

Life with God is marked by loyalty

Genesis 39

Recently I have tested the batteries in our smoke alarms.

Do you know how I know its time to test the batteries in my smoke alarms?
Because we've had a change in Prime Minister, that's why!
In this country we change Prime Ministers quite a bit
and so it serves as a useful *and regular* reminder
to check the batteries in your smoke alarms!

It's simply amazing, isn't it, the rate at which our Prime Ministers have changed
over the last 10 years:

Not a single Prime Minister has served a full term in all that time;
our latest PM has only been in the job a few weeks as we speak;
and we have a federal election due next year
and so we may have yet another leader in the not too distant future.

What does this revolving door say about us as a nation?

I think it says more about our parliamentary parties more than anything else.
And if you ask our deposed Prime Ministers what this trend teaches us
I think they would say it proves *loyalty* is a virtue in weak supply.

Political parties are finding it harder and harder to maintain loyalty for their leader

So much so that the drama we've seen in Canberra is becoming predictable.
I remember seeing an article on the ABC website
which showed that over the last 15 years or so
we've had around 70 changes in party leadership in this country,
that's including all parties at both state and federal levels.
And in many of those cases—not all, but in a fair few of them—
the party has decided to not stay loyal to its leader.

But even though disloyalty is common, that doesn't mean it is any less painful.

More than one politician has shed tears after being shoved aside,
And each *one of us* at some point has felt the sting of disloyalty.
Perhaps a colleague broke your confidence to gain something for themselves,
Maybe someone you've trained has taken that knowledge to a competitor,
Perhaps you've felt the sting of betrayal in your own family:
rotten kids who take advantage of you,
trusted adults who've haven't acted in a trustworthy manner.

Is there a better way to live?

I think there is,
and we see that way demonstrated in today's chapter of Genesis.

Today the story shifts back to Joseph,

and as we follow Joseph's adventures in Egypt
 we him modeling an approach to relationships
 that is far more appealing than what we've seen already from his family;
 It's an approach based on *faithfulness and loyalty*,
 and it's an approach which is inspired by God himself.

Let's remind ourselves about Joseph's journey up until this point.
 Joseph enjoyed a privileged position in his Father's house,
 But then he found himself stripped of his cloak and cast into a well,
 Pleading for his life he thought he was going to die,
 and indeed he *was* going to die before he was sold off into slavery.
 And then as he stood on the seller's block
 he would have been prodded and poked and checked for disease and lice,
 before a stranger named Potiphar purchased him and took him home.

No doubt Joseph would have been wondering,
I wonder whether God has forgotten about me?
What about those dreams I had about ruling over my brothers?
Was God simply mocking me?

But then we come to verse 2, and we see that God isn't far away at all.

The LORD was **with** Joseph so that he **prospered**, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³When his master saw that the LORD was **with** him and that the LORD gave him **success** in everything he did, ⁴Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.

Notice the repetition in these verses.

Twice we are told that God was *with* Joseph.
 Twice we're told that God helped Joseph make headway in his new situation he prospered (v2), and the Lord gave him success in everything he did (v3).
 Just when it seems like Joseph's life was as good as over,
 God proves his loyalty to Joseph,
 showing that he was *never* going to abandon him.

You know it's an interesting thing working next to a major suburban hospital.

I see lots of different things that I wouldn't ordinarily see,
 and, from time to time, I see elderly parents walking arm in arm
 with adult children who appear to have grown up with a disability.
 Mum may be leading the child to an appointment
 or Dad might helping the child into a car.
 The children are old enough to have children of their own,
 or to be themselves the ones talking their parents to an appointment,
 but that's not how life has turned out
 and the parents are still doing the caring,
 40 or maybe 50 years later.

And I think it's an incredible picture
 of the steadfast love that exists between a parent and child.
 These parents are faithful. These parents are loyal.
 And as long as they are able,
 these parents are never going to turn their backs on these needy children.
 And so it is with our heavenly Father.
 He's never going to tire of us, he's never going to stop loving us.

These parents I see at the hospital have made great sacrifices,
 and so too God's love for us involves great sacrifice:
 the death of Christ on the cross,
 the costly provision of forgiveness for us wayward and needy children.
 That's loyalty. That's faithfulness.
 he will never leave us we are told in Hebrews, he will never forsake us.

Now, it seems that God's blessing of Joseph
 didn't stop with him finding success as a slave.
 We read at the end of v6 that Joseph had been blessed with good looks.
 Joseph was well built and handsome, the Bible says.
 Other translations say that he was handsome in form *and* appearance.
 The idea here is that Joseph was blessed with more than a nice face.
 You might say he was *athletic*, or *fit*. Think "contestant on *The Bachelor*".

Now when you are incredibly good looking,
 it's just as much a curse as it is a blessing (or, so I've been told).
 Good looking people tend to garner people's attention,
 and you can become a bit of a target, or maybe a magnet for trouble.
 Joseph is no exception. Verse 7:
 after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"
 And so with this invitation to come to bed comes an invitation to be disloyal.
 However, Joseph doesn't spend a single moment entertaining the idea:
 The first sentence in v8 is short and to the point: But he refused.

I think many people today would think that Joseph did the right thing.
 From what we've heard, Potiphar seems like a reasonable guy,
 he could have treated Joseph any way he wanted to
 but instead he's given credit where credit is due,
 he's noticed Joseph has some kind of leadership ability so he's promoted him.
 What kind of ungrateful jerk would then sleep with this guy's wife?
 So we think *good on him. He's done the right thing by his boss.*

But as Joseph gives the reasons behind his refusal,
 We see that Joseph is aware of an even deeper type of disloyalty:
 Have a listen from the rest of v8: "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does
 not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my
 care. ⁹No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me

except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against (who, Potiphar? No) How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against ... God?"

