritual thing he could have done, RUN!

We don't know if perhaps Joseph felt himself weakening or if he just realized that this woman was very determined, but he knew that the time had come for him to get out of that place.

There are times in our lives when we need to stand firm and resist a temptation through our verbal witness but there are also times to flee! It may not seem spiritual to run away but the Bible says in 2 Tim. 2:22, "Flee the evil desires of youth,..." (See also 1 Tim. 6:11) We need God's wisdom to know when to stand and fight and when to fight by running.

The way that Joseph overcame such a strong temptation teaches us our fourth principle:

PRINCIPLE 4: CHRISTIAN VICTORY IS POSSIBLE!
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Let Joseph's life encourage us that no matter what, we can have victory! No matter how strong the temptation, we can overcome. We are more than conquerors. (Rom. 8:37)

To think about: With what temptations do I struggle? How can I use the principles from the life of Joseph to overcome this temptation?

Before we leave this time of Joseph's life let's notice a couple of other things. First of all the results of victory. I wish that I could tell you that everything worked out fine in this time of Joseph's life, that when the husband came home he understood what Joseph had done. But integrity and purity will often be misunderstood. Joseph's fleeing cost him dearly; he was falsely accused and thrown into prison. The world would look at the results and say it is not worth it, but the Bible says that it is better to lose a part of our bodies than to go to hell. (Mt. 5:29-30. Interestingly this is also related to lust, a sexual sin.)

When Joseph refused to go to bed with his master's wife he did not know what the outcome would be. He did not know that he would lose his job and be thrown into prison. But one thing he did know and that is that his integrity rested on his faith in God and he was willing to die rather than compromise. He was willing to pay the price whatever it might be.

He was misunderstood. When we choose to live a life of integrity, we may end up in prison like Joseph did. Things may be tough for us at home. Your older brother or sister may not understand. Our fellow classmates may laugh at us. The boy you like may quit you when you refuse to go to bed with him. People will test you and you will be misunderstood.

But Joseph is telling us today that it is possible to live for God. It is possible to live a life of victory. As we will see in a moment God continued to bless Joseph and finally rewarded him for his faithfulness but at the time of this temptation Joseph only did what was right. The outcome he left in the hands of God.

Another area that Joseph's life brings out is the area of our sexuality. God created Joseph and all of us as sexual beings. Many people feel that to have sexual

desire is wrong. However, God created Joseph, and each of us, as sexual beings. Sexual desires are simply an evidence of God's creation and in themselves are not sinful. God created sexuality and it is good when experienced within God's plan. However, they have the potential to be misused if we do not follow God's plan for them. Satan tries to destroy what God intended to be a beautiful thing. Like fire, sexuality has the potential for good but also the potential to destroy. A God-given desire quickly becomes lust when channeled in the wrong direction. Our sexual desires need to be controlled by the Spirit of God so that they are a positive force in our lives as God intended them to be.

Young people especially face struggle with sexual desire. It is helpful to realize that the sexual desire is a part of being human and it is a blessing of God. When faced with sexual temptations you can tell God, "Thank you for creating me as a sexual being with normal desires. Help me to channel them in the way you intended for them to be used. Help me to keep my thoughts and actions pure and holy as I wait for your timing for a life partner."

Part Three: In Prison

V. JOSEPH IN PRISON (39:20-40:23)

Once again Joseph loses his coat and is unjustly thrown into confinement, this time in the king's prison. Imagine the crush of disappointment which came Joseph's way. Just when everything finally seemed to be working out, he is thrown into prison; a second major disappointment for Joseph.

A. The Lord was with him

What a difference these words make, "But...the Lord was with him." By all external appearances God had deserted Joseph but we cannot look at only the external. In good times the Lord is there; in bad times he is still there.

In fact, we know that it was while Joseph was in prison that he would come in contact with the one who would help him to enter the king's palace. He didn't know this of course at the time, but we need to remind ourselves again that when things look dark, God is still in control.

B. Joseph's attitude

Notice Joseph's attitude in prison. He had been rejected by his brothers, sold into slavery and put in a very difficult position in Potiphar's house. Yet he worked hard and tried to do what was right. He took a stand for his beliefs and ended up in prison! What would you do in a similar situation? Most likely you wouldn't be very happy. You would wonder if it was worth all the hard work. And certainly you would think twice about working hard again.

The Bible doesn't tell us exactly what Joseph's response was. But from the reaction of the warden of the prison we can make some strong assumptions. He didn't just sit around and feel sorry for himself, he got up and went to work. He must have done more than his share of the work because he was recognized by the warden as an outstanding man worthy of his trust. Joseph received another promotion and became the chief prisoner! What a powerful testimony Joseph gives us about the power of a positive attitude.

To think about: What is your attitude when you are faced with difficulties? Even when things are normal, do you look on the positive side of life or the negative? Your attitude is your choice.

C. The prisoners dreams (40:6-8)

Into Joseph's prison come two men, servants of the king. These men, a former cupbearer and a baker, through the providence of God come under the care of Joseph. Also in God's providence and timing they both had significant dreams. Let's notice a couple of things from this account.

