

# CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

## WHEN YOU HAVE THE POWER TO GET EVEN

### GENESIS 42

#### ***Power Tests What's Really in You***

***Genesis 42:6-9*** 6 Now Joseph was governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the earth. 7 Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan to buy food." 8 So Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. 9 Then Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them, and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land!"

- Genesis 41 ends with the seven years of abundance coming to an end and the seven years of famine have begun
- Egypt had food because of the wisdom of Joseph
- Food is now scarce in Egypt and Pharaoh directed everyone to go to Joseph because he oversaw the food distribution
- Genesis 42 opens with the famine spreading from Egypt to Canaan
- Jacob, Joseph's father hears that there is grain in Egypt and tells his sons
- They weren't excited, joyful or happy over the news that there was grain in Egypt, they're just staring at each other
- Jacob's brothers are staring at each other because *Egypt* has *triggered* something in them
- It was in Egypt where they sold their brother into slavery
- The brothers really don't want to go to Egypt because their conscience is bothering them and possibility that they may see Joseph alive
- They brothers finally obey their father and head to Egypt to buy grain
- Joseph is *governor* of the land, *and* he *oversaw* selling the grain
- If you wanted to buy grain in the famine, you had to come to Joseph
- Joseph's brothers arrive in Egypt to buy grain, and they have to *personally* come to Joseph because he is the *controller* of *all* the grain
- The brothers come and bow down before Joseph, they don't know it's Joseph, but Joseph knows exactly who they are
- Joseph has the advantage
- Joseph has the authority, the food, the position, the information
- The power has completely shifted
- Years ago, Joseph was at *their* mercy, now they are at *his* mercy
- Your character is tested when you have options
  - When you have no power, you don't have many choices
- But when you have power, you have options
- You can:
  - retaliate,
  - humiliate,
  - embarrass,
  - expose,
  - punish,
  - destroy.

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- At this point, Joseph *remembers* his dream, how his family would bow before him, and how brothers *treated him* because of his dreams
- Joseph could have said, “it’s payback time!”
- But Joseph doesn’t immediately retaliate
- Joseph refuses to use his power simply for revenge, but he does use his power to test, discern, and determine whether his brothers have changed
- There’s a powerful principle at work here; you haven’t really demonstrated character until you have *the power* to do wrong and *choose* to do right
- The test of Joseph’s character wasn’t when his brothers had power over him; it was when he had power over them Anybody can say, “I forgive you,” when they have no ability to get even
- What happens when you finally have the opportunity to return the treatment you received?
- We must be careful how we “use” power because power *reveals*
- Give some people an *opportunity to get even* and you discover what’s really in their heart; they will try to hurt you *more than* you hurt them
- Power doesn’t necessarily *change* your character; but it often *reveals* your character

#### Remembering the Hurt Doesn’t Require Revenge (vs. 9, 21-24)

**9** Then Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them, and said to them, “You are spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land!” .....**21** Then they said to one another, “We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.” **22** And Reuben answered them, saying, “Did I not speak to you, saying, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.” **23** But they did not know that Joseph understood them, for he spoke to them through an interpreter. **24** And he turned himself away from them and wept. Then he returned to them again, and talked with them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.

- Verse 9 says, “**And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them...**”
- Joseph remembers his dream, the betrayal, the pit, being sold into slavery, being separated from his father, etc.
- Joseph remembered the dream, but he didn’t use the dream as *permission* for revenge
- Sometimes Christians think that if we forgive somebody, we’re supposed to act as though nothing happened.
- Joseph remembered
- Notice the difference; Joseph remembered *what* they did without *becoming* what they did
- You can remember the betrayal without becoming bitter.
- Then something amazing happens; the brothers begin talking about what *they did* to Joseph
- Verse 21 “**We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul...**”
- Joseph hears them.
- And verse 24 says “**And he turned himself about from them, and wept...**”
- Joseph cries.
- Because the wound is still real

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- The difference is Joseph's pain did not control his behavior
- But Joseph then turns back to his brothers and continues talking to them
- Maturity means pain doesn't get to *make your decisions* for you
- Some people are making today's decisions based upon yesterday's wounds
- They aren't responding to the person in front of them.
- The past is making decisions in the present
- But God wants to heal us so that our history can inform us without controlling us.

