

Women's Bible Study – Fall 2008

Overcoming: A Life Well Lived

The Life of Joseph from the book of Genesis

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Overcoming the Weight of Responsibility– Genesis 46-47

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My husband has an unusual hobby. Well, actually he has several. One is amateur radio. He uses a variety of electronic equipment to communicate with other operators locally and worldwide. These communications are used for recreation and for public service in the event of emergencies and disasters.

We have six, yes six antennas on our property. It is no secret in our home that I do not find these aesthetically pleasing. Moreover, I do not enjoy answering questions about them like the time when the UPS man came to the door and asked, "What is that?" Or when the game warden met me as I pulled into the driveway and asked, "Do you own a large pair of tree trimmers so I can untangle a deer that has managed to get his antlers stuck in the guy wires of the antennas?" But I have learned over the years that marriage involves give and take and that I have to take responsibility for some things I would rather ignore.

However, I said he had several unusual hobbies. The hobby I actually wanted to discuss was that of running for political office. So far in our marriage of 22 years, Scott has run for office about once every ten years. The last time he ran, 2 years ago, was by far the most public.

For those of you who don't know, I am introvert and my husband is very much an extrovert. I like to stay at home, take care of the children, do laundry, read, and write. Scott likes to meet and greet people. He likes to debate ideas, participate in television and radio interviews, and have large gatherings at our home. We are very different and so what constitutes a weighty responsibility is very different for each of us.

There was one particularly vivid example that emerged in the midst of the campaign. It was a Tuesday night and I was preparing to teach on Wednesday. I had spent most of the day finishing the lecture. I hadn't styled my hair and was dressed very casually. I was planning on being at home all day, unseen, except for a brief moment when I went to pick up the children. It was about 5:30 and I was preparing dinner.

The doorbell rang. I answered it. There on the front porch steps was a video cameraman, completely outfitted with lights, camera, and a host of other official looking equipment. I was stunned. When I inquired about the nature of his visit, obvious to everyone, except me, he said he had come to do a video for the campaign and would be meeting Scott there for an interview in about 20 minutes. I reluctantly let him in. I then called one of the campaign staff and said in a forced imitation of civility, "Did anyone forget to tell me something about the schedule today?"

I retreated to our bedroom and just sat rocking and stewing. I remember thinking, Lord, I did not sign up for this. I did not sign up to be in campaign literature mailed to 20,000 homes. I did not sign up to have my neighbor call nightly to ask if I wanted to see the political attack ads that had come in the mail that day. I didn't sign up to have unannounced videographers in the living room. I wasn't even properly dressed or the house cleaned. It was Tuesday after all, and I was doing something for God. So I sat, rocked, and conversed with God, I think it would be fairer to say grumbled. The weight of responsibility . . . how do we overcome it?

Let's begin our answer by taking out the family album. We are going to look at 10 snapshots from the life of Joseph and his family as recorded in chapters 46 and 47. Then we will examine them through the lens of the weight of responsibility.

Snapshots

Snapshot #1: The Dilemma

Let's pick up the narrative back in Chapter 45, verse 25: ²⁵ So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. ²⁶ They told him, "Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt." Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them. ²⁷ But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. ²⁸ And Israel said, "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die." Chapter 46, ¹ So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

Now, listening to these verses you may wonder, What Dilemma? Well, think about some of the snapshots in your family album that encompass a broad generational significance that may not be immediately evident in the snapshot. Here is one from my family. (Photograph) This is a picture of two of our daughters carrying a Bible in my brother's wedding. The snapshot tells you certain things about my family. However, to me it represents a much larger generational picture. You see the Bible belonged to my mother, who died many

years before little Sarah who is carrying it was born. And that is my father sitting on the front row watching the procession.

In the same way, there is much generational history behind Jacob's decision to go to Egypt. Obviously, the desire of his heart is to go to Egypt to see his beloved son Joseph. An added benefit is that there will be food in Egypt.

