

Hope Church March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Genesis 39:1-18

What really matters: FAITHFULNESS

We're in week two of our series called ***What Really Matters***. Jesus said something in Matthew 23 that should make every church person a little uncomfortable:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you HYPOCRITES! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have *neglected* the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

**Matthew 23:23 NIV**

JUSTICE – God telling the **truth about what's broken** and making it right. God-centered, not me-centered.

MERCY – God moving toward people in their brokenness and **restoring dignity**.

And today we come to FAITHFULNESS. Not the flashy moments. Not the spiritual hype. But the quiet and steady obedience most of us struggle with.

We live in a **disposable culture**.

- Phones get replaced every two years.
- Jobs change every few years.
- Relationships end the moment they get hard.

Loyalty has become rare.

- If something stops working — **we move on**.
- If a relationship gets difficult — **we step away**.
- If a commitment becomes inconvenient — **we reconsider**.

And without realizing it, we *start believing something dangerous*: **faithfulness is optional**.

- Stay as long as it works.
- Stay as long as it feels good.
- Stay as long as it benefits me.

Matthew uses the Greek word **πίστις** (*pis-tis*) to describe FAITHFULNESS.

Not feelings. Loyalty. Showing up and doing what's right over time. Even when it's

**unnoticed**. Even when it's **inconvenient**. Even when it's **costly**. Even after the **feeling to**

**do something has faded**.

And few stories in the Bible show that better than the story of Joseph.

If you have a Bible or the Bible app, go to GENESIS 39.

- Genesis 39 begins with Joseph in a place he never expected to be.
- Joseph was **sold into slavery by his own brothers**.
- Not kidnapped by strangers. Betrayed by family.
- Imagine the emotional PTSD:
  - ⇒ He was the favorite son.
  - ⇒ He dreamed about the future.
  - ⇒ Then suddenly sold like property.

#### Verses 1-6:

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. //

// Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. //

// So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome...

- Joseph was far from home. He's a **foreigner living in a culture** that wasn't his.
- Potiphar was a powerful **Egyptian official**. Likely connected to the royal guard. That means Joseph was placed inside *an influential household*.
- One phrase keeps repeating in the story: **The Lord was with Joseph**. From the outside it might *look like Joseph had been abandoned*. But God never left him.
- Joseph **stayed faithful** in ORDINARY WORK. And over time he was trusted with more responsibility. Eventually Potiphar trusted Joseph with everything he owned.
- In a small but real way **God's promise to Abraham** – that his family would bring blessing to the nations – was starting to show up through Joseph.
- Then the story adds one more detail: *Joseph is physically attractive*. This is not a random mention. The writer of Genesis is preparing us for the temptation that's about to come.

And that raises a question most of us eventually must wrestle with. What do you do when life doesn't go the way you thought it would?

**Being faithful when life is unfair.**

- If anyone had a reason to say – God abandoned me – it would be Joseph.
- But that didn't happen. Joseph **lost his freedom** but not his FAITHFULNESS.
- Joseph didn't check out because life was unfair. He kept going because he believed the Lord was still with him. Even in slavery.
- Tim Keller once said:

Suffering is unbearable if you aren't certain that God is for you and with you.

- He showed **integrity**. He **worked faithfully**. Potiphar trusted him with everything.
- FAITHFULNESS isn't waiting for life to improve.
- FAITHFULNESS is **bringing your best to God** right where you are.
- Some of you are in a Joseph season right now:
  - ⇒ The job feels beneath you.
  - ⇒ The recognition never comes.
  - ⇒ Someone else got the promotion.
  - ⇒ You're doing good work—and nobody seems to notice.
- If we're honest, many of us make a quiet deal with God: *if life works out, I'll trust You.*

- FAITHFULNESS says something very different: **God is worthy of my loyalty even when life doesn't go my way.**

Your circumstances may change. But being faithful is still your choice.

Verses 7-10:

...and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in

this house than I am. //

// My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" And though she spoke to Joseph day after

day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her...

- This wasn't a passing attraction. Potiphar's wife kept pursuing Joseph. Day after day. **It was deliberate and persistent.**
- And she *abused her power*. She had STATUS and INFLUENCE. Joseph had **nothing**.
- The Hebrew word for "refused" carries the idea of a strong and decisive NO – **אָמַן** (*va'yma'en*). Almost like Lynette every time I ask for new golf clubs.
- **Joseph didn't hesitate.** Two reasons for his no.
  - ⇒ Horizontal reason: he would betray Potiphar's trust.

⇒ Vertical reason: he would sin against God.

- *Wicked thing and a sin against God* – **sexual sin** isn't just psychological or social. At its **CORE**, it's spiritual. It affects our relationship with God.
- And the pressure from Potiphar's wife didn't stop.

FAITHFULNESS doesn't only show up when life is difficult. Sometimes the **real test comes when life gives you freedom.**

### **Being faithful when no one is watching.**

- FAITHFULNESS is who you are when no one else is around. When it's **easy and even exciting** to give in to the temptation.
- Joseph had **freedom and trust** in his job. *That's when the test came* — day after day.
- But Joseph kept saying no. He kept his distance.
- Not because he was afraid of getting caught, but because **he knew who he belonged to**. For Joseph it wasn't just about breaking a rule. He knew it would **damage his relationship with God** — and he refused to go there. #goals
- FAITHFULNESS shows up in private moments — when you could get away with it.  
⇒ Sometimes it looks like putting the phone in another room late at night.

