

- If you type in “The rise and fall of . . .” into Google, you get a ton of results. There are thousands of stories of someone or group of someone’s grew to prominence and then it all fell apart.
  - It can happen with organizations. Many of you who are 40 or older remember Enron.
  - Began in 1985 and grew like crazy. Kenneth Lay became the CEO. In 15 years they were a \$100 billion company, 7<sup>th</sup> largest on the Fortune 500 and a stock price over \$90.
  - As fast as it went up, it went down faster. In 2001, they reported a \$600 million loss, irregularities began to appear. Investigations were launched, the stock crashed to less than \$1 and they went into bankruptcy by the end of the year.
  - 5,600 employees subsequently lost their jobs and Ken Lay was convicted of fraud but he died of a heart attack before he could go to prison.
  - It can happen with people. One of the most famous was Alphonse Capone.
  - He grew up in NYC, moved to Chicago, and by 26 years old was running the mob. For 5 years he was utterly famous (or infamous). Known and visible and powerful.
  - But at 32 years old, he was convicted of tax evasion and sentenced to 11 years in federal prison. He contracted syphilis and by the time he left prison at 40 it was reported his brain was like that of a 12 year old and he died before he reached 50.
  - It can happen in religious circles. Mars Hill church was founded in 1996 by Mark Driscoll. His charisma and leadership grew it. 10 years later it was recognized as one of the fastest growing churches in NA. It had assets in excess of \$30MM, had started 13 churches, reached 10’s of thousands of people every Sunday, reached hundreds of thousands electronically. But problems began to pop up and Driscoll was accused of bullying, patterns of sinful behavior, and by Jan 1, 2015 all the sister churches were released to operate on their own and Mars Hill closed down.
  - One of the long time elders said, "This all began as a work of the Spirit, but we quickly started to push harder and harder, trying to accomplish it with human efforts—bigger, better, faster, stronger." It failed miserably.
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- It is a story that is repeated all too often. No one is immune. How do we handle success?
  - What happens when our life is going well? Or a portion of it?
  - We have been discussing how to prepare for opportunity, using the story of Joseph as a guide.
  - Today is the greenhouse for tomorrow. Life changes. God is working. He is preparing us for opportunities that lie ahead and how we respond to opportunities is determined today.
  - We are to develop faithfulness now, in the little things, when no one is watching, because God is preparing us.
  - This can take a long time. The “sometime” between now and whatever God has for us can stretch out. We are called to be faithful in little while we are in the sometime, with all the current, smaller opportunities that he places in our paths.
  - What happens when get through the sometime?
  - When things are great in our marriage?
  - When our kids are in a great place?
  - When promotions and responsibility are increasing at work?
  - When money is more abundant?
  - When my relationship with God seems to be fresh and vibrant?
  - When my skill at a hobby, sport or something else seems to be at a high and it is still increasing?
  - When my influence has grown?

- How do we keep from being a victim of a rise and fall story? What happens when that opportunity finally comes? I've seen it happen far too often.
- We have worked faithfully to get that promotion. It requires more time. We begin to be consumed by the job. We spend more and more time at it. All of a sudden, things at home collapse.
- We finally get that dream guy or girl. After all this time we are in love. Things are wonderful. We enjoy it so much that we begin to make compromise. Cracks begin to appear. The relationship turns sour. We are left with a broken relationship and wounds that will haunt us for the rest of our life.
- **HANDLING OPPORTUNITY WELL BRINGS MORE OPPORTUNITY.**
- How can we handle success well?

- We finished last time with Joseph in the middle of the "sometime". He had been unjustly imprisoned, jailed, for years.

- He labored faithfully without any knowledge or inkling that anything would ever change.

*41:1 When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream.*

- 2 dreams actually. The kind of dreams that hung with him after he woke up. He couldn't forget them. They were vivid. They were different.

*8 In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.*

- You can feel opportunity creeping up. Getting ready to be at the forefront.

- The drama is building. Two lives are going to intersect with amazing results.

