

Three-Dimensional Leadership

Genesis 47-50

INTRODUCTION: This is one of those subjects that I don't think I have ever heard addressed. Generally, we have the idea that for a great change to occur, there must be a widespread turning to the Lord – a revival of sorts, where everyone gets on board, and everyone moves at the same pace, and thankfully, that happens at times. It happens in scripture; it has happened in our nation's history during movements like the First Great Awakening.

But the danger of waiting on such a movement is that we tend to underappreciate the massive difference that one person fully devoted to the Lord can make. Joseph was such a man.

Think about it – we see some change in the lives of his brothers, but they never really become spiritual heavyweights. Joseph, on the other hand, was able to save not only his family but the entire Empire of Egypt. What would your family look like if it had such a leader? Could that leader be you?

I want to talk to you today about becoming a Three-Dimensional Leader – that is what sets Joseph apart.

You see, I agree with **John Maxwell**, who said, *“Leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less”*. Everyone is a leader to some degree if you have influence. Yet so many fall into the trap of associating leadership with position. Some of you are already thinking – one day I will be a leader. One day, I will get a job where I have reports directly and can boss people around... then I will be a leader. In fact, Pastor, I don't think I'll even dial into this sermon very much because, you see, I am not yet a leader. But when I become one, I'll find this sermon online and listen to all you have to say.

Well, if that's your attitude, you probably aren't much of a leader. But that can change. You see, leadership is not a position, it's not authority or rank – Leadership is the ability to influence others, and every single one of you can do that.

- Joseph was a leader when he was the runt of the litter at home
- Make him a slave, Joseph was a leader as a slave
- Throw him in prison. Joseph was a leader in prison

I am convinced that I don't need a large church filled with leaders to change this world; I just need a handful of Josephs.

What made Joseph a great leader? I want to teach you the concept of THREE-DIMENSIONAL LEADERSHIP.

CONTEXT: In Genesis 47–50, we see the closing scenes of Joseph's life and the life of his father Jacob. The famine still grips the land. A family of Hebrew shepherds has been transplanted into the most powerful empire on earth. And it is Joseph who navigates all of it — securing their survival, stewarding their future, and ensuring that the covenant promises of God would endure long after he was gone. You see, a three-dimensional leader does not merely solve today's problems; he builds a foundation that outlasts his own life.

Today, I want to draw your attention to three marks of Joseph's three-dimensional leadership found in these closing chapters of Genesis.

1. 3D Leaders are Multi-Directional Leaders

- Good Leaders can influence those under their authority.

- Great Leaders influence both those under their authority and those whose authority they are under.

Leading down is assumed by virtue of POSITION. Joseph led down to his servants, across to his peers, and up to his supervisor.

Genesis 47:7–12 (ESV)

7 Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8 And Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How many are the days of the years of your life?” 9 And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.” 10 And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. 11 Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. 12 And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father’s household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

Joseph is influencing his father Jacob, the Pharaoh of Egypt, His brothers, and their families. Everyone is benefiting from Joseph’s influence.

3D leaders, do not limit their influence to those under their rank – but they seek to have 360 degree influence on the organization as a whole.

In his book, *The 360 Degree Leader*, John Maxwell reminds us that ninety-nine percent of all leadership occurs not from the top but from the middle of an organization. Most of us will never hold the top seat — and God never said we had to. Maxwell writes, *“You can lead others from anywhere in an organization. And when you do, you make the organization better.”* The question is not *where* you lead from, but *whether* you lead in every direction.

Leading down is assumed by virtue of POSITION. Anybody with a title can give an order. But Joseph didn’t just lead down — Joseph led down, across, and up.

He led his servants — DOWN. In Potiphar’s house, Joseph was placed over every servant and every affair of the household (Genesis 39:4). Later, in prison, the keeper handed him authority over every prisoner (Genesis 39:22). Joseph didn’t wait for the corner office. He led wherever he was planted. Joseph saw those beneath him not as tools to use, but as people to develop. He interpreted dreams for the butler and the baker not because it advanced his career, but because he cared about the people around him. That’s leading down.

