

Keys For Living

Part 1 – Perseverance

Gen 41:37-46

The sweet smell of success – everybody loves success.

And in this passage of Scripture we see Joseph, at the pinnacle of his success, standing before the king of Egypt, and the king handing him complete authority.

By most people's standards, that's success.

But I bet there were people who didn't know his background who thought, "Yeah, well that's okay for you, mate. Life has been handed to you on a silver platter."

But Joseph wasn't always a successful man.

At the age of 17, ten of Joseph's brothers ganged up on him, faked his death, and sold him into slavery.

His new owners took him to Egypt, and sold him to a man named Potiphar.

He proved to be so trustworthy that his master entrusted the entire handling of his affairs to Joseph.

And then the trouble began.

Potiphar's wife, who no doubt was used to getting her own way, took a fancy to the young Hebrew slave.

Day after day, she pressured him to sleep with her.

Finally, when he continually refused to sleep with her, she accused him of attempted rape, and Joseph was thrown in jail.

Betrayed by his own brothers, enslaved, wrongfully accused, jailed, Joseph didn't get it easy.

I think that many of us can relate to facing difficulties in life.

Today, I'm beginning a series entitled Keys For Living, and this message is about something I believe is absolutely essential for survival.

It's a quality that Joseph had.

And it's most definitely a quality that Jesus personified.

That quality is perseverance – the ability to hang in there, to stick with it, to keep on going.

Here are five things to note about perseverance.

1. People who persevere experience failure just like everyone else

Joseph did – it was his big mouth that got the ball rolling.

Persevering people try, and fail, and sometimes it's their own fault, sometimes it isn't.

But they get over it.

They are not some super-breed of human who go from success to success.

The thing is, we all make mistakes, we all have down times, we all fail sometimes.

Nobody is fail-proof.

And failure may not necessarily say anything about you personally.

It might say something about others.

ILLUS – Did you know that Charlie Chaplin once entered a Charlie Chaplin look-alike competition? He came third.

ILLUS – In 1947 Lester Wunderman was arbitrarily fired from his advertising job in New York. But he felt he still had a lot to learn from the head of the agency, Max Sackheim. So the next morning Wunderman went back to his office and began working as he had before. He talked to co-workers and clients; he sat in on meetings – all without pay. Sackheim ignored him for a month. Finally he walked up to Wunderman: “Okay, you win,” he said, shaking his head. “I never saw a man who wanted a job more than he wanted money.” Well, guess what? Wunderman went on to be one of the most successful advertising men of the century. He’s credited with having invented preprinted newspaper inserts, plus subscription cards such as those used by Time-Life Books and the Columbia Record Club; ideas that have produced billions of dollars in profit.¹

His boss might not have seen his potential, but Wunderman persevered till he broke through.

Your failure may have less to do with you than with the way others perceive you.

But even if your failure was your fault, that’s not the end of the world.

Some of the greatest people in the Bible had monumental failures – here are some of them:

ILLUS – Moses once committed murder. King David committed adultery and then tried to cover it up by committing murder. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob establish a family tradition of lying and deception. In Jesus’ hour of need, Peter denied even knowing Him.

Yet, all of these men went on to be greatly used by God – despite their failure.

2. People who persevere choose not to live in the past

ILLUS – I’m a pretty good typist. I’m not the fastest in the world, but I can do about 50-60 words a minute. The downside, of course, is that my handwriting is shocking. And the more I type, the worse my writing gets. Sometimes, even I can’t read my writing.

But there’s a wonderful function on a computer – CTRL Z. For those who aren’t computer literate, it’s an undo function. So you’re typing away, and you look at the screen, and you realise that your hands have been on the wrong row of keys. So you’re faced with all this gobbledygook. No problemo. CTRL Z saves the day. And it’s just like you never made a mistake in the first place.

But life doesn’t come with a CTRL Z function.

ILLUS – You’re in a conversation, and some angry words escape. And you think: Quick! CTRL Z! Whoa, that was close.

But you can’t; what’s said is said, and what’s done is done.

But that doesn’t mean we have to be pulled down by our past mistakes for the rest of our lives.

Unless we choose to live in the past.

Here are four things we can experience that tell us we might be living in the past: anger, resentment, regret, guilt.

And you know what? God has an answer for every one of those.

But we have to let Him take control, and we have to choose not to live in the past.

ILLUS – Sparky was someone who chose not to live in the past. He was nicknamed Sparky at school, after a comic strip horse, and as much as he hated it, he just couldn’t shake it. He wasn’t the brightest kid in the school, and failed every subject in Grade 8. He still holds the record as the worst physics student in the school’s history, and also flunked Latin, algebra, and English. He wasn’t good at sport either. Kids rarely talked to him outside of school, he never had a girlfriend, but there was one thing he loved doing – drawing cartoons. He dreamed of drawing for Walt Disney, so when he finished high school, he sent some of his cartoons off. He waited and waited, and finally got a reply telling him there was nothing available for him. Then he got an idea: He was such a loser, and he wanted to tell his own story in cartoon form. Today, that man is known the world over. His name is Charles Monroe “Sparky” Schultz, creator of Peanuts comic strip.²

Through all his failure, he chose not to live in the past.

