

# Overcoming Satan's Religious Performance Trap

“‘I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,’ says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:18).

Satan wants us to see ourselves as slaves and orphans, not sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. The marketplace wants to make us slaves living from performance instead of our hearts.

In Luke 15, we find the story of the prodigal son. Jesus tells this story of a son who asked for an early inheritance, then floundered it away through a sinful life. Once he realized his sin, he repented. The father welcomed him back and did not even make mention of his sin. He rejoiced over the return of this son. This is a picture of the unconditional love of our heavenly Father.

The prodigal's brother, however, was a picture of a son living as a slave. He lived to please the father through his performance. His works made him feel entitled to preference, and he was angry with the father's unconditional acceptance of the wayward son. His pride revealed that he was not living as a son but a slave.

We are all susceptible to this attitude.

Before we were born-again into God's kingdom, we were all slaves and orphans. However, all of us are adopted as sons and daughters when we receive Christ into our lives. Galatians 4:1-7 says, “Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. ... Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son,

and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Living as a son is the key to living a victorious Christian life. Joseph lived as a son, not as a slave. His father, Jacob, doted on him. In fact, his father gave too much favoritism to his son, attracting spirits of envy and jealousy that almost resulted in murder.

Even when Joseph was made a slave in Egypt, he still lived as a son. A slave would have become bitter and would have retaliated for his circumstances. However, Joseph entrusted himself to his heavenly Father, as evidenced by his behavior. He was thrown four difficult tests, and he passed each one of them with flying colors.

Joseph passed the test of betrayal by forgiving God and his brothers. He passed the sexual temptation by fleeing from Potiphar's wife and going to prison for his righteousness. He passed the perseverance test when he was forgotten after giving a dream interpretation to the cupbearer. And he passed the stewardship test when he refused to repay all those who had betrayed him and became a faithful steward over the resources of Egypt.

Joseph lived 81 years after being elevated from the prison cell. He could never have passed those tests had he not lived as a son. The one thing he always wanted more than anything else was to see his father again. The father-son connection was strong in Joseph, and this is why he was successful in his trials.

“And God sent me before you to preserve posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of his entire house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt” (Gen. 45:7-8).

When God delivered Joseph from prison, He took him from prison to the pinnacle of power. Many of us have taught that Joseph

was second in command to Pharaoh. Actually, Joseph was over Pharaoh's entire household. He may not have had the title of *Pharaoh*, but from a spiritual position, Joseph was over the entire nation. However, a closer examination of Scripture tells us two very important things about his advancement: The purpose of Joseph's deliverance was to save the lives of his brothers for the sake of a new nation and for Joseph to "spiritually father" Pharaoh.

How could it happen that a 30-year-old would father someone possibly twice his age? It is because it was a spiritual relationship. Joseph never lost sight of who he was. He never lived as an orphan or a slave. He could be a father to Pharaoh because he was a good son first. He was able to forgive and see a larger story to his life because of his position as a son that he never rejected. This allowed him to operate from an intimate relationship with his heavenly Father, to have dreams and interpret dreams and to gain supernatural marketplace strategies that would give him favor among the leaders of government because he was a problem-solver, not just a religious person. This is also why he did not succumb to the temptations that come with power and influence and wealth.

Joseph remained a steward of God's purposes on the earth for the nation of Israel and Egypt. This is why many marketplace leaders cannot be entrusted with wealth and influence today. They still live as orphans and slaves by seeking to achieve value through their accomplishments rooted in performance, workaholicism, money and fear of failure.

Joseph lived a life that others were attracted to. His life was rooted in his position as a son of his heavenly Father and his father, Jacob. Joseph's fondness of his father was expressed many times in the Scriptures. The one thing he longed for more than anything during those years of separation was to be reunited with his father. This is a picture of the spiritual son-to-father relationship.

## God Disciplines His Sons and Daughters

"If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness" (Heb. 12:7-11).

In order to be a legitimate son or daughter we must allow our Father to discipline us at times. Discipline is always for our profit. God's desire is that we all become more like His Son, Jesus. That requires "pruning the branch" along the way.

And God doesn't prune dead branches, only those that are alive and yielding fruit. This was true of His own Son: "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8-9).

So, are you living as a son or daughter or as an orphan? God wants to demonstrate His love to you as your heavenly Father. Why not ask Him to show you how to live as a true son or daughter?

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