

Integrity

Series: Rising Up (Lessons from the Life of Joseph)
January 16, 2022 – Brad Bailey

Intro

Last week we started a short series to begin the new year. Our series **in this first month** of the new year is **focused on allowing God to speak to us about rising up.**

I sense that for many of us... this pandemic season has **caused us to lose some spiritual vitality...and I believe that God wants us to rise up again... to rise up to all the purpose and potential that have not changed.**

In the midst of a season where **so much change** can cause us to **lose our footing...and to lose some spiritual vitality....how can we get that footing again.**

The effects of a global pandemic and polarizing political drama can leave us with a sense that **“everything has changed.”**

And when we allow ourselves to surrender to that feeling that “everything has changed” ... we **lose our deep spiritual vitality** that is connected to what is unchanging.

> We need to be restored by the reality that what has changed is actually very small and secondary to all that is at hand in this gift we call life.

So we’re taking lessons on what that means from the life of a **man named Joseph** who was **faced with rising up** time and again **from huge setbacks.**

As we talked about last week, **Joseph is one of the most intriguing figures** in the Bible. The account of his life is given in the first book of the Bible...the Book of Genesis. The second half of the book gives the account of how **God began calling a people to himself...** a people to whom he would begin to reveal Himself...and through whom he would bless the whole world.

And this begins with his calling out of a man named Abraham... then his son Isaac... then Isaac’s son Jacob... and now Jacob’s sons... of which one is Joseph.

And **Joseph’s life is given the most extensive accounting** in the opening book of Genesis.

His life is one defined by taking strange turns that leave him in strange places.

And that is why his life speaks to every one of us who find that our lives can take strange turns that leave us in strange places... places that we never expected... places that can leave us feeling defeated... places we need to rise up from.

His life begins as the favored son of his father. His **future looked bright.** In fact he is **given a vision** of how **he would rise up and be honored by his family.**

Last week we looked at the **importance of having a vision,** and holding on to it, for our life. Joseph **had to hold onto that vision...**to let that **vision define him** when the forces of the circumstances declared that they define him.

As you may recall... **as the favored son... Joseph’s older brothers** had become **filled with jealousy and hatred towards him.**

So much so that one day when he is sent to join them in an area several miles away...they beat him until nearly dead and staged his death by **ripping his clothes** – his robe specifically - to shreds and then **dipping them in goat’s blood.** Then they sold him into slavery through a **caravan heading toward Egypt.** Then they took Joseph’s torn and bloodstained clothes to their father, saying they found them and that he must have been killed by a ferocious animal.

So what happened next? Let's find out. And this is from the book of Genesis.

“When Joseph was taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelite traders, he was purchased by Potiphar, an Egyptian officer. Potiphar was captain of the guard for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. The LORD was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master. Potiphar noticed this and realized that the LORD was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did. This pleased Potiphar, so he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned.

“From the day Joseph was put in charge of his master's household and property, the LORD began to bless Potiphar's household for Joseph's sake. All his household affairs ran smoothly, and his crops and livestock flourished. So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn't worry about a thing—except what kind of food to eat!” (Genesis 39:1-6, NLT)

Let's stop there, because there's some important background here.

First, Joseph was **sold into slavery**, and his **destination turned out to be Egypt** – at that time, the most **powerful sociopolitical force on the planet**. Egypt ruled the known world.

Second, he was sold to **a man by the name of Potiphar**, an official of Pharaoh. Pharaoh was one of a line of rulers who were considered to be like gods.

Their word, their rule, was absolute. No one else had their power, their control. And Potiphar was not just any official, but **captain of the guard**.

So even though a slave, this was **a great place for Joseph to land. And land he did – and began to succeed.**

But what was the key to his rise through the ranks as a slave? To where he became head of everything that Potiphar owned.

Yes, God was with him, but *why* was God with him? **What was it about Joseph that God so clearly honored?** What was it that caught Potiphar's attention? Let's go back to what we just read and pull it out:

“... he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned.... Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn't worry about a thing.” (Genesis 39:4,6, NLT)

See what it was? **Potiphar trusted Joseph.**

He could be trusted with leadership; he could be trusted with possessions. He could be trusted with processes and methods and values.

Why? Because **he found Joseph to be a man of integrity.**

And that's the key trait I want to focus in on: Integrity. [1]

It's been said that...

Integrity is who you are when no one is looking.

Or to describe it another way...

