

- What are some things you do when no one is looking?
 - Pick your nose, Air guitar, Sing?
 - Strain just a bit to see the available balance of the person in front of you at the ATM?
 - Eat a French fry off the floor in that restaurant (even after the 5 second rule).
 - Take something from work and slip it into your purse?
 - Curse out someone else when you are by yourself?
 - Cheat on an exam? On someone else?
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- John Wooden was a very famous basketball player and coach. He died about 6 years ago at the age of 99.
 - He was nicknamed the "Wizard of Westwood," he won ten NCAA college national championships in a 12-year period as head coach at UCLA, including a record seven in a row. No other team has won more than two in a row.
 - At one point his teams won an NCAA men's basketball record 88 consecutive games. Wooden was named national coach of the year six times. He was the first person ever was inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame as a player and as a coach.
 - He was one of the most revered coaches in the history of sports, and coached famous players like Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Bill Walton. Wooden was renowned for his short, simple inspirational messages to his players. He said things like:
 - *"Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are."*
 - One of things he said is a truth that goes back thousands of years, and the focus of what we are talking about today. *"The true test of a man's character is what he does when no one is watching."*
 - We are in the second week of our series looking at the life of Joseph, called, "Preparing for Opportunity."
 - We saw last week that there are opportunities that will come your way. With people. Opportunities in your job. In your church. Opportunities to grow. Opportunities to accomplish God's plan and expand his kingdom.
 - We want to be prepared for those opportunities as they arise. We saw that God is working in us and our situation, even when it doesn't look like it.
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- What you do when no one is watching matters more than you think.
 - **WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING, GOD IS PREPARING.**
 - It is not simply what we do when we are in full view of others that decides if we will be and do what God designed. In fact, the greatest training, the kind that changes us, tempers us and grows us, happens when we have the option to do the opposite, do less, slack off, and no one would be the wiser.
 - **WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING, GOD IS PREPARING.**
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- We don't have time to go over the story from last week, but we ended the section of the life of Joseph with this statement.
Genesis 37:36 Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.
 - Joseph, the favored son of Jacob, became a slave.
 - After a brief interlude, the writer of the narrative picks up the story again starting in Genesis 39.

Genesis 39:1 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

- **WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING, GOD IS PREPARING.**
- Joseph's life was in a very bad place. A place where he was alone and no one was paying attention.
- He was living in a country that was not his own. This meant new customs, new language, new religions around him, and living among people that were not like him. It was not like going to a new company or new neighborhood. There were new relationships and expectations.
- He had to be told & shown what to do. He had to do it. He had to learn language. Maybe he knew some of it, maybe not.
- He was not there because he wanted to be. He was "taken." The situation he found himself in was not voluntary.
- Might I suggest that there are three questions we can ask that will help us cooperate with God's preparation when no one is watching.

I. Am I living with a victim mentality?

- If anyone had the right to wallow in misery because of what happened to him, it was Joseph. If there was a victim, a person who did not deserve what happened to him, it was him.
- The victim mentality says it is always someone else's fault.
- You can tell if you are thinking this way if you find yourself always blaming others or life for your problems. It's your bosses fault. The people I work or serve with.
- It's the government's fault. The church's fault. Our spouse. Our kids.
- You might be thinking this way if you find yourself constantly dwelling on the idea that it isn't fair. If you believe that others are out to get you. If you believe deep down that perhaps God is being particularly hard on you.
- Sometimes the situation we are in is our own fault.
- In 1995, Susan Smith, a South Carolina mother, pushed her two sons into a lake to drown and then blamed a fictional car-jacker for the deed She wrote in her confession: "I dropped to the lowest point when I allowed my children to go down that ramp into the water without me. I took off running and screaming, 'Oh God! Oh God, no! What have I done? Why did you let this happen?'"
- Other times, the situation we are in we simply have no control over.
- Regardless of how you got where you are, God wants to prepare you for what's next.
- When we act as the victim we block God from preparing us for what's next. We lose an incredible opportunity to grow in character or skills or both.
- Instead of leaning into God, we just try to feel better. Throw ourselves into our work. We ignore what is the problem and focus on what we're good at.
- We focus on activities, hobbies or addictions.
- We simply might spend our time justifying ourselves to avoid painful self-reflection.
- Even though Joseph could have done any or all of these things, he did not.
- We don't control our circumstances, but we control our responses to them.
- What do you think about? What are your thought patterns like? What do you think about certain people? What do you feel about your situation? Your spouse? Your job? Your friends? Your teachers and classmates?
- **WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING, GOD IS PREPARING.**