He led his peers — ACROSS. Joseph practiced this in Potiphar’s house and in the prison. He wasn’t competing with the other servants — he was completing them. He built trust. He added value. He let the best idea win.

He led his master — UP. This is where Joseph separates himself from ordinary leaders. Maxwell identifies nine principles for leading up, and Joseph embodied them all.

He led himself first — practicing self-management, discipline, and purpose even in slavery and imprisonment. He lifted the load of his leaders; Potiphar didn’t have to worry about a single thing in his house because Joseph carried it (Genesis 39:6). He became the person others turned to when things needed to happen — what Maxwell calls “becoming a go-to player who produces under pressure.” When Pharaoh needed answers, it was Joseph — a prisoner, a Hebrew slave — whom they called. And Joseph didn’t just solve the problem; he offered a plan. He led up so effectively that Pharaoh said, “Can we find such a man as this, in whom is the Spirit of God?” (Genesis 41:38).

Remember in **Genesis 45:8 (ESV)** — “So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.”

Look at what God did. He made Joseph “a father to Pharaoh” — that’s leading UP. He made him “lord of all his house” — that’s leading ACROSS. He made him “ruler over all the land of Egypt” — that’s leading DOWN.

Maxwell says that *“the role of leaders in the middle of an organization — in nearly every circumstance — is to add value to the organization and to the leader.”*

Joseph did exactly that. In every house, in every prison, in every palace, Joseph added value in every direction. He didn’t wait until he was at the top to start leading. He led from wherever God placed him.

Craig Groeschel puts it this way: *“If you’re not leading well where you are, a bigger title won’t fix that. Leadership is not about position. It’s about influence.”*

3D Leaders are Multi-Directional Leaders...

2. 3D Leaders are Holistic Leaders

A 3D leader takes responsibility for the physical well-being of those God has entrusted to his care, not just in matters pertaining to work but also in practical needs and eternal spiritual needs.

Genesis 47:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. ¹² And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father’s household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

Notice what Joseph does here. He doesn’t just give them a place to sleep. He gives them *the best of the land*. He doesn’t just offer charity — he provides according to the specific needs of each family unit. *“According to the number of their dependents.”* Joseph is thinking about children. He’s thinking about the elderly. He’s thinking about mouths to feed. This is not a bureaucrat distributing rations. This is a leader who sees the *whole person*.

Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, once wrote: *“The leader of the past knew how to tell. The leader of the future will know how to ask.”* Joseph was already living this. He didn’t impose a one-size-fits-all solution on his family. He assessed. He listened. He provided according to their actual needs.

Too many leaders care only about what people produce. Three-dimensional leaders care about who people are. They care about the whole life — the family at home, the burden on the heart, the struggle no one talks about.

But Joseph’s holistic care went beyond the physical. Look at what happens later:

Genesis 50:19-21 (ESV)

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. ²¹ So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph addressed their **spiritual anxiety** — their fear that he would take revenge after Jacob’s death. He addressed their **emotional wounds** — he “comforted them and spoke kindly to them.” And he addressed their **practical needs** — “I will provide for you and your little ones.”

Physical. Emotional. Spiritual. Three dimensions of care from a three-dimensional leader.

John Maxwell writes in **The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership**: *“People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”*

Joseph's brothers had spent twenty years terrified of this moment. And instead of judgment, they received provision. Instead of vengeance, they received kindness. Instead of condemnation, they received comfort.

Drucker also observed: *"Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things."*

The right thing was not merely efficient administration. The right thing was tenderness. The right thing was addressing the fear in his brothers' eyes and speaking peace into their souls. Any manager could distribute grain. Only a leader could heal a family.

When you make caring for people your top priority, people will follow you anywhere. Not because of your title — but because of your heart.

If you lead a business, do you know what your people are going through at home? If you lead a ministry, do you care about more than attendance? If you lead a family, are you leading the whole person — body, mind, and soul?

3D Leaders are Multi-Directional Leaders...3D Leaders are Holistic Leaders...

