

# OVERCOMING SUCCESS

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*Genesis 41-42*

## Introduction:

Success is something that we all want to obtain. We want to have it, we want to keep it, and we usually want others to know when it was that we received it. But the problem with success is that it often causes us to forget where it came from. It is so easy to become convinced that the success we enjoy is our own doing.

As we have looked at the life of Joseph we see a man committed to God and to godliness. In spite of the disastrous events of his life he remained faithful to God. He faced many difficult and trying experiences which tested him in many ways. Yet we have seen how he overcame each disappointment, and how he triumphed in each test he faced. What he didn't know at the time was that these tests that he was facing were actually being used by God to prepare him for an amazing position of responsibility and power.

His first major test was the test of adversity as he encountered the treachery of his brothers. Their hatred and desire for vengeance led them to sell him to some traders, resulting in him becoming a slave in Egypt, far from home and family. Yet he overcame their treachery, remaining faithful to God and eventually being promoted to a position of power in the household of Potiphar.

Next came the test of the body, as he faced incredible sexual temptation. Potiphar's wife cast longing eyes at him and not only offered herself to him but demanded that he satisfy her passions and lustful fantasies. Once again, he remained faithful, and refused her advances, knowing that to comply would violate Potiphar's trust in him as well as destroying his relationship with God. He overcame the temptation and passed the test of the flesh with flying colors.

The result of his faithfulness, however, landed him in prison. But even there he was faithful and God began the next stage of his preparation. He was promoted to a position of leadership and responsibility in

the prison, being placed in charge of the other prisoners. But eventually he faced another test, what we might call the test of the soul. He was faced with the discouragement of being forgotten. When he had the opportunity to have his case brought before Pharaoh, the friend that he trusted to take that message to the king forgot all about him. Yet again, Joseph remained faithful. In fact, in all of this the key thing that he learned was that he needed to continue to trust God and that he was totally dependant on God. Later on when Pharaoh said to him, "I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." His response came immediately, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." Joseph had learned to have no confidence in himself but only in God.

He overcame discouragement and passed the test of the soul. His years in the dungeon had brought him to see that that his mind, his will and his emotions must be completely committed to God.

Well, in our study today we find Joseph facing another test—an-other adversity that he needs to overcome. This is perhaps the most sinister of all because the deceitfulness of the human heart causes us to question why this would even be a problem. It is the test of prosperity. Joseph is confronted by the dangers of success.

## The Story

I guess the place to begin is by looking at the account of what happened in Joseph's life to put him into this position of power and success and then we will look at the issues involved.

I think you probably know the story and we read some of it earlier from Genesis 41, but we are going to review it briefly.

- Pharaoh's dreams – vv. 1-7 – *review the dreams briefly.*
- Inability of Pharaoh's wise men and magicians to interpret the dreams – v. 8. It is always impossible for the natural man to understand the things of God. This was a message from God.
- The stirring of the cupbearer's memory – vv. 9-13 – he tells Pharaoh about Joseph who interpreted his dream two years earlier.
- Joseph's interaction with Pharaoh – vv. 14-16 – he gives all credit to God for any ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams.

- The interpretation of the dreams – vv. 17-32 – seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. The certainty of this because the dream was doubled, two dreams...
- Joseph's advice – vv. 33-36 – it would certainly have been risky of offering advice to the King. Note – Joseph did not say a word about himself...this was not a self-promoting suggestion.
- Joseph's promotion – vv. 37-44 – Pharaoh recognized the great wisdom and ability Joseph possessed.
- Joseph completely integrated into the royal court – v. 45. His name is changed, and he is given an Egyptian wife, the daughter of one of the priests of their godless religion.

Theodore Epp gives some keen insight into what this meant for Joseph. Listen to these words:

*"The hands that had known the hard toil of a slave were now adorned by the king's ring. Joseph's feet had been freed from the torment of the fetters, and now a gold chain was put around his neck. Joseph had lost his coat of many colors 13 years earlier when his brothers took it from him in anger and jealousy. Later, he had left his outer garment behind in the hands of Potiphar's wife when he had fled from her. But now he was given a royal wardrobe of fine linen. Once Joseph was treated as offscouring by the Egyptians, but now all Egypt was commanded to bow before him as he rode on the second chariot as the prime minister of Egypt."*

What a change this was for Joseph. And all of this happened because Joseph was determined to please God and refused to yield to the temptation of sin.

## The Test

So that is the story. But now the question is, would he be able to accept prosperity and still keep his heart right with God? He was only 30 years old at this time and his new position and prosperity could have easily turned his attention away from spiritual things. However, God had been preparing him for 13 years—since Joseph had been sold as a slave by his brothers. These years of training were needed to prepare

Joseph's character and to give him strength for the test he was now facing. The test of success and prosperity is one which causes the demise of many people if they are not properly prepared.

Even though Pharaoh changed Joseph's life completely with this promotion, and though he changed Joseph's name, he could not change Joseph's heart. In the verses that follow we see the dedication and commitment of Joseph to doing his required tasks to the very best of his ability. There are several things which stand out in Joseph's life here:

- He was personally involved in the project from beginning to end. He did not run the show from his ivory tower – vv. 46-49.
- He was diligent and meticulous the task assigned to him – vv. 47-49.
- He gave his sons names that reflected his trust and reliance on God – vv. 50-52. *Discuss the meanings of the names.*
- When the famine came he personally oversaw the distribution of the grain that had been stored.

At no point did Joseph allow his position or power become a source of pride in his own ability or a source of conflict with others. He passed the test of prosperity and overcame the dangers of success.

## Conclusion

So what are the lessons for us? We live in a rather prosperous part of the world. We have all achieved some measure of success in our lives. What are the dangers we face when dealing with success and prosperity?

- Pride – a puffed-up sense of my own value. The Bible is clear about the results of pride. Remember Nebuchadnezzar – *look at Daniel 4 and discuss what happened – read vv. 28-32.* Prov. 16:18 makes it clear, "Pride goes before destruction..." There is always a risk, when blessed with prosperity and success, of becoming enamored with our own importance, and believing that we are responsible for our own success.
- Self-sufficiency – this is the corollary of the first one. If we become proud and wrapped up in ourselves, we forget that all we have and are is because of what God has done in and through us. One of the great concerns that Moses had as God's people were preparing to

enter the promised land was that they would forget God. *Look at Deut. 8 and read vv. 7-14, 17-18.*

Overcoming success – the test of prosperity... in many ways the dangers of prosperity and success are far greater than the dangers of poverty and distress. The latter often drive us to our knees to seek God, while the former lead to an inflated view of our own worth and sufficiency.

The key to Joseph's overcoming character was that he never lost sight of God's role in everything that happened in his life. And the only way to victory for us is to keep our eyes focussed on God and recognize that everything we have in life and everything we are is not because of our doing, but is the result of his hand on our lives.