1. Joseph's alertness towards people.

Joseph was an alert worker. It says in v. 6 that Joseph noticed that they were both dejected. This tells us that Joseph was alert to the needs of people with whom

he came in contact. He recognized a need and he took the opportunity to minister to their needs.

We also need to develop alertness to the needs of those around us. How many times are coworkers, fellow-students, or neighbors showing signs of stress or worry and we don't seem to notice. Or maybe we notice but feel that it is none of our business? We need to ask God to help us recognize needs in the faces of those around us. A simple question such as the one Joseph asked, "Why are your faces so downcast?" may open up a door for God to minister.

To think about: Do I notice the needs of people around me?

2. Joseph's awareness towards God.

Joseph was sensitive towards God; he was aware of God's presence in his life. He recognized that the interpretations belong to God. Joseph had by this time in his life developed a real awareness of the presence of God, the reality of God and the power of God.

D. The role of dreams.

Dreams play a significant role in the story of Joseph. He had dreams which he shared with his brothers; now there are the dreams of the butler and the baker and soon there will be the dream of Pharaoh. In his youth his dreams got him into trouble; now his ability to interpret dreams will get him out of trouble!

In the Egyptian culture dreams carried special significance and a high value was placed on the correct interpretation of dreams. The Egyptians has special manuals to assist in the interpretation of dreams.

The prophet Joel predicted that in the last days one of the signs of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit would be "Your old men will dream dreams." (Joel 2:28) Even today dreams can be used of God to warn of coming events or to give a certain message from God. Interestingly however, there are no dreams recorded in the Bible *after* the prophecy of Joel quoted in Acts 2:17! The only mention of a dream after that is in Jude 8 where the false prophets are accused of being dreamers. This should lead to caution with dreams. What can we do when we have a dream that we feel is significant?

1. Test it with the Word

All dreams should be tested with the word of God, just as prophecy is to be tested. Any dream that is not in agreement with the word of God should be rejected.

2. Move cautiously

Wisdom should be exercised when taking action on a dream. When God reveals something to a person through a dream they should pray for discernment before sharing it with anyone. There could be different reasons that the Lord has revealed something to a person. Particularly when there is a sin involved I have seen much destruction happen when a person too quickly begins to tell others. They might have a dream of the pastor with a snake and they start spreading the word that the pastor has been guilty of sexual sin. Before the truth can be established the

damage has been done. If a dream involves someone in sin, go to that person as you are instructed to do in Mt. 18:15-20. Perhaps God just wants you to pray about it and intercede on behalf of the situation. Recognize that dreams, like any supernatural gift, comes from God (Js. 1:17) and must be used wisely.

E. Times of hope...disappointment

Joseph, with God's help correctly interpreted the dreams of the king's officials. As he predicted the cup bearer was restored to his former position with the king. It was a time of hope for Joseph. Surely, for the first few days after the cup bearer left he was singing! Now, at last, the way will open for him to be released from the prison. I can imagine his thoughts the first week; *Surely it will be any time now. Maybe the cupbearer is waiting to find a good opportunity to speak to the king, I know that they are busy now, but tomorrow...* But as the days slowly changed to weeks and the weeks to months Joseph finally had to realize that his hope was not going to materialize. Verse 23 says very simply and very painfully, "The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him." How often when we put our hope in man we will be sorely disappointed.

Recognize that God was still in control. As badly as Joseph wanted out of the prison at this time what would have happened if he would have been released? He would never have made it to the palace!

F. Times of testing

The first verse of chapter 41 says that two years passed after the cupbearer was released. Imagine Joseph spending two more long years of imprisonment in that place! By now he was 28-30 years old, no longer a young man of 17. Surely he must have wondered what in the world God was doing with his life. What about those dreams? It was a time of testing for Joseph, a time of waiting, a time of character shaping that teaches us our fifth principle:

PRINCIPLE 5: CHRISTIAN CHARACTER IS MOLDABLE.
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Moldable is defined as "able to be shaped, bent or drawn out as by hammer or pressure." Times of testing are not pleasant but they are very necessary in our lives. Just as gold is refined and purified by being burned, so our Christian character is shaped into the image of Christ through times of testing. James 1:3-4 says, "because you know that he testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

All these years were a time of testing for Joseph, a time of waiting upon God. God was almost finished with this test but Joseph couldn't know how much longer it was to last. Also in our lives we may not be able to see what God is doing, but know that his testing is working for our good. He is shaping our character. We can't develop patience without frustrations; we cannot develop love without some conflicts, and we can't develop peace without some storms. This is why James tells us to consider it "pure joy" when we face these trials (Js. 1:2). This principle is

related to our second one, Christian events are acceptable. God uses the events of our lives to shape the character of our lives.

To think about: What areas of my character are being shaped by God? Am I allowing him to do his work?

Part Four: In the Palace

VI. JOSEPH IN THE PALACE (41)

A. Joseph called out of prison to interpret dreams.

After what must have seemed like a long, long time Joseph is going about his duties one day when someone comes to the prison looking for a Hebrew called Joseph! Imagine the scene as Joseph hears that call. Imagine his thoughts as he is quickly prepared to go into the presence of the king. He was shaved (Egyptians were usually shaved while the Hebrews weren't) and given new clothes. He leaves prison behind and soon he is standing in the presence of the mighty king of Egypt, Pharaoh.

