

INTRODUCTION

This is the fourth message in the series entitled, “Joseph: Following God’s Road to Success.” The topic of this message is “God’s Detours: Enjoy the Scenery.” If you asked fifty people on the street and to define success, you may well receive fifty different answers. But the Bible gives a simple definition anyone can remember: Success is finding and following God’s Will for your life.

If you want to be successful in God’s eyes, Joseph can serve as your model. In the previous message we met Mrs. Potiphar, who was the original desperate housewife. She continually tried to seduce Joseph to have sex with her, but he resisted the temptation. In her final, desperate attempt, Mrs. Potiphar grabbed Joseph’s coat and he literally ran out of his clothes to get away from her. She was left holding his tunic in her hand, and her wicked mind devised a plot to punish Joseph for rejecting her advances. The English writer, William Congreve, penned the words often quoted (or misquoted): “Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.” (from *The Mourning Bride*, 1697)

Mrs. Potiphar started screaming that she had been sexually attacked by Joseph, and she had his tunic as evidence. Let’s pick up the story in Genesis 39:19

Genesis 39:19-23. When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, “This is how your slave treated me,” he burned with anger. Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

After awhile, Joseph was joined in prison by two of Pharaoh’s servants, the cupbearer and the baker. The cupbearer was like a royal food taster. He checked Pharaoh’s food and drink in case someone was trying to poison him. Both men had strange dreams and Joseph interpreted the dreams. He told the Baker his days were numbered and he would soon be executed. And he told the cupbearer he would soon be restored to his place of service to Pharaoh. In Genesis 40:14-15 Joseph asked the Cupbearer to help him. He said,

“But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.”

Lest you think this was some kind of country club prison, remember, it was a dungeon. Both dreams came true according to Joseph’s interpretation. The Baker was executed and the royal food taster was given his job back. Let’s pick up the story in Genesis 40:23-41:1:

The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him. When two full years had passed Pharaoh had a dream...

Pharaoh had a couple of dreams that confused him. In one dream seven fat cows were grazing by the Nile River, and then seven thin cows came up out of the river and ate them up. In his next dream seven large heads of grain were eaten up by seven sparse heads of grain. Nobody in the palace could tell him what the dream about the cows meant, so Pharaoh became MOOOdy, and was in utter despair. Nobody could tell him what the dream about his grain meant. Finally, the cupbearer remembered Joseph.

Genesis 41:9-16. Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged.” So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” “I cannot do it,” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.”

God has a plan for your life, just as He had a plan for Joseph’s life. However, God’s road to success often contains detours. God was in the process of making Joseph the Prime Minister of Egypt, but Joseph had to experience some interesting detours along the way. He started out on the fast track to success as a 17-year-old heir to his daddy’s fortune. But then, detour, he found himself beaten up by his brothers and thrown into a pit. He was sold as a slave and taken to Egypt. It seemed like his life got back on track when he proved himself to be successful as the head servant of Potiphar. But then, another detour—he was falsely accused of attempted rape, and sent to prison. He tried to be faithful, and when he helped a couple of fellow inmates, he thought they might be his get-out-of-jail-free card. But instead, detour! He was forgotten for two miserable years. About the time he thought things would never get better, surprise, his detour was over and he found himself as the Prime Minister of Egypt.

Life is like that. It’s full of surprising twists and turns, and there are plenty of detours. There are at least four similarities between life’s detours and actual traffic detours on the highway.

1. DETOURS ARE USUALLY UNEXPECTED

Have you ever been driving on a trip and suddenly you see a “Detour ahead” sign? It’s probably good you didn’t know the detour was ahead, or you would have been anticipating it with a sense of dread. Life is the same way. You can be traveling along when suddenly everything changes without warning. One day you’re perfectly well, and the next day you’re lying in a hospital bed. One day, you have a job, and the next day, you’re looking for a job. One day, your family is intact, and the next day death takes a family member from you. One day Joseph had a job as a chief servant, and the next day he found himself in jail. Someone said “life is what happens when you’re making other plans.”

2. MOST DETOURS ARE ON ROUGH ROADS

I was driving a U-Haul van last week to move my daughter Laura Grace to Norman, Oklahoma. There was a bad accident near Gatesville, Texas and the law enforcement officers were rerouting all the traffic. Instead of being on a smooth, four lane highway, I found myself on a dirt road with plenty of potholes. I was driving as slowly as I could but all I could think about was how all the furniture in the back was probably crashing around. Fortunately, everything arrived intact.

