

True Success, God's Way

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In his work, *The Secret of My Success: My Journey from the Bottom to the Top*, Joseph Jacobson shares his remarkable tale of achievement in matters both personal and professional. Never securing even a high school diploma, Mr. Jacobson rose above his life's circumstances over and over again to attain the position of chief executive officer with one of the most significant organizations of his day. His story is filled with betrayal and scandal that were overcome in part due to Jacobson's remarkable integrity, humility, and compassion, yielding his life a terrific success by any reasonable standard. Many of his contemporaries even thought Jacobson had supernatural assistance. Curiously, there have been many "business experts" that have considered Jacobson's tale to be morally overbearing and far too simplistic to have application in the post-modern 21st century.

If you are concerned with becoming a success in your career or just concerned with how to make it through the current crisis you are facing at work, I cannot think of a book I could endorse with greater confidence or enthusiasm than Mr. Jacobson's awe-inspiring true story. Having said that, however, I cannot recommend that you go buy a copy... you see, you likely already have one. The life's work submitted for consideration is that of Joseph, Jacob's son, which is found within the only leather-bound, gold-edged business book I am aware of—the Holy Bible.

Far too often God's people dichotomize their lives into the spiritual and the secular. "God's Word is for the Lord's Day and we are on our own for the other six" seems to be the unspoken mindset of many in the Church. Destructive consequences of this line of thinking are too numerous for this article, but one result is the failure of Christians to realize the innumerable and immeasurable blessings that come from applying God's Word to our walk every day in every way. This failure stems from a lack of appreciation for the wisdom that the Creator shares with the creation (and what greater authority could we have for how things work than the Designer Himself?) regarding success in matters of health, marriage, family, government, and business. Let's spend some time with Joseph reflecting upon the secret of his success.

In the latter third of Genesis, we find the familiar story of Joseph, firstborn of Jacob's beloved Rachel. As you recall, Joseph was thrown to the bottom of a pit as a preferred son and hated brother, only to emerge from the same pit as a slave, alone, on his way to an unfamiliar land. Gone were the comforts of home and the warmth of that famous coat of many colors. Before him was a life of challenges and opportunities that would transform him in ways previously unimagined in his young life. How was it that Joseph was able to navigate through these rough and rocky waters to wind up as ruler over all Egyptians excepting only Pharaoh? What was the secret of his success?

The first secret to Joseph's success was his **integrity**. There was no equivocation with Joseph; he chose to follow God regardless of the circumstances or consequences. This integrity was famously on display when he asked the question of Potiphar's wife following her invitation, "How then can I do this wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). Perhaps more remarkably, Joseph consistently displayed this virtue to the extent that those around him could not deny that God was with him. It's one thing to have integrity when the choice is "black and white" and the answer seems easy as was the case with Potiphar's wife. It is another matter altogether to make the right choices every day when it feels like no one is watching (whether you are at the bottom of a pit or tucked away within the walls of a palace). It is within these shadowy areas that Satan finds some of his greatest gains in the lives of those who would follow God. **The Deceiver will gladly move you away from God at inch at a time for 8 hours a day. He's not concerned about the speed, just the distance.** Be strong! Do not be moved! Maintain your integrity! There is something unique and attractive about a man who consistently honors his commitments, speaks only the truth, and maintains his Bible-based principles.

While a life of integrity grabs the attention of those who are witnesses, it is the second of Joseph's traits that deflects that attention to the Father—**humility**. When stuck in a rut, threatened with being passed over for an honor or promotion, or even downsized, many turn to the ancient art of self-promotion. They feel they must inform all who will listen (and many who would rather not) how much smarter, more savvy, or more qualified they are than their peers. When Joseph was at a crossroads and presented with the opportunity to claim credit for his gift of the interpretation of dreams—to solidify his worth and importance to those who could help him advance—he refused to accept credit, opting instead to give the glory to God (Genesis 40:1-

8). Are our workdays spent glorifying God or promoting self? Do we acknowledge God in all our ways (Proverbs 3:6), or are we busy cleaning His fingerprints from our lives so that others can focus more clearly on us?

In his life of integrity and humility, Joseph was able to make a key substitution that eludes so many in the world today—**compassion** in the place of self-pity and vengeance. After Joseph had risen to a key position in Potiphar’s house, his momentum was seemingly stripped by a false accusation and a resulting imprisonment (Genesis 39). While in the prison, Joseph was not found wallowing in a cell of self-pity—instead he was focused on the needs of others. When he found two of his fellow prisoners (the baker and cupbearer of Pharaoh) to appear troubled, he did something significant. He asked, “What’s wrong?” (Genesis 40:7). This simple invitation to share another’s load (whether mental, emotional, or spiritual) afforded Joseph the chance to help fellow prisoners and afforded God the chance to eventually reward him with an exit from the prison. Fast-forward several years later—some hungry visitors from the east came to Egypt looking for food (Genesis 42:1-5). As the overseer of Egypt, God had providentially given Joseph sway over the fate of the brothers who had been so cruel to him on a daily basis. Can you imagine a more perfect opportunity for the fleeting satisfaction of sweet revenge? Again, the lightly traveled high road of love and compassion was selected as Joseph eventually found himself weeping in a beautiful, redemptive reunion with those who had cursed him and broken the heart of his beloved father (Genesis 45:15). Are you ever wronged at work by customers or co-workers? Are you ever mistreated by your boss? Do your abilities surpass the job that you are performing? Are you under-appreciated? Are there people on the phone with you or in the cube next to you who are suffering and are hiding heartbreak and pain behind their shallow smiles and courteous pleasantries? If any of these things are present where you work, God is providing you an opportunity to rise above the prison of self and to glorify Him in the freedom that comes from serving others with compassion.

So, if we walk with integrity, humility, and compassion as Joseph did, we will all achieve spots at the top of our professions, right? Wrong. While it is true that God ensured Joseph’s success and placed him over all of Egypt, it is worth noting that, as is the case with many things in this life, God’s definition of success may be different from ours. You see, Joseph is described as a success as a young slave in Potiphar’s house (Genesis 39:2). It’s worth noting what immediately

precedes this declaration—“The Lord was with Joseph.” It did not take power, prestige, or a paycheck for Joseph to be a success. It simply took walking with God; the presence of Jehovah made (and still makes) the difference. It makes a man a success. Repeatedly in his life, those around Joseph (members of an idolatrous and polytheistic nation), were forced to acknowledge the presence of God in his life. As a result, he was known by the Pharaohs for generations to come (Exodus 1:8).

Our challenge as men of God is to become successful by drawing near to God and, once at His side, walking with Him. Will we rise to great heights? **Perhaps... if that is where God needs us.** Will we get rich? **“Godliness with contentment is great gain”** (1 Timothy 6:6), so, **“Yes, in the truest sense.”** Will our stories be known far and wide? **It’s possible but not likely.** But, God will use our stories to educate and inspire those around us. It may be that He will use us to comfort the afflicted we encounter (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). We may attain earthly wealth and be able to bless the lives of others via our charitable compassion (1 Timothy 6:17-19). It could be that someone reading this very page will be lifted up to shine brightly for our God on a national stage. We don’t know all of the details of His plan, but we know He has one. Let us resolve to live our lives, do our work with integrity, humility, and compassion, and make sure the *Secret of Our Success* is a well-written book with a happy ending.