However, there are also other considerations. This is not the first famine in the land. In fact, Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, faced a similar situation. His father, Isaac, also faced a famine. (Genesis 26:1) ¹ Now there was a famine in the land—besides the earlier famine of Abraham's time— . . . Both these ancestors headed toward Egypt, and there had been consequences and stumbles for them along the way. God had even told Isaac not to go there.

Moreover, Jacob is 130 years old. This is a long trip. This will be a different culture. Also, he was living in the land promised by God to him and his descendants. God had promised that they would become a great nation. Would that happen if he left to go to Egypt?

Worst of all, God seemed to be silent on this issue. Jacob wasn't really used to this silence. God had appeared to him seven times in his life; several of those conversations provided Jacob with specific direction on geographic moves.

Jacob has to make a decision. So taking into consideration the desires of his heart, the logical need to make provision for his family, the seeming presence of providential circumstances, and the lack of prohibition by God; he packs all his belongings and heads toward Egypt. However, he makes one final stop. He stops at one of the Border cities of Canaan, Beersheba. It was kind of the point of no return. He offers sacrifices, worships, and seeks the mind of God. It is a very useful pattern for making decisions.

Snapshot #2: The Promise

Genesis 46: , ² And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, "Jacob! Jacob!" "Here I am," he replied. ³ "I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. ⁴ I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes." Jacob had to step out in faith; but God met him and reassured him.

Snapshot #3: The Procession

Next in verses 5-25 we see, the Procession. These are the kinds of verses that we skip or skim because they seem boring to us, just a list of names. Consider;

however, if they were the names of your family, your children, your grandchildren, and your great grandchildren. Then, each name would have an honor, a history, and a cadence in just being spoken. These are the seeds of a mighty nation.

Snapshot #4: The Leader

²⁸ Now Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to get directions to Goshen. Judah is the fourth born son. Jacob's other three sons, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi had demonstrated by their behaviors as unfitness for leadership. Judah wasn't perfect either; but he was the one who had offered his life in exchange for the life of Benjamin. His father now allows him to lead the procession, Judah, the leader of the tribe of Judah, through whom the Messiah, Jesus Christ, will come.

Snapshot #5: The Reunion

Now, we come to what is probably the most poignant moment in the life of Jacob and Joseph. It was a moment I am sure they thought would never come. It had been a long time in coming, 22 years. ²⁹ Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time.

Can you imagine the picture? Two grown men, one a powerful young ruler, strong, commanding, authoritative, but who had suffered much in his young life. The other man frail and elderly who had experienced much heartache, suffering, and tragedy spread over a lifetime. And both of them embrace and weep for a long time. ³⁰ Israel said to Joseph, "Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive."

Snapshot #6: The Strategy

Following this emotional reunion, they need to turn to the business of finding a place to live. Joseph already had tremendous responsibilities. There have already been two years of famine and there are five left. Joseph must continue a tight management of the food supply to prevent widespread starvation.

Now, with the arrival of his family, his responsibilities increase. You wonder if it seemed a little like the Beverly Hillbillies arriving in California. Only this is a big family, and they don't just need a mansion, they need a parcel of land. Joseph has a strategy. ³³ When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, 'What is your occupation?' ³⁴ you should answer, 'Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.' Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians."

Snapshot #7: The Monarch

Joseph takes five of his brothers into to meet Pharaoh and the conversation goes just as planned. Chapter 47, ⁵ Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you, ⁶ and the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land. Let them live in Goshen. And if you know of any among them with special ability, put them in charge of my own livestock."

Commentator Henry Morris notes several benefits to the settlement of this embryonic nation in Goshen. He says, "Although Egypt was, if anything even more polytheistic in its religion than Canaan, there was not the danger of assimilation that perpetually confronted them in Canaan. The Egyptians felt themselves racially superior and were reluctant to mix and intermarry with foreigners . . . Also, these people were culturally and intellectually the most advanced nation of the world at the time, so there was much of future value the children of Israel could learn in Egypt."¹

Snapshot #8: The Blessing

I find this one of the most interesting snapshots in the whole album. After the specific details are worked out regarding the living arrangements for the family, Joseph presents his father to Pharaoh.

⁷ Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before Pharaoh. After Jacob blessed Pharaoh, ⁸ Pharaoh asked him, "How old are you?" ⁹ And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers." ¹⁰ Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence.

Sometimes when you bring an older family member to an event and do introductions you are never exactly sure what will happen. My grandmother is 99 years old and I have experienced this many times. There is just something very stately about Godly men and women who have such a lifetime of experience behind them and a short distance between them and heaven. They seem to have a freedom to speak the truth and an ability to cut right to the heart of an issue.

I think it was like that with Jacob. He was facing the most powerful man in the world. And he blesses him. Did you catch that? Jacob blesses Pharaoh, not once but twice. Now the greater person is the one who blesses the lesser; but you see that is exactly what happened. The leader of the Nation of Israel, the

¹ Morris, Henry. The Genesis Record. Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, Michigan 1976, 629.

father of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, the Patriarch from whom will come the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords is standing before Pharaoh. He is the greater and he had every right to convey a blessing.

Snapshot #9: The Famine

I want to acknowledge the very fine commentary by Dr. Henry Morris on Genesis for some of his insights provided in this section regarding the famine. When the brothers came to Egypt the second time Joseph told them that there would be five more years of famine in the land. We see during that time that the situation becomes very desperate. ¹³ There was no food, however, in the whole region because the famine was severe; both Egypt and Canaan wasted away because of the famine. Joseph begins by selling the grain; but the people eventually run out of money. Next, they give their livestock in exchange for food and are carried through the year; now both their money and animals become the property of Pharaoh or the central government. Actually, this was probably to their advantage since they would not have been able to keep their animals alive during the famine.

Then, the land was given in exchange for food. Finally, the people themselves become slaves in exchange for food to eat and seed to sow their lands. 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.

The situation is very desperate indeed; but note that it was the proposal of the people to trade their land and labor for food. It was not Joseph's. We might look at this whole exchange of goods and services and say it carried way too high a price tag of personal freedom; but there were not many options. In this scenario everything became the property of the government. This created a feudalistic economy; which really grates against my market driven capitalist frame of reference. However, about the only other option would have been a welfare state in which food was given away which would likely have destroyed personal and national morale, would have bankrupted the government, and probably would have eventually resulted in social anarchy. The food would likely have been quickly depleted and mass starvation would have taken place.

Let's see what happened next, 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 favor 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.

The people were provided with seed for their lands and food for their households. Even though Pharaoh now owned their lands, the people continued to work their own lands, using seed furnished by the government. They were allowed to keep 80% of what they produced, and 20% was to go to Pharaoh. Basically, this amounted to a permanent income tax of 20% of gross income. That would not be considered excessive by today’s standards. Also, note that there was little if any complaining about this arrangement, on the contrary, the citizens seem grateful to Joseph. It was a difficult time in history, a time of weighty responsibility for Joseph, and yet the nation was fortunate to have a Godly, humble, and compassionate leader.

There also seems to be this great contrast between the Egyptians and the Israelites. In the region of Goshen it seemed they were left alone and flourished. They acquired property and become fruitful and increased greatly in number. The seeds are growing and will continue to grow. After centuries, more than four of them, circumstances will change, and they will become the slaves and begin to cry out for a deliverer. And God will be there to hear their cries and to grant them a Deliverer and show them the Shadow of a Savior.

Snapshot #10: The Parting

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 favor 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.

Joseph has probably moved on to other responsibilities since the years of famine are over; but Jacob gives him one last responsibility and it is a big one. He is to carry his body out of Egypt and bury him in the land of Canaan. Lorie, will pick up the family album next week and show us the concluding snapshots.

Overcoming the Weight of Responsibility

Examples

At this point you may be asking so what does all this have to do with us? None of us are carrying the weighty responsibility of providing food for a starving nation; but weighty responsibilities don't just belong to public officials and patriarchs. Weighty responsibilities take many forms: an unplanned pregnancy, a difficult marriage, the loss of a job, a job transfer, a promotion, caring for an ill or dying family member, and responsibilities for grandchildren.

There can be weighty responsibilities with extended family members or in-laws. You may have children with special needs or difficult personalities. Just being a mother brings weighty responsibilities. You may have weighty responsibilities in the workplace, in the community, or in your church.

Characteristics

As varied as these responsibilities are there are some common characteristics of weighty responsibilities. First, they usually arise unexpectedly. Second, the response required from you is out of your comfort zone. Third, they present us with a dilemma or a choice. Fourth, we are required to make those choices with less information than we would like. Finally, weighty responsibilities are usually matched with a specific gift, set of skills, or life experiences that God has specially provided that allow you to bear the weight of that particular responsibility.

Strategies for Overcoming

Let's look at some strategies for Overcoming the Weight of Responsibility. This morning/evening we are only going to discuss two; but they are huge and will challenge you for a lifetime. The first strategy is preparation. We have to develop the mindset that we are going to be confronted with weighty responsibilities. This is not a theoretical possibility this is an eventuality.

Preparation: Learn to Recognize Weighty Responsibilities

We can prepare in several ways. One way is to learn to recognize weighty responsibilities when they arise. Remember the characteristics, remember how they appeared in Joseph's life, and remember how they appeared in Jacob's life. When we learn to recognize these responsibilities, they don't take us so much off guard. We can spend more time thoughtfully and prayerfully approaching them rather than spending our time in anxiety.

For the perfectionists in the crowd, a caution, you may not handle the first few confrontations with weighty responsibility well. You may find yourself completely overwhelmed or you may just turn away. Take heart, I have noticed that God often gives us smaller responsibilities from which to learn and gradually increases

the intensity of the weighty responsibilities that he places before us. However, we want to be quick learners so that we are productive and useful Godly Women who don't make the same mistakes over and over.

I would like to also draw your attention to the fact that our ability to accept weighty responsibilities has no age limit. Notice that Jacob had been prepared to die and talked of dying for decades; and yet God had significant responsibilities for him in the latter years of his life. So, be prepared, learn to recognize weighty responsibilities as they arise.

Preparation: Increasing Our Knowledge of God

We can also prepare for weighty responsibilities by increasing our knowledge of God. We can do that by spending time praying which is simply talking to God. When we spend time day by day talking to God we learn to recognize his voice, even though it is not an audible one like Jacob heard. We learn to ask for his assistance on daily matters. We learn to recognize his answers both in his word, his people, and in circumstances.

We can increase our knowledge of God by increasing our knowledge of his Word. All of our decisions regarding weighty responsibilities need to be filtered through the lens of scripture. In other words, if scripture prohibits an action no matter how passionate we feel about the action, or the seeming presence of providential circumstances; it is wrong. A good example is a woman who has met the man of her dreams. He is perfect in every way, except he is married. No matter what she "feels" to be God's will or how much she has prayed about the relationship, or the seemingly providential circumstances that surround it; this action is clearly wrong because it contradicts scripture. However, in order for the Word to be a useful tool in our lives, we have to pick it up and read it. In other words we have to know what the scriptures say in order to know if our potential decision is a contradiction.

Preparation: Know Yourself

We can also prepare ourselves to face weighty responsibilities by knowing ourselves. Learn your strengths and special gifts. Spend some time and effort building on your strengths. If your strength is hospitality then spend some time developing that gift. Read about it. Practice it. This will help you in the future as you face the weight of responsibility. I know sometimes it doesn't seem to be connected; but Joseph practiced the skills he had where he could and God used them to prepare him for weighty responsibility.

Equally important is a knowledge of our weaknesses. What are the areas in which you need to learn and grow? What are the areas in which you are most easily tempted? Spend time and effort addressing your weaknesses. These

efforts allow you to be a more useful in overcoming the weight of responsibility. In your preparations you must develop an honest assessment of both your strengths and weaknesses. All of these strategies fit under the broad heading of preparation. However, we will never feel completely prepared when facing weighty responsibilities and that actually helps us with the final strategy.

Don't Try to Do It Yourself

That strategy is don't try to manage the weight of responsibility by yourself. The quickest way to be overwhelmed by weighty responsibility is to think you can do it in your own strength. You cannot.

Only in the strength of Christ can you do anything. You see, God is not interested in making you or me look good; He is interested in bringing Glory to Himself. We must seek to turn to him for strength to carry us through times of weighty responsibility. I think that was why Joseph and Jacob were able to overcome their Weighty Responsibilities.

Well, I should conclude the story I began in the introduction. Remember when we last checked in on our sulking heroine, she was rocking in the chair in her bedroom and talking with God. And as I rocked and talked I began to calm a little. I began slowly to realize that even though I wasn't running for public office, I had made a commitment when I married Scott. I had responsibilities. At that moment they felt very weighty; I think mainly because I was trying to carry them myself. It was my role to be my husband's helpmate and with God's direction and counsel I was going to have to figure out how to manage a new normal.

So after a quick cell phone call to Scott, and a brief conversation when he got home, I began to pull myself together, at least emotionally. I still wasn't dressed for an interview; but no problem I wasn't the candidate, so I just skirted by the living room and left to pick up the children. I was still a little embarrassed; but it was o.k.

I got back from picking up the girls and headed straight for my bedroom, only to hear a campaign staffer holler after me, Mrs. Wright would you like to answer a few questions? This road wasn't going to be as smooth as I thought. I kept walking; but hollered back, a firm "No". The staffer turned to my husband and said, "Do you think she'll change her mind?" My husband, with a chuckle responded, "Not a chance." I burst out laughing. Responsibility can be weighty; but God will provide for his servants in unexpected ways if they trust him.

Discussion Questions for Overcoming the Weight of Responsibility

1. Can you relate to any of the unexpected responsibilities that Jacob or Joseph faced? How about the weight of responsibility in general? If so, name one or two examples of responsibility that is weighing heavily in your life right now?
2. From the lecture choose “one snapshot from the family album” and discuss some principles that might apply to your own life.
3. When facing the weight of responsibility what are some principles that a Christian can use to make decisions regarding these responsibilities?

Study Questions for Overcoming the Weight of Responsibility

1. Read our text for study, Genesis chapters 46 and 47.
2. List some of the major events (bullet points) that happened in those passages.
3. Although our study has focused on Joseph’s life, we will be spending some time in this lesson looking at the life of his father Jacob. What are some of the changes or unexpected responsibilities that Jacob encountered in his life in these two chapters?
4. What are some examples of the weight of responsibilities that Joseph faced in these two chapters?
5. Can you relate to any of the unexpected responsibilities that Jacob or Joseph faced? How about the weight of responsibility in general? If so, name one or two examples of responsibility that is weighing heavily in your life right now.
6. Locate some verses in your Bible that deal with the topic of God’s Will.
7. How can you apply those verses when you are faced with the weight of responsibility? How might these verses apply when you are in the processing of deciding whether to accept responsibilities that are weighty? How might these verses apply when you are making decisions that involve carrying out responsibilities that are weighty?
8. Look up 2-3 verses that you find encouraging when responsibility weighs heavily upon you.
9. From the lecture choose “one snapshot from the family album” and discuss some principles that might apply to your own life.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS REGARDING WOMEN’S BIBLE STUDY of AUTUMN RIDGE CHURCH - please contact us at wbs@autumnridgechurch.org