

Integrity: A Life That Counts – Pt. 1 (Genesis 39:1-23 June 22, 2008)



I have titled this two part series – “Integrity: A Life That Counts.”

But as we look at the story of Joseph in Genesis 39 – I don’t want you to be misled. When this chapter is preached – it usually sounds as if the Lord put it here to instruct us on how to remain sexually pure – or how to be a good employee.

But we need to remember that the *primary* reason this story is here is **not** to give us a lesson on how to live a life of integrity. The *primary* purpose of this story is as part of the whole account of the life of Joseph – where the unmistakeable message is to display the glorious sovereignty of God.

How God works *all* things together for good. How God works through men of integrity and through men of wicked motives – and orchestrates events small and large – to weave His grand plan of salvation.

The main lesson in this chapter has to do with the power of God to accomplish His ends.

We are meant to see the hand of God. Four times in these verses we read that the Lord was *with Joseph*. The events of his life were *not* ultimately due to the will of men – but to the hand of God.

And while it is not immediately clear to us – the Hebrew readers would notice that all seven times that God is mentioned in this chapter – it is His covenant name – Yahweh – the Lord – that is used.

This name is only found in one other place in the Joseph narratives.

The covenant name is associated in these verses with Joseph being sold as a slave and Joseph being cast into prison. The point is that even in these tough times – Yahweh – the one who made a covenant of love with Abraham – is **with** Joseph. He is not alone. God is with him working all things for good.

If Joseph had not been sold into slavery and had not been cast into prison – he would not have met the king's cupbearer and baker and would not have risen to the place where he could save his nation.

This display of how God works all things together for good is the *primary* purpose of our passage.

But, there is indeed a *secondary* purpose to this passage. Under the most difficult of circumstances – Joseph was tested and found to be a man of integrity – and God used his integrity in incredible ways.

If Joseph were not such a man of integrity – he would not have been in a position to save the nation.

Just imagine if it was Judah – the Judah of chapter 38 – who was sold into slavery by his brothers.

I doubt this Judah would have been a faithful servant and risen to leadership in Potiphar's house and thus been in a position to be alone with Potiphar's wife.

Even if he did end up alone with her and she propositioned him – almost certainly he would have leapt at the opportunity to sleep with her. They would have kept their affair quiet and he would not have ended up in prison – or they would have been discovered and he would have been executed. So he would not have met the cupbearer and baker and been raised to power and save the nation.

So while the *primary* purpose of the Joseph narrative is to paint for us a picture of God's sovereign working – it is also true that the Lord wants us to understand that while He can use evil and immorality – such as the evil of selling Joseph into slavery and the immorality of Judah with Tamar – He longs to use men and women of integrity as His vessels to impact this world.

Integrity is a word that you don't hear often enough. Business leaders, politicians and unfortunately church leaders – all suffer from a perception of a lack of integrity – and often it is a well deserved perception.

You only have to read the bare details of the Iguana-gate affair engulfing two of our politicians to realise this.

But I want to suggest to you this morning that one of the great ways you can impact this world for the kingdom is to be a man or woman of integrity.

It is a great tragedy that all too often congregations walk away from sermons with the impression that the only way to have a life that really counts – that really makes a mark for the kingdom – is to be a pastor or missionary – or some other type of full time worker. And yet – 98% of congregations are filled with accountants and plumbers and housewives and students.

When we think of the great men and women of church history – we normally think of the pastors and missionaries.

So the result is that many Christians think that they have no role in impacting the world for Christ.

But, I want you to remember that the Bible does not draw the sacred/secular dichotomy in the way that we are prone to do. Instead – the Bible consistently pictures Christians who are called to sacred areas – priests, prophets, Apostles **and** it describes those saints who are called to secular work – from the lowest slaves to the highest government officials. The Scriptures present **all** as godly examples who serve the Lord and make a mark for the kingdom.

Think about those who changed the face of human history. Was Abraham a priest or prophet – or Isaac – or Jacob – or Judah?

What about Moses or Joshua or David or Nehemiah?

They were used by God – but primarily they were secular leaders.

God has used some Christians who were not pastors in amazing ways – we know the famous ones like William Wilberforce.

