

PERSPECTIVE: THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

Daily Study

Introduction

2 Corinthians 4:18

...we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

Most of us have sat in a classroom or attended a seminar where a presenter flashed an image on the screen and asked us to identify what we saw. Maybe you were shown a horse that, when turned sideways, looked like a frog. Perhaps you argued with fellow participants over whether you were seeing a duck or a rabbit in Jastrow's drawing. Or were you asked whether the woman in the picture was young or old, only to realize, after squinting and twisting, that you could see both?

Perspective. So many factors shape how we see the world and what is happening around us. Our past experiences, culture, worldview, prejudices, presuppositions, and the comments of those we trust all inform our perspective. Our insecurities and fears, pain and pride, shape how we interpret events. Critically, once we see things a certain way, it is difficult to see them any differently.

Artists often play with perspective. Sidewalk chalk illusionists, photographers, and even selfie-takers use forced perspective to create fantastical images. By altering distance, scale, angle, and placement, they exploit how the human eye processes depth to give the impression that a tourist is crushing the Eiffel Tower underfoot. It turns out that being too close or too far from something easily distorts our sense of what is real.

What if this is true of our spiritual lives as well? Are we tempted to make a single moment, a day, or a year the sum total of God's work on our behalf? Are we in danger of drawing the wrong conclusions about God because of the forced perspective created by losing a job, being falsely accused, being diagnosed with cancer, or the death of a loved one?

Thank you for joining us for this sermon series, Perspective: The Life of Joseph. In it, we will wrestle with our character flaws and recognize that Joseph was far from perfect. We will come face-to-face with disappointment, unfairness, abuse, and neglect. We will notice how often, amid the bleak darkness of difficulty, the Bible says, "Yahweh was with Joseph." We will see what faith looks like as this forgotten

teenager experiences God breaking the “forced perspective” of pain, loneliness, and cruelty to show him that “... *in all things God works for the good of those who love him*” (*Romans 8:28*). By the end of Joseph’s life, the slave is elevated to ruler, offense yields forgiveness, and abandonment turns into belonging. Finally, we will take a week to look at Joseph and notice that, with a slight shift in angle and a squint, we see contrasts and comparisons to the face of Jesus.

So, let me show you some images on the screen. What do you see? If you turn your experiences at a slight angle, you might break the forced perspective of proximity to what happened most recently and see a new picture come into focus: Jesus is with you.

Lovewell,
Pastor Dave Ferguson and the Crosswalk Series Guide writing team.

PERSPECTIVE: THE LIFE OF JOSEPH
Daily Study - Week 1: Dysfunction

Week 1 - Monday: Hostility

Genesis 37:2-4

This is the account of Jacob.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Maybe you know someone you would say, if you want to know the story of Fred, Barbara, or Sam, then let me tell you about his or her son. She hung the planets on that boy. Everything revolved around his favorite. That's how it is in the 37th chapter of Genesis. You want to know the story of Jacob? Then you are going to need to hear about his son, Joseph.

Don't misunderstand. Jacob has twelve sons. It just takes a while for the others to be mentioned by name. And when they are, it's in the context of the story of Joseph. He is the centerpiece of this patriarch's affections, and they all know it.

Some of this is predictable. A few chapters earlier in the book of Genesis, you will find the story of Jacob being tricked into marrying Laban's daughter Leah instead of his true love, Rachel. Seven years of hard labor later, Jacob earned the right to marry his originally intended bride. It appears he never got over the trickery, and his marriage to Leah was loveless (Genesis 29:31), while his devotion to Rachel grew stronger.

Rachel struggled to have children, while Leah bore Jacob six sons. To complicate matters, both Rachel and Leah gave Jacob their handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah, in marriage to help produce offspring. Each handmaid bore two sons. Four wives and ten children later, the household was a hotbed of competition, tension, and resentment, as Rachel remained childless. Finally, Rachel gave birth to Joseph. Then, when he was between 6 and 9 years old, Rachel died in childbirth as Jacob's final son, Benjamin, was born.

Jacob should have known the crippling effects of family favoritism, having grown up in the household of a father who favored his brother Esau (Genesis 25:28). Yet, as is often the case, what should have cautioned him only drove him to imitation. At times in our story, Joseph is privileged to stay home while the other sons must work the sheep fields. Joseph is treated as his father's representative and spokesperson to his older brothers. If it wasn't enough for them to notice the obvious, Jacob gave Joseph a special coat to wear, proclaiming his favored position.

Some translations of Scripture describe the coat as "multi-colored," and it may have been. But the best translation of the Hebrew suggests it was a "lengthy coat" (likely with long sleeves). This language describes a princely coat, not one intended for work. In a vivid depiction, Jacob makes a plain statement. "I am elevating my eleventh-born son to the birthright of the family. He is the first son of my beloved wife Rachel. None of the rest of you fully count as my sons. I have exempted him from working the same way you will each have to. He is my favorite." Joseph's brothers could see that their father loved him most, and they hated him for it.

The primary problem with favoritism is its exclusionary nature. I used to joke with my mother that I was her favorite among her three children. She would smile and say, "Yes, you are, you all are." Everything about her behavior validated that claim. This story starts with pain. Not on Joseph's part. It begins with a multitude of family members who don't feel included or loved. How might this story have differed if this father's love had been universal, unconditional, and freely given? What a contrast to the love of God described in Zechariah 2:8, when He says of His followers, "... whoever touches you touches the apple of my eye..."

- 1. What are some of your favorite things? Holiday? Vacation spot? Dessert? Hobby?**
- 2. Have you ever known yourself to be someone's favorite? Whose and why do you think they favored you?**
- 3. What does it mean to you to know that you are the apple of God's eye? Is this easy to believe? Why or why not?**

Week 1 - Tuesday: Dreams

Genesis 37:2-11

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

As a child, I loved the stories of Joseph that my parents read to me. This faithful young man, hounded by his brothers, sold, exiled, and imprisoned, never lost faith. I saw him as the innocent, spotless hero. Accordingly, Joseph's life can be presented as otherworldly, unattainable, and superhuman. Is he the exception to Paul's declaration that "... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)? If so, these stories have little to teach us and offer no example we can follow. However, embedded in the first verses of his story, we find evidence that Joseph isn't perfect and that he struggled with pride and selfishness just like us.

The second verse of Genesis 37 describes Joseph returning from his brothers to give his father a "bad" or "evil report" about them. I had always read this as meaning that Joseph's brothers were doing bad things, and that he did the responsible thing by sharing it with his father. We don't know whether Jacob had sent Joseph on a reporting mission or whether the teenager regularly engaged in the schoolyard practice of tattling. Either way, the original Hebrew wording of this passage carries something important. Every time the word translated here as "report" appears in scripture, it carries sinister overtones of fabrication, slander, or even false accusation. So when the author tells us that Joseph brings Jacob a "bad report" regarding his brothers, it is hard to miss that he does so to his own advantage. Our awe-shucks

protagonist may feign innocence, but he knows what he is doing. Joseph is smearing his brothers to increase his own celebrated status.

The story moves to the telling of two dreams. For the remainder of his life, Joseph displays high-level intelligence, remarkable discernment, and top-tier strategic planning. Does it seem plausible that he is unaware of how sharing these visions will affect his brothers and their families? Is he oblivious to their ever-growing anger? Or is he playing to his father's favoritism and his own pride? I believe the answer is unmistakable. Joseph isn't perfect. He is struggling with the need to build his credibility and approval, as most of us do through our teen years.

As I reflect on this passage, I love the stories of Joseph even more. Not because I like how he needled his brothers or fabricated his father's disapproval, but because I find them more relatable. They also give me hope. The scriptures tell us that God was with Joseph throughout his life, not waiting for him to become perfect. Yahweh drew near despite Joseph's sinfulness and failings. Surely, He walks with me too.

