

The Character of Joseph

“Behold, we count them happy which endure.”
James 5:11

“For by it the elders obtained a good report.”
Hebrews 11:2

Introduction:

1. Bible “heroes” are examples to teach us godliness (Rom 15:4; I Cor 10:6,11; Psalm 37:37; Phil 3:17).
 2. Joseph is in the Hall of Faith as an illustrious elder of the Old Testament church (Heb 11:2,22,38).
 3. As a witness in the bleachers of our race, he should provoke us to godliness and zeal (Hebrews 12:1).
 4. Here is one of the great persons in the history of the world after whom we all should aspire and pray.
 5. The Bible exalts David highly as God’s favorite, but Joseph may be his superior in several measures.
 6. There are princes in Zion, average Christians, and fools. Joseph was a prince. Do you seek the same?
 7. It would be good for us to say in the future, “Would Joseph do that?” or, “What would Joseph do?”
 8. You will have 100’s of opportunities daily to be like Joseph, so let us learn what Joseph did in life.
 9. We do not preach the types of Jesus Christ in Joseph’s life, for (a) the Bible gives us no example of such milquetoast preaching and (b) we can go straight to the New Testament reality to preach Christ.
 10. Joseph was born to Jacob and Rachel just before Jacob left his father-in-law’s employ of 20 years.
 11. He advanced from a lowly shepherd boy to second most powerful ruler in Egypt, though a foreigner.
 12. He lived to be 110 years old, and he ordered his bones to be carried in a coffin from Egypt to Canaan.
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1. At 17, he *reported the evil conduct* of his brothers to his father (Gen 37:2). He cared more to do right than to be accepted, even at this vulnerable age. This showed righteousness, courage, honor of authority, and disregard for peer pressure. This was not tattling, for he was honoring the authority of his father, who had a right to know sinful deeds in the family. Most youth will protect wicked friends and siblings from authority, even when questioned.
 2. At 17, he *was loved more by his father than the other children*, but he did not use this privilege for sin, resent his father for the trouble it caused, become lazy or resentful of assignments, or despise him for the weakness (Gen 37:3). This showed submission to authority, contentment with circumstances, and ruling his spirit. Many favored children would use such affection for their own ends or despise a parent in their hearts.
 3. At 17, he wore the *coat of many colors* to please his father, though it made him very different, made him a daddy’s boy, and caused jealousy (Gen 37:3,23). This showed courage, honor to his father, and disregard for peers. Most youth want to follow the fads of the world, dress like the losers around them, be sloppy, and resent being told what to wear by parents. Remember that Jacob was 108 at this time, but there was no generation gap!
 4. At 17, *his brothers hated him*, because Jacob loved him most (Gen 37:4). They could not be kind to him. He did not compromise to be accepted, showing contentment, conviction, courage, and resolve. He was happy to be loved by God and his father, and he did not care what his wicked brothers thought. He did not let the thoughts, words, or actions of others – even his closest peers – influence his thoughts, words, or actions. Joseph had character!