#### FORGIVENESS DOES NOT ELIMINATE DISCERNMENT

##### Genesis 42:9–20

- When Joseph sees his brothers, he doesn't *immediately* reveal himself
- He wants to know:
  - Who are you?
  - Where are you from?
  - Do you have another brother?
  - Is your father still alive?
- Joseph is gathering information
- Some people may wonder, “Why doesn't Joseph simply forgive them?”
- Joseph is not only dealing with forgiveness, he's dealing with trust and reconciliation, too
- Joseph wants to know whether they've changed
- These are the same brothers who once sacrificed Joseph for a few pieces of silver
- Joseph is *testing* his brothers to see if they have changed over the years
- Joseph needs to find out:
  - Are they still the same men they were 20 years ago?
  - Have they changed?
  - Do they care about Benjamin?
  - Will they abandon another brother?
  - Are they capable of taking responsibility?
- The test eventually exposes their conscience.
- Verse 21, “**We are verily guilty concerning our brother...**”
- It's important to realize that forgiveness doesn't require you to give your discernment
- Joseph's actions suggest that he is not simply seeking revenge; he is testing whether his brothers have changed
- Sometimes we can confuse forgiveness with *immediate restoration* of trust
- There is a difference between forgiveness, trust, and restoration of responsibilities
- Forgiveness can be given freely; trust is often rebuilt gradually over time
- It's interesting that Joseph has an Egyptian name, Egyptian clothing, Egyptian position, Egyptian authority, Egyptian surroundings, yet he says, “I fear God.”

#### CHARACTER USES POWER TO PROVIDE, NOT PUNISH

**Genesis 42:25** Then Joseph gave a command to fill their sacks with grain, to restore every man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. Thus he did for them.

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- Verse 25 reveals Joseph's character in a beautiful and powerful way, **"Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack..."**
- Joseph is helping the men who hurt him
- And now Joseph is feeding them.
- He has the opportunity to punish them.
- Joseph fills their sacks with grain *and* puts *all the money* they paid in their sacks, too!
- Jesus said in **Matthew 5:44** **But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;**
- Joseph gives us a picture of a man who had *the power* to retaliate against those who hated him but instead used his power to provide for them
- Apostle Paul said in **Romans 12:21** **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**
- We can see Joseph's character development
- Joseph refuses to use his new position to seek revenge
- Joseph had the power to punish his brothers, but he chose to position himself to preserve them
- That's the difference between *revenge* and *redemption*
- Joseph eventually becomes part of God's plan to preserve the very family that wounded him
- Joseph says in **Genesis 50:20**: **"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good..."**
- There are three questions we need to ask ourselves when we have the power to get even:
  1. *Am I trying to restore justice or satisfy my anger?*
  2. *Is my response consistent with the person God has been developing me to become?*
  3. *Will I use my power to bless them instead or destroy them?*
    - The greatest evidence of maturity is not that you "have" power; it's what you *do* with power.
- Joseph's greatest test wasn't the things he went through
- One of Joseph's greatest tests came when the people who hurt him were finally placed in his hands
- And Joseph had a choice
- And Joseph's actions demonstrate that God had done something in him
- Question for all of us: *"What will you do when God puts the person who hurt you in your hands?"*
- And *now*, the circumstances have changed.
- You *could* get even
- But before you do, *remember*; your character is revealed when you have the power to do to someone what they did to you, but choose a *different* response
- Joseph could have used his power to *destroy* his brothers, but instead, God used Joseph's power to *preserve* them