



Week Seven: Joseph's Final Choices

Spiritual Discipline: Service

Read: Genesis 49:28 – 50:26

Consider: Jacob blesses each of his sons before he dies. He reiterates that he wants to be buried in Canaan with his forefathers (49:28-32). "When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people" (49:33). Joseph grieves his father's death and orders that his body be embalmed (50:1-2). Even the Egyptians mourn for Joseph's father (50: 3, 10-11). Joseph then asks permission from Pharaoh to bury Jacob in Canaan; he receives permission, and many of Pharaoh's officials go with Jacob and his family to their homeland (50:4-9).

However, Joseph's brothers are still unsure of his true feelings for them. They fear that Joseph may have been holding back his revenge while Jacob was alive, and that now Joseph may take the opportunity to get even with them (50:15). The scripture explains, "So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this command before he died: "Say to Joseph, 'Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.' Joseph wept when they spoke to him" (50:16-17). Once again, "His brothers also came and fell down before him...." (50:18). Following is Joseph's response: "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.' Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them" (50:19-21).

At the conclusion of Genesis, we are told of Joseph's death at the age of 110. We are reminded of the good life he lived by virtue of experiencing his children and grandchildren, several generations removed. He reminds his family that God will lead them out of Egypt and back to Canaan and makes them promise that they will take his body back to Canaan with them when they go (50:22-26).

Service: Foster says, "Submission and service function concurrently." (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 121) He also states, "Of all the classical Spiritual Disciplines, service is the most conducive to the growth of humility." (Foster, 130) Foster makes a number of distinctions between "self-righteous service" and "true service." (Foster, 128-130) Following are three of the characteristics of "true service" which he mentions:

- "True service comes from a relationship with the divine Other deep inside. We serve out of whispered promptings, divine urgings." (Foster, 128) Joseph served God before he served anyone else; therefore, God blessed all that he did. Whether he was helping the keeper of the prison, serving Pharaoh and the Egyptian people, or giving his brothers food and supplies for their trips, his utmost concern was in following God's leading in order to secure God's desired outcome.
- "True service rests contented in hiddenness. It does not fear the lights and glare of attention, but it does not seek them either. Since it is living out of a new Center of reference, the divine nod of approval is completely sufficient." (Foster, 128) Joseph was content whether he was serving Potiphar, the prison keeper, Pharaoh, his father, or his brothers. His station made no difference; his ability to serve was of utmost importance.
- "True service is free of the need to calculate results. It delights only in the service. It can serve enemies as freely as friends." (Foster, 129) Joseph jumped at the chance to serve his brothers, who considered themselves his enemies (50:15). Even once his father was gone, he reassured them, "I will provide for you and your little ones" (50:21).

After his father is buried in Canaan, Joseph doesn't take the opportunity to avenge himself on his brothers; in fact, he weeps at the suggestion. Instead, he continues to extend mercy and goodwill to them.

Application:

- Make a list of at least 4 ways in which you serve others (your family, your church, your friends, total strangers, etc.).
- For each act of service write down **why** you choose to serve these people in these ways. Be honest with yourself.
- For each act of service, also note whether your motivation is "self-righteous service" or "true service." If you're not sure which category your act of service falls into, consider who receives the ultimate benefit and glory. (Foster states, "[Self-righteous service] centers in the glorification of the individual.") (Foster, 129)
- Think of some ways that you can serve others "in hiddenness."

Spiritual Disciplines (items with * have been specifically discussed in the narrative of Joseph):

Meditation (including Imagination)*

Prayer

Fasting

Study

Simplicity

Solitude*

Silence*

Submission*

Service*

Confession

Worship

Guidance

Celebration

Hesed (and Attachment Love)*

Mutual Mind with God*

Spiritual Maturity (including Emotional Maturity)*