Pharaoh welcomes Joseph and tells him that he has heard that Joseph is able to interpret dreams. Joseph's response is significant, "I cannot, but God can!" He is no longer a self confident young man, but has developed a deep confidence in God.

Pharaoh tells Joseph of the dream which has disturbed him. Joseph in turn gives Pharaoh the correct interpretation. God is warning Pharaoh of coming events in Egypt. There will be 7 years of plenty followed by 7 years of famine.

Not only did Joseph interpret the dream but he offers Pharaoh a very good plan for organizing the country (vs.33-36). His plan was to appoint someone to be in charge of storing grain during the years of plenty so that it could be distributed during the years of famine.

B. Joseph promoted to second in command.

When the king sees how God has revealed to Joseph the interpretation of the dreams and the wisdom of the plan which Joseph has, he decides that there is no one more suited for the job than Joseph.

In a moment, Joseph is promoted to the second highest position in the land. He is given a special ring, royal robes, a special chariot and authority over the whole nation. He rides forth in a chariot with people shouting before him. What a promotion, from the prison to the palace in one day! From prisoner to prime minister overnight!

God has a way of preparing people for promotions. When we think about Joseph's life we can realize that the 17 year old favorite son was not ready to lead a nation but the 30 year old Joseph was well equipped. During his time in Potiphar's house Joseph received training in management, finances, administration and bookkeeping which he now needed in leading Egypt. In the prison these skills were further sharpened and he developed more sensitivity to the needs of people. He learned the discipline of hard work and he knew the meaning of suffering. Moreover during those 13 years, he learned to depend on God rather than his favored position; he learned to overcome temptation; and he learned perseverance. His character was molded in testing; refined in temptation and purified by waiting. God needed a leader and he knew that Joseph needed to go thru all these things as preparation. Men promote those who are nice; God promotes those who have paid the price!

Joseph wore a robe of *sonship* as a young man but it was ripped away from him. For the next 13 years he had to learn to wear the robe of *service* before he was qualified to wear the robe of *seniority*. In a like manner Jesus laid down his position as a son; humbled himself to serve and finally was exalted and given the name above every name.

Joseph's promotion leads us to our sixth principle:

PRINCIPLE SIX: CHRISTIAN PROMOTION IS DESIRABLE

God's promotions are always good and are done at the right time. 1 Tim. 3:1 says that it is good to desire the work of leading God's people. There is nothing wrong with seeking a promotion but we must always await God's timing to shape and mold our lives. Many desire to be in a great position but are not willing to pay the price. For Joseph it was 13 years in slavery; for Moses it was 40 years in the wilderness; for Paul, three years in the desert. What it will take for you and I only God knows! Christian promotion is good, but it will be done in God's way and in his time.

To think about: Has God done his work in my life to prepare me for promotion or am I seeking promotion in my own strength?

C. The rewards of integrity.

There is a characteristic of Joseph's life that we would do well to note, INTEGRITY. Integrity can be defined as a lifestyle of unchanging purity and holiness. It is a consistently good and honest lifestyle. Joseph exemplifies this characteristic which is so much missing in our world today. There are so many who will change under stress; many who are good when around the right people, but who will do wrong if they are with the wrong people. People of integrity are consistent in doing good. Joseph was such a man. We have already seen how he dealt with temptation in a situation which would have ruined a lesser man. He was a man of principles and he lived them out. He was willing even to be thrown into prison rather than compromise his integrity.

Notice what happened to Joseph as a result of his integrity. As we observed him in Potiphar's house he was living an honest and upright life, he was working hard and respecting his boss and it brought blessing.

"He prospered (2)...the Lord gave success (3)...the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian (5)...the Lord gave him success in whatever he did." (23) And even in prison God gave him favor. V.21 says, he (God) showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. And in v. 23, "The Lord...gave him success in whatever he did."

God honors integrity. 1 Chron. 29:17 says, "God is pleased with integrity." God loves to look down and see that you are living a life that is pleasing to him and he will honor it. Sometimes this will be in the form of a physical blessing and at other times it will be a spiritual blessing.

Have you ever noticed that many of the people who live ungodly lives always seem to have troubles? The money that they have earned dishonestly or by bribing seems to melt away. The favors won by lying seem to be empty. They may have

material possession but are without peace. Why? Their lives are not blessed by God.

Notice that in Joseph's life he was successful but that did not always mean that everything was going good for him. He was even successful in prison! God's standard of success will be different than that of the world, but integrity will always bring blessing.

Do you want the blessing of God to rest on your life? Live a life of integrity as Joseph did.

To think about: Is there an area of your life in which you have not walked in integrity? What do you need to do to make it right?

D. The sons of Joseph.

Joseph was now in charge of all of Egypt and began to carry out his plan to store grain. It involved great leadership to collect and store this vast amount of grain.

As a part of his job benefits Joseph was provided with an Egyptian wife! (Again purity pays off! As a slave he had no hope of marriage. As a prisoner he must have given up on marriage. But now a wife is provided for him. He didn't even have to pay dowry!) Two sons were born from their relationship and their names, especially the first one, are significant.

