

Read also Romans 8:5-13. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

What is the foundation you build upon when life as you know it changes? What shapes your behavior? What do you fall back on?

Joseph was seventeen when life changed for him. He was a spoiled teen, but safe and secure. Until, that is, his eleven brothers ganged up against him and sold him to Midianite traders, who took him to Egypt, far away from his home, his habits, his language, and his lifestyle. Everything about faith is challenged in this story. Let's hear it. READ the story.

We remember Joseph before he was sold by his brothers as arrogant, spoiled by his father, a troublemaker, headstrong—a game player. Then abruptly life changed. The Psalmist says, “Joseph was sold as a slave. They bruised his feet with fetters and placed his neck in an iron collar” (Ps 105:17-18).

He was a purchased man; no longer free, no longer the special son. What do you imagine happened in the silence of that long ride from Dothan to Egypt, between Joseph being sold and Joseph being bought?

It was the end of the world as he knew it. His former life was over. He had lost the game. His brothers had killed the dream, it seems. He was humbled and most surely desparate.

What decisions does a person make in such a situation?

What would you do if you suddenly lost everything? That question is a little convicting. Would I stand on my faith? Would it be real enough to rely on? Would I ask, God, why are you letting all this happen?

Years later the Psalmist assessed Joseph's situation like this:

“Until the time came to fulfill his dreams, the Lord tested Joseph's character” (105:19).

That tells us, then, that along with a vision for the future, God's mission in your life today is to strengthen your character.

That Psalm also reminds us of God's promise to Abraham that he was the beginning of a very large family that would bless all the nations of the world, a family that extends to you, and me. He also recaps Joseph's role as the ruler of Egypt whose work would actually preserve both Egypt and Israel.

God is into blessing people over and above the actions of political power, defining the purpose of political power through Joseph's actions as a faithful way to serve the community.

How did Joseph, an arrogant, self-centered young man, get to be a person with the wisdom to rule a nation successfully in a time of great famine, providing food for two entire nations?

Simply put, how does a seventeen year old spoiled teenager step into the running of a nation? Very cautiously, with risk, hard work, and training.

We often tell children the fairy tale of the “Three Little Pigs.” The three little pigs grew up and it was time to leave their mother’s home and make it on their own.

The first little pig wanted the quickest and easiest way to build a house. So he gathered some straw and in one day, had his house. But an enemy came along, and that fox in no time had taken the straw house apart and ate up the little pig.

The second little pig did a little better than the first. He gathered some sticks and built his house. Perhaps it took him two days to complete it and he was a satisfied little pig. But an enemy came along, and that fox in no time had blown the stick house to pieces, and he ate up the little pig.

The third little pig was a patient, determined little pig. He searched and searched for some brick. Then he did whatever work was necessary to mix some mortar. It was time consuming. It was messy, he had to learn how. But little by little the house of bricks went up. Finally he was able to move in. Not long afterward, the enemy came. He knocked and he blew, and slammed himself into the door. But the enemy could not blow the house down. Finally, that ole’ fox decided to go on the roof and descend down the chimney. But the industrious little pig had put a large kettle of water on the fire. Though the enemy broke in, he was destroyed, and the little pig lived to tell about it.

After that long ride to Egypt, feet shackled, neck in an iron collar, life as he knew it gone, I imagine a sobering silence as Joseph met an enemy. Notice in the story of the Three Little Pigs all of them were subject to the enemy. Enemies can defeat you, or they can give you the opportunity to ask yourself, *what kind of man or woman will I be?*

- Will I stand for good?
- Will the principals of my faith be the reality that I live out in tough times?
- Will I be a person of integrity?
- When I am humbled, will such humility shape me into a person of service or a person of hatred, ease, or passivity?

How do you build a house of bricks? How do you overcome the enemy?

And, if we look at ourselves as the Church who represents Jesus Christ out in the community, what kind of representatives will we be?

Jesus tells us:

"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world -- like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father" (Mat 5:13-16).

Joseph's faith isn't talked about in this story, but he "lived" his faith in public. He knew that adultery would dishonor God. He diligently did his job to satisfy his boss. He went the second mile. And God was with him, guiding him, making his work fruitful and filled with success. So his faith showed in his actions.

When seduced, Joseph recognized the wife's proposition as evil. She was an enemy. But his house was strong. It was a house of bricks.

Jesus said, "Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash" (Mat 7:24-27).

Is your house solid? How are you standing against your rainstorms? How are you handling the enemies of:

- Fractured relationships
- Sibling rivalries
- Pride
- Headstrong opinions
- Difficult setbacks
- Temptation

Joseph had a tough road. He went from sale to success to seduction to jail.

When an enemy comes against you are you giving up? Are you giving in?

The Spirit says, "I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference" (Rev 3:19).

Joseph was God's man who was being sent out into the community to eventually lead, rule, and accomplish good for many people. This would not happen without hurt. He had to go through God's school of fire. But God was right there with him in the fire. Six times in this passage it says, "The Lord was with Joseph and he became successful," and "the Lord blessed others for Joseph's sake." Despite what may come to you, God never leaves your side, and you can count on that, even when it doesn't seem he is there.

God was building Joseph's character and also getting him exactly where he wanted him, which was in the service of Pharaoh. It was a hard way to get there but God had great plans for this leader.

Do you resist every hard thing that comes your way? Or do you learn as if God himself is your teacher? We are most receptive to what God is doing in these adverse situations.

When the good guy loses, lift up your head. Look around, for God is at work in you, and He will see you through.

Amen