5. At 17, *God gave Joseph dreams* about the future; and he told his dreams, though seeming arrogant and impossible (Gen 37:5-11). He showed boldness for the truth, reverence for God, and no fear of man. Most youth are ashamed of their religion, and they quake to speak of Jesus Christ or the Bible to others – they may even be embarrassed to pray before eating in public. Like Elihu, Joseph was not ashamed of the truth before parents or older siblings.
6. At 17, *Jacob sent Joseph to his brothers* far away; he cheerfully went about 60 miles to them, though he knew they hated him (Gen 37:12-14). He showed cheerful obedience, submission, and courage. Most favored youth would beg to be excused from a lengthy, lonely, and difficult trip; they would whine in fear that their brothers hated them. But Joseph quickly and readily agreed to be his father’s servant, though it was questionable.
7. At 17, he *fulfilled his mission*, though it involved the further effort of traveling to Dothan (Gen 37:15-17). When he did not find them at Shechem after searching for them, where they were presumed to be, he traveled to Dothan on the advice of a certain man. Many might have given up or used the difficult as an excuse to quit, but not Joseph. He finished the assignment. This conduct shows diligence, faithfulness, and responsibility.
8. At 20?, *Joseph served Potiphar very faithfully*, rather than pining and whining, rather than grudging and stealing, rather than sleeping and dragging (Gen 39:1-6). He showed great diligence, faithfulness, honesty, and integrity along with faith in God. The Lord blessed his industry, and he was promoted from slave to boss! He had the key to the office, store, and vault; but he never considered taking a thing, though he might have resented slavery. There is no such thing as discrimination, when you are as faithful as Joseph, and the Lord blesses your effort. Joseph advanced in spite of race, age, language, training, resume, origin, etc. Solomon taught this great wisdom later, including that diligence in assignments will bring you before kings rather than mean men (Pr 12:24; 14:35; 17:2; 22:11,29; 27:18).
9. At 20?, *Joseph was extremely handsome and successful*, well favored by the Lord in physical features (Gen 39:6b). But he showed humility and service anyway, though it is easier to do so when ugly. Remember, his mother was the beautiful and well-favored Rachel. His beauty did not cause ambition, arrogance, or haughtiness. He was not above any assignment or task. Superior ability or other advantages do not corrupt good men.
10. At 25?, *Mrs. Potiphar tried to seduce him*, but he would not consider it in spite of his need, the willing partner, and a situation far from home and any accountability (Gen 39:7-12). His consciousness of the trust Potiphar had put in him and his fear of God were greater than all these circumstances, and he risked everything to avoid this heinous sin. He was no libertarian philosophizing about “victimless crimes” and “consenting adults” – Potiphar and God would be victims, and neither of them consented to the proposed wickedness. The words and concept of casual sex are unacceptable to God; He will judge it (Heb 13:4). He showed great faithfulness, fear of God, righteousness, self-denial, and hatred of sin.
11. At 25?, *he would not even be with her*, because Joseph would not compromise with sin or make a provision for his flesh (Gen 39:10). This shows great holiness and temperance.

12. At 25?, *Joseph was falsely convicted of attempted rape*, in spite of a perfect record and lack of evidence. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned – where was her love now? Beware of the strange woman! But he continued to trust God in prison, where he excelled again (Gen 39:19-23). He showed great faith, faithfulness, longsuffering, patience, and temperance.
13. At 25?, *Joseph had had several serious setbacks*, and God's favor and promises seemed far off; but he did not despair or become destroyed, as he trusted God and His promises as much as ever. His faith was very great, as he ignored the terrible circumstances of his life.
14. At 28, *Joseph inquired about the sad faces* of Pharaoh's two officers, after they each had a dream in one night (Gen 40:5-7). Instead of showing typical prison hardness or any personal arrogance, bitterness, hatred, revenge, or distance, Joseph instead showed his humility, compassion, and neighborly love.
15. At 28, *Joseph had no fear to glorify God or his relationship with Him*, for he explained to the butler and baker that only God could interpret dreams and he was His messenger (Gen 40:8). This showed his great reverence of God and confidence in his relationship with Him.
16. At 28, *Joseph told the true interpretation of their dreams* to the two of them together, though the truth would have hurt (Gen 40:8-19), showing fear of God and love of the truth.
17. At 28, *Joseph used means*, for he asked the butler to remember his kindness and get him out of prison (Gen 40:14-15). This showed prudence and wisdom under God's providence.
18. At 30, *Pharaoh asked Joseph to interpret his dream*; but he denied that he had any ability to do so himself (Gen 41:14-16). He could have been pompous and puffed up; he could have played up his ability in hope of escaping prison and advancing himself; but he rejected such natural reactions and showed great humility and reverence to God.
19. At 30, *Joseph gave Pharaoh a message of peace* (Gen 41:14-16). He could have altered God's kind message to his captors and enemies; he could have resisted telling the truth like Balaam; he could have withheld the prudent solution; but he showed faithfulness to God, respect for authority, and kindness to his captors and enemies.
20. At 30, *Joseph was unashamed to acknowledge Jehovah*, though he was speaking to the most powerful monarch on earth who worshipped other gods (Gen 41:25-28). He was not ashamed of his God, his God's sovereignty, or his religion. Are you as bold in speaking on behalf of your Maker and Saviour? He was fearless and zealous religiously.
21. At 30, *Joseph sought the welfare of his captor nation*, and he used his wisdom to suggest a prudent response to the coming famine (Gen 41:33-36). This showed kindness and love.
22. At 30, *Joseph was clearly directed by God and visibly noble in character*, for Pharaoh chose him to rule the land for his divine knowledge and public manners (Gen 41:37-41), proving godliness, graciousness, discretion, and wisdom.

