

## DOING GOOD WHERE YOU ARE

### GENESIS 40

We have little control over the circumstances of our lives. They will often be determined by decisions made by others. However we do have control over how we respond to our circumstances. Joseph is a worthy example for all of us to follow when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances. He had done the right thing, but it all turned out wrong. This is not unusual. Many righteous acts will actually result in difficulty for those who do them.

When tempted by the seductive wife of Potiphar, he rejected her invitation to immorality. Instead he remained loyal to his God and his master. When her offer was spurned, she turned on Joseph in fury. Her lies ultimately led to his unjust imprisonment. Still a young man, without any friend to encourage him, this young Hebrew found himself confined in an Egyptian prison. His conscience is clear, but he is still confined. What do you do? Do you become bitter and sullen? Do you fight the system in anger? Do you lash out at those around you? Do you dream about revenge?

This would seem to be the natural course, but instead Joseph chooses to do good while in prison. If the prison is to be his home, it will also be the place where he serves God. He will not wait until his circumstance change in order to do good, rather he will begin where he is. He seems to have been guided in this by certain convictions. It will be helpful to us to follow the same principles. You too may find yourself in a difficult circumstance, one where things are out of your control, and you will need some principles to guide you.

I. EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE IN LIFE WILL HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO GOOD.

Let us make sure that we understand the circumstance in which Joseph found himself. He is a prisoner. He is confined to the main prison of the Egyptians, it was the prison where the prisoners sentenced by the king were kept. I have only known about prison life as a visitor, but some of you have had experience with prison life. It would probably be a mistake to equate the Egyptian prison in which Joseph found himself with the Lubbock County Jail, or the Monford unit where some of you work. It would probably be much more primitive and far less comfortable. It would be a good place to become a very bitter person, especially if you were there unjustly.

Prison life would mean that he had no control over the daily activities of his life. He made no decisions about what he did and when he did it. He had no choice about what he would eat or what he would wear. If you are limited in this way, surely there will be no opportunity to do good. However when they locked Joseph in the jail, they unknowingly locked the Lord in with him. We have the sure witness that the Lord was with him in the prison. Is this not a wonderful thing—the Lord is with you wherever you are? He is there to help you find an opportunity to do good. He is there to use you in the fulfillment of his purpose.

Evidently the first step that Joseph took was to respond to his circumstance with a positive attitude. This must have caught the attention of the one in charge of the prison for Joseph was soon made a trusty. He handled that so well, that he was soon placed in charge of the whole prison as the chief trusty. Every circumstance will provide you the opportunity to demonstrate a positive attitude. Just demonstrating a positive attitude can be a real contribution for good in a dark circumstance.

Joseph also found an opportunity to serve others. There were two troubled men with him in the prison. Before being imprisoned they had both served the royal household. One had been the cupbearer and the other had been the baker for the royal family. Because they had displeased the Pharaoh, they were thrown into prison. While in the prison they had been troubled by strange dreams, which filled them with a strange sadness.

When Joseph observed the depression of the men, he approached them concerning their depression. One by one they readily unloaded their troubles on Joseph while he gave them a sympathetic listening ear. Since he walked with God, he knew about dreams. He was able to interpret the dreams of these two men. He found someone that he could serve even in the midst of a prison.

Who has God brought into your life through your present circumstances that you can serve? I heard Dr. Charles McLaughlin share at testimony at Glorieta this summer. Dr. McLaughlin has since died and gone to be with the Lord. During his long months of confinement with cancer, he was under the care of home nurses. One of the nurses who visited with him gave him an opportunity to share his faith with her. She had been so impressed with his

positive attitude concerning his terminal condition, they she wanted to know his secret. The result was that he led her to personal faith. The patient ministered to the caregiver.

There is a way you can do good right where you are.

## II. DO GOOD BY USING THE GIFTS THAT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU.

Our God does all things well. He has given to you gifts to use in the circumstance right where you are. This is clearly demonstrated in the experience of Joseph. God had gifted Joseph with administrative abilities. He was about to accept responsibilities and to faithfully carry them out. This had already been demonstrated during his stay in the home of Potiphar. These gifts will enable him to serve the head of the prison and to make a contribution to the welfare of all his fellow prisoners.

Furthermore the Lord had given to him insight into dreams. This had come while he was still a teenager in the home of his father Jacob. When the cupbearer and the baker shared with him their dreams, he was able to interpret their dreams for them. The cupbearer told him of seeing a vine

where three clusters of grapes grew very quickly. Joseph gave him the good news that he would be restored to the house of Pharaoh in just three days. The baker told him of seeing many kinds of bread, but the birds of the air came and ate it. He was told the distressing news that in three days the Pharaoh would cause him to be hanged. Since he had the gift of understanding dreams, he would use it right where he was.

Without doubt the Lord has given you a capacity to serve that will match your present circumstance. He is faithful in his providence to prepare us for the places where we will find ourselves in life. The place and circumstance may not be what we would choose, but there is still an opportunity to do good. If there is an opportunity to do good, then we should do it.

### III. DO GOOD WITHOUT ANY EXPECTATION OF RETURN.

This is another hard lesson to learn about life. Good done will not always pay off in some immediate return. If you evaluate the outcome of doing good, you might become a skeptic.

As far as we know, Joseph carried the administrative responsibilities of the prison without any material benefit. He sought to make it a more orderly and

comfortable place for the prisoners without any pay—except the satisfaction of a job well done. We are tempted to ask too often—what is there in it for me?

After he had told the cupbearer of Pharaoh the explanation of his dreams, he had made a request of the man. He requested, “But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.” The cupbearer would have been in a position to help Joseph, but he didn’t. Instead we read: “The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.” Does that sound like a familiar line? It often happens that way—you do a good deed, but the person to whom you do good soon forgets. You never even get a thank you card. Hopefully none of us have been like the servant of the king—been the object of kindness from someone and then forgot to show any gratitude.

The principle that we need to follow is that we do good without any expectation of return. You may have seen the beatitude that says, “Blessed are they who expect nothing for they shall not be disappointed.” It is a pretty

safe prediction to say that if you do good, you will probably not see any immediate benefit from having done it. Do it anyway.

#### IV. DO GOOD WHERE YOU ARE OUT OF GRATITUDE FOR THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

Even though Joseph was in a prison, he was not without an awareness of the goodness of the Lord. When Moses records that the Lord was with him, we should understand that Joseph was aware of the goodness of the Lord. Sure he was in prison, but given the circumstance of his life, he could have been dead. His brothers could have carried out their evil plan and taken his life. The penalty for the lie told by his master's wife could have been death. Instead he is still enjoying the gift of life. The Lord is truly with him so he will do good to others just out of gratitude for the gift of life.

A name that comes to mind as I think about this is Joni Erickson who was tragically injured in an accident some years ago. She could have become bitter as a young person with a bright future. Instead she decided to be grateful what she had and to look for opportunities to do good. In her limited situation she has become an excellent writer, a singer, an artist, and has a



radio ministry that touches thousands of people. She has done the good she could do and thereby has brought glory to our God.

Maybe you can't do what you might have done in a different circumstance, but what can you do? What opportunity is there to do good where you are? What gifts do you have that might be used to bless others? Are you willing to do it without any expectation of return? Then begin today. Do the good you can do to the glory of God right where you are!



IV. DO GOOD IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE GOODNESS OF THE  
LORD.