

## To Be or Not to Be

1. Warm up: God is the master artist who has created all kinds of beauty and built into us a deep appreciation for beauty. What's something in nature, the arts, music, or elsewhere that you find stunningly beautiful?
2. We began Sunday's sermon with the question: What does a beautiful life look like? It's a key question because each of us really wants to live a beautiful life. Jeff suggested the answer is found in a single word – integrity. In the Bible, Joseph gives us an excellent example of integrity in action. Read Genesis 39:1-20 as printed on p. 3.
  - a. The Joseph we encounter in Genesis 39 is quite different from the younger version of himself we saw last week in chapter 37. The young Joseph was a spoiled, self-centered brat who lorded his most-favored-son status over his other brothers, ratted them out when they did wrong, and dreamed of the day when he would be king and his brothers would bow down to him. But the hardship Joseph encountered after being sold as a slave seems to have changed him. When you compare your younger self to your present self, what's something significant that's changed in you?
  - b. Integrity means doing the right thing even when it's difficult or costly. In today's scripture passage, Joseph faced a serious test of his integrity. If we assume that Potiphar's wife was attractive to him, he probably found himself wrestling with powerful sexual urges coupled with a tendency to rationalize (maybe Potiphar wasn't being good to her, besides he would never know, etc.). Innumerable people have risked and lost everything to gratify sexual desire. Why do you think that is? Why is sexual temptation such a powerful test of our integrity?
  - c. Fear was probably also a factor in Joseph's predicament. He surely realized that if he refused the advances of Potiphar's wife, she could make big trouble for him. Get on her good side, and she could make his life easy. Get on her bad side, and she could make his life a living hell. Imagine yourself in his situation. What feelings and thoughts do you think he wrestled with as he weighed his options?
  - d. Joseph chose to do the right thing. He refused the advances of Potiphar's wife, but paid a heavy price. He ended up in prison. Do you admire what Joseph did? Why or why not?
3. Doing the right thing is often difficult or costly. So why should we? Jeff suggested three important reasons. **First, integrity liberates me from the pain of guilt.**
  - a. Each one of us has had times when we've compromised our integrity and found ourselves experiencing a lot of guilt. There's nothing worse than living with guilt. Jeff told about a time when he worked for a company that used deception to sell vacuum sweepers and how terrible that made him feel. Tell us about a time when you failed to do the right thing. How did that affect you?

- b. Thankfully, there have also been times when we've managed to do the right thing even when it was very difficult or costly. Tell us about a time like that for you. How did it feel? In retrospect, was it worth the cost?
- 4. **Second, integrity is what allows me to feel God close to me** – and feeling close to God is the best feeling in the world. Psalm 63:5 says, “[In your presence my] soul is satisfied as with a rich feast.” When God is close to us, we feel full.
  - a. Jeff reminded us of the lyrics to Linda Ronstadt's song, “Don't Know Much.” he said the lyrics make him think of God. Read the lyrics on p. 3. Does the lyrics resonate with you and your relationship with God? If so, how so? What words or phrases call to you?
  - b. How would you describe to someone what it feels like when you're close to God?
  - c. There's an old saying, “Love me, love what I love.” It's hard to draw close to someone if you don't value what they value. Jeff said, “God loves what is right and hates what is wrong. If I want to feel close to God, I've got to love what God loves.” James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God and God will draw near to you.” What do you think that verse means? What does it mean to draw near to God? And what happens when we do?
- 5. **Third, integrity turns my life into something beautiful.** God is the master artist, and we are created in the image of God. That means we innately share God's passion for beauty. Innately, we long to live beautiful lives, and integrity is how that happens. The people we most admire are people who do beautiful things, i.e., people who do right even when it's costly. Jeff shared the story of Harriett Bailey, a slave woman whose infant son was forcibly taken from her. Despite the danger and hardship, she would sneak away from her plantation after dark, walk 12 miles, cuddle with her son until he went to sleep, then sneak back. Her son grew up to be Frederick Douglass. Tell us about someone you admire who risked much to do the right thing in their life.
- 6. It's one thing to say we should live with integrity and quite another to know how we can get better at it. Jeff offered two suggestions.
  - a. First, practice. John McCain once said, “Courage is like a muscle. The more we exercise it, the stronger it gets.” Jeff said the same is true of integrity. Do you buy that? Why or why not?
  - b. Second, learn from our mistakes. Learning from our moral failures allows us to turn scars into beauty marks. Tell us about a time you morally failed and what you learned from that experience that makes you a better person now.

## Genesis 39:1-20

Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him. <sup>2</sup>The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. <sup>3</sup>His master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. <sup>4</sup>So Joseph found favor in his sight and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. <sup>5</sup>From the time that he made him overseer in his house, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake. <sup>6</sup>So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge.

Now Joseph was handsome. <sup>7</sup>And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, 'Lie with me.' <sup>8</sup>But he refused and said to his master's wife, 'Look, with me here, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand. <sup>9</sup>He has not kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' <sup>10</sup>And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not consent to be with her. <sup>11</sup>One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work, <sup>12</sup>she caught hold of his garment, saying, 'Lie with me!' But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. <sup>13</sup>When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, <sup>14</sup>she kept his garment by her until his master came home, <sup>15</sup>and she said to him, 'The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; <sup>16</sup>but as soon as I raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside.' <sup>17</sup>  
<sup>18</sup>When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, he became enraged. <sup>19</sup>And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison.

## **Don't Know Much, by Linda Ronstadt and Aaron Neville**

Look at this face  
I know the years are showing  
Look at this life  
I still don't know where it's going  
  
Look at these eyes  
They never seen what matters  
Look at these  
Dreams so beaten and so battered  
  
So many questions still left unanswered  
So much I've never broken through  
But when I feel you near me, I see so clearly  
The only truth I've ever known is me and you  
  
I don't know much  
But I know I love you  
And that may be all I need to know