

From our Comfort Zone to Our Character Zone
Portrait of Overcoming
Genesis 37 - 50

He was born into a very dysfunctional family.

His father had also come from a dysfunctional background.

His father was married to two different women, and had two mistresses besides that.

His father's first wife bore him 7 children, his mistresses bore him two children each, and his other wife bore him two children one of which is the one we are looking at today.

After a number of years she produced another child but she died giving birth to her second child.

Only one of the children born to his father was a girl, and she was raped as a young woman, and her brothers avenged her by killing the one who raped her as well as all of her family.

To make matters worse he was favored above all of his older brothers and sister which made them all very jealous. His father treated him special by letting him stay home and take it easy while they had to do all of the work on the farm. He also made a very special coat for him and failed to teach him how to be humble.

Who knows who I am talking about?

So today I want to talk to you about the characteristic of overcoming obstacles in life.

It doesn't matter where we come from, what our childhood was like, God can and will use us if we are willing to trust him. Often we feel like we can't be used of God, or were not good enough or talented enough. Sometimes we do discover God's gift or call on our lives, but then abuse it, or ignore it. Sometimes we run into problems and feel like God has forsaken us, or he just doesn't care. I'm sure that most of you have had times like that in your life, and it's often how we choose to deal with those times that makes the difference. We can throw up our hands and say I give up, or we can draw closer to God and wait for him to open the right doors.

Probably no one in the Bible, apart from Jesus himself went through more adversity than Joseph did. That's why I have chosen him to be our example of overcoming adversity. Again this is one of the characteristics we can develop only after we grow our faith, increase our obedience, build upon our commitment, and develop our courage. From that follows integrity, and endurance.

I. Adversities Joseph faced.

A. First those he had no control over.

1. He was born to Rachel, the Love of Jacobs life.
2. If you know the bible you probably know the story, if you don't let me share it in a nutshell so to speak.
 - a. His father Jacob had agreed to work for Laban for 7 years to get to marry Rachel who he loved.
 - b. Laban tricked him into marrying Leah his oldest daughter first.
 - c. That was probably allowed by God to teach him a lesson since he had been dishonest with his brother and father.
 - d. What goes around comes around.
 - e. Then he had to work for another 7 years for the hand of Rachel.
 - f. God made Leah fruitful and Rachel was not.
 - g. By the time Rachel was pregnant with Joseph, Jacob had 11 children, 1 girl and 10 boys,
 - h. So when he was born, he became his Father's favorite.
3. Next he was elevated in position above all of his brothers, by his father Jacob.
 - a. It can be real hurtful if a parent makes a decision like that. My mother saying to my brother, if Marvin had been here that wouldn't have happened.
 - b. That was Jacob's doing.
 - c. He made him a coat of many colors.
 - d. Back in those days, most coats were knee-length, short sleeved, and plain --- in other words --- work clothes. Joseph's "coat of many colors was richly ornamented and long-sleeved. It was not suitable for common work. Instead, it was the kind of garment worn by an overseer or manager. It was the kind of garment suited to the

“heir” of a Middle-Eastern clan --- it was appropriate apparel for a first-born son. And in that culture, the first-born inherited everything. He ruled the family. When the 10 older brothers saw Joseph wearing that coat, it was as if their father had called in his Lawyer and changed his Will.

4. Even God elevated him above the others.
 - a. Joseph had a couple of dreams.
 - b. Both indicated that the brothers would bow down before him.
 - c. That was like pouring gas on a fire.
 - d. So just imagine how they felt when this annoying little tattletale came up to them and announced: “Hey guys! Guess what I dreamed last night? We were all binding up sheaves of wheat when all of a sudden MY sheaf stood upright. And then --- get this! --- all YOUR sheaves of wheat gathered around and bowed down to mine. Cool, huh?”
 - e. Then a few days later the little spoiled brat says, “Guess what? I had another dream where the sun, moon and 11 stars were bowing down to me!” Genesis 37:7, 9
 - f. Now, when I talk about dreams, I’m not talking about DAYDREAMING I’m not talking about IMAGINING THINGS Daydreaming is when you imagine yourself winning the lottery. Which by the way is the largest in history 1.6 Billion.
 - g. It reminds me of a little boy who had a vivid imagination, he said... "Momma, momma, there's a bear in the yard." It scared mother to death and she ran to the window and looked out and there was a little dog in the front yard. She said, "Son, you have lied to me. Go on up to your room and tell the Lord what you said to me. And don't come down until you talk to the Lord." The little boy went upstairs and very soon he was back down at the supper table. Mother said, "Son, did you tell the Lord what you told me?" he said, "Yes, momma, I did." "Did you tell the Lord that you said there was a bear in the yard and it was a dog?" "Yes, I did, momma." She said, "What did God tell you?" he said, "Momma, God told me not to feel bad about it, He thought it was a bear, too, the

first time He looked out that window." Vivid imaginations!

- h. That's probably what the brothers thought about Joseph's dream.
- 5. He was sold into slavery by his jealous Brothers.
 - a. That was real hate, they wanted to kill him.
 - b. But the eldest brother intervened, and told them not to kill him instead put him in a well.
 - c. He had intended to rescue him later.
 - d. But before he could do in they sold him into slavery.
 - e. And then lied to their father to cover it up.
 - f. And then he was sold to Potiphar.
- 6. He was falsely accused of attempted rape.
 - a. He was faithful and worked his way up the ladder to Potiphar's house.
 - b. But when he wouldn't give in to Potiphar's wifeshe lied about it and got thrown into jail.
- 7. He was forgotten by the cup bearer.
 - a. After he had interpreted his dream correctly, he was restored but forgot about Joseph.
- B. Then those he had control over, there were really not to many.
 - 1. He didn't learn humility until after he faced many adversities.
 - 2. He wore the coat proudly in front of his brothers.
 - 3. He lauded them over with his dreams.
 - 4. He took his God given talents for granted.

II. Adversities made him the man he was.

- A. Because of these adversities he began to see God at work in his life.
 - 1. I'm sure that was not always clear to him.
 - 2. It must have been hard to see his brothers turn against him.
 - 3. It had to be hard to be falsely accused of rape, we may have seen that played out here recently.
 - 4. It must have been hard to be forgotten by someone he had befriended and helped.
- B. But when it all come down, he could see how God was using all of these to bring about Glory to him.

1. God DOES use the hard times of life for our good. He is the original expert at making good out of bad. Every single one of us is going to have to take some unexpected --- and unpleasant Pit Stops in life. When that happens, we need to learn the lesson Joseph learned --- and LOOK UP. When Joseph hit the bottom of that deep well shaft, he had nowhere to look but UP. It was probably the first time in his 17 years that he'd been in a situation he couldn't get out of. He couldn't climb out or jump out or even talk his way out. He'd reached the end of his own power. Joseph couldn't escape from that Pit on his own. He couldn't free himself from Slavery on his own. He couldn't get out of that dark Egyptian Prison on his own. Joseph learned his limits ... He learned that he had nowhere to look but UP.
 2. That's when Joseph learned that when God was all he had, God was all he needed. He learned that God Himself was enough. He learned that God ... and God alone ... could make his Dream come true.
- C. Do you think that if Joseph had known all that he had to go through for God to fulfill those early dreams that he would have bragged about them or even told his brothers.
1. I really doubt it, he would have probably run the other way, and told his father thanks but no thanks for the coat.

III. What can we learn about adversities.

- A. First and foremost, they are a part of life.
1. Remember Jesus said "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."
 2. I'm sure that Noah, Abraham, Joshua, Caleb, and Deborah all faced adversities.
 3. Jesus himself faced all kinds of adversities in his life.
 4. As did Simon Peter, John, Paul and all of the early Christians.
 5. Martin Luther, Calvin, John Wesley, William Wilberforce, Eric Liddell, Bonhoeffer, Mother Teresa and millions of others who have overcome great adversities in life.
- B. Second we can learn what God has in store for us.
1. If Joseph had become bitter when his brothers turned on him, or when he was falsely accused, or forgotten by a friend do you think he would have ever understood why what had happened

to him.

2. He would not have been able to say to his brothers, what you intended for evil God intended for good to accomplish what is now being done.
3. Abraham Lincoln once said, "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."
4. This both proved to be true in Joseph's life.
5. The Roman method of threshing grain has one man stirring up the sheaves while another man rides over it in a crude cart equipped with rollers instead of wheels (sometimes flat boards were used). Sharp stones or bits of iron were attached to the cylinders to help separate the husks from the grain. The cart was called a Tribulum. This is the origin of the word, "tribulation."

When afflictions come to us, we may think of ourselves as being torn into pieces under cruel pressures of adverse circumstances. Yet, the purpose of the Tribulum was not to tear up the sheaves, but to expose the grain. We are never put under the pressures of a trial needlessly.

Let me close with a story.

A parable is told of a farmer who owned an old mule. The mule fell into the farmer's well. The farmer heard the mule "braying", or whatever mules do when they fall into wells. After carefully assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the mule, but decided that neither the mule nor the well were worth the trouble of saving. Instead he called his neighbors together and told them what had happened...and enlisted them to help haul dirt to bury the old mule in the well and put him out of his misery.

Initially, the old mule was hysterical! But as the farmer and his neighbors continued shoveling and the dirt hit his back...a thought struck the animal. It suddenly dawned on him that every time a shovel load of dirt landed on his back.....HE SHOULD SHAKE IT OFF AND STEP UP!

This he did blow after blow. "Shake it off and step up...shake it off and step up...shake it off and step up!" he repeated to encourage himself. No matter how painful the blows, or distressing the situation seemed the old mule fought "panic" and just kept right on SHAKING IT OFF AND STEPPING UP! It was not long before the old mule, battered and exhausted, STEPPED TRIUMPHANTLY OVER THE WALL OF THAT WELL. What seemed like it would bury him, actually

blessed him.....all because of the manner in which he handled his adversity.
THAT'S LIFE! If we face our problems, respond to them positively,
and refuse to give in to panic, bitterness or self-pity...The adversities that come
along to bury us usually have within them the potential to benefit and bless us!