

CAPITOL STUDIES

MAY 24, 2023 • WEEK 20



JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

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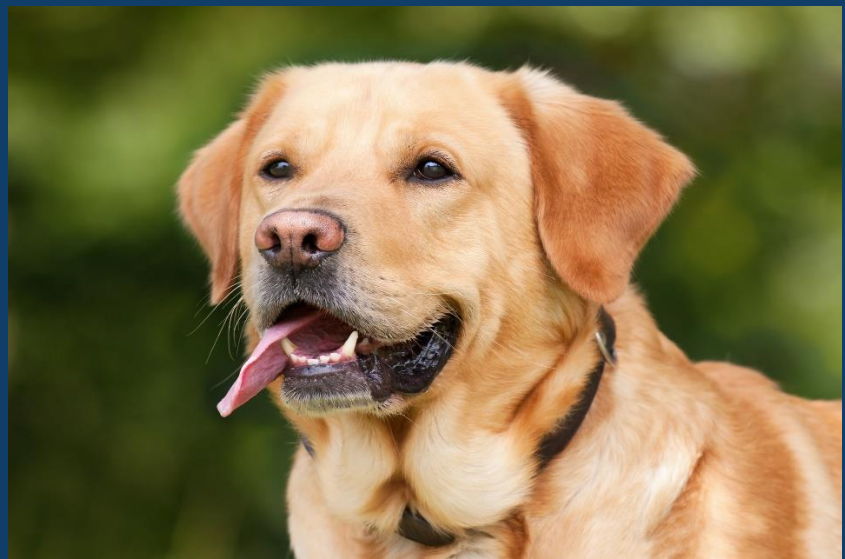


Verse of the Week

Genesis 50:19-20

But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

How Should a Christian Respond to Trials?



TWO BOYS WERE WALKING ALONG A STREET when they encountered a large dog blocking the sidewalk. "Don't be afraid," one of the boys told his more timid companion. "Look at his tail, how it wags. When a dog wags his tail, he won't bite you." "That may be," admitted the other, "but look at that wild gleam in his eye. He looks like he wants to eat us alive... Which end are we going to believe?" You may have felt like those two boys when you've had to face trials in your life. The Bible exhorts us to "count it all joy" when we encounter various trials (James 1:2). We are assured that God "causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). But sometimes we aren't quite convinced whether to believe the promises of God or run from the great trial that faces us.

Pastor Arin Hess
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INTRODUCTION

Joseph's godly mindset carried him through the many trials in his life. He was badly mistreated by his own family as well as by others whom he had not wronged. He spent the better part of his twenties in an Egyptian dungeon, separated from his father, not knowing if he would ever see him again. Yet despite all these trials, he says to his brothers, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." He knows, even though at the time his brothers hated him and wanted to get rid of him, God was working those hard things together so Joseph would be in Egypt to preserve the children of Israel.

*To bear up under trials, we must set our minds
on what we know about our God.*

I. GOD IS SOVEREIGN

As Creator, He has the right to exercise His mighty, ruling power over His creation. With our finite minds, we will not understand all His ways. The Bible declares that God is the sovereign God who "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11).

Genesis 50:15-19

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!"¹⁶ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying,¹⁷ 'Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong." ' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.¹⁸ Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?"

Despite all Joseph's assurances and kindnesses to his brothers, they still cannot bring themselves to believe that Joseph could possibly bear no ill will against them whatsoever. Little do they understand how deeply Joseph—*through* all his trials—has come to believe in God and rest in His sovereignty.

II. GOD IS ALL WISE

He cannot make a mistake. He has all knowledge and will use it in the best way possible. He has a perfect plan for our lives. Nothing, including the evil deeds of wicked men, can thwart God's plan. A mistaken idea, widely promoted in Christian circles, is that all trials are from the devil and that a good God would never send trials to His children. Thus, we are to rebuke the devil and claim our victory by faith. If we aren't delivered, then it is assumed that our faith is faulty. But clearly Joseph had great faith, yet he was not delivered. The psalmist attributes the experiences of Joseph directly to the doing of God.