- 1. Who is someone you have always looked up to? Why?**
 - 2. Can you remember a time when you stretched the truth to your advantage? When was it? How have you felt about it since?**
 - 3. On a scale of 1-10, how much do you shade the truth to your own advantage when you think no one will figure it out? Why do you think you do this? What would you like to say to Jesus about this?**
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Week 1 - Wednesday: The Plot

Genesis 37:12-24

Soon after this, Joseph's brothers went to pasture their father's flocks at Shechem. When they had been gone for some time, Jacob said to Joseph, "Your brothers are pasturing the sheep at Shechem. Get ready, and I will send you to them." "I'm ready to go," Joseph replied.

"Go and see how your brothers and the flocks are getting along," Jacob said. "Then come back and bring me a report." So Jacob sent him on his way, and Joseph traveled to Shechem from their home in the valley of Hebron.

When he arrived there, a man from the area noticed him wandering around the countryside. "What are you looking for?" he asked.

"I'm looking for my brothers," Joseph replied. "Do you know where they are pasturing their sheep?"

"Yes," the man told him. "They have moved on from here, but I heard them say, 'Let's go on to Dothan.'" So Joseph followed his brothers to Dothan and found them there.

When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him. "Here comes the dreamer!" they said. "Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, 'A wild animal has eaten him.' Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!"

But when Reuben heard of their scheme, he came to Joseph's rescue. "Let's not kill him," he said. "Why should we shed any blood? Let's just throw him into this empty cistern here in the wilderness. Then he'll die without our laying a hand on him." Reuben was secretly planning to rescue Joseph and return him to his father.

So when Joseph arrived, his brothers ripped off the beautiful robe he was wearing. Then they grabbed him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

Hostility between Joseph and his brothers had reached a boiling point. One look at the teen filled his siblings with suspicion, dread, and anger. Far from home and working in dangerous territory, their senses were heightened as they saw a figure approaching in the distance, wearing the long-sleeved coat of a prince. The identification was immediate. The tattletale had been sent to spy on them again. The crew of shepherds began brainstorming ways to get back at their brother until, finally, someone said it out loud. "We could kill him and end our troubles. Who would know he hadn't been attacked by wild animals traveling out here alone?"

Several well-known studies on groupthink and group polarization show that groups of like-minded individuals often make more extreme decisions than any one individual would on their own. Does one of the brothers jokingly suggest violence, and, through the laughter, do things escalate? Ultimately, they settle on the most severe plan possible.

It appears that the oldest brother, Reuben, wasn't present at the brainstorming session that led to this murderous plot. However, by the time Joseph arrived, the plan had already been hatched; Reuben heard of it and successfully derailed the group's momentum. Upon his arrival, Joseph was attacked, stripped of his identity, and thrown into a pit while the brothers regrouped.

Let's pause here to reflect on a couple of dynamics. First, Joseph's mentality. His self-centered mindset causes him to miss all the cues that should have warned him of danger. This moment feels like watching someone run to hide in a shed filled with chainsaws in a movie called *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. How could he be so blind? Simple. He cannot see through the intoxicating hubris of pride.

Second, consider the courage it took for Reuben to stand up to the scheme of his nine brothers and de-escalate their bloodlust. Something in Reuben's character speaks up and steps in. His actions remind us of an important principle from Proverbs 29:11:

Fools vent their anger,
but the wise quietly hold it back.

- 1. Name one of your pet peeves. Why do you think it bothers you?**
 - 2. Who is someone who makes you angry? Why do you think that is? What have you done about it?**
 - 3. What is going on in your relationships that God may ask you to de-escalate? How could you do so? What would you like to say to Jesus about this?**
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Week 1 - Thursday: Silver

Genesis 37:25-28

Then, just as they were sitting down to eat, they looked up and saw a caravan of camels in the distance coming toward them. It was a group of Ishmaelite traders taking a load of gum, balm, and aromatic resin from Gilead down to Egypt.

Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain by killing our brother? We'd have to cover up the crime. Instead of hurting him, let's sell him to those Ishmaelite traders. After all, he is our brother—our own flesh and blood!" And his brothers agreed. So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt.

Knowing the end of the story allows us to ask a significant question: how many imperfect things did God use to save His people? Joseph will clearly serve as the instrument Yahweh employs to rescue the Egyptians, the surrounding nations, and Jacob's family from famine. To do so, he will overcome Jacob's favoritism, Joseph's pride, the competitive fury of his ten brothers, and the Midianites' slave trade, to

name a few. Out of man's sinful nature, He is weaving a royal coat of His own. The miraculous power of God uses the scraps of our failings to quilt together the fabric of salvation.

During this pivotal moment that leads to Joseph's slavery, Reuben is missing again. This time, Judah steps in to save their younger brother's life. Slavery, barely better than death, is the loophole God needs for His plan to succeed. The Midianite slave traders can see that these shepherds are desperate to offload their prisoner. With no bargaining leverage, Joseph is sold for 20 pieces of silver, the minimum price allowed in the culture of the day.

Stripped, sold, shackled. As the sun sets, Joseph's homeland and all he loves drift into the distant sands. His life is over. Or is it just beginning? Perspective. For him and for us, we might always suspect that the most difficult moments are when God does His best work.

For I am about to do something new.

See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?

I will make a pathway through the wilderness.

I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.

Isaiah 43:19

- 1. What is something you have had to sell in a hurry? What price did you get for it?**
 - 2. What is something or someone you have found particularly difficult to say goodbye to? How have you journeyed through it?**
 - 3. What are you going through right now that feels disastrous? How could God bring salvation from this problem? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?**
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Week 1 - Friday: The Father

Genesis 37:29-36

Some time later, Reuben returned to get Joseph out of the cistern. When he discovered that Joseph was missing, he tore his clothes in grief. Then he went back to his brothers and lamented, "The boy is gone! What will I do now?"

Then the brothers killed a young goat and dipped Joseph's robe in its blood. They sent the beautiful robe to their father with this message: "Look at what we found. Doesn't this robe belong to your son?"

Their father recognized it immediately. "Yes," he said, "it is my son's robe. A wild animal must have eaten him. Joseph has clearly been torn to pieces!" Then Jacob tore his clothes and dressed himself in burlap. He mourned deeply for his son for a long time. His family all tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "I will go to my grave mourning for my son," he would say, and then he would weep.

Meanwhile, the Midianite traders arrived in Egypt, where they sold Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Potiphar was captain of the palace guard.

The deed is done. Joseph is gone.

As Reuben returns to find what his brothers have done, reality engulfs the group. The relief of getting rid of their tormentor gives way to the dread of informing Jacob. They cannot tell him the truth. So they act on the plan they workshopped when Joseph was still approaching in the distance. Taking his coat, they tear it, drag it through the dirt, and soak it in the blood of a goat. But then comes the hardest part, delivering it to their father. In the end, none of them has the courage to face him. They send it with a servant.

Temptation sells us an idea without consequences. Enamored with the prospect of having what we want, we ignore the cost. But then the fine print at the bottom of the advertisement becomes reality. As the years rolled by, guilt and remorse must have engulfed these brothers. Did they ever sit with their father without seeing lines of grief etched across his face, knowing they had drawn them there? Could they rescue a lamb from a ditch and resist the memory of pulling Joseph from the pit? Could they participate in the sacrifice of a lamb and seek forgiveness without seeing the coat awash in blood? Did every sunset bring the mirage of a Midianite caravan disappearing over the horizon?