3. 3D Leaders Deal with All Tenses of Leadership — Past, Present, Future

Joseph's leadership dealt with:

- a. **Past Regrets** - he settled the fears and apprehensions of his brothers who feared he might turn on them after their father passed.
- b. **Present Needs** - he ensured that the needs of his organization and family were met in the midst of tremendous challenge (famine in the land).
- c. **Future Needs** - he arranged for his bones to be carried back to Canaan in 400 years when his family returned.

Many leaders are only capable of operating in one tense. Some are stuck in the past — constantly relitigating old failures, old wounds, old conflicts. Some can only see the present — they react to every crisis but never build anything lasting. And a few can envision the future — but they neglect the people bleeding in front of them today.

Joseph operated in all three. That is what made him extraordinary.

DEALING WITH THE PAST — Genesis 50:15-21

After Jacob died, Joseph's brothers were gripped by terror. They assumed that Joseph's kindness had been a performance for their father's sake — and now that Jacob was gone, the act was over.

Genesis 50:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him."

They were projecting. Because *they* would have taken revenge, they assumed Joseph would. But Joseph did something that only a secure leader can do — he addressed the past without being imprisoned by it.

He told them: "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:19-20).

Craig Groeschel often teaches that *"the strongest leaders are not those who never get hurt but those who choose to heal and lead anyway."*

Joseph could have nursed his wounds for decades. He chose healing. He chose to reframe his suffering through the lens of God's sovereignty. And in doing so, he freed not only himself — he freed his brothers from their guilt, their fear, and their shame.

Maxwell writes: *"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way."*

Joseph knew the way to forgiveness. He walked it himself. And then he showed his brothers how to walk it too.

If you are a leader carrying unresolved bitterness from the past, it will poison every decision you make in the present. A 3D leader deals with the past — not by ignoring it, not by excusing it, but by entrusting it to a sovereign God.

DEALING WITH THE PRESENT — Genesis 47:13-26

The famine was devastating. The people of Egypt had spent all their money. They had traded their livestock. Eventually, they traded their land. Joseph managed one of the most severe economic crises in the ancient world — and he did it with wisdom, fairness, and foresight.

Genesis 47:23-25 (ESV)

²³ Then Joseph said to the people, "Behold, I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh. Now here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. ²⁴ And at the harvests you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones." ²⁵ And they said, "You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh."

The people's response tells you everything: *"You have saved our lives."* Joseph didn't exploit the crisis — he navigated it. He gave the people seed to plant. He gave them a sustainable system — eighty percent stays with you, twenty percent goes to Pharaoh. In the middle of a catastrophe, Joseph was building infrastructure for recovery.

Peter Drucker wrote: *"The best way to predict the future is to create it."*

That's exactly what Joseph did. Even while managing a present-tense crisis, he was creating the conditions for future prosperity.

Groeschel teaches that *"leaders who only manage the crisis will always be in one. Leaders who build systems will eventually build something that outlasts the storm."* Joseph was a systems builder. In the midst of famine, he was already planting for the harvest to come.

DEALING WITH THE FUTURE — Genesis 50:24-25

This is perhaps the most remarkable act of Joseph's leadership. On his deathbed, Joseph makes a request that reaches four hundred years into the future:

Genesis 50:24-25 (ESV)

²⁴ And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." ²⁵ Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here."

Joseph is dying. He could talk about his legacy. He could recount his accomplishments — savior of Egypt, reconciler of his family, second in command of the greatest empire on earth. Instead, he talks about God's promise. He points his family beyond Egypt, beyond the famine, beyond his own lifetime — to Canaan. To the covenant. To the future.

And then he does something breathtaking: he makes them swear to carry his bones.

Why? Because Joseph understood that his body was a sermon. His bones would be a testimony for four centuries — a reminder to every generation of Israelites in Egypt that *this is not your home*. God has something better. God made a promise. And Joseph believed it so deeply that he staked his funeral on it.

Hebrews 11:22 honors this moment: *“By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.”*

Of all the things the Bible could have commemorated about Joseph — interpreting dreams, resisting temptation, saving nations — the one act singled out in the Hall of Faith is this: he made plans for his bones. Because that’s how a generational leader thinks. He doesn’t just live for the moment. He leads for the future.

Maxwell writes: *“A leader’s lasting value is measured by succession.”* Joseph’s succession plan wasn’t a corporate memo.

