

SUCCESS INSPITE OF ADVERSITY
GENESIS 45:4-13

Joseph has to be one of the great success stories of all of history. He was born into a rather dysfunctional family in the land of Canaan but became a success in the nation of Egypt. He arose from obscurity to sit in the second most powerful seat in all of the Egyptian kingdom. As the designated representative of the Pharaoh he was in charge of the economic strategy for the land of Egypt at a time when they were facing great difficulty. He was so successful in the management of the economic affairs of the Egyptian kingdom that he brought great honor to the name of Pharaoh and great blessing to his own Hebrew people.

If you can imagine some reporter from the Egyptian Times going out to the large impressive home in which Joseph lived to conduct an interview with him, you can appreciate some of the surprises he must have encountered when he began to question Joseph about his background. It must have been a surprise to him that Joseph was not born in Egypt. When he questions Joseph further he must have been shocked by the revelation that Joseph was in Egypt because he had been sold as a slave by his Hebrew brothers in Canaan. Can you imagine how shocked he must have been when he discovered that Joseph had actually spent some time in prison because he had been charged with sexually molesting the wife of one Egypt's most powerful men. In spite of all of the unfortunate turns that had come to him, here he is now seated in the seat of power, second only to the Pharaoh himself. What can we learn about success from the experiences of Joseph? We should particularly be concerned to note the relationship that adversity can have to success. Most people have the impression that it is some adversity that has happened to them in life that

has prevented their success in life. We tend to blame our failures on some unfortunate incident that took place, some injustice that has been done to us.

But when you consider carefully the life of Joseph you begin to appreciate the adversities from a totally different perspective. Joseph might never have been where he was, nor achieved what he achieved, if it had not been for the adversities that he suffered. There are two primary truths that we can place in our heart from the experiences of Joseph.

I. CHARACTER IS DEVELOPED IN ADVERSITY AND IS AN ESSENTIAL FOR A SUCCESSFUL LIFE.

Our generation has rediscovered the relationship between character and success. We went through a period of time in which success has been almost totally related to personality and techniques. Most recent studies have indicated that we have overlooked an important element in success. The essential relationship is that between character and success. Character becomes the basic foundation for success.

I. Character is revealed in adversity.

If you want to know about the character of a person, you observe them in the midst of the bad times of life. Joseph provides us with a notable example of this. When he found himself in the house of Potiphar, the powerful Egyptian leader, his true character was revealed. It happened when the wife of Potiphar was attracted to this young Hebrew. Joseph had the physical makeup that spoke of strength. He was very diligent in everything he did. He proved himself to be an outstanding manager of Potiphar's household. Potiphar's wife was sexually attracted to him. But

Joseph was able to see through her approaches to him and was very careful to rebuff every approach. When she offered herself to him his character was revealed. "But he refused. With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

Even though his refusal of her advances finally cost him his position in Potiphar's household and landed him in an Egyptian prison, he did not give in to the temptation. There was strength of character present in him. The adversity that came only revealed that strength of character.

Unless adversity can destroy character it cannot permanently keep a person from success. Only something that can erode character can ever permanently hinder you from a achieving success.

2. Character is strengthened in adversity.

Rather than destroying character, adversity actually strengthens character. There is a relationship between the sufferings that he has been through and the injustices that he has endured and the character that Joseph manifests when he came to the high seat in Pharaoh's court. The injustice at the hands of his brothers and the betrayal on the part of Potiphar's wife and the years in the Egyptian prison have only strengthened and developed in him the character that allows him to carry the weighty responsibility of Egypt's economic strategies.

When you are tempted to use the things that have happened to you as an excuse for failure in your life, you need to remember the experiences of Joseph. You might add to his name that of John Bunyan, the English Baptist preacher, who spent 12 years in Bedford's jail. It was as a direct result of those years of imprisonment that he was able to bless the world with Pilgrim's Progress. You might remember Beethoven whose life was anything but easy. He grew up with a drunken father and in the midst of poverty. Deafness set in upon him when he was 29 years old. By the time he was 59 he could communicate only by writing. But in spite of all of these adversities he composed the deathless musical masterpieces that still bless the lovers of music.

Adversity is not the enemy of success that we often take it to be. It may be the friend of success.

II. GOD CAN WORK THROUGH ADVERSITY TO PROMOTE OUR SUCCESS.

The theological name we use for this is "providence." The providence is the divine activity by which he over rules the things that happen in our lives that are evil to make them turn out for our good. There is no better example of this in all of scripture than the life of Joseph.

While the brothers of Joseph meant to do him harm when they sold him to the caravan of traders that took him to Egypt, God overruled their intentions for good. Their deed of hate actually turned out to be a blessing. It put Joseph in a place where God could use him to become the physical savior of the land of Egypt and Jacob and his own brothers. He would never have been able to become Pharaoh's counselor if his brothers had not sold him into Egypt.

When Potiphar had Joseph confined to a prison he meant to impose upon him punishment for an apparent indiscretion against his wife. He meant it to be something that would hurt Joseph.

While there was pain in the privation that he experienced in prison, God over ruled the circumstance to make the prison experience the stepping stone to the palace of Egypt. It was in the prison that he became the counselor to the chief cupbearer of the Pharaoh. It was this chief cupbearer that he counseled in Egypt who would remember Joseph when the Pharaoh needed a counselor in a time of crisis. It was through the relationship with the cupbearer that Joseph had the opportunity to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. When he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, this prompted the Pharaoh to offer him the position of overseeing the economic recovery strategy for the land of Egypt.

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was at work over ruling the whole circumstance for the good of Joseph and the family of Israel. He would never have been able to save his family from the crisis of the famine if he had not been in Pharaoh's house. He would never have been in Pharaoh's house if he had not been in the Egyptian prison. God was at work over ruling to bring about the success that he had promised to Joseph.

We are always faced with the temptation to make a judgment about the adversities that have come upon us before God has had opportunity to finish His work. Instead of leaping to a quick conclusion that says, "This is going to keep me from ever realizing my dreams," wait it out. Who knows God may be at work even now moving you toward the fulfillment of the deepest and greatest dream of your life.

The thing that happens to us that appears at the time to be unjust and evil will not be able to prevent us from achieving success. The thing that may keep us from achieving success is making a wrong response to the adversity that comes our way. If we respond to the adversity in anger and bitterness, and allow our lives to be full of resentment it may well keep us from ever knowing success. If we respond to the adversity with steadfastness and confidence in God, the God who governs this world will make the adversity a stepping stone in the success.

In his book, LIFE CHANGES, James Hefley sites and example of this. Dr. A. J. Cronin had a thriving and well paying medical practice in London when he began having severe attacks of indigestion. He consulted a colleague and was told he had a chronic duodenal ulcer. An immediate and complete rest was mandatory or he might die.

Dr. Cronin had long had a strange "urge to be a writer." He took his family to a cottage in the midst of the green meadows sheltered by wild grander of mountains. There he wrote his first novel, The Citadel. It was translated into 21 languages selling over three million copies and was serialized, dramatized, and filmed. His illness marked the beginning of one of the greatest literary careers in the 20th century. Who knows, if he had never had a stomach ulcer he might never have written a book.

Don't give up on God too quick. Adversity may be the stepping stone and not the death to your success.