

Intro:

The story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50 is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. It's incredible to watch how Joseph handled severe adversity. While a teenager, his brothers out of spite sold him into slavery. Later while doing his job a seductive woman framed him, and forced him to spend time in prison. Yet he never threw in the towel. Would you agree with me that Joseph was a great man?

Q: What made Joseph such a great person?

If you think about it (see Swindoll), Joseph never accomplished any of the things we normally associate with biblical greatness. He never slew a giant. He never walked on water. He never healed a blind man. He never wrote a verse of Scripture. He never survived a lion's den. In fact, he never performed a single miracle. He was an ordinary person that grew up in what we call today a dysfunctional family.

Q: So what made Joseph a great person?

We'll see today in Genesis 45.

Proposition: In Genesis 45, we can see 2 traits of a truly great person.

The Main Characters in the Story:

- A. Joseph (1-15)
 - B. Pharaoh (16-24)
 - C. Jacob (25-28)
- I. A truly great person is Compassionate towards People.
Notice what Joseph did towards his brothers:
- A. He took the initiative to get close to them (4).
 - B. He helped them come to grips with their sin and guilt (4).
 - C. He talked with them.
 - D. He took steps to meet practical needs.
- II. A truly great person is Confident in God.
Notice what Joseph knew about God:
- A. God is Sovereign.
 - B. God is Sufficient.

The Main Characters in the Story:

- A. Joseph (1-15)
- B. Pharaoh (16-24)
- C. Jacob (25-28)

Let's highlight Joseph. What made him such a great person? What can we learn from him? I see 2 tremendous traits in his life throughout the entire story, but especially highlighted in Gen 45.

Disclaimer: These 2 traits are not profound. But they are essential.

I. A truly great person is Compassionate towards People.

Let's join the drama, already in progress. Joseph and his 11 brothers are together. The brothers still don't know it's Joseph. He tested them in ch 44 by putting his silver cup in Benjamin's satchel. He announced that the penalty would be that Benjamin would become a slave, while the others could go free. That was the test.

Joseph wanted to see if his brothers had changed. Would they dump Benjamin like they dumped him 25 years earlier? Had they learned to love anybody besides themselves?

Then Joseph saw that God had changed their hearts. Judah spoke up and volunteered, "Please sir, if you do that my father will die. I can't bear the thought. Make me your slave instead of my brother Benjamin. Let him go free."

When Joseph heard those words, here's what happened. The climax...

V 1 "Then Joseph could not control himself..."

Q: Why could Joseph not control himself?

A: He'd seen evidence of his brothers' repentance and change of heart. They had learned their lesson from their sin 2 decades before. So he commanded everyone to leave the room, except for his 11 brothers.

Then what happened?

V 2 "And he wept aloud..."

Real men don't cry, right? Wrong! Only wimps show emotion, right? Listen. There's not a man in this room who is more of a man than Joseph. Joseph knew how to face danger head on. He wasn't afraid to tackle huge obstacles. But he wasn't ashamed to weep either. In fact, this is the third of 5 times Joseph wept over his brothers. And it wasn't a few muffled sobs either. What does v 2 say? The Egyptians in the other room could hear cries.

Joseph was a man of great compassion. It would be well for us to learn to weep at times. There are things that ought to break our hearts...

Illust:

The brothers are a basket case at this point! They're trembling in their boots. They have no idea what's got a hold of this Egyptian governor. Then they were really shocked. Remember he'd been speaking to them in Egyptian through a translator. But now they hear in their native Hebrew tongue...

V 3 Hebrew--"Ani Yosaph!"

"I am Joseph! Does my father yet live?" What did he say? They couldn't believe their ears. They were speechless. They were terrified. This must be some bizarre joke! But then they heard a shocking statement that only their brother Joseph could make...

V 4 "I am Joseph your brother whom ye sold into Egypt."

