

Patchogue Church of the Nazarene  
Sunday 9&11 AM – October 9, 2005

## **Lordship Living – God Provides: Faithfulness**

### **Lasting Returns**

Genesis 39:20-21

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**“But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden” (Gen. 39:20b-21) NIV.**

**Today’s Focus:** God rewards those who are faithful to Him.

**Food for Thought:** I will put my time, talent, treasure, and touch to work for the Kingdom.

### **Introduction**

Faithful. The idea of faithfulness has suffered in our generation. We more often hear stories of betrayal or unfaithfulness than stories about those who are faithful, especially when it comes to marital faithfulness.

Gallup Poll, 73 % of Americans < 45 believe life spent with the same partner is both unusual and unnecessary.

Gallup Poll, 89 % currently going through divorce cited a family history of divorce as a contributing factor to the demise of their own marriages.

From this, we can deduce that **when we model unfaithfulness, others are affected by our actions.**

The opposite is also true. **When we model faithfulness, we influence others to be faithful!** When we observe someone who is faithful, whether in marriage or in their walk with God, we are encouraged to be faithful too.

- biblical examples of persons who were faithful.
- N.T. tells us – O.T. events serve as examples
- God has graciously given us these accounts to challenge and spur us to follow in their footsteps.

Today, we’ll look at the life of one of the best examples—  
Joseph, the son of Jacob.

### **Faithfulness Is a Choice**

You and I make choices every day.

And every choice we make means *not choosing something else*.

Choose - get up and go to work, - choose to not sleep in.

Choose - study and do homework, - choose to not watch TV, golf.. Sometimes we face obstacles to the choices we make.

- complete a college education, it’ll cost - time and money.
- successful in our business, beat the competition.

**It's not always easy to follow through on our choices.**

It's the same with being faithful.

**Faithfulness is a choice, and it's one we have to stick with if we are to please God.**

*Think about Joseph. He was Jacob's favored son. For this reason, his brothers envied him. Of course, Joseph also told his brothers about dreams he'd had where they bowed down to him. This infuriated them, and when they had the opportunity, they decided to get rid of him. First, they planned to kill him, but instead they sold him into slavery.*

Joseph's buyers took him to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar, the captain of the guard. Potiphar soon realized Joseph was successful in whatever he did. The Scriptures say the reason for this was *because the Lord was with Joseph*. As Potiphar benefited from Joseph's work and God's blessing, he gave the Hebrew slave more and more responsibility.

But into every life some rain must fall, and Joseph seemed to suffer from periodic downpours. Potiphar's wife noticed Joseph was successful at everything he did, and was a handsome young man, so she made advances toward him. Joseph's response is critical for us to hear today. He said, "*How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?*" His words are reflected in David's psalm of repentance to God, "*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight*" (Ps. 51:4).

*When we're unfaithful to others, we're unfaithful to God. Who knows how tempted Joseph was to give in to the advances of Potiphar's wife? Beautiful rich lady coming on to this single guy?*

What we do know is *Joseph made the choice to remain faithful* to his boss, Potiphar, and, more importantly, to his God.

Joseph made the **choice** to be faithful. And he stuck with it.

Gladys Aylward was a missionary to China more than 60 years ago. She was forced to flee when the Japanese invaded Yangcheng, but she wouldn't leave her work behind. With only one assistant, she led more than one hundred orphans over the mountains to freedom.

During her harrowing journey out of war-torn Yangcheng, Gladys grappled with despair as never before. After a sleepless night, she faced the morning with no hope of reaching safety. A thirteen-year-old girl in the group reminded her of the much-loved story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.

"But I am not Moses," Gladys cried in desperation.

"Of course you aren't," the girl said, "but God is still God!"

Regardless of the pressures or temptations we face,  
*God is still God.*

*What temptation are you facing right now? Maybe you're struggling to be faithful in your marriage. You're facing a difficult time, and it isn't easy. But faithfulness means sticking with the promises you've made and trusting God. Maybe you're struggling financially. You've made a commitment to tithe your income, but there are challenges. Do you all know what tithing is? It is not just another word for your offering; it is 10% of your income! Look at the insert in the worship folder for more information on tithing. Story of our kids tithing! Motives? Personal Gain? Faithfulness to God? IRS - 10% donations?*

*Remember, times may be tough, but God is still God.*

*God will not abandon us in any situation—ever.* He is always there to help us make the best choices, if we will ask Him for help. Of course, *it's up to us to obey*—and as seen in the life of Joseph—*obedience is critical* to living the life of faith.

