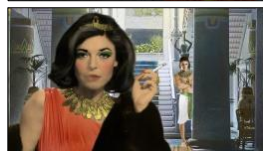
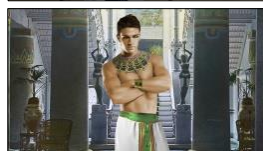
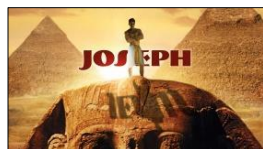


Royal Pain

Defying Suffering by Defining Success

March 26, 2023

Today we're defying disappointment by defining true success!



Here's my trivia question: **Was Joseph more successful at the beginning or end of chapter 39?** That'll make more sense in a moment. Joseph is my favorite story in the OT. That's the cover from a series I did 11 years ago. But, see the shadow of Joseph's name? If you hold the cover upside-down in front of a mirror, it actually says: Jesus. Because **God established a testimony in Joseph, by turning his life upside down. As He often does with us.** And we're told that *we*, as in a *mirror*, reflect His glory. Little Joe is a cocky teen whose fed-up half-brothers toss him into a dry cistern. Know how big *this* one is? here's a life-size Joseph for *scale!* After being in the pit, he's *enslaved* in *Egypt*, sold to Potiphar (the *kingpin* of the king's *elite force*), and put on *plantation duty*. But, **at the beginning of chapter 39, he's promoted to C.O.O.** of the *second* most powerful *palace* in the *single* most powerful *nation*. And every servant *bows* to *him*, like in his God-given dreams – wherein the *sheaves* of *wheat* bow before him, as do the *sun*, *moon*, and *stars*. (Gen 37:7-9) But *then*, he's *falsely* accused of attempted rape by Mrs. P. And **by the end of chapter 39, he's tossed into the royal prison** under Potiphar's house. So: **Was Joseph more successful at the beginning or end of chapter 39?** It all depends on how we define *success*. Here's how chapter 39 *begins* and *ends*.

[First] He lived *in the house* ... **[and]** the Lord was *with* him and ... **gave him success in everything he did**, **[and]** Joseph found *favor* in [Potiphar's] **[eyelinered]** eyes and ... **Potiphar put him in charge of his household**, and ... *everything* he owned. – Genesis 39:2-4 NIV

But **[then]** while Joseph was *there* in the *prison*, the Lord was *with* him ... and granted him *favor* in the **[Max Factored]** eyes of the *prison warden*. So **the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison**, and ... *all* that was done *there*. ... because the Lord was *with* Joseph and **gave him success in whatever he did**. – Genesis 39:20-23 NIV

Well *there's* a consolation prize, huh? "Is *this* what *faith* gets me? Cuz it's *not* what I *signed up* for." Take heart, cuz **the pit is always about something deeper than the pit**. Just as **suffering is always about something beyond the suffering**. This is when we get to see who we're really serving: *God* or *self*? And *why*: **to get what we want**, or **to grow into what He wants?** As a matter of fact, **the real tragedy isn't the suffering**, we *all* have our *cross* to *bear*, **it's wasting the moment while we're there!** So whatever you do, don't *sit* in your *cell* and *sulk*. In a *palace*, in a *pit*, in a *box* with a *fox*, point is, **the world defines success by circumstances**. The more *comfy* your *current conditions*, the more *successful* you are.

But, **God defines success by our trust in Him, and our care for others.** For instance, when Jesus was *unjustly murdered* on a cross, was He a *success* or a *failure*? They *thought* He'd *failed* – till three days later. So, in *God's* eyes, lil' Joe is *more successful* at the end of this *unhappy chapter* of his life.

[Cuz] The eyes of the Lord are on those who *fear* Him, on those whose *hope* is in His *unfailing love* ... [and] We wait in *hope* ... for we *trust* in His holy *name*. – Psalm 33:18-21 NIV

[Because, sometimes] In *faithfulness* You have *afflicted* me. [And in those times] May Your *unfailing love* be *my comfort* – Psalm 119:75-76 NIV

[Cuz, you see] [The Lord] called for a famine in the land ... [but] He sent a man before them— Joseph—who was *sold* as a *slave*. [Uh-oh. Remember what we said about being *sent*? I'll *remind* you in a *moment*] They hurt his *feet* with *fetters*, he was *laid* in *irons*. Until the *time* that His Word came to *pass*, the Word of the Lord *tested* him. [As it does *all* of us, with all those *seemingly unfulfilled promises*] – Psalm 105:16-21 NKJ

