

A FAMILY PRESERVED

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God works through adversity and even the evil actions of people to bring about good.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Genesis 37–50

+ **SETTING:**

We now enter the story of Joseph. We learn in Genesis 37 that Joseph was Jacob's favorite son, and once again, favoritism caused problems in this dysfunctional family. Joseph was one of the youngest of Jacob's children, yet in his dreams, Joseph saw his family bowing down to him (Gen. 37:5-11). In their jealousy and spite, the brothers sold Joseph, and he became a slave to Potiphar in Egypt (Gen. 37:36). Joseph earned great favor in Potiphar's household but was thrown into prison when Potiphar's wife lied and said Joseph had tried to sleep with her.

DAY 1

READ:

Genesis 40

FOCAL PASSAGES:

Genesis 40:9-15,20-23

NOTES

Every person feels lonely at some point in his or her life. Friendships might not be as deep as you desire. A marriage might not meet your expectations. Church members might be less involved than you would like. There are many reasons you might feel lonely. Sometimes the feeling of loneliness could be based on real hurt done to you, and other times it could be a result of isolation on your end. Either way, it is a real and painful feeling.

Joseph surely knew this feeling well. He spent years in prison and likely felt the weight of loneliness more often than most of us ever will. Yet he knew God was present with him.

You might feel entirely alone, but if you are a Christian, you always have the presence of God with you. There are many places in Scripture where God reminded His people of His presence. Genesis 28:15, Deuteronomy 31:6, Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 28:20, and Hebrews 13:5 are just a few examples of the times God told His people, "I am with you." What's more, those who are found in Jesus possess the Holy Spirit, which means God is not just with you, He is in you.

Our God is unlike anyone else. He does not abandon you when things get difficult. He doesn't ignore you when you speak to Him. He wants you and cares about you and desires to be with you. This truth about God's character is a great comfort in the midst of loneliness. If you are tempted to believe the lie that no one loves you, look again and see God extending His hand, inviting you into His presence.

Where do you turn when you struggle with loneliness?

DAY 2

READ:

Genesis 41

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 41:1-16

NOTES

In the television series *The Blacklist*, there are a lot of unanswered questions. One of the main characters, Elizabeth Keen, seeks answers about her past, her childhood, her relatives, and her husband. As the story unfolds, small pieces of the puzzle are revealed, but each episode seems to demonstrate the puzzle has far more pieces than anyone realizes. There is one character, however, who seems to be all-knowing. Raymond Reddington, a notorious criminal, has answers but withholds them for his own purposes and often for the apparent protection of others. It is the pursuit of knowledge and information that sends Elizabeth and others into desperate emotional positions and causes many of them to wish they never knew anything at all.

We often want to have all the answers. We look at the way our lives turn out and wonder what God is doing. But God, unlike Raymond Reddington, actually does know all things and is not motivated by selfish reasons. And we, unlike Elizabeth and others, can actually trust God and know that His plan is good.

Our temptation is to doubt God and believe the lie that He doesn't know what He is doing. Imagine if Joseph decided God wasn't good enough at being God. What if he took matters into his own hands and argued with Potiphar or fought while he was in jail? We likely wouldn't have the rest of the story. Instead, Joseph knew he could trust God. God never failed him, so there was no reason to obsess over having all the answers. Joseph's faithfulness to trust God and believe that He was working all things for good is an example to us all.

Where are you seeking answers for the hardships you endure in your life?

DAY 3

READ:

Genesis 42–45

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 45:1-8

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Biblical forgiveness does release us, and not simply from our own anger and hurt. Biblical forgiveness releases us to bring the mercy we received from God out into the world to others."¹

—Leslie Leyland Fields

Injustice seems to flood our news cycle, our cities, and the world around us. People are persecuted for their religion, discriminated against for their race, and abused for their gender. Various parts of the world have made some progress at setting policies and protections for people who are treated unjustly, but for the most part, the world is not as it should be. Christians, however, are lovers of justice because God is just (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 89:14).

It is not wrong for us to fight for justice in this world. Yet we must always remember that when we are wronged, we are not called to take revenge and bring down the hammer on our enemies. Rather, we want to make it our aim to live at peace with everyone, as much as it depends on us (Rom. 12:18).

This can be a difficult task when we have been wronged. Our temptation is to take matters into our own hands, to avenge ourselves. Joseph could have done this, but he did not. He resisted the temptation to exact vengeance upon his brothers. Instead, he showed them kindness. And his kindness was like fiery coals heaped upon their heads (Rom. 12:20-21). God does not call His children to respond with hatred toward our enemies but with kindness and care for them.

All throughout Joseph's story, God used evil for good. In Romans 12:18-21, in honor of our gracious and just God, we are called to the same task. This requires that we die to our desires and live according to the cross. Jesus bore our sins, and He did not deserve to experience that punishment. He overcame evil with good, and as His followers who have the Holy Spirit, we have the strength to do the same.

