Overcoming a Victim Mentality

Injustice will inevitably invade our lives

There’s no escaping being “victimized” by people or life itself

How we respond when it does is of great importance

What can easily occur if we aren’t vigilant is a descent into what is called a “victim mentality”

What are some characteristics of this?

In other words, how can we identify it?

Those who have fallen prey to a victim mentality believe it’s entirely justifiable to place themselves outside what I refer to as the circle of responsibility

Within the circle of responsibility are all the commandments from the Word of God which we are live to by

The person with a victim mentality has convinced themselves they do not need to live by those principles because they have been victimized, either by God, someone else or life’s circumstances

In other words, they believe they have been unfairly become the victims of injustice and what has happened to them is, in every way, totally undeserved

This injustice therefore gives them the right to step outside having to obey God’s ordained precepts because they’re a victim

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People with victim mentalities have a propensity to think their victimization is unique

They tend to think they are only ones who are suffering injustice

It’s like it’s only their struggles which matter and nobody else’s comes close

So they do not have a global view of suffering but primarily a self-centred one

Therefore, they have an inclination to place everyone else in the circle of responsibility other than themselves

In other words, you have to obey what God says but I don’t since I’m a victim

A person with a victim mentality also frequently manifests a very critical spirit

They will meticulously pick out other people’s faults while overlooking their own

Further characteristics are a deep-rooted bitterness, along with an insistence they are always right about everything

People with victim mentalities rationalize away their sin rather than humbly submit to the sovereignty of God

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What does the Word of God teach us specifically about this?

One of the best options for unwrapping this biblically is to begin with the life of Joseph

The story of Joseph is unquestionably one of the most fascinating and inspiring stories within the Old Testament

Joseph had every opportunity to adopt a full-blown victim mentality

Let’s immerse ourselves back into his life and see how he made the choice to be a victor and not a victim of terrible injustices

Genesis 37 begins to tell his story when he was a 17-year-old teenager

Joseph had one younger full brother, Benjamin

He had 10 other half-brothers, born to Leah as well as two concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah

There was also one sister, Dinah who was also born to Leah

Joseph’s family dynamic was not the best

One can accurately say Joseph grew up in a dysfunctional home

There was tattle-telling, v. 2

There was overt favoritism, vv. 3,4

There was some not so subtle superiority, vv. 5-11

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All of this dysfunctional background was about to play into what occurs next in a very significant way, vv. 12-36

Jacob sends him on a mission and Joseph’s half-brothers, other than Reuben, see it as the perfect opportunity to get rid of him

He’s walked about 50 miles to find them

First injustice – they rip off his coat of many colors

Second injustice – they cast him into a pit

Third injustice – there was no source of food or water in the pit

Fourth injustice – they sell him to Midianite slave traders

Fifth injustice – they cover it up rather than tell the truth

So now, in only a few hours’ time, Joseph has gone from being completely free to becoming a slave with no rights

He will have no chance, other than if he tries to escape, to see his mother, his father, or his own home ever again

He’s a captive within a foreign land, living amongst people with a foreign language, having to eat foreign food and learn foreign customs

He’s only a teenager and this is the only life he will ever know for the rest of his days

He’s been mercilessly victimized

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He may have deserved some payback for his actions but certainly not to this degree

How easy would it have been for him to become bitter at this point in his young life?

And what about God?

Why didn’t He step in to stop this from happening?

What will be Joseph’s response to this horrible injustice?

Will he adopt a victim mentality?

Will he put himself outside the circle of responsibility?

Let’s turn to Genesis 39 to find out the answer

He’s now a slave with Potiphar’s house

Amazingly, in fact, his life took a positive turn for the better, vv. 1-6a

So it seems like, up to this point in time, Joseph has not fallen into a victim mentality perspective

But that is about to be severely tested

Notice how God has sovereignly blessed him but as we shall see next God does not sovereignly shield him from temptation

Everything takes a huge turn for the worse beginning in verse 6b

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Joseph, if he had fallen into a victim mentality, for what his brothers unjustly did to him, could have easily placed himself outside the circle of responsibility

My brothers made this happen and God permitted it

No one back home will ever know if I commit adultery, so I won’t be disappointing my parents

Furthermore, I deserve to indulge in this invitation to sin when I consider what was done to me

However, Joseph’s entertains none of these rationalities which would be commonplace in the minds of those who manifest a victim mentality

Instead, Joseph puts himself within the circle of responsibility and honors God through making a commitment to moral purity

However, even though he was resolutely committed to doing what was right, he suffered further injustice

Again, I want to emphasize how God did not sovereignly stop this from happening

Why wouldn’t God step in to prevent yet another injustice?

All the unexpected good things which happened in Potiphar’s house have gone up in smoke

Surely now a victim mentality will take root in his heart

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“God, I didn’t give in to this by doing what was right in Your eyes, and so this is what I get for being obedient?”

“I’ve been victimized already by my brothers and now this?”

“Why should I obey Your commandments any longer?

“This certainly isn’t fair!”

Apparently Joseph did not let a victim mentality take root within his heart

Incredibly, through God’s providence he is looked upon with favour by the prison keeper and just like in Potiphar’s house is given a prominent place of governing authority

Let’s stop to review what Joseph has had to endure throughout his young life up to this time

It’s nothing short of a rollercoaster ride

Looks for his brothers and finds them – good

Coat is ripped from his body – not good

Thrown into a pit without food or water – not good

Take out of the pit – good

Callously sold as a slave – not good

Rises in authority and prominence in Potiphar’s house – good

Tempted by Potiphar’s wife to commit adultery – not good

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Resists the initial temptation – good

Continues to experience continual pressure – not good

Refuses to give in when it’s easiest to do so – good

Is intentionally betrayed by Potiphar’s wife – not good

Thrown in the king’s prison – not good

Rises in authority and prominence there – good

I’ve taken time to review all of this because every “not good” was an off-ramp opportunity to sink into a victim mentality

Furthermore, the relentless instability of his circumstances could have easily caused him to seriously doubt whether God was on his side

Now he is in prison and yes things are going better for him there but he’s still in prison – it’s not the Holiday Inn

He has no idea if this will ever change

This seemingly will be his home for the rest of his life

He’s been victimized in such grievous ways

How can he not be overcome by a victim mentality as hours melt away into days and days into months?

Will anything ever change?

Chapter 40 provides us with the answer

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Pharaoh’s chief butler and baker are thrown into prison

They each have significantly vivid dreams which affect them greatly the morning after

Joseph notices this and volunteers to be their interpreter

It’s good news for the butler, vv.12-13

Joseph gives the butler a specific request and for the first time reveals his personal thoughts the great injustices he had experienced, vv. 14-15

The chief baker doesn’t receive the same good news, v.19

Events unfold exactly as Joseph said it would happen

However, after his reinstatement the chief butler completely forgets Joseph’s request

This was yet another opportunity for a victim mentality to take root within Joseph’s heart

In fact, his circumstances do not change for two years

He could have easily put the blame on God for not preventing his injustices

He could have easily, entirely abandoned his faith in God

He could have easily permitted a root of bitterness to sprout and grow unhindered in his heart

He could have easily given up on life itself

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However, chapter 41 proves otherwise

Pharaoh had a night of unnerving dreams

No one amongst his magicians and wise men could interpret them

Suddenly, a light bulb goes on in the chief butler’s mind

He remembers how Joseph can accurately interpret dreams

Pharaoh calls for Joseph

Notice what Joseph says in verse 16 which serves as clear evidence he’s not been overcome by a victim mentality

What transpires next is truly amazing

Joseph rises to second in command behind Pharaoh

He has gone from the pit, to prison to the palace

I would strongly suggest not falling into a victim mentality made this possible

Now let’s fast-forward to Genesis chapter 50

In the scene before us, Joseph’s brothers fear their lives may be in jeopardy

After Jacob dies, they believe Joseph will finally settle accounts with them for their injustice toward him

Let’s see how this unfolds, beginning in verse 15

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Joseph reveals one of the keys to avoiding developing and living out a victim mentality

It is to have an unshakeable belief in the overarching, benevolent sovereignty of God

Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

Injustice ultimately works for the believer’s benefit, bringing greater glory of God

2 Corinthians 4:16-18: “Therefore, we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not see. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Christians who evidence a victim mentality render themselves unusable for God

Because Joseph maintained a firm belief in God’s sovereignty, God was able to accomplish amazing things through him at every stage of his later teenage and future adult life

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Significant Concluding Points

Do not think you are immune to adopting a victim mentality because life will continue to present you with unfair circumstances and undeserved injustices

Trusting in God’s benevolent, eternal and unchanging sovereignty is essential to be victorious

Never place yourself outside the circle of responsibility no matter how unfair the injustices are you are presently experiencing

Remember, obedience isn’t a guarantee of being free from further injustices

Keep loving, praising, honoring and serving God throughout every injustice you may encounter in this life