Forced perspective is a profound problem. We mistake small things for large ones and the biggest things for small ones. We easily minimize the consequences to get the short-term hit of indulging our hunger. Then we pay the price in crippling guilt and paralyzing shame, realizing our secrets harm us. We have all experienced this collapse of perspective. And there is only one remedy. The forgiveness of Jesus.

As you read this, one thing is certain. You are in need of forgiveness. Good news. The one who has what you need is quick to give it. The sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient to cover whatever you have done. He promises forgiveness the moment you confess. The scriptures tell us: ... *if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive*

us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness (1 John 1:9). And Jesus reminds us: "My grace is all you need" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Reordered perspective. The hunger you were tempted to satisfy is replaced by something new Jesus is making.

Meanwhile, Joseph... God's plan to redeem this family and rescue the nations will take twists and turns. It won't be quick. Joseph will endure 13 years of desperation and difficulty. But make no mistake, Jesus is working. Count on this. Jesus is working.

- 1. What is something you purchased only to quickly regret it? What did you do about it?**
 - 2. Do you carry guilt or shame over something you've done or didn't do? What should you say to Jesus about this?**
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PERSPECTIVE: THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

Daily Study - Week 2: Temptation

Week 2 - Monday: Prosperity

Genesis 39:1-2

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

There is a popular theology today that suggests you can tell whether the Lord is with you by what happens to you. Your career is on the rise, the house sells for more than the asking price, or you get pregnant as soon as you hoped. Your social media shares vacation spots, the cars you drive, and decadent meals. God's presence can be seen from a distance. The only problem is that the Bible teaches something different.

Repeatedly, scripture challenges the idea that God's presence is measured by how well things are going. For instance, in John 16:33, Jesus warns His disciples, *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* So, which is it? With Jesus in our lives, will we experience trouble or be overcomers? Could it be both? As it turns out, prosperity is a matter of perspective.

Most recently, Joseph has been ripped from everything he knows, sold into slavery at a bargain-basement price, transported across the desert to Egypt, and sold into the service of Potiphar. This is a brutal man responsible for Pharaoh's security, managing the state prisons, conducting royal investigations, and overseeing executions. Joseph isn't on a skiing trip in Aspen or honeymooning in Cabo. Yet in these circumstances, the Bible says, *"The LORD was with Joseph, and he prospered"* (Genesis 39:2).

Is it possible that the dissonance in this story reveals two distinct worlds? Is there a difference between the inner and outer worlds? A contrast between the physical and the spiritual? This would explain a lot. What if real prosperity is experienced from the inside out? Is true success a spiritual reality rather than a physical one? Could this be what Paul taps into when he says:

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:12-13)

What if prosperity **is** the presence of Yahweh? Like the undaunted spirit of a concentration camp survivor or a hospice patient, somehow able to claim joy, Joseph is living a life of prosperity as a slave, alone, with no hope of rescue.

Today, may you live the lavish life of prosperity... peace, contentment, and joy... because Jesus is with you.

- 1. If you could travel anywhere in the world to experience one meal, where would you go and what would you eat?**
 - 2. What is something you have been praying for that, as of yet, you haven't received? How does that make you feel?**
 - 3. What gift for your inner world would you like to ask Jesus for today?**
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Week 2 - Tuesday: Trust

Genesis 39:3-6a

When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Thirteen years will pass between Joseph's sale into slavery and his ascension to leadership in the courts of Pharaoh. While we don't know how much of that time he spent in the household of Potiphar, our passage reads with speed and minimalism.

The captain of Pharaoh's guard purchased Joseph. The Lord was with him; he prospered and lived in Potiphar's house. Not only did he live in the house rather than the slave quarters, but this servant quickly experienced visible success. So much so that Potiphar elevated him to his attendant, put him in charge, and trusted him enough to stop paying attention to anything beyond his own food.

What an incredible difference between Joseph's relationships with his brothers and with his owner. The privileged brat and sheep shirker becomes a hardworking, strategic manager: conscientious, loyal, thorough, trusted. One group wants to kill him. The other can't help but follow him. Is it just different groups of people? Or has something changed in Joseph?

You have probably noticed that when things get difficult, some people shrink back, dwell on negativity, and become worse versions of themselves. Others step up, find new strength, and discover previously unnoticed abilities. Joseph seems to have been the latter. Rather than pout, spend his time reminiscing about the "good ole days," or complain against Yahweh, he applies himself, builds trust, and influences his surroundings.

Here is the lesson. Failure, disaster, pain, and trouble are opportunities in the hands of Jesus. What are you experiencing that God could use to develop your

resourcefulness, unleash more talent, or deepen your compassion? What am I tempted to wish away that, when submitted to Him, would smooth my rough edges and create something beautiful? True, it takes maturity to see things this way. And that's the point. Somewhere, somehow, stumbling across the desert sands in chains, Joseph matured into a new kind of man, a warrior of faith.

- 1. What talent or skill are you currently working to develop? How is that going?**
 - 2. How would others describe your response to difficult circumstances? Why do you think they would say that?**
 - 3. What personal difficulty does Joseph's story remind you of? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?**
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Week 2 - Wednesday: Seduction

Genesis 39:6b-10

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

You might wish you were wealthier, more talented, more handsome, or more beautiful. But those things always carry the cost of greater exposure to temptation. Joseph was a charismatic, natural leader. He was the kind of handsome that turned heads when he entered the room. So it wasn't long before the problems with Potiphar's wife began.

We have no idea whether this woman is in a loveless marriage, has a history of loose behavior, or simply holds a different moral worldview from Joseph. Whichever is the case, she has set her sights on the bright, athletic Hebrew servant. And she acts on it, "Come to bed with me!" (v6)

There are probably many things so extreme they present no real temptation to you. You wouldn't say yes to killing your irritating coworker. But you might happily make them the butt of an office-wide joke. Robbing a bank isn't likely to tempt you. But fudging your taxes, well... that's another story. So when this woman brazenly invites Joseph to fornicate with her, it's an immediate, pointed refusal. Most of us would do the same, wouldn't we?

The original language paints a picture with more color and far greater depth. While the wording of verse six, "*come to bed with me,*" is an accurate option, it is more

literally translated as “*come lie beside me*” or “*be beside me.*” Joseph has options for interpreting her invitation. By the time she persists “*day after day,*” he will have no doubt about her intentions. But initially, his successful resistance requires subtlety. Joseph chooses not to spend time with her, even though he could claim innocence, while foolishly drifting, step by step, toward the sexual cliff she hopes to pull him over. He refuses to spend time with her, period.

Finally, the recipe for Joseph’s successful resistance is outlined in verse 9, “*How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?*” You might read this as one thought repeated twice, but he is pointing to two distinct failings. When Joseph mentions “such a wicked thing,” he is referring to his relationship with Potiphar, the trust that would be broken, and the moral contract he chooses to uphold. Caring about people gives us extra courage to do the right thing. Second, he adds, “and sin against Yahweh.” Here, Joseph reflects on the importance of his spiritual journey and the value he places on God’s presence in his life. Two things. Each contributes to the power required to resist “day after day.”

Today, no matter the temptation or the number of days in a row you have been hounded, may you experience deliverance through your love for the people around you and the goodness of Immanuel, God with us.

- 1. What small, socially acceptable failing do you struggle with, such as gossip, inappropriate humor, or wandering eyes and thoughts?**
 - 2. Who inspires you to do the right thing and gives you the courage to become the person you aspire to be? Are they available to you in a moment of weakness? What would need to happen for that to be possible?**
 - 3. What persistent problem hounds you daily? What do you want to say to Jesus about it?**
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Week 2 - Thursday: Accusation

Genesis 39:11-18

One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. “Look,” she said to them, “this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.”

She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: “That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.”

