

Practical Wisdom of a Man of God

Genesis 46.31-47.27

While God's plan cannot be thwarted by the sinful actions of men, it is magnified when combined with the wise leadership of godly men. Joseph is 'Exhibit A' of this truth, both with his family, and with the Egyptians. *Happy is the man who finds wisdom (Proverbs 3.13)!*

Joseph's Family Meets Pharaoh (46.31-47.12)

- *Joseph prepares his family to meet Pharaoh (46.31-34)*
- *Pharaoh meets Joseph's brothers and blesses them (47.1-6)*
- *Jacob blesses Pharaoh, and is blessed by Pharaoh (47.7-12)*

Joseph's Wise Leadership Blesses Pharaoh and Egypt (47.13-27)

- *People of Egypt live, and Pharaoh prospers (13-26)*
- *Israel thrives in Egypt and grows in number (27)*

The 'moral' of the story: *Wise leaders ensure God's blessings!*



Ready or not, here comes the 2020 presidential election! One week from tomorrow, the Iowa caucuses will kick off the primary season. The Democratic candidates for president are fighting to come out on top – although few winners in Iowa have gone on to become president.

In the lead-up to the primaries, a new Insider poll asked voters to list qualifications that made them more likely to vote for a certain candidate. The top ten were:

1. Served as a governor (+33%)
2. Grew up middle class (+29%)
3. Served as vice president (+28%)
4. Has released tax returns (+26%)
5. Member of the Senate (+25.5%)
6. Armed forces veteran (+25%)
7. Grew up poor (+23%)
8. Member of the House of Representatives (+22%)
9. Age 50 or younger (+17%)
10. Multi-lingual (+15%)

Ironically, the highest ranking candidate based on these qualifications is Montana Gov. Steve Bullock, who isn't even in the race any more! But if we looked for a leader based on what scripture places the highest value on, we would look for a man of God with practical wisdom.

Someone might object: *We aren't voting for a pastor! We want leaders who will protect our freedoms and provide for our needs, instead of their own.* Based on the example of Joseph, what you're looking for is a godly man with practical wisdom.

But this passage doesn't just apply to political leaders; it applies equally to leaders in homes and business. What we are going to see demonstrated in Joseph is the kind of wisdom that makes the lives of everyone it touches better.

But before we come to Genesis 46 and examine Joseph's wisdom, let's take a moment and look back, and ask a pointed question: *If Joseph is such a classic example of godly wisdom, just how did he get that way?*

Let me quickly dispel some answers you might think of: Joseph didn't get that way because he was born smart. He didn't get that way by studying hard at school. He didn't get godly wisdom by going to Bible college or seminary, or any kind of formal religious training. In fact, he spent most of his life in a polytheistic, idolatrous country, and much of that time incarcerated with the worst lowlifes in society in prison.

Joseph got his godly wisdom in the only school God has for us to learn in. The school of trials and suffering. The day Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, he was a seventeen year-old brat, the favorite of his daddy, who flaunted his dreams of ruling and coat of many colors.

Thirteen years later, he emerged from an Egyptian prison and displayed faith in God and mature wisdom that so dazzled Pharaoh that – facing an unavoidable catastrophe and a national emergency, he immediately gave Joseph a place of unrestricted power to run his country. The only things in-between were slavery, being falsely accused, and spending years in prison.

OK, don't get me wrong: I'm not suggesting you should aim for that in your life. But I am saying this: Suffering and trials are God's secret doorway to spiritual wisdom and strength.

This principle literally oozes from every story and epistle in Scripture. Let me just highlight two: James, the half-brother of Jesus, believed after watching his brother die on a cross and rise from the dead. He became a leader of the first church in Jerusalem, was persecuted by other Jews, and eventually suffered martyrdom at the hands of the high priest Ananus in 61 A.D. Years earlier, he wrote probably the oldest epistle in the New Testament, which bears his name. In James 1.2-4, he wrote this:

Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The apostle Peter knew this. In his first epistle, he writes:

If when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God (1 Peter 2.20b)

What experiences of life result in spiritual endurance and maturity and God's favor? *Trials and suffering.*

Erwin Lutzer wrote a book entitled *Failure: Backdoor to Success*. What seems like a time of failure to you may be God's curriculum to make you wise and successful.