- God had Joseph right where he wanted him. I am sure it did not feel like it to Joseph. He must have felt wronged. What allowed Joseph to respond well in his circumstances and not fall into a victim mentality? That's our second question.

II. Am I cultivating God's presence in my life?

2 The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, 4 Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. 5 From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. 6 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.

- His situation improved. His life hit bottom and started to rebound.
- The key phrase for the entire chapter is introduced by the writer here.
- v2,3,5
- My friends, who is walking beside you changes everything.
- God's presence was with him and Joseph cultivated this relationship.
- He did not only enjoy God's presence when things were good, but it started much before this. God was with him when things were bleak. He leaned into this.
- The Lord being with Joseph is not a one-sided thing. This is not a picture of Joseph doing what he wanted and God just making stuff happen.
- Rather, this is a picture of a man who made a decision. A decision that he would willfully, purposefully, consciously, and intentionally live in a manner that pleased God.
- Somewhere along his journey, Joseph concluded that life with God may be hard, but life without God was impossible. I am sure he spoke to God, listened to God, lived like he had been taught as a youth – we don't know the details.
- We DO know that his relationship with God was critical to him. Things began to turn around for Joseph. He prospered in his role. Years passed and he worked hard at his responsibilities. He grew in his skills. He knew God better.
- So much so that Potiphar noticed. He did not simply notice that Joseph was good at everything he did. We are told he saw that God was with him and giving him success.
- He grew in responsibility. He was given more and more responsibility. He went from slave with nothing – slave with a little – Potiphar's attendant – in charge of everything. (There is a side principle here – when we are faithful in little things, it leads to faithful in bigger things. If you want to be prepared for opportunity and used by God, then fully commit to what is in front of you now – we will look at this in detail next week.)
- The lesson here is not that if we pursue God he will give success. The lesson is to cultivate our relationship with God constantly, especially when no one is watching.
- We are told multiple times that it was the Lord who gave Joseph success. Sure he worked hard. He developed his skills. He worked on his relationship with the Lord. God was preparing him for the future in all these things. These skills would become critical when the opportunity arose years later. But it was God's presence that made all the difference.
- If you take credit for your successes, then when you are not successful it will crush you.
- But **WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING**, it is exactly there that **GOD IS PREPARING**.
- Joseph was cultivating God's presence and this led directly to our third question.

III. Am I setting and maintaining boundaries?

- Boundaries are simply guiderails to help us make decisions. They are decisions we make ahead of time on how we are going to respond to life.
- If you have them, they will help you prepare for what is next, for opportunities. If you do not have any, you will drive your life off the road and into a mess.
- Why? Because stuff is going to happen and we need to be ready.

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.

- We probably don't understand the full extent of the difficulty facing Joseph.
- This was an unexpected opportunity. An opportunity for some short term pleasure. (He didn't have to take her to dinner, woo her or even worry about a long term relationship.)
- There was no one watching. Yet he decided he would not cave in to her demands. How?
- There was no one to hold him accountable. He did not have Scripture (not written yet).
- He did not have a church, accountability or prayer partners. He did not have family or parents to tell him not to.
- Yet he turned her down. How did he do this? Was it simply an attempt to protect his position?
- What allows a 30 yr old to say no to a relationship. They are lonely and desperately want it and wants to just take the next one that looks OK.
- How does a teenager who is being pressured by their boyfriend or girlfriend to become intimate walk away from this when everyone else says it is OK, even if it costs them their relationship?
- How does a person continue to serve others well when no one notices or appreciates the sacrifices they make?
- Why do some people work hard and not cut corners even though they could do so and no one would ever notice?
- Joseph's answer to Potiphar's wife tells us.