Persistence allows temptation to escalate. Whether Joseph has dropped his guard a little or Potiphar's wife has orchestrated the servants' absence, the effect is the same. Our handsome hero stands vulnerable to the woman of the house.

However playful her advances had originally been, our story now drips with entrapment, coercion, and force. She grabs Joseph and hangs on as he sprints from the house, wearing at least one fewer garment than he started with. He has put to full use the instruction Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 6:18, "*Flee from sexual immorality.*" Good advice. If your internet browsing, a coworker's flirting, or an overt invitation nears the threshold of your sexual morality, run. Don't pause to argue; remove yourself immediately.

What happens next is another lesson in the realities of this sinful world. Just because Joseph resists evil doesn't mean he's immune to attack or slander. He has repeatedly done the right thing by his boss and by his faith. Nevertheless, he is about to pay a steep price for his fortitude.

Potiphar's wife soaks in the simmering broth of rejection. By the time her husband comes home, she has concocted a story, gathered the closest thing she can find to witnesses, and sits with exhibit A on her lap. How is it that Joseph keeps getting into trouble over his coat?

Shoving Joseph's outer garment in her husband's face, this woman reenacts her false accusation, setting in motion the next round of the young Hebrew's troubles. Each difficulty is worse than the last. And just when things seem to improve, calamity descends. Hopefully, God's presence was able to convey the sentiment Peter would later express:

"For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God... if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God." (1 Peter 2:19-20)

- 1. If you are watching a sporting event, either live or on television, and an official makes the wrong call, how do you react?**
- 2. Was there a time when you were punished for doing the right thing? When? Why do you think it turned out that way?**
- 3. Have you ever resented God for unfairness? When did that happen, and what would you like to say to Him about it?**

Week 2 - Friday: Conviction

Genesis 39:19-23

When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

The accusation has been made, and the master of the house is furious. Yet the supervisor of palace executions responds to his wife's allegations of rape by placing the alleged perpetrator in the royal prison. That seems mild. Is his response evidence that Potiphar believes Joseph over his wife? But he cannot let this go unpunished. Prison time it is.

Once again, whether this is good or bad news is all a matter of perspective. Slavery was a sudden, horrific shock to Joseph. But he applies himself, gains favor, and becomes indispensable to his master. Good fortune, right? Ah, now he is in the path of a selfish deviant willing to frame him with the worst kind of lies, resulting in a life sentence. Catastrophe, no? Except Joseph is now positioned to serve his cellmates, listen to their dreams, and build the network that will bring about the fulfillment of God's prophecies for his life and the redemption of his family. Crazy.

We often struggle to keep an accurate score of what is happening in our lives. Some of our greatest disappointments become the path to moments we treasure. Other times, we claim a win before realizing the hidden cost of our circumstances. Like seeing around the corner of a building, we have to walk the full block before our vision clears.

Once again, the ever-developing theme of Joseph's life reappears. "The Lord was with Joseph." And again, he is unwaveringly conscientious, diligent, and an influential leader. "The Lord gave him success in everything he did." Perspective.

- 1. Think of a time you were punished as a child. How were you punished? What was it for? Did you deserve the punishment?**
 - 2. Isaiah 53:5 says that Jesus was pierced for our transgressions and that His punishment brings us peace. How do you respond to Him after He has done this? Consider writing a prayer that includes your thanksgiving.**
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PERSPECTIVE: THE LIFE OF JOSEPH
Daily Study - Week 3: Abandoned

Week 3 - Monday: Freedom

Genesis 39:20-23

Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Like fingernails on a chalkboard, the writer of Genesis drops the line, "Yahweh gave Joseph success in whatever he did." It takes an unusual perspective to stir the ingredients of slavery, false accusation, and a life sentence and call it victory. This raises a question. Is it possible that the evidence of the outer world gives very little clue to what is happening in the inner world?

Galatians 5 tells us that when the Holy Spirit inhabits our lives, whatever else is going on around us, we begin to experience the growth of specific benefits. "... *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*" (Galatians 5:22-23) Notice that while the impact of this fruit can often be witnessed from a distance, it grows from deep inside. For instance, love makes an impact on our relationships, yet it grows in the secret of our inner world. No one can force you to love. You have to choose to allow it to grow. These fruits germinate from an attitude of willingness, an openness to orient oneself to an internal compass unaffected by things like false accusation or imprisonment.

Adopting an attitude of joy, peace, and gratitude when things are falling apart around us is truly remarkable. But make no mistake, it is a real option for your life, no matter what is happening to you. Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl wrote, "*Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.*" Notably, he wrote this after losing his parents, his brother, and his wife in the Nazi concentration camps.

Perhaps the greatest miracle of God's presence is His power to fill us with hope when things look hopeless, love amid abuse, peace in troubled times, and joy in all circumstances. Now that is success.

1. What is your favorite fruit? What do you like most about it?

2. Which of the fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23 do you find most elusive, most difficult to attain?
 3. What is currently threatening your joy? What would you like to say to Jesus about that?
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Week 3 - Tuesday: Position

Genesis 40:1-4

Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them.

I find it fascinating how time and place shift our sense of who is important. I served as a chaplain to high schoolers for nine years and then as a professor with undergraduate students for another eight. Those back-to-back experiences allowed me to observe the frequent shift in students' lives from "big man on campus" to obscurity, or the awkward, unnoticed young lady to the college beauty. If we decide who is important too early, we are often wrong.

Then, there is the dynamic of location or subject matter. It is always interesting to watch a person with the kind of expertise that garners respect and deference step into a conversation in which they are ignorant and unknown. They may arrogantly expect to be treated with reverence based on their position in the economy of their field, only to be brutalized by dismissal, finding others uninterested in their point of view.

Possibly the most vivid gap between perceived and actual importance stems from position. Our story includes a cupbearer and a baker, two individuals who, at a quick glance, may seem to serve in menial positions. But these are not kitchen help. They serve Pharaoh as ministers in high-level governmental positions requiring absolute trust and security clearance. They have constant access to the supreme monarch of Egypt. These elite ministers of the court were capable of influencing royal safety and state affairs. However, importance based on position is always fleeting and temporary.

Our story follows two high-ranking officers as they are stripped of their positions and thrown into prison. No longer do they have influence based on their business cards. Their power is gone.

Compare the influence of the cupbearer and the baker with that of Joseph. Even here, in the depths of imprisonment, Joseph is their inferior. He must "attend to them." Yet it is Joseph who interprets their dreams, Joseph who influences the throne, Joseph whose name is remembered. As it turns out, position is not required to affect this story, change your workplace, or impact our community. While certain

positions can be useful, God simply needs our diligence, perseverance, and an attitude of hopefulness.

Today, whether you were the last one hired or your name is on the door, if you have never been called a leader or if most people look to you, may you accept the opportunity to partner with Jesus. May you experience the impact that transcends positional power and watch God move.

- 1. What were you like in high school: popular or unpopular, a “big person on campus” or unnoticed?**
 - 2. What are the settings in which you have positional power? Do you find it easy or hard to govern the additional power you experience? Why is that so?**
 - 3. In what circumstances do you wish you had more ability to influence things? How do you envision God could use you in that environment without relying on the power of position?**
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Week 3 - Wednesday: Empathy

Genesis 40:4-7

After they had been in custody for some time, each of the two men—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison—had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.

When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. So he asked Pharaoh’s officials who were in custody with him in his master’s house, “Why are your faces so sad today?”

We are left to imagine how much time has passed between each event so far in Joseph’s life: from freedom to slavery, from success in Potiphar’s house to accusation and imprisonment, from the general prison population to manager, and even the introduction of these two royal courtiers in Genesis 40 verse seven, “*After they had been in custody for some time.*” However, we do know that this whole span of time was approximately eleven years.