Detours are rough. They have to be driven slowly and carefully. In the same way, life’s detours are usually pretty rough. Sometimes we steer ourselves into some rough situations by the bad choices we make. But sometimes we are put on a detour by circumstances beyond our control. I would have thought Joseph would have been rewarded for resisting temptation, but instead, he was falsely accused, and convicted of attempted rape. My first reaction to that is “That’s not fair!” That’s true, but it’s important to realize that God never promised life would be fair.

3. DETOURS HAVE TO BE TAKEN IN FAITH

Sometimes when you see a detour sign it leads you on a road you’ve never traveled before. You have to believe the detour signs will get you back on the main highway—you have to drive by putting your faith in the detour signs. God’s road to success is not a freeway; it’s more of a “faithway.” We don’t walk by sight, we walk by faith. I’m sure Joseph wondered *why* he was suffering jail when he was innocent. When we’re on a detour, we want to ask the same questions. “Why me, Lord? Why am I on this rough road right now?”

Just remember, God has the destination in mind. Don’t ever think you’ve figured God out. We can never fully understand God. Our minds are like tiny grains of sand compared to the massive universe of God’s omniscience. Sometimes it seems to us that what God is doing doesn’t make sense. That’s because we don’t have enough sense for God’s sense to make sense. If you ever are tempted to think you’ve got God’s detours all figured out, just read Isaiah 55:8-9, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

4. YOU CAN WHINE OR CHEERFULLY ACCEPT A DETOUR

Detours are going to occur. What’s more important is *how* are you going to react to them? Over the past few months I’ve been unable to drive down New Copeland Road next to Hubbard Middle School because of road construction. That’s the way I’ve been driving to church for the past fourteen years. Instead, I have to drive through a neighborhood, and it takes me longer. After a few weeks, I was thinking about how long it was taking them to fix that road, and I was losing my patience. Then one day, I started noticing the neighborhood. I started noticing the GABC 50th Anniversary yard signs. So, now as I drive through that neighborhood, I’ve started prayer driving (with my eyes open). I’ve started praying for the families in those houses. That has allowed my detour to become a delight.

Because of his detours, Joseph could have become a whiner. He could have said, “It’s just not fair! I don’t deserve this!” But instead of whining, he focused on shining. He turned those detours into opportunities to excel.

Are you traveling on the detour of sorrow right now? Has death taken someone from you? Trust the Man of Sorrows, and hear Him say to you, “Let not your heart be troubled.” Are you on the detour of loneliness? If you are a child of God, hear Him saying to you, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the earth.” Are you on the detour of pain and suffering? Jesus knows what it is to suffer, and He is saying to you, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Are you on the detour of disappointment? Have circumstances of your life become bitter and unpleasant. Remember this, if you are a follower of Jesus, in the future you WILL be able to write Romans 8:28 over this detour. “For we know that in all things God is works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Has someone let you down and you can’t seem to forgive them?

God allowed Joseph to travel down some interesting detours, but He later put him on track for success. In 1969, Canadian sociologist, Dr. Laurence Peter wrote a humorous book entitled *The Peter Principle*. It became such a popular book, you can find the Peter Principle defined in the American Heritage Dictionary. To summarize it, the Peter Principle is the theory employees in an organization always rise to the level of their incompetence.

As I have studied the life of Joseph I want to share with you **THE “JOSEPH PRINCIPLE” FOR SUCCESS**. There are three key characteristics in Joseph’s life that allowed him to survive sinkholes, resist temptations, and recover to detours to find success. If you adopt these same three qualities, you will be closer to finding biblical success, too.

(1) Whatever job you have, give it your best!

When Joseph was a servant in Potiphar’s house, he worked so faithfully and diligently that he was promoted to the chief slave. When he was in prison, he worked so hard at his duties; he was promoted to run the prison. And he was such a faithful servant to Pharaoh he became prime minister of the entire nation!

When Joseph took a job, he worked at it as if God was his boss. The Bible says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord.” (Colossians 3:23) The lesson is simple: If you are faithful and diligent in the “small” jobs, God will entrust you with bigger jobs. To put it another way: If you think you’re too big for a small job, you’re really too small for a big job!