[But] The God of [Joseph's dad] *Jacob* [in whom *little Joe* put his *faith*] ... established it for a *testimony* in *Joseph* when he went throughout the land of Egypt. – Psalm 81:5 NAS



When Jesus *sent* the man born blind, *unaided*, down a *treacherous* quarter-mile stairway, to *grope* his way to his *healing* in the *Pool of Siloam*, we saw, when *he* saw, that **he hadn't been abandoned by God, but sent**, which can *feel* the *same*. Well, that ain't *nothin'* compared to the *testimony* He's *establishing* in us! "He *sent*" "Joseph" to be "*sold as a slave*". So, *that* was a *huge success*! Do you *know* what you *signed up* for? Probably *not*. But:



We *know* that in *all* [the very *bad*] *things* God works for the *good* of those who *love* Him [but] ... *according* to His *purpose*. – Romans 8:28 NIV



[Because] "Whoever wants to become *great* among you must be your *servant*, and whoever wants to be *first* must be *slave* of *all*. For even the Son of Man did not *come* to *be served*, but *to serve*, and *to give* His *life* as a *ransom* for many." – Mark 10:43-45 NIV

So, *Yes!* The *cross* was a *success!* Which He *knew*, cuz He *knew* what He *came* to *do*. But do you? Joseph is *imprisoned*. He's lost his *position*, *reputation*, and any *hope* of any *future* he'd *hoped* for. **Think it'll be part of his *testimony*?** Yes. *One* of the *best!* **Think he *feels successful*?** You *kidding*? This may be hard to *fathom*, but in *ancient Egypt*, **greatness was defined by how much money and how many servants you had at your disposal.** Hard to *relate*. But that's just how it *is*, as the *next chapter* (literally) of Joseph's life *begins*, with the *unclear* and *seemingly unending suffering* of:

Some time later, [Yuck!] the [royal] *cupbearer* [who *grew* the *grapes*, made the *wine*, and *tasted* for *poison*] and the [royal] *baker* [who *ran* the *bakery* and *brewery*] of the *king* of *Egypt* [their *god*, with a *small 'g'*] *offended* [lit. *sinned against*] their *master* [lit. *lord*] ... Pharaoh [who had a *Downton Abbey* at his *disposal*] was *angry* with his two officials ... and put them in *custody* in the [dungeon under the] *house* of [Potiphar *Schwarzenegger*] ... in the *same* [royal] *prison* where *Joseph* was [unfairly, unjustly, and oddly being] *confined*. [And, in a *twist* of *fate*] The captain of the guard [little Joe's lord, with a *little 'l'*] *assigned* them to *Joseph*, [the man the Mrs. had *accused*] and he *attended* [lit. *served*] them. – Genesis 40:1-4 NIV



Just *three* pharaoh's before *Joseph* (4,000 years before *us*) a guy made a model of a royal Egyptian *bakery* and *brewery*. (Tomb of Meketre, c. 1978^{BC}) It's held up quite well! Bread and beer making are closely related, so the *two processes* were combined in *one complex*. Want to see what they made?



This is a 4,000-year-old loaf of Egyptian flat bread that was 100 years past its pull date when Joseph was in prison. (Mortuary Temple, Mentuhotep II, c. 2010^{BC}) And this is a 3,400-year-old bowl of grapes! (Tomb of Kha, c. 1386^{BC})



Not only has Potiphar *wrongly imprisoned* his own *chief of staff*, he's now got him *serving criminal servants!* And yet, this just *oozes* God's *sovereignty*, and *reminds* us how **the Lord works within any circumstances without being limited in the least**. But, you know what this says about Potiphar? **He still trusts Joseph!** And what's *that* say about Joseph? **He must still trust God.** And what's *that* say about God? **He must want us to trust Him ... and attend to the needs of others ... no matter our current confines**, or how *unfairly* He's *allowed* us to have been *treated* ... to establish *our testimony*. There's actually a big difference between something being **unfair** and **unjust**.



For instance, if a kid in a classroom has a *peanut allergy*, and the *only* snack that day is *peanut butter crackers*, the kid will *either* be *deprived* of the snack *altogether*, or wind up with *plain ol' crackers*. **This is not fair**. Not fair at *all*. But, **it's so obviously just and right**. But when it comes to the *many deprivations* God *allows* in *our lives*, it's not *nearly* so *obvious*. Cuz **we're not aware of what'll actually kill us, from our eternal Father's perspective**. So, like young Joe, we gotta *trust* the Lord. Because:

After *they* had been in custody for [the **dreaded**] *some time*, each of the two men—the *cupbearer* and the *baker* ... had a *dream* the same night, and [since **God was behind it**] *each* dream had a [actual] *meaning* of its own. When *Joseph* came to them the next morning, *he* saw that *they* were *dejected*. So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were *in custody with him* in *his master's house*, "Why are your faces so sad today?" – Genesis 40:4-7 NIV



Need we go further? Wow. *That* testimony right *there*, is *much* more *powerful* than the "*powerful*" stuff that happens *after* he's *powerful!* And *this* is what makes Joseph so *uniquely* successful! **He comforts fellow-sufferers while he waits for God to make sense!** We don't *ignore* our own *pain*, we *comfort others* in *spite* of it. Cuz sometimes in the "*some time*" **we waste our time demanding relief when our Father's only offering comfort**. Know the *difference*? During a *marathon*, **relief would be a recliner and a foot massage**. Whereas **comfort is a cup of Gatorade and the encouragement to press on!** And if you haven't noticed, we're in a *marathon* down here!

[And **that's why Paul says**] Praise be to ... the *Father of compassion* and the *God of all comfort*, who *comforts us* in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. – 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV

And since he'd *been comforted* in the *past* with *divinely prophetic dreams*, as well as the *ability* to *understand* their *meaning*, Joseph *now* *comforts* his fellow *dungeoneers* with his *God-given gift*.

Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? [the One with a big ‘G’] Tell me your dreams.” So [in a nutshell] the chief cupbearer ... [said] “I saw a vine ... [with] three branches ... [that] ripened into grapes ... [and I] squeezed them into Pharaoh’s cup” ... [Joseph said] Pharaoh will ... restore you to your position ... [so] *remember me and mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison.* [So now we know what he’s feeling while he’s comforting] For I was *forcibly* carried off ... [and] I have done *nothing* to *deserve* being put in a *dungeon.*” ... [The baker said] “I too had a dream: On my *head* were three baskets of *bread* ... but the *birds* were *eating* them ... on my *head.*” [And everyone went, “Ooh, it don’t take a *prophet* to know *that ain’t good.*” And it *wasn’t.* Three days later, the *body* of the *Chief of bread* was *broken and hung a tree,* and the *Chief of wine* was *forgiven and restored,* just like the *two criminals* on either side of Jesus] ... [The] cupbearer, however, did *not remember* Joseph; [in fact] he *forgot* [all about] him. – Genesis 40:8-23 NIV

Yes! Success! From God’s perspective. Because **Joseph needs some more “some time”** before he’ll *truly* be ready for the *unimaginable* undertaking his Lord (with a big ‘L’) has, *unbeknownst* to him, *assigned* to him. You see, **each tragedy served to increase His capacity to trust and serve.** Because, as an *arrogant son,* **he served himself;** as a *prominent slave* **he served the powerful;** as a *convicted felon* **he’s serving the dejected;** and as a *ruler* **he’ll serve and save the entire starving world.** But first, God’s gotta *teach* him the *great truth* of *true greatness.* Because God is *establishing* a *testimony* in Joseph. And *back* in his *boyhood* dreams, everyone was bowing, but *no one* was *servicing!* Because **God had called Joseph to serve the hungry who bowed to his authority ... to be their savior.** With a *small ‘s’.*

Joseph is one of the *greatest,* most *successful,* humans in *all* history. And *not* because of his remarkable rise to power, but because **he fulfilled the Word of God against all odds.** And you can *too.* By *trusting Him* and *servicing those* confined with you.

See, *your King* comes to you, *righteous* and having *salvation,* gentle and riding on a donkey ... “As for you, because of the blood of My covenant *with you,* I will free *your prisoners* from the *waterless pit* ... O *prisoners of hope*” – Zechariah 9:9-12 NIV

[The Lord] gives *food* to the *hungry* ... [and] sets *prisoners free* – Psalm 146:7 NIV

[And] “I, the Lord, have called you in *righteousness* ... to *free captives* from *prison* and to *release* from the *dungeon* those who *sit* in *darkness.*” – Isaiah 42:6-7 NIV

[So let’s] [Comfort] with the *comfort* we *ourselves* have *received* – 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV

[Remember] “The Son of Man ... [came] to *give His life*” – Matthew 20:26-28 NIV

And *that’s* what we *signed up* for.

Because, **truly successful living involves great and generous giving.** Which requires *defying suffering* by *defining success* as God does – as *servicing.* Because, when you’re trusting our Father, and caring for others, in *spite* of your *own circumstances,* and within the *confines* of your *own* dreaded “some time”, you just *couldn’t* be *more prosperous* in the eyes of the Lord.

So, how successful *are* you in *this* chapter of *your* life?