It was Joseph! And he hadn't forgotten what they had done to him. Surely the cat and mouse game was over. He'd played with them long enough. Now he'd call in the Egyptian bouncers and repay them for their wicked deed. He had every right.

But he didn't. There was no vengeance in Joseph's heart. He didn't retaliate. He didn't do to them as they'd done to him. That's what made him such a great

person. But don't exalt Joseph. As we'll see in a moment, even Joseph would say, the glory belongs to God alone!

Quote: Lewis Smeades wrote a book entitled Forgive and Forget. Here's what he says, "Forgiving seems almost unnatural. Our sense of fairness tells us people should pay for the wrong they do. But forgiving is love's power to break nature's rule." (in Swindoll, 110)

A truly great person is Compassionate towards People. He doesn't just "talk about" compassion. He shows it.

I want you to see Joseph's Compassion in action. Watch what he did towards the very brothers who had wronged him:

1. He took the initiative to get close to them (4).

V 4 "Come near to me."

Joseph took the first step to remove the barrier between him and his brothers. JOSEPH took the step. And remember, Joseph wasn't the one who erected the barrier! But he knew that God wanted that wall to come down. So he made himself vulnerable, and opened up his life.

Eph 4:32 "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has forgiven you."

Remember what Jesus did with Peter after he'd denied him? He took the initiative to restore him. So must we.

Illust: Civil war story of woman who needed to let go

2. He helped them come to grips with their sin and guilt (4).

V 4 "whom you sold."

Why did Joseph bring up the past? Was he rubbing it in? No. He'd already forgiven his brothers. He brought up the past for their own good. He'd buried the hatchet, by God's help. Now he wanted his brothers to do the same.

3. He talked with them.

Don't minimize that. One of the hardest things to do with someone who's wronged you is this. Talk with him or her.

Q: Husbands and wives, do you ever give your spouse the silent treatment? Please don't forget Eph 4:26. Usually marriages don't fail in a blowout, but a slow leak. Talk things out!

Joseph did. He talked with his brothers. Watch what he told them...

READ vv 5-8

Joseph talked. He addressed the past problem, so it could be buried forever. He released his brothers from their past guilt. He prompted all parties to look at the situation from God's perspective.

4. He took steps to meet practical needs.

Compassion is practical. It's not "pie in the sky by and by" talk. Watch what Joseph did to meet practical needs:

a) Physical Needs

Vv 9-13 "...I will nourish thee... (*v 9)."

Vv 21-23 "Joseph gave them wagons..."

Illust:

b) Emotional Needs

Vv 14-15 "...he kissed them..."

That touches me. How could Joseph kiss the very ones that robbed him of the prime of his life? Only by God's help, as we'll see. But he touched them. He ministered to them a healing touch.

Q: What impact did Joseph's compassion have on his brothers?

V 15 "his brethren talked with him."

Do you see that? The brothers hatred and jealousy are gone! Joseph diffused their hatred with love. He melted their hearts by his compassion.

Illust:

Q: Are you a compassionate person?

I confess God has convicted me about this. Friends, if we are going to be more like our Blessed Savior, we need to learn to exhibit compassion towards others. If we're going to impact lost people, we need to shower them with compassion. If we're going to become truly great people, we must learn to be Compassionate towards people.

Illust:

Q: I'm not Compassionate like Joseph. How can I be?

A: The answer is related to a second, even greater trait in his life. A truly great person is Compassionate towards people. And...

II. A truly great person is Confident in God.

We've said it many times before, and we'll say it again. Joseph is not the prime character in Gen 37-50. This is not really so much a story about Joseph, but about God. God was REAL in Joseph's life.

Notice what Joseph knew about God.

A. God is Sovereign.

Notice again the striking statements...

V 5 "Be not grieved...God did send me..."

God sent me. You sold me. You bartered with the Midianite slavetraders. You tried to get rid of me. But God sent me. God used your deed to accomplish His purpose. What was that? "To preserve life."

Joseph knew that God is Sovereign.