Has Joseph known the cupbearer and the baker for a few days, months, or years? We don’t know. But at this point in the story, it is worth pausing to notice an interesting detail that may shed light on how God was able to use Joseph so successfully.

The fact that each man had separately been shown a meaningful dream the same night is notable. Joseph’s willingness to interpret them and the way he delivered the news will be important. But we will look at that tomorrow. For now, notice the conclusion of verse six, “... *he saw that they were dejected.*”

Over time, Joseph’s heart has softened from the teenage brashness that allowed the pain and distance he had caused in his own family to go unnoticed. He has

developed a deep empathy for those around him, so he immediately sees the stress and discomfort on the faces of the two he has been tasked to serve. Rather than dismiss it as none of his business, he seeks to serve more deeply than simply bringing food or washing prison clothes. Joseph reaches out to ease the emotional hardship in their lives. “Why are your faces so sad today?” Joseph asks.

There is incredible power in entering into the pain and frustration of others. Joseph’s influence over these two men shifts as he asks the question and begins to feel what they feel. Though it won’t be obvious for another couple of years, God’s rescue of Joseph from prison hinges on his willingness to draw close, ask vulnerable questions, and practice the kind of empathy required of friendship rather than servitude.

Joseph could have excused himself from helping, considering the men above him by the privileges of the court, or beneath him in ethnicity. He could have decided they were too different from one another to help. But by leaning into the empathy God has grown in his heart, he unlocks the future God has intended for him. Amazing the impact of one little question born of empathy.

- 1. Think of two or three of your closest friends. In what ways are you most different from one another? Why do you think you are friends despite these differences?**
- 2. When you notice an emotional change in a friend, how easy is it for you to bring it up in conversation? Why do you think that is?**
- 3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how naturally empathetic are you? Would you like to become more empathetic? What would you like to say to Jesus about that?**

Week 3 - Thursday: Speak Up

Genesis 40:8-19

“We both had dreams,” they answered, “but there is no one to interpret them.”

Then Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.”

So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, “In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh’s cup and put the cup in his hand.”

“This is what it means,” Joseph said to him. “The three branches are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For I was forcibly carried off

from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon."

When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, "I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread. In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head."

"This is what it means," Joseph said. "The three baskets are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat away your flesh."

As we near the climax of this week's story, Joseph notices the stress on the faces of his two charges and asks what is wrong. The cupbearer and the baker are comfortable enough with him to share what has happened. They have each had a dream during the night. They are distinct yet similar enough to seem significant. But the more they discuss them, the less clear they become.

"There is no one to interpret the dreams," they complain. Joseph gives them hope, but first explains his reasoning. "Yahweh has the power of interpretation. Tell the dreams to me."

It is always tempting to take credit due to others, especially the credit that belongs to God. It feels good to receive praise and to be seen as indispensable in others' lives. It takes maturity and a clear-eyed perspective to insist that admiration belongs to the source rather than the messenger. Joseph draws attention to God rather than to himself.

The dreams are fairly simple, and, in retrospect, the conclusions make sense. The cupbearer will be set free and returned to his duties in Pharaoh's court in three days. It must have been rewarding to see relief and anticipation wash over his face. Joseph takes a moment to ask for help as his prison mate returns to power.

The baker's dream is not as easy to talk about. Most of us have faced the challenge of recognizing that a friend is approaching a difficult truth we can see clearly, while they seem not to. What to do? Can I pretend I don't have the information and just avoid it? Should I soften the truth with hints rather than being direct? We don't know whether Joseph said more than is recorded in this passage. Did his tone convey care and love? Did he mercifully slow down at the right moments to allow his friend to process thoroughly? Did the look on his face convey sorrow over the story rather than punctuating the resulting pain in a staccato burst of plain facts?

Here we land on something important. Mercy includes the courage to walk with others through difficulty. Sometimes that means being the one to break hard news with compassion. Sparing people's feelings by hiding the realities they must face usually serves our own comfort rather than theirs. Joseph doesn't avoid the hard conversation. But having suffered pain and isolation so often himself, surely his

intentional presence lifts some of the burden as he helps his friend walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

- 1. How often do you dream and remember it the next day? What is a recent dream you had?**
 - 2. Have you ever had a dream that “troubled” you? What was the dream, and why did it affect you that way?**
 - 3. Is there someone in your life who is going through a difficult time that you feel you should help? How would you do so? Is there something you should say to them?**
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Week 3 - Friday: Forgotten

Genesis 40:14; 20-41:1

“... when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison.”

Now the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials: He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand, but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation.

The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream

What a disaster: he proposed on one knee, but his heart deflates as she stammers out a rejection. He was told, “The promotion is a done deal, start packing your office,” only to sit in a meeting where someone else was announced for the job. The pregnancy test reveals that her prayers have been answered, just to have the days and weeks reveal a false positive. Is there anything more devastating than the gut punch of a promise falling apart?

While Joseph mourns the loss of his friend, the baker, his spirits must remain high. As the dream predicted, the cupbearer is restored to his role in the palace. The two would have parted with hugs, high-fives, and promises. It was a certainty. Joseph was about to go free. However, the hours turned into days, and weeks into months, as Joseph realized he had been forgotten. He was abandoned.

An all-too-familiar feeling must have overwhelmed Joseph as reality enveloped him like a thick blanket. He was stuck. It began in the desert sands, where each camel's footstep widened the distance from the family he loved. The loneliness and desperation swelled as lies were told and relationships were lost in the house of Potiphar. And now the disillusioning, slow death of broken promises floods his mind. He is forgotten...

... or is he?

The miracle of a journey with Jesus is that it unfolds in a world apart from human betrayal, malice, and broken promises. In this way, two things can be true at once. Joseph endures incredible pain and relational famine in one world while experiencing joy, hope, and fulfillment in the other. Cellmates must have wondered how he could maintain such an amazing attitude while being forgotten this way. I wonder if he could explain the peace and joy found only in the love of God?

- 1. Who has made a promise or promises to you? How is it going?**
 - 2. What currently makes you feel alone or isolated (at least occasionally)?**
 - 3. How is your inner journey with Jesus going lately? Why do you think that is? What would you like to say to Him about this?**
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PERSPECTIVE: THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

Daily Study - Week 4: Rescue

Week 4 - Monday: Remembered

Genesis 41:1, 14

When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream...

So Pharaoh sent for Joseph...

"When two full years had passed..."

I have to admit, I'm not a very patient person. I like to make things happen, pull the trigger, get things going. It drives me a little crazy to sit in a committee or among a group of people for the second or third time, only to discuss the same problems and brainstorm the same solutions, while no one has done anything about them in the meantime. What are we waiting for, people?

Even harder for me? When someone has made a commitment that affects a range of decisions I'm considering, it's hard to resist acting on that promise and moving forward on the assumption they will follow through. Wisdom and experience tell me to wait until the "chickens are hatched" before acting. But it's hard to resist. Oh, the waiting.

We've all experienced dark days when the job offer doesn't materialize as promised, the pay raise is derailed, or the offer on the house falls through. Maybe the challenges you've faced include a fiancé changing their mind, a spouse walking away, or a baby lost before birth. Beyond being painful, these experiences teach us to view the world through cynical eyes, minimize hope, and check out on faith.

Today's passage in Genesis 41 echoes a pattern repeated throughout Scripture. The pain and problems of today may seem insurmountable, but "*when two full years had passed...*" something happens. Abraham might be unsure of where he is going, but "*when two full years had passed,*" God showed him the land of promise. Moses might be pinned between the Egyptians and the Red Sea, but "*when two full years had passed,*" the sea parted, and a path was made. The walls of Jerusalem may have crumbled, and depression may have taken hold of Nehemiah's heart, but "*when two full years had passed,*" the king sent him with the time, money, and authority to rebuild the walls. Jesus may be buried in a tomb, but "*when two full years had passed,*" the stone rolled away, and he arose again.

