

BECOMING INDISPENSABLE

A Devotional Meditation on Vayeshev (And He Settled)

Genesis 37:1-40:23; Amos 2:6-3:8;
Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 10:1-6; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 11:24-26

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My wife and I joke about how I make myself indispensable. During my Army career, whenever I moved into a new position, it would take time not only for me to learn the job, but for my new colleagues to get used to me. As the “new guy,” I had to prove myself knowledgeable and competent, and demonstrate my willingness and ability to get along with everyone. Sometimes there would be formal requirements, such as classes I had to attend to learn about the job, but those were only a small part of the process. The biggest part was earning the trust of my colleagues. I would know when I had reached that point when people stopped comparing me to my predecessor, and began to seek me out as the resident expert. That’s how I made myself indispensable.



Quarterback. Photo by Eric Hamiter, February 14, 2010, [via Flickr](#).

What are the characteristics of an indispensable person? Competence, creativity, skills, and abilities are important, but they mean little if a person is untrustworthy. We see that in sports. An athlete may be the highest-rated quarterback in college football, but if he disregards team rules, misses practice, and argues with his teammates, he will find himself replaced by a more reliable player, even though the replacement is less skilled.

Reliability should bring rewards, but that’s not always the case. All too often, competent, trustworthy people are not rewarded for their efforts. Someone else gets the promotion, or the educational opportunity, or the preferred assignment, not because he is the better candidate, but because of something unfair. He might be related to the boss, or have “worked the system” to gain an inappropriate advantage. Maybe he is the type of person who works hard to look good, and that’s how he wins the promotion even though he has little competence.

It is in unfair situations like these that genuine character comes out. A trustworthy person will continue to perform commendably, knowing that it is for the good of the team, the organization, or the family. She knows what she’s done even if an unscrupulous superior claims the credit for her achievements. It won’t take long for others to see what is happening and learn who to talk to when they want something done right. They may not be able to help fix the unfair circumstances, but they can provide encouragement, and be encouraged to do the right thing when they themselves endure unpleasant circumstances.

Trustworthiness is essential not only in work and sports, but in all areas of human interaction. For example, long before I became involved in foster care ministry, I learned of the horrible things that happen to some children. Abuse and neglect are more common than we like to think. Often this abuse happens because someone in a position of trust with a child proved themselves unworthy of trust. It's the same with neglect: when one's own pleasures outweigh the value of a child, then the needs of the child go unmet, and great harm is done.

Where else do we see the consequences of untrustworthiness? Everywhere. It's present in theft, murder, assault, and illicit sexual encounters. Someone might become jealous of another person, or covet what they have, and thus begin a chain of thought that, if left unchecked, leads to action.

We see this process happening throughout the life of Joseph. Something in his character made him trustworthy in his youth, although his lack of age and experience caused him to make mistakes and offend his brothers. He had plenty of opportunity to overcome those shortcomings, thanks not only to the trust his father Jacob placed in him, but also thanks to the tests God allowed in his life.

Think about Joseph's tests for a moment. The first was the loss of mother, Rachel, when he was a child. Then, as a young adult, his jealous brothers nearly killed him, and caused him to be sold as a slave into Egypt. Even as a slave, his trustworthiness endeared him to his master, but it also brought a more serious trial when his master's wife tried to seduce him. His refusal of her advances reveals the reason why he chose the more difficult path:

"Look," he said to his master's wife, "my master doesn't think about anything in the house with me in charge, and everything that belongs to him he's entrusted into my hand. No one in this house is greater than I, and he has withheld nothing from me—except you, because you are his wife. So how could I commit this great evil and sin against God?"

Genesis 39:8-9 TLV

This is the heart of the matter. Joseph's relationship with his Creator gave him a clearer perspective on what is truly important. He carried that perspective into prison when his master's wife unjustly accused him, and that's what enabled him to find another position of trust with the jailor and his fellow prisoners. He demonstrated that character matters, and that good character transcends even the worst of circumstances. That's something another person familiar with Egyptian bondage demonstrated several generations later:

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Instead he chose to suffer mistreatment along with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. He considered the disgrace of Messiah as greater riches than the treasures of Egypt—because he was looking ahead to the reward.

Hebrews 11:24-26 TLV

How do we cultivate such character? Ideally, that cultivation begins at home in our infancy, with the examples modelled by godly, trustworthy parents. That's why our

adversary seeks to destroy our families, replacing them with rootless individuals whose trustworthiness extends only as far as money and threats can control them. All is not lost, however. Trustworthiness is a heart matter that develops as our hearts are transformed by the renewing of our minds. That's why Paul urges us to take captive our thoughts to the obedience of Messiah. Those who learn this as children have a great advantage, but it's never too late to begin. Pastors, teachers, mentors, and prayer warriors all have a role in this, both for those who took the right path in their youth, and for those who still have trouble finding it in adulthood.

This is why Paul teaches us what those of good character should model for the community. We understand that from his letter to Pastor Titus:

The reason I left you in Crete was so that you would set in order the things that remain and appoint elders in every city as I directed you—if anyone is blameless, the husband of one wife, having children of faith with no charge of wild living or rebellion. For the overseer must be blameless as God's administrator—not arrogant, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not violent, not greedy for dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, loving what is good, self-controlled, upright, devout, disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message in keeping with the teaching, so he can both encourage by instruction that is sound and convict those who speak against it.

Titus 1:5-9 TLV

We point to this passage as a list of qualifications for church leaders, but why should we limit it to that? These characteristics should be common among all of God's people precisely because they are uncommon in the wider world. Cultivating them is what makes us indispensable.