

## Column – The peril of success

A favorite Bible character is Joseph. His coat of many colors is the stuff of which Vacation Bible School skits and even an award-winning musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber are made.

Joseph's story is a roller-coaster ride. He was the favored son of his father, then sold into slavery by his brothers. In Egypt, he was placed over the house of Pharaoh's captain of the guard, only to be falsely accused by this man's wife and cast into prison. Yet, in the end, he ended up second in command to Pharaoh.

Joseph handled trouble well. While going through hard times, he never waivered in his faith in God. When life got tough, he never complained, compromised or gave up.

Perhaps more significant still, when success came, he did not let it spoil him. The Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle once said: "For every one hundred men who can stand adversity there is

only one who can withstand prosperity.” Joseph was the ‘one’.

Joseph’s way of dealing with success can serve as a guide to us today. From him, we can learn both the source of success and its purpose.

Let’s begin with the first, the source of success. For many, that source is themselves. It leads to a stuck-out chest, a bloated ego and an exaggerated self-importance. It causes some to say, “I did this, Look at me!” Joseph did not go down this road.

Stories of self-made billionaires sell magazines and attract viewers on YouTube videos. I think if someone had called Joseph ‘self-made’, he would have corrected them. His attitude towards success is revealed in the name he gives his two sons: Manasseh and Ephraim.

According to Genesis 41:51, the meaning of the first – Manasseh – is “God . . . hath made me forget all my toil.” The verse that follows reveals the meaning of the second – Ephraim – “God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

Notice God, not himself, stands at the head of both statements.

Not only do we learn from Joseph the source of success, but its purpose. Success was not something to be clutched and held onto for himself, but something to be used for the good of others. In his case, it was so many lives could be saved in a coming famine . . . including, as it turned out, the lives of the very brothers who had sold him into slavery. Success did not made Joseph indulgent and arrogant, but busy and a man for others.

Adversity and success come to each one of us. The second may well prove the more problematic. Joseph (and ultimately Jesus whom he prefigures) teaches us how get both right.

*ALMIGHTY and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service; Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

(Collect, 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity, Book of  
Common Prayer)

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