

Hi Ho, Hi Ho! Its off to work we go. ... well not really when one gets to my age ... but it IS Monday morning, and time for our weekly Devotional. God bless you as you read and pray.

## FACING CULTURAL CHALLENGES AND CHANGES

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris

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“You rejoice in this, though now for a short time you have had to be distressed by various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith – more valuable than gold, which perishes though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:6-7; HCSB)

The people who read this Devotional have lived through a labyrinth of cultural changes. Some of these changes with their demanding challenges have become a blessing while others have been greatly confusing and difficult. We have had to adjust to them, like them or not. The question is: “How do Christians live through times of cultural change with its challenges, and especially challenges that are contrary to the Word of God?” God’s Word provides for us some key examples from which we can learn valuable lessons. These are examples of the life of victory during demanding cultural challenges and changes.

### 1. JOSEPH: A LIFE OF CULTURAL DEPRIVATION.

As a young person, noted to be seventeen years old (Genesis 37:2; HCSB), he was sold into a culture totally different from his beloved Hebrew culture and life style. He was deprived of the family and the many cultural attitudes, activities, and associations with which he was familiar and accustomed. By the time he was 30 years old he had passed through thirteen of the best years of his life in a culture unknown before. Some people may be tempted to say that these thirteen years were “lost years” in Joseph’s life. However, having been deprived of his familiar and comfortable cultural environment, at the end of those “so-called lost years” it became obvious that Joseph had endured in a new cultural environment. He was given a place of importance and tremendously high-level prominence in the new culture. In the divine record of Joseph’s life found in the Book of Genesis, there are four very significant statements that account for what God was doing in a life that though culturally deprived, was yielded to Him. God made a difference that can be interpreted only in the context of the miraculous. These four statements are found in Genesis 39:2, 3, 21, and 23, as following:

1. “The LORD was with Joseph.” (Genesis 39:2a; HCSB) Because of this, the result is clearly stated: “... and he became a successful man.” (Genesis 39:2; HCSB)

2. “... his master saw that the LORD was with him...” (Genesis 39:3a; HCSB) The stated result is likewise thrilling: “... the LORD made everything he did successful.” (Genesis 39:3b; HCSB)

3. “... the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him.” (Genesis 39:21a; HCSB) And the result? “He granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. The warden put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph’s authority, and he was responsible for everything that was done there.” (Genesis 39:21b, 22; HCSB)

4. “The warden did not bother with anything under Joseph’s authority, because the LORD was with him.” (Genesis 39:23a; HCSB) And then the record states: “The LORD made everything that he did successful.” (Genesis 39:23b; HCSB)

And logically you ask: “Dr. Bob, are you telling us that when we have a positive attitude toward our culture, and accept it with all its challenges and changes, even though it not what we really desire, that we will be successful in everything we do?” My answer is simply this: “That depends how you interpret the word ‘successful. It also depends on who determines that success. We must Let God determine and define ‘success’ and let God be the Author of our success!”

### 2. ELIJAH: A LIFE OF CULTURAL DISSONANCE.

Elijah was a dynamic Prophet of God in the Old Testament, known as “Elijah the Tishbite, from the Gilead settlers.” (1 Kings 17:1; HCSB) At the time of the ministry of Elijah, Ahab was the king of Israel. Few kings if any, have a more despicable record of sin and ungodliness than King Ahab. God’s Word declares: “Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the LORD’s sight more than all who were before him ... Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him.” (1 Kings 16:30, 33; HCSB) Sin does not go unpunished. Judgment must come ... and it did! The Bible states that Elijah “said to Ahab, ‘As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.’” (1 Kings 17:1; NKJV) Three exhilarating truths emerge from this proclamation:

1. The LORD God lives. "As the LORD God of Israel lives..."
2. The LORD God reigns. "... before whom I stand..."
3. The LORD God wins - ALWAYS. "... no dew nor rain these years, except at my word."

