

Chapter 3: What God Intended

The life of Joseph from a _____ standpoint:

1. _____ or under - _____.

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

1 Peter 4:10

Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits.

1 Corinthians 12:7

He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

2 Corinthians 1:4

"The job does not _____.

The man _____."

2. **On the job, _____ means everything.**

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

Proverbs 11:3

"The Lord hates people with twisted hearts, but he delights in those who have integrity."

Proverbs 11:20

The Lord hates dishonest scales, but he is pleased with honest weights.

Proverbs 11:1

Flee from sexual immorality...

1 Corinthians 6:18

Flee from idolatry...

1 Corinthians 10:14

Flee the evil desires of youth...

2 Timothy 2:22

So give yourselves completely to God. Stand against the devil, and the devil will run from you.

James 4:7

Sometimes the best way to take a stand is to _____.

In order to be a leader, a man must have followers. And to have followers, a man must have their confidence. Hence, the supreme quality for a leader is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army or in an office. If a man's associates find him guilty of phoniness, if they find that he lacks forthright integrity, he will fail. His teachings and actions must square with each other. The first great need, therefore, is integrity and high purpose.

—Dwight Eisenhower

Today's Equipping Point

Be _____

“Give me an _____ heart.”

Psalm 86:11

3. We must learn to deal with _____.

“After Joseph had been taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelites, Potiphar an Egyptian, one of Pharaoh's officials and the manager of his household, bought him from them. As it turned out, God was with Joseph and things went very well with him. He ended up living in the home of his Egyptian master. His master recognized that God was with him, saw that God was working for good in everything he did.”
Genesis 39:1-3

Today, we are building _____.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do we allow our jobs to define us so much?
2. How is attitude toward your job related to spiritual leadership?
3. What specifically will you change today about yourself? Who will keep you accountable for this?

Teaching Script

A man once walked by a building site and saw three stone masons side by side, sweating over their work in the hot sun. He asked the first, "What are you doing?"

"Laying bricks" came the reply.

He asked the second stone mason, "And what are you doing?"

"Building a wall" came the reply.

Then he asked the third mason, "And what is it you are doing?"

"I am building a great cathedral."

Today, what will you be doing? Laying bricks or building cathedrals?

This week we come to Chapter 3 of *The Story*, and the tale of Joseph. There have probably been hundreds and thousands of sermons preached on Joseph, but today I'd like to come at it from a different angle, one I've not heard before. I'd like us to talk about the theology of work, based on the life of Joseph.

I don't have to tell you that a man's professional life is at heart of his self-worth and self-definition. And it strikes me that potentially no one in the Bible, Old or New Testament, had to have a better grip on the consequences of his work than Joseph. And so, in a 6 a.m. Bible study where most of us will leave here to go to *work*, it seems appropriate that we ask the question:

Today, what will you be doing? Laying bricks or building cathedrals?

You're familiar with the story—Joseph is his father's favorite, but betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery. He works well for Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard, until he's set up by Potiphar's wife, and gets thrown into prison. There, he serves the prison warden well, and eventually his gifts for interpreting dreams land him in front of Pharaoh himself. And in his third job, he doesn't just manage a house or a prison well—he manages the entire country, and saves Israel in the process.

Can I give you three things that really stick with me from the life of Joseph from a vocational standpoint?

1. Unemployment or under-employment.

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. (1 Peter 4.10)

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

1 Peter 4:10

Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits.

1 Corinthians 12:7

He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

2 Corinthians 1:4

If anyone could be deemed as under-employed, it was Joseph. But we see that he always used his gifts of leadership and dream interpretation wherever he was.

I'm guessing with this many guys here, we have a range of experiences present this morning: most if not all of us have been under-employed if not totally *UN*employed. Many, if not most, of us have been passed over, screwed over, or just run over in our jobs. And some of us in this room, right now, are dealing with pink slips, disappointment, anger, and all the resulting financial pressure and emotional fallout.

But according to Joseph, every job deserves your best, no matter what you're doing or where. Paul agreed:

Servants, do what you're told by your earthly masters. And don't just do the minimum that will get you by. Do your best. Work from the heart for your real Master, for God, confident that you'll get paid in full when you come into your inheritance. Keep in mind always that the ultimate Master you're serving is Christ. The sullen servant who does shoddy work will be held responsible. Being Christian doesn't cover up bad work.

