

Winning the Struggle



by Dr. Clair Schnupp

ARE YOU HAPPY?



We all want to be happy. The first thought that comes to mind when we think of happiness is being part of a happy family.

THINGS DON'T ALWAYS WORK OUT

However, things do not always work out the way we would like them to. Something happens which suddenly makes a home unhappy. There are children whose father or mother died when they were babies. There are others whose parents were killed when they were ten or twelve or fourteen, bringing sadness into a happy family.

Many people are never happy because of grief and sorrow. Because of something that happened or because of the situation in which they find themselves, they think they will never be happy.

HAPPINESS... A BABY BROTHER

Let's look at the life of a boy in the Bible who had plenty of reasons to be unhappy. Joseph lived with his father and his mother, and they loved him very much. He had brothers and sisters. Then one day his father said, "We're going to have a little baby." And, oh, was he excited!

He was waiting and waiting. He would come and say, "Mother, how long will it be till the baby is born?"

"Oh, six months!"

He would wait a few more days and then say, "How long till the baby is born?" Still six months. He would wait another day or two... "How long...?"

After awhile it went down to five months, four months, three months, two months. Oh, he was getting eager to see his little baby brother or sister.

A LONG JOURNEY

At this time Joseph's father and mother and all their household started a long journey to their grandfather's house. Joseph was excited because he had never seen his grandfather. He would never see his grandmother, Rebekah, because she had died. They would need to travel for many days.

"I WANT MAMA!"

But one night Joseph's father came to him and said, "Joseph, I'm sorry to tell you this, but your mother died." I can see Joseph sitting there in shock and then beginning to cry.



Before Joseph's mother died, a baby boy was born, and she named him Benjamin. We read about it in Genesis 35:18. I can see Joseph the next day, walking out alone on the hillside, thinking how much he loved his mother. As he walked away with tears in his eyes, his father tried to comfort him.

As unhappy as Joseph was, he did not get bitter. I can imagine him finally lifting his head and saying, "Okay, God, if that's the way you want it, I accept it."

HELLO... GOODBYE

They then resumed their trip. Soon they would see Grandfather. I can see the excitement coming back into Joseph's heart.

They traveled day after day. Finally they arrived at Grandfather's place. Joseph was so happy to see Grandfather. His grandfather held him and talked with him. Now at least he could live with Grandfather. He had wanted to live with him for many years, and here he was!



They were there for only a short time when his father told him that his grandfather had died. I can see Joseph saying, "Oh, no, not again!" I can see him crying. I can see him feeling bitter. "God, don't you love me? Don't you care for me? Don't you see my tears?"

But, I can see him finally saying, "Okay, God, if that's the way you want it, that's the way it will be. I'll accept it."

A FAMILY FIGHT

The story goes on to say that Joseph's brothers hated him. "They hated him and could not speak peaceably to him" (Genesis 37:4). Day after day they would shout at him. Joseph's heart would go down. They would have beaten him up if they



would have had a chance. They could not speak peacefully to him. They were always shouting at him, calling him names, and treating him unkindly.

Year after year, they would not be nice to him. I can just imagine Joseph saying to himself, "My mother and my grandfather are dead, and my brother's hate me. But at least my father loves me."

LOVE FOR HATE

He would go to his father's side. "Father, they really hate me."

"Yes, but I love you."

At least he had his father. I can see him lying on his bed, crying because of the way his brothers treated him, not wanting him to come with them.

He would still lift his face toward God, "Lord, please help me to love them. Please help me to forgive them."

HELPING OUT

One day his father said, "Joseph, would you take some food out to your brothers in the field? They're hungry. They have been away for quite a while."



So Joseph took the food to his brothers. As he took it, he thought, "Well, maybe this time they might be good to me. Maybe this time they won't holler at me. Maybe this time they'll be kind to me. Maybe just this one time."

He may have prayed, "God, please help them to be kind to me this one time. I want to forgive them even though it makes me feel so terrible when they are mean to me. Please help them to be kind to me." If he did pray that, he had to wait a long time for his prayer to be answered—many, many years.

