

# What Do You Do In The Dark?

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In Ephesians 5:1, Paul urges us to imitate or follow God—not an easy thing to do. It takes many qualities, not the least of which is good character.

The dictionary defines *character* as "the combination of qualities that distinguishes one person, group or thing from another." It is moral or ethical strength, integrity, fortitude, excellence. It derives from a word meaning "a letter of the alphabet."

An English word not found in the Bible, character comes from a Greek word meaning "to engrave, mark or brand." A brand designates ownership. If we have the character necessary to follow Christ, in effect, we wear His brand.

The most unique definition that I have heard for character is "what you do in the dark." Dark, as used here, is both literal and figurative. Darkness hides what we do. Most crimes are committed under cover of darkness, and probably more sins occur at night as well. That is its literal meaning.

What about its figurative meaning? Satan is often associated with darkness, and conversely, God is linked with light (*cf.* Acts 26:18). Nothing is hidden from God. Everything we think, do and say should withstand the light of day. In other words, character is a way of life, not a show you put on for others, not a false front. Character is doing the right thing whether or not anyone is there to see it.

## The Example of Joseph

Joseph is a good example of this kind of character. Sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt, he becomes the property of Potiphar, a high-ranking government official. Despite what Joseph has been through, hated by his brothers, sold into slavery and separated from his father, he maintains his good character.

Seeing this, God is with Joseph and allows him to prosper (Genesis 39:2). Instead of sending him to the fields where the labor was hard and the conditions bad, Potiphar assigns him to work in his house. His master notices that all Joseph does prospers, so he makes him his personal servant. Eventually, he puts Joseph in charge of all that he has (verses 3-5).

Considering his slavery, Joseph's life is good—then his character is tested. "Joseph was good-looking and handsome. By-and-by his master's wife cast her eyes on him: 'Lie with me,' she said" (verse 6-7, Moffatt translation throughout).

Now here was temptation!

But he refused. He said to his master's wife, "My master does not trouble himself about anything in the household, but has left everything in my hands, so that my authority is equal to his own; he has kept nothing from me except yourself, for you are his wife. How then can I commit this great crime, and sin against God?" (verses 7-9)

Well-spoken words for a young man in his late teens or perhaps early twenties! Joseph had faced temptation and withstood it. But wait—"Day after day she spoke to Joseph . . ." (verse 10). The seduction of Joseph by this undoubtedly attractive and powerful woman continued.

Joseph's character was strong, though: ". . . but he would not listen to her appeal to lie with her or to be with her" (verse 10). Oh, this woman is clever! She pleaded with Joseph just to sit with her, but he knew what that would lead to!

One day when the house was empty (according to first-century Jewish historian, Josephus, the Egyptians were celebrating a pagan festival, but Potiphar's wife had pleaded sick), she escalated her assault on Joseph's character. As he was working, ". . . she caught him by the robe, saying, 'Lie with me.' But he ran off, leaving the robe in her hands, and got away" (verses 11-12).

How many men would be strong enough to withstand this kind of sustained attack on their character? Remember, none of Joseph's family or friends were around. Who would know if he succumbed?

### **Moral Character**

Josephus writes:

For when his master's wife was fallen in love with him, both on account of his beauty of body and his dexterous management of affairs; and supposed that if she should make it known to him, she could easily persuade him to come and lie with her, and that he would look upon it as a piece of happy fortune that his mistress should entreat him, as regarding that state of slavery he was in, and not his moral character, which continued after his condition was changed. . . . (*The Antiquities of the Jews*, 2.4.2)

Though a slave, his "moral character" remained intact. "How can I commit this great crime and sin against God?" he asked (verse 9). Who knows how long Potiphar's wife kept this up? Weeks, perhaps months.

Undoubtedly, Joseph prayed, meditated and fasted about this problem. He knew that to deny this woman was to face her wrath, yet he never wavered. As a result, Potiphar's wife had him thrown in jail on false charges. By not giving in to sin, he found himself behind bars! Yet God continued to bless him even in prison, and he ultimately ruled Egypt.

Joseph had made a courageous decision. But he had the character to do so because he had made right decisions in the past. Character does not just happen, but is built over time by making a series of courageous, right decisions.

In his letter to Rome, Paul reminds us:

It is far on in the night, the day is almost here; so let us drop the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of the light; let us live decorously as in the open light of day—no revelry, or bouts of drinking, no debauchery or sensuality, no quarreling or jealousy. No, put on the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, and never think how to gratify the cravings of the flesh. (Romans 13:12-14)

Character *is* what you do in the dark!