Maybe you are at the beginning of this cycle, when a promise fills you with hope, and you haven't had time for disappointment. Others of us have waited so long since the promise was made that despair and hopelessness have taken over. For yet others, today is the day the message comes, "the king has had a dream and is sending for you." Wherever you fit in this predictable story, I invite you to adopt the perspective and faith of Joseph. Hold fast to the promise that God loves you and is working on your rescue.

"When two full years had passed, Pharaoh sent for Joseph."

- 1. When someone tells you they have a surprise for you and asks whether you want to know what it is before it arrives, how do you respond? Why do you think you react that way?**
- 2. What have you wished for that took so long you gave up hope, only to have it turn out well in the end? What have you learned from that experience?**
- 3. What are you in the middle of right now that feels discouraging and makes you wonder whether you will ever find relief? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?**

Week 4 - Tuesday: Troubled

Genesis 41:1-9

Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted—thin and scorched by the east wind. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up; it had been a dream.

In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “Today I am reminded of my shortcomings.

I really struggle to remember names. People are gracious and often express empathy for the challenge of keeping track of so many community members. But it doesn't matter. I feel my ears burn when I blank in the middle of greeting someone I've already met and can't remember their name. Recently, in the middle of a one-on-one prayer with a team member (yes, that means it's someone I'm around regularly), my inner voice interrupted my thoughts with two possible names for my prayer partner. I was in the middle of thanking God for (fill in the name here)'s friendship when my memory offered up both Melissa and Jessica. Ouch. I was already committed, so I confidently inserted the name I was 75% sure of and waited for the tension of a mistake, eyes tightly closed. Thankfully, I guessed correctly and wasn't exposed for my confusion. But I almost wimped out and inserted something generic and noncommittal.

Forgetting names embarrasses me. Worse yet, forgetting an appointment. I am mortified when I realize I have overlooked a commitment and left someone hanging. It is tempting to feign ignorance or make up an excuse. Anything to sidestep the shame, even over small things.

Today's passage takes us to Pharaoh's dreams. Often, when we dream, we struggle to remember them by morning. Not these two dreams. These visions stuck with the supreme monarch and troubled his mind. He asks for help from interpreters and discusses them publicly enough that the chief cupbearer hears about them. That's when it happens.

Like that moment when you wake with a start, look over, and realize you have overslept and are expected somewhere in the next five minutes, the cupbearer bolts to attention. He suddenly remembers a promise he made 2 years earlier to a friend who offered help and asked to be remembered. Surely his face flushes with blood as embarrassment and shame wash over him. He has been consumed with his own freedom and has forgotten his promise. Now, confronted with embarrassment and shame, the cupbearer swallows hard and admits his fault, “Today I am reminded of my shortcomings.” He tells Pharaoh about his friend, who seems to understand dreams and can help interpret the monarch's troubled visions. But where is he? The cupbearer stammers, “His name is Joseph. He is a Hebrew ward of the prison of the palace guards.” Rather than shrink back to preserve his pride, he summons the courage to admit his failing, unwittingly making way for God's plan of salvation.

1. **Can you recall a time you were late for an appointment because you overslept? What happened?**
 2. **What system do you use to remember appointments? Are you good at it? Why or why not?**
 3. **What is something you are tempted to ignore, minimize, or fib about to avoid shame? What would you like to do about it? Who should you confess this to?**
 4. **What is going on in your life that you find confusing or troubling? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?**
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Week 4 - Wednesday: Self-Awareness

Genesis 41:14-16

So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

"I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

Isn't it amazing how something you have prayed for can be stalled and at a standstill, leaving you hopeless, and then, with the tripping of one domino, everything falls quickly into place? It is unclear what Joseph understands about his hasty summons to the palace. Does he realize the cupbearer has finally come through on his promise? In any case, he fully understands the solemnity of his opportunity to appear before Pharaoh. Joseph models a principle we do well to follow.

Not every moment carries the same weight. Some are "high-value targets." While it can be hard to notice when the mundane becomes an opportunity for eternal impact, sometimes it's just plain obvious. In my profession, a call to come to the hospital or a text asking to meet for coffee to talk about committing one's heart to Jesus signals high importance and high value. In those moments, whether at a funeral or when someone reaches out for help, my spiritual pulse quickens, and I find it easy to focus.

Joseph may not realize what's about to happen, but he can tell it's big. He shaves (how long has it been) and puts on his best clothes. Pharaoh's face is etched with frustration and intensity as he explains, "I can feel I'm at a crossroads. Something important is about to happen, and I can't figure it out. I've racked my brain, challenged my staff, and tried to let these dreams go, but I can't. And then I heard that **YOU** can help me. Please. Tell me what it all means."

Joseph's reply drips with self-awareness as he says, "I'm sorry, but I cannot do it." This is definitely not what Pharaoh hoped to hear. The prisoner hurries to add, "But it's going to be okay. The God I serve will give you an answer." Joseph wants to make sure everyone listening knows who to credit for what is about to happen. The glory belongs to Yahweh. What a spiritually mature perspective.

So often, we wrestle for praise and admiration that belong to someone else. The irony is that there is usually enough to go around when we are honest and stop scrambling to grab it for ourselves. God Himself is generous, allowing His glory to shine across our lives when we humbly make space for Him to work.

- 1. Have you ever underestimated the importance of a moment and shown up underdressed? When was that, and what happened?**
 - 2. What is one of the most important opportunities you have had recently to show up for your family or a friend? How did you respond to that moment?**
 - 3. Have you ever been given credit that belongs to God? When that happened, how did you respond?**
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Week 4 - Thursday: Providence

Genesis 41:28-32

"It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe. The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon."

I wonder who was allowed to hear Joseph's interpretation of these dreams. Was it just Pharaoh? Was the court filled with onlookers straining to catch every word? Were the king's magicians and wise men watching and thinking, "Yeah, that makes sense." Was the cupbearer there, quietly smiling, thinking, "That's my boy."

Led by the Holy Spirit, Joseph methodically explains the two dreams, point by point. Seven years and seven years, plenty will be followed by famine. Then Joseph's final sentences provide the exclamation point. The events of the next fourteen trips around the sun are not up for discussion. They are decided and set. God has sent you, oh Pharaoh, these dreams because He wants you to do something about them. Sure, you have been warned. But more importantly, you have been chosen as an agent of God's power.

Across time, God has repeatedly chosen to use feeble, imperfect people as instruments of salvation. Whenever something good comes of the partnership between God and one of us, it begins with awareness. This is just such a moment.

Maybe the court was filled with onlookers that day. If so, did they see the lowly prisoner speaking with the most elevated person on the planet and realize they were equals? Were they impressed by the awareness that Yahweh cared enough about the lives of the Egyptians, the Hebrews, and all the surrounding nations to create a way through the famine? Maybe their eyes were opened, and they caught a glimpse of the providence of the God who has loved them since eternity past.

- 1. Who are two or three people you turn to when sorting through a problem? What about them gives you confidence?**
 - 2. What current problem or challenge in your life is weighing on your mind? Which element(s) concern you most? How could God bring blessing from this situation?**
 - 3. What is happening in your life that shows evidence of God's love for you? What would you like to say to Him about it?**
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Week 4 - Friday: Influence

Genesis 41:33-41; 46

"And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine."

The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?"

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt."

Something about his interaction with Pharaoh's dreams gives Joseph the confidence to shift from interpreter to consultant. Inspired by God's Spirit, he outlines a several-point plan, and Pharaoh loves it. His advisors are astute enough to see the momentum in the room and agree willingly. But who could they find with this kind of discernment? HmMMM.