It was a coffin in Egypt — a container of promise, a monument to faith, a four-hundred-year sermon illustration.

Joseph invested in his people — not just for the present, but for a future he would never see. He entrusted the next generation with a vision bigger than themselves.

ILLUSTRATION: The measure of a leader is not simply what he accomplishes in his own lifetime, but what he sets in motion for those who come after him. In 1900, a man named A.E. Winship decided to trace the descendants of Jonathan Edwards — the great Puritan theologian, pastor, and leader of the First Great Awakening. Edwards had died nearly 150 years earlier, in 1758.

But Winship wanted to know: what had become of the family tree of a man who devoted himself to God and to the spiritual formation of his children? What he discovered was staggering. Among Edwards’ approximately 1,400 descendants, Winship found:

- 1 Vice President of the United States
- 3 United States Senators
- 3 governors
- 3 mayors
- 13 college presidents
- 30 judges
- 65 professors
- 100 lawyers
- Over 100 clergymen and missionaries
- Nearly 300 were college graduates. Doctors, military officers, authors, and public servants filled the family line for generation after generation.

What was the secret? It was not wealth. It was not political connections. Historians tell us that every night when Jonathan Edwards was home, he would spend one full hour conversing with his children — and then he would pray a blessing over each one of them by name. Night after night. Year after year. A father on his knees, entrusting the next generation to God.

For contrast, Winship also studied a man from the same era known as Max Jukes — a man with no religious convictions and no interest in the spiritual formation of his family.

Among his roughly 1,200 descendants, the study found 7 murderers, 60 thieves, 190 prostitutes, 150 other convicts, over 300 who died prematurely, and 440 who were physically destroyed by addiction. Two families. Two legacies. The difference was not genetics — it was generational faithfulness.

The choices a man makes on his knees today will echo in the lives of people he will never meet.

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CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

Joseph could lead in every direction because he trusted the One who held every direction in His hands. He could care for the whole person because he knew the God who made the whole person. He could plan for the future because he believed the God who holds the future.

Joseph's leadership was not self-made. It was God-sustained.

Look at the compass needle of Joseph's life — it was always pointing Godward:

- Tempted by Potiphar's wife: "How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against **God**?" (Genesis 39:9)
- In prison: "Do not interpretations belong to **God**?" (Genesis 40:8)
- Before Pharaoh: "**God** will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." (Genesis 41:16)
- Naming his sons: "**God** has made me forget all my trouble. **God** has made me fruitful." (Genesis 41:51-52)
- To his brothers: "**God** sent me before you to preserve life." (Genesis 45:5)
- On his deathbed: "**God** will surely visit you." (Genesis 50:24)

In every season — slavery, prison, palace, family reunion, famine, death — Joseph's first word was **God**.

That is the foundation of three-dimensional leadership.

Maxwell writes: "*The single most important thing a leader can do is to be grounded in something bigger than themselves.*" For Joseph, that "something" was not a philosophy or a strategy. It was the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

"Are you building something that requires God's power, or something you can pull off on your own?"

Joseph's entire life required God's power. From the pit to the prison to the palace, nothing Joseph accomplished was achievable on his own strength. And that is precisely what made him dangerous — dangerous to the enemy, dangerous to despair, dangerous to every force that tried to stop the purposes of God.

Genesis 50:20 (ESV)

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

This is the verse that holds Joseph's entire life together. Every injustice, every betrayal, every forgotten promise, every lonely night in a prison cell — God meant it for good. Not that God authored the evil. But that God is so sovereign, so wise, so relentlessly purposeful, that He wove even the worst chapters of Joseph's story into a tapestry of redemption.

Joseph is a remarkable figure. But he is also a shadow of a greater Leader who was yet to come. One who would provide not just bread but the Bread of Life. One who would bless not just twelve sons but every nation on earth. One who would make peace not between brothers but between sinful humanity and a holy God. And One who would plan — from before the foundation of the world — to lay down His life so that we might live.

That Leader is Jesus Christ. And the question for each of us today is this: Have you entrusted your life to Him? Are you building on His foundation? And are you leading the next generation to do the same?