

OBJECTIVE:

'To outline and evaluate what Joseph has to teach us about work and vocation'

Introduction

The life of Joseph as revealed within the Old Testament book of Genesis, chapters 37-50, has much to teach us by way of Godly example on the Christian approach to life overall, including our approach to **WORK**. What is our approach to work like? With regards: ambition, promotion, disappointment, success and failure; amongst others.

Discussion: 5 mins – is the workplace more stressful these days than ever before?

Case Study: Joseph: Gen 37-50:

A Consistent Example:

Look up some of the following verses: what is the consistent link? *Kingdom living* is characterised by *obedience* & God's *Kingdom plan* is accessed through *simple obedience* – how do the following verses demonstrate this in the life of Joseph?

Gen 39:2, Gen 39:4-5, Gen 39:22-23, Gen 41:39, Gen 45:4-12

Joseph's attitude to the varying scenarios and people that he came across was above all things, **consistent**. Joseph was not a different person in his home life, to when he was in public. His authentic, consistent approach, grounded in his daily dependence upon his Lord, authentically shone through each and every situation that he found himself in.

WH Griffith Thomas states, "In adversity he trusted his God and waited God's time. In prosperity he leaned upon his God and found His grace sufficient"¹.

This consistent attitude is equally reflected by the Apostle Paul in Philippians chapter 4 when he states, 'I have learnt to be content whatever the circumstances'².

Q? How CONSISTENT are you at church/home/work? – 5 mins

An Honest Approach – Gen 37: 5-11

Discussion: Is honesty always the best policy?

Within Genesis 37, the backcloth to Joseph's initial trials is revealed. The backcloth and burden of being a 'favourite son', with jealous brothers is the picture we are given. It is into this situation that Joseph openly and honestly shares his dreams with his family; dreams that depict him as one day, being exalted amongst them. Joseph's honest approach has been commented upon as perhaps being naïve or arrogant; though the latter is hardly in keeping with the Joseph one sees throughout the rest of the Genesis narrative.

In the world of work today, there can be **increasing pressure to 'cut corners'** and costs in unethical ways. The 'honest' employee is not necessarily the most popular one.

There can be a temptation to keep the 'status quo', not to 'rock the boat'. Yet throughout all of the ups and downs, Joseph demonstrated an uncompromising, consistent, honest approach; whether **communicating his dreams to his family (Gen 37:5-10), rejecting the advances of Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:6-10), or interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh (Gen 41:25-40).**

How hard is it to be honest with our families – knowing they might get upset with us? (Gen 37)

What temptations might WE face within the workplace? (Gen 39)

How difficult is it to be honest with the 'boss' –even with bad news? (Gen 41)

Q? How HONEST are you within the workplace? Do you find it easy to share your dreams & ambitions? Or to resist temptation – 'everyone takes pens home', or to 'tell your boss' difficult things?

Whilst the initial outcomes of his honest words and actions may have appeared to cost him severely; Joseph was able to rest in the overall purposes of God, no more demonstrated than in his remarkable insight in Genesis chapter 50 where he is able to declare to his brothers, '**..God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives**'³.

"What you are doing is not right. **Shouldn't** you walk in the **fear** of our **God** to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? Nehemiah 5:9

Success and Failure:

How important is being successful in earthly terms, to us?

Does our spiritual 'thermometer' rise as our 'successes' increase? "God is blessing me – I must be doing something right" (plus the opposite! – Job's friends).

The **consistency** of Joseph has already been stated as the hallmark of his God-centred life. On the initial outset, it seems an obvious and easy thing to demonstrate Godliness whilst enjoying success and favouritism. However, it is often during times of apparent comfort and lack of **adversity** that our Godly witness can be under most threat of being weakened or eroded; as our dependence upon the Lord may not be so apparent.

Commenting on the believer in prosperity, WH Griffith Thomas states, "*the believer needs nothing less than Divine power to keep him humble, simple and faithful, and for all of this, there is no school like the grace of God*". There is a saying that 'it takes a steady hand to hold a full cup'; it would have been just as difficult for Joseph to demonstrate a Godly attitude whilst in prosperity as it was for him to exercise dependency whilst within 'the cistern'.

Prosperity – Gen 45:1-8: – Joseph reveals himself to his brothers (some people would just love this situation!)

Adversity – Gen 39:19-23: - Whilst Joseph was not necessarily able to understand God's purposes in letting this great injustice happen, **he trusted his Lord enough with the outcome.**

The key point here for the believer is to be able to see each step as the providence of God. If we are close to Him, we can trust His purposes and plan for our life. The Apostle Paul puts it like this in Romans chapter 8, '*..and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him..*'⁶.

Trials and Temptations – What trials are we facing currently?

There can be a tendency for the believer to interpret their circumstances as a reflection of God's favour on their lives; with 'good' things revealing God's pleasure with us; and the 'bad' events somehow suggesting God's wrath or displeasure.

J Oswald Sanders comments, "*Trials and temptation are matters in which both God and Satan are involved, and the man of God can expect them from both quarters. Satan's objective is to accomplish our ruin, God's to establish us in holiness*".

Ambition and Promotion: Gen 39:6-10: Col 3:23:

Is it right for the Christian to be ambitious? Is there any limit on this?

Joseph does indeed have 'ambition', **but his desire is primarily to serve God and honour Him**. He clearly demonstrates this in his rejection of the advances of Potiphar's wife. Whilst 'getting in' with the 'bosses' wife may be considered by some to be a good move; Joseph sees his first loyalty to his ultimate 'boss', the Lord. Thus in his reply to Potiphar's wife, whilst acknowledging his loyalty to his earthly master, he ultimately sees God as the One to whom he is accountable; **'..how then can I sin against God?'**

Winning at all cost was not an option for Joseph. Whilst man could be deceived and trampled on, God cannot. J Oswald Sanders comments, *'...to him, a sin against God was immeasurably more serious than a crime against man'*.

Joseph's primary ambition to honour God and preserve his testimony, providentially leads to his promotion. As he is trusted by all he works for, be it the jailer, Potiphar or Pharaoh; this ultimately leads to his exaltation.

The primary approach for the believer today, like Joseph, should be to honour the Lord in every position they find themselves in; as God's Kingdom is sought first, the 'other things' will be added as the Lord allows (Matt 6:33) – **we are ultimately serving the Lord –**
"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" – Col 3:23

Our Work and Vocation:

How do you view the daily work you do? As God's Calling?

Joseph experienced many a rise and fall as he went through 'God's school' of preparation. **It is only in clever hindsight that he was able to reflect on the overall purposes of Almighty God in putting Joseph through each 'term' of training (Gen 45:8, 50:19).** Each episode would serve to prepare Joseph for the tough calling of leading a nation through a tough and difficult period; indeed *'his bitter experiences had been necessary to strengthen his nature so that he could hold his own with the stoutest men of Egypt'*.

Many believers see their work or vocation as merely **a means to an end**, or an interruption to the 'more important' ministry that takes place within our church programmes. Mark Greene comments, *'There are several things we don't really believe – all vocations are equal and so called 'secular' work is a vocation – (and) many of our biblical heroes were in fact, workers'*.

Believers today need the mindset that as God's people, **we are never 'off duty', and the fact is that our primary calling is not to 'a place' but to a 'person' – Jesus Christ.**

The believer's vocation is to minister for God wherever He has placed them. It may well be that the 'place' or 'type' of work will change or vary, but the overall Godly brief and calling will not.

Q? How would your attitude change (do you think) if in everything you did you were able to say 'this is for Christ'?

Our Leisure – How easy do you find it to relax?

With all the talk of being on constant 'duty' or calling for God, it would be easy but wrong to conclude that 'time off' is against God's plan and purposes. However, whilst we do indeed represent the Lord at all times; with the disintegration of 'family time' and the advent and intrusion of the commercial 'machine' into Sundays, never has there been a more important time for the believing individual or household to honour God's desire, indeed command, that we set aside time specifically for personal and family devotion to Him. Mark Greene states, *'Today we need to set aside the frantic drive to put every day, every minute to profitable use, to meet our agenda and to slake our thirst for the security we think we can find in constant activity'*¹⁴.

In each and every situation, whether engaged in physical 'work' or 'downtime'; Joseph utilised each opportunity to communicate and liaise with His heavenly Father.

Exodus 20:8-11: read:

Nehemiah said, "Go and **enjoy** choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."
Nehemiah 8:10 – people needed time out

"for without him, who can eat or find **enjoyment**?"
Ecclesiastes 2:25 (the Lord brings perspective/fulfilment)

"Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to **enjoy** them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God".
Ecclesiastes 5:19

"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our **enjoyment**".
1 Timothy 6:17

Conclusion:

In each and every situation that the believer finds themselves in today, they too need to exercise a Godly, consistent approach like Joseph; seeing the rise and falls of our work life as further opportunities to minister to those among whom God has placed us.

Ministry is not simply what we 'do in church', it is the consistent, ongoing lifestyle and testimony to those within our 'sphere of influence', be it co-workers, other parents at the local parent and toddler group, or other. The significance for our Christian life is not found within the 'work we do' but rather, as Mark Greene puts it:

'...our significance lies in our relationship with the Creator of work'.