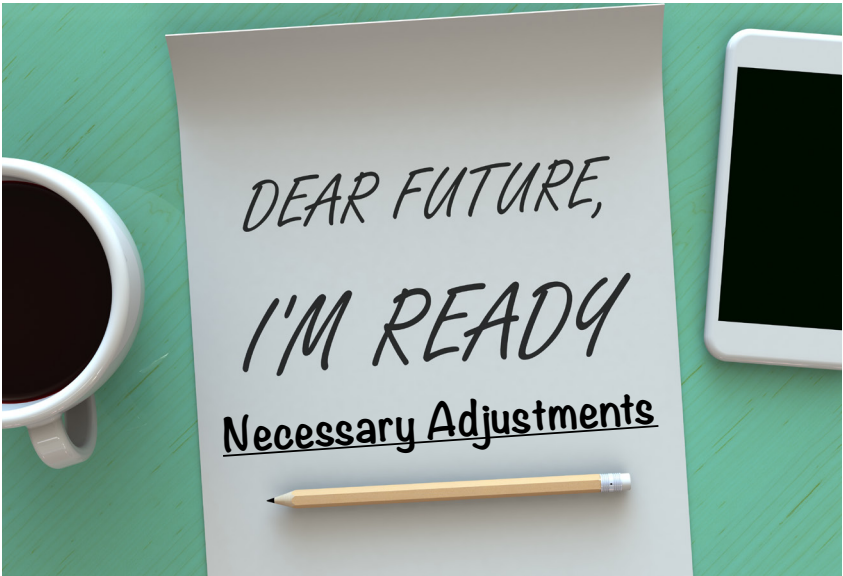


At a glance

When plans change regarding leadership, our first response is often *why*? Leadership in our lives, whether in our home, place of employment, or especially in our church can often stir panic. Changes in this category, whether planned or unexpected, often result in our comfort zone changing. There is no better case in Scripture for that than Joseph.



As I sit here and write, we are a few weeks away from a presidential election. By the time you read this, we will know the outcome. Even though this election cycle has been especially contentious and discouraging, be reminded that there are many nations on our planet that operate under a dictatorship, and a change in leadership happens only by death or coup.

In contrast, every four to eight years Americans are accustomed to witnessing an orderly, peaceful transition from one administration to another. But even under the best of circumstances, with any change in leadership, whether government leader, pastor, or even our boss at work, we are sure to experience a certain amount of angst.

What will the new leader be like? Will I feel comfortable with his/her leadership style? What changes will be made? How will those changes affect me? Will my life be made easier or more difficult? How should I respond to unwelcome changes?

Rather than wringing our hands and, Heaven forbid, even becoming a *complainer*, what is the correct response for a child of God? Not surprisingly, the Bible gives us an excellent model to follow in this area. His name is Joseph. During his lifetime, Joseph was placed under the authority of a number of different leaders, some godly, some ungodly. Through it all, Joseph managed to not just survive, but to thrive in each situation.



## Papa Genesis 27-37

The first authority figure in Joseph's life was his father Jacob. Although Jacob was a God-fearing, Jewish man, he presided over a very dysfunctional family. He seemed to be passive and tolerant of the family's bad behavior. It would not be unfair to say Jacob was at times a weak leader.

In spite of this, Joseph had a loving relationship with his dad and was definitely the favorite son. But even that was a problem because Jacob's open display of favoritism caused friction among the siblings. Joseph became the object of ridicule and was hated by his older brothers.

The relationship between Joseph and his brothers dete-

riorated to the point that they could not say a kind word to Joseph. When Jacob commissioned Joseph to go check on his brothers who had moved the family's livestock quite a distance from home, Joseph submitted to his father's request. He simply said, "Here I am" (Genesis 37:13). He went, knowing his brothers would not be happy to see him. When given an unpleasant assignment, he didn't argue or gripe. He just did it. Even at a young age, Joseph worked without an "attitude" and was compliant.

However, the trip to check on his brothers ended disastrously for Joseph. After forcing Joseph into a pit, the wicked brothers dropped their plan to murder Joseph and instead sold him to a band of Midianite traders. No longer was Joseph under the tender care of a doting father.

**Reflective Questions:**

How can parents teach children respect for others who will be in authority over them?

Is there a difference between obedience and submission? If so, explain.

**Potiphar**

**Genesis 37:36;  
39:1-20**

The horrific treatment of Joseph by his brothers eventually landed him in a most unlikely place under a new boss. We don't know much about Potiphar except that he was the captain of the guard for the Pharaoh of Egypt. It is safe to assume Potiphar was a powerful man, with authority to imprison and even execute criminals.

Potiphar purchased Joseph as a common slave. Overnight, Joseph went from the position of a patriarch's son to a lowly servant of a pagan. He was thrust into an environment that was completely foreign to him—a strange country, a differ-

ent culture, an unknown language. How easy it would have been for Joseph to throw up his hands and quit. If ever anyone deserved to have a pity party, it would have been this young man. Instead of quitting, he chose to get up every morning, roll up his sleeves, put a smile on his face, and go to work.

