



YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

Module 2—Genesis Part 2

Lesson 4: Joseph and Potiphar's Deceiving Wife—Genesis 39

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)

God is with all of us. This is what blessing is—God sharing God's life with us. We recognize God's presence; we don't receive it. God is already there. God was with Joseph; so much so that others (Potiphar) recognized the presence of God surrounding him. Many studies teach that in some way this prosperity that Joseph received (Potiphar choosing Joseph to run his homestead) was due to Joseph being "entitled to well-being". Joseph is entitled to nothing. God chooses whom God has favor on, and God had favor on Joseph. This of course does not mean that Joseph was exempt from trial and tribulation. Potiphar trusted Joseph because he noticed Joseph's relationship with God. Joseph lived a life that could be trusted. Trust is a reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something. Potiphar trusted Joseph to the point that he left nearly everything he was responsible for in Joseph's hands, with the exception of the food he ate. Meaning, Potiphar had no cares other than keeping himself fed. Joseph cared for it all.

Potiphar's wife found Joseph to be very attractive. The Scripture tells us that Joseph was a very well-built and handsome man (vv. 6-7) and Potiphar's wife wanted Joseph physically. Joseph's response to her is the very reason why Potiphar trusts him. This loyalty to Potiphar, and even more significantly his love for God (v. 9), keeps him from falling into the temptation of sin. Potiphar's wife persists; yet, Joseph resists due to his love for God and duty to his employer. Joseph, however, is falsely accused and returns to a barren time in his life. The Lord is with Joseph in prison too. This is evidence that God's blessing doesn't mean God blesses only in times of freedom and success. Joseph, while in prison, is protected again (v. 22-23). God was with him.

GOD'S STORY

God's hand remains on Joseph, allowing for Joseph to be used of God to help Pharaoh. This is an integral part of the narrative. Joseph, through the interpretation of the dreams of both the baker and the cupbearer, begins a journey to Pharaoh that Joseph could never have manufactured himself. Both of these dreams put Joseph in a place where he is able to eventually get in front of the king. As you know, Pharaoh sees in Joseph what Potiphar saw in Joseph—leadership, courage and loyalty. This puts Joseph in a position to not only experience a reunion with his family but also care for the people of Egypt who were experiencing a tremendous drought and food shortage. This is what it means to be a blessing. God uses Joseph even in unwanted and unplanned circumstances to carry out God's will for the world. Joseph is living in the shoes of his great grandfather Abraham quite well.

OUR STORY

When I read the narrative of Joseph and look at the ups and downs in his life it makes me wonder how closely my life resembles Joseph. I've never been thrown into a pit and sold into slavery. I've never been put in charge of a government official's house. I've never been placed in prison for a crime that I did not commit. I have never been put in charge of a prison. I've never interpreted dreams for another. I've never been asked to interpret dreams for a king. I've never been asked to be in second command of a nation. Finally, I've never been asked to find a way to feed millions of people in a land where food and water are in shortage. These things, I am quite glad actually, have never happened to me.

My life, however, has had many ups and downs, just like your life. I've had moments of joy and moments of mourning. I've been in places of desperation and yet been brought out of them. I've experienced leadership of others and been asked to do things that are way beyond my competencies. I, like you, have had moments of aloneness and uncertainty and moments of fellowship and clarity. This is what life is like. Life has its ups and downs. I believe that this is one of the many points that the narrative is suggesting we comprehend and find meaning for our own lives. God is still there—always. In the good times and in the bad times, God is present. God's blessing doesn't go away with the bad times. To the contrary, God's blessing is God sharing God's life with us. This truth allows us to weather the storms of life. The writer wants the Israelites to remember that even in their most difficult times, God blesses. God's blessing is not tied to success. Success is not a theological category. God's blessing, however, is tied to God's faithfulness, which is why it is always present.

One thing God has asked of me, whether in the ups in life or in the downs of life, is to be a blessing to others. In fact, God has asked this of all of us, for all times, in everything for everyone.

OTHERS' STORY

God is a God of reunion and reconciliation. This much we know for certain. The entire biblical narrative, Old and New Testaments both, is full of stories of reunion—reunion with God, self, others and the world.

People find their way to God and make new life out of an old life. Through spiritual transformation, people have a coming together again, gathering or event that reshapes the way they view the world. People also have a revelation with their self and find their true identity all over again. For some of us, this happens throughout all of our life. We, being created in the image of God, are always seeking to find a way to live into that image. There is also reunion with others, like what we see with Joseph and his family, specifically, his brothers. We also have recently seen this with Jacob and Esau. God desires that we not only be reconciled to God, but to others as well.

We will later see that Joseph's reunion with his brother led Joseph to forgive them all (even though his brothers may have remained skeptical thinking that their previous deeds demanded revenge) because he knew that "God sent me ahead of you." Meaning, it was in God's plan that you do what you did to me in order that God's purposes be met and God's promise fulfilled. Joseph gets what reunion with God, self, others and the world is all about.

THE WORLD'S STORY

Joseph was sent to prison even though he was innocent. He could have felt all kinds of emotions. This could have included feelings of anger and envy. Envy can be greed, jealousy, bitterness, resentment, and spite and in the end an insatiable desire to want what is found in another. In the case of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37), envy is what leads them to at first want to kill Joseph but settle on throwing him in a dried out cistern, selling him to others as a slave and then claiming he is dead to their father. Envy makes people do crazy things.

Envy is one of the seven deadly sins. Envy has been described as “sorrow for another’s good” (Thomas Aquinas). The world we live in is filled with envy. The gifts and skills in other people, the way one looks, the possessions one has or doesn’t have, the relationships people have, and so on can all lead toward a life consumed by envy. Envy can destroy your soul. Envy can erode your spiritual life down to nothing if you let it. Envy is the opposite of goodwill. Kindness, friendliness, benevolence, and so on can all be stifled by envy’s gripping power.

Here are several ways to combat feelings or behaviors of envy and live in a place that accepts our circumstances, whatever they might be:

- 1. Remember that envy is a sin.** This, if you truly desire to live a holy life, needs to be first on the list. To move toward a place where there is greater frequency and duration of holy moments in your life, you must remember that envy is a sin.
- 2. Remember you are God’s creation.** God made you to be who you are, not who someone else is. If you want to move past feelings and behaviors of envy, live daily knowing that, although you may need some improvement and have some growth areas in your life, God created you to be you!
- 3. Come clean with who you really are.** As you realize that you are God’s child, it may also be helpful to make a list of the things that make you who you are. If you have a hard time coming clean with who you really are—be as honest as you can—then you may need to find someone to help you identify your unique contributions to this world and to God’s mission.
- 4. Be generous.** When I get envious, I strive to be more generous. Generous in my compliments, my giving, my listening, my helping, and so on. Living a kind life that is open-handed and ready to act as though nothing is truly yours, envy can be held at bay.
- 5. Celebrate others.** Part of living a generous life is finding ways to rejoice in the good things that others accomplish and experience. This will take some time to become an authentic action and discipline. However, if you push through it, it will help you become less envious.
- 6. Remember you can only control your own circumstances.** If you live with the reality that you can only control your own actions, it will help you embrace what happens to you and not worry about what happens to others. Living within your means requires that you know what you can actually control and what you can’t.
- 7. God is your audience, no one else.** Remember that God is the only one you are living to honor and glorify. You’ve been created, in part, to point people to God. This means that you have an audience of One. Although this will likely be a continuous tension in your life, it is critical to overcome envy by knowing, believing and living as though the only one you are to honor is God.