I thought of that this week after the San Francisco 49ers defeated the Green Bay Packers to go to the Super Bowl. In the game, SF running back Raheem Mostert rushed for 220 yards, second-most in NFL playoff history, and scored four touchdowns. What most people didn't know was that Mostert had been dropped by six NFL teams in the last two years. He kept himself motivated by putting the dates each team cut him on his phone. When he got his chance, he was ready.

Joseph became a wise, godly leader through years of trial. What trials are you dealing with right now? Hold on to God, talk with Him each day, read His Word and He'll transform you into a person with godly wisdom.

So what does 'godly wisdom' look like? And what are its results? How does it impact others' lives? Joseph shows us in two episodes, beginning in Genesis 46.31.

Joseph's Family Meets Pharaoh (46.31-47.12)

As our story opens, Joseph is with his family in Goshen, but they need to meet Pharaoh. They are foreigners, and while they are related to him, Joseph doesn't want to take advantage of his position. The Pharaoh they likely had to come before was Sesostris III – this is his image I saw in a museum in Copenhagen last year. Sesotris III ruled during a time of great prosperity, and this reflects the events of Genesis 47.

Joseph knows exactly what he wants: He wants Pharaoh to give his family land in Goshen. Why Goshen? Because it was lush and beautiful, but it was also far away from

major cities and centers of Egyptian culture, where the Israelites might be drawn away from worshipping God. He has a plan.

- *Joseph prepares his family to meet Pharaoh (46.31-34)*

In 46.31-34, Joseph lays out his plan. When they meet Pharaoh, they will tell him that they are shepherds. In v34, Joseph tells his brothers,

...you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,' that you may live in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians.

Got it? Joseph *wants* Pharaoh to separate his family from the rest of Egyptian society. Egyptians detest shepherds, so Pharaoh will agree to let them live on their own.

- *Pharaoh meets Joseph's brothers and blesses them (47.1-6)*

In 47.1-6, that is exactly what happens. Pharaoh asks the brothers what their occupation is; they tell him that they are shepherds, and ask him to let them live in Goshen. He agrees.

- *Jacob blesses Pharaoh, and is blessed by Pharaoh (47.7-12)*

Joseph then brings his father Jacob to meet Pharaoh, and twice – in 47.7 and 10, Jacob blesses Pharaoh. Way back

when God first called Abram, He told him that He would bless those who blessed him – and here, Pharaoh blesses the people of Israel, and Israel (Jacob) blesses him.

Pharaoh may not have thought much of Jacob's blessing, but the effect of it was nothing short of stunning.

Joseph's Wise Leadership Blesses Pharaoh and Egypt (47.13-27)

- *People of Egypt live, and Pharaoh prospers (13-26)*

In 47.13-14, we read this: *Now there was no food in all the land, because the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. Joseph gathered all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan for the grain which they bought, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house.*

We are in the middle of the seven years of famine. After the first two years, all the money in Egypt and Canaan is brought to buy grain – so Pharaoh now has all the money. The people still need grain, so in v18, Joseph trades grain for their livestock. The next year they needed more grain, so they gave ownership of their land to Pharaoh and gave themselves to him as slaves (19-20). Furthermore, they had to give a fifth of all they produced to Pharaoh.

In v25 the people respond: *“You have saved our lives! Let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's slaves.”* Amazing! They sell themselves into slavery, but they thank Joseph for saving their lives!

- *Israel thrives in Egypt and grows in number (27)*

At the same time Joseph is saving the lives of all the Egyptians, guess what is happening to his family? In v27 we read:

Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous.

Conclusion

The moral of the story is this: *Wise leaders ensure God's blessings!*

What a contrast Jacob and Joseph are! Jacob tried to succeed his own way. He cheated his brother out of his birthright. He fooled his father Isaac to steal his brother's blessing. He fled for his life and worked like a dog for his conniving uncle Laban for twenty years. He wrestled with God. It was a hard life. He tells Pharaoh, “Few and unpleasant have been the years of my life” (47.9)!