But, Most of these leaders began as lowly nobodies. Shepherds, servants – who were faithful in little and used by God.

When we get to heaven – have no doubt that the majority of those who impacted the world for Christ will be men and women you have never heard of. Faithful men and women of integrity – housewives and employees – those who raised godly children – impacted their neighbours – prayed for missionaries – sacrificed worldly ambition – those who history has overlooked – but who loom large in the pages of eternity.

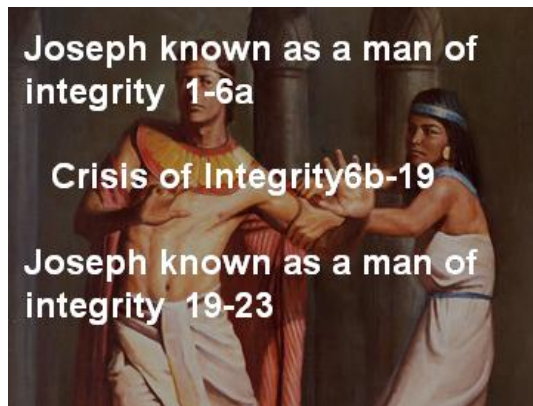
Two of the most influential men in the Old Testament – two men used in mighty ways – never served as priests or prophets or religious leaders. They served as servants in the employ of foreign governments – but through their faithfulness they rose to changed the course of human history.

I speak of course of Joseph and Daniel. And one reason the Lord used these men so mightily was that they were men of integrity. Their light shone out into the dark world.

They impacted the world around them and they were instrumental in the purposes of God.

Look with me at a chapter that shows the life of Joseph – Genesis 39.

Notice if you will that this chapter begins and ends the same way – highlighting Joseph's integrity and character.



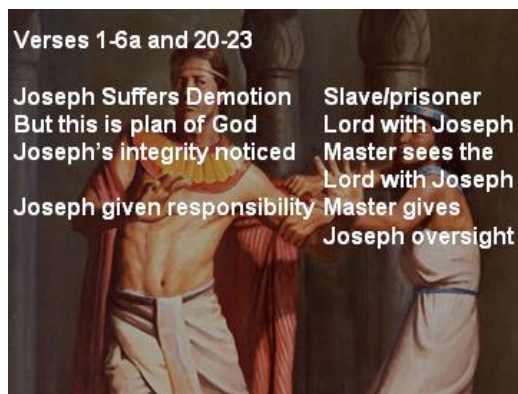
Joseph known as a man of integrity 1-6a

Crisis of Integrity 6b-19

Joseph known as a man of integrity 20-23

And sandwiched in the middle is a crisis of integrity.

Notice as well the similarities between these bookends that show Joseph as a man of integrity.



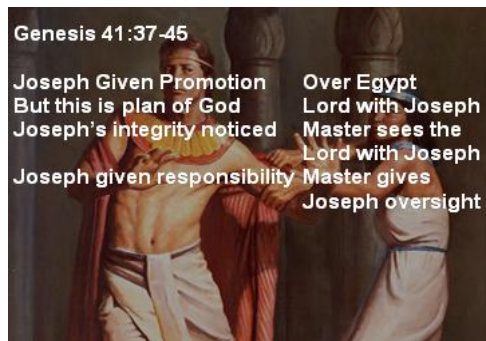
Verses 1-6a and 20-23

Joseph Suffers Demotion
But this is in the plan of God
Joseph's integrity is noticed
Joseph given responsibility

Slave/prisoner
Lord with Joseph
Master sees the Lord is with Joseph
Master gives Joseph oversight

We are meant to see that Joseph was a faithful man of integrity under the most trying of circumstances – his pagan masters noticed – and he was placed in a position to have an impact for the Lord.

And then later in chapter 41 – there are striking similarities when Joseph is promoted from the dungeon to having charge over Egypt.



Genesis 41:37-45

Joseph Given Promotion
But this is in the plan of God
Joseph's integrity is noticed
Joseph given responsibility

Charge over Egypt
Lord with Joseph
Master sees the Lord is with Joseph
Master gives Joseph oversight

What I want to do is divide this sermon into two parts.

