

# BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

## “From Bad To Worse”

Genesis 39:1-23

2003

### Introduction

#### The Wedding!

About three years ago I officiated the most bizarre wedding of my life! Anything that could go wrong did!

A sweet Christian couple in their late 60's

Both marrying after being widowed

They invited Becky and the boys to come and join them for dinner at Kintaros  
Locked their flower leis in the trunk of their car at their vacation rental

Approaching black clouds with rain coming down in sheets

30 minutes later, they arrived just as the wind picked up and the rain drizzled

Meanwhile my boys were climbing the trees next to the beach.

The branches were wet and slippery and my son, John, lost his grip and fell  
about 6 feet on his head on a pile of lava rocks and immediately needed  
medical attention. Becky was at the car waiting for guests.

Fortunately, a guest (registered nurse), was on hand to examine the injury, put  
ice on Johnny's head and take him to Becky.

By this time the rain was coming down in buckets and we began the ceremony  
under umbrellas. The couple seemed oblivious to the situation and was just as  
happy as could be!

About half-way through the ceremony, I caught some movement out of the corner  
of my eye and to my surprise, my other son, Michael, was doing jumping  
jacks behind us trying to get on the videographer's video! Let me tell you, it  
isn't easy to communicate death to your child while officiating a wedding!

After the ceremony, we went directly to the emergency room to have Johnny's  
head examined! We were wet, miserable and we were going to miss dinner at  
Kintaros.

As we were beginning to laugh about the whole thing, lo and behold, who shows  
up, but the newly married couple and their guests. They skipped dinner to  
come and check on my son. Well, we prayed right there thanking God for His  
grace and I got the whole ER staff to come out and take pictures with the  
newly married couple.

Some of the unforeseen surprises we face in life are just comical! But other times,  
there is not much to laugh about when things just seem to go from bad to worse:

The loss of a job, a broken marriage, health problems or financial crisis.

But as bad as things may be in life, it's hard to imagine that anyone had it any rougher  
than Joseph. If there was ever a man who had a reason to complain and feel sorry for

himself, it was Joseph. But he didn't. Instead, he entrusted himself to God and served Him faithfully in the midst of all the strange and unexpected turns in his life.

## I The Beginning of the Good Life

A. Joseph was **sold** to Potiphar [Verse 1]

1. One of Pharaoh's officials

**Officer** = Cariyc (saw-reece') = "To castrate" [Eunuch]

It was a common practice in ancient times to make the king's closest officials eunuchs, to ensure they would be wholly devoted to their king (and not tempted by his numerous wives and concubines). If this was true of Potiphar, it might, in part, explain the sexual aggressiveness of his wife.

2. A captain of the guard

**Captain of the guard** = "The chief executioner or chief of police"

Now, it was not a coincidence that Joseph ended up in this man's home.

Unbeknownst to Joseph, the Lord had sent him to Potiphar's house to prepare him for the important task which lay ahead, that of serving as the second highest official in the land of Egypt. But in order for this to happen, Joseph first had to learn the language, culture, business and politics of Egypt. And it wasn't handed to him on a silver platter! He had to get up early and stay up late to both do his job and to learn Egyptian ways.

B. Joseph was **blessed** by the Lord [Verse 2]

1. The Lord was "with" and "**prospered**" Joseph

Acts 7:9-10 "Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles."

Isa 41:10 "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Joseph served to the best of his ability in whatever circumstances he found himself. If Joseph was going to be a servant . . . he would be a servant to the glory of God. If he was to be a prisoner he would be the best prisoner in the jail. He could have complained. But he didn't. Instead he faithfully served God in whatever circumstance he found himself.

Col 3:22-25 "Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

**Application:** Many Christians seem to be waiting for the ideal time and place to serve the Lord. But Joseph just rolled up his sleeves and served where he was!

2. Potiphar saw that: [Verse 3]

a. The Lord was with Joseph

Joseph was a shepherd. So it was probably in the fields watching the flocks where Joseph first evidenced his work ethic and leadership skills. Good reports reached the ears of Potiphar, who then brought him into his house. Now, under the watchful eye of his master, Joseph's administrative skills were even more apparent.