V 7 "God sent me to preserve a posterity...and to save your lives..."

V 8 "So now it was not you...But God...He made me a ruler..."

V 9 "...God hath made me lord of all Egypt..."

Joseph told his brothers, God sent me to Egypt. God had his hand on my promotion to #2 in Egypt. God did it all! God's in control of my life. You didn't send me here. God did.

Note: Joseph didn't excuse his brother's sin. Remember he already helped them to deal with that. But here he acknowledges the truth that nothing can happen to us without coming through God's wise hands.

What a great trait! Joseph was the kind of person that prompted people around him to look at situations from God's perspective. Do you know people like that? They're good people to have around.

Illust:

Great people are Confident in God. They know that God is Sovereign. That truth impacts their lives.

Rom 8:28 "We know that all things work together for good..."

I Cor 10:13 "There hath no temptation taken you ... God is faithful..."

Great people know something else about God.

B. God is Sufficient.

Think about something. 25 years have passed since the crime the brothers committed against Joseph in Gen 37. Now finally we're told WHY God allowed that tragedy. But it doesn't really start making sense until 25 years later. We can see now that God used this family tragedy to accomplish His will.

Quote: I read an interesting observation in an article entitled, "The Joseph Syndrome," (Leadership Journal, Fall 92), "Joseph had no idea why he was born into a home with as much strife and hostility as his, why his father favored him, why God permitted the painful events in his life. The end of the story helps answer those questions: He was sent to Egypt to save his family from starvation. He unknowingly set the stage for the exodus of Moses and Israel by inviting Jacob and his brothers to live in Egypt with him. He was ultimately used to preserve the family lineage through which the Messiah would one day come.

"Even at the end of his life, I suspect there were unanswered questions. He was able to say, as he surveyed the painful wreckage of his past relationships with his brothers, 'You meant this for evil, but God meant it for good.' But why did reconciliation have to take so long? Why so many years of separation? Joseph probably went to his grave with some of the mysteries still unanswered." (130)

Let's be honest. Joseph waited 2 decades to find out WHY. Some of us may have to wait a lifetime, and still not find out WHY.

But He knew this about God. God is Sovereign--He makes no mistakes. And God is Sufficient. He is good, and what He does is good, even if we don't see the whole picture.

God used tragedy to accomplish His purpose in Joseph's life. He did that throughout the Bible. Here's what Jeremiah acknowledged about God:

Lamentations 3:38 (NIV), "Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?"

Q: What response does a Sovereign and Sufficient God want from us?

A: He wants us to TRUST Him. Just like Joseph did.

Jer 17:7 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the LORD is."

The rest of the story went like this. Pharaoh heard about the family reunion (16-24), and authorized an entorage of gifts to be sent to Joseph's father. The brothers had a hard time convincing Jacob that Joseph was truly alive, but finally he believed (25-28).

I chuckle at what Joseph told his brothers as they were leaving...

V 24 "See that ye fall not out by the way."

NIV "Don't quarrel on the way!"

Don't resort to old tactics, brothers! Don't argue. Old patterns of sin are stingy!

Conclusion:

True greatness is revealed not in grand deeds, but in daily attitudes. What made Joseph a great person? He was Compassionate towards people. He was Confident in God.

Q: Can God still use tragedy to accomplish His purposes?

Illust: I was impacted at the OARBC conference when a Pastor in the Cleveland area spoke. He's pastored there 40 years. He and his wife endured an incredible experience. It had to do with their son. It's a modern day prodigal son story. But in this case, the son died of Aids. I'd like to read the story as told by that son, entitled, "How Aids Saved My Life."

We've seen 2 traits of a great person. A truly great person is Compassionate towards others, and Confident in God.

The only way to be such a person is through Jesus Christ. We are not great. He is. We are sinners. All of us. The only way we can become the person God aims for us to be is by acknowledging Jesus Christ as the Savior and Lord of our life.