How will you overcome the evils around you with good?

DAY 4

READ:

Genesis 50

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 50:15-21

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #29:

GOD'S PLAN AND HUMAN ACTION

God's sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many plans are in a person's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail." In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge and yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

Joseph's kindness toward his brothers wasn't just due to his love for his father (although he did love his father very much). He loved them too. He reminded them repeatedly that they had nothing to fear from him and that he bore them no ill will because what they intended for evil God was working for good. Through his kindness, Joseph was reconciling his relationship with them.

To reconcile means to restore or to make right. This is one of the major themes of the Bible. Through the gospel, we are made right with God, reconciled to Him by faith in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection (2 Cor. 5:17-18,21). This is such good news for all of us who have done wrong and sinned against God. Because of Jesus, we are reconciled to our Creator. Our relationship is set right once more. We should dwell on this good news, but we should not forget that our reconciliation is not for our benefit only.

We are reconciled for a purpose—to be ambassadors for Christ. An ambassador is an official representative of a nation or realm, and we are part of God's kingdom, which means we are representatives of His saving realm. We are sent out as those who have been reconciled so we can bring reconciliation to the whole world (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Our calling is to go and bring others into the fold of God's kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ. We invite others to be reconciled as we were. In this, we fulfill our purpose in life to worship and glorify God.

How are you participating as an ambassador for Christ in this world?

DAY 5

READ:

Ephesians 2

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ephesians 2:19-22

NOTES

Let's be honest: Being part of the church can be difficult at times. Yes, we are fellow members of God's household, and doubly yes, because of the gospel, we are family. But therein lies the issue—we are family, and families often have disagreements. While it's likely safe to say that you have not experienced the same kind of family strife as Joseph experienced, the experience of disagreement and difficulties between family members is not unfamiliar. The image that we have in our minds of what the church should be and what our experience happens to be is often very different. That's not because the ideal of what the church is according to Scripture is bad or wrong. It's because we are people prone to the same sinful behaviors of all people since the first humans sinned.

That's why it's so important for us to remember that our union with each other was built on the very foundation that Joseph and all the other people in Scripture laid out. God was creating a way for all the people of the world to be reconciled to Him. He did this by establishing a covenant with Abraham and keeping His promises through Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and beyond. God preserved His people over centuries of strife and difficulty, through rebellion, idolatry, rejection, and legalistic obedience, and He is still preserving us today.

Any differences or disagreements we have ought to fade when we recognize that we are not strangers but family. We are being built up together by God in Christ and we share the same Holy Spirit. Our family is found in those who trust in nothing but the blood of Jesus. If we are tempted to argue or become disunified with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we must remember that we have the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, and we are now bound together by this Spirit. We can trust that even the hardest times in the church are worth the struggle because of what God is doing.

How can you serve the church and participate in building it up by the power of the Spirit?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"There is no victory without opposition. God has not called you to a life of ease. He has called you to a life of victory through His Son Jesus Christ."²

-Adrian Rogers (1931-2005)

POINT 1: God is faithful to be present with His people, even in adversity (Gen. 39:21-23).

Though the worst circumstances put Joseph in slavery and in prison, God's _____ and _____ comforted Joseph in his situation.



How can we know God cares for us in difficult circumstances?

Joseph was _____ in his circumstances, but God's presence alone resulted in the _____ things that would follow.



Why are we tempted to rely on our own strength or ability and not trust God?

POINT 2: God is faithful to prompt forgiveness and reconciliation in His people (Gen. 45:4-8).

Joseph forgave his brothers because he recognized God's _____ plan and _____ in what had happened to him.



How does trusting in God's sovereignty factor into our willingness to forgive others?

God's sovereign plan ensured that His _____ were cared for and _____ for during seven long years of famine in the land.

POINT 3: God is faithful to bring good, even from evil (Gen. 50:15-21).

Joseph trusted the sovereign God to do what is _____ and _____ even through the evil of human beings.

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #29: GOD'S PLAN AND HUMAN ACTION

God's sovereignty over all of life encompasses the _____ actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many plans are in a person's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail." In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen _____ actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the _____ of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge and yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.



How does Joseph's story affect the way you understand your life circumstances?

MY RESPONSE

Because we are a people who have been forgiven of our evil deeds, we forgive those who sin against us, recognizing that God is working everything for the good of those who love Him.

- **HEAD:** How will you change the way you think about the power of evil in this world?
- **HEART:** In what circumstances do you need to rejoice, knowing that God cares and provides for you?
- **HANDS:** How will you demonstrate the kindness and forgiveness you have received in Christ?

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The cross shows us that God can take the worst possible evil and through it accomplish the greatest possible good—the destruction of evil itself."³

—Christopher Wright