**Illustration:** Abimelech and Phicol said to Abraham (Gen 21:22)

“God is with you in **everything** you do”

Abimelech and Phicol recognized Abraham as a man who was the object of God's divine love, favor and protection. As a result, Abimelech wanted to have a treaty with Abraham in order to protect himself and his people from being on the wrong side of Abraham's powerful God.

b. The Lord gave Joseph **success** in everything

**Application:** Would you like to have success in everything?

2 Kings 18:5-7 “Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook.”

C. Joseph found **favor** in Potiphar's eyes [Verse 4]

1. He became Potiphar's attendant

Prov 22:29 “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men.”

2. He was entrusted with Potiphar's entire estate

Lk 16:10 “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.”

**Application:**

Titus 2:9-10 “Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.”

D. Joseph was a source of **blessing** to Potiphar [Verse 5-6a]

Gen 12:2 “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.”

1. His entire estate was blessed by the Lord

**Blessed** = Barak = “To confer divine benefit”

Potiphar observed that Joseph’s effectiveness was due to his relationship with his God (verse 3), because Joseph, rather than taking credit for his success, was a man who I believe publicly gave glory and praise to God.

1 Cor 1:31 “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

2. He left Joseph in charge of everything he had

Potiphar was wise enough to recognize the extraordinary ability of Joseph and eventually, made Joseph his administrative assistant, giving him responsibility over every facet of his estate.

**Application:** How would your employer describe you?

As believers, we should make every effort to be exemplary employees, doing whatever we can to bring success to our company.

Clearly, Joseph rose to the top, but how long did all this take? Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold into slavery (Genesis 37:2). He was 30 when Pharaoh promoted him (Genesis 41:46), and had been in prison for two years before that (Genesis 41:1). So, he was in Potiphar’s house for 11 years. It took 11 years for the full measure of God’s blessing to be accomplished in Joseph’s life.

## II The Unraveling Of the Good Life

- A. Joseph was well-built and **handsome** [Verse 6b]

The only other men who are referred to in this way were:

David (1 Sam 16:12) and Absalom (2 Samuel 14:25)

- B. Potiphar’s wife took notice of Joseph: [Verse 7]

**Took notice** = Nasa' = “To lift up ones eyes”

It was after Joseph’s rise to power and position that the physical attractiveness of Joseph registered with Potiphar’s wife. There is little chance that she would have had any interest in a mere slave. But a man who had great leadership abilities and good looks—well, that was an irresistible combination.

1. She attempted to **seduce** him (“Come to bed with me!”)

For Joseph, her request could have been enormously ego-inflating. Here was a beautiful, wealthy and influential woman who not only found him attractive, but wanted to actually sleep with him! We can only imagine the temptation this presented a young man still in his teens.

Prov 7:13-20 “She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said: “I have fellowship offerings at home; today I fulfilled my vows.

So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you! I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love! My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon."

**Application:**

What would you do in a similar situation?

If you haven't spiritually and mentally prepared for such a temptation, you might find that you are unprepared in the heat of the moment!

C. Joseph refused on two grounds: [Verse 8-9]

1. His fear of displeasing his **earthly** master

a. He didn't want to violate his master's trust

Additionally, it would have destroyed Joseph's credibility and character.

These were things he was unwilling to sacrifice for the temporal pleasure of sin for a season.

b. He didn't want to violate his master's marriage covenant

For Joseph adultery was not an option! It wasn't even open for debate!

Heb 13:4-5 "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."

2. His fear of displeasing his **heavenly** Master

"How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

**Illustration:** David's repentance for his sin with Bathsheba

Ps 51:4 "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight ..."

D. Potiphar's wife **persisted** in her seduction [Verse 10]

1. She tried to persuade Joseph day after day

I'm sure she dressed seductively and touched Joseph as often as possible in her effort to break down his resistance to an adulterous affair.

a. Joseph refused to go to bed with her

1 Cor 10:13 "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

b. Joseph refused to even **be with** her

Prov 5:8-9 "Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your best strength to others and your years to one who is cruel."

2. She laid a trap for Joseph [Verse 11-12]

This was a woman who was unaccustomed to hearing the word, “NO!”

a. She waited for him to be alone

Prov 23:27-28 “... a prostitute is a deep pit and a wayward wife is a narrow well. Like a bandit she lies in wait, and multiplies the unfaithful among men.”

b. She caught him by his cloak, but:

1. Joseph left his cloak in her hands

Joseph was left with nothing on but his BVDs.

2. Joseph ran out of the house

Joseph did what we are all supposed to do when faced with this kind of situation: He fled (2 Tim 2:22)! This was not a figure of speech . . . it was a battle plan. It was not the time for explanations or polite dialogue. It was time to run!

c. She lied to protect herself and punish Joseph [Verse 13-18]

This lie against Joseph must have been especially painful. He was accused of the very thing he had aggressively avoided. Interestingly, we have no record of Joseph being given an opportunity to defend himself against these false accusations or to face his accuser.

1 Peter 2:19-23 “For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God . . . Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”

### How did Joseph resist the temptation?

1. He was a faithful witness of the Lord! He flew the flag high!
2. He stayed busy serving the Lord where he was.
3. He was careful to never be alone with his temptation.
4. He called things what they were: Adultery was sin!
5. He clearly understood the price of sin!
6. He recognized that all sin is ultimately sin against God.
7. He just said "No!" and was willing to suffer the consequences of his choice!

### III The End Of the Good Life

A. When Potiphar heard his wife’s story: [Verse 19-20a]

1. He burned with anger

*Burned with anger* = Charah 'aph = To blaze up (with rapid breathing)

Prov 6:32-34 “A man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away; for jealousy arouses a husband's fury, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge.”

2. He put Joseph in the king's prison

"Death was the only penalty Joseph could reasonably expect. His reprieve presumably owed much to the respect he had won; and Potiphar's mingled wrath and restraint may reflect a faint misgiving about the full accuracy of the charge." (Kidner)

Based on Gen 40:3, 7 that we will study next week, the king's prison may very well have been the basement floor of Potiphar's own house!

In reality, Joseph's imprisonment by Potiphar was:

1. An answer to his persistent prayers: “Lord, protect me from this woman.” Where safer than behind the bars of a dungeon?
2. God's chosen location to further develop Joseph's leadership skills and the setting of a very important future divine appointment between Joseph and the cupbearer of Pharaoh.

B. But while Joseph was there in prison: [Verse 20b-21]

1. The Lord was **with** him

Ps 27:1-3 “The LORD is my light and my salvation -- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life -- of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.”

2. The Lord showed him kindness

3. The Lord granted him **favor** with the prison warden

Prov 16:7 “When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.”

C. The prison warden: [Verse 22-23]

1. Put Joseph in **charge** of all the prisoners

"It is but of little consequence where the lot of a servant of God may be cast; like Joseph he is ever employed for his master, and God honors him and prospers his work." (Clarke)

Prov 27:18 “He who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who looks after his master will be honored.”

2. Made Joseph responsible for all that was done there

3. Paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care

- a. Because the Lord was **with** Joseph
- b. The Lord gave him **success** in whatever he did

Once again, Joseph rises to the top, becoming the chief administrator of the prison. Through his experiences in Potiphar's house and then in prison, God was honing Joseph's administrative skills in preparation for his ultimate assignment as Pharaoh's right hand man and the deliverer of Israel.

### **Conclusion**

Joseph is truly a remarkable man; "He was loved and hated, favored and abused, tempted and trusted, exalted and abased. Yet at no point in the one-hundred-and-ten-year life of Joseph did he ever seem to get his eyes off God or cease to trust him. Adversity did not harden his character. Prosperity did not ruin him. He was the same in private as in public. He was a truly great man." (Boice)

I wonder what great work God is preparing you for? I can't answer that question, but what I can do is tell you how to be prepared for the opportunity when it comes:

1. Love God with all your heart

2 Kings 18:5-7 "Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook."

2. Love others using whatever gifts God has given you to build up the body

3. Be the best you can be at what you do

Col 3:23-24 "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

4. Leave the rest up to God!!

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