Colossians 3:22-25

In Joseph's story, we learn that God put him squarely in each circumstance precisely because that's where his gifts were needed, *at that point in time*. I'm wondering if we can't say the same thing.

Before we moved to San Antonio, I went through a ten-month period of unemployment. It was humiliating, it was depressing, it was a bad time. During that year my daughters were in 2nd and 4th grade; but as it turned out, since I didn't have a job, every day I took them to school. Every day I picked them up from school. Every day I was at home and available to immediately hear about their day, help with homework, and just generally be a dad, when normally I would have been stuck in a meeting or in traffic. Is it possible, I wonder, that for that season, while my kids were still young, God had me right where He wanted me, and that even in such a difficult season, my job was to bloom where I was planted right then?

If you find yourself in some version of a dungeon, between a rock and a hard place, with far more questions than answers, may I suggest that if in fact God is sovereign, you might, like Joseph, be right where you're supposed to be?

I don't know who said it, but it's certainly true:

"The job does not make the man. The man makes the job."

So, bloom where you are planted.

This leads us to our second takeaway:

2. On the job, *character* means everything.

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

Proverbs 11:3

The Lord hates people with twisted hearts, but he delights in those who have integrity.

Proverbs 11:20

The Lord hates dishonest scales, but he is pleased with honest weights.

Proverbs 11:1

We hear about integrity, or the lack of it, every week in the news:

- Eliot Spitzer—moral crusader, laws against sex tourism and prostitution, part of ‘escort sting’ operation
- Mark Foley—congressman, crusader against child exploitation, sends explicit text messages to young pages
- Larry Craig—Republican family values senator, caught in MN airport restroom on gay solicitation

And it’s not just politicians on the evening news; there’s the man who pads his expense account, who mentally undresses his co-worker every day, who lies about having to work late.

Joseph had a lot of responsibility; but he took integrity so seriously that when his master’s wife made a play for him, he ran.

Monty Python: “Run away! Run away!”

Flee from sexual immorality...

1 Corinthians 6:18

Flee from idolatry...

1 Corinthians 10:14

Flee the evil desires of youth...

2 Timothy 2:22

So give yourselves completely to God. Stand against the devil, and the devil will run from you.

James 4:7

Sometimes the best way to take a stand is to get the heck out.

This brings us to our Equipping Point for today:

In order to be a leader, a man must have followers. And to have followers, a man must have their confidence. Hence, the supreme quality for a leader is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office. If a man’s associates find him guilty of phoniness, if they find that he lacks forthright integrity, he will fail. His teachings and actions must square with each other. The first great need, therefore, is integrity and high purpose.

—Dwight Eisenhower

Today's Equipping Point:

Be consistent.

"Give me an undivided heart."

Psalm 86:11

You can go to church, join a small group, come to our men's group...but if you lead a compartmentalized life...

Remember those verses from Proverbs 11...

If you're a different person at home than at work, if your vocabulary is different, if the surfing history on your computer is different at home than at work, then let us take a page from Joseph's work history and as we lead our families spiritually, let's be men with undivided hearts.

And last...Joseph's story shows us that on our jobs...

3. We must learn to deal with disappointment.

After Joseph had been taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelites, Potiphar, an Egyptian, one of Pharaoh's officials and the manager of his household, bought him from them. As it turned out, GOD was with Joseph and things went very well with him. He ended up living in the home of his Egyptian master. His master recognized that GOD was with him, saw that GOD was working for good in everything he did.

Genesis 39:1-3

Let us stop at this point and re-read last part of verse 1: Joseph had just been bought. He had gone from his father's favorite, splendidly clothed and highly favored, to being someone's property. I doubt that any of us who have been fired, passed over for a promotion or betrayed by a colleague have ever gone from heir apparent to **property**. But despite this precipitous fall in stature, the Bible says there was something about Joseph...something about him that was so winsome, so attractive, so appealing, that "his master recognized God was with him, and saw that God was working for good in everything he did."

How was that possible? How could someone who had been bushwhacked by his brothers, left for dead, then sold to someone who just happened to be walking by...how was it possible that when Joseph landed, the man who bought him in the same way he would have purchased cattle, saw God in his life?

The only way is that Joseph had what we discussed last week: faith. No matter where he found himself, he never doubted God had a plan for his life. Joseph had unlocked a key to occupational success that most men never achieve: he learned that God is sovereign, and that in each of our lives, there is always an Upper Story.

