

# The Secret of His Success

Genesis 50:15-21

Pastor Bill Mosley 9-13-2020

Poor Richard said "An empty sack cannot stand upright." The sack he means is of course the sack of life. What does it take to have a sack so full it stands up in the face of all adversity? We could do worse than to take as an example, Joseph, son of Jacob, and prince of Egypt.

All the worst possible things in life happened to him.

How can a man rise from slavery & prison to prince of the realm? How can a man go from victim at the mercy of his brothers to hero with power to save his brothers from starvation? How can anyone be so righteous as to forgive the conspirators that beat him up, set him up for slavery & eventually prison, & lied to his father, saying he was dead?

To rise to such power and to be so forgiving, Joseph had to have character, commitment, & confidence.

He had been his father's favorite. That will sometimes make a child hard to live with. You could tell by his coat he was his father's pet -- a designer jacket of many colors. No wonder his brothers resented him. And then he told them his dream of sheaves of wheat. In his dream his 9 older brothers' sheaves were bowing to his. The brothers asked with rage, "Do you really expect to rule over us?" And they plotted how they might rid themselves of this arrogant dreamer.

At first his brothers schemed to kill him, but finally they decided to sell him into slavery to Midianite traders who were passing by. Then they took Joseph's fancy jacket, dipped it in goat blood, & showed it to their father. He said, "Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces." Then Jacob mourned.

Meanwhile, in Egypt, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard. Potiphar right away recognized that Joseph was someone who could be trusted. He put him in charge of all he owned.

Things went well. Until Joseph tangled with Potiphar's wife. Joseph's response to her attempted seduction shows us the kind of person he was. He told her, "My master trusts me with everything he owns. How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

Joseph was a person of character. We need people of this kind of character today.

A study of the most successful leaders in corporate America found that these giants of business had 3 things in common. First, a high level of energy. Second, a definite plan for personal success. & third, a high level of personal integrity. Companies want leaders as well as workers who can be trusted. Integrity means character.

Joseph had extraordinary character, and extraordinary commitment. It was extraordinary because Joseph's life took so many strange twists and turns. Spoiled child of a tribal leader, sold into slavery, then put in prison.

Potiphar's wife became fixated with her desire for Joseph. She threw herself at him, but he refused. One day she grabbed his cloak. He turned & fled, leaving his cloak behind. The spurned woman got her revenge. She accused him of the obvious crime, with the cloak as evidence. & Joseph found himself in prison.

Twice now at a young age he has been gravely wronged -- first by his brothers, now by his master's wife. Any one of us would probably have let such adversity get to us. We would have asked in a whiny voice, "Why me?" We might allow the injustice to affect our relationship with God. We would have found ample reason to stray from God's plan for our lives. But not Joseph. His character and his commitment to his God kept shining through, even in prison. The warden was so impressed by him he made him trustee over the whole prison. Like cream, no matter how hard you shook Joseph, he kept rising to the top. He was committed to doing right. He was committed to serving God.

He had character, commitment, and Joseph never lost confidence in the goodness of God. In prison he became known as an interpreter of dreams. He interpreted a dream for Pharaoh's cupbearer. Two years later, Pharaoh is plagued by dreams he knows are important. His cupbearer recommends Joseph to

interpret their meaning. The dreams show that the land would enjoy 7 good years and 7 bad years. Joseph recommends that Pharaoh put someone in charge of storing food during the good years to prepare for the bad years. Pharaoh chooses Joseph.

The famine comes & now Joseph is the 2nd most powerful man in the empire, & his brothers come to beg for food. He has them in the palm of his hand.

He makes them squirm for a bit, made more exquisite because the brothers don't recognize him. When he reveals himself, there is a tearful reunion. He could get revenge, yet he forgives them. His reason? "God sent me before you to preserve life. It was not you who sent me here, but God."

The secret of his success is that through it all he never lost sight of God's purpose for his life. That was his faith. That was his confidence.

Now these brothers are Jacob's sons, after all. Jacob was a trickster, a con-man. The brothers know their father, & themselves. So when Jacob dies, they remember that Joseph is also Jacob's son. Has he been conning them all this time, trying to fool father, & now that father is gone, what will Joseph do? Is it finally payback time?

Well, no. God's purpose for us is that we be people of forgiveness. Once forgiven, always forgiven. & that is Joseph's character, commitment, & confidence.

Joseph forgives his brothers again.

I don't know if I can be that forgiving. It's not natural. Joseph of Egypt did it. Jesus calls us to it.

The Good News is that we are forgiven. Thru the death & resurrection of Js, God has decreed, once & for all, that our sins are null & void. *We share the Good News by being as forgiving of others, to live in a continual state of forgiveness, to make forgiveness our trademark.*

Our character, our commitment, our confidence.

G.K. Chesterton: "Christianity has not been 'tried & found wanting', it has been found difficult & not tried."

God made a covenant with his people before Abraham. In Jesus, God makes a new covenant with his people. And this one is even more intimate than the old one. It's based on God's love for his people, not the people's love for God. And it runs on forgiveness.

God is love. In the gospel reading, Jesus is saying to show some love.

To love people is to accept them for what they are, celebrate their strengths, support them in their weaknesses, and join with them in carrying their burdens & bearing their pains. Not to try to change them or control them. Just look at Romans 14.

There's a prayer that I think Joseph could have taught his brothers. It's like the serenity prayer. In fact, it's a new serenity prayer:

God, grant me the serenity  
to accept the people I cannot change,  
the courage to change the person I can,  
and the wisdom to know  
that that person is ME.

Lord, help us to know how you work in everything, & in everything to know your forgiveness, that we may give it too, & say No to everything that makes it more difficult to say yes to you.