I am entertained by the thought that Joseph is oblivious to how this will turn out. Pharaoh couldn't find meaning in his dreams among the smartest advisors in his court. Then Joseph steps up to clarify. And now he counsels the king to find a man of

discernment to implement a plan he has just outlined. If only there were such a person with that kind of wisdom. Are eyes slowly locking on Joseph as he makes this recommendation?

Pharaoh turns to his officials and asks, “Do we know anyone capable of this? Can you think of anyone possessing this kind of discernment? Maybe someone God speaks to, who can interpret dreams and such? Someone who says, ‘I cannot do it, but God can’? Hmmmm. Of course, it would need to be someone with a free schedule. Who could we find? Say, Joseph...”

What a difference a day makes. It began with a prisoner receiving a good shave and ended with the full transfer of power. The slave boy, accused, sentenced, and forgotten, is elevated to opportunity and influence. Has he had time to reflect on his teenage dreams? Has it clicked that the prophecies from long ago were true, even if they hadn’t mentioned the tragedy and trials of the past thirteen years? Perspective. This story, at times most typified by tears trailing across sand-blistered cheeks, is turning. Over the next ten years, it will shift from misery to providence, from betrayal to reconciliation. Perspective. He may not understand it yet, but he can certainly feel the shift. The higher ways of God are redefining his life. He is moving from abandonment to redemption, from being left out and alone to belonging, from worthlessness to purpose.

Whatever you are going through today, take heart from Joseph’s story. In the darkest days, hear God’s voice reverberate through confusion or pain: *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* (Joshua 1:5) Feel the shift in perspective as He says, *“I know the plans I have for you, plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”* (Jeremiah 29:11)

- 1. Have you ever been surprised by a promotion or a job offer? What was it? How did it make you feel?**
 - 2. What need in your workplace or community of faith has God made clear to you? Have you considered that he may be asking you to step up to that challenge?**
 - 3. What calling has God placed on your heart that you haven’t pursued yet? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?**
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PERSPECTIVE: THE LIFE OF JOSEPH
Daily Study - Week 5: Reconciliation

Week 5 - Monday: Famine

Genesis 42:1-3

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons... "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die."

Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt.

Genesis 42:6

Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground

Genesis 42:8

Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him.

Genesis 42:18-24

On the third day, Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die." This they proceeded to do.

They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us."

Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood." They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.

He turned away from them and began to weep, but then turned back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.

The famine has reached the point that Jacob's family can no longer rely on their reserves. They must travel to Egypt to bargain for grain. Jacob holds back his favorite, Benjamin, while sending ten of his sons on the journey.

The scene unfolds like a movie as Ruben and his crew of betrayers arrive to buy grain. They don't recognize the man standing before them, but Joseph identifies them immediately. Feigning ignorance of their language, he uses an interpreter to speak with the Hebrew negotiators, maintaining his disguise as an Egyptian.

The Scriptures say that Joseph's immediate response is to "speak harshly to them" (Genesis 42:7). I've always read this as a good strategy for determining whether their character has grown or if they are still the same vindictive, mean brothers he last spent time with. But I wonder if this isn't just an honest reaction to seeing them. Is he struggling with wanting to help? Considering outright rejection?

Before the chapter ends, Joseph has accused them of spying, held them in custody for three days, imprisoned Simeon indefinitely, and framed them for theft by having his servants hide their silver payments in the grain they had bought. Maybe this is all strategy. But it smells like the fumes of the last embers of anger and resentment, a famine of its own.

Somehow, as thirteen-year-old images of home disappearing behind distant sand dunes flash across his mind, God is planting flowers in the desert. The famine will not last because God's love can sprout forgiveness where we thought nothing could grow.

- 1. Would it be more difficult for you to go without technology for a month or to go a week without seeing another person? Why do you think that is?**
- 2. Is there someone you have been avoiding lately? Why have you been doing this? Is there something different you should do about it?**
- 3. Have you been wronged by someone you feel you cannot forgive? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?**

Week 5 - Tuesday: Benjamin

Genesis 43:1-2

Now the famine was still severe in the land. So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go back and buy us a little more food."

Genesis 43:8

Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die."

Genesis 43:29-30

As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son, he asked, "Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?" And he said, "God be gracious to you, my son." Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.

The hunger in Jacob's family is temporarily staved off by the grain from the returning expedition. But as the supplies dwindle, discussion turns to going back for more. It hasn't seemed to matter much to Jacob that his son Simeon is still held captive in Egypt on the condition that the family return, this time bringing his youngest son

Benjamin. The patriarch will hear nothing of it, as the stench of favoritism wafts back through this story.

There is no relief from the famine, and the last of the grain is gone. As Tony Robbins said, “Change happens when the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change.” So discussions of returning to Egypt resume. Driven by starvation, Jacob finally considers allowing Benjamin, the last link to his love for Rachel, to join the mission to save his family.

Central to this part of our tale is Judah's role. He emerges as the family leader, urging his father to send them to seek grain and pledging his life as a guarantee of Benjamin's safety. This fourth-born son of Jacob and Leah negotiates the family's return to God's path of rescue and will become the line through which salvation comes, not only for his immediate family during the famine but also for all humanity in the promised Messiah. We will keep an eye on this throughline in the days to come.

Eventually, the Hebrew caravan returns, arriving before the Egyptian prime minister. Seeing his younger brother softens Joseph's heart, and sends him weeping to another room. Is it conceivable that the ache of betrayal can be vanquished? Have his brothers truly changed? Would they repent? Can his own resentment and anger be fully set aside and healed? Is reconciliation possible? Over the years, God has been melting the bitterness in Joseph's heart. Every hardship has turned to success by the powerful presence of Yahweh. Shifting perspective has allowed this slave-turned-ruler to see the beauty of God's plan emerge.

The arc of our story reaches intermission as Joseph eats on one side of the room at the Egyptian table, with his brothers on the other at the foreigners' table. His mind whirs as threads come together to weave the cloth of a plan. He knows what he will do. And if these brothers have truly changed, he will see his father once again.

- 1. What is something you have had to guarantee? What have you used to secure that guarantee?**
- 2. Who has been especially difficult to forgive? Why is that? What helped you embrace forgiveness?**
- 3. Which relationship of yours could use reconciliation? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?**

Week 5 - Wednesday: Testing

Genesis 44:1-5

Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: “Fill the men's sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man's silver in the mouth of his sack. Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one's sack, along with the silver for his grain.” And he did as Joseph said.

As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, "Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid good with evil? Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.'"

Genesis 44:14-18

Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him. Joseph said to them, "What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?"

"What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied. "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup."

But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace."

Then Judah went up to him...

Genesis 44:33

Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers."

The plan is in place, and the trap is set. Joseph frames Benjamin as a thief, caught red-handed mid-getaway. Not only has each brother, once again, left Egypt with their payments of silver stashed in the grain they had purchased, but the youngest has apparently pilfered the ruler's silver cup. This discovery comes after the brothers boldly claim their innocence, and the declaration is made, *"Whoever is found to have [the cup] will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame."* (v10)

Ironically, no one in the story believes Benjamin is a criminal. The brothers, buoyed by the discovery of their own surreptitiously returned silver, don't believe he did it. Benjamin and all of Joseph's servants know he didn't do it; they did. And then there is the mastermind, Joseph.

The theatrics continue as the travelers return to the palace to face the furious protagonist. Here is where it gets interesting. By now, Judah is the acknowledged leader of the family, and he steps forward to address the situation. He knows they are stuck. There is no denying the problem. The cup of Pharaoh's overseer has been found in Benjamin's belongings. However it got there, Judah can see no way out. *"We cannot prove our innocence. We are now your slaves."* Notice how Judah throws himself and his brothers into slavery alongside Benjamin.

