

Church in the Wild Devotional
Sunday, May 27, 2018

Last Sunday alliteration helped us grasp how God worked for good in Joseph's saga. After God used suffering to **prepare** him and incarceration to **position** him, Pharaoh's bizarre dream **propelled** Joseph to great **prominence** (thanks Jerry for suggesting the final "P")!

God propelled Joseph into a uniquely prominent life; he was "in charge of the whole land of Egypt." Few of us will be "great" in the world's eyes. But by Jesus' definition, we are destined for greatness if we gain the humility to serve human need as disciples who serve our Lord (Matt 23:11). While our circle of influence will be smaller than Joseph's, the Lord speaks to the quality of our influence in the next section of his saga: **Read Genesis 41:46-49, 53-57.**

Joseph previously recommended that Pharaoh set aside 20% of the harvest for seven years (41:34). We Americans can certainly understand why this national discipline was remarkable. After a few years of budget surpluses in the late 1990s, our nation's deficits have exploded the last twenty years due to the tax and spending policies of Republicans and Democrats alike (And to quote Forrest Gump: "That's all I've got to say about that")!

My point is that just because Pharaoh appointed Joseph to implement Egypt's preparation for famine doesn't mean that it automatically happened. Joseph's sustained influence made the difference. Likely he repeatedly reminded Egypt's elites of the brutal fact of approaching famine, to prevent them from selling 100% of their crops and living in greater luxury.

Joseph's stewardship of power reminds us that God wants His people to work for the benefit of everyone, including those who don't share our beliefs. When in Babylon, the Jews were told to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jer 29:7). Applying this principle means that Christ-followers should be respectful to everyone, regardless of ethnicity, lifestyle, or ideology. We start by building relationships; our greatest influence is sharing our faith.

Our nation is in a difficult season. Any positive influence that we give could be consequential. As God's people, we should be advocates for *shalom* (peace and well-being for all). Practicing Christians aren't a majority, but with our voice and our vote, we can bless our "Egypt." Joseph didn't use his power to compel the Egyptians to worship his God; instead Joseph worked for the common good and let his example speak for itself. As Joseph was for Egypt, Christ-followers should be calm and respectful truth-speakers regarding national crises. We should advocate thoughtful problem-solving, seeking solutions that benefit everyone.

Seeking for the common good doesn't always line up with one ideology or a single political party. Brevard County citizens realized that no one benefits from the degradation of the Indian River Lagoon, so people of varied political persuasions came together to pursue practical solutions (Dredging muck and preventing nitrogen-rich runoff). On a national level, the repeated horror of mass shootings cries out for common-sense solutions that would reduce deaths from gun violence (especially by keeping mentally ill people from having access to firearms).

Christians are not monolithic. We are divided in opinion and may feel alienated from believers with conflicting views. Nonetheless, Christians could unite to "bless Egypt" by:

1. Modeling calm and respect whenever we discuss controversial issues;
2. Support candidates who are respectful to all and seek solutions that benefit everyone;
3. Challenge politicians on "my side" not to be divisive or distract from problem-solving (Hint: Politicians are more likely to listen to their supporters than to their critics).

Questions to Discuss or Ponder:

- What contemporary controversies cry out for Christians be a greater influence for good?
- How could you influence politicians not to be divisive or distract from problem-solving?