23. At 30, *Joseph married Asenath*, daughter of Potipherah, priest of On (Gen 41:45-46). He did not self-righteously or Pharasaically oppose marriage to an unbeliever, since he knew mercy is greater than sacrifice in extraordinary cases (II Kgs 5:17-19; Matt 12:1-7; 23:23; Mark 2:23-28). This exceptional example does not justify believers marrying unbelievers (Gen 6:1-7; I Cor 7:39; 11:11). He showed much discretion and wisdom.
24. At 35, *Joseph had two sons by his Egyptian wife*, whom he trained in the fear of the Lord, and they became heads of two tribes of Israel (Gen 41:50-52). He either converted his wife and/or his children, for these two tribes never had any problem leaving Egypt! Joseph was a noble father by bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.
25. At 37, *Joseph prudently saved for the future*, remembering the word of the Lord, and taking extensive precautions in light of it, though a famine seemed impossible in the face of such recurring abundance (Gen 41:47-49), showing he was prudent and foresightful.
26. At 38, *Joseph took charge in a great calamity*, and secured the prosperity of Egypt by selling corn to Egyptians and foreigners alike (Gen 41:54-57). He was a strong leader.
27. At 38, *Joseph humbled his brethren gently*, but he took care of them and their families with free food (Gen 42:6-11). The real practice and test of love is forbearing and forgiving others – here is the greatest example of brotherly love (Matt 18:21-35; I Cor 13:4-7; I Pet 4:8). Note the severe offences to compare, and you have brothers in Christ as he did in the flesh. Joseph was a Psalm 112 prince. He showed compassion, forgiveness, and loyalty.
28. At 38, *Joseph used guile to see his brother Benjamin*, for he used their fear and appearance of spies to motivate them (Gen 42:15-20). He knew how to be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove. He showed his godly craftiness and brotherly love.
29. At 38, *Joseph restored his brothers their money*, after crying at their internal arguing about their guilt (Gen 42:21-25). He will recall this tendency later, when he warns them to not fall out by the way. He could have gloated; he could have been stingy. He showed his forgiveness, generosity, and tenderness.
30. At 38, *Joseph honored Reuben for his kindness*, for he imprisoned the cruel Simeon (Gen 34:25-26; 49:5-7), the second son rather than the first (Gen 42:24), because of Reuben's effort to save him (Gen 37:21-22; 42:22). This showed kindness, loyalty, and fairness.
31. At 39, *Joseph entertained his brothers very kindly*, showing great love for his father, Benjamin, and his brothers (Gen 43:26-34). This is what the Bible presumes when it refers to brotherly love (Heb 13:2). He had great family affection and generosity.
32. At 39, *Joseph showed himself a lover of drama*, as he practiced even greater intrigue with his brothers at dinner and with his silver cup afterwards (Gen 43:33 – 44:2), showing deep bowels of feelings and the desire for public affection and honor.