Psalm 105:1, 16-18

Oh, give thanks unto the Lord; call upon His name, make known His deeds among the people....¹⁶ And He called for a famine upon the land; He broke the whole staff of bread.¹⁷ He sent a man before them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave.¹⁸ They afflicted his feet with fetters, He himself was laid in irons;¹⁹ Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him.

God had a perfect plan for Joseph to be the instrument He would use to save His chosen people.

III. GOD IS ALWAYS GOOD

Psalm 107:1, 8-9

O give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His lovingkindness is everlasting....⁸ Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men!⁹ For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, and the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.

Psalm 84:11

Oh, For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

Joseph continued to live a pure and upright life regardless of the consequences. He was a man of character day in and day out. Though many times he could not see the “good,” he trusted God. He continued to be faithful in doing what was right, and God honored him. Now, looking back, Joseph can clearly see the good hand of God in bringing him and his family to Egypt.

Genesis 45:5, 7-8

Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life....⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.⁸ Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God.

Even wicked acts committed against us with evil intent are turned, by God’s providence, to God’s purposes, which are always good. When someone wrongs you, be especially on guard. Satan tempted Eve by getting her to doubt the goodness of God. He implied that God was withholding something good by keeping the forbidden fruit from her. The devil will tempt you by whispering, “If God really cared for you, He wouldn’t have let this happen.” No doubt Joseph often had to resist that temptation over the years. But in each case, he affirmed his trust in the goodness of God.

Genesis 50:20

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.





IV. GOD IS LOVE

Remember that you are loved though you are a sinner. God loves you with an everlasting love. His love will never change. It has no conditions attached to it. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God” (1 John 3:1).

We must love others in the same way God loves us. “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Love even when others sin against you. Love even when they are enemies: “But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44, KJV). Joseph shows love by speaking kindly and comforting his brothers.

Genesis 50:21

[Joseph said,] “So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

V. GOD FORGIVES

Remember that you are forgiven. “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13-14). “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

We are to forgive as we have been forgiven. “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). It’s easy to say, but it’s tough to apply. The difficulty increases in proportion to how badly you’ve been hurt. When you’ve been hurt badly, you don’t feel like forgiving the person, even if he or she repents. You want to see some sort of suffering. You want payback.

Perhaps you’re struggling with those feelings right now. Your pain may be from a recent situation, or it may go back for years. But if you’re bitter and unforgiving, you’re not obeying the two great commandments, to love God and to love others. Bitterness not only displeases God; it spreads to others. It hurts you, and it defiles many (Hebrews 12:15). If we want to please God, we must ask, “How can I root out bitterness and truly strive to forgive those who have wronged me?”

After their father Jacob’s death, Joseph’s brothers begin to worry. They can’t forget how they wronged Joseph. They knew that he had forgiven them 17 years before. But now that their father is dead, will Joseph pay them back for all the wrong they did to him? They send a message to Joseph saying that their father, before his death, charged them to tell Joseph to forgive their sin against him. Showing his tender heart, Joseph’s spontaneous response is to weep. Then he reassures his brothers, asking: “Am I in God’s place?” Even though Joseph is the



second most powerful man on the face of the earth, a man who could give the command and have his brothers imprisoned or executed with no questions asked, he puts himself on their level, under God, and lets them know that they are forgiven. Joseph's response shows that he truly has forgiven his brothers: "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?"

His question is a good one to ask yourself when you are tempted to withhold forgiveness or to seek vengeance against someone who has wronged you. To forgive as God commands, you must submit to God's mighty hand in the situation. Then He will give grace to humbly reach out in forgiveness to others. How they respond to your offer of forgiveness is their choice. The Bible is clear that we are to forgive just as God has forgiven us. God doesn't extend forgiveness until we repent, but God aggressively offers forgiveness to us and seeks through His kindness to bring us to repentance. He paid the price for our forgiveness in the death of His Son while we were still His enemies. The barrier to reconciliation wasn't with God; it was our own lack of repentance. Having humbly offered forgiveness to those who have wronged us, we must leave the rest to God.