*9 Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. 10 Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. 11 Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. 12 Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. 13 And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was impaled." 14 So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh.*

- Joseph is out of prison – for all we know, the first time outside the prison in years.

- He has an opportunity – he might not even know for what, but perhaps a chance to be heard.

- The drama builds. We know what is going to happen, but Joseph doesn't. Joseph has been pulled from the dungeon for one purpose only. If he cannot do it, you can bet he's going back.

*15 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."*

- I wonder about this point. Dramatic pause. Pharaoh looking at Joseph. Joseph has a chance to pump up his own value and worth. His answer reveals a lot about what God has been doing in his life.

*16 "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."*

- Joseph definitely wants out of the prison. I am sure he pictures being able to go serve in a better situation – maybe more like he originally had with Potiphar.

- He has a chance – but he realizes it is still up to God.

- Pharaoh proceeds to tell his dreams to Joseph.

- The first was about 7 plump fat cows coming up out of the Nile and then 7 gaunt, lean, starving cows came and ate the first 7 cows.

- His second dream was 7 plump full heads of wheat that were consumed after by 7 withered, dry heads of wheat.

*25 Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.*

- God has given you two dreams because he decided this and will not change his mind.
- There are going to be 7 years of plenty. Food in abundance. More than enough. It's going to be great.
- But then there are going to be 7 years of famine. Starvation. Nothing will grow. It will be so bad people will forget the good years.
- Now Joseph takes a risk
- He has interpreted the dreams to Pharaoh. He could stop there. He could wait to see what reward he might get. Perhaps he would be freed from prison.
- Instead, Joseph goes out on a limb. You have to remember, he is a slave who was in prison, standing before one of the mightiest men in the world at that time.
- I wonder if he had been counseled to only speak when spoken to. If he stepped off script here.

*33 "And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. 34 Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. 35 They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. 36 This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine." 37 The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials.*

- He added his recommendation even though it was not asked for. He interpreted and then risked giving advice. We have no idea if he saw himself as this person, but it is highly doubtful.
- Most of us will never have a chance to run a nation. Most probably, not run a company or be in charge of a ton of things. Yet we will all have opportunities. Opportunity to say something in an awkward spot. To pray for someone in public. To take a greater role in our community or church. To use our resources to make a difference in a particular place. In order to handle success well, we must:

## **I. Be willing to follow God into opportunity.**

- We are not the best judge of we are ready for what God has planned for us. He is.
- God knows better than you do when you are ready for what he has for you.
- Aggressive people want to jump into something whether they are ready or not. I can do this. I can make it work. Thank goodness God did not let me do things when I thought I could handle them – it would have been a disaster.
- We can fall the other way too. We're never ready. We don't think we can do it. We live by fear of looking foolish, failing or not being able to get it done.
- God knew when Joseph was ready. The opportunity was right in front of him.
- God knows when you are ready.
- Follow him into that opportunity.
- The only way to do this well is to:

## **II. Maintain humility and trust.**

- Joseph had learned humility. He was not a humble 17-year-old. He was the favorite. He bragged about his dreams. He lorded it over his brothers and family. He was a bit uppity.

