

The Story of Joseph

Power House

Part 19 - July 15, 2012



Joey's in da'house!

He's come a long way in a short time: from a powerless teenager (bragging to his brothers about a dream of wheat, where *their* wheat bows to *his* wheat), stripped of his little authority and dumped into a pit, to striving in the wheat fields (learning how Egyptians cultivate and harvest wheat), to now approaching the power house of Potiphar.



And we paused with Joseph at the gate, to ponder his tornado of thoughts: The dream of wheat: vision, delusion, nightmare? The field work: preparation, destiny, coincidence? And then, he shakes off his past, puts the Hebrew "hillbillies" behind him, and enters the most powerful house, in the most powerful city, in the most powerful country in the world. Potiphar's house was in Itjtaway, [Itch-towie] the capitol city of the 12th Dynasty. The ruins haven't been discovered.

But, by the end of today's story, *you'll* know *exactly* where Potiphar lived. Potiphar's title of "captain of the guard" (39:1) doesn't do it justice in the translation. This is the *very same title* given to the Babylonian general who destroys Jerusalem in 586^{BC}. Flash-forward about 1308 years ...



... Nebuzaradan [NEB-uh-zahr-AY-dan] the **captain of the guard**, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the Lord, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every great house he burned with fire. - 2 Kings 25:8b-9 NAS

Potiphar was likely a respected commander of the Egyptian army, now serving Pharaoh *directly*, with an elite team of hand selected soldiers. And Joseph has just entered control central.

With clout, we control people. With cash, we control things. And that's why we desire 'em so *much* ... for the power of *control*. And Potiphar has plenty to spare of both! He was compensated with land that he had neither the time nor desire to manage. And the more he watched Joseph, the more impressed he became.

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. [Don't underestimate this word "attendant". Joseph becomes the C.O.O. (Chief Operating Officer) of the entire plantation] Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. - Genesis 39:3-4 NIV

Joseph exemplifies the faithful steward in Jesus' parable of the talents.



His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" – *Matthew 25:21 NIV*

For Joseph, this means sharing Potiphar's power and prosperity. Joseph is suddenly now, himself, a slave master! So, how will Joseph choose to *use* his new found power?

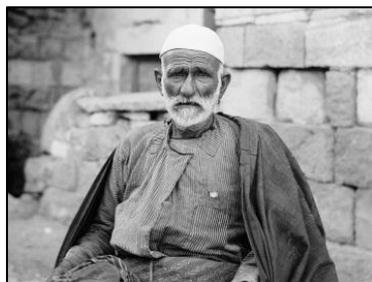
While making an analogy about His coming kingdom, Jesus details some of the abuses of power that tempt a household steward.

"But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of." – *Matthew 24:48-50 NIV*

As servants of Jesus, we tend to have better success handling great adversity than great *prosperity*. The enticements that come with power are just far more subtle and devious and alluring. But Joseph chooses to use his power to *bless* others for *God's* glory rather than using it to *control* others for his own.

According to a Jewish legend, Potiphar overheard Joseph speak his name while softly praying in Hebrew. Potiphar later asked if it was a spell. And Joseph shyly admitted that he had been asking God to help him be a *blessing* to Potiphar.

From the time he [Potiphar] put him [Joseph] 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. – *Genesis 39:5 NIV*



Remember God's promise to Abraham regarding his descendants? Flashback about 197 years to Joseph's great grandpa ...

The LORD had said to Abram ... "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." – *Genesis 12:2-3 NIV*

"Peoples" is plural because it means groups, tribes, and nations. And the very first fulfillment of *this* prophecy, the very first descendant of Abram (later changed to Abraham) that God *actually* uses to bless a legitimate "peoples", is Joseph, in Egypt. And God *doesn't* call him to be a prophet or a preacher, but a farm hand, an assistant, a manager, an *incarcerated criminal*, and a government leader ... *okay, those last two kind'a overlap!*

God's glorification of a servant is *never* for the servant alone, but for the *return glorification* of God, through the edification of others, to the immense *gratification* of the faithful servant!

In the same way, God will use *you* to do amazing things in everyday life if *you'll* do what *Joseph* did: he *used* power, but wasn't used *by* power; he *took up* power, but wasn't taken up *by* power.

So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. [Probably for religious reasons; we covered this last time in "Living the Dream"] – Genesis 39:6a NIV

It's interesting how the world will tempt you with power even as it despises your faith. But, the best way to battle their bias is to *bless 'em with your faith!*

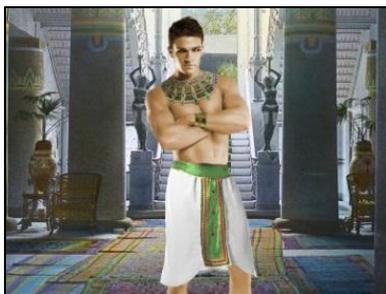


[Jesus said] "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." – Matthew 5:14-16 NIV

This is *just* what Joseph did! And this is *just* what Potiphar saw.

So, Joseph's got it made! Economically he's secure. Vocationally he's respected and trusted. And physically ... he's a *hunk!*

Now Joseph was well-built *and* handsome ... – Genesis 39:6b NIV



And it means *exactly* what you think it means. It's fairly rare for scripture to describe physical traits like this. However, I did find three other examples in Genesis: Joseph's great grandma, Sarah, "*What a beautiful woman*". (12:11) Joseph's grandma, Rebekah, "*The girl was very beautiful*". (24:16) Joseph's mother, "*Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful.*" (29:17) and it means *exactly* what you think it means. Joseph was a handsome man with a great physique!

And this is yet *another* power, one that's potentially lethal! Nothing wrong with being well-built and handsome, but it brings a unique set of temptations and dangers. He's a hot, hormonal, Hebrew. And all that physical, farm labor has expressed itself in his toned and tanned frame. *Yeah ... and he's probably charming too!* ... and *kind* and *compassionate* and *godly*.

And now he's in charge! Likely the youngest C.O.O. ever to serve at Potiphar's! Imagine how the servant girls must've swooned!

But, remember what we know about Joe. He was insensitive and boastful with his dreams; instead of blessing his brothers, he blessed himself at *their* expense, and he ended *up* in the pit.

God *used it, but Joseph needed it!* And knowing he's headed for Potiphar's prison makes me think maybe he needs *another* trip to the pit, for an even deeper level of humbleness and dependence. I think God uses the prison to protect him from where this power is leading, *and* to give him the perspective and the fortitude to deal with the *overwhelming power* that's on its way.

Joseph learned agriculture in Potiphar's field, and humility in Potiphar's prison; so what'd he learn in Potiphar's *house*? Don't be alone with *Mrs.* Potiphar!

... and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" [And Joseph said, "Are you trying to seduce me, Mrs. Potiphar?"] – *Genesis 39:7 NIV*



Mrs. Potiphar is used to getting what she wants. And Joseph looks like an ideal companion for a casual affair between a younger man and a bolder woman! She's shamelessly, brazenly, selfishly aggressive. This is what you call the *direct approach!* Most translations fail to capture the forcefulness (and humor) of the original Hebrew, which is better rendered as, "Sex! Now!" We laugh because ... *sex*, but it's really about *power*. Yes, it's a betrayal of her husband ... but it's not really about *that* either.

In every city there are *two cities*: a spiritual city of God and a material city of man. And what marks the citizens of each city, is their *supreme* motive – love of God or love of self.¹ And the *practical* difference is found in *how* they use power. Mrs. Potiphar is using her power as a citizen of the city of man, to satisfy her own corrupt cravings at the expense of others. She's possessed by the power she possesses. But the *best citizens* will *always* reside in the city of God, because in *every* area (business, medicine, education, government, law, or *whatever*), they use *their* power to bless and glorify.

Don't let yourself off the hook ... *you have power!* Sex appeal, brains, silver tongue, seniority, and *money*, it's not about type or amount, but how you *choose* to use whatever you got. The city of man *assumes* your power is *mostly* for you; "You're #1!" It goes further and says that you should live out to the *margins* of your power ... maybe a little *beyond*; "You only go around once!"

Where did Potiphar and the Mrs. live? City of man. And where did Joseph live? City of God. And where do *you* live? There's a quick way to tell. Who sits on the throne, supreme? When Jesus spoke about His coming kingdom, He went on to say ...

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions." – *Matthew 24:45-47 NIV*

Daniel's faith was tested in the lion's den; Joseph's will be in the *cougar cage!* And so begins Joseph's struggle with the *second* temptation in Potiphar's house ... the lure of sexual pleasure.

And this is where we have to close God's story for today.

¹ From the A.D. 5th century book, "The City of God", by St Augustine