

LEARNING TO DEAL WITH THE "HOWEVERS" IN LIFE

Because of the great wisdom he displayed to the king of a rich and powerful land, a young slave was once elevated to the position of Prime Minister. Wherever he went thereafter, runners preceded him and shouted, "Bow the knee." Thirty years later he would learn a hard lesson.

At age 30, Joseph was a Hebrew slave imprisoned in Egypt because of a false accusation against him. But a sudden turn of events brought not only his release, but also instant promotion to the Pharaoh's second in command.

When Joseph was about 60, his father, Jacob, was dying. As was the custom, Jacob called for Joseph's two sons so he could bestow the patriarchal blessing upon them. Since Jacob was blind, Joseph carefully arranged the boys in front of their grandfather in just the right positions. He naturally expected his father to simply extend his right hand to the head of the elder son to impart the blessing and prerogatives of the firstborn. But that's not what happened.

Jacob purposely crossed his hands to rest his right hand upon the younger boy. This unexpected change of plans greatly displeased Joseph, and grasping his father's hands, he urged, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head."

But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. However...."

Even after the great Apostle Paul entreated the Lord three times for removal of the "thorn in his flesh," God also said "however" in so many words and did not do it. But in the gracious acceptance of that painful "however," Paul learned to be content with the hard spots of his life, even seeing them as unexpected fountains of strength.

When our son Barrett was small, I would often take his hand when I sensed he was in danger of stepping into traffic. If he pulled away and continued his own course, I could do nothing to protect him. But if he let me lead him--let me say "however" to his plan--he would be safe even though the route might seem unnecessarily long.

Over the years, I have earnestly prayed for health and housing and relationships and finances. I have prayed for opportunities and wisdom and calm circumstances and relief from difficult trials. And many times God has said, "I know, my son. I know all these things are important to you, and you think you would be better off if you had them. However...."

In such times there's always a lesson I need to learn--and find contentment with it. The "howevers" we find thrust into our plans are an inextricable part of our learning process, and how we respond to them says a lot about our growth and maturity.