

## Resolving Disappointments

Bruce Goodrich was being initiated into the cadet corps at Texas A & M University. One night, Bruce was forced to run until he dropped -- but he never got up. Bruce Goodrich died before he even entered college. A short time after the tragedy, Bruce's father wrote this letter to the administration, faculty, student body, and the corps of cadets: "I would like to take this opportunity to express the appreciation of my family for the great outpouring of concern and sympathy from Texas A & M University and the college community over the loss of our son Bruce. We were deeply touched by the tribute paid to him in the battalion. We were particularly pleased to note that his Christian witness did not go unnoticed during his brief time on campus." Mr. Goodrich went on: "I hope it will be some comfort to know that we harbor no ill will in the matter. We know our God makes no mistakes. Bruce had an appointment with his Lord and is now secure in his celestial home. When the question is asked, 'Why did this happen?' perhaps one answer will be, 'So that many will consider where they will spend eternity.'"

Everyone experiences disappointments in life and some of those are very painful. The dictionary says that a disappointment is the feeling of sadness or displeasure caused by the defeat of one's hopes or expectations. It can also be a sense of unhappiness because someone has behaved badly towards you. Some people are able to resolve the disappointments in their hearts others are not. The ability to resolve disappointments in one's heart is of extreme importance and it significantly impacts a person's quality of life.

There is a powerful family story in the book of Genesis that illustrates this principle. In this story Joseph's brothers did not resolve their disappointments, but Joseph did.

### Joseph's Brothers

Jacob, the Patriarch, had a house full of children. Joseph's brothers growing up experienced several disappointments. Joseph used to reveal to their father what the brothers were up to (Gen 37:2) and they did not like that. They quickly realized that dad's favorite son was Joseph. Jacob loved Joseph more than the other sons and he gave Joseph a special robe of many colors (37:3). Joseph had special dreams and so the brothers "hated him even more for his dreams and for his words" (Gen 37:8 ESV). The father's special treatment of Joseph caused the brothers to be very jealous of him (37:11).

One day Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers who were keeping the sheep in Dothan. When the brothers saw Joseph they began to conspire to kill him (37:18). When a caravan of Ishmaelites came by the brothers decided to sell Joseph to them as a slave (37:28). They put an animal's blood on Joseph's robe of many colors and lied to their father implying that Joseph was dead (37:31).

Unresolved disappointments led to resentment, which led to hatred, jealousy, selling a brother as a slave, lying to their father and devastating their father's heart. Their guilt stayed in their hearts for many years. Many years later when circumstances turned against them, "...they said to one another, 'In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us'" (42:21).

This dark path started with unresolved disappointments. Decades later, when their father died, the brothers said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him..." (50:15). The brothers' unresolved disappointments led to a lifetime of guilt. Unfortunately, this can

happen in our lives today. When disappointments are not resolved in our hearts they can lead to bitterness and resentment, to bad decisions, guilt and deep sadness.

## **Joseph**

Now let's turn our attention to Joseph who also experienced many disappointments, but he handled them differently. Joseph was sold as a slave by his own brothers and taken to Egypt, far from his family. He was sold a second time to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard (39:1). While there Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce Joseph. Joseph fled from her; she lied about him and accused him falsely to her husband and Joseph was thrown into prison, having done nothing to deserve it (39:20). After helping the chief cupbearer in prison Joseph asked him to mention Joseph to Pharaoh. He ended up forgetting about Joseph, "Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him" (40:23).

Joseph's disappointments seem to be much more severe than those of his brothers. He ended up removed from his family by force, became a slave and spent thirteen years in prison unjustly. If there was someone that had a reason to be resentful it was Joseph. But he chose not to.

Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams and is made the second in command in all of Egypt. In the years of hunger Jacob sends some of his sons to Egypt to buy food. There the brothers encounter Joseph. On a second trip to Egypt all the brothers are together, including the youngest, Benjamin. Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, "'I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?'" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence" (45:3). Now Joseph had the power to make his brothers pay for what they did to him, but he did not, why? The answer is simple, Joseph had resolved his disappointments in his heart. We will take a look at Joseph to learn from him how we can resolve disappointments in our lives.

**1. Recognize the wrong that was done to you, but don't make that your permanent dwelling.** Joseph didn't pretend his hurtful past hadn't happened. He told Pharaoh's cupbearer, "I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit" (40:15). In order to heal from your disappointments you need to recognize they happened and they are hurtful. There is a time to grieve those hurts. But, you also need to make the decision that you are not going to live there permanently; you want to move on, you want to heal from that disappointment.

After Joseph became prime minister in Egypt he got married and had children. It is interesting to notice what he called his sons. Back in those days personal names had special meanings. "Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. 'For,' he said, 'God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.' The name of the second he called Ephraim, 'For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction' (41:51-52). Joseph recognized his hurt, but he was seeing that God was helping him forget his hardship and God was bringing good things in his life despite the afflictions he had suffered.

We too need to recognize the pain that was caused in our lives, but we must decide to look to God for healing from those past hurts and for better things in our lives. Decide not to live in the past. When we live in the past we miss the good God is bringing to our lives now.

**2. Focus on your daily relationship with God, not on the injustice done to you.** When people are hurt they need to make a decision to stop focusing on themselves, stop licking their wounds and instead focus on God and His Word. What was Joseph's focus? We read about Joseph walking with God and talking about God, "The Lord was with Joseph..." (39:2). Again, "But the Lord was with Joseph..." (39:21).

Others could see that Joseph walked with God, “And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?” (41:38).

We need to choose to focus on God and walk with God each day. Let God speak to your heart through His Word and transform your soul. Lift your eyes from your disappointments to the God that is able to work good things out of any disappointment. He is the God that brings new life out of the valley of dry bones. Focus on Him. Walk with Him. Joseph walked with God even in prison; follow his example.

**3. Focus on pleasing God, not yourself.** Sometimes we rationalize that we can seek some kind of pleasure in things that will end up hurting us, because after all we have been hurt. So many Christians with unresolved disappointments turn to substance abuse, addictions or unhealthy relationships. They are trying to medicate the pain. That is wrong thinking.

We need to decide to seek things that please God. After Joseph was rejected by his brothers he found himself in a new place and his wife’s boss kept asking him to jump in bed with her. He could have rationalized this pleasure for a moment, but he decided to please God above all others, including himself, and he told her no. He said, “How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” (39:9).

You need to make decisions based on what is pleasing to God and not to you. We need to turn to God and ask Him to meet the needs of our hearts instead of turning to the things of the world to seek to meet those needs. Joseph said to his brothers, “... I fear God... (42:18). The fear of men will cause you to stumble. If you fear God you will want to please God and you will be blessed by God.

**4. Forgive and love those who hurt you.** Joseph was in a perfect place for revenge against his brothers, yet he chose to forgive and love his brothers. “But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them” (50:19-21).

Joseph never told his father what the brothers did to him. He did not want to break his father’s heart and hurt his brothers; a true sign of forgiveness. His continual focus on God, who is forgiving and loving, led Joseph to forgive and love his brothers, even though they didn’t deserve it.

God has forgiven you and loves you and He asks you to do the same to the person who disappointed you. Ask God for the grace to do just that. It doesn’t come from you, it comes from God, through you. In some cases people feel that God is the one who disappointed them. Remember that God is not the author of evil; he works even through broken things to bring about good, “...for those who love God all things work together for good... (Rom. 8:28). The path to a better quality of life for you takes you through forgiveness and love. God will help you do that.

**5. Speak God’s truth to yourself and others.** Joseph decided not to wallow in his past hurt, but to focus on God, to walk with Him and to trust Him. His words revealed his focus on God. He told the Pharaoh’s baker and cupbearer, “...Do not interpretations belong to God?” (40:8). When Pharaoh had dreams Joseph was called to interpret them. Joseph could have taken credit for himself to make himself look good, but instead, “Joseph answered Pharaoh, ‘It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer’” (41:16). After Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dream, he affirmed again who was the source of this revelation, “...God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do” (41:25).

Words matter! When our words are God centered instead of me centered, they reveal that our hearts are focusing on God and not on ourselves. Your heart needs to hear your own mouth speak the truths of God. God also told Joshua to do this, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth..." (Josh. 1:8). It is the truth of God's Word that corrects our faulty thinking. It is not enough to think you know key truths about God, your mouth must speak them, so your ears hear them, and they get down into your heart and soul.

**6. Trust the Sovereign heart of God and his ability to bring about good when others fail you.** When Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers he spoke of what God had shown him. "...do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life... God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God" (45:5-8). Perhaps one day you will see how God turned your painful disappointment into something good. He loves you and He has good plans for you. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). Trust the Sovereign heart of God and his ability to bring about good when others fail you.

Some people are able to resolve the disappointments in their hearts make good decisions and live a more peaceful life. Others are not able to resolve their disappointments; they bury them in their souls, they become resentful and their quality of life suffers. "See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled" (Heb. 12:15). The ability to resolve disappointments in one's heart is of extreme importance and it significantly impacts a person's life and family. Let's learn from Joseph's example and resolve the disappointments in our heart, for the glory of God and for peace in our hearts and our families.

I close with this story told by Brian L. Harbor. The year was 1920. The scene was the examining board for selecting missionaries. Standing before the board was a young man named Oswald Smith. One dream dominated his heart. He wanted to be a missionary. Over and over again, he prayed, "Lord, I want to go as a missionary for you. Open a door of service for me." Now, at last, his prayer would be answered. When the examination was over, the board turned Oswald Smith down. He did not meet their qualifications. He failed the test. Oswald Smith had set his direction, but now life gave him a detour. What would he do? As Oswald Smith prayed, God planted another idea in his heart. If he could not go as a missionary, he would build a church which could send out missionaries. And that is what he did. Oswald Smith pastored The People's Church in Toronto, Canada, which sent out more missionaries than any other church at that time. Oswald Smith brought God into the situation, and God transformed his detour into a main thoroughfare of service.

What will you do about your disappointments?

Moises Esteves