

Genesis 40 Dealing With Disappointment

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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I keep running into people struggling with different variations on a common issue: life, or some aspect of it, hasn't turned out the way they thought it should. And to make matters worse, most of them felt like they were doing the right things, they were "playing by the rules," but they still didn't get the outcome they expected.

The issues they face span a broad range:

- car problems
- relationships
- job loss/problems finding a job
- miscarriage, premature birth, or birth defect
- promotion or assignments
- personal performance in some area
- parenting – why aren't the kids acting the way they should?
- health

Sooner or later we all seem to learn that you aren't guaranteed an awful lot in life, even if you "play by the rules." As they say in the financial world, "past performance is no guarantee of future results."

So, how do we respond to all of this? I'll give you one answer that has been popular for the last hundred years or more - Stoicism. Some of you may have heard of the poem *Invictus* by William Ernest Henley:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
 How charged with punishments the scroll.
 I am the master of my fate:
 I am the captain of my soul.

Is that really what life is about? Me, alone, facing the difficulties of life by myself? Thanking “whatever gods may be” and doing my best to stand up under the “bludgeonings of chance?” Telling myself over and over, “put on a stiff upper lip man,” “never let ‘em see you sweat!”

There are people who live like that, telling themselves over and over, day after day, “just get it together man, you can do this!”

The message of the Christian life is completely different – it recognizes that yes, we do suffer defeat at times; yes, we suffer loss and disappointment in life. We even suffer unjustly at times, *but we are **not** alone*. We are not our own masters or captains. We live under the gracious hand of a merciful God who escorts us through the pains of life, even though we wish He would lift us over them. And this God is able to redeem our suffering and use it for His glory if we will bring it all to Him and honor Him as we pass through our trials.

That’s what we’re going to see this morning as we look at the life of Joseph. Remember, he has been sold into slavery by his brothers, falsely accused of rape by his boss’s wife, he’s now living in an Egyptian prison – he’s obviously not the “master of his fate,” but one day God will make beauty out of ashes and He will pull Joseph out of that jail and put him exactly where He wants him. But not today.

[1](#) It came to pass after these things *that* the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. [2](#) And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker. [3](#) So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph *was* confined. [4](#) And the captain of the guard [that is, Potiphar] charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while.

Joseph’s biography shows a man who ‘bloomed where he was planted,’ a man who had the ‘Midas touch.’ Here he is in jail, but he has been elevated to the position of overseer, basically running the jail from the inside.

Pro 22:29 Do you see a man [who] excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown [men].

God designed this world, and when we live in it according to His rules, we ought not be surprised that we enjoy success. Success professionally, success financially, we have wonderful marriages, life as a whole just works.

Now, it doesn't always turn out that way, obviously Joseph is in jail. We still live in a fallen world surrounded by sinful human beings and we are opposed by Satan and his demons so things don't always turn out the way they should, but still for the Christian, success and joy should be the norm. *Especially* when you define them according to God's standards, in a way that is independent of, not dependent on, external circumstances.

5 Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who *were* confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night *and* each man's dream with its *own* interpretation. 6 And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they *were* sad. 7 So he asked Pharaoh's officers who *were* with him in the custody of his lord's house, saying, "Why do you look *so* sad today?"

8 And they said to him, "We each have had a dream, and *there is* no interpreter of it." So Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *them* to me, please."

Sometimes our disappointments open up doors to glorify God and serve or encourage others that we wouldn't have if life had gone the right way. Joseph is able to tell these men about the God he serves **because** he is jail. Disappointing circumstances in his life led to a chance to minister to someone else going through the same thing. And one of the fastest ways to earn 'street cred' is to have gone through what someone else is suffering.

I was in the hospital when my son Ben was born. Right after he had been delivered, they took him, wrapped him up and put him in the little bed under the lights for the initial exam. I didn't know what to do, it was my first time going through all of this and I was looking back and forth between my wife and my son when the doctor said, "it's OK, you can go over and look at him." But just as I was about to walk over, the nurses who were attending to him were joined by more people who had just come into the room and they took my son away.

It turns out he was having a hard time breathing because he had gotten some fluid into his lungs when he was born. They eventually wound up taking him to the Neo-natal ICU where he would spend the first week of his life.

The next day my wife and I went up to go and see him in the NICU. There were several small beds in one large room and as you walked past each crib there was a photo of mom and dad above the crib so the nurses knew what the child's parents looked like. In the crib next Ben was a little baby named Ethan who had been born premature, and above it was a picture of James and Patrick – a gay couple who had paid a surrogate to have a child for them.

