

When Things go Desperately Wrong

Genesis 37:18-24

Foreign to most of us, and only a slight memory to the rest was a time in our country's history known as the *Great Depression*. Through a period of forty-odd years. It was the struggle of many families to carve out all but the simplest existence. I remember my Dad talking about leaving home and working in Labor Camps (known as CC camps) when he was just a boy, to help his family survive.

It was a time that movies have looked back on. Some in horror and others like Earl Hamner's nostalgic creation of the *Walton's*, a family who loved each other through the hard times and reflected a glowing picture of simplistic living in the midst of poverty. But the truth is, hard times are hard on families because they're hard on people. And I am pretty confident that if the option were left open to most of us, we would just as soon skip the hard times.

You remember, in this year's Family series, we have been looking at Jacob's family, as we seek to learn from their mistakes. So today I have entitled our study, "When things go Desperately Wrong."

When young Joseph set out to find his brothers who were tending Jacob's herds in Dothan, it is doubtful that he anticipated the disaster that awaited him. He knew that his brothers resented his very presence. When he found them at Dothan, they had already conspired against him and plotted his murder. As soon as they saw him coming, they nudged one another and said, "Here comes the dreamer!" Their initial plan was to kill him on the spot, throw him in a pit, and tell Jacob that a wild animal had devoured him. For some reason Joseph would never understand, Reuben (of all people) talked the others out of it. He suggested that instead they simply throw Joseph into

the pit, but not kill him. (Maybe Reuben planned to rescue Joseph later, but subsequent events prevented that possibility.)

They seized Joseph, stripped his prized tunic from him, and threw him into an empty pit. Then they sat down beside the pit and calmly ate their lunches! Joseph begged their mercy, but they left him in the dark pit to die. **The dreamer was stuck in a dark place with no one but God.** As you can see, there was no love lost between Joseph and his brothers at this point. As they were picnicking, a caravan of Ishmaelites on their way to Egypt passed by with camels bearing sweet gum and spices. **Seeing more profit in a live slave than a dead brother, the brothers decided then and there to sell Joseph into slavery to the Ishmaelites.** (The sale was Judah's idea, but the others readily agreed.) They pulled him up out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelite traders for thirty shekels of silver.

What a strange experience. Joseph overheard his brothers planning to tell his father that he had been killed. And he knew from what he heard his new "owners" saying that he would travel far from home and would probably never return. **The course of life can change radically in a moment, can't it?** Joseph's did on that day.

His brothers went to great lengths to convince their father of his death. They took his tunic (which Jacob knew Joseph would never have given up) and dipped it in the blood of a slaughtered male goat. When they arrived back at home they handed it to Jacob with these words: "We found this; please examine it to see whether it is your son's tunic or not."

Before he even turned it over in his hands, Jacob knew the garment was Joseph's. He voiced the meaning of their charade before they had a chance to explain, saying, "A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!" **In the traditional expression of emotion, Jacob tore his own coat in grief, put sackcloth on his body, and mourned for days on end.** No matter who tried to comfort him,

he would not be quieted. He wept bitterly and grieved over the loss, unaware that Joseph was still very much alive.

The truth of the matter is that some of our best-laid plans never materialize. Maybe you know some one, maybe you, that was enjoying the *freeway of life* when all of a sudden the *bottom fell out*, the *roof caved in*, the *wheel ran off*, and they found themselves in a situation where, totally unexpected, things went desperately wrong.

So how does all of this relate to our life and families? I want to share with you a couple of principles that I think will help us deal with just such a circumstance.

The first principle is that some of the greatest successes are often followed by failure. *Joseph's* darkest hour came as ours frequently do - unexpectedly, and on the heels of much happiness, security, and success. He was a favored son, a young man touched by the hand of God with dreams of a bright future.

This principle is seen very clear in the life of Christ. Matthew 21:1-11 says, “Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, The Lord has need of them, and immediately he will send them. All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved,

saying, Who is this? So the multitudes said, This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.” Just a few short days after this great triumphal entrance, we have these words in Mark 15:6-15, “Now at the feast he (Pilate) was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them. But Pilate answered them, saying, Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews? For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. Pilate answered and said to them again, What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews? So they cried out again, Crucify Him! Then Pilate said to them, Why, what evil has He done? But they cried out all the more, Crucify Him! So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified.” The very people just days earlier that cried, “Hail him!” now are crying, “Nail him.”

Remember, some of the greatest *successes* are often followed by *failure*.

The second principle is some of the greatest *services* in life are often followed by *forgetfulness*. Joseph has served his brothers and his father well. Although it is true that he was his father’s favorite, Joseph was willing to do whatever he was told and whatever he could for the good of his family. But the bottom line was that because of jealousy his brothers never considered Joseph’s service to his family.

Take for example the children of Israel. While they were miserable, broken, and begging to God for deliverance, God raised up a man by the name of Moses to confront Pharaoh to let God’s people go. Through a series of events Pharaoh finally agreed to set the children of Israel free. But, later, he changed his mind and sent his

army to capture and kill those Israelites. When the army had the children of Israel up against the Red Sea, God intervened and parted the *Red Sea*, and closed up the water thereof and drowned Pharaoh's entire army. But now they are making their way through the desert, on their way to the Promised Land, and they begin to murmur and complain about everything from the food to the weather, until finally they cry out in Exodus 14:12, "Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness."

I remember the story found in Luke 17:11-18, "Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us! So when He saw them, He said to them, Go, show yourselves to the priests. And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" **Remember this, if people don't care enough to thank God for His blessings, don't expect them to appreciate your efforts very much.**

I have no doubt there have been those people in your life that you have befriended and even helped financially, maybe even helped them get their lives straightened out, and then after a little while they could not find it in their heart to even speak to you anymore. Remember, some of the greatest services in life are often followed by forgetfulness.

Last of all, the greatest shortages are always followed by fullness. As we move forward in the life of Joseph, we will find that he had

become entrusted with the greatest wealth of food and resources the then world had ever know. He life has been of unjust treatment and want, but now he is in a position to bring hope and plenty to those in his charge.

I am reminded of the story in Matthew 14:15-21, “When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food. But Jesus said to them, They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat. And they said to Him, We have here only five loaves and two fish. He said, Bring them here to Me. Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the *disciples*; and the *disciples* gave to the multitudes. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.” **Have you ever wondered what the disciples must have been thinking?** Surely they must have been thinking, “There just isn’t enough to go around, but Jesus said for us to do it, so we will give it our best shot.” I mean, after all, the disciples were hungry to, and yet, Jesus told the disciples to feed the 5,000 men plus women and children. **Now, how many disciples were there anyway?** Let me see, oh yea, there were *twelve*? How many baskets of food were left over when the disciples finished feeding the somewhere between five and twenty thousand people? The Bible says, “So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained.”

We have this promise in Philippians 4:19, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” People, you can rest assured of this one fact – God will always meet your need and then throw in a blessing, if we will only be obedient to His will for your life.

The greatest shortages are always followed by fullness.

The scientist and inventor Thomas Edison was sixty-seven years old and at the pinnacle of his career when his laboratory facility caught fire. Edison's son remembers shouting for his father as the fire raged out of control, not knowing if he was trapped inside. As he cried out he saw his father running toward him saying, "Son, go get your mother and bring her here. She'll never see another fire like this one as long as she lives." **While the fire was still burning, Edison leaned back on a table and fell asleep.** The next day he called together all his employees and said, "We're starting over. This time we're going to make it better than before. We're going to build it from scratch and do it right." As he sifted through the ashes of his office, Edison found a picture of himself, frayed and charred around the edges but with the image still intact. Picking up the picture he turned to his son and said, "See, the fire never touched me. It never touched me."

There may come a time in life when things go totally and unexpectedly go wrong. We may lose all we have acquired materially in this life, but if we have invested in spiritual values, no tragedy that can happen in this fallen world will ever touch us. The beloved hymn "Amazing Grace" says it best: "Through many dangers toils and snares, I have already come; 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."

If you have never been saved, why not today?

Everyone please stand for prayer.

Father,

Your Word is true. There are times when life just isn't fair. But I know that I have a loving Heavenly Father who is always just and fair, full of grace and compassion. Give me the courage to chose to allow life's storms to make better instead of bitter. In Jesus' name. Amen.