"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?"

- Joseph had set boundaries in his life.

A. He had decided ahead of time how to act.

- This was not a spur of the moment thing. He knew how he would act.
- If you wait until a moment of temptation, decision or opportunity is upon you before you ever consider it, the likelihood of messing it up or missing it goes way up.
- Example: Girl who wants a good guy. My boundaries on Christ-follower. They had no such boundaries and it killed them later.
- Boundaries can be what I WON'T do, or what I WILL do. (Standing "Yes")

B. He set his boundaries based on what pleased God.

- He saw his actions primarily as they related to God. It would have been a sin against Potiphar. Against his wife. But Joseph's reasoning was that it would be a sin against God.
- He decided (this is why cultivating God's presence is so important) that what mattered to God mattered to him.
- The decision that what matters to God matters to me happens when no one is watching.
- Joseph made that decision. He did not try to get close to the line. He was not trying to parse how much he could get away with before it was a "sin."

- He knew that **WHEN NO ONE WAS WATCHING, GOD WAS PREPARING**, and so he set boundaries.
- Why is this important. Because when you set boundaries, they will be repeatedly tested.
10 And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.
- It says that she spoke to Joseph day after day. This was not a one-time temptation. She was after him. She pushed and pushed.
- He avoided her. It says that he would not even be with her.
- He decided what would please God and stayed consistent to it day after day. When you decide on how to live, set boundaries, they will be challenged. You will be tempted. Especially when things are not going well or compromising on your boundaries seems like the easier option.

C. He found that having boundaries did not guarantee immediate success.

- Remember the saying “there is nothing more dangerous than a woman scorned.”
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.”
- He was lied about and framed for something he never did wrong.
- When she finally manipulated the situation to get him alone and pushed the issue, he “ran.”
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.
- All of Joseph’s faithfulness, his investment in his relationship with God, all his hard work, his integrity, his boundaries have landed him in a worse place than any he has been in so far.
- Now he is not only a slave, he is an imprisoned slave.
- There is something about the results that has us screaming, “That’s not fair. He shouldn’t be treated that way. He did everything right.” And we are correct.
- God is not all that interested in fairness. He is interested in preparing us for what lies ahead. He wants to shape our character and our thoughts.

- **WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING, GOD IS PREPARING.**

- The writer at the end of this part of the account brings us back to the main idea.
But while Joseph was there in the prison, 21 the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. 22 So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. 23 The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.
- God’s presence is the only consistent factor in Joseph’s life.
- No matter what happened, God was there. God was working. And Joseph trusted him.
- **WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING, GOD IS PREPARING.**
- This preparation is what will get us ready for what’s next. Often, this can only happen in difficult times when no one is looking.
- An army going through basic training is not ready for battle. Not until soldiers have faced the battle, and been under fire do they consider themselves proven, hardened, worthy.

- A ship cannot prove that it has been sturdily built as long as it stays in dry dock. Its hull must get wet; it must face a storm to demonstrate genuine seaworthiness.
- *“The reason why many fail in battle is because they wait until the hour of battle. The reason why others succeed is because they have gained their victory on their knees long before the battle came...Anticipate your battles; fight them on your knees before temptation comes, and you will always have victory.”* (R.A. Torrey)
- Don't fall into the victim trap.
- Cultivate God's presence in your life.
- Set and maintain boundaries.
- **WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING, GOD IS PREPARING.**
- How is God looking to prepare you today?