In one final test, Joseph objects by appealing to Benjamin's brothers' self-interest, *"Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace."* (v17)

At this pivotal moment, Judah pulls Joseph aside and pleads for his youngest brother's freedom. He proves that his promise to Jacob was not bravado or the posturing of a coward. He foreshadows the coming Messiah and offers his life in exchange for Benjamin's. At this, the Egyptian leader buckles. The test is over.

- 1. Have you ever been pulled over by a police officer? How many times? Have you ever given an excuse or reason for your actions that got you out of a ticket?**
 - 2. Have you ever had someone take the blame you deserved? Do you know why they did that? How did you respond?**
 - 3. Knowing that Jesus traded His life for yours and invites you to live His eternal life, what would you like to say to Him?**
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Week 5 - Thursday: Forgiveness

Genesis 45:1-5

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you."

Joseph is overcome with emotion at the moment of the reveal. He is their long-lost brother. Fear washes over the group as they realize what has been going on. They are at the mercy of the one they overpowered, stripped to his undergarments, and sold into slavery years earlier. They had denied their father the truth. Now they no longer control the story. Worse, he has been toying with them. Why? Is he enjoying part one of a series of tortures? What will happen next?

Joseph asks about their father, but no one can answer. They are paralyzed with fear. There must have been mercy in his eyes as he encourages them to come closer, and slowly, like testing the water at the edge of a pool, they inch toward him. He knows they are in shock as he says, "Don't be afraid, and don't be angry with yourselves." Isn't it interesting how often the injured party shows the first grace, closes the gap, and creates reconciliation?

Over the years, Joseph has gained the perspective to see things through God's eyes. Yahweh has used his brothers' sins to position the Hebrew teen in the courts of

Pharaoh. He sees that God's hand has been over him, even if most wouldn't recognize it. In that moment, standing face-to-face with his tormenters, he made a simple choice to let go of bitterness and forgive.

- 1. What hobby, sport, or activity from your past no longer fits your life? Is it hard to let it go? Why or why not?**
 - 2. What guilt or shame do you need to release? Why is it hard to do so? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?**
 - 3. Knowing that Jesus promises forgiveness for every confession, what would you like to bring to Him today?**
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Week 5 - Friday: Redemption

Genesis 45:25-46:1

So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. They told him, "Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt." Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them. But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. And Israel said, "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."

So Israel set out with all that was his...

Genesis 50:15, 18-20

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"

His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

The brothers return home with quite a story to tell. They have had miles to decide how to break the news of their treachery from fifteen years earlier. How did they decide who would be the spokesperson as they admitted what they had done? My guess is that the same brother who so often stepped up to the challenge does so again. Judah is likely the one.

Jacob is one hundred thirty years old, feeble and easily confused. He struggles to process the story as the punchline is shared: Joseph is alive. This passage omits the harsh words he must have spoken as disbelief gives way to understanding. His son is alive. Not only that, he is the leader of the one country with the resources to save his family. And he is calling for them to come.

The beauty of a family reunion forms the foundation of this redemption story, but it will not be fully realized until after Jacob's death. Fear and separation still hover just beneath the surface of the relationship between Joseph and the ten brothers responsible for his exile. They must have wondered whether the only reason they were included in their family's rescue was their father's presence. What would happen after he was gone?

Mercy and grace are the capstone of this story. After burying their father, Judah and his brothers fall at Joseph's feet in guilt and shame, declaring, *"We are now your slaves."* Joseph lifts their faces and covers their shame, saying, *"Yes, you meant to harm me. But God has turned it into good. He has also changed my perspective, filling my heart with forgiveness and compassion. He has used this to save many lives. He has saved my life."*

- 1. Has there ever been anyone in your life you once considered an enemy who became a friend? How did that happen?**
 - 2. Is there someone you treat well only because you share a mutual friend? Who is that person? What would happen if the mutual friend left the picture?**
 - 3. Is there something bad that has happened in your life that, over time, you have seen God use for good? What was it? How does it make you feel that God has brought something positive out of it?**
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PERSPECTIVE: THE LIFE OF JOSEPH
Daily Study - Week 6: Jesus Through the Life of Joseph

Week 6 - Monday: Humility

Philippians 2:6-8

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

In this, our final week's study of the life of Joseph, we will revisit each of the previous weeks and notice the face of Jesus reflected in these stories. At times, we will hear echoes of His character and see foreshadowing of His sacrifice. Today, we highlight the contrast between Christ's humility and the human arrogance of Joseph's early days.

Genesis 37 portrays Joseph as a young man grasping for credibility, stepping on his brothers' reputations to elevate his own. He is the favored son who plays to his father's emotions at the expense of others, willing to sacrifice character on the altar of image-building. Joseph allows hostility to grow rather than sacrifice his position of power.

Notice the difference in how Jesus behaves. First, He deserved the power, fame, and position. Yet He set them aside in His efforts to save us. *"He gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being"* (Philippians 2:7). As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 8:9, *"You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich."*

Secondly, Jesus devotes all His power and energy to the service of others. He trades the crowds' adulation for a crown of thorns. He refuses a political throne and chooses death on the cross. Jesus trades His freedom for ours, His life for ours. He chooses not to save Himself. Instead, He saves me.

And here is the ultimate miracle. Not only does Jesus present this bold contrast to the prideful privilege of Joseph's early years, but embedded in that contrast is the healing required to erase the hostilities our selfishness creates. As Ephesians 2 says:

For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. (v14)

Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. (v16)

Jesus is the antidote to my pride and the hostility it breeds. He brings healing to our wounds, comfort in our sorrows, forgiveness for our sins, and belonging amid our fractured relationships. Jesus is the answer to the big questions in my life.

1. **What physical injury, large or small, have you recently experienced? What was it, and how have you recovered?**
 2. **Who is currently suffering from something you could pray for? What would you like to say to Jesus about them?**
 3. **What strained relationship do you have that needs healing? How could Jesus help you with it?**
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Week 6 - Tuesday: Temptation

Hebrews 4:15

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

Matthew 4:1

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

During his time in Potiphar's house, Joseph was hounded by daily temptation. Jesus, too, suffered under the pressure of temptation. It may be hard to imagine that it was difficult for Jesus, since He successfully resisted. He was perfect, right? But when you consider the wilderness temptations in Matthew 4 or His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane in Luke 22, you are left with the impression that He was pushed to the very edge of sanity, exhausted to the limits of consciousness, and that He needed the assistance of angels to recover. Hebrews says Jesus was "tempted in every way."

Joseph's resistance was noble, but it was short-term and incomplete. Jesus perfectly resisted throughout His life. If you feel that disqualifies Him as our example, quite the opposite is true. It is **because** He successfully resisted that we can follow Him. Jesus' life is the true north that guides us. Hebrews 2:18 says, "*Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*"

More than just an example, His perfect resistance to temptation makes His grace and forgiveness available. Jesus needed to face what we face in every way while remaining sinless, so He could offer His life as a substitute for ours. He paid the price for our sins and now offers forgiveness in exchange. Jesus risked failure and loss to step into the gap, suffer, and die so that we could be reconciled, forgiven, and free. Because of His sacrifice, we can live.

"He committed no sin... He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:22, 24)

Today, right now, don't hesitate. Confess your need for a savior. Admit how often you have fallen to temptation. Accept the grace of Jesus. Live clean and free.

- 1. Recall a time when you broke something. What was it? Was it able to be fixed? How?**
 - 2. Is there someone you know you should forgive? What is stopping you? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?**
 - 3. What do you need to confess to Jesus right now? Claