

INTRODUCTION

This is the first message in a new series entitled “Joseph: Following God’s Road to Success.” Genesis is one of the most important books in the Bible, and the story of Joseph and his amazing Technicolor life takes up one fourth of the book.

God’s road to success is like that song by the Beatles. It’s a “Long and Winding Road.” You can’t appreciate the first part of Joseph’s story without a synopsis of his entire life. When he was only 17, he was so hated by his brothers they beat him up and sold him into slavery and lied to their dad, telling him a wild animal had killed him. Joseph was taken to Egypt where he became a household servant of man named Potiphar. Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him and when he refused, she accused Joseph of sexually molesting her. He ended up in prison. While in jail, Joseph interpreted the dreams of a couple of his fellow inmates, and years later Pharaoh brought him out of jail to explain one of his nightmares. To fast forward to the end of his life, Joseph ended up as the Prime Minister of Egypt, the second most powerful man in the world’s only superpower at the time.

God has a road of success for you, and your main goal in life should be following that road. But in order to get on God’s road to success, you must embrace the correct definition of success. Success is not retiring early with a lot of money. Success is not having a nice home with two cars in the garage. Success is not advancing to the top of the ladder. The Bible definition for success is quite simple: Success is finding and following God’s will for your life. And with God, success is not a destination to be reached; it’s a process to be learned. Before you can proceed very far down God’s road to success, He may have to point out some things in your life that will slow you down. I’m calling these “God’s speed bumps.” When he was just a teen, Joseph had some attitudes in his life that had to be changed. Let’s read about them in Genesis 37:

Genesis 37:1-11. “Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah, and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, ‘Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.’ His brothers said to him, ‘Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?’ And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. ‘Listen,’ he said, ‘I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.’ When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, ‘What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down

to the ground before you?’ His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.”

I don’t really like speed bumps, because I usually like to keep the pedal to the metal. But speed bumps serve a purpose. They make me slow down. If I don’t slow down, I’m in for a jolt that rattles my teeth. I think God sometimes intentionally puts speed bumps in our pathway to get our attention. He’s trying to get us slow down to learn something important.

Without a doubt, Joseph was a great servant of God. But there were some attitudes in his life God had to remove before He could fully bless him. Dr. Kim Gilliland has observed:

“Joseph, at the age of seventeen, was not the humble, likable, mild mannered young man that we sometimes picture. He was more likely a pompous, arrogant, conniving spoiled brat. He was Little Lord Fontenoy with full, puffy sleeves to match his full, puffy ego. His father liked him best and he rubbed it into all of his other brother’s faces. No wonder they were jealous of him. No wonder they schemed against him. If he had been my kid brother, I’d have been tempted to throw him down the well too!”

In this passage, we can find three speed bumps—dangerous attitudes in Joseph’s young life. They may be present in your life as well. We can read about the first one in verse 2: “Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers...and he brought their father a bad report about them.” From this verse we can learn:

SUCCESS LESSON #1: YOU MAY SEE THE FAULTS OF OTHERS BUT YOU DON’T HAVE TO DECLARE THEM!

Joseph came home from tending the sheep with his brothers and he complained to his father about his brothers. The word “bad report” in verse 2 is the Hebrew word for “slander.” He slandered his brothers. Without a doubt, his brothers had faults, as we shall see in the next lesson. But rather than talking to them about their faults, Joseph goes running to his papa. He sounds like a spoiled kid who says, “I’m telling on you!” So, we see the first speed bump that may slow you down on God’s road to success.

Speed Bump: A critical attitude

My mother used to tell me, “If you can’t say something nice about someone, don’t say anything at all.” There are some people who live by just the opposite; they never say anything unless it is a word of criticism. They’re the people who see the dark cloud instead of the silver lining. You’ve heard the expression, “When life hands you lemons, make lemonade.” Life really doesn’t give out lemons; it’s critical people with sour, acidic attitudes who are always passing out verbal lemons. And be careful, when you make lemonade, they’ll spit in your lemonade! Their favorite exercise is jumping to conclusions and running people down. Are you like that? If you have a critical spirit, you won’t travel far down God’s road to success.

In Charles Shultz’s cartoon, “Peanuts,” Lucy was always giving Linus a hard time. In one strip Linus asks Lucy, “Why are you always so anxious to criticize me?” Lucy replied, “I just have a

knack for seeing other peoples' faults." Linus says, "What about your own faults?" Lucy smiles and says, "I have a knack for overlooking them."

Some people complain about anything and everything. Once a family was driving home from church and the dad says, "I'm glad that's over. The preacher's sermon was boring, and he spoke too long. The music was too loud and I didn't like the songs. The pew was hard and the people were unfriendly." His ten-year-old son in the back seat who had watched his dad during the offering said, "But you gotta' admit, dad, it was a pretty good show for a quarter!"

If you're like Joseph, and you're always looking for something to criticize in this world, you'll always find something to criticize. But God had bigger plans for Joseph, and this was a character quality God wanted to prune from his life.

Everyone has faults and flaws. But the Bible says when you love someone you'll be willing to overlook their faults. The characteristics of love are found in I Corinthians 13 and we discover that "It (love) keeps no record of wrongs." (I Corinthians 13:5) Some people go around keeping a record of every slight and fault. They're making a list and checking it twice, they're gonna' find out who's naughty, not nice.

This was Joseph's speed bump when he was young. Later, when he had the perfect opportunity to extract revenge on his brothers, he didn't criticize them. He had learned his lesson. Have you learned that lesson?

Each of us has an opportunity every day to either build people up or to tear them down. It's a lot easier to tear someone down than it is to build them up. I found a poem by an unknown writer that expresses it well. It's called, "A Builder or a Wrecker?"

As I watched them tear a building down
A gang of men in a busy town.
With a ho-heave-ho, and a lusty yell;
They swung a beam and the side wall fell.

I asked the foreman, "Are these men skilled,
And the men you'd hire if you wanted to build?"
He gave a laugh and said,
"No, indeed, Just common labor is all I need."

I can easily wreck in a day or two,
What builders have taken years to do."
And I thought to myself, as I went my way
Which of these roles have I tried to play?

Am I a builder who works with care,
Measuring life by rule and square?
Or am I a wrecker who walks to town
Content with the labor of tearing down?

“O Lord let my life and my labors be
That which will build for eternity!”

Author Unknown

Now, look at verse 3 to discover Joseph’s second speed bump: “Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons...and he make a richly ornamented robe for him.”

SUCCESS LESSON #2: YOU MAY RECEIVE MEDALS, BUT YOU DON’T HAVE TO WEAR THEM!

My first memory of Joseph comes from faithful preschool Sunday School teachers who taught Joseph’s coat was more than just colorful. How would you feel if your dad bought you and your other siblings a coat at Goodwill, and then drove to Neiman Marcus to buy the most expensive coat for your kid brother? But this meaning of that coat went much deeper than a simple wardrobe preference. Hebrew scholars suggest the long robe was a ceremonial garment that symbolized Jacob had chosen Joseph to be his main heir. Joseph had ten older brothers, and one younger brother, and he wasn’t the logical choice for heir. But remember, his father, Jacob, had grabbed the birthright from his older brother, Esau. No wonder the brothers were so jealous of Joseph! That brings us to see the second speed bump Joseph had to overcome:

Speed Bump: A conceited attitude

It’s clear Joseph flaunted the robe in front of his brothers. It wasn’t the kind of robe a guy would wear to tend sheep, but later in this chapter, Joseph finds his brothers, and guess what he’s wearing? When I perform some weddings and participate in graduations I have a long, black, academic robe I wear. It’s really a symbol of my ministerial education. It says I’ve earned a bachelors, masters, and doctor’s degrees—but it’s not the kind of thing I wear all the time. For instance, this afternoon, we’re having one of our church golf tournaments. How do you think I’d be received if I showed up on the first tee wearing my robe?

The point is, you may receive honors, awards, and medals in life, but that doesn’t mean you have to display them all the time. The best Olympic athletes have medals placed around their necks, but how many of them wear them every day? That would be far too conceited. The most admired athletes are those who display a little humility.

It is part of our fallen human nature to want to exalt ourselves. We want to promote our own greatness. But God is looking for people who are willing to exalt themselves. It was a tough lesson for Joseph to learn, and it’s a tough one for us to learn.

There is a scriptural principle that every follower of Jesus must learn. Here’s the principle: The way up is down and the way down is up. Maybe you can understand it better in the words of Jesus. He said, “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:12) The Bible says, “God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6) The way up is down—when you promote yourself, don’t be surprised if

God resists you—and the way down is up—when you humble yourself before the Lord, God can lift you up. Before Joseph made it to the palace, God sent him to a pit and a prison.

Before we leave this point, I want to issue a parental warning. Moms and dads, if you have more than one child, be careful that you don't show favoritism to one of your children at the expense of the others. We all know some kids seem to need more love, or some kids receive your love more than others. But learn from Jacob—you can actually harm your child if you show them more preference than another. You may be the one building a huge speed bump on their road to success. We all know that a spoiled child becomes a spoiled teenager, and unless something changes, they grow into a spoiled adult. So, parents, love your children equally.

Finally, you can find the last speed bump in Joseph's life in verse 5, "Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more."

SUCCESS LESSON #3: YOU MAY HAVE LOFTY DREAMS, BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO SHARE THEM!

Joseph had two dreams that made him believe he would be a great man. When he shared the first dream, his brothers hated him even more. When he shared the second dream, his father rebuked him. We shouldn't fault the dreams, because one of them came true - his mistake was sharing the dreams. It's easy to identify the third speed bump on the road to success:

Speed Bump: A self-centered attitude

In both dreams, Joseph is at the center and everyone else is bowing down before him. Were these dreams from God? The Bible doesn't say. The first dream came true, because years later, his brothers would bow before him, even without recognizing who he was. But it's difficult to believe God gave Joseph the second dream, because God never errs. How could Joseph's mother bow down before him? She had died a few years earlier giving birth to his Joseph's younger brother, Benjamin.

Everyone should have dreams and aspirations. But if your dreams involve the promotion of SELF you need to examine your motives. And you don't have to tell all your dreams to others. As a 17-year-old, Joseph had visions of greatness and when he shared the dreams with his brothers, it was like pouring gasoline on the smoldering fire of their animosity.

God cannot bless you if you are full of self. When we are all born, we are, by nature, egocentric people. Everyone in our universe revolves around us—*our* needs and *our* feelings. When we're hungry we cry out for food. When we are angry we cry out for justice. When we're mad, we strike out in anger.

As we grow older we learn there are other people in our universe, but it's easy to maintain our egocentricity. As we grow older still, we learn the Bible claims there is one God who is our Creator, and He must sit on the throne our personal universe, just as He rules over the actual universe. Becoming a child of God involves replacing SELF with GOD at the center of your personal universe.

In her book *The Christian's Secret to a Happy Life*, Hannah Whitehall Smith wrote: "The greatest burden we have to carry in life is self. The greatest thing we have to manage is self." Indeed, we must all learn that the secret to JOY in life is found in the priority of those three letters J.O.Y. Jesus, Others, Yourself.

CONCLUSION

What road are you on right now? There is a road that seems right to a man, but it leads to destruction. It's the wide road, the popular road, and the easy road. But Jesus said there is a narrow gate, and a narrow road that leads to real life—and only a few people are on it. Joseph got on the right road. Are you on God's road to success? Once you get on it, don't think it's going to be a smooth ride. You may encounter some pesky speed bumps. God is trying to teach you some important lessons today. Do you have a critical spirit? You may see the faults in others, but you don't have to declare them. Are you conceited? You may be given medals, but you don't have to wear them. Are you self-centered? You may have lofty dreams, but you don't have to share them.

Several months ago, I read an ancient fable about a princess. Once upon a time there was a very unhappy princess. She was unhappy all the time because she was not beautiful. As she constantly looked at herself in the mirror, she worried and despaired because she was very plain looking, and there was nothing anyone could do to change her appearance. Nobody told her she was not beautiful, but she knew they were just being polite. She knew in her heart they whispered behind her back that she was ugly. This made her become sensitive and distrustful of others. And because she was unhappy, all the people around her were unhappy, too.

One day, a kind old aunt visited the princess. She gave the princess three magic secrets to make her beautiful. The princess took her aunt's advice to heart and began to practice the three beauty tips.

Soon she forgot about her unhappiness, and started gaining rave reviews throughout the kingdom that she was a princess of incomparable beauty. Her reputation spread to other kingdoms. As she grew older, her beauty only seemed to grow. Many young girls would eagerly seek her out to ask her the secret of her enduring beauty. The princess was happy to share her aunt's three timeless beauty tips: (1) Smile at everyone you meet; (2) Look for all the beauty you can find in others; (3) Say something kind to everyone.

When the Princess stopped being so self-centered and obsessed with her own appearance, her life changed. The same thing happened to Joseph. It took a pit experience and a prison experience, but finally Joseph took his eyes off himself and started thinking of others.

The Bible teaches that this kind of un-selfish attitude is a key to finding God's blessings. The Bible in Philippians 2: 3-4, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:3-4)

There's nothing wrong with ambition if your ambition is to follow God. However, selfish ambition and vain conceit will only produce pain in your life. Does it seem right now that God seems to be resisting your progress? It could be He's pointing out some speed bumps in your life—attitudes you need to change.

Our example for unselfish living is Jesus. The next verses in Philippians 2 say: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ. Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:5-8)

Like Joseph, Jesus had a beautiful robe—it was the robe of His Divinity—His equality with God, but He didn't strut around showing off His Divinity. He laid it aside and became one of us. And it wasn't just a dream He had, the prophecy of scripture said that people of all nations and races will bow down before Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Yet Jesus didn't go around demanding people bow before Him. He came to be a servant to others. He laid down his life for you and for me.

God has a plan for your life. Success is finding and following God's will for your life. You don't have to fear His will. God loves you and His will is what you would choose for yourself if you were as smart as God. But before you can proceed down God's road of success, you must first get on the road. You must enter into a personal relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

OUTLINE

Success is finding and following God's will for your life.

1. YOU MAY SEE THE FAULTS OF OTHERS BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO DECLARE THEM!

Speed Bump: A critical attitude

"It (love) keeps no record of wrongs." *I Corinthians 13:5*

2. YOU MAY RECEIVE MEDALS, BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO WEAR THEM!

Speed Bump: conceited attitude

Jesus said, "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." *Matthew 23:12*

3. YOU MAY HAVE LOFTY DREAMS, BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO SHARE THEM!

Speed Bump: A self-centered attitude

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." *Philippians 2:3-4*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes