

The Common Thread

By Rick Ezell

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50:20 NIV).

Taking a bad situation and making something good out of it is not uncommon. More than one person affirms: “I have no problems in life. I have only opportunities.” The pages of history are lined with individuals encountering negative setbacks only to make something positive out of them. They are better for it. And in many cases so are we.

Thomas Edison, when a boy, received a blow on his ear which impaired his hearing. What a tragedy! But later he felt his deafness was a blessing, for it was a tool by which he was saved from distractions. This allowed him to concentrate on his work, and out of that concentration emerged some of the greatest inventions of all times.

Victor Hugo, a literary genius of France, was exiled from his country by Napoleon. What a tragedy! Out of that period of exile arose some of his most creative works. When he later returned home in triumph, he asked, “Why was I not exiled earlier?”

Helen Keller, born blind and deaf, faced obstacle after obstacle in her life. However, on more than one occasion she confided, “I thank God for my obstacles, for through them I have found myself, my work, and my God.”

George Frederick Handel was at a low point in his life. His money was gone, and his creditors hounded him, threatening him with imprisonment. His right side became paralyzed, and his health deteriorated. For a brief time he was tempted to give up. In the midst of the darkness he picked himself up and began to do the only thing he knew to do—write music. And out of that despair he wrote the oratorio known as “The Messiah,” which many consider the greatest piece of church music in history.

The fiber tying Edison, Hugo, Keller, Handel and Joseph together is that these people refused to be defeated by their problems. They saw their misfortunes and bad luck not as dilemmas to destroy them, but as opportunities to grow and develop in ways that otherwise would have been impossible.

That was Joseph’s strength. Joseph succeeded in spite of his unfair circumstances. He responded to difficult crises with a positive attitude. He developed a godly character in the midst of unjust suffering. He built something prevailing on the lot that was given him in life. He discovered in his defining moment that when life is unfair, God is still good. I do not know when he learned this truth. But he did learn it. His life and attitude can be summarized by his own words, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50:20).

His brothers hated him; he loved them. His brothers harmed him; he helped them. His brothers sold him to slavery; he freed them. His brothers envied him; he was generous

with them. They meant it for evil—God intended it for good.

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