⇒ Sometimes it means ending a conversation that's starting to go somewhere it shouldn't.

⇒ Sometimes it means being completely honest with money when it would be easy to fudge the numbers.

- Integrity means being the same person everywhere — in **public**. In **private**. And **online**.

- And the scary reality is that most of these *decisions are made long before the temptation arrives*.

- Today temptation usually doesn't walk into the room like Potiphar's wife.

⇒ It shows up on a screen.

⇒ It shows up in private messages.

⇒ It shows up in emotional connections that slowly cross a line.

- Joseph didn't try to manage the temptations. He ran away.

Sometimes the *most obedient* thing you can do is **simply to leave the room**.

#### Verses 11-18:

One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak

in her hand and ran out of the house. When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. //

// “Look,” she said to them, “this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.” //

// She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: “That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.”

- Up to that point Joseph had resisted the temptation. But the situation **turned dangerous**.
- GENESIS 39 tells us that there were no other men were in the house. It almost **feels like** Potiphar’s wife had set up the moment.
- Joseph **reacted immediately**. He ran. But that the CLOAK he left behind became evidence. She used it to *build her story*.
- She plays the race card - called Joseph that **Hebrew servant**. Turning Joseph into the outsider — the threat.
- She retold the story, so the **evidence supported her version**.

- She even shifted the blame toward Potiphar himself. Implying this whole situation was the **result of his poor judgment** in bringing Joseph into their house.
- And with one final twist, Joseph's CLOAK — **the proof of his integrity** — became the evidence used against him.
- And he was sent to jail.
- Prisons in Egypt was likely a **rough stone holding place** inside the captain of the guard's compound. **Dark** and **cramped** and **thick with the smell of sweat and damp earth**. Most of the men inside had NO IDEA if anyone outside even remembered they were there.

At this moment Joseph has done everything right. He resisted temptation. He honored God. He protected his integrity. **And now we find out what FAITHFULNESS sometimes costs.**

### **Being faithful when it seems to backfire.**

- If this were a **feel-good TV movie**, the story would go like this:
  - ⇒ Joseph resists temptation.
  - ⇒ God rewards him.
  - ⇒ Everything works out.
- But the Bible is more honest than that. *Potiphar's wife lies and Joseph ends up in prison.*

- He does the right thing — and his **life gets worse**.
- This part of the story exposes one of the hardest truths about FAITHFULNESS.
- FAITHFULNESS does not guarantee an **immediate reward**. Does not guarantee a **positive outcome**. Does not guarantee it's gonna **be good for me**.
- Sometimes FAITHFULNESS costs us.
  - ⇒ It might **cost you a promotion** because you refuse to play politics.
  - ⇒ It **might cost you popularity** because you won't laugh at what dishonors God.
  - ⇒ It might **cost you a relationship** because you refuse to compromise your convictions.
- FAITHFULNESS is obedience while **leaving the outcome to God**.
- Reminded me of Jesus' prayer — into your hands I commit my spirit.
- It's **staying loyal** even when it looks like you're losing.
- Eugene Peterson described the Christian life as:
 

A long obedience in the same direction.

When you step back from Joseph's story, you see something deeper. This isn't just a story **about resisting temptation**. It's about what FAITHFULNESS looks like in a broken world.

- Without FAITHFULNESS, **justice becomes reactionary** — responding to whatever crisis shows up next.
- Without FAITHFULNESS, mercy becomes sentimental — a feeling instead of a commitment.
- And when FAITHFULNESS *disappears*, **everything starts to fall apart.**
  - ⇒ Marriages collapse.
  - ⇒ Friendships break.
  - ⇒ Churches fracture.
  - ⇒ Trust disappears.

FAITHFULNESS is what holds relationships together. And this is where **Joseph's story quietly points us to Jesus**. Joseph was faithful in *one house and in one prison*.

JESUS was **faithful in every moment** — in the wilderness and in his suffering and in the betrayal and all the way to the cross and even death itself.

*So unfaithful people* like you and me **could be rescued**.

What does faithfulness look like for us? Simple game plan.

- Remember who you belong to before you decide what to do.
- **Secure your boundaries** before temptation shows up.
- *Stay faithful* in those small and hidden places.

Because the small choices you make when nobody sees **are the ones shaping who you become.**

Years ago, along the rocky coasts of Europe, **lighthouse keepers** had a very simple job.

- **EVERY NIGHT** their responsibility was the same: Keep the light burning.
- They didn't *steer ships*. They didn't *control the storms*. They didn't *decide where sailors traveled.*
- Their job was simple: **stay faithful and keep the light burning.**
- Some nights the sea was calm. Some nights storms slammed against the rocks. Some nights nobody even saw the lighthouse.
- But the keeper stayed. Night after night. Storm after storm. *Faithfully tending the light.*
- Because *somewhere out in the darkness*, **someone needed that light to find their way home.**

FAITHFULNESS often feels like that.

You don't control the storms. You don't control the outcome. You don't always see the impact.

But you **keep the light burning**. In your MARRIAGE. In your WORKPLACE. With your INTEGRITY. In your WALK WITH GOD.

Don't chase applause from people. Live for the moment when God will say:

Well done, good and faithful servant.