The firstborn son of Joseph was named Manasseh, Hebrew for "forget" since he says in 41:51, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my fathers household."

At first glance it seems like at this point Joseph has really been healed from the past experiences of his life and is ready to move on. But I believe a closer look reveals more. First of all he still gives his sons Hebrew names, indicating that he has not forgotten that he is not an Egyptian but a Hebrew. He still remembers his family identity.

Secondly, the name Manasseh means to forget. But why name a child something you have forgotten? Perhaps Joseph was trying desperately to forget all the pain of his family life, trying to pretend that it all didn't happen but surely he could not forget completely.

Finally, why didn't Joseph take a few months during those years and go home to see his family? Surely, in his position of authority, he could have been excused for enough time to make the journey. He could have seen his father and told his family that he was still alive. I believe that the name Manassah gives us a clue. Joseph was trying to forget all the pain of the past. His past brought back painful memories of rejection and abuse. To return home would bring all that pain to the surface again. It was more than he wanted to think about. Yet, every time he called his firstborn to forget, he was surely reminded of his brothers whom he was trying to forget!

Although Joseph was not ready to face the pain of his past God had a greater plan for him, not to erase the past but to heal the past.

Part Five: Reconciliation

VII. JOSEPH'S BROTHERS COME TO EGYPT. (CHS.42-47)

The 7 years of plenty pass by. Joseph is married with two children. He is a busy man, working hard to store up grain for the years of famine. Storehouse need to be build. Records need to be kept. Grain must be collected and moved to strategic locations. It is a national effort under the leadership of Joseph.

Then the famine anticipated by the king's dream begins and Joseph begins to sell the grain which he has collected in the preceding years. The famine is so severe that it not only affects Egypt but the surrounding countries as well. It reaches to Canaan where Joseph's family is living. At this point more than 20 years have passed since Joseph was sold into slavery.

A. The first visit by brothers. (ch. 42)

The first six verses of ch. 42 tell us that the 10 brothers of Joseph were finally sent to Egypt to buy food for the family. Jacob feared to send Benjamin after the harm that had befallen Joseph so the other 10 went. V. 6 tells us that they came to Egypt and bowed down before Joseph.

1. Dreams fulfilled. (Num. 23:19; 2 Pet. 3:8-9)

The first observation we can make from this is that as these 10 brothers came and knelt before an unknown ruler in a foreign land the dreams of Joseph some 20 years before were being fulfilled! GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES! He may not do it when we thought it would happen but he has never failed to fulfill his word. Num. 23:19 says, God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should change his mind. Does he speak and not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? 2 Pet. 3:8,9 reminds us, With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Remember, God keeps his promises!

2. Joseph's struggle and test.

Verse 7 tells us that Joseph recognized his brothers as soon as he saw them but they did not recognize him. Joseph had aged by 20 years, he was clean shaven, speaking a foreign language, and was in an unexpected position of authority so it is not strange that they didn't recognize him.

Imagine the emotions that must have flooded Joseph's mind as he was going about his normal duties when suddenly he notices at the back of the room some familiar faces. He could hardly believe his eyes. He looks more closely and confirms that those 10 men are his own brothers. It must have immediately brought back a flood of long buried memories, painful beyond description. There was Judah who had said, "Let's sell him to the traders." And there was the one who had held out his hand to receive the 20 shekels of silver from the hands of the traders. He relived his useless cries as he had pleaded with them to save him to no avail. (v. 21) Again, Joseph felt the pain of the chains clanking from his feet (Ps. 105:17,18); he remembered the shame as he was sold to Potiphar; he remember being thrown into prison for refusing to do wrong.

Now, how would Joseph respond? Would he take revenge? Would he kill them? Would he forgive them and forget the past? Surely there was a battle in Joseph's mind as he saw them come closer and closer. Finally he devised a strategy of testing his brothers. It would give him more time to work through his own emotions and it would also enable him to see if his brothers had changed their ruthless ways.

When the brothers came Joseph accused them of being spies. They declared their innocence but in spite of their cries he had them thrown into prison for 3 days. How ironic! Now the tables are turned and it is the *brothers* who cry for mercy but end up in prison. Now it is *their* future which is uncertain. Now it is *their* time to think.

After 3 days in prison Joseph decides that instead of keeping all but one of them he will keep only one and send the others back to Canaan, testing them for the truthfulness of their story. Simon is bound and ten from the brothers as a captive. He is the second born. Perhaps Joseph chose him instead of Judah, because Judah had saved his life years earlier.

3. The brother's guilt.

Notice the response of the brothers in vs. 21-23, "They said to one another, Surely we are being punished because of our brother..." They realized that they were reaping the fruit of the evil they had done 20 years before. More than any other evil in their lives, their treatment of Joseph was still on their minds. It is very significant that after 20 years their guilty conscience was still troubling them. For 20 years they had seen their father mourn and they all knew that they had lied to him. Sometimes people say that time will heal any wound but this example from the lives of Joseph's brothers teaches us that time will not heal a guilty conscience. Let's look at the Christian conscience.

4. The Christian's conscience.

A. The effects of a guilty conscience (1 Tim. 1:18-19; 3:9; 4:2; Tit. 1:15)

The Christian conscience is a gift from God! It is like a spiritual barometer which, when functioning properly, gives us a good indication of our spiritual health. It is an alert to us that something is wrong or an assurance that all is well. When we do something that violates God's law we have a conscience to tell us we are guilty.

We all know the terrible feeling of being guilty. It is painful and unpleasant. Not only does it feel bad but 1 Tim. 1:18-19 tell us that a guilty conscience can shipwreck a person's life. It can destroy our spiritual walk with God if we don't learn to respond to it correctly.

It is possible after continually ignoring our conscience to dull it or as 1 Tim. 4:2 says, to "sear" it. This means that it is no longer as sensitive to right and wrong as it once was. It is also possible to have a weak or defiled conscience (1 Cor. 8:7)

A guilty conscience will sap our spiritual energy and cause us to stop growing spiritually. It is something that needs to be dealt with immediately.

B. The solution for a guilty conscience. (Heb. 9:14, Acts 23:1; 24:16; Ps. 51; 103:12; 1 Jn. 1:9)

Is there a solution for a guilty conscience? Yes, praise the Lord, there is a solution. Here are two steps we can take that will result in a clear conscience.

1. Confession.

1 Jn. 1:9 says, “If we confess our sin he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sin and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Confession brings wonderful release from the guilt of sin. The blood of Jesus Christ is able to cleanse a guilty conscience (Heb. 9:14). There is no reason for us to live with a guilty conscience. We can have complete freedom.

In confession we must be specific. It is not enough to say, “Lord *if* I did anything wrong please forgive me.” We must be willing to name the sin. Call it sin, don’t call it a problem or a mistake, it was sin! Say, “Lord, I confess impure thoughts to you.” “I confess that I have gossiped.” “I confess that I was angry and spoke harshly to my wife.” We always need to confess our sin to God and as he leads us we may often need to confess our sin to the person that we have wronged.

2. Restitution.

Restitution is a second step that is sometimes necessary for total cleansing of the conscience. Restitution simply means *to make right the wrong that has been done*. This goes beyond confessing your sin to someone and involves repayment of the wrong in case of theft. Zacchaeus is the model for this type of restitution (Luke 19:1-10). He not only confessed his sin but was willing to repay those he had wronged.

Restitution is painful but it is a powerful means of cleansing our conscience. We need God’s wisdom to determine when restitution is necessary, but we should be willing to do it when he leads us. If, after confession to God your conscience is still not clear, you may need to take this step of restitution. Prov. 14:9 says, “Fools mock at making amends for sin.” Our goal should be to have a conscience that is totally free. We should not need to fear that anyone can come up to us and say, “You did this wrong and you never tried to make it right.”

This leads us to our seventh principle of Christian life:

<p>PRINCIPLE 7: CHRISTIAN GUILT IS REMOVABLE</p>

Oh, what freedom it brings to have a clear conscience! Make it your goal to have a conscience that is completely free. Paul said, “So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.” (Acts 24:16) No matter what it costs you, get a clear conscience.

To think about: Are there any areas in which your conscience is not clear before God or man?

4. The response of Jacob.

Joseph finally releases the brothers but keeps Simeon in prison. In fact he makes sure that Simeon is bound “before their eyes” (v.24). Also he gives the order that the brothers silver be returned to their sacks of grain.

So they begin the long journey home. They were frightened as they discovered the money of one brother in his sack, fearing that it was another bad sign on an already frightening journey.

When they reach home they give their father Jacob a full report. They told him of the way they were received and also that Simeon was left behind and that unless Benjamin came with them they could not go back.

As they emptied their sacks they discovered that there was money in all of the sacks!

Notice the response of Jacob at this point. He says in v. 36, “You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!”

This is a *natural* response. In fact we can all identify with this elderly man. We cannot help but to sympathize with him as he appears to have lost two sons and he may have to risk losing Benjamin, his youngest. So he says, “Everything is against me!”

But this is simply a *natural* response, not a response of *faith*. First of all what Jacob believed to be true we know was not true. He had not lost Joseph and he would not lose Simeon. Even if all were lost, a response of faith will echo Habbakuk when he says, “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.” (Hab 3:17-18)

Furthermore, Rom. 8:31 says, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Jacob was not at this point walking by faith in God’s promises; he was walking by sight. How often do we lose sight of the promises of God and begin to focus on the way things appear? When the going is rough we need to cling to the promises of God.

To think about: Is there a situation in your life in which you are responding naturally instead of by faith? What would be a response of faith for you?

B. The second visit by brothers. (ch. 43)

Even after Rueben offers both of his sons as security for Benjamin Jacob is not persuaded and is unwilling to release Benjamin to go.

Finally the family begins to desperately need food again and they all see the need to return to Egypt. After much discussion Judah emerges as the leader of his brothers and finally makes a promise that Jacob accepts.

1. Judah’s promise. (v. 8,9)

Judah promises that he himself will bear the responsibility of taking care of Benjamin during the journey to Egypt. Reuben had offered both of his sons but

Judah offers *himself* as security. This is a first sign of a change of heart, a bit of unselfishness, an indication of concern for someone else. The father agrees reluctantly and sends them on their way, bracing himself for the worst.