Integrity is who we are when we're not bound by mere outward consequences.

For instance, informing a cashier that they gave you too much change and going back to the store to pay for something you forgot to pay for are two examples of showing integrity in everyday circumstances.

There is integrity...

- When we follow through with the promises and commitments we make.
- When we refrain from sharing information that wasn't intended to be shared.
- When we take responsibility for our actions.

Integrity is the foundation of trust.

If someone asks if they trust you...and you tell them what you believe...or what you will do... it's not what they are asking. Trust is based on what you will actually do...on whether the your beliefs and behavior are really united as one.

In fact... the word "integrity" comes from the verb "to integrate." It means to be so united that you become a complete or perfect whole.

That is the quality that Potiphar saw Joseph.

Joseph lived with a combination of **competence and consistency** that Potiphar couldn't help but admire. People of true character and integrity **stand out and invite our trust.**

This was the trait that got Joseph noticed. It's also the one that got tested.

Let's keep reading:

“Joseph was a very handsome and well-built young man, and Potiphar’s wife soon began to look at him lustfully. ‘Come and sleep with me,’ she demanded.” (Genesis 39:6-7, NLT)

Wow. (A few of you just sat up. Some of you are thinking... “That’s not in my Bible !” Well...it is.) It's quite the dramatic scene.

It's a moment in which **every element of desire and opportunity aligns** to create a truly **vulnerability moment.**

He is in the **wrong place...at the wrong time... with the wrong person.**

Joseph was young – he couldn't have been much past his early 20s by this time....his hormones are at a peak... and he's been enslaved far away in a foreign culture...alone. We can only imagine that his own desires were intense.

And this woman... Potiphar's wife? Well, Potiphar would have had his pick of women for a wife because of his rank and wealth, so she was probably one of the most beautiful women in all of Egypt.

And **she comes to him – directly, seductively - saying, “Sleep with me!”**

So here is this **attractive woman ...pouring out her affirmation and her desires...** to this **young attractive hunk of manhood** who has been made a slave and is **likely hungry for affirmation.** [2a] (Attraction and affirmation... a great combination to enjoy in a marriage... is the dangerous combination we must avoid with others.)

And what made it even more alluring is that **no one would see you.** No one would know. He wasn't the one initiating....she was...so it may have felt safer to go with it than to reject this woman.

It's really is a moment that defines his integrity. [2b]

There was **nothing that said “no” around him....which means the only source of “no” would have to be in him.**

You may have never been in a situation exactly like Joseph...but we'll all have situations where we come face to face with the opportunity to do something we know you shouldn't do... and no one is looking.

When you're a kid....and **the money is on the counter.**

When we have a **test to take**...and getting some help from **some hidden notes** or from another test taker won't be seen.

When the **boss is out of town**... and no one will know **how you use your time.**

When you're **home alone**... and **no one will know what you're watching.**

When the **form you are filling out** asks a question...and **answers that are not the truth** may be advantageous.

We've all had situations when we have the chance, the opportunity, to do something we know we shouldn't, and we know nobody will know. And nobody will see.

Which turns up the volume on the temptation to about as high as it can get.

So what did Joseph do? Let's keep reading.

“But Joseph refused. ‘Look,’ he told her, ‘my master trusts me with everything in his entire household. No one here has more authority than I do. He has held back nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God.’

“She kept putting pressure on Joseph day after day, but he refused to sleep with her, and he kept out of her way as much as possible. One day, however, no one else was around when he went in to do his work. She came and grabbed him by his cloak, demanding, ‘Come on, sleep with me!’ Joseph tore himself away, but he left his cloak in her hand as he ran from the house.”
(Genesis 39:8-12, NLT)

Can you feel how the tension went up?

You can sense **how powerful the moment is pulling on him.** When he runs... you can sense he just dodged a bullet.

If you've heard the phrase **“there but for the grace of God go I”**... used to acknowledge that one is lucky not to be in the same challenging situation as someone else.

In this case... **it wasn't just a moment.** Did you catch that? ***She kept putting pressure on Joseph day after day.*** Day after day she dressed to arouse his desire for pleasure... a pleasure that wasn't his to have. Day after day she likely affirmed him...in ways that he may have longed for.... but that weren't for her to bring.

And it is noted so clearly... **that “no one else was around.”** As we had noted... integrity is who you are when no one is looking. Who you are when situations like this come your way.