VI. GOD IS JUST

He is the only competent judge, the One who knows every thought, intention, and action of every person. Therefore, He can and will always judge rightly, exercising appropriate punishment when and where it is needed. The Lord says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay" (Rom. 12:19). Most of us want God's justice for the guy who wronged us but God's mercy for ourselves. However, to love our neighbor as ourselves means that we will want God's mercy for him just as we want it for ourselves. We must allow God to be the judge of all and trust Him to deal justly with each person. Despite the severe treatment he received, we do not see that Joseph holds anything against God, and he is not holding onto the grievous wrongs committed against him by his brothers. He has turned this all over to God, allowing Him to be the Judge of all and trusting Him to deal justly with each person: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:15c, KJV)

VII. GOD CARES

Genesis 50:22-26

Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. ²³Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees. ²⁴Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." ²⁵Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here." ²⁶So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.





God has not abandoned Joseph. He shows His caring heart by allowing Joseph to spend 17 good years with his father. He then gives Joseph the privilege of many more years with his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren. Can you see him bouncing his grandbabies on his knee? God allowed great trial in Joseph's life, but now He gives him great blessing.

Joseph shows us what caring should look like for the believer. He could say, "I forgive you. Now get out of my life." He could leave his brothers to provide for themselves, but instead, he personally cares for them and their families. His words of forgiveness are proven in his deeds of kindness, showing he really cares. In his final words to his family, he reminds them that they have a God who keeps His promises, who will always be with them, and who will always care for them.

CONCLUSION

Are you in your proper place before God? *Do you grumble about your circumstances or about the people who have mistreated you?* If you do, you aren't in submission to the sovereign goodness of God. You may not think you're grumbling against God, but really, you are. You are angry with Him for allowing these things to happen. When trials come, we must rehearse what we know about our God, so we can honestly say with Joseph, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. I submit and trust His purpose in it all."

Our studies on the life of Joseph have shown us the meaning of true success. Joseph succeeded in man's eyes, with his career, but more importantly, he succeeded in God's eyes. The final verses of Genesis give us the epitaph of Joseph, a truly successful man. They help us to refine our priorities as we think about the direction of our lives. A successful life is not measured by its length. Even though Joseph lived relatively long by today's standards, he did not live as long as his father (who complained about the shortness of his 147 years) or his grandfather (who lived to be 180). But Joseph enjoyed the blessings of God with his family, and he left them with his strong faith and hope in his loving, caring God and His yet-to-be-fulfilled promises.

We see one final allusion in this chapter to the providential fulfillment of the dreams that started our story of Joseph: Joseph's brothers *fell down before him* (Gen. 50:18). The prediction that long ago his brothers despised and derided (Gen. 37:5-11) is unwittingly and repeatedly fulfilled (Gen. 42:6; Gen. 43:26-28; Gen. 44:14). God always has a way of providentially impelling men to bow in submission to His purposes.

Pastor Arin Hess

Bow the Knee

Ron Hamilton (*Majesty Music* © 2004)

What a privilege to come into God's presence,
Just to linger with the One who set me free.
As I lift my eyes and see His awesome glory,
I remember who He is and bow the knee.

Bow the knee; bow the knee.
He is King of all the ages; bow the knee.
God alone on His throne,
See Him high and lifted up, and bow the knee.
Kneel before Him, all adore Him,
As you live to love Him more, bow the knee.

Questions to Consider:

- If vengeance is wrong, how do you explain the imprecatory psalms? Should we ever pray those psalms against our enemies?
- How can a victim of rape, child abuse, or some terrible crime honestly believe that God meant it for good?
- How do you get the feeling of forgiveness when you don't have it?
- Can a person truly forgive and yet press charges against the offender?

FOOTNOTES

All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*.

Some of this material was gathered from Pastor Steven Cole's work found at <http://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-84/>.

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Theme Verse

Philippians 4:8

*Finally, brethren,
whatever is **true**,
whatever is **honorable**,
whatever is **right**,
whatever is **pure**,
whatever is **lovely**,
whatever is of
good repute,
if there is any
excellence
and if anything is
worthy of praise,
dwell on these things.*



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