*Is obedience a habit of your life?* Do you seek to do the things God wants you to? Do you strive to be *faithful in your service* to God as you serve Him and others?

### **Through Our Faithfulness, We Gain Lasting Returns**

Back to Joseph. *Do you realize even though Joseph made the right choice to be faithful to God, he still suffered from injustice?*

Potiphar's wife falsely accused him, and her husband put Joseph into prison. Later, while in jail, he would interpret the dreams of Pharaoh's servants, but would be forgotten when one of them returned to the house of his master. *Suffering for doing right!*

When you consider how Joseph—the favored son of Jacob—was *mistreated* and seemingly *forgotten*, you might expect him to throw up his hands in frustration and say *following God wasn't worth the effort*. But that's not the way the story reads. *Joseph continued to be faithful to his God even though his circumstances were bleak.* He used his skills to benefit the jailer and the other prisoners as he had in Potiphar's house.

*Not "Why Me?" – but "Now What, Lord." - PJ msg.*

*Joseph was faithful* in honoring the Lord and the Lord showed him favor. Later, Joseph's brothers realized their long lost brother was still alive and that he *might take revenge* on them.

Gen 50:19-20 - *But Joseph told them, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, to judge and punish you? As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people.* NLT

*He saw the big picture* and God's hand even in the unpleasant experiences of his life.

Sometimes, it's *difficult for us to see the "big picture."* We focus on the immediate difficulty of our situation or the temptations we face or our own selfish desires. But God wants us to see things from His perspective - takes some determination and faith.

**The natural inclination of every one of us is to cling to the things we have**—to try to keep them for our own benefit.

This isn't unlike the two-year-olds in our nursery. They don't understand the concept of sharing. Their favorite word is "mine!" That word seems to stay with us all of our lives. Mine – my house, my boat, my income, my bank account, my investments. MINE! It's MINE! We love to possess things, but it is really owned by God – yes – all of it. HIS!

But God wants to break us of this *selfish spirit*.

**God wants us to be generous—with Him and with others.** When we refer to giving to the Lord, we often think of *finances first*. Let's think of finances later. Did you know there are other ways we can be faithful in giving to the Lord?

*Think for a moment about your time.* Are you faithful in giving your time to God? Do you allow Him to help you set priorities in how you use your time each day? Do you give time to serve others through the church or in your community? *You will be blessed!*

*What about your talents? What gifts has God given you that you can use faithfully? Have you—or will you—commit them to God’s service? You will be blessed!*

*How about the ways in which you can touch others uniquely through personal relationships? Are you faithful to give yourself to God to do this? You will be blessed!*

Then, *examine your use of money*. Money is always a tough area to address. PJ hates to talk about money and giving, that’s why he asked me to. We can always get rid of the Asst. Pastor.

Is the way you spend and give of your income in line with the rest of your life? What do the priorities of your spending say about your faithfulness to God? *Do you acknowledge Him as the Owner and yourself as the manager of all He has provided you?*

Waldo Weaning talked about **Three Levels of Giving:**

- 1. You have to (Law)**
- 2. You ought to (Obligation)**
- 3. You want to (Grace)**

If you have not yet reached the place where you want to give yourself, your time, your talent, your treasure, and your touch in faithful service to God, *will you ask God to help you get there?*

*We want to see you be blessed by God in your life.*

I love to give! – Corinne and I came from obligation giving to joyful giving by trusting God and watching Him continually bless us time and again. I remember one time after we had been tithing for a while. I was 1985, while I was very sick, we need about \$900 for something – it’s mostly a blur to me now... story ...

God provided the amount and the tithe - \$1000. We gave \$100 to a friend who needed \$100. God is amazing! *You will be blessed!*

Mal 3:10 - *Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the LORD Almighty, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Let me prove it to you! NLT*

Once there was a talent show at a local hall.

The first contestant played a saxophone solo.

The second contestant read a poem she wrote.

The third contestant walked out to the stage carrying a guitar... “I didn’t put anything together.”

The crowd fell silent. Shortly after he walked off the stage, his father seized the guitar and gave it to the saxophone player saying, “Take this and use it so others may hear the music this instrument makes.”

I don’t know about you, but there are times when I’ve felt like that third contestant. Perhaps you feel you have a talent for something, but you’re not sure if you’re *talented enough*. Have you ever thought about *where your talents come from?*

God knows our potential better than we do! He gives us an abundance of talents because He trusts us with them. It is up to us to *use those talents in ways that make Him proud* of us as His children.

When we use our time, talent, treasure, and touch for God's glory, *He rewards us*. We may not see it now. We may not even be able to see any way good could result from our gifts. *Like Joseph* sitting in prison, we may be unable to see the end of the story. But *God is faithful*. If we are faithful in serving Him, He will be faithful in rewarding us.

BUT – we cannot give in order to get for ourselves – as some teach. That would be giving with wrong motives. James 4:3 – “*When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on yourself*”

### **God Gives Us Gifts and Talents to Bless Others**

What are you good at? What are the things you do well, perhaps better than others do? What are your gifts and talents?

Now here's a second question. Why are you good at the things you're good at? Why has God given you abilities to sing or teach or make money or lead or create? I'll tell you why:

**God has given you these gifts to bless others.**

Joseph was blessed with gifts and talents that allowed him to be a blessing to the people of Egypt and to the entire Middle East. He continued to prove himself trustworthy and God showed him favor, even in prison.

We have the false notion that others possess greater or better gifts and talents than ours. The reality is God knows each of us and gives each one the gifts we can most effectively use in His service. Whether it's cleaning the restrooms or preaching the sermon, we each have a responsibility to use our gifts, graces, and talents Almighty God has entrusted to us.

After a classroom discussion on spiritual gifts, a young man asked the professor, “Is my gift prophecy or exhortation?” ...

Knowing him very well, the teacher was careful as he responded, “I don't think either one is your gift. But if I have ever known someone who has the gift of helps, it's you. You're sensitive to the needs of other people and always ready to help.”

A look of disappointment came over the young man's face. “I knew it!” he responded.

Struggling with a low self-image, he was pursuing what he wrongly perceived to be a *greater gift*. *You will never be fulfilled trying to become someone you are not.*

God hasn't distributed gifts and talents equally, and for this reason alone we can be assured our sense of self-worth shouldn't be based on what we do. Our self-acceptance should derive from our identity in Christ and our growth in Christian character.

Show me someone who understands who he is as a child of God and whose character exemplifies the fruit of the Spirit, and I will show you someone with a healthy self-image.

God has given you gifts and talents, and they are not for your use alone. They are to be used to bless others. The greatest mistake you can make is to conclude your gifts are somehow better than those of another.

**In God's eyes, all gifts are equal because they equally serve the Body—His Church.**

When God called Moses to lead the Hebrew people out of slavery, He asked Moses, “*What is that in your hand?*” He was ready to use Moses and the things Moses had. God asks each of us this same question today. What is in your hand? Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? Have you identified your talents? Are you willing to offer them in faithful service to God? Will you do it?

I have a *survey* that helps people assess what their spiritual gifts may be. See me if you would like a copy. To some it is enlightening, to some it is a confirmation, but to all it should be an encouragement to use the gifts God has given you.

### **Conclusion**

As a way of committing yourself to faithful service in the Kingdom, *will you offer your time, talent, treasure, and touch* to God? Will you be like Joseph and be faithful to God wherever you are? Will you be faithful regardless of your status? Will you be faithful even when you don't feel like it? Will you gladly give God yourself and your gifts in faithful devotion and service?

George Washington Truett was a preacher in Dallas for 47 years. He once visited a wealthy West Texas rancher for dinner at his huge ranch home. After dinner, the rancher took Dr. Truett to a veranda on top of his house, and lit a big cigar. The sun was setting, and if you've ever been to West Texas, you know you can see a long way out there. The man pointed to the south toward some oil rigs and said, “I own everything in that direction as far as you can see.” He pointed east toward some cotton fields and said, “And I own everything in that direction, too.” He pointed north toward a huge herd of cattle and bragged, “And preacher, I own everything as far as you can see in that direction.” He turned to the west, and said, “And I own everything you can see in that direction, except the sun, of course.”

Dr. Truett turned to the man and pointed straight up the sky and said, “And how much do you own in that direction?”

The benefits of your faithfulness may come to you in this life, or you may not receive them here. You will have great reward in heaven when you hear God say, “*Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into your Master's rest.*” But, you'll only hear those words and receive lasting rewards if you've been faithful to keep God first in your life.

**How much do you own in that direction?**