HATE STRIKES

For when he got there they grabbed him. They grabbed the food from him. They tore off his coat.



They were going to kill him, but then decided not to. There was a big pit nearby, a well without water. They took him and threw him down into it. That was how much they hated him. Then they sat up at the top and ate all the food.

They probably heard Joseph down in the well, calling to them, "Please, please, please help me!"

Poor Joseph's heart went right down to his sandals!

He finally sat down at the bottom of the pit and cried. He felt the temptation to hate his brothers and to be bitter. "I lost my mother, I lost my grandfather, and my brothers have treated me cruelly all these years. Now even God has forgotten me down in the bottom of this pit."

But finally he lifted up his face, looked up from the hole, and said, "Okay, God, I'll forgive them."



"LET'S SELL HIM"

As the brothers were eating, they looked up and saw Ishmaelites coming. Judah said to his brothers, "Come, let us sell him to these merchants."

"Yeah, that's a good idea. If he died, we would not get anything. Let's sell him. Now we can get rich on the guy."

Joseph may have been thinking, "Maybe now they'll be kind to me. Maybe they'll love me." But then the Ishmaelites came along. Joseph saw these men giving his brothers twenty pieces of silver and

he knew what was happening. The tears flowed down his cheeks.



"Please, don't sell me to those men," he pled.

His brothers slapped him across the face. "Be quiet!"

Then they gave Joseph to the Ishmaelites. I do not know what the Ishmaelites did. They did not want him to run off so they probably put him up on one of the camels. The camels traveled down toward Egypt, bumpity-bump. With every bump of the camel, Joseph's heart went thump, thump. "My mother died, my grandfather died, my brothers have treated me terribly all these years. And now I won't even have my father to talk to."

Feelings of bitterness and anger rose up in his heart. How he wished he could do something to his brothers!

I am sure he was tempted to sit there and say, "Poor me! God doesn't love me. God doesn't care. There's no way anything good will ever happen to me. I wish I could die. Everything goes wrong with me. Nothing goes right."

GOD KEEPS WATCH

As Joseph rode mile after mile, many things went through his mind. But eventually he turned his face toward God and cried, "Please help me as I go into this strange land that I know nothing about."

I am sure that he could not understand the language of the Ishmaelites, nor the language of the Egyptians when he got there. It was a strange land. He had no friends. But he had a beautiful attitude by the time he arrived there. The Ishmaelites sold him—maybe for one-hundred pieces of silver—to one of the Egyptian rulers, Potiphar.

Potiphar liked Joseph. He was sweet and tender and forgiving, not angry and bitter as many of the other slaves were. Potiphar eventually put Joseph in charge of his whole house. Joseph was thankful for how kind Potiphar was. Joseph was happy with

the situation.

But I know when he went about his work that there were many times when he thought about his dear mother, about how she died that night. He thought about his grandfather who he liked so much and who died so suddenly. He thought about his brothers who treated him so badly. He thought about the time in the pit and of when he was sold. He thought about his father.

I am sure he sat with tears in his eyes many times. Yet he found strength in knowing that God makes no mistakes. Potiphar put him in charge of his whole house. During this time Joseph grew up to be a fine young man.

SIN SETS A TRAP

Potiphar's wife was a wicked woman. She wanted Joseph to go to bed with her. She would come and say, "Joseph, would you go to bed with me today?"

And Joseph would reply, "NO!"

Yet Joseph had to stay there, because this was his work. I am sure she put on more pressures every day—the wicked woman that she was.

One day she was burning with her wicked desire. She grabbed Joseph and was going to force him to sin. Joseph just shook off his coat and ran. There she stood with his coat.



Then she cried out, "Potiphar, Potiphar! Joseph tried to rape me! Quick, I got his coat! Hurry! Hurry! Potiphar!"

THE TRAP SPRINGS

They captured Joseph and threw him in jail. There he sat. I am sure there was a real battle going on in his heart. "God, I obeyed you. I didn't sin with that wicked woman. I have listened to you,

and this is what I get."

If only we could quickly flash on a screen all the battles that were going on in Joseph's heart as he sat there in jail after that wicked woman lied about him.



