

“THE SECRET SAUSE OF SUCCESS” **(Genesis 39:1-23)**

Today we continue our study of the life of Joseph and come to Genesis 39. Hidden deep in a vault at the SunTrust Bank in Atlanta, Georgia is one of the world’s most famous recipes to which only two people in the world have access. The recipe is for the world-famous soft drink Coca-Cola. For 139 years, Coca-Cola has easily been the top-selling soft-drink and over half the world has tasted it. But to this day no one knows exactly what’s in it.

In Louisville, Kentucky another famous recipe is kept in a two-foot-thick vault, with round the clock surveillance by armed guards, and a unique PIN code known only by two people – both of whom must be present in order to open it. The recipe is the handwritten recipe written by Colonel Sanders of the eleven herbs and spices used in Kentucky Fried Chicken. To make sure the secret doesn’t get out, the spices are mixed in different locations, and then taken to another location where they’re mixed together so that no one knows all the spices that are present.

Whenever someone or something is successful, people want to know why – what’s the secret – what did they tap into that no one else has? If we were to study successful people in the Bible, one person you might think of right away is King Solomon. The book of Ecclesiastes describes how he had it all – money, power, fame, women, palaces and gardens. Yet, by his own admission, he was miserable, and wasted much of his life living for the things of the world.

In contrast to Solomon, Joseph had none of the advantages Solomon had – he was betrayed and abandoned by his brothers, was sold into slavery, and ended up in prison for a crime he didn’t commit – yet through every misfortune he suffered, he kept rising to the top and eventually became the second most powerful person in the world. What was his secret sauce? How did he achieve such success despite all the adversity he faced?

His secret, as we see his story unfold, was an unwavering dedication to God’s call on his life. When he was 17 years-old God gave him a vision of his future – that one day he would be in a position of prominence and his family would bow down to him. He didn’t know what this vision all meant or how it would play out, but he believed that God had a grand purpose for his life and that purpose drove him to trust God even when facing one calamity after another. We know, of course, how the story ends and that God elevated Joseph to a high position of authority to save his family from extinction. In the big picture of the Bible, God used Joseph as a key part of His plan to save the world through Jesus. If Joseph and his family don’t make it to the end Genesis, you and I are doomed because there is no Jesus and there is no salvation.

As we come to Genesis 39 this morning we’re going to see three marks of success – not as the world defines it, but as God does – and I want to start with a definition of success that guides everything we’ll see in our story today: Success is dedication to fulfill God’s purposes for your life through His hand of blessing despite the obstacles that stand in your way.

This definition tells us three things: 1) First, it tells us that success for a believer is propelled by having an overarching purpose in life, a purpose that comes from God. Without a compelling purpose, we flounder. 2) It also tells us that any success we have comes from God – any gifts or abilities or accomplishments we have are a gift from our creator – it is only through His hand of blessing that we can do anything. 3) And finally, it tells us that biblical success is not dependent on favorable circumstances, but that God does some of His best work in our lives through the most difficult of circumstances.

The first mark of success we see is **consistent faithfulness in the face of adversity**. In verse one we read... “Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.” After his brothers sell him to a caravan of traders, Joseph is taken 400 miles south to Egypt where he’s purchased by Potiphar, a high-ranking officer in King Pharaoh’s court. All this must have seemed surreal to Joseph – he’s only 17 – he’s lived a good life, he’s served his father, and unlike his brothers, he has a strong faith in God. One day he is the favorite son of Jacob wearing a robe of royalty – and on his way to doing great things for God – now he suddenly finds himself in a foreign land, a vastly different culture with a language he doesn’t know, working as a common slave.

It would be natural for Joseph to ask, “Where’s God? Why is this happening to me?” Have you asked these questions? You don’t ask them when things are going well, you ask them with life is suddenly turned upside down. In Joseph’s case it must have been particularly puzzling since he hadn’t done anything wrong – he had faithfully served God and now this is happening. The theme throughout Joseph’s life is that, although he knew God had a purpose for his life, he spent many years in the dark as to what that purpose was and how it would unfold. In other words, he lived by faith not by sight – as every servant of God is called to do.

But despite his conditions verse 2 says... “The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.” The Lord was with Joseph – four different times we read this phrase in Joseph’s story – which is the most repeated promise in the Bible – there are at least 100 references God saying, “I will be with you.”

One my favorites is Isaiah 43:2-3... “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you (like the Red Sea); and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you (like the Jordan River); when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze (like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego); for I am the Lord your God.”

God is with you in every event and circumstance in life, even the ones where it seems as though His is absent. He’s with you when you’re driving alone at night on a dangerous road – He’s with you when you’re in the doctor’s office waiting for results from a test – He’s with you when you’re standing beside the graveside of a loved one. God is with you right now – whatever is going on in your life, He is with you.

Verses 3-4... “When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.” It’s likely that Joseph started out with menial jobs, but quickly caught the eye of Potiphar, and was soon placed charge of Potiphar’s house and estate. If you are young and just starting out in the workforce, take note of the qualities Joseph possessed.

Number one, we can assume that Joseph worked hard – that’s what bosses want to see. Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.” Employers today are desperately looking for people who will work hard, show up on time, and be responsible – and if you do you will never be lacking for work.

Number two, be trustworthy. Potiphar saw in Joseph someone he could trust to take care of his affairs, even when he was away. As believers, our ultimate aim is to please God through our work – knowing that He is watching all we do. When we work for the Lord, our human bosses will notice and give us more responsibility. Jesus said, “He who is faithful with a few things will be put in charge of many things.”

Number three, use your work as a witness to others. Potiphar could see that God’s hand of blessing was on Joseph – he could see there was something different about him. We are called of God to be light in a dark world, and one of the ways we point people to God is by being a faithful, trustworthy, hard worker.

Verses 5-6a... “From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph’s care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.” When you are a faithful, trustworthy, hard worker God not only blesses you, but all those around you. Potiphar thinks, “I’ve struck gold with this guy. Ever since he showed up, my fields are producing more crops, my house is running smoothly, and I have freedom to come and go – I don’t have to worry about anything except coming home and eating dinner.”

Joe Rogan, a popular talk-radio host who is an agnostic, said recently that he’s come to see the key role that Christianity plays in the stability of society. He said in a chaotic world we need a moral compass, and while Christianity has long been that compass, it has been cancelled by culture and we have lost our way. Joe Rogan is right. Wherever Christianity has spread, society reaps the benefits. One of the purposes for which God called Joseph’s great-grandfather Abraham was for his family to bless all peoples on earth. God is using Joseph’s consistent faithfulness in the midst of a pagan culture to bless the people around him – and God has called us to do the same wherever He places us.

The second mark of Joseph's success is **resilient character in the face of temptation**. Verse 6b-7... "Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, 'Come to bed with me!'" Joseph apparently inherited some good genes because his mother Rachel was described as lovely in form and beautiful. His grandmother Sarah and grandmother Rebekah were also described as being beautiful and each had foreign kings who wanted them as their wives. Now we see that it's a foreign woman – Potiphar's wife – who has designs for Joseph.

Stop for a moment and think of all God has blessed Joseph with – prosperity, success, authority, respect, and good looks. With every gift God blesses you with comes a vulnerability to temptation in the area of your strength. It's when things are going well that you most need to be on guard against temptation. David fell into sin when he was at the height of his power. Solomon made all the right choices early in life, then allowed his success to go to his head and began making all the wrong choices.

In Deuteronomy 8:10-11a God warned the people of Israel to be careful when they enter the Promised Land and enjoy the abundance of the land, saying, "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God." Joseph was climbing the ladder of success, but now faces a temptation that could derail everything.

Verses 8-10... "But he refused. 'With me in charge,' he told her, 'my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?' And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her."

Praise God for Joseph! We live in a day where the idea of sexual purity seems impossible, even for Christians. But Joseph shows us it is possible to rise above the sexual chaos and temptations that surrounds us and maintain sexual purity. Joseph was no different than you and me – he was a good-looking young man with all the same sexual desires we have, but he resisted temptation. Before we see how he did it, I don't want us to miss the powerful nature of his temptation.

First, it was **a sustained temptation**. There wasn't just one proposition that could be brushed aside, but regular propositions came day after day. Potiphar's wife gave Joseph certain looks and subtle words, hinting to him that her offer was still open. Some might resist temptation at first, but when it keeps coming at them, their resistance crumbles. Satan knows where we are weak and when we are vulnerable, and he will keep coming back, again and again, using one argument after another, and eventually wear us down.

Second, it was **a secret temptation**. No one would have to know. The true test of character is what we'd do if we were certain that no one would find out – what would we do if not one was looking? If we're honest, sometimes our motivation for not sinning is fear that someone may be watching or facing the embarrassment of getting caught. Joseph's knew this was a secret temptation with little chance of getting caught.

Third, it was **a sensible temptation**. Every sin offers some kind of rational excuse. We do not give into sin because we think it will hurt us, but because we think it will satisfy some desire. Joseph's temptation, from a human standpoint, seemed to make sense – not only could he enjoy the pleasure of sin, but by cooperating with Potiphar's wife he might climb further up the ladder of success or even be freed from slavery.

Temptation always comes with an excuse or justification...

- “Who's going to find out? We're all alone.”
- “My wife or my husband does not meet my needs at home so why shouldn't I look elsewhere?”
- “I'm so lonely – I've resisted time after time, but God will understand if I give in.”
- “We're about to be married soon anyway – what difference does it make?”
- “Just this once and I'll never do it again.”

Joseph's temptation was as strong and powerful as any you and I will ever face – it was sustained, secret, and sensible. He could have easily yielded, yet somehow, he didn't. He found the power to say no and be victorious over sin. How did he do it? I recently came across a term called “pre-decision.” Every decision you make is a vote toward who you will become – that is why we need to think ahead. Pre-decision means that you decide now what you will do later. Joseph's victory over temptation, in large part, was due to some pre-decisions he made.

First, **he pre-decided that sexual sin was wrong before temptation came along**. If you're single and dating someone, you need to decide what your standards are before you get into a relationship. If you decide in a moment of passion, it's probably too late. If you're married, you need to pre-decide that you will not develop close relationships with someone you might be attracted to – you don't flirt with them, you don't use them as your confidant, you don't give them gifts – you use common sense guardrails to keep yourself from sin.

Second, **Joseph pre-decides by thinking through the consequences of sin**. Joseph gives Potiphar's wife two reasons why he won't sleep with her. Number one, he says, “I'm a loyal servant of your husband – he trusts me and treats me well, and I cannot and will not break that trust.” “What's more,” he says, “I cannot and will not sin against God. No one may see us, but God will, and I cannot do such a wicked thing in His sight.” Joseph had a settled conviction that sex was a gift of God reserved for the covenant of marriage. Since God invented sex, he trusted God to know best how it was to be enjoyed – and that going beyond the boundaries God had established could only lead to harm, so he resisted.

Third, **Joseph pre-decided to, as much as possible, remove himself from the opportunity to sin.** Potiphar's wife was a beautiful and clever woman, so when Joseph turned down her initial proposition, she tried another approach. She tried to spend time with him, to win him over slowly, but verse 10 says that Joseph "refused to even be with her." He knew he was vulnerable to sin and would not even allow himself the opportunity to sin.

The book of Proverbs counsels us to... "Make a level path for your feet, and all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your feet away from evil" (Proverbs 4:26-27 Burean). In other words, don't flirt with temptation – don't put yourself in a position to be tempted – if there is something that causes you to keep tripping up, remove it.

Billy Graham, who spent much of his life traveling while preaching the gospel, pre-decided that he would never be alone with another woman, and would not stay at motels that carried pornographic movies. Billy Graham and Joseph were no different than you and me – they faced the same temptations we do – but they took common sense precautions to minimize the risk.

Fourth, **Joseph pre-decided his game plan before being tempted.** Verses 11-12 say... "One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, 'Come to bed with me!' But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house." Joseph comes into the house one day and notices everything is quiet—there are no other servants around – and he's all alone with Potiphar's wife. This time she doesn't take no for an answer and grabs hold of Joseph's cloak and demands he come to bed with her.

I remember hearing John Maxwell speak to a group of men and he shared ten ways to deal with temptation. Number one, he said at the top of his lungs, RUN! Joseph did just that – he ran out the door as fast as he could. He lost his coat, but he kept his character. 2 Timothy 2:22a says... "Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness." Don't reason with sin, don't fantasize about it, don't vacillate – flee – run as fast as you can from sin.

By doing such an honorable thing Joseph is surely going to be rewarded for his resilient character – or so we expect – but that's not what happens. Verses 13-20a... "When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. 'Look,' she said to them, 'this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.' She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: 'That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.' 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."

Every time Joseph does something right, things turn out wrong. He does the right thing in obeying his father and checking on his brothers, and his reward for doing right was getting thrown in a pit and sold into slavery. Now he does the right thing in resisting temptation, and his reward is being thrown into prison. But God had a plan, and His plan is right on schedule.

This leads us to the third mark of Joseph's success, and that is **unwavering trust in the face of injustice**. Verses 20b-23... "But while Joseph was there in the 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."

Once again, even though Joseph is treated unjustly for doing what is right, God was with him and caused him to prosper. Just as he caught the eye of Potiphar and was put in charge of his house, Joseph now catches the eye of the prison warden and is put in charge of the prison. No matter where Joseph was placed, he rose to the top and was successful.

He did not allow his circumstances to destroy him, but used them as a springboard to success. Some people play the "if only" game – if I had a better situation, I would prosper – if I only had a different family, I would prosper – if I only lived in a different place, I would be successful. But God says, "bloom where you're planted." Where you are does not matter – what matters is what God is doing in your life where you are.

As we'll see in Joseph's story, good things can happen in difficult circumstances, even prison. The Apostle Paul took advantage of his time in prison to witness to the prison guards and lead them to Christ, and he also used it as an opportunity to write several books of the Bible. The Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation while he was a prisoner on the Island of Patmos. John Bunyon wrote the classic *Pilgrim's Progress* in prison. Instead of saying "if only," these men said, "Lord, how do you want to use me in this situation?"

This brings us full circle to the secret of Joseph's success: He was dedicated to fulfill God's plan and purpose for his life despite the obstacles that stood in his way. The reality of life is that there will always be obstacles – there will always be adversity, there will always be temptation, and there will always be injustice – but when you are convinced of God's plan and recognize that He is with you in every situation – like Joseph you can thrive in any environment and Joseph shows us how.