Sam once had a job as an assistant manager working in what we used to call a “Dime Store.” One of his most unpleasant jobs was a rotation of cleaning the employee restroom. He decided he would make a game out of it, and see if he could make it cleaner than anyone else. He attacked the job with a passion. He cleaned the commode as if he was going to drink out of it. Sam later became the manager of that Ben Franklin store, then the manager of several Ben Franklin stores. Then he started his own store in Rogers, Arkansas. And Sam, who you probably know as Sam Walton, tried to instill that same work ethic in all his associates. And today, there

are managers who cleaned toilets to perfection at one time.

(2) However long it takes, don’t give up!

Can you imagine Joseph languishing in that prison for two long years after he had helped the King’s cupbearer? I’m sure there were times he wanted to give up and quit—but he didn’t.

We all know about the sexual temptation Joseph faced and resisted. But I believe he faced an even greater temptation in prison—the temptation to quit; the temptation to pull over in to a parking place of bitterness. But he resisted that temptation as well.

Are you at a point in your life when you want to quit? The first coaching advice I can ever recall hearing came from my Little League baseball coach. We were behind in a game and he said, “Winners never quit, and quitters never win.” I thought that was pretty profound—I still do. The Bible says it this way, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:9)

Rick Warren wrote in *The Purpose Driven Life*: “Great people are just ordinary people with an extraordinary amount of determination. They simply don’t know how to quit. I believe that a person’s greatness is not determined by his or her fame, position, or wealth but rather what it takes to discourage that person.”

When you want to quit and give up, remember patience and persistence are two of the most powerful forces in life!

(3) Wherever you go, acknowledge the Lord!

During all of Joseph’s detours, He never stopped talking about the Lord. When Mrs. Potiphar tried to seduce him, he said he could not do such a wicked thing in the sight of God. When the cupbearer and the baker asked him about dreams, Joseph told them all interpretations belong to God. Then, when he was brought before the most important man in the world, the Egyptian Pharaoh, Joseph acknowledged the Lord. He told Pharaoh, “I cannot do it,” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.” (Genesis 41:16) The Hebrew language literally says, “God will give you the peace of mind you need.” Joseph was telling the King that only the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the Bible, could give him inner peace.

The quickest way to get back on the smooth roads of life is to acknowledge the Lord in all of your situations. Do you remember our focus passage for 2005? “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” (Proverbs 3:5-6) Are you ready to move off of the crooked paths of rough detours and get back on the straight highway of God’s Will? Start talking about the Lord to everyone you know. Let people know He is the Lord of your life.

One of my heroes is Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A. He founded a tremendous business by perfecting the chicken sandwich. I have one of his books entitled, *It’s Easier to Succeed Than*

to Fail. From the very start, Truett Cathy acknowledged the Lord in his business life. He made a commitment that his restaurants wouldn't be open on Sunday. He's not legalistic about it, and he doesn't criticize other stores that may do business on Sunday. In fact, he says he eats in other restaurants on Sunday. But from the start, He wanted to honor the Lord and honor the Lord's Day by being closed so he could teach his boy's Sunday School class, and so his employees could have a day to worship. I love Chick-fil-A, and every time I drive by the closed store on Sunday, I'm reminded that Truett Cathy is a man who is not ashamed to acknowledge the Lord in his business. If you want to truly succeed in life, you should memorize Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For it is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone who believes."

CONCLUSION

Whatever you're going through right now, don't forget God has a plan for your life. His plan doesn't always take you directly from point A to point B. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line, but the shortest distance between misery and joy is knowing and loving God. Joseph discovered that, and you can, too. If you'll do the best job you can, wherever you are now; and if you'll take the attitude that you aren't going to give up; and if you will acknowledge God in everything you, you will be able to find and follow God's will for your life—and that's what success is all about!

If you aren't a Christian, your life is headed on a detour you don't want to finish. Jesus said there is a road that leads to hell, and many people are on it. The sad thing is the people who are on this road don't realize it is heading to destruction. The Bible says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end, it leads to death." (Proverbs 14:12) It is God's will for you to be saved. The Bible says "God is not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (II Peter 3:9) If you will turn from your sins, and place your faith in Jesus Christ, you can get on the right road for your life.

OUTLINE

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes