

Character Over Compromise

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Date: 09 March 2025

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[0 : 00] Born in Descumbia, Alabama, to a former captain in the Confederate Army, turned editor to a local newspaper. At 19 months old, she developed an illness that doctors then called, quote, an acute congestion of the stomach and the brain.

It's thought that it was actually a form of meningitis that left her both blind and deaf. She spoke of her experience, and she said that it was like I was at sea in the fog.

However, Helen made the most of it and did amazing things after learning a sign language that began very primitive, but her vocabulary grew very quickly.

She's in the forefront of that picture. And Ann Sullivan, her tutor and teacher, is sitting beside her as she puts sign language into Ann's hands, so Ann can, and they sign to each other that way.

It's amazing how that works. She also grew to become a well-sought-after speaker and prolific author. She was fifth on the list of Gallup's most widely admired people of the 20th century.

[1 : 17] A lot of people give definitions of character, but when Helen Keller speaks of character, I want to listen.

She said of character, character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

She, as much as anyone, would understand trials and sufferings. And so would Joseph. When we get to Genesis chapter 41, we see a high point.

But if we look closely, we also see his character coming through. And I will say it is strong. Now, I want to revisit some verses that I spoke of last week and to take them a step further.

And I say that because most of you don't have a clue what I said by the time you leave the building. And I understand that, okay? But some folks write something down in their Bible.

[2 : 28] And it's their job, ordained by God, to come to their preacher and tell him when he last preached that passage of Scripture. And some of you are going to say, you just preached that last week.

So I'm going to read part of that again. I'm going to deal with some of that again. But I also want to go a step further with that. We pick up in this story where he, Joseph has just told Pharaoh, interpreted Pharaoh's dream and told him that they will have seven years of harvest, followed by a horrible seven years of drought and famine.

And then he gave a plan for Pharaoh to handle it. And the first plan was to appoint a wise and discerning man. And the second point was to tax people 20% of their harvest to put up for the hard times.

In response to that plan, this is what it says Pharaoh said. This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants.

Verse 38. And Pharaoh said to his servants, can we find a man like this in whom is the Spirit of God? Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, since God has shown you all this, there's none so discerning and wise as you.

[3 : 53] You shall be over my house and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, see, I have set you over all the land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck.

And he made him ride in his second chariot. And they called out before him, bow the knee. And then he set him over all the land of Egypt.

Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, I am Pharaoh. And without your consent, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.

And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zephanath Paneah. And he gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphar, priest of On.

[5 : 02] So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt. I had decided that if we had a boy, we were going to name him Zephanath Paneah. Because he would never be, nobody else would get that name, I bet, in his class.

Joseph was 30 years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt.

During the seven plentiful years, the earth produced abundantly. And he gathered up all the food of the seven years, which occupied in the land of Egypt, and put the food in the cities.

He put in every city the food from the fields around it. And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea until he ceased to measure it.

For it could not be measured. Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphar, priest of On, bore them to him.

[6 : 08] Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. For he said, God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house. The name of the second he called Ephraim.

For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction. The seven years of plenty that occurred in the land of Egypt came to an end. And the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said.

There was famine in all the lands. But in all the land of Egypt, there was bread. When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread.

And Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, go to Joseph. What he says to you, do. So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened up all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians.

For the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt, to Joseph, to buy grain. Because the famine was severe over all the earth.

[7 : 14] What a wonderful ascent. In a single bound, Joseph goes from the dungeon to the steps of the throne.

After his dream, his father had rebuked him. Now Pharaoh, the greatest monarch of his time, after his dream, welcomes him. His brothers had despised him.

Yet now he is ranked as the greatest force in Egyptian economic life. His hands are unshackled. His finger is adorned with a signet ring.

Which is the signature of Pharaoh. On that ring, there would be a cartouche. And a cartouche is this engraving that shows the distinctives of Pharaoh.

This is the one for Ramesses the Great. And apparently he was the Pharaoh that did not quite sit down. But if you didn't get that, keep looking because the slide is going to leave eventually.

[8 : 21] Okay. The word in the Hebrew for ring is to sink. You sink the ring into hot wax to leave the seal.

No need for him to check his decisions with Pharaoh. He could stamp with confidence. All the authority of Egypt was put on his hand.

What? An elevation. Garments of fine linen. Exquisite garments. These garments were so fine that they were see-through. And what they would do is simply layer those fine linens over and over and over on top of the royalty.

The Egyptian pagan priest wore that. The Pharaoh wore that. And that was distinctive among them. His coat of many colors and the heritage of the Hebrews, get this, had been erased.

It was gone. And now he was placed in fine linen of a royal but yet wicked ruler of the world. His feet are no longer in fetters and a chain of gold is placed around his neck.

[9 : 32] Those chains sometimes held large pendants with hieroglyphic celebration of the Pharaoh. Similar to the cartouche. But it was a big pendant look like a rapper would wear or something.

They would wear around their neck. Or they would wear what's called an unk cross. And an unk means life. And so these crosses celebrated the God that held your life in his hands.

Or in her hands. Or in their hands. It was the Egyptian thought. But it was also, whichever one he wore, a graphic illustration of power and wealth.

And I can't help but think. There were prominent officials around Pharaoh. The equivalent to his cabinet. The equivalent to Congress.

All those people that were around him. Making decisions on his behalf for the country. That now a prisoner from a foreign land had shot up and rose among them.

[10:49] And taken over their positions of power. It's amazing the kind of atmosphere he must have been in. In addition, he would ride in a chariot like Pharaoh's. Only behind Pharaoh.

And people were required to bow to him like they did Pharaoh. Who was considered a god. Now don't forget Joseph's dream. In Genesis 37 verse 9.

He dreamed that all the world would bow down to him. And God gave him that dream. Because it came true. In Genesis 41. His 13 year sentence as a slave and prisoner abruptly ended.

13 years of hardship, setback, frustration are now over. And instead he's been thrust into a world of prominence and prestige. When Pharaoh told him, Without your consent, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.

That means no one had permission to work. No one had permission to move. To be mobile. In other words, to make major decisions without his consent.

[11:57] More wealth and power than you can imagine. I was trying to think of a modern day example of that.

And I'm a little afraid to give it. Because I make no connotations one way or the other when I bring up this. But just so you somewhat understand. And you understand how our country has mixed feelings about the whole thing.

We see an example of that today. There's an unelected person that has the power to direct the purse strings of America.

Because the most powerful office in the world has given him that permission. By himself, Elon Musk, who would have no power except what is given to him by his extreme wealth.

When authorized by the Oval Office, any and all money moves. Now listen, Joseph didn't have a Supreme Court or other courts to slow him down in that process at all.

[12:59] You know, like it or not, it's a similar situation. And that may look powerful, wonderful as we see Joseph's rise for Joseph. But as Lee Corso says, not so fast, my friend.

I mean, don't be fooled. Because Joseph's always also living in a world of compromise. He's living in a world of paganism. He's living in a world of high pressure.

I mean, he's in the belly of a pagan, demonic, misguided power and prestige. How do you stand up in the midst of that? It gets worse. His name changed to Zephanath-Paneah.

And Zephanath-Paneah means God speaks and lives. Now Pharaoh knows God gave Joseph the vision of leadership. But Pharaoh realized it in a lost kind of way.

Because Pharaoh's a man without God. He's a pagan. A demonic man. And the spiritually darkened gets spiritual matters mixed up.

[14:07] So Pharaoh knows a God has informed him. I hope that he acknowledges that it's the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that gave Joseph the knowledge that he did.

But it does not appear so. Because Joseph is given in marriage the daughter of the priest of On, the city also known as the Helopolis, which was the center of the worship of the sun god, Ray.

Now my friend, that's as high in the royal family as one can imagine. However, it's also as deep into pagan, demonic, wrong worship as you can get.

It is very likely that his wife was in his home worshiping false god that the evil one crafts for pagan lost people. Right in his own home.

Now how do you handle such as that? I mean, realize he's had a radical change of wealth. He's had a radical change in power. He's had a radical change in peer pressure, in societal pressure.

[15:17] How do you handle such as that? Have you ever heard of sudden wealth syndrome? Sudden wealth syndrome is when someone wins the lottery or somebody receives a large inheritance or someone is given a lump sum.

Many times for those folks, it can lead to anxiety. It can lead to fear. It can lead to sleeplessness. It can lead to overspending.

It can lead to impulse buying. Some of you are thinking like I am. Well, I'd like to take a shot at it anyway, you know. But how you handle it makes all the difference in the world.

I have a friend that I served on a seminary board with who was in investment management. And his father owned a business. And as his father began to age, he left his investment management business to go lead his father's business.

When he took over his father's business, his father's business was worth \$10 million. After leading that business for seven years, that business grew from a \$10 million business to \$100 million business.

[16 : 33] And then he sold that business for \$250 million. And he and his father, taking the proceeds from that sale, the first thing they did was tithe to their church.

Can I get an amen? They tithe to their church. And beyond that, I know of three very significant gifts that they gave to Southern Baptist seminaries, which now have buildings with their names on it, as well as a Southern Baptist Conference Center in Oklahoma where they live, where they've built a large building there as well.

They gave away \$50 million. That is remembering who blessed you.

Not only did Joseph obtain great wealth instantly, but the power that he obtained immediately would be too much for most.

How do you handle it when people are bowing at your feet and you own the black card for the richest nation in the world? That is a lot of power.

[17 : 52] How one handles it makes all the difference in the world. In ancient times, coins were not minted as they are today in large mechanical processes.

Instead, they were made by melting the gold or the silver that was to become a coin, and they poured a small bit of that gold or silver into a hard mold and then pressed the die containing the image of a ruler or a god into that metal.

They made every coin slightly unique. They had irregular shapes. They were soft and uneven edges.

Oftentimes, the less than honest folks would take a sharp knife and they would carefully peel away some of the excess gold or silver.

They would save these peelings off these coins until they had enough to melt down and then made into another coin. It was such a common practice that the city of Athens passed 80 laws against trimming coins.

[19 : 06] And even today, in museums, it's hard to find a coin that does not have the edges trimmed away. When Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 verse 27 said, But I discipline my body and I keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

The word disqualified in the Greek is the term that is often used to describe a coin that has been whittled away so badly that it was no longer acceptable.

The merchants would not take it anymore. It had to be recalled. It had to be remitted. And that kind of slowly whittling down process is what too often happens in individual lives when they are blessed.

When wealth and opportunity come, and even attention along the way, it is often that compromise comes with it. Standards of behavior are not held as high, and priorities cannot be, priorities can be misplaced.

Why is that? Because honor leads to pride, and pride leads to a fall. And that might be a sudden fall, or it could be a slow one, a whittling away of character that is way too costly.

[20 : 30] But I want you to understand something, folks, this morning. We are never on the throne. We're not. We are not in charge.

God is. God is. Regardless of the power or the wealth that's handed to us. Not only that, there's pressure. The Egyptians were a godless people that revered Pharaoh as divine and believed in all kinds of gods.

As a matter of fact, in the coming years after Joseph's life, Moses would come about and would lead God's people out of Egypt.

And the plagues that would come to Egypt when Moses was leading them was a direct attack on their made-up gods. The Nile turned blood as a plague.

That was attack on what they considered holy, sacred waters, as well as the two gods of the Nile.

The plague of darkness that comes is an attack on Ray, the sun god.

[21 : 47] The frogs that came as part of a plague attacked Hekit, which is a fertility god made in a man's image with a frog head.

The locusts that came were attacking the god of the harvest and so on. So that's the kind of atmosphere, an atmosphere with all of those gods, that's the kind of atmosphere that Joseph was in.

And the priest of the main area of this demonic worship was his own father-in-law. Temptation all around him to not honor God.

That is pressure. Or as Helen Keller put it, that is not ease and comfort. One of two things are going to come out in a situation like that.

Either character is going to shine through or either there's going to be compromise. And I'm thankful today that Joseph chose character.

[22 : 48] Now, how do I know that? How do I know that he never left his faith in God in the midst of that circumstance? I'll tell you how I know.

I know by what he named his sons. The first thing I learned from the name of his first son is that he had a blessed forgetfulness. A blessed forgetfulness.

The first son was named Manasseh. The name means to forget. He said, God has allowed me to forget my yesterdays. Now, think about that.

What did Joseph forget? Did he forget how his brothers betrayed him? Did he forget how they threw him in a dry cistern? Did he forget that desert journey that he took to the slave block?

Did he forget the daily temptation of the boss's wife? Did he forget the false accusation of his boss's wife? Did he forget the impending jail sentence that he served?

[23 : 49] Did he forget the dungeon they put him in? Did he forget his forgetful cellmate that forgot for two years the difference that Joseph made for him? I want to be clear about something.

I don't believe he forgot any of that. I don't think you can forget all that. He didn't forget the events that happened. I'll tell you what he forgot. He forgot the pain of it.

I'll tell you what he forgot. He forgot the bitterness of it. He gave those things to God. He didn't let that bitterness rise up against him.

He wasn't in the bondage of his past. And I want to be clear this morning. Only God can bring that kind of healing. Only God can bring healing of a rough past caused by other people.

Only God can bring that. And God did bring that for Joseph. And Joseph did not forget what God had done. He said, God has allowed me to forget.

[24 : 54] He had a blessed forgetfulness. But he also had a thankful heart. His second son was named Ephraim.

And it means to be fruitful. God had made him fruitful. Now I'm sure he was speaking partially of his two children that were born to him.

But he's also speaking of the harvest. Because scripture tells us that both of those sons were born during the days of a plentiful, bountiful harvest.

Matter of fact, verse 49 says this. And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance like the sand of the sea until he ceased to measure it.

For it could not be measured. Through it all, he never caught sight. Excuse me. He never lost sight of the glory and the goodness of God.

[25 : 59] And now as famine is approaching, he's ready for whatever comes. Because he didn't compromise. He trusted God through every step of the way.

And he lived that out in godly character. As I pondered on that this week, I pondered on the power that was put in his hands and the wealth that was given to him and the pressure, the societal pressure that he was under.

And in reality, when we've seen the church of Jesus Christ be the strongest that it ever could be, it was usually when societal pressure was the greatest. In atmospheres of ease and comfort, the reality is there's a lot of compromise in the Christian church.

But real Christians stand up for what is right in the midst of pressure. And I thought about all those things. And I couldn't help but think about the Apostle Paul and what he said in Philippians chapter 3 verse 13.

When he says, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[27 : 05] Paul had to forget a lot of great accomplishments that would easily fill somebody with pride to be all that God would have him to be. Joseph had to forget a lot of hurt, a lot of things that people had done to him that was not fairly done to him, a lot of things that scarred his life, a lot of things that shelved him for a long time.

So whether it's greatness or whether it's pain, to live with godly character in the midst of a world trying to choke us out spiritually, we need to be able to walk away from yesterday and come fresh today to God.

And in that process, don't ever forget to give him thanks for all that he's done. God's been good to us, folks.

If we had time this morning, we took time to give thanks for what God had done. People all over this building could stand up and talk about God's greatness to you, God's goodness to you and how thankful you are for that.

And because God's been so faithful in the past, man, I don't know what tomorrow's coming, but I know who's already there. I know who's already taking care of it and I can put my confidence and my trust in him.

[28 : 23] And that's exactly what Joseph was saying. God's been good to pick his first Baptist church. What blessed fruitfulness God has given us. And I am thankful to stand here today and tell you he's still at work.

I still know what he's doing in people's lives that you don't know about. So let's not forget the things that slow us down. Cast those things aside. And you don't have to do that alone.

God will help you do that and to move forward into thankfulness for the fruitfulness that comes only through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

How do you stand in the midst of the pressure that we feel in life so often? I'll tell you what you do. You put whatever burdens you under the blood of Christ. You ask God to forgive you of your past and you ask God to give you a blessed forgetfulness for the things that you need to let go of, the things that you need to not put your confidence in and to not allow you to scar you from the evil one who's robbed you of things in the past to rob you of things in the future.

[29 : 43] There's no need to do that, my friend. You can walk fresh today. You can know that the Lord's already went before you. He's paved your path. And for that, we have much to be thankful for.

I want to ask you this morning, has there ever been a time in your life when you've surrendered your life to Christ? When you've ever said, Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner and I've never surrendered my life to Christ.

And so Lord, today, I want you to control my life. I come as I am and I ask you to forgive me of the sin that I've committed and I ask you to empower me to live for you.

God, guide me from this day forward to live my life, to honor you and to praise you. Friend, if that's never happened to you, I want you to know that today's the day of salvation.

You can have your life forever changed today by surrendering to the Lord Jesus. And if you have any unction within you at all to want to do anything like that, I'm going to tell you, you didn't come up with that. God's already initiated that.

[30 : 47] He's working in your heart, so you just obey him as he speaks to you. Maybe you've done that privately, but you've never done that publicly. Jesus, by example, as well as by his commission, tells us that when we're saved by the blood of the Lamb, when we're Christians, we ought to acknowledge that through baptism.

That's how we are to announce to others what God has done in us. To not do that becomes a major snare sometimes in our walk with God. And if you've never done that, I'd love to counsel you in that.

We won't do it this morning. Don't panic. But we'll line up a time to be able to do that in the future.

Maybe you're here this morning, God's leading you to Pickens First Baptist Church.

You feel like he's drawing you to be here. God's blessed us mightily, and we're very thankful for that. And if you feel like God's leading you, be a part of that. You come. I'd love to guide you in that process.

For the most of us, there's stuff that we need to forget. We need to lay it down before the Lord today.

[31 : 55] Whether it's at your seat, whether it's at this altar, whether it's with me praying with you, we need to lay some stuff down with some blessed forgetfulness and let it go. The second thing we need to do is thank God that he ain't give up on us yet, that he's already walked before us, and he'll never leave us or forsake us.

We have a lot to be thankful for, folks, only in Christ. Let it mark not only our hour, let it mark our lives in all we do. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, I love you and thank you for the opportunity you give us to come to you and to be changed. God, I pray right now that you'll work and you'll move in each and every life in this place. Help us to simply be obedient to follow your will and your way right now.

In Jesus' name, amen.