So they make their way to Egypt again. Again Joseph sees them and this time he tells his steward to prepare a meal for them at his house.

2. The meal together.

As the brothers are taken to the home of Joseph they are quite alarmed. They don't consider it an honor to eat with the Prime Minister but fear that Joseph is ready to take them as slaves. They try to explain to the steward what happened with their money and he assures them that all is well. Simeon is brought out to join them.

When Joseph comes to join them they present to him the gifts that they brought and bow down to him twice. Joseph inquires about his father and they assure him that he is well. Then he sees his younger brother Benjamin and he is so moved that he cannot control his emotions and has to leave the brothers for a time of weeping. Joseph's example forces us to think about our own emotions.

3. The Christian and emotions.

a. Joseph's example (42:24; 43:30; 45:2, 14; 46:29; 50:17).

Numerous times in the story of Joseph we read that Joseph wept. His emotions were so high that it became increasingly difficult for him to maintain his composure.

We live in a society that tells us that it is not manly to cry. Ironically, the same society tells us that when a man explodes in anger we can be sure that he is a real man.

What does the Bible teach about crying and our emotions?

b. Other biblical examples. (Gen. 33:4; Ezra 3:12; 10:1; Neh. 1:4; Jer. 9:1; Lk. 22:62; Jn. 11:35; Acts 20:37; Rev. 5:4)

The Bible is filled with examples of great men who cried. The list includes Jacob and Esau, Ezra, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, Peter, John, the Ephesian elders, and even Christ himself. Surely that list should cause us to stop and think about how we view our emotions.

The Bible teaches us that we were created with emotion; in fact it is a part of being created in the image of God since God also has emotions. Our emotions are a part of our humanity and need to be expressed under the control of the Holy Spirit. Joy, sadness, and grief are a part of being human. Why do we accept the philosophy of the world that says it is wrong to express sadness, but right to express joy at a sporting event? Our emotions should be under the control of the Holy Spirit and expressed in ways that bring honor to Jesus. But they can and should be expressed. Jesus showed his emotions when he wept at Lazarus' funeral. He showed joy. He expressed anger when he cleansed the temple. The example of Joseph and the rest of scripture teach us that it is permissible for a man to cry. In fact, a person that is not able to express his emotions appropriately is missing a part of what God intended for him.

That is our eighth principle:

PRINCIPLE 8: CHRISTIAN EMOTION IS EXPRESSABLE

The life of Joseph teaches us to express our emotions under the control of the Holy Spirit. When God weeps, we can weep; when God rejoices, let us rejoice; when God is sad, let us be sad.

Now, back to our story of Joseph. The brothers were called to be seated and as they were shown to their places they observed something very strange indeed, they were seated in the order of their birth from oldest to youngest. At the first place was Reuben, then Simon, then Levi and on down the line to Benjamin. It is not hard to correctly guess the ages of young children but these are grown men, probably 40-60 years old!

Joseph also favored Benjamin with special portions of food. Not only was he close to Joseph but I believe that Joseph was trying to test the other brothers in yet another way. How would they respond to this display of favoritism?

The meal passed without further incident, much to the relief of the brothers and they spent another night in Egypt, eager to be on their way home.

VIII. FINAL TEST AND RECONCILIATION (CHS. 44-45)

The next morning the brothers are sent on their way. But Joseph has devised a final test for his brothers. He has instructed that a special cup be placed in Benjamin's sack of grain. It was a test designed to see if the brothers had experienced a change of heart.

A. The missing cup.

I can imagine the relief that the brothers felt to finally be on their way out of that strange city. I can feel the tension released as they headed towards the security and comfort of home. Judah especially breathed a sigh of relief. He could tell Jacob that everything had worked out well. They were all together, the 11 of them.

Imagine their dismay when they see dust in the distance and soon they can make out the all too familiar face of the steward. He asks them why they have done such a wicked thing to take the cup of his master and of course they protest their innocence. They are so confident that they are not guilty that they tell the steward that if the cup can be found among any of them the guilty one would die.

The steward begins the search. First Reuben, then Simeon, Levi, Judah and on down the line. Finally there is only one left, Benjamin. Everyone begins to breath a little easier. Surely they don't suspect Benjamin. But out of the bag comes the hand of the steward with the cup! How could they protest that they were innocent?

The brothers were so distressed that they tore their clothes, an expression of deep grief. They load their donkeys and return to the city. Surely their minds were spinning. Now what will happen to them? Will they ever reach home safely? Why did it have to be Benjamin of all the brothers? What could they tell their father?

Joseph confronted them harshly and Judah answered by saying that they would all be slaves. Joseph says, "No, only the one who had the cup, the rest could

go home in peace.” Here is the test Joseph had devised. What would be the response of the brothers? Will they abandon Benjamin just as they had abandoned Joseph more than 20 years before and make up another wild animal story? Or will they have compassion?

B. Judah’s plea shows change of heart.(44:33,34)

Judah speaks for the group of somber brothers. He eloquently summarizes what has happened and tells Joseph how much Benjamin means to the father. In fact, he says that if they return without Benjamin their father would die of grief (v. 31). Remember this is the same Judah who 22 years earlier had said, “Let’s sell him to the traders and make some money on the deal.”