After this, "... it came to pass after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, 'Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.'" (1 Kings 18:1; NKJV)

Through the very difficult years of cultural dissonance (a serious lack of agreement), in which it appeared that evil was reigning throughout the whole earth, the faith of one man of God did NOT fail. Elijah knew the God who lives, who reigns, and ALWAYS wins. At the end of the contest on Mt. Carmel the Bible says: "All the people fell on their faces and said: 'The LORD, He is God.'" (1 Kings 18:39; NKJV) And again, God determined and defined, and was the Author of success.

### 3. DANIEL: A LIFE OF CULTURAL DISTORTION.

It was the time of the Babylonian Captivity of Israel, the people of God. Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BCE) was one of the most powerful of the ancient rulers. His philosophy was similar to that of the Assyrian rulers of the eighth century. They focused on displacing entire populations of people by taking them into captivity and immersing them in a culture new to the captives. It was a religious culture or environment. For Daniel and his colleagues, it was distorted because of the interpretation of the religious belief system in Babylon that was totally contrasted to Israel's belief system. Religious "names" representing the names of Babylonian "gods" were given to Daniel and his colleagues. These names were, respectively, to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah, the name Shadrach, to Mishael, the name Meshach, and to Azariah, the name Abed-Nego. We have become accustomed to referring to Daniel's three friends by their Babylonian names. A religious distortion, to be sure!

Daniel and his three loyal friends, stood firm in the midst of the many (obviously) attempts made to "re-culturize" them into the distorted religious system of the Babylonian and later the Medo-Persian empire. How did this happen? It did not "just happen." The key is found in a powerful statement in the Book of Daniel. "God gave these four young men knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature and wisdom. Daniel also understood visions and dreams of every kind." (Daniel 1:17; HCSB)

The Scriptures declare: "At the end of the time that the king had said to present them, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king interviewed them, and among all of them, no one was found equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they began to serve in the king's court. In every matter of wisdom and understanding that the king consulted them about, he found them 10 times better than all the diviner-priests and mediums in his entire kingdom. Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus." (Daniel 1:18-21; HCSB) And therefore again, God determined and defined, and was the Author of success. There it is! A life of cultural deprivation, overcome by Joseph. A life of cultural dissonance, overcome by Elijah. A life of cultural distortion, overcome by Daniel and his three friends. But in it all, through it all, it is Almighty God who determines, defines, and is the Author of successful living in the midst of cultural challenges and changes!

For all of God's people since Calvary-love was poured out on Golgotha's sullen hill, it is under the triumphant declaration, Tetelestai (It is finished!) that followers of the Lamb of God live in victory even in the midst of cultural challenges and changes! As people redeemed by the shed blood of Jesus on the Cross, we may live in a place and time when we are deprived of the culture we find and desire in the Word of God. We may face a horrific environment of severe dissonance, creating a spirit of fear in the lives of some. Or, we may find ourselves living in a culture that is quite distorted due of the application of religious language and/or practices displayed before us as a so-called "life-style of choice." But, may God help us to be on the alert and walk with Him who alone is the Guarantor of a life of victory when we face the challenges and changes of our culture.

One of the hymns that graces the church in its obedient walk with God was written, words and music by Eugene M. Bartlett, in 1939. Sing it! Believe it! Rejoice in it! Thank God for it, because there is ...

### VICTORY IN JESUS

1. I heard an old, old story, how a Savior came from glory,  
How He gave His life on Calvary to save a wretch like me.  
I heard about His groaning, of His precious blood's atoning.  
Then I repented of my sins and won the victory.

2. I heard about His healing, of His cleansing pow'r revealing,  
How He made the lame to walk again and caused the blind to see.  
And then I cried, 'Dear Jesus, come and heal my broken spirit.'  
And somehow Jesus came and brought to me the victory.

3. I heard about a mansion He has built for me in glory,  
And I heard about the streets of gold beyond the crystal sea,  
About the angels singing, and the old redemption story.  
And some sweet day I'll sing up there the song of victory.

CHORUS (after each verse)

O victory in Jesus, my Savior forever!  
He sought me and bought me with His redeeming blood.  
He loved me ere I knew Him, and all my love is due Him.  
He plunged me to victory beneath the cleansing flood.