

Inspiring Moments

Which would You Rather Be? Successful? Or Fruitful?

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In Genesis Chapters 37-41 (see also Joseph's Waiting-Room Experience), you see the terrible injustice Joseph had to endure for 13 years. However, despite the various setbacks he suffered, Joseph was very successful in what he did during those 13 years of 'waiting-room' experience. Sold as a slave by his brothers at the age of 13 years, he worked for Potiphar (security chief of Pharaoh's palace) as an apprentice slave. Soon he rose to become the head of Potiphar's household. He was so good in his job, his boss had not a care in the world.

However, he was thrown into prison on the false accusation of rape by Potiphar's wife, who in fact attempted to seduce Joseph. So Joseph found himself in the royal jail. He became such an invaluable inmate to the chief jailor who made Joseph his deputy. Like his previous boss, under Joseph's supervision, the chief jailor had not a care in the world. While Joseph was serving time in the royal jail, he successfully interpreted two of his fellow inmates' dreams (baker and cup bearer). The cup bearer, as Joseph correctly predicted, was re-instated to his job (while the baker was killed), but he forgot to help Joseph to plead with Pharaoh for his release. So Joseph was left in jail to suffer another two years. Finally, the cup bearer remembered Joseph and introduced him to Pharaoh who was having terrible dreams and none of his magicians could interpret them for him. Joseph successfully interpreted the dreams for Pharaoh. He was eventually made the Governor of Egypt at the age of 30 years.

The question is: What was the secret of Joseph's success? We know that God was behind Joseph's success. However, we also see Joseph's success as inscribed in the names of his two sons: Manasseh and Ephraim. What is in a name? In Joseph's case, it says a lot. First, 'Manasseh' means "God has made me forget all my troubles, and the family of my father" (Gen 41:51). Joseph was able to be successful in his jobs, despite his 13 years of suffering, because God helped him to forget his troubles. That is a very important lesson for those of us going through challenging times while waiting for God's deliverance. Leave your troubles to God, go and lead a normal life (as normal as it can be).

More significantly is the name of Joseph's younger son, 'Ephraim' which means "God has made me fruitful in this land of my suffering". Notice the word is not "successful" but "fruitful". This is highly significant. What is the difference between "success" and "fruitfulness"? A lot, it is like "chalk and cheese". They appear to be the same but there is a significant difference. "Success" is what the world sees in you. "Fruitfulness" is what God sees in you. You can be "success" but not "fruitful". For instance, you can be a very rich billionaire or a very famous film star or sportsman but you have helped no one except your family. That is "success" but not "fruitfulness". On the other hand, you can be "fruitful" but not "successful". There are lots of good people out there doing good for the disadvantaged and poor quietly, unnoticed and unrecognised. That's "fruitfulness", though not "success". So which would you rather be? Successful or fruitful? Some say: Why can't I have both? But God may ask you: "Can you handle both?" When we become successful, we tend to forget God.

We may not all be successful, but we can all be fruitful.