

*“But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So, the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.” – Gen. 39:20-23*

Throughout his whole life, Joseph kept stumbling into situations that seemed awful, yet in them he found a way to be successful. In fact, this became a defining trait of Joseph’s: his constant success.

Born to his father Jacob as “brother number 11”, he had no chance for glory, fame, or success. These were reserved for the eldest, who carried both the birthright and the blessing. If he died, it passed to the next younger, and so on. The likelihood that it would pass 11 times was virtually impossible. Yet he was the firstborn of Rachel, Jacob’s beloved. And for this, he was Jacob’s favorite. And his brothers hated him for it. So, first Joseph is sold into slavery. But soon he is successfully running the entire household of his new master. Then his master’s wife attempts to seduce him and when he refuses, she gets him thrown into prison. But soon he is successfully running the entire prison. Then he is forgotten in prison, but soon he is remembered and becomes the second-in-command of the Egyptian empire and so saves the entire region from famine. No matter what happened to Joseph, he became wildly successful in whatever venue he found himself.

This drive to achieve, to succeed, is one of the ways we reflect God’s character into this world. We are talking right now about 9 aspects of the Image of God that each of us is given, though we each lean heavily toward one in particular. While it is God who brings success, He is Himself also the very definition of success.

Now, lest I begin to sound like a “Health and Wealth” televangelist, let me assure you that this is not a “God wants you to succeed” nor a “God will make you succeed” lesson. In fact, this is not about you at all. This is about God, and God’s image reflected into the world. You, and me, are only the mirrors reflecting this, not the source of it and not the result of God’s success. For example, Jesus’ “success” was His own death (and resurrection to be sure). The Apostle Paul’s “success” was to be beaten almost to death – twice – and to ultimately die for Jesus. And for millions of people throughout history, “success” has meant to die in obscurity, but in complete faithfulness.

It is we who turn this idea of “success” into a selfish pursuit. In fact, for those who lean most heavily into this aspect of God’s character, one of the pitfalls is that we usually value the appearance of success over true success. This means that often they will twist, bend, and even break the truth in order to seem successful. What we have to remember, all of us, is that the success we strive for must be all about God, about reflecting God into the world around us. For God’s followers, our drive to achieve must be about the achievement of God’s kingdom, God’s mission.

America is often called the land of the Achiever, where success and fame trump any truth, any true growth. But for Godly achievers, the drive to expand the Kingdom of God, to obey God completely, and to bring success to the Mission is a beautiful reflection of the core of God’s being.