Then he says in vs 33-34, “Please allow me to remain behind as your slave and let Benjamin return home with his brothers.” What a change! This is a selfless act. He never dreams for a moment that the story will end as it does. He is willing to remain in Egypt for ever, so that Benjamin will return. He is willing to never again see his three sons and two grandsons (see 46:12). He cannot bear to think of his father’s pain if Benjamin doesn’t return. He is willing to suffer rather than to again see his father grieved. With this he has passed the test!

C. Joseph reveals himself (45)

Here is the great climax in the story of Joseph. After sending away all the officials and interpreters Joseph changes language and in one of the most dramatic moments in scripture tells his brothers, “I am Joseph.”

His brothers understandably were unable to respond, in fact they were terrified. He calls them closer and begins to share with them. A couple of things from his sharing are very significant.

1. There is no bitterness.

Joseph’s response shows no sign of bitterness towards his brothers. Somewhere in the two years he had completely forgiven them. If he had ever desired revenge, he had forgotten it now. He was able to love and forgive those who had caused him so much pain. His example teaches our ninth principle:

<p>PRINCIPLE 9: CHRISTIAN FORGIVENESS IS POSSIBLE.</p>

Many times people will say, “I can’t forgive *that* person.” But the life of Joseph challenges us to realize that Christian forgiveness is possible. If Joseph could forgive his brothers surely we can forgive those who have wronged us. More than that, the story of the unmerciful servant in Mt. 18 makes it clear that since God has forgiven us of so much, we should be willing to forgive whatever another has done to us. Forgiveness frees us from the bondage of the person who has wronged us. Many people are literally controlled by a person who has wronged them. They cannot lose the grip that person has on them until they forgive them. Forgiving someone does not mean that what they did was right; it just allows you to release them into the hands of God. It can be incredibly painful to forgive, but so wonderfully freeing at the same time.

To think about: Are there any persons in your life whom you have not forgiven? For Christ's sake, let them go. If necessary, make a list of them and one by one go through the list and in prayer tell God that you forgive them for the specific thing that they did.

2. He recognizes God's plan

Part of the reason Joseph was ready to forgive was that he recognized God's plan for his life. At this point the puzzle finally started to fit together for Joseph. He could see God's hand in all the events of his life. He remembered his dreams as a young man and he recognized that it was God's plan for him to be in Egypt in order to save the lives of his family. He realized the principle, "Christian Events are Acceptable" because God is in control! Joseph could recognize even the "bad" events in his life as good since God had his hand in them. Can we do the same, even before we fully understand?

3. The Christian and the past.

At this point I believe that God had healed the pain from Joseph's past. He could look at his firstborn, Manasseh, and no longer feel the pain. Thru forgiveness and thru seeing God's hand in his life he had been freed from the past.

This part of Joseph's life teaches us the last principle:

PRINCIPLE 10: CHRISTIAN MEMORIES ARE HEALABLE
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Joseph had some painful, painful memories. Memories that were so deep he tried to forget them, to bury them and pretend that they didn't exist. It took time, but God graciously allowed Joseph to face his pain and to receive healing from those memories as he chose to forgive his brothers.

We also often come to the Lord with painful memories from the past. Maybe you have been abused by a father or mother, beaten or even sexually abused. You may have been in a relationship where you were hurt beyond description. You may have wounds so deep that you have never shared them with anyone. Today Jesus is saying to you through Joseph, "Come to me and allow me to heal those memories." Don't ignore it, don't pretend it didn't happen, don't claim you've forgotten it, bring it to Jesus and let him heal it. He is able and willing. Let the tears flow, but let the healing begin. Do it now, don't wait for another time.

Part Six: Conclusion

IX. JOSEPH'S FAMILY COMES TO EGYPT (CHS. 46-47)

Joseph sent for his family to come from Canaan to Egypt. His brothers took the report to their father who could scarcely believe his ears. But he was finally convinced that Joseph was alive and they made plans to set out for Egypt.

A. God provides reassurance.

When they came to Beersheba Jacob offered sacrifices to God as Abraham and Isaac had done in earlier years. It was at this significant place of worship that God spoke to him in a dream and assured him of his presence and that it was his plan for him to go to Egypt. It must have been a source of great encouragement for Jacob.

Our God is a God of encouragement. He knows when we are facing a difficult situation or an uncertain road and he loves to provide words of encouragement for us just at the time we need it. If you need encouragement take a moment and allow God to speak to your heart.

B. Joseph is reunited with his father Jacob (46:28-30)

Jacob comes to Egypt with all his family, 66 people in all. What a reunion! There are new nieces and nephews to meet and others who had changed so much. And then Jacob and Joseph are in each others arms. 22 years since the last hug! What an emotional time for both of them.

Much of chapter 47 describes how Joseph continued to distribute the food to the Egyptians during the years of famine. Finally the famine came to an end and things returned somewhat to normal.