This week I am going to look at the two bookends – Joseph as a man of integrity before a pagan nation.

Next week – I want to look at the lessons from the life of Joseph about how to maintain our integrity in the midst of the most trying of temptations.

These are both crucial lessons for us – integrity before the world and integrity in the midst of temptation. They are so important that I want to spend a week on each.

So look with me at Genesis 39 verse 1:

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

After being sold to the Ishmaelites – Joseph makes the long trip down to Egypt – away from his family – away from the Promised Land.

It must have been an incredibly hard time for Joseph. In a moment of madness that he never saw coming his life is transformed. He is just seventeen – and one moment he is the favoured son of a wealthy man – the next he finds himself in a foreign land – unable to speak a word of the language – surrounded by all manner of gods and idols – no one anywhere who knows the Lord – and then he is taken to the central slave market – probably forced to stand there naked – and he is offered for sale to the highest bidder.

He had to know that his chances of ever returning to Canaan or seeing his family again were incredibly remote. He faces a future that is very bleak – little chance of marriage or a family, almost no hope of freedom and the years ahead will be filled with back breaking work. In fact many slaves simply died of overwork and mistreatment.

What does a situation like this do to a young man's faith? In fact where is his faith at this point?

Remember – while he comes from the chosen family – the only way to describe that family is dysfunctional.

Joseph has seen favouritism, anger, violence, revenge. His father has failed the Lord, his brothers have failed the Lord. And Joseph himself was a spoiled braggart.

But despite all of this – it is clear that Joseph *had* listened to the accounts of God's dealings with Abraham and Isaac and his father Jacob. Joseph was indeed a young man of faith.

In chapter 37 he was brash and spoiled and a braggart. But as he entered this new life in Egypt – the reality of his faith would be tested.

Was his faith real? Would it sustain him in a time of incredible distress and hardship?

James 1:12 says:

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

Stood the test – this is a word that is used of gold that is heated until the impurities rise to the top and are removed and then reheated and more impurities removed – until finally it is tested and approved.

It is in the crucible of trial that our faith finally proves the reality of our salvation.

Don Carson talks about a man he knew in England. Raised in a Christian home, he became a doctor and spent years serving as a missionary in a leprosarium. He came back to England and became an elder in his local church.

To all intents and purposes he was a true and fine Christian.

Then one day – he stunned everyone by up and leaving his wife and his church and running off with his young nurse.

When the dust settled, the pastor of the church finally came to the conclusion that this man was never saved. He had appeared to be a believer – but he had never faced a crisis point in his life – illness, trial, severe temptation – something that showed the reality of his faith.

He had grown up in a loving home. He loved public health and wanted to treat lepers – being a missionary was no sacrifice. He wanted to be an elder.

The first test of his life was when he faced flirting from his nurse – and he failed. He had not cultivated a deep relationship with the Lord – his internal life was not pure and of integrity – he had not put down the deep roots that stand the trials of life.

Brothers and sisters – in the good times – you have better make sure you are a man or woman of integrity in the secret places – or in the day of testing your faith may be shown for what it really is – not approved.

There comes a time when the calibre of our faith is tested. Joseph was at that point.

There must have been a huge temptation to say – if this is what faith gets me – give me the world. He could easily feel abandoned by God and man.

If the love of God means slavery in Egypt – give me the world.

And, even if he decides to stay true to his faith – it is no easy task. There is no Bible at this time – just the stories he heard at his father's knee. There is no slave prayer meeting or a friend to encourage him and help him.

But God is with him.

Often we think our children have to be surrounded by Christian friends and Youth Groups and nurtured in the church for them to come to faith. But at times – trials can show a young man or woman the truth – who have I in heaven or earth but You Oh Lord – only one person will truly be with me in every trial – and when their faith is tested – they turn to the Lord and He does not fail them.

Often trials are the best thing for our faith.

Joseph is seventeen – and this is make or break time. To make it tangible for me – I thought of Wade Venz or Tim Zerk – same kind of age – take them and put them as slaves in India to a Hindu family – no Bible, no contact with Christians – enslaved year after year – with no end in sight.

Under such circumstances – faith must come from above. It does not come from within. The Lord is with him. God give him the faith not just to survive – but to thrive.