Joseph is under no illusions as to where his good fortune has come from.

Its not because he's clever or lucky
It's because God has been *with* him and has been loyal *to* him.
How could he then stab God in the back by sinning against him?

You see some people make moral decisions by working out what's best for them.

Others might consider what going to benefit the people they love,
still others by what is going to benefit the community.
But Joseph's ethical reasoning is based on entirely different criteria;
he's thinking about what's going to please God.

Why is saying *NO* to an affair is something that will please God?

Why is God so concerned about what goes on in people's bedrooms?

Well, all throughout the Bible, *and even today*,

Marriage is something that is meant to symbolize God's loyalty to us.

In the Anglican marriage ceremony, the minister says these words:

*Marriage is the symbol of God's unending love for his people,
and of the union between Christ and his Church.*

So the idea is that as husbands and wives maintain faithfulness,
they demonstrate something of God's faithfulness to us.

The marriage ceremony also says that *marriage should be honoured by all*

A quote directly out of Hebrews 13,

and that *no person should tear marriage apart*, a quote directly from Jesus.

And so in line with these principles Joseph is showing that he respects marriage,
that he has no interest in dishonouring the marriage of his master,
and that ultimately he is wanting to respect God and his ways above all else.

On the other hand, Potiphar's wife is showing that she is made of lesser stuff.

V10 tells us that her offer is made persistently, day after day,
and then in v12 her desires are aroused so much
that she resorts to physical harassment, perhaps even physical assault
She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!"
But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

These middle verses of the chapter offer a useful case study

as to how sexual temptation is both served up and resisted.

Temptations can come to us persistently with the aim of wearing us down:

Day after day Potiphar's wife makes her offer to Joseph

Temptations can come when we are vulnerable,
note that in verse 11 no-one is there in the house when things come to a head.

But two things are worth noting in Joseph's response:

First of all, he's absolutely clear on what his values are.

As soon as this temptation is served up we see what Joseph's values are
He's made the decision that God is the one he's honoring,
He's made the decision that it's God's standards that he'll live by.

It is so important to *think yourself clear*, to be clear about your morals
so that when the point of decision comes
you're left in no doubt about what the right course of action will be.

But secondly you'll notice that when he is caught in a dangerous position
he has no hesitation to flee, to run away!
In fact Joseph's action here preempts what we find in the New Testament.
Joseph flees from Potiphar's wife,
Paul tells the Corinthians in 1 Cor 6 to *flee from sexual immorality*,
and he tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 2 to *flee from the evil desires of youth*.
At least three times in the Bible: *Flee ... flee ... flee*

You don't have to be watching the news long
to hear of yet another high profile case of sexual assault or harassment.
Men thinking they can push or cross boundaries and get away with it,
women living with the trauma of assault all their lives.
How different things would be,
if more people took the Bible's standards as their own.
Flee from sexual immorality.
People think the Bible's standards are too high or too old fashioned
but look where the alternative has brought us.

Joseph's example is a great one for everyone.
Resolve to honour God with your body,
and resolve to run away, if that's what it takes.
Find yourself tempted by a workmate?
Start looking for another job.
Internet providing temptations too strong to resist?
Dump your smart phone and make do with a simpler device.
That's what a friend of mine has done recently.
The iphone is gone and he's using something more old fashioned.
Like Joseph, he's fleeing from sexual immorality

Such godliness may prove costly.
Take a look at what happens next for Joseph:
Potiphar's wife accuses Joseph of attempted rape.

It really is an evil and brazen lie that is leveled against Joseph here.
 First of all she plays the race card against Joseph: *this Hebrew* she calls him
 She then displays utter contempt for her husband by blaming him.
You brought him here she snarls.
 And then we have the blatant lie, claiming that she had screamed,
 and then, holding up the cloak that *she* grabbed from Joseph's back,
 she suggests that *Jospeh* was the one who had disrobed himself.

Friends we have to understand that loyalty to God will make us some enemies.
 I saw a news article once about a young Christian married couple,
 he's Australian, she's from Italy,
 And for her to secure a visa they needed proof about their relationship.
 But there was a hiccup because their refusal to live together beforehand
 caused the authorities to become suspicious, they assumed it was a sham.
 Eventually it was granted but the government thought it strange
 that two people would not share a bed before marriage.

And while affirming sex as a thing only for *married* people will bring strange looks,
 then affirming sex as only for married *men and women* will mean you are hated.

When the Bible tells us to flee sexual immorality,
 it means all sorts of sexual immorality, including gay sex.
 And that's a message that may land some Christian people in gaol.
 There are lobby groups that are seeking to outlaw these teachings.
 Even though the world is tearing itself apart with its sexual freedom,
 it will not accept the guidance of God's word,
 in fact, at points it will seek to silence God's word.
 So despite the truth, the injustices will keep coming, as they did for Joseph.

However, take careful note of how the chapter ends:
 Even though we are told that Potiphar burned with anger as he found out,
 Joseph is not killed, which is what he could have expected.
 Rather he is sent to prison,
 where the process of rising to the top starts all over again.
 V21 the LORD was with him;
 he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.
 A brief reminder at the end of the chapter that God's loyalty never wavers.

God might be taking us on a rollercoaster journey, but he's never disloyal.
 Joseph knew this and modeled that loyalty in his own life.
 A loyalty to God, and a loyalty to the people God had put in his life.
 And this was his decision despite some pretty heavy consequences
 May the Holy Spirit help us to imitate Joseph, as he imitated God.
 I'll lead us in prayer.