Some of you are hacked off today because of some surprises. You've been terminated without cause or without notice...you've been personally wounded by the actions of a former boss...cast off by a company...neglected by a bureaucracy.

But guys, if we do not deal directly with our bitterness and overcome our disappointment, God will never be evident in our lives. If I continue to carry a grudge against a current or former boss, NO ONE will ever come up to me and say what was said about Joseph: "You know, I'm noticing that GOD is really with you, He just seems to reside with you. I've noticed that GOD is working for good in everything you do..."

Let me just ask: has anyone ever said those words to you at work? Has anyone ever watched you in meetings, observed your work habits, listened to how you talk about your boss, your wife, your family, and said that your work and your attitude is so compelling, so engaging, it just seems that God must be with you? I confess to you that *nobody ever* said anything like that to me when I worked for MCI or North American Van Lines.

Our tendency is to get our pound of flesh, exact our revenge, get in the last word.

Listen, I know it's hard. I've been fired...I've been passed over...I've been put inside a box where my giftedness was allowed to hit on maybe three out of eight cylinders...I've been relegated to a position that utilized a fraction of what I had to offer. I'm sure you have too.

But is it possible that you and I are sometimes put in humbling circumstances so that God can work out some character issues deep inside? Is it possible that, just like Joseph, our faith needs to be challenged that even in slavery, or a dungeon, unemployed or under-employed, un-utilized and forgotten—is it possible that a difficult professional environment has a higher purpose? An Upper Story? A bigger picture?

I think Joseph must have figured that out. I think he must have discovered that if God is sovereign, if in fact nothing is accidental or haphazard, that his disturbing condition was not an indication of God's absence, but a part of His plan, and a crucial step in Joseph's journey to becoming a man.

Is it possible today that wherever you find yourself professionally, the same thing is true? And that we, like Joseph, must have an unshakable faith that wherever we are today is precisely where we need to be?

Do you, like Peter, have the faith to say, "*Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.*" Luke 5:5

These 13 chapters of Genesis describe a roller-coaster life of ups and downs that paints a very clear picture of what faith looks like up close and personal—of what it means to say, "OK Jesus, because you say so, because you put me here, I'll do it. I don't see the point, I'm pretty burned out, but because you say so, I'll let down my nets again and do my best."

The movie, *Mr. Holland's Opus*

- A musician who struggles to find success in life
- Dreams of composing a magnificent symphony that will be played by orchestras across the world

- But the real world has bills to pay, so takes a job as a high school music teacher—save money and write later
- He absolutely hates teaching, but wife gets pregnant
- Throughout movie he changes
 - comes to love teaching
 - finds ways to inspire his students to love music
 - to find their self confidence.

Thirty years pass and Mr. Holland is about to retire. On his final day he packs up his desk and heads for his car. On the way he hears music coming from the auditorium. He goes to see what's happening. He opens the door to find the auditorium filled with his students from the past thirty years. They're playing a piece of music he wrote. It's a concert in his honor. And then one of Mr. Holland's former students delivers a speech:

"Mr. Holland had a profound influence in my own life, yet I get the feeling that he considers the greater part of his own life misspent. He was always working on that symphony of his, to become rich and famous. But Mr. Holland isn't rich, and he isn't famous, so it might be easy for him to think himself a failure. But he would be wrong.

*"Look around you, Mr. Holland. There is not a life in this room that you have not touched. We are better because of you. Mr. Holland, **we** are your symphony. **We** are the melodies and the notes of your opus. **We** are the music of your life."*

Without knowing it, Mr. Holland had been writing a different concerto—a work that touched lives in a way he couldn't see.

In the same way, Joseph was commissioned to do work that on the surface, could be seen as humiliating, frustrating—a slave, in prison—*just laying bricks*. But like Mr. Holland, he later discovered he was doing something far greater: he was saving his nation.

Today, would you resolve with me in faith that there is an Upper Story not just to Joseph's jobs, but to yours, and to mine. And that despite the failures and obstacles, our work matters greatly. Because we are not just laying bricks, or selling pharmaceuticals, or teaching students. In your family, with your staff, in your team, you have temples of the Holy Spirit.

Today, we are building cathedrals.

[Prayer]

Father, we have been convicted today by this great man of faith. Make us men of character, that have consistent lives and undivided hearts. Give us an unshakable faith to deal with the disappointments that are sure to come. Remind us we are investing in lives—we are building cathedrals.