

From the Book
Lasting Success
David A. Norris

Chapter Eleven

*Joseph, God's Pattern
for an Overcomer*

Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Have every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. Genesis 45:1-2, 4-5

Joseph knew the pain of mental and spiritual woundedness. As in the life of Job, the scene here is opened for us to see the divine purpose in Joseph's afflictions. Joseph's difficulties were hidden as they occurred. As in our lives, God's purposes eventually became apparent.

God's Purposes

1. The drastic change in Joseph's life was probably necessary. As a favorite son, he was in great danger of being spoiled. Then there were portions of his nature that would remain undeveloped except in circumstances away from home. Circumstances, prosperous or adverse, do not alter character, but they are the means of developing character.

2. God used all these things in carrying out His plans. He had a great work for Joseph to do. He knew that the Israelites needed, first of all, the long discipline of residence in Egypt to fit them to become the people of God. Second, by contact with a highly civilized people they received an education in arts, law and government, – unlikely prospects in Canaan. Third, in Egypt they would not adulterate their race and lose their distinctiveness through intermarriage with the Canaanites. Finally, their marvelous redemption

would teach them to have faith in God and His omniscient care.

Good Out of Evil

It is a comfort to know that God rules over all and that He can use the evil which men do in such a way as to defeat their plans and bring forth good.

Practical Observations

1. Selfishness is the rich soil in which all wrong passions flourish.

2. Envy is diabolical. Other sins yield some short-term pleasure, but envy offers nothing but torment. It is the soil of selfishness in which crimes flourish.

3. A saint in his worst of trials has greater happiness than a sinner in his best triumph.

4. The crime that results from envy brings with it a long train of sorrows to many persons.

5. God brought good out of this evil, but it was evil in itself and would have brought only evil had not God intervened.

6. Jacob deceived his father, and his children deceived him. As the saying goes, "Curses, like chickens, come home to roost."

7. Sins are social; crime begets crime. Envy, hatred, murder, lying, and unkindness to parents were all united together in this transaction.

8. Here is inspiration and comfort for our disappointing hours. Joseph, in the pit or as a slave, could see no way in which his captivity could work out for good, **yet he was faithful**.

9. The mills of God grind slowly, but "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23).

Joseph, Ruler in Egypt—Genesis 41:38-48

Golden Text—*Them that honor Me I will honor* (I Samuel 2:30).

The Section of History—Genesis 39-41

New Testament Light—(1) The story (Acts 7:9-11); (2) Peter in prison (Acts 12:4-11); (3) God's providence (Romans 8:28); (4) faithful in few things, ruler over many (Matthew 25:21, 23; Luke 19:26); (5) promises of success (Matthew 6:33; Mark 10:29-30). Psalm 105:16-22 refers to God's wonderful and loving providence over His people at this time.

Time—1716 B.C., thirteen years after Joseph was sold to the Midianites.

Place—It is generally supposed that the capitol of Egypt at this time was Zoan, near one of the mouths of the Nile River.

Joseph was now 30 years old (41:46). He was 17 when he was sold into Egypt (37:2). It is supposed that he spent 10 of the 13 intervening years as a slave of Potiphar and 3 in the king's prison.

Jacob, now 121 years old, was still living at Hebron.

Explanatory

I. Thirteen Years of Preparation—Joseph in “The Testings” of Life.

Ten Years of Service and Trial. Joseph, when he reached Egypt, was sold to Potiphar, “the captain of the guard.” The military class in Egypt ranked next to the priesthood, and the entire force consisted of 410,000 men who were divided into two corps, one thousand serving as the king’s body-guards. Potiphar was probably the captain of one of these, and was consequently a man of great honor and influence.

Three Years in Prison. At the end of ten years, another bitter trial came to Joseph. After long resisting temptation, his very goodness was made the occasion of an unjust accusation. Without trial he was cast into prison. In Genesis 41:14, it is called “the dungeon.” In Psalms 105:17, 18, we are told that his feet were hurt with fetters; he was laid in iron. The imprisonment was at first severe. But God kept him and afterwards gave him a better life of waiting upon the other prisoners.

Steps in Joseph’s Training and Preparation. (1) His troubles were severe. (2) He learned trust in God. He simply clung closer to God, as should we. (3) He had long opportunity to study himself and his needs. (4) Whatever the circumstances, Joseph did what was right. He not only *looked* on the bright side, he *worked* on the bright side. The way to be ready for larger fields is to be faithful in the smaller ones. It is good to remember that the particular sphere we are in is of very small importance compared with what we do in that sphere. Humility is just as beautiful in a hovel as in a palace. Truth, courage, and honor are no more noble on a throne than in a factory or on a farm. Love, gentleness, and self-denial are as blessed in the kitchen as in the parlor, or in the prison as in the court. (5) The injustice done to him did not make him unjust to others. (6) He was observant and diligent in the development of his mind. (7) The work he had to do for Potiphar was excellent training for the future. Egyptian courtiers were often rich. One, for example, had 835 oxen, 220 cows and calves, 760 asses, 2,235 goat-like sheep, and 974 goats. For Joseph to care for all these would require much learning, preparation and executive ability.

II. Links in the Chain of Divine Providence by Which Joseph Was Delivered.

The story of the dreams of the butler and baker and Joseph’s aid to them is given in Genesis, chapter 40. Joseph continued in prison for two years after showing kindness to the released cupbearer, who ungratefully forgot all about Joseph. Then, when God sent two strange dreams to Pharaoh, the butler remembered Joseph. He was called out of prison and, receiving the

interpretation from God, told Pharaoh that the two dreams had the same meaning. In this New Testament dispensation dreams are no longer needed or used by God, but in the Old Testament God often used dreams to warn of coming events. Seven years of abundance were to be followed by seven years of extraordinary dearth. Joseph counseled Pharaoh to appoint a qualified person to have authority over all the land, that he might store up the surplus corn of the seven years of plenty for the seven years of famine.

There are Two Elements in every life—the **Divine** and the **Human**—God’s providence and man’s free choice. Our success in life depends upon both. All the open doors in the world are of no use if we have not prepared to enter them. What are opportunities for business to one who has not learned business? What are libraries to one who refuses to learn to read? We have seen the human element in Joseph’s life in his faithfulness and discipline.

The Divine Element interrelates with the human element. All through his life there were circumstances beyond his control. This divine element opened doors. It prepared ways, it directed the concurring actions of men, and Joseph experienced enhanced character development.

III. Joseph Exalted to Be Governor of Egypt—Verses 38-45.

38. *And Pharaoh said*, in response to the advice Joseph had given, *Can we find such a one as this is*, for the carrying out of the proposed plans? Doubtless the story of Joseph during his slavery and his prison life was familiar to them, and by his past actions, as well as his present wisdom, they saw clearly that he was especially fitted for the proposed work. *A man in whom the Spirit of God is*. He attributed Joseph’s wisdom and fidelity to the true source. One in whom God’s Spirit dwells (1) will have wisdom and unfailing common sense; (2) will be faithful to all his duties; (3) will have his commitment to overcoming obstacles attended by God’s blessing.

39. *Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this*. We see in Joseph a striking illustration of the truth of the promise, “Them that honor Me, I will honor.” If God had shown Joseph much, He would also give him wisdom in the future. Such a man would be invaluable as a ruler. *There is none so discreet*, refers to Joseph’s intelligence, and clear insight into matters and his comprehension of their true character, while *wise* denotes a capacity of devising measures to gain desired ends.

40. *Thou shalt be over my house*, my palace, including all the officers and ministers of the kingdom.

42. *And Pharaoh took off his ring*. The ring was undoubtedly a signet, or seal-ring, which gave validity to the documents to which it was affixed and by the delivery of which, therefore, Pharaoh delegated to Joseph the chief authority in the state.

43. *Made him to ride in the second chariot.* Thus arrayed, Joseph was placed in Pharaoh's second chariot (next to Pharaoh's) and they led a splendid procession through the city.

44. *I am Pharaoh.* That is, I, by my authority as the Emperor, raise Joseph to this position. *And without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.* Joseph's authority was to be absolute and universal.

IV. Joseph's Great Work—Verses 46, 48.

46. *And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh.* He did not remain among the pleasures of the court but immediately went to his new duties. *And went throughout all the land of Egypt* to issue the proper orders and, in order to see their execution, made an immediate survey to determine the sight and size of the storehouses required for the different quarters of the country.

48. *And he gathered up all the food of the seven years.* According to his own advice to Pharaoh, Joseph gathered up a fifth part (v. 34). This was the government tax. Doubtless the people also stored up grain for themselves, but according to their faith which was much less than Joseph's. This tax continued during the seven years of plenty.

True Success. His success consisted (1) in his worthy character and fitness to serve God and man, (2) in his work in helping a great number of people, (3) in his proclamation of God to an idolatrous people, and (4) in the blessings he brought upon his father's family.

Lessons from Joseph in Egypt

1. There is a divine and human element in every successful life.
2. The trials and experiences are meant to prepare us for greater success.
3. So our whole life is a school for the future life. "We know not what we shall be." We do not know what glorious work or place is before us.
4. But we do know that faithfulness in little things is the preparation for greater things. We work for God doing our best every day.
5. We cannot control our circumstances, but we can control what we shall do in the circumstances.
6. God's plans and promises never fail, though He may be long in working them out.
7. The abiding presence of God by His Holy Spirit, leading to obedience and pure motives, is the way to wisdom and to success. He that serves God with supreme devotion will serve man most faithfully.
8. There is always a demand for people who do their best.

9. Influence in the long run belongs to those who rid their minds of selfish aims. People feel themselves safe when with those who are unselfish.

10. Success is honoring God by doing what you can do well, and doing well whatever you can do.

11. There will always come a famine of sorts, but Christ has plenty to spare for all who will come to Him.

Subject: The Way to a Successful Life

Follow the story. **Apply** it to our present life. What did God do, and what was Joseph learning? He was learning about Egypt and obtaining an inside view of the people's characters and feelings, which no king on the throne could obtain. He was growing strong and self-reliant. He was learning kindness and the power of serving. He learned of the faithfulness of God and the importance of honoring God's ways rather than what seemed expedient. The difficulties would have been of no use to him if he had not learned to overcome them as they came along.

Illustration—John Bunyan could not understand why God should allow him to be imprisoned and shut out from his work for twelve precious years. He longed to preach the Gospel to the thousands of people waiting to hear him. He could not then see that by writing *Pilgrim's Progress* while he was in prison he would preach to millions instead of thousands, and for centuries instead of years.

Joseph Forgiving His Brethren—Genesis 45:1-15

Golden Text—*If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him* [forgiveness is assumed; a better translation would be: “consider him restored”] (Luke 17:3).

The Section of History—Genesis 41:53-45:28

New Testament Light—(1) overcoming evil with good (Romans 12:20, 21); (2) how to treat enemies (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:14); (3) forgiving (Matthew 6:12, 14-15; 18:21-35); (4) how God leads to repentance (Romans 2:4; Matthew 5:45).

Time—1707 B.C., the second year of the famine, 9 years after the last lesson and 22 after the sale of Joseph by his brothers.

Place—Heliopolis, in Egypt; situated on the Nile, near the mouth of the Nile. It was about 250 miles from Hebron, Jacob's home.

Jacob—About 130 years old. He is still living at Hebron with eleven of his sons.

Joseph—39 years old, of which he has spent 22 in Egypt, 13 of them as a slave and 9 as a governor. He has a wife and two children. Benjamin must be 24 or 25 years old.

I. A Panorama

The story that follows is a series of events from life. Each has its own way of instruction for us.

1. The Famine in Hebron. Jacob's family of 11 sons and many servants was on the brink of starvation.

2. The Caravan to Egypt. Ten brothers went to Egypt, leaving Benjamin at home. There were probably many beasts of burden besides those which the brothers rode. There would also have been servants.

3. Joseph's Rough Treatment of His Brothers. He denounced them as spies and imprisoned them partly in order to learn about his father without disclosing himself.

4. The Ghost of the Past. In their trouble, his brothers remembered what they had done to Joseph. The past confronted them. Reuben recounted how he had tried to save Joseph. Joseph himself overheard and understood all this, although they thought they were talking in a tongue unknown to him. Reuben's character and past actions were thus revealed to Joseph, and Joseph knew how to treat him.

5. Simeon, whom his father called self-willed, cruel, and fierce in anger (Genesis 49:5-7), was kept in prison as the one who most needed discipline, as doubtless the fiercest toward Joseph. The others were released after three days and returned home with provisions.

6. The Second Caravan. They could not go back to Egypt without Benjamin. The father refused to send Benjamin; starvation was at hand. Jacob finally consented with sad reluctance, and Benjamin went along. They took for the Egyptian governor a gift of spices which the famine had not destroyed.

7. The Second Reception. The touching scene at a feast: Joseph saw his own brother once more. Benjamin was given a portion. Joseph had to express his feelings in some way.

8. The Silver Cup was put in Benjamin's sack so he would be brought back, and no distinction would be made between the brothers who had sold Joseph. They returned to the capitol.

9. Judah's Noble and Touching Plea revealed his character to Joseph. This was Judah, who all "shall praise," the "lion's whelp," whose "sceptre shall not depart" (Genesis 49:8-10). In Judah's intercession for Benjamin he demonstrated the feeling that accompanies meaningful prayer.

10. Why Did Not Joseph's Brethren Recognize Him? (1) They were grown up when he left them, but Joseph left them as a beardless boy of seventeen, and he was now a man of forty. (2) They were in the shepherd dress in which he knew them, while he was robed in the magnificence of royalty. (3) They spoke in his native tongue while he spoke Egyptian, and to them only through an interpreter. (4) They had no expectation of seeing him in that position, but he knew the country from which they came.

11. Joseph's Treatment of His Brothers at first seems to be strange, but the reasons seemed to unfold as follows: (1) To learn

all about them and their circumstances, so as to know what course to take. (2) To awaken their memories of the past and stimulate their conscience toward repentance. (3) To later render his forgiveness of the past more complete since they would know that it was in full view of all they had done. (4) To test his brothers and to see how worthy they were of the benefits that he could confer. He learned how they now treated their father, how they loved Benjamin, how kindly their feelings were toward one another. Their trials had greatly improved their character. (5) To show them that God had fulfilled his early dreams (Genesis 42:9); His interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams was therefore also correct, and God had been with him in life.

II. Joseph Reveals Himself—Verses 1-4.

When Joseph had sufficiently tested his brothers and found them tender of heart, full of kindness to Benjamin and his father, then Joseph saw that the hour had come to reveal himself to his brothers.

1. *Then Joseph could not refrain himself* (i.e., keep himself from showing his emotions) before all them that stood by him (i.e., the Egyptian officials of his household); and he cried (issued an instruction), he caused every Egyptian to leave, for two reasons. (1) His role forbids the presence of others at this unrestrained outburst of emotion among the brothers. Besides, (2) the workings of conscience bringing up unavoidable recollections of past errors are not to be unveiled to the public.

2. *And he wept aloud.* These were tears of emotion—pity and joy more than sorrow. *The Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard* the sound of Joseph weeping. Orientals tend to withhold the expression of their feelings. The news about his brothers became known and the Pharaoh was *pleased*, Genesis 45:16.

3. *I am Joseph.* The natural voice, the native tongue, the long-remembered features would all at once strike the brothers with great apprehension. *Doth my father yet live?* This question shows where Joseph's thoughts were. *They were troubled at his presence.* The memory of all the wrong they had done to their brother came upon their souls like an avalanche. They would have sooner expected thunder and lightning than to see their injured brother on a throne in Egypt. They knew they were in Joseph's power. If he should treat them as they once had treated him, there would be no hope for them.

4. *And Joseph said . . . I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.* It was impossible to evade allusion to their earlier wickedness, but, rather than being angry and upbraiding, Joseph revealed a humble spirit of love and tender care.

Gospel Applications (1) Jesus seeks us before we know Him. (2) Before Jesus can come into our lives, there must be an awakening of our conscience. We must see and feel our sin. Then

(3) we need to repent in dust and ashes, and show by our attitude that we repudiate the old evil and desire to do the good deeds of the new man. (4) Jesus comesto us as our brother. He is not ashamed to call us brethren (Hebrews 2:11). All brotherly feelings are in Him toward us. (5) He bids us come to Him (Matthew 11:28-30) and be not afraid, though (6) we have rejected and neglected Him. (7) Jesus forgives all the past. (8) Jesus comes to us to supply our needs, to save us from the spiritual famine of worldliness. (9) This salvation is not for us alone, but for our friends, our families, and our children. We are to go forth as demonstrations of God's divine abundance and invite all to accept Christ.

III. God Brings Good Out of Man's Evil—Verses 5-8.

5. *Now therefore be not grieved.* Joseph here shows the nobleness of his character. Wounds healed do leave scars behind them, and sometimes the memories make it harder to forgive ourselves than to forgive others. But sin, when forgiven, should be considered forgiven! We should trust in the forgiveness of Christ who paid for our sin instead of wasting our strength and joy in vain and bitter regrets. "Let the dead past bury its dead." *For God did send me before you to preserve life.* God used their evil to accomplish His purpose. There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how He will. This is the joy of perfect faith in the divine providence, that God overrules all men and all events and will compel all to aid in carrying out the purposes of His love. This is the final stage of penitence. The knowledge that God has prevented our sin from doing additional harm erases the bitterness and despair with which we view forgiven sin in our past. At the same time it strengthens the most effectual bulwark in our mind for rejecting sin—obedience to the holy and overruling God.

6. *God sent me before you.* This phrase shows that God was bringing good out of their evil.

7. *So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.* Although the brothers were guilty, God accomplished His will through their deed. They were to blame, but this thought made it easier, now that they had repented, to forgive themselves.

Note. First, it is impossible for us to judge whether or not any event is a blessing or a misfortune by simply looking at the event itself because we do not know the whole. Second, there is a danger of using the fact that good can come from evil as an excuse to sin. We should clearly see that the evil and its consequences are ours to avoid, and the good is God's to accomplish. It would be inconceivably horrible for this world if God were not able to bring good out of man's evil.

IV. Joseph Sends for His Father to Come Into Egypt—Verses 9-15.

8. *Haste ye, and go up to my father*, for every moment's delay lengthened the sorrow and anxiety of the aged patriarch.

9. *Thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen*. It probably was an unsettled district, but rich in pastures and belonged in a very loose way to Egypt.

10. *And thy household*. In verse 18 Joseph speaks of "their households," showing that each of the patriarchs now had his own body of dependents, in addition to the larger clan which belonged to Jacob.

11. *And, behold, your eyes see*. There is no doubt of my identity, and you can thus prove to our father, Jacob, that there is no danger in accepting this invitation.

12. *And ye shall tell my father of all my glory*. Why? Not out of pride, but (1) to make him sure that his promise could be carried out; (2) to comfort his father in the good fortune that had come to his long-lost son; (3) to make it easier for the ten sons to confess to their father the crime and deceit of the past. They would see that the present good radiated the power of God.

13. *And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept*. These were tears of joy. Indeed, humility cherishes the tender feelings.

14. *After that his brethren talked with him*. They were now at rest, the past forgiven, the present full of hope, and they could now tell Joseph the many things he wished to know about them and to learn Joseph's history from him, that they might repeat the marvelous tale to their father.

Gospel Applications (1) We have a Prince, a King, holding all riches in His power, and we should tell others. (2) When God invites us to come, it is to abide in His kingdom, and eat of the richness of His blessings. (3) There is the perfect assurance of forgiveness. (4) God brings good out of evil, and teaches us, as we look at the depth of our sins, to see the height of His love and to wonder and adore so wondrous a salvation. (5) Christ expresses His love to us. He loads us with kindness. He rejoices with us. (6) We talk with Him now as His children, read His Word and walk in loving communion with Him.

Practical Observations in Conclusion

1. Much of the punishment of all sin is future punishment, Joseph's brethren were suffering for sins committed twenty-two years before.

2. Those who have done wrong must expect to be tested and proved before they are received back into friendship and trust.

3. Often times it is by some circumstance or event, which perplexes, troubles, or gladdens us that leads to new thoughts regarding conduct and communicate important ideas for success in life.

4. In finding their lost brother again, the sons of Jacob also found their own better selves which they had lost. They had been living in a lie, unable to look the past in the face.

5. Your only protection against ruin through exposure is in refraining from sin, which will always expose you.

6. Note the delicacy and courtesy with which Joseph treated his brothers who had injured him. These are basic Christian virtues to be diligently cultivated that lead to success.

7. There is great comfort and encouragement in the assurance that God overrules all. He does not destroy man's free-will, but He uses man's actions to accomplish His own purposes. What a sad and hopeless thing it would be if the world of human affairs were like the chance world of "Hafed's Dream!" Looking for an acre of diamonds, Hafed lost what was really valuable. The Lord reigneth. The Lord, infinite in wisdom, love, and power, is our basis for being overcomers.