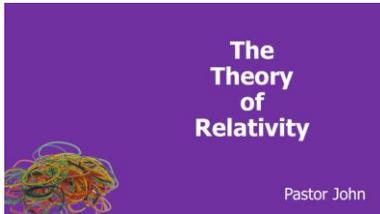


## The Theory of Relativity

June 4, 2018

Scripture: Genesis 39: 1-23



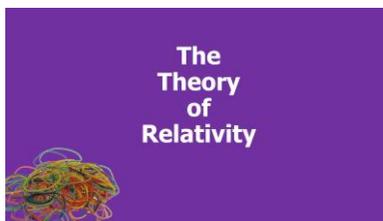
As we begin tonight, I want to start by looking at some common choices we make. In most of these choices, one is not necessarily good and the other evil. But in most cases, one choice is "better" than the other. By show of hands, how many of you like a little ice cream now and then? While ice cream is not inherently evil, fruit would be a better choice. We all could take a little more time each day to exercise, even if it just going for a walk. But we often end up here instead. Again, television is not necessarily bad, but a walk would be better for us. Here are a few more choices



that we often make. Again, one choice is relatively "better" for us. Reading versus Facebook. Each have their merits and each have their negatives. Spending time with the family versus going out with friends instead. Again, positives and negatives for each choice.



Now that you are thinking a little bit about making some choices, let's turn to a few more serious choices or decisions that people face. Walking back to your car after shopping at ShopKo, you find a wallet lying next to your car. What do you do? You go out to eat, the waitress brings you your bill, you notice that the four deserts are not on the bill. What do you do? Late one night you are puttering around on the computer at home. Everyone else is asleep. Something pops up on your screen. You are enticed. You hover over the pop-up. What do you do?



Growing up we are all taught right from wrong. As we raise our children, we all want to instill a sense of right and wrong in them, don't we? When we interact with other people, we want to be treated right, don't we?

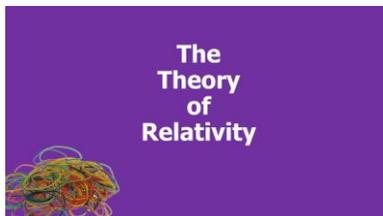
While our sense of right and wrong is usually clearly instilled in us, at times, morality can be relative. Yet at times in life, the absolutes become a bit fuzzy. I invite you to take a couple of minutes to discuss these two questions at your tables.



- 1) Did you grow up believing morality was relative or absolute?
- 2) How have those beliefs in right and wrong influenced your behavior over the years?

Our sense of right and wrong influences our behaviors in different ways. While I believe that most people are basically good, at times we make poor or bad choices. For example, we pick up that wallet that was laying in the parking lot at ShopKo. We experience an "ahhh" moment as we find \$120 in the wallet. But, as is always the case when we make a bad decision and there is a consequence that accompanies said decision, we all come to that "ugh" moment. It is the "ugh" that comes when we realize that we shouldn't have done or said that. In our example, it is the uncomfortable and guilty feeling that keeps us awake as we lay in bed later that night. But we took the cash and we must live with the consequences of our decision. The reverse is often true when we make a wise choice. When faced with a moral dilemma and we make a good or right choice,

we experience that “ahhh” moment without the “ugh” moment. It is the moment when we are happy or glad that we made the better choice. In our example, it is the feeling we get when we walk into the store and give the wallet and all of its contents to the manager. We like that we made the good choice.



In terms of our faith, we equate making the “wrong” or “bad” choice with something we call “sin”. In much the same way, when we sin there are consequences that we must face with the choice that we made. Like the moral decisions we face in everyday life, there is an inner debate that we have in our minds. The question comes down to do we bend and surrender to the temptation or do we resist? When we fall to temptation and we sin, we do usually have the “ahhh” experience but then we also have that “ugh” moment at some later time. Conversely, when we face a temptation and we are able to overcome it, we too have that “ahhh” moment.

In our passage for tonight, we have part of the story of Joseph. He was sold into slavery by his brothers and finds himself living in Egypt, the slave of an officer of Pharaoh’s guard named Potiphar. Please join me as we read the first part of our passage for tonight. The words will be on the screen.

<sup>1</sup> Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. <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>1</sup> Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. <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 attended him; 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 and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. <sup>6</sup> So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate".*

<sup>4</sup> So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him; 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 and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. <sup>6</sup> So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate".



### The Theory of Relativity



Being sold into slavery, of course, was not good. Yet Joseph had a choice to make. He could make the best of his situation or he could sulk and be hard to get along with. Joseph decided to do his best and God was with him. He rose in status and in power. Potiphar gave Joseph much responsibility. Life was as good as it could be for Joseph. Joseph was living in the 'ahhh' of life. Please join me as we continue our story.

Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. <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.

*Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. <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 is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he 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 lie beside her or to be with her.*

<sup>9</sup> He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he 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 lie beside her or to be with her.

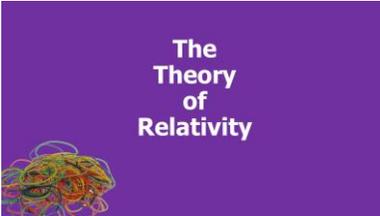
### The Theory of Relativity

Joseph again had a choice to make. But remember the facts – he was a slave in Potiphar's house. He could not just go find another job somewhere else in Egypt. He could not just go to work for a different person. When faced with this moral dilemma, what choices did he have? He could bend and surrender to the desires of the flesh. He could bend and surrender to the temptation to flee and to try and escape the situation. What compromises could Joseph make in this situation? Please take a minute or two at your table to discuss Joseph's situation using these two questions:

- 1) What compromises or choices could Joseph make in this situation?
- 2) What would be the "cost" of each choice or compromise?

1. What compromises or choices could Joseph make in this situation?

2. What would be the "cost" of each choice or compromise?



The  
Theory  
of  
Relativity

If Joseph gave in to the temptation at hand, he would have been disobeying God and what he knew God and Potiphar expected of him. It would be a tough place to be in, wouldn't it? There does not seem to be a good possible outcome. To find out, please listen as I read the rest of the story from Genesis 39.



Genesis 39:  
11-20

*<sup>11</sup> One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work, and while no one else was in the house, <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 called out to the members of her household and said to them, "See, my husband has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us! He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice; <sup>15</sup> and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside." <sup>16</sup> Then she kept his garment by her until his master came home, <sup>17</sup> and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; <sup>18</sup> but as soon as I raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside." <sup>19</sup> When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, "This is the way your servant treated me," he became enraged. <sup>20</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.*

This outcome seems more like an “ugh” for doing the right thing than an “ahhh” for doing the right thing, doesn’t it? It certainly must have felt that way to Joseph as he sat in prison. Joseph did the right thing and he still ended up in prison. This God that he dared not sin against has let him end up in prison. Have you ever done the “right” thing only to end up feeling like you did the wrong thing? This is one of the reasons that doing the right thing can feel relative at times. The feeling that it is not fair at times challenges our sense of right and wrong and may even hinder our ability to do the right thing. But Joseph’s story does not end here. Let’s read the rest of the story:

*<sup>21</sup> But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. <sup>22</sup> The chief jailer committed to Joseph’s care all the prisoners who were in the prison,*

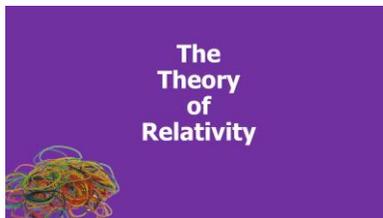


*... whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. <sup>23</sup> The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph’s care, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.*



*<sup>21</sup> But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. <sup>22</sup> The chief jailer committed to Joseph’s care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. <sup>23</sup> The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph’s care, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.*

In the end, Joseph’s situation is not much better. Instead of being a slave in Potiphar’s house, he is a prisoner in jail. But there are two important things that we must note here. First, Joseph remained true to God and to himself. Joseph chose not to bend or to surrender to what he knew was wrong. Second, God remained with Joseph. No, being in jail was probably not the best place to be. But God remained with Joseph and God continued to prosper Joseph.



In our lives, there is no guarantee that God will prosper us financially or materially or in any other way when we choose to do the right thing, when we choose to remain true to our faith. But God does promise to be with us.

As we close this time of conversation, I leave you with three questions to consider. They are for you to consider as you go through the week ahead.

These three questions are also on the back side of your bulletin. If, during the week, you have questions about these or want to talk about them or anything else, drop in or give me a call.

Here are the questions I would love for you to consider during the week ahead:

1) How would moral compromise have compromised Joseph?

2) What potential compromises are you facing that could compromise you?

3) Are you running away from an eventual "ahhh" because of an immediate "ugh"? Or are you willing to tolerate an "ugh" to ultimately arrive at an "ahhh"?



Let us pray...