Phil 3:12-14 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. (13) Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, (14) I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Of course, Paul was able to forget the things which were in the past, because he had already brought those things to the Lord.

3. Persevering people make the decision to keep moving on

ILLUS – One of the worst train disasters in history happened in Spain in 1944. It was a long passenger train with an engine on each end. It was on its way through a tunnel when the front engine stalled, so the engineer in the rear engine started up and started to back out of the tunnel. Meanwhile, the front engineer got the front engine going again. With no way to contact each other, both engines continued to pull in opposite directions. Full-speed ahead in both directions means you are stationary, and over 500 people died of carbon monoxide poisoning.³

All those people died for one reason alone: the train stopped moving.

And the train stopped moving for one reason alone too: there was one too many drivers.

In the passage we read just before, Paul said, "...reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

We have to keep moving forward, and the only way we can do that is to decide who is going to be in charge.

Will it be us, or will it be Jesus?

If it's going to be us, we'll keep going backwards.

If we want to try both us and Jesus (that's two drivers pulling in different directions), we'll stand still on the spot.

The only way to move forward is to put the Lord in charge, and to keep Him there.

4. Persevering people take one day at a time

ILLUS – From John Wesley's diary: Sunday morning, May 5, preached in St. Ann's, was asked not to come back anymore. Sunday p.m., May 5, preached at St. John's, deacons said "Get out and stay out". Sunday a.m., May 12, preached at St. Jude's, can't go back there either. Sunday p.m., May 12, preached at St. George's, kicked out again. Sunday a.m., May 19, preached at St. somebody else's, deacons called a special meeting and said I couldn't return. Sunday p.m., May 19, preached on the street, kicked off the street. Sunday a.m., May 26, preached in meadow, chased out of meadow as a bull was turned loose during the services. Sunday a.m., June 2, preached out at the edge of town, kicked off the highway. Sunday p.m., June 2, afternoon service, preached in a pasture, 10,000 people came to hear me.⁴

Here's a really profound truth; it may sound really simple, maybe even a little stupid.

You can't live tomorrow today.

We're stuck in this 24-hour slot, subject to time.

And there's absolutely nothing we can do about it, but that's not for want of trying, is it?

We worry, we fret, we get fearful about what might happen tomorrow.

And all the while, today – the day we're in – may be a wonderful day, but we can't enjoy it, because we're trying to live tomorrow.

ILLUS – A little bit like Adam and Eve, in the garden of Eden. They've got everything they want there. Everything is perfect. And there's only one thing God has told them they can't do: eat the fruit of the tree that's in the middle of the garden. And there's Adam and Eve, everything is wonderful. But instead of enjoying what they've got, they're just thinking, "I want what's over there."

Let's not fall into the same trap – worrying about tomorrow so much that we can't enjoy today.

Mat 6:30-34 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (31) Therefore do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” (32) For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. (33) But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (34) Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

One day at a time.

Living tomorrow today is an impossible task.

If we focus on today, we can trust God for tomorrow.

5. Persevering people know that God’s strength is available to them

ILLUS – One day a tiny boy was playing and digging in his sandpit when he discovered a large rock. He carefully dug around it, and with a huge effort, rolled it to the edge of his sandpit. But no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t get the rock over the little wall. He struggled and struggled to lift it over, but it just rolled back and onto his fingers. Finally, he burst into tears. All this time, his father had been watching from the window, and suddenly he appeared next to his little boy. “Son”, he said, “why didn’t you use all the strength you had available?” “I did, Daddy. I used every bit of strength I had.” “No you didn’t, son. You didn’t use all your strength. You didn’t ask me.” Then his father bent down and lifted the rock over the wall.⁵

I can’t do much without God’s help.

In fact, Jesus said, (John 15:5) “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

ILLUS – The glove is a great clothing accessory, and it can do lots of things when I’m wearing it. But take my hand out and it can do nothing.

You and I are like that glove; we need the hand of God to be able to do anything worthwhile.

If we open ourselves up to God’s strength, we can do any task He has set before us.

Phil 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

DON’T YOU QUIT: When things go wrong as they sometimes will, When the road you’re trudging seems uphill, When the funds are low and the debts are high, And you want to smile, but you have to sigh, When cares are pressing you down a bit, Rest if you must, but don’t you quit. Life is strange with its twists and turns As all of us sometime must learn. And many a failure turns about, When we might have won had we stuck it out. Don’t give up, though the pace seems slow, You may succeed with another blow. Success is failure turned inside out, The silver tint of the clouds of doubt. And you never can tell how close you are, It may be near when it seems so far. So stick to the fight when you’re hardest hit. It’s when things get worse that you must not quit. T.L. Osborn

¹ Rhema Broadcasting Group

² Rice, Wayne *Hot Illustrations for Youth Talks* p186-8

³ Rice, Wayne *Hot Illustrations for Youth Talks* p208-9

⁴ Newman, Bill *The Ten Laws Of Leadership* p40-41

⁵ Rice, Wayne *Hot Illustrations for Youth Talks* p36-7