- God knocked this out of him. Over a decade of serving others, suffering unjustly, had not jaded him, but had developed in him a deep humility to submit to God's plans.
  - When Pharaoh gave him his opportunity, he gave God the credit in advance. He knew God had been responsible for his success in the past. He knew God was the one at work. He did not take credit for anything even though that was a risk.
  - That's because he had learned trust.
  - He had learned confidence in God.
  - If God would watch over him when things were bad, he would watch over him now.
  - He had cultivated his relationship with God which now stood him in good stead.
  - His interpretation was confident. He believed that God was communicating. God was active. God was doing things.
  - One of the biggest curses with success is forgetfulness. We forget that God is in charge. God gave us what we have. God can be trusted no matter what.
- Joseph followed God into his opportunity. He humbly but with confidence in God interpreted the dream and gave his recommendation.
  - Then, in the span of three short sentences, Joseph's life turns completely upside-down. *39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you.*
  - Joseph made an impression on Pharaoh. *40 You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."* *41 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt."* *42 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck.* *43 He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.* *44 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt."*
  - Joseph is large and in charge. It's a stunning turnaround.
  - His dreams and interpreting of dreams prepared him for the opportunity when he stood in front of Pharaoh.
  - All his skills at leading, administrating, organizing, planning, managing that he developed as a slave in Potiphar's house and under the jailer were going to be utilized.
  - He was 30 years old. 13 years as a slave and in jail to hone his character. 13 years to teach him skills. 13 years to realize that God is always in control. For the next 7 years, Joseph's life was a whirlwind of activity.
  - Pharaoh gave him a prominent woman as his wife.
  - He traveled the whole land managing the collection of food.
  - He was so faithful in doing it that the amount of food collected was beyond measuring – he stopped keeping track because there was so much.
  - **HANDLING OPPORTUNITY WELL BRINGS MORE OPPORTUNITY.**
  - Joseph was the epitome of success. How did he handle this opportunity well?

### III. Step up your game.

- Opportunities are accompanied by responsibility.
- There is no such thing as great opportunity and zero responsibility.

#### A. **Engage in the opportunity wholeheartedly.**

- Joseph's jump in fame, wealth and power was accompanied by enormous responsibility.

- Joseph was diligent. He was as faithful in success as he was before. He did not slack off. He carried out the plan. He upped his game.
- The need for faithfulness doesn't stop with increased responsibilities – the consequences of unfaithfulness simply get higher because there is more at stake.
- When opportunity comes, it is not a time to relax, to take it easy.
- There is a saying that says: *"The reward for work well done is more work."*
- Joseph continued to be faithful with his new responsibility
- The work did not stop. It simply changed. He traveled. He planned. He worked hard.
- When things go well, this is often when we start to relax. We coast. We've made it.
- When opportunity comes – go for it!

### **B. Stay grounded.**

- Joseph continued to listen to God. He invested in his relationship with God.
- Even though he was now fully immersed in the religion and culture of the land. He was busy. He was accomplishing what God put him there to do.
- Yet he didn't forget God. How do we know?

*50 Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphara, priest of On. 51 Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household."*

- He still missed his father and his family. He fully acknowledged and recognized that God had given him his new family and role. He knew his blessings and success came from the Lord.

*52 The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering."*

- He knew that his fruitfulness, his success, was a gift of God. Even though Egypt was the "land of his suffering", God had prospered him.
- When we succeed, it is easy to become a bit too busy for God. He gets lip service but we can become increasingly focused on ourselves.
- The busier we are and the more successful we are, the more we need to deliberately invest in listening to God.
- *"I have so much to do today that I'm going to need to spend three hours in prayer in order to be able to get it all done."* (Martin Luther)
- When the job is great, your marriage is awesome, your kids are great, then seek God more. Step up your spiritual game. It will keep you grounded.

### **C. Keep learning.**

- God was using Joseph to save a country. He was using Joseph to keep his promise.
- He was not done with him yet. The biggest challenge was yet to come.
- He was still preparing Joseph for what was coming next. God's promise to save the world, the promise of the coming Messiah Jesus, is going to happen through the opportunities presented to Joseph.
- We never fully arrive. God is always preparing us for something else.
- You have never arrived. You never have a corner on truth. You are never always right. There is always more we can learn about ourselves. About others.
- God is always speaking. Through his word. Through others. Through circumstances. We cannot not afford to stop listening.
- **HANDLING OPPORTUNITY WELL BRINGS MORE OPPORTUNITY.**
- No matter how large or small the opportunity, when we stay faithful in it, God leads us to more opportunity.

- We don't get to decide what the opportunity is. We don't always know the importance or impact of an opportunity. When it comes, be willing to follow God into it. Do so with humility and trust.
- Keep on upping your game. Improve your skills. Stay grounded in Jesus. Learn from him.
- May we be people that handle the opportunities that God gives us well.
- And may God use each of us in increasing measure as we do.