

Question: Life seems to take a lot of unexpected twists and turns. How can we view these and not allow them to discourage us and become disappointed with life?

Few of us live by our first choices, whether it is the city or house that we live in, car we drive, or our job or health. Most important is not that life takes some unexpected turns, but how we react to the situation in which we find ourselves. The Bible provides us some excellent examples of how God continues to work in the lives of his faithful people who persevere through disappointments and hardships. One of the clearest examples is the apostle Paul.

The Bible tells us that Paul had planned to go into Asia on his second missionary journey, but he was “kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching in the province of Asia.” Then he tried to go north into the province of Bithynia. Again the Spirit would not allow it, so he traveled eastward to the coastal town of Troas. There he was given a vision of a man calling him to come over to Macedonia. Interpreting this as God’s call to go preach in this province of Greece, Paul boarded a boat the next day to cross the Aegean Sea. Had Paul given up and not kept pressing forward, he would not have been the one to carry the good news of Jesus into Europe for the first time. God turned Paul’s second best into one of the most significant events in Christian history (Acts 16:6ff).

What enabled Paul to turn defeat into victory, take second best and turn it into a successful opportunity? (1) *A Deep faith in God.* Whatever the disappointment, there was no bitterness or complaining. He was convinced God had a purpose for his being in Troas that was worth discovering. He kept moving forward through faith in God’s active presence in his life. (2) *A love for people.* Instead of “looking out for number one,” Paul lived to bring help and hope to others. He knew that wherever he went he would find people who needed to know about Jesus. Our greatest disappointments seem to come when things don’t work out to our personal advantage. However, when we live to bless others, we seldom have reason to feel disappointed. There are always others in need of hope and blessing.

Another outstanding example is found in the Old Testament story of Joseph. This favorite son of his father was despised by his brothers. They first planned to kill him but decided to sell him into slavery, and they led his father to believe he had been killed by a wild beast. Later in Egypt, he was falsely accused by his master's wife because he refused to be seduced by her. Although he was cast into prison, God gave him the interpretation of dreams. When he was able to interpret the king's dreams, he was made the second highest ruler in the land. As a result, he was able to save his own family and the future of the nation of Israel. You can read the entire story in Genesis 37-50.

Every life in this fallen world will face difficulties and disappointments, but God can still help us through our difficulties in life as he did for Paul and for Joseph. Trust God to have a purpose for your life, love people, and keep moving forward with eyes open to what opportunities may come your way in life's twists and turns. At the end of your life, you will not be disappointed in the result of this kind of faithful perseverance.

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