He met the moment... and sustained his integrity.

How? What was at work within him?

Well... what we discover...is that **he never lived as if no one was looking.** He developed a deep commitment to those who trusted him.

Did you catch what Joseph said to Potiphar's wife? What came immediately to his mind?

He says... that **it would be a betrayal of the trust her husband had put in him.**

Authentic integrity is that which understands that **one is actually never simply alone...**that true relationship is always relating to another by what we do... by the faithfulness to them. Her husband **Potiphar... doesn't cease to exist just because he is not present.**

But he said something else. Let me read it again:

***"How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God."* (Genesis 39:9, NLT)**

"How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

The ultimate constant relationship... is God.

The truth that shaped Joseph's life was that **there's always someone watching.** That there is a God and **your entire life is seen.**

From the very start of our lives, we **begin try to find our identity** in our relationship to other people...and **as a result we become many versions... with various conflicts...**and when we are a part from people... we can naturally feel uncertain who we really are.

And what Joseph reflects is how integrity is developed in relationship to God.

Integrity is found and formed in that which unites the whole of our lives... the seen and unseen of our lives... which is ultimately a reality that exists in relationship to God.

It's important to realize that integrity is **not simply a matter** of having **willpower or discipline** in how we behave. Willpower and discipline can serve our integrity...but integrity is about who we are. Integrity isn't something you enforce on to your life, as much as it's something you cultivate within your life. **Integrity is not something you do, but someone you are.** It's about the strength of our compass...not just our legs.

That is why last week we saw that the **first lesson we learn from Joseph is** about the power of a divine vision and purpose for our lives. The ability to rise up in such times begins with that which transcends such times.

Integrity is what we develop when we let that vision and purpose define us.

So what happened next? Joseph got another promotion, right? The success just kept coming? His integrity was instantly rewarded?

This is one of the things I love about the Bible. It tells it like it is. Here's what actually happened:

"When she saw that she was holding his cloak and he had fled, she called out to her servants. Soon all the men came running. 'Look!' she said. 'My husband has brought this Hebrew slave here to make fools of us! He came into my room to rape me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream, he ran outside and got away, but he left his cloak behind with me.'

"She kept the cloak with her until her husband came home. Then she told him her story. 'That Hebrew slave you've brought into our house tried to come in and fool around with me,' she said. 'But when I screamed, he ran outside, leaving his cloak with me!'

***"Potiphar was furious when he heard his wife's story about how Joseph had treated her. So he took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king's prisoners were held, and there he remained."* (Genesis 39:13-20, NLT)**

Now, we **might think...** this **doesn't sound like it helped him rise up.** He is unjustly accused and imprisoned.

But **many see something more going on here than that.**

The account tells us that Potiphar was burning with anger. It doesn't say against *who*. And there are **good reasons** that this **anger was more about his wife.**

Don't forget who this was. Potiphar was captain of the guard. The guard was an elite group of warriors who guarded the Pharaoh and did his bidding. They were also the **hit squad**, almost like the undercover covert group. Some historians have **termed the captain of the guard** the "**Chief of the Executioners.**" He could have anyone killed.

In Egypt, attempted **rape was a capital offense.**

Here was a slave who, **he was told, dared to sexually assault his wife.** If he believed that to be true... he would have had him executed in a way that **would have made a clear statement.**

And all he did was put him in prison?

It's very likely that Pharaoh's anger was **actually about his wife.** We **already know something about what she was like.** She may well have had a pattern of being **unfaithful and manipulative.**

He may have been **angry that she was forcing him to do away with his most favored servant,** a man he knew to be trustworthy, because of the public nature of her accusation.

He had to do something, so he did the least possible.

Potiphar was in a tough position. He couldn't discount his wife's accusation without publicly humiliating her and himself in the process.

But the action he takes against Joseph is as light as it can be and still retain the family's honor.

Joseph **wasn't killed,** Joseph **wasn't exiled,** Joseph **wasn't put into slave labor...** Joseph was **simply put in prison.** And not just any prison, but **the king's prison.** The one that **maintained some dignity.** The one where he would be **fed, sheltered, cared for – and ultimately, released.**

So there is good reason to believe that Potiphar knew the kind of woman his wife was... and he knew the kind of man Joseph was.

Joseph's integrity was recognized....and integrity is often recognized over time.

Yet authentic integrity is never based on that recognition.

Joseph chose what is right... regardless of what was fair.

He had known that others can treat you unfairly... and he will find that true as we go forward into his life in the coming weeks.

Doing the right thing matters to God, but it often doesn't matter much to others. In fact, when one person does the right thing, the result is often that the wrong others do stand out in stark contrast. People don't like that. It is kind of like how a school class may dislike the really good student because they "mess up the curve."

Integrity will transcend what is fair... for what is right.

When we feel life is unfair... we can become vulnerable to justifying that we might as well do what we want.

We can tend to think of our being good as a deal for we have for God to make life easy.

Authentic integrity is a choice about who we are ... despite what comes.

Reminded of these words often attributed to Mother Teresa...

People may be illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. Love them anyway.

If you do good, people may accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway.

***If you are successful, you may win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.
The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.
Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.
People favor underdogs, but follow only top dogs. Fight for a few underdogs anyway.
What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.
People really need help but may attack you if you do help them. Help people anyway.
Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough; give the world the best you've got anyway. [3]***

So if the set backs have had you focus on what's around you....let's rise up by taking back the power of who we are... the power of integrity.

Integrity is the “you” that rises above change.

It is the foundation we rise upon.

We tend to think that we are **doing better or worse based on circumstances**. If you ask me how I am doing...I can tend to answer by telling you how the circumstances of my life are going.

But the more significant reality...is that the real me is who I am inside... as a person.

Your success as a person is not based on where you live... or your job... or your bank accountor your health. It is based on how whole you are.

And the good news is that **your integrity cannot be taken from you.**

Integrity is the solidity that we can take hold of to pull ourselves up again.

No matter what setbacks you face - no matter what you have to rise from – **integrity will always be the foundation on which we can pull ourselves up again.**

And **whatever has changed AROUND us... does not change what is WITHIN us.**

If we are going to rise up amidst so much that we don't control...we need to **wake up each day** and focus less on the **swirl of circumstances around us... and more on who we are going** to be in the midst of it.
[4]

Through the life of Joseph.... God is saying... focus on what's within you.

And integrity involves honesty.

Integrity is **not just about how well we do, but with how honest** we are about the struggles we have.

When we know that there is a gap between **what we believe and how we behave...** integrity may begin with being honest with those we are in trusting relationships with. We may have some lives with whom we can close the gap by being honest.

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. - Martin Luther King, Jr.

PRAYER

Responsive Song: Psalm 19 - [May the Words of My Mouth](#)

Resources: The general approach to using the life of Joseph as a means for a short series of lessons for rising up amidst pandemic effects drew from James Emery White's "The Rising" series.

Notes:

1. Some references to integrity... maintaining faithfulness...in the Scriptures:
1 Chronicles 29:17 (NLT)

I know, my God, that you examine our hearts and rejoice when you find integrity there. You know I have done all this with good motives, and I have watched your people offer their gifts willingly and joyously.

God singled out Job as an ideal example of a man of integrity.

Then the Lord asked Satan, "Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil. And he has maintained his integrity, even though you urged me to harm him without cause." - Job 2:3 (NLT)

Integrity should be the hallmark of a Christian. Temptation is all around, but God is our rescuer and refuge. We can depend on God to be victorious in this life:

Psalm 25:19-21 (NLT)

See how many enemies I have
and how viciously they hate me!
Protect me! Rescue my life from them!
Do not let me be disgraced, for in you I take refuge.
May integrity and honesty protect me,
for I put my hope in you.

Proverbs 11:3

The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.

2 Corinthians 8:21

For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.

2a. Attraction and affirmation... a great combination to enjoy in a marriage... is the dangerous combination we must avoid in terms of spending time with the opposite sex alone.

2b. The truth is that there may be times that could have been tempting ...but there was some aspect that wasn't in play.

A woman could have solicited him...that he really was not attracted to... or maybe there was attraction but plenty of ways others would have known. In other words...there will be times when the circumstances just don't make something possible...and those are not times that really test us. But this was one of those times that did. He would have had desire... she was attracted to him...and there was a reasonable means to control the setting and be hidden.

3. These statements have often been attributed to Mother Teresa, but the original collection of sayings were created by a college student named Kent M. Keith and published in 1968 in a pamphlet titled "The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council." Noted

<https://quoteinvestigator.com/tag/mother-teresa/>

4. God has told us that His Spirit... is seeking to form us... to develop fruit.

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Galatians 5:22-23)