33. At 39, *Joseph forgave his brothers freely and fully*, putting his total trust in the sovereignty of God about being sold into Egypt (Gen 45:1-12), showing great mercy toward others and great trust in the secret will of God.
34. At 39, *Joseph was affectionate and emotional*, openly showing great feelings for Benjamin with tears and embraces and with kisses for all his brothers (Gen 45:13-15), thus showing the bowels of compassion and tender feelings of great men (II Sam 1:17-27; II Tim 1:4).
35. At 39, *Joseph was highly esteemed by Pharaoh*, for no grudge or jealousy had risen even after 9 years in his employment, for Pharaoh honored Jacob and his family (Gen 45:16-21), thus proving again Joseph's great diligence, faithfulness, humility, integrity, and zeal.
36. At 39, *Joseph warned his brothers to bury the past*, by telling them to not fall out by the way by arguing about personal guilt (Gen 45:24), showing great forgiveness and wisdom.
37. At 39, *Joseph embraced his father tenderly*, by taking a chariot to him and weeping on his neck a good while (Gen 46:28-30), showing tender affection and regard for his father.
38. At 39, *Joseph carefully orchestrated family protection*, for he covered their despised profession and secured for them the best land of Egypt (Gen 46:31-34), showing discretion.
39. At 39, *Joseph was unashamed of his Hebrew shepherd family*, for he presented them to Pharaoh to confirm Goshen's prime land (Gen 47:1-10), proving his loyalty and reputation.
40. At 40, *Joseph's reputation secured the best positions for his family*, for Pharaoh sought to bless his family by virtue of his great reputation (Gen 47:11-12), proving his great integrity.
41. At 42, *Joseph bought the people and lands of Egypt for Pharaoh*, for they had no more money or cattle to barter for food (Gen 47:13-26), thus showing his prudence and zeal.
42. At 56, *Joseph swore to honor his father*, who solicited a vow to take his body and bury it in Canaan with his fathers (Gen 47:27-31). Jacob chose Joseph, the son he could trust, to promise to bury his body in the family cemetery. He showed integrity and loyalty.
43. At 56, *Joseph sought his father's blessing on his two sons*, for Jacob blessed Joseph with the family's birthright and with two tribes of Israel (Gen 48:1-22), thus Joseph showed his proper child training and reverence for his father and God.
44. At 56, *Jacob blessed Joseph abundantly*, for Jacob by God's inspiration poured out on him and his descendants a glorious blessing (Gen 49:22-26). Joseph was given the birthright by having two tribes in Israel – Manasseh and Ephraim. He proved his name was very great.
45. At 56, *Joseph mourned greatly at his father's death and funeral* (Gen 50:1-3,7-11). He led a serious funeral procession and extended mourning in honor of his father, showing his bowels of compassion, deep feelings, filial affection, and parental honor.

46. At 56, *Joseph kept the vow to his father*, for he buried him in Canaan (Gen 50:4-6,12-14). His roundabout request indicates great wisdom in gathering Pharaoh and his court on his side, which he strengthened by mentioning the oath and the existing family cemetery and promising to return. He showed his faithfulness and integrity.
47. At 56, *Joseph forgave his brothers again*, even though his father was dead, and he could have done with them as he wished (Gen 50:15-21). Even though they lied to him about the matter, he overlooked it all to be comforting, kind, gracious, and liberal. Let their fear and guilt after 30 years warn every sinner. He showed his great integrity and mercy.
48. At 110, *Joseph required an oath of the Israelites*, for he had faith and hope in God's promises to bring them again to Canaan (Gen 15:13-14; 50:22-26), so he wanted his bones carried out of Egypt, thus showing his great faith in God and His words.
49. About 1700 years later, Paul *inscribed Joseph in the Hall of Faith by the Holy Spirit* for his faith in God's promises to bring Israel out of Egypt to require an oath of the Israelites to bury him in Canaan, which they did (Heb 11:22; Ex 13:19; Josh 24:32).

Conclusion:

1. We have learned some character traits from the life of this man ... **righteousness, honor of authority, disregard for peer pressure, obedience to parents, honor of parents, conviction, courage, reverence to God, submission to truth, cheerfulness, diligence, faithfulness, honesty, humility, service, fear of God, self-denial, hatred of sin, faith, longsuffering, patience, temperance, compassion, love of others, love of the truth, respect for authority, kindness to his enemies, zealous religiously, discretion, graciousness, wisdom, excellent training of children, prudent, foresightful, leadership, craftiness, forgiveness, loyalty, tenderness, family affection, generosity, mercy, trust in the will of God, bowels of compassion, tender feelings, integrity, zeal in his work, tender affection, discretion, a great name and reputation, and great faith in God's words, among other virtuous traits.**
2. What young men or women (and older ones) will follow Joseph's example? The sky is the limit for all such; but if you cheat or compromise in following his example, God owes you nothing but trouble.
3. Let us pray that God in His grace and mercy might form Joseph's character in each and all of us.
4. Remember, we count them happy which endure (James 5:11). What are you not enduring at this time?
5. Are you the youngest child in a family, or near the youngest? You can be the greatest as Joseph was.
6. To fully benefit from this study, you need to read Genesis 37-50 slowly and meditate on Joseph's life.