Joseph, on the other hand, is dealt a bad hand: Sold into slavery, imprisoned on false charges – all told, in chains for thirteen years. But he rises to power, and saves both his own family and all the Egyptians. He sees God's hand in the events of his life – forgives his brothers, and gives all his family a secure home in the land of Goshen.

Listen: God's plans cannot be thwarted by sinful actions of men. Over and over in Genesis, sin scars the narrative, and yet God's plans are not stopped. His people suffer, but He keeps fulfilling His promises.

But with Joseph's wise leadership, God's plans are not only fulfilled – His blessings are abundantly poured out on His people.

Scripture tells us that God is *immutable* – He doesn't change. When Jesus was on earth, He said, *I came that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly* (Jn 10.10b). That's what Joseph had – *abundant life* – and that's what we can have today.

The hymnwriter summed it up well:

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

Digging Deeper

1. Joseph shows practical wisdom as he prepares his brothers for their meeting with Pharaoh. He says he will tell Pharaoh that they are shepherds, and that they are to say the same thing to him (46.32, 34), then explains why: “For every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians” (34b). Combined with the general loathing Egyptians had for Hebrews (Genesis 43.32), Joseph is making sure that his family and the Egyptians won’t mix at all! How does this reflect God’s wisdom for His people? (See Gen. 24.2-4; 26.34-35; 27.46; 28.1-9; Exod. 34.11-16; Deut. 7.1-6). How would you apply this ‘godly wisdom’ today?
2. In Gen. 47.7-12, Joseph presents his father Jacob to Pharaoh. Twice (vss. 7 and 10), Jacob ‘blesses’ Pharaoh – this may have been part of him greeting and saying ‘farewell’ – thus incurring God’s favor on Pharaoh’s rule. Did God bless Pharaoh? God promised Abram, *I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse* (Gen. 12.3a). Reflect on the truth of this promise in relation to Egypt (here, and later in Exodus). Is this promise still true today?
3. Joseph’s wise leadership benefitted not only his family, but the Egyptians as well. How did it benefit his family (see 47.11-12, 27)? How did it benefit the Egyptians (47.13-26)? At the same time, how did it benefit Pharaoh (*incredibly*)?! The surpassing value of wisdom is shown in God’s dealing with Solomon (see 2 Chron. 1.7-12). It is also emphasized in Proverbs; what does wisdom provide in these passages? Prov. 2.1-10; 3.1-26; 4.1-9; 8.12-21, 32-36.
4. God’s ‘economy’ is linked with godliness. Under Joseph’s wise leadership, Egyptians became slaves (47.19, 25), but they and Pharaoh flourished, and they praised Joseph for saving them (25)! In contrast, 430 years later, another Pharaoh made slaves of the Hebrews, leading to suffering, and ultimately the defeat of Egypt! What lessons for our priorities, pursuits, and submission to God (individually and as a nation) does this suggest?

Practical Wisdom of a Man of God (46.31-47.27)

While God’s sovereign hand overcomes the foolishness of men, it shines brightly in the wise leadership of godly men. The godly man will pursue wisdom (Prov. 1.7; 2.1-10), not because without it God’s plans will be defeated (for they won’t), but because with it God’s people will flourish, and all those within his sphere of influence will be blessed.

In our study this week, Joseph demonstrates practical wisdom both with Israel and the Egyptians. Today’s scripture records how Joseph wisely counseled his family before they met Pharaoh, and how both they and Pharaoh were blessed as a result. The result of Joseph’s godly wisdom – borne out of the trials he endured, and his faith in God, results in blessings for everyone. As you read the passage, see how many ways God’s blessing is shown.

Isaiah 5.21 warns, ‘Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight!’ Heeding godly men, and godly wisdom, is always a pathway of blessing. That’s a lesson we are wise to bear in mind, as we enter an election season in which we will choose our country’s leaders.