It didn't take long for Potiphar to see something very different about Joseph. Genesis 39:2 tells us "the Lord was with Joseph." Everything Joseph touched prospered, and it did not escape the notice of Potiphar. Joseph found grace in his employer's sight, and he (Joseph) served him (Potiphar). Did you catch that? *He served him.*

Joseph worked hard and was rewarded. Joseph was a faithful employee and did everything in

his power to make Potiphar successful. The high-ranking official quickly promoted Joseph to overseer of his household and eventually over everything he had.

### Reflective Questions:

Kent Hughes once said, *“If you want to test whether you have a servant’s heart, see how you feel the next time someone treats you like a servant.”* What was Jesus’ attitude regarding serving others? (Mark 10:45; Philippians 2:6-8)

Think of someone you know who serves others well. What are some of his/her characteristics you would like to emulate in your own life?

How should you react when treated unfairly?



## Prison Keeper

Genesis  
39:20-40:23

Just when it seemed that things could not be going any better, a false accusation was made against Joseph. The only thing Joseph was guilty of was loyalty to his God and to his boss. Suddenly he found himself unjustly thrown into the slammer. The person now in authority over him was not a

loving father, or even an influential commanding officer. His superior was, of all things, the prison warden.

Once again, Scripture makes no mention of Joseph feeling desperate or the least bit sorry for himself. What is mentioned again is that “the Lord was with Joseph.” With the Lord’s help, Joseph made the necessary adjustments to new surroundings, his loss of freedom, and a new supervisor. What flexibility and resilience Joseph possessed! In

no time, Joseph found favor with the prison warden and was given great responsibility within the jail. Again the Bible writer points out that *Joseph served*. Even while incarcerated, he served his supervisor and his fellow inmates well.

It is during Joseph's imprisonment we are allowed to see another quality in Joseph we may have otherwise not known. Living in a dungeon with convicts under the watchful eye of a guard, one might expect to see a hardening in Joseph's spirit. But the opposite is true. Genesis 40:6-7 says Joseph took note when a couple of the prisoners looked sad, and he reached out to them with compassion. His own plight was bleak, yet he was thinking of others.

### Reflective Questions:

Dr. Richard J. Krejcir defines flexibility this way: ***Flexibility*** is *being open to the plans and ideas of others, and willing to be instructed and challenged to change for the better. You have to be willing to bend; if not, your relationship will break. This characteristic will help us see the big picture, how people and events are all interlinked with a sovereign God at the controls.*

Look up these examples in Scripture where people were flexible. What would they have missed if they not been willing to be flexible?  
Genesis 12 (Abraham)

Mark 1:16-18 (Simon and Andrew)

Matthew 2:7-12 (The Wise Men)

Are there some areas in your life where you can be more flexible without compromising your principles?



# Pharaoh

## Genesis 41

Sometimes, it is darkest before the dawn. Though Joseph had been forgotten by some, God had not forgotten him. Another big change for Joseph was in the works. The Lord carefully orchestrated a chain of events that resulted in Joseph's release from prison and promotion to the palace. He was working for the King of Egypt!

"Now, that's a change I could handle," you may be thinking. But even this change for good required some adapting. It was a whole new ballgame. To be sure, this position had its perks. But Joseph had a lot to learn to be able to function well under this new leader.

Surely, Joseph's head was

spinning with questions. What was Pharaoh's philosophy and approach to governing? What were the ruler's long-term/short-term goals for the kingdom? Was he a big-picture guy or a detail person? What was the king's temperament? What about palace protocol? Joseph was on a steep learning curve in order to be effective in this administration.

With the Lord's help, Joseph navigated another change successfully. He flourished under yet another leader. He found a way to use his gifts wisely and productively and to contribute every way he could. By all rights this promotion should have been a heady experience for Joseph. But he knew God was the source of his wisdom and abilities. He never lost his humility and was careful to give God the credit for all his accomplishments.

### Reflective Questions:

What do these Scriptures teach us about our responsibility to civic/government leaders? (Romans 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17)

How often do you pray for the President and other leaders in government?

What is your duty regarding your pastor(s)? (Hebrews 13:17-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 25)



Anyone familiar with the life of Joseph understands that the dominant theme of his story is the sovereignty of God. At every juncture of Joseph's life, God's unseen hand was at work. Please don't miss it! How reassuring it is to be reminded God is in control!

However, for the purpose of this study, we have focused on how Joseph responded to the various leaders God placed over him. What a sterling example he is. Regardless of the circumstances or who was in charge, Joseph maintained a good work ethic, a servant's heart, and a positive attitude.

Can I be real for a moment? At "my age" it is getting more difficult to surrender to change. Even though I know it is good for me to be nudged out of my comfort zone, my first inclination is to resist. God *will* place new leaders in our lives from time to time. Some we will like better than others. Their tastes, preferences, and style may not be what we have been used to. Remember, different doesn't mean wrong.

Isaiah 43:19, *"Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it?..."*

Let's be grateful for the leaders God has placed in our lives. Support them with prayer and cooperation. I would surely hate to miss out on any "new thing" God has for me.

**About the Writer:** Debbie Burden resides in Nashville, Tennessee, with her husband Keith, and works at the Free Will Baptist Executive Office. She has two daughters and six grandchildren. She is a member of Cofer's Chapel FWB Church and teaches a weekly Good News Club at a public school. In her spare time she enjoys cooking and antiquing.

***"If you want to test whether you have a servant's heart, see how you feel the next time someone treats you like a servant."***

**— Kent Hughes**