He was probably tempted to think, "God, you're not fair! You don't know what you are doing. Life is too miserable. Life is too bad. God, you're not fair to me."

"If only I could die. If only that roof could fall down and crush me. If only that guard would draw his arrow back across his giant bow and shoot me. If only I could wring the neck of that woman. What agony! If only I could die."

KEEP LOOKING TO GOD

He sat there in the corner of the jail, just crying. Finally he looked up and said, "Okay, God, if that's what you want, just please help me. I don't want to be bitter. I want to forgive. I want to love. There is no happiness in hate. Teach me to forgive. Give me strength."

Time went on. Finally the jailer put him in charge of the whole jail. Because he was bitter? NO! Because he hated everyone? NO! Rather because he knew how to forgive and look to God.

One night the king had a strange dream. No one could interpret the dream for him. Finally someone remembered Joseph and how God had given him the wisdom to interpret a dream. The king called for Joseph. God revealed to Joseph the meaning of the king's dream. Egypt would be in great trouble. A big famine, lasting many years, would come. Many people would die unless something was done to prepare for the famine.

Because Joseph had kept a good attitude in spite of all the difficulties and problems and because he had kept his life close to God, the king now was able to put him in charge of important work which would save the lives of many.



Joseph finally got married. After all the years of agony and turmoil and tears, he was happy with his life. He was happy with his wife and children. Then he could say, "God, I'm beginning to understand that it pays off to walk in victory, to have forgiveness, to seek your help, and to work on attitudes that aren't right or wholesome toward you nor toward life itself. And I want to change them."

POWER OF FORGIVENESS

All those years of brokenheartedness made Joseph into a man that God could use. But first Joseph had to learn how to find victory and to walk in forgiveness. He had to find that power in God.

Then came that beautiful chance for him to kill his brothers. But he did not. Instead he forgave them. He cried on their shoulders. "I love you.



There's no food in Canaan. Come down here and live in Egypt."

He was kind to his brothers and forgave them. Because of this, his brothers and his father did not die in the famine.

There is power in forgiveness. We have nothing to gain by hating. We have nothing to gain by being bitter toward God for the difficulties that come into our lives. We need to forgive. So many times we say, "If only this or if only that would not have happened, then I would be happy."

JOY IN GOD

Joseph knew how to find joy with God in spite of all the things that went wrong. We cannot change the situations of pain and sorrow that arise in our lives. There is absolutely no way we can change them. Instead, it is our attitudes toward difficult situations that must change. God wants to help us have a good attitude and a forgiving heart; He wants us to look to Him for help and strength in the midst of these troubles.

What would Joseph have had to gain if he had become bitter and resentful? Nothing. What would Joseph have had to gain if he had caused the ceiling to fall on himself and crush him? Nothing. What did he have to gain by forgiving, by looking to God for strength? Everything.

Suppose the ceiling would have fallen on him while he was resentful. His life would not have been profitable to himself nor to others. But in accepting his situation, he found what God was leading him to later. Because of his attitude, God blessed him. He had heaven to gain in the end.



THE INSIDE IS WHERE IT'S AT

Every person has struggles and temptations. The struggles are in your mind. The battle is not out where we can see it. The battle is inside.

The Bible says that we wrestle not with flesh and blood. Our biggest problem is not people who

do not like us - people who are flesh and blood. Our biggest problem is Satan working in our hearts and minds, trying to destroy us. That is our biggest problem.

Satan wants to destroy us from the inside—through our minds and through our imaginations.

WINNING THE STRUGGLE

Yet, we do not want to give in. God is on the side of victory. He wants to make us into better people and better Christians. He wants to give us more of His joy by helping us to forgive, to love, to understand the situation, and to keep the right attitude about what happens to us in life.

That is victorious living. The battle within us is for us to win but only with God's help. We know what is going on in our hearts. We know what the struggle is that we are facing today. Each one of us faces a struggle, some to a different degree than others. Some days the struggle is different; some days the struggle is harder. But the struggle is ours to win with God's help. We have no one else to blame if we lose this battle. Let each one say with Paul in Philippians 4:13: "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*"

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