When the hour of testing comes – God gives strength and faith to His people. Joseph is tested – but this only strengthens his faith.

He finds himself sold to Potiphar – one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

This term captain of the guard might be misleading. Later in Scripture – men with almost the same title are basically the head of the army – so probably Potiphar is probably the general in charge of the Egyptian army.

A man such as this would have had a large household, many slaves and significant land holdings.

You don't get to be head of the army without understanding men and instilling discipline. He is probably a hard man – he probably has little love for foreigners – his slaves would work long hours – **but** the integrity of Joseph wins him over

Verse 2:

The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

Joseph was faithful – a man of integrity – and the Lord caused him to prosper.

Joseph would have started out knowing not one word of Egyptian – probably toiling in the fields. But, verses 3 and 4:

When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favour in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.

Talk to any employer – an employee who works hard – who seeks the good of the business – who is honest, trustworthy – a man of integrity – employers long for such a man.

A man you can trust with your money, your assets, who won't hit on the women at work, seeks to be a blessing – they are a rare asset.

Slave households functioned through fear and intimidation. Slaves worked because of the lash and the prison. They had no share of the profits – no hope of a better life.

So a young man who works hard, who is cheerful, who is honest, who seeks to be a blessing – he would stand out.

Potiphar noticed Joseph.

These verses encompass years – maybe a decade. Joseph would have learned the language and then been entrusted with small tasks – then bigger tasks – until finally Potiphar realises here is a man who he can trust to run the entire household.

Notice that this verse says – that Potiphar saw that the Lord was with Joseph. How? He didn't have a glowing halo. No – he saw that he was different.

He was a Hebrew who worshipped Yahweh. Undoubtedly Potiphar learned from Joseph that his work ethic – his integrity came from his faith.

In Colossians 3:22-24 – the Apostle Paul tells us how a child of God serves:

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour, 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.

Joseph served because a child of God is to act with integrity toward their employer.

Brothers and sisters – if I spoke to your employer about you – what would they say?

He is an OK employee?

She isn't too bad?

Do they think of you as no different to anyone else?

It is one thing to put on a good front on Sunday – but how is your life at work – at home – in the secret places – is it ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ - approved.

Do those who know you realise that the Lord is with you. Is your work so different – so outstanding – so dedicated – are you a man or woman of integrity – so your boss asks – why are you different? – and you can say I serve the Lord Jesus – that is what makes me different.

Are you salt and light – or are you just like the rest?

Do you believe that your vocation is a ministry where you serve the Lord? God has you there to show the world a transformed life.

At times your boss might not like your faith – you won't cook the books – you won't rip off the customer – you won't lie – it might cost you a promotion – but I tell you – you will stand out and he will notice.

Think about your work – do you grumble – do you slack off – do you spend too much time web-surfing – do you gossip?

Or are you the best electrician or accountant or nurse or teacher that you can possibly be? Do you view each day as an opportunity to serve Christ?

I tell you – let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. What you do at work is your missionary service – your letter from God to a watching world.

If you are a man or woman of integrity – others **will** notice. And when the opportunity comes to share your faith – men and women **will** listen.

But, if you slack off at work – if you are a poor employee – if you are a bad employer – if you run a business and do it badly – then please – **don't** tell anyone you are a Christian – you dishonour the name of Christ.

If that is you – repent today and set yourself to be the best employer or employee or businessman you can be.

You want to change the world for Christ – start where God has you and be salt and light. Joseph was a faithful slave – you don't get much lower than that – and he changed the world.

I thought about naming names – but I won't. I will say this – we have some men and women here in this church who are men and women of integrity in the workplace – as employees – as employers – as businessmen – and you honour the Lord with your lives. I am so thankful for you. And the effects of your testimony will only be fully known in eternity.

Verses 5 and 6:

From the time he put him 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. 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.

God blessed Joseph and through him Potiphar. His crops and flocks multiplied. The household ran well.

Potiphar could leave everything in Joseph's hand and sleep well knowing a man of integrity had his best interests at heart. Joseph was a man you could trust.

I suspect all the neighbours asked where they could get a Hebrew slave who feared the Lord.

It would be great if I had employers calling me saying – listen – we employ Albert from your church – he is the most incredible employee and he says that his work ethic comes from his faith in Jesus. Do you have five others like him?

Notice the one thing that Potiphar did not entrust to Joseph – the food or literally – the bread – he ate.

This seems such a strange exception. I doubt Potiphar made his own food. I doubt he trusted another slave to make his food but not Joseph.

What does this mean? The Jews have long taught that this is a metaphor saying that Potiphar gave Joseph full run of the house – he could do anything, use anything – with one exception. He could not have sexual relations with Potiphar's wife.

Eating bread was often used as a euphemism for sexual relations.

Proverbs 30:20 says:

This is the way of an adulteress: She eats [bread] and wipes her mouth and says, 'I've done nothing wrong.'

Proverbs 6:26 says:

The prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread.

In Exodus 2:20-21 – Zipporah's father talks to his daughters about Moses and asks "Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat." Literally – invite him to

eat bread. The next verse reads – Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage.

Many of the Rabbis understood – invite him to eat bread – to mean – I will offer for you to marry him and the privileges that come with this.

Look down at verse 9 of Genesis 39 where Joseph says:

My master has withheld nothing from me *except you*, because you are his wife.

Verse 6 says the only exception is bread – in verse 9 it is Mrs Potiphar – so most likely the Jews are right that this is a euphemism for sexual relations with Potiphar's wife.

But why mention this? Surely not sleeping with the master's wife was a given!

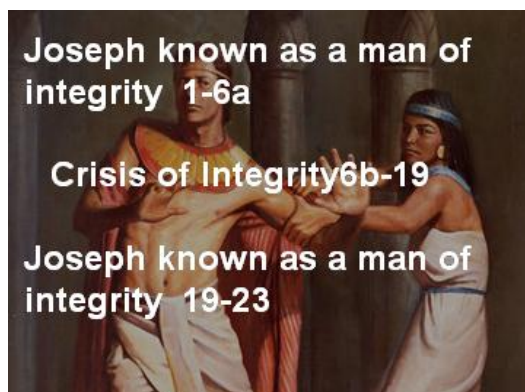
Egypt was one of the societies of the time in which adultery was frowned upon.

Theoretically, married men did not use their female slaves for sexual pleasure – but of course this practice was widespread and a blind eye was turned. **But** being a male-oriented society – the reverse was frowned upon. For a slave to have an adulterous affair with the lady of the house carried the death penalty.

So it seems strange that Potiphar should ban Joseph from Mrs Potiphar's bed – that should be understood. Most likely, Potiphar knew his wife and her tendencies and made sure that it was spelled out to Joseph to stay away from her.

This euphemism leads us to the central section of the chapter – where Joseph faces a crisis of integrity. These verses are for next week.

But for now, remember – the Lord is with Joseph. But this does not mean the absence of trials and difficulties in life. In fact Joseph now faces a test that will make him or break him – a crisis of integrity.



Joseph known as a man of integrity 1-6a

Crisis of Integrity 6b-19

Joseph known as a man of integrity 20-23

In one sense Joseph has faced ten years worth of crises of integrity. As the years passed – no hope of seeing his family – never a word from a fellow believer. He had to be tempted to abandon his faith. Does he become Egyptian? Does he indulge his passions with female slave? – he was in a position to do so. Does he work diligently or slack off like the rest?

But in verses 6b-19 we will see the great test of Joseph's integrity. Next week we will look at how Joseph dealt with this – it will help us when we face major tests and temptations.

But this morning, I want us to look at the other end of the two bookends – verses 20-23.

Put yourself in Joseph's shoes.

He had been obeying his father – going out to report on how his brothers were doing – and that faithfulness landed him in Egypt as a slave.

He had resisted the temptation to abandon the faith.

He had resisted the temptation to be a poor worker.

He had served Potiphar and the Lord faithfully for ten years.

He is still a slave – but he had risen to be head slave in a major Egyptian household.

Then came a crisis of integrity. Does he sin against – Potiphar, Mrs Potiphar and God by giving in to the demands of Potiphar's wife that she sleep with him? Despite her repeated attempts – he refuses – and his reward is that she cries attempted rape.

He ran out leaving his cloak she had torn from him.

Joseph is no fool – he knows the kind of woman she is. He had to have an inkling that she might use that cloak against him.

But he just had to get out of there. He was more concerned to be a man of integrity than to simply appear as a man of integrity.

Note that this section ends with an interesting comment – verse 19:

When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger.

There is a division of thought as to who he burned with anger against.

The first thought is that he burned with anger against Joseph – but many think he burned with anger against his wife.

You don't get to be the captain of Pharaoh's guard if you are a fool. He probably knew his wife. The fact he warned Joseph to stay away from her indicates this.

And Potiphar knew Joseph. Ten years of integrity stands for something.

The fact that Joseph is not killed almost certainly indicates that Potiphar is not entirely sure what exactly happened.

But Potiphar has to do something – his own wife has cried rape. If he thought Joseph had actually attacked his wife – have no doubt – Joseph would be dead before the sun went down.

But instead, he puts Joseph into the best prison in Egypt – the one he himself oversees – the one where the king's prisoners go.

And in chapter 40 verse 3 – it is Potiphar himself who assigns the king's prisoners to Joseph.

Most likely Potiphar is just plain angry. Angry at his wife – he suspects she was not entirely innocent – angry at Joseph for getting himself into that situation so he loses his faithful servant.

But, what is clear is that Joseph's integrity saves his life and leads him to the next step on the Lord's plan to save the nation.

If Joseph had not been so faithful – Potiphar would not have doubted his wife. If a sleaze like Judah had been caught with Mrs Potiphar – he would be dead.

Verse 20:

Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

Again – this is another crisis of integrity. Joseph had been faithful – Joseph had done what was right – and now he goes from head slave to bottom of the food chain – prison.

This was probably the best prison in Egypt – but from what we know the conditions were still atrocious.

It takes great faith to not blame God – to not throw in the towel. If this is the reward for faithfulness – give me the world. But not Joseph.

He believes that God is with him even in prison. Verses 20-21:

But while Joseph was there *in the prison*, the LORD was with him.

Don't skip past this.

Many of us often pray that the Lord would be with us – but – make sure that if you pray that prayer – you understand what it might mean.

We saw earlier in this chapter that the Lord was with Joseph and it came after the demotion of Joseph from favoured son to the lowest slave in foreign household.

Now this statement follows another demotion of Joseph. After years of faithful service he had risen to the position of head servant – but his integrity led him to be cast into the depths of prison.

We know where this story leads – to Joseph as ruler over Egypt. But for thirteen years his faithfulness was rewarded by a series of devastating setbacks – slavery and imprisonment.

Unfortunately we have been conditioned to think that because the Lamb – Jesus Christ – wins in the end – His people must win now.

Not so – faithfulness and integrity often mean pain and suffering in this life.

But we are meant to understand that throughout this whole ordeal – the Lord was *with Joseph* – that all these events were under the sovereign hand of God.

Look at verses 20-23:

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

Joseph did not throw in the towel – he did not spit the dummy – he knew the Lord was sovereign – he knew his task was to be a faithful witness – a man of integrity.

You are faithful – you end up in prison – and you stay faithful – that is integrity – his faith is □□□□□□□□.

And again – his integrity was noticed – the warden saw that Lord was with Joseph and he made him responsible for running the prison.

You have to have a real testimony for the warden to throw you the keys and say – prisoner – run the prison.

But without that integrity – he would not have been in charge of the prison and had the baker and cupbearer entrusted to him – and interpreted their dreams and become ruler of Egypt.

Brothers and sisters – few of you will become missionaries and pastors and full time workers – but *never* forget – every one of you is a living letter from the Lord to a watching world.

The plan of God is not for a few saints to do the work of evangelism and being salt and light – but for every one of us to be salt and light.

A witness to our families, in the workplace, in school, in the neighbourhood. To be tangibly different – trophies of grace. To show a world what Jesus Christ can do with a life.

And one of your prime credentials is your integrity. Your transformed life.

Listen to 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10 where Paul writes:

You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

The Thessalonians were changed – turning for idols to serve the living and true God – to serve Jesus who saves men from the wrath to come.

Their lives were so transformed that when Paul went to cities – word had already spread about what Jesus did in the lives of the saints in Thessalonica.

That is the testimony of changed lives.

In 2 Corinthians 3:3 Paul says:

You are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

You are a living letter written to your boss, your co-workers, your neighbours, the mums at tuckshop and tennis. And your integrity – your transformed life – these are the message from God to a dying world.

Most won't listen. As far as we know – Joseph did not lead the Egyptians he worked with to the Lord – Potiphar, the warden, Pharaoh – we have no indication they came to saving faith.

But perhaps some did. Either way – as you read Genesis you see how God used Joseph's integrity to change history.

Yet, there is no way that Joseph knew that at the time. As he languished in prison, he could not have known the impact of his faithful service of Potiphar and the warden. He could not have known that in his crisis of integrity that fleeing from Potiphar's wife would be an event that led him to rule over Egypt and save his family.

He only knew that despite how things seemed – he had to be faithful. But without that integrity – the seed line would not have been saved and Messiah would not have been born. In effect – his faithfulness saved himself and the nations.

I cannot tell you exactly how God will use your faithfulness – I can only assure you that He will.

That mother at work, that customer you deal with – who wants to know what is different about you. They ask and you lead them to Christ and their son becomes the next Wilberforce – their daughter an Elizabeth Elliot.

Conversely – your lack of integrity will affect others. Your kids see you smile on Sunday and explode on Monday. You go to church – but don't read the Word. You claim Christ but live like the world.

Perhaps that son who was going to impact a generation as a godly business leader – a role model in the corporate world – now becomes just another worldly man out for the mighty dollar?

That daughter who was going to raise a godly seed who would have such an impact – does she now just raise a bunch of godless children?

Only God knows the ripples that lead from your integrity.

Nor can I tell you that the path of integrity is an easy road. In fact – most often it is a hard and difficult path. Being faithful does not always mean an easy life – in fact the faithful man or woman often suffers.

Ask Joseph. Integrity led him to slavery and prison – for thirteen years.

Nor can I tell you that there will be vindication in this life.

Read Revelation. On one hand we have the picture of the victorious King of Kings and the new heaven and earth – but throughout the book we read about the suffering of saints in this life.

Revelation 6:9-10:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"

Revelation 12:17:

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Read Romans 8:36:

For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

Read the sufferings of Paul in 2 Corinthians 11.

Remember – eleven of the twelve Apostles were martyred.

Read of the prophets – their suffering – their martyrdom – their imprisonment.

Integrity costs. You might have to leave a job you love to flee from a woman who has her eye on you. You might not get the promotion because you refuse to lie to customers.

Perhaps you will count the cost of faithfulness with prison or martyrdom.

But what I can say for sure is that through every trial and temptation and difficulty – the Lord Jesus promised to be with us.

The Lord said to Jacob – I will be *with* you. And through the trials of Padan Aram – the Lord was faithful.

The Lord repeatedly said that He was *with* Joseph. And through the trials of slavery and prison – the Lord was faithful.

The gospel of Matthew begins with an incredible promise. Matthew 1:21-23:

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” ... “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

He will save us from our sins and God Himself will be with us.

The gospel of Matthew ends with an incredible promise. Matthew 28:20:

Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

I don't know what lies ahead of you. What I do know is this. The Lord longs to use faithful men and women. Most of you won't be pastors or missionaries or full-time workers – but you are all evangelists – living letters to your workplace and schools and neighbourhoods. And one of the great tools you have is the integrity that comes from the power of the Holy Spirit.

God uses men and women of integrity in incredible ways.

And the path of integrity is usually difficult – but the Lord Jesus will be there with you every step of the way. Through trials and persecution and illness and loneliness and despair.

This truth is summed up so well by the poem Mary Stevenson wrote in 1936 – *Footprints in the Sand*:

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord. Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky. In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there was one only.

This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints.

So I said to the Lord, “You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there has only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?”

The Lord replied, “The years when you have seen only one set of footprints, my child, is when I carried you.”

Trust in this truth as a man or woman of integrity – and God will use you in incredible ways.