C. Joseph's final promise to Jacob. (47:28-31)

Jacob (Israel) had found a home in Egypt for 17 years but his final request to Joseph shows that he had not forgotten that his real home was in the land of Canaan. He recognized that he was only a pilgrim here. He realized that there were many promises of God yet to be fulfilled and he was looking forward to them. He had the same attitude as Abraham and others who, as Hebrews 11:13 says, "Admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth." Jacob was not at home--and neither are we! 1 Pet. 2:11 calls us "Aliens and strangers." How about you? Do you feel completely settled here on earth? If so, you are on dangerous ground! Remember that you have another home in another land which is where you really belong.

X. FINAL BLESSINGS AND DEATH OF JACOB. (CHS. 48-49)

Jacob is sick and on his deathbed so Joseph is called and comes with his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

A. Jacob adopts Joseph's two sons. (48:5)

Jacob adopts the two sons of Joseph as his own. Thus Joseph receives a double inheritance and his two sons each become tribes in the Jewish nation. This also explains why there is no tribe named Joseph.

Then Jacob calls for the two boys (they must be more than 19 years old - Jacob lived in Egypt for 17 years and there were two years of famine before he came and both boys were born during the time of plenty) to come and be blessed.

B. The youngest is placed ahead of the elder. (48:1-28)

Joseph expected that his oldest son, Manasseh would receive the primary blessing from the grandfather. Instead Jacob very deliberately places his right hand on the head of the second-born, Ephraim. This unexpected change seems almost commonplace in scripture and it illustrates to us that God's ways are not man's ways. See also Seth over Cain (4:25); Shem over Japheth (chs 10-11); Isaac over Ishmael (17:18-20); Jacob over Esau (45:23); and Judah and Joseph over their brothers (49:8-10;22-26)

God is not limited to our way of thinking; many times the things that seem perfectly natural to us are only that, perfectly natural. But our God is supernatural! We should not make the mistake of assuming things when it comes to God, for his thoughts are not our thoughts and his ways are not our ways (Is. 55:8) Sometimes we assume that God's blessing will rest upon a certain person or a certain plan but he will sometimes take his hand of blessing off of the oldest son and place it upon the younger.

C. Jacob gives his final blessings. (49:1-28)

In these verses Jacob gives his final blessings to his sons. (It seems in many cases more like curses than blessings!) It would make an interesting study to follow their fulfillment in scripture but for now we will only look at one, the blessing of Judah in v. 10. Jacob says to Judah, The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the rulers' staff from between his feet. This was fulfilled in David's line of rulers and ultimately in the Lion of the tribe of Judah, Jesus Christ. Praise God for the power of his word.

We could also observe here the power of our words as parents. We can bless or curse our children through our tongues. Take some time to speak words of blessing and affirmation to your children tonight.

D. Jacobs final request. (49:29-33)

The final request of Jacob, to be buried in Canaan, is significant because it again shows his faith in the promises of God and that he did not feel at home in Egypt.

XI. BURIAL OF JACOB AND DEATH OF JOSEPH. (CH. 50)

A. Joseph buries his father. (vs. 1-14)

After the death of his father, Joseph goes back to Canaan with his brothers to bury their father. There was a big group that accompanied him and there they buried Israel as he had requested near Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Rachel and Leah. (see 49:31)

B. Joseph's brothers fear revenge. (vs. 15-21)

After the death of their father the brothers fear that Joseph will now retaliate for the wrong they had done. So they go to him with a seemingly fabricated story saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrong they committed in treating you so badly.'"

Their fear indicates that they didn't understand the extent of Joseph's forgiveness. It also indicates that they didn't yet have a clear conscience 39 years after their sin. Joseph had forgiven them and released them. He was free but they had not received that forgiveness. Neither do we know of any time that they came to Joseph to ask his forgiveness except now in this roundabout way.

It impresses upon us again the importance of cleansing our consciences from the guilt of the past. Do it today.

C. Joseph forgives with a powerful statement of faith.

Joseph's response in v. 19-21 is full of meaning, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives..." What a powerful statement! These are the words of a man who has been mellowed by years of walking with God, a man who has allowed God to heal the hurts of the past, a man who is surrendered to whatever God has for his life. Joseph is not just giving lip service to an all-powerful God; he acknowledges his work in all the events of his life.

Can you state as confidently that God has brought you through? Has he healed your past? Have you forgiven those who have wronged you? Is your will broken to his will? Do you have the quiet peace in your life that Joseph's statement reflects?

D. The death of Joseph reflects a life of faith. (vs. 22-26)

Joseph enjoyed a privilege not accorded to any other patriarch; he saw his great-great-grandchildren! When the time has come for him to die he gives instructions to his brothers for them to carry his bones out of Egypt when God takes them back to Canaan. This is a statement of great faith in the God he had served. Faith is "Being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." (Heb. 11:1) For this reason the writer of the book of Hebrews says, "By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones." (Heb. 11:22)

Conclusion

We have followed Joseph through pits, prisons and palaces. We have seen him grow from a 17 year old youth to the leader of a nation; from a somewhat arrogant boy to a man walking with God. We have learned from his life about work, about dealing with temptation; about the importance of a clear conscience; about forgiveness; about healing from the past; and about God being in control of our lives. Where are you at in your journey of faith? What steps is God calling you to take as you follow him? Allow God to search your heart and to speak to you and then follow his gentle leading.

The name Joseph means “May he add” (see Gen. 30:24). May the Lord add many blessings to your life as you serve him!