For the next week each time we came to spend time with our son, we also got to chat with one or the other of Ethan's dads. Of course, as soon as they asked the question, "so, what do you do?" the cat was out of the bag and my identity in Christ was known. But God opened great doors for conversation with these men, and to this day we can't help but wonder if our son was hospitalized for the sake of a divine appointment in the NICU.

Remember, God isn't in your life just for your own private benefit, something you keep to yourself. God stepped into your life because He wants to restore you *but also because He wants to use you to bless others and point them to Him*. And sometimes that means going through the wringer so you can meet and minister to others who have been through it as well, but who are trying to cope without the knowledge of Christ.

[9](#) Then the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "Behold, in my dream a vine *was* before me, [10](#) and in the vine *were* three branches; it *was* as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes. [11](#) Then Pharaoh's cup *was* in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand."

[12](#) And Joseph said to him, "This *is* the interpretation of it: The three branches *are* three days. [13](#) Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler. [14](#) But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. [15](#) For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon."

Joseph's story is a great model for us because here we find a man who is successful despite his circumstance, yet who is seeking to improve his circumstance – he does a great job while he is in jail, but he's also still trying to get out of jail. He is living in a state of tension and remains faithful to God throughout the whole ordeal.

When life doesn't turn out the way we hoped, we have to avoid two extremes: fatalism and romanticism.

Fatalism says, "this is it. This sucks, but this is it. It's never going to get any better. I missed my chance. It's over." You just roll over and take it.

Romanticism says "in just a minute it's all going to change." Or, "tomorrow is going to be different." It's hope, but without anything real to hope in, just a fluffy sort of optimism with no grounding.

What we need is a way to balance both. You have to be able to accept that what has happened, has happened. It's your new reality. But, that doesn't mean you're stuck.

[16](#) When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, "I also *was* in my dream, and there *were* three white baskets on my head. [17](#) In the uppermost basket *were* all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head."

[18](#) So Joseph answered and said, “This *is* the interpretation of it: The three baskets *are* three days. [19](#) Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from you.”

Well, that’s a bit of a bummer. Probably not what he was hoping for. Unfortunately, it’s exactly what came to pass.

[20](#) Now it came to pass on the third day, *which was* Pharaoh’s birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants. [21](#) Then he restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand. [22](#) But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. [23](#) **Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.**

Seriously? It’s one more blow for Joseph. One more evidence that he is not “the master of his fate.” And also evidence that you can’t go hanging all of your hope on another person – whether it’s your spouse, your boss, your ‘hook-up,’ or even your doctor. No one can guarantee to provide you with the results you want EVERY time.

At some point, Joseph realizes he’s been forgotten. He realizes that what he thought would be the answer isn’t going to pan out. He got his hopes up for nothing.

I know some of you have been there. I’ve been there. When it feels like you just can’t get a leg up. Can’t get any traction. Nothing seems to come together no matter how hard you try, no matter how good your motives or goals.

So where do we go from here? Let me share some observations with you. I don’t claim to have figured this all out; if I had I wouldn’t get frustrated with disappointments anymore in my own life. But I’ll share some of what I’ve learned from my own experiences and watching the lives of others.

The first thing I have learned is how common this is – we see it most clearly in the big issues, the major set-backs and disappointments, but really, we deal with it multiple times each day. In traffic, in parenting, in meetings, things don’t go our way and we react.

When disappointment comes and we react, that reaction gives us a glimpse into the condition of our soul.

Our reaction may be emotional or physical, it may involve inward depression or lashing out in anger, but whatever happens, the way we react to adversity and disappointment shows us a lot about ourselves.

Jesus taught that storms reveal our foundation – in Matthew chapter 7 He told the story of the wise man who built his house upon the rock and the foolish man who built his house upon the sand. It wasn’t until the rains came down and the floods went up that their

foundations were tested and exposed. So, storms reveal our foundation; they show us what we're made of in ways that the normal rhythms of life can't.

Now, your initial reaction may not reflect the person you want to be or are trying to be, but when you're squeezed, what comes out shows you what's really inside and exposes our need for sanctification. If you think about it, Jesus never got pushed so far that He snapped, so if you're snapping, it means you need a little bit more of Him in you.

After we react to the disappointment, we start asking "Why?" We start searching for a narrative. We need a story to tell others and ourselves as we try to make sense of what just happened. We want to be able to put it into words. As we search, there are four directions we can go, and the danger is that we will start to lash out like a wounded animal and lay blame:

- self – I shoulda, woulda, coulda; it's my fault, I blew it. I suck, so you go curl up in a hole somewhere. Or you think, I've just got to do better next time, I didn't do things right, I need to figure it out and work harder next time.
- others – if only they... The ref made a bad call. HR didn't forward my application. My boss won't stop... whatever. This is the classic response to disappointment – I was doing fine until you came along.
- Environment/circumstances – if only it wasn't so hot, or so cold, or if only the economy was better, or if only, fill in the blank
- God – God let me down, He didn't do what I wanted Him to do, or He's against me. If you don't know God or don't believe He is actively involved in your life, you might also call this Fate, chance, or karma, "whatever gods may be."

Now, the answer for why things didn't turn out right could legitimately be one of those things. Maybe you didn't do things right. Maybe someone else really did sabotage you – that's what happened with Joseph. Maybe the environment or circumstances really weren't right, or maybe, possibly, God is opposing you because you're heading in the wrong direction.

But here's what you really need to catch – those things only matter to a degree. God is not as concerned about the outcome of your issue as He is about how you conduct yourself in it and how you respond to it. He's not as concerned about how long it takes you to get home as He is about how you act while you're sitting in traffic.

If it were essential that things turn out the way you hoped for, He, as the sovereign God, could reach down and miraculously turn the tide of events. If He doesn't, there must be a greater plan in store and we will just have to trust Him.

You don't know how your situation will ultimately turn out. We rarely have a clue what is going on in our lives, but we can be encouraged by looking back through history. The best way to understand what God is doing is not by looking forward through a telescope, but by looking in the rearview mirror at what He has already done, in our lives and throughout history.

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Take Joseph for example, he's in jail right now, and he'll stay there for another whole year, but at precisely the right time, God will pull him out and elevate him to the second most powerful position in Egypt and use him to deliver that nation and the surrounding peoples, including his own family, from famine. Whole nations will benefit because of one man's walk with God.

Sometimes God uses our success as a platform for His work; but sometimes He uses our defeats. ANYTHING can be redeemed for the Lord's glory if we undertake it in the right way. The process is more important than the outcome.

Maybe what you are suffering through right now will one day be used to encourage, bless, or inspire others. What is important is that you conduct your self with integrity through the trial so you don't defame the name of Jesus.

So how do you do that? How do you build a firm foundation so that when the storms of life come, they don't knock you down? I'll give you four things:

1. Reasses - what's your definition of success? What are you trying to achieve? You need to remember that you are already a child of God, and no higher crown can be placed on your head than the one He gives to you, everything else we're striving for and struggling with is secondary and temporary. There is nothing more valuable you can receive on this earth than what Christ has done for you on the cross.
2. Worship – renew your focus on who God is, what He has done, and what He has promised
3. Word – Romans 12 says we need to renew our minds, to think truth
4. Fellowship – don't forsake the gathering of the saints; speak words of comfort to one another, Ps, hymns, and spiritual songs.

And you have to keep going through these four steps, because none of us just get to flip a mechanical switch and guarantee that we will respond in a godly manner to every defeat and disappointment that comes our way.

Now, let me be honest, none of this puts food on the table, reverses what has been done, or restores what has been lost, but it helps you stay focused on eternal truth and keeps you from doing or saying something you will later regret.

Life is going to keep handing you set backs, emergencies, and frustrations. You're never going to advance beyond them. So you can either put on your stiff upper lip, grab the wheel and try to be the "master of your fate" and the "captain of your soul" and accept the blows as they come, or you can seek to glorify God in all that you do and ask Him to be your shield and your defense, your comfort in a time of need, your healer, redeemer, and restorer.

Because when you go through disappointments you have to answer one final question – you're either in this all alone or you're in this under His care – which is it?

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God is no stranger to disappointments – He created this world and everything in it, He did everything right, but we still choose to make it all wrong. Fortunately, instead of letting us wallow in the problems we caused, He sent His Son to save us.

We're going to celebrate communion now, and I encourage you to take a minute and bring your disappointments and your discouragements to Jesus. Ask Him to help you make sense of them and to be the hope and strength you need to keep going – surrender your suffering to Him and ask Him to use it for His glory somehow, someday.