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MORE THAN TOIL

A 5 PART DEVOTIONAL BIBLE STUDY FOLLOWING
THE LIFE OF JOSEPH; UNPACKING THE LESIONS
FOR EVERYDAY DISCIPLES IN BUSINESS
LEADERSHIP

WEEK ONE: Humility

Read

Genesis 37:1 – 11

Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.

²This is the account of Jacob's family line. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. ³Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. ⁴When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. ⁵Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more.

⁶He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: ⁷We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

⁸His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

⁹Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

¹⁰When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" ¹¹His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Romans 12:3 – 8

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Read More:

Genesis 37 – 38

Reflect

Leadership is something that many of us will be very familiar with and in all probability, something we have read a great deal about. The models of leadership we see demonstrated in business vary hugely and yet something that is all too often overlooked is **humility**. Growing in Christ centered humble leadership that is applicable to our everyday lives ought to be of significant importance to us. Both our readings today are full of lessons to guide us on this path.

Our Romans passage starts by calling us to “not think too highly of ourselves”. This seems like an odd thing to say within the context of addressing gifting. However the passage calls us to recognize ourselves within the content of others and their gifts. Paul, the author of this passage makes the point that each of us operate as a single part of a communal whole. Our gifting; including our gift and call to leadership, is no more important than any other gift or role, and depends upon the gifts of others so that collectively we thrive.

Leadership requires humility and an ability to ‘see’ the others who equally contribute to the thriving of the whole.

Joseph illustrates perfectly someone who operated in his gifting but failed to do so in a way that honored others. We later find out that his dreams do indeed come true but not before his brothers fake his death and sell him into slavery. Gifting without humility can become a taunt to others and in turn undermine the impact you can have.

Christ centered, biblical leadership doesn’t just happen but rather it takes a proactive effort for us to reflect upon ourselves and others and then embrace the diversity we see. Self-awareness, humility and embracing difference is not easy and requires and willingness to engage with and accept the risk of acknowledging views different from our own.

Pray

Pray that you might be shown the diverse gifting’s of others within your organisation. Pray for the humility to embrace diverse views. Trust that your leadership is a gift from God, be confident that the Lord equips us for what he calls us to. Be a bold and humble Christ centre leader.

WEEK TWO: Influence

Read:

Geneses 39:1 – 6

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. ² The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. ³ And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴ So Joseph found favour in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all *that* he had he put under his authority. ⁵ So it was, from the time *that* he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field. ⁶ Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate.

Matthew 5:13 - 16

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deed sand glorify your Father in heaven.

Read More:

Genesis 39

Reflect:

Salt and Light. There are many good explanations of how the people of God are to be like salt and light in the world, but the thread that seems to run through many of them is the concept of *influence*.

Throughout the history of God's people we have been set apart as a light to the nations. Though our acts, character and faith we are lights that illuminate the love, grace and renewing power of Christ. As a disciple of Jesus you become a light emitting, flavour giving, co-creating image of Christ.

We are called to be people of influence not hidden away, snuffed out or flavourless, but rather shining bright and releasing the creative flavour of God's kingdom into the world.

Many Christian business leaders say that they feel called to their workplace and position of leadership but their minister or church do not really understand or value that call.

Does these feel familiar? For too long business has been seen as synonymous with wealth, greed and the love of money. You and I know that that is not true but what could be done to show that to others?

How can you be a positive influence and ambassador of business for good?

We see though the life and workplace leadership of Joseph whilst running the estate of Potiphar that his faith, leadership and success was inextricably connected to the faithfulness of God towards him. Joseph's commitment to his work was as a service to God and as such resulted in fruitful relationships, influence and success.

Pray

Today pray that you might step into a position of influence, that the Lord might expand the territory of your influence and strengthen your impact so that your work might highlight the person of God.

WEEK THREE: Holiness

Read:

Genesis 39:6 – 20

So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome,⁷ and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"⁸ But he refused. "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."⁹ No 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 God?"¹⁰ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

¹¹ One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹² 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.

¹³ When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, ¹⁴ she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. ¹⁵ When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

¹⁶ She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. ¹⁷ Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. ¹⁸ But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

¹⁹ When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. ²⁰ Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

Galatians 5:13 - 26

³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." ¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Read More:

Genesis 40

Reflect:

Business leadership can be a difficult position to remain holy.

When Peter started his career as a consultant he was excited about the opportunity to support his clients, improve their services and lead in a way that demonstrated his Christian values. It was within the first 6th months that a senior consultant insisted he attend an adult's entertainment venue with some clients and within a year he was partaking in the culture that surrounded him, he was drinking most days, taking illegal stimulants and welcoming opportunities to work late rather than return home.

Peter might be an extreme illustration but the fact is, business life can present many challenges to remain focused on faith and a life of holiness.

Our Galatians passage lays out some clear guidelines for us as the people of God for how we operate in the world. Whilst some of the 'desires of the flesh' listed in verses 16 – 21 might seem far from our experiences I am confident that many of us will have encountered and might recognize within ourselves jealousy, rage, anger and selfish ambition.

Joseph recognized his gift, and we have seen that his gifting led to power, influence and material wealth. In such a position it can be hard to discern how to operate when faced with uncomfortable and morally questionable situations. However we must take a leaf out of Joseph's book, sometimes it is best simply to remove yourself from the situation; even if it comes at a material cost you will reap a spiritual return.

Pray:

Walking a path of holiness is not easy but the path to which we have been called and a way made possible through the Holy Spirit. Pray for a renewed indwelling of the Holy Spirit so that through His power you might live a life of holiness.

WEEK FOUR: Stewardship

Read:

Genesis 41:46 – 57 (For context read whole chapter)

⁴⁶ Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and travelled throughout Egypt. ⁴⁷ During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. ⁴⁸ Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. ⁴⁹ Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure.

⁵⁰ Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. ⁵¹ Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." ⁵² The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering."

⁵³ The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, ⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. ⁵⁵ When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph and do what he tells you."

⁵⁶ When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout Egypt. ⁵⁷ And all the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe everywhere.

Psalm 24

¹ The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,

the world, and all who live in it;

² for he founded it on the seas

and established it on the waters.

³ Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD?

Who may stand in his holy place?

⁴ The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,

who does not trust in an idol

or swear by a false god.

⁵ They will receive blessing from the LORD

and vindication from God their Saviour.

⁶ Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek your face, God of Jacob.

⁷ Lift up your heads, you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

⁸ Who is this King of glory?
The LORD strong and mighty,
the LORD mighty in battle.

⁹ Lift up your heads, you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

¹⁰ Who is he, this King of glory?
The LORD Almighty—
he is the King of glory.

Read more:

Genesis 41 – 46

Reflect:

In 2018 the World Health Organization stated that world hunger is increasing with over 821 million people going hungry and over 20 million at risk of the most severe famine. Those working in the sector will often say that there is 'always *disease* between starvation and death'. What these health and development workers are referring to is that famine and starvation have multifaceted outcomes, the last of which is death. Famine is one of the most pressing global issues facing the world today, exacerbated significantly by the impacts of climate change which has made food production unprecedentedly precarious with unpredictable and extreme weather patterns.

As a result, there is a growing call to reshape our understanding of the natural world and our place within it. With the growth of benchmarks for better business such as BCorp, Future Fit and the UN Global Compact, business leaders and increasingly looking to move more towards a vision of business and humanity 'in communion' with creation, not dominating or exploiting it for our own direct gains.

Stewardship has long been the term used within the Christian community to describe this relationship with creation. Coupled with a prophetic vision, Joseph illustrates the far reaching impact of God-centered leadership that operates from a position of trust in what God calls him to do. In the midst of a famine so severe that "all the other lands" were without food, Joseph had ensured that Egypt, of which he was in charge had enough to feed both Egyptians and those from surrounding counties.

The statistics will be familiar, that between 70% - 90% of businesses fail to survive beyond 10 years. With as many as 60% failing to make it past 3 years. The reasons behind these company's collapse are many and varied, however a repeated issue is, 'We overreached'. Expenditure exceeding income and failing to build in financial safeguards, as well as misunderstanding the market remains the most common reasons why companies fail.

Our Psalm calls us to keep the main thing the main thing, remembering that everything is the Lords and we are called to steward what he entrusted us with. Successful stewardship requires a listening ear to the Holy Spirit so that our energy and resources are directed in a way that cannot only deliver a return for the business but go beyond, and from our excess serve those most in need. God cares deeply about your day to day and will guide, instruct and equip your leadership, vision and strategy; we are simply called to listen and act on what we hear.

Pray:

Simply opening yourself up to the possibility that God wants to use you in your business and workplace will transform the impact you can have. Ask God for a fresh and prophetic vision for your leadership so that your success enables the health and wellbeing of God's creation.

WEEK FIVE: Justice

Read:

Genesis 47:13 – 31

³ There was no food, however, in the whole region because the famine was severe; both Egypt and Canaan wasted away because of the famine. ¹⁴ Joseph collected all the money that was to be found in Egypt and Canaan in payment for the grain they were buying, and he brought it to Pharaoh's palace. ¹⁵ When the money of the people of Egypt and Canaan was gone, all Egypt came to Joseph and said, "Give us food. Why should we die before your eyes? Our money is all gone."

¹⁶ "Then bring your livestock," said Joseph. "I will sell you food in exchange for your livestock, since your money is gone." ¹⁷ So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and he gave them food in exchange for their horses, their sheep and goats, their cattle and donkeys. And he brought them through that year with food in exchange for all their livestock.

¹⁸ When that year was over, they came to him the following year and said, "We cannot hide from our lord the fact that since our money is gone and our livestock belongs to you, there is nothing left for our lord except our bodies and our land. ¹⁹ Why should we perish before your eyes—we and our land as well? Buy us and our land in exchange for food, and we with our land will be in bondage to Pharaoh. Give us seed so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate."

²⁰ So Joseph bought all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh. The Egyptians, one and all, sold their fields, because the famine was too severe for them. The land became Pharaoh's, ²¹ and Joseph reduced the people to servitude, from one end of Egypt to the other. ²² However, he did not buy the land of the priests, because they received a regular allotment from Pharaoh and had food enough from the allotment Pharaoh gave them. That is why they did not sell their land.

²³ Joseph said to the people, "Now that I have bought you and your land today for Pharaoh, here is seed for you so you can plant the ground. ²⁴ But when the crop comes in, give a fifth of it to Pharaoh. The other four-fifths you may keep as seed for the fields and as food for yourselves and your households and your children."

²⁵ "You have saved our lives," they said. "May we find favour in the eyes of our lord; we will be in bondage to Pharaoh."

²⁶ So Joseph established it as a law concerning land in Egypt—still in force today—that a fifth of the produce belongs to Pharaoh. It was only the land of the priests that did not become Pharaoh's.

²⁷ Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number.

²⁸ Jacob lived in Egypt seventeen years, and the years of his life were a hundred and forty-seven. ²⁹ When the time drew near for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, "If I have found favour in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt, ³⁰ but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried."

"I will do as you say," he said.

³¹ "Swear to me," he said. Then Joseph swore to him, and Israel worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

Amos 2:6 – 16

⁶ This is what the LORD says:
“For three sins of Israel,
even for four, I will not relent.
They sell the innocent for silver,
and the needy for a pair of sandals.
⁷ They trample on the heads of the poor
as on the dust of the ground
and deny justice to the oppressed.
Father and son use the same girl
and so profane my holy name.
⁸ They lie down beside every altar
on garments taken in pledge.
In the house of their god
they drink wine taken as fines.
⁹ “Yet I destroyed the Amorites before them,
though they were tall as the cedars
and strong as the oaks.
I destroyed their fruit above
and their roots below.
¹⁰ I brought you up out of Egypt
and led you forty years in the wilderness
to give you the land of the Amorites.
¹¹ “I also raised up prophets from among your children
and Nazirites from among your youths.
Is this not true, people of Israel?”
declares the LORD.
¹² “But you made the Nazirites drink wine
and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.
¹³ “Now then, I will crush you
as a cart crushes when loaded with grain.
¹⁴ The swift will not escape,
the strong will not muster their strength,
and the warrior will not save his life.
¹⁵ The archer will not stand his ground,
the fleet-footed soldier will not get away,
and the horseman will not save his life.
¹⁶ Even the bravest warriors
will flee naked on that day,”
declares the LORD.

Read More:

Genesis 47 - 50

Reflect:

Amos has a lot to say about oppression and the plight of the poor in Israel. Nowhere in the whole book of Amos does God ever suggest that poverty is in some way the fault of the poor. Rather it is difficult not to assume from the book of Amos that God looks sternly on those in positions of power who use their position to take advantage of and fail to care for the poor.

What is clearly seen from Amos is that God does expect a certain type of behaviour from one to another, and he will not tolerate injustice. Note that he treats both Israel and other nations similarly in this regard (1:11; 2:1; 2:6). Justice is universally applicable and desired by God for all.

It is clear that those spoken about in Amos were ruthless and self-centred, motivated by what they could gain for themselves no matter the cost to others. We've seen from the previous reflection on Galatians 5:13 – 26 that such selfish ambition is not part of Christ-centred discipleship. We ought to be challenged then when we read Genesis 47:13 onwards, because we are faced with an account of Joseph who appears to take advantage of a global crisis by rather than making his stockpiles available free of charge he accepts money, possessions, livestock, land and eventually the people themselves as slaves in payment for his stockpiled food. If anything, this behaviour appears like a ruthless capitalist willing to maximise his return irrespective of the cost to others.

However, note verse 25; as a result of Joseph's actions in time of crisis, what first seems like oppression leads to a situation that the Israelites, who were on the brink of death, stated "you have saved our lives". We then go on to read that "the Israelites settle in Egypt, in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased in number."

Joseph's God-centred leadership and business mindedness enabled the nation not only to survive but thrive. God calls us to be co-creators with him in his world and this includes the creation and Godly leadership of our organisations. With bold and prophetic vision, you can achieve great things that may just transform whole nations.

Pray:

The Lord has equipped you to be his hands and his feet in the world, using what you have in your business and workplace to co-create a world in which justice reigns. Never underestimate what you can achieve when you are in line with God's purpose and plan.

We have seen from the life of Joseph that leadership is far from easy; and business, commerce and governance is full with risk. However, his life also shows that God's plan for his creation and people is made manifest by the hands of faithful disciples committed to honouring him in the work they do.

Pray that today you might take the next step in your leadership journey and that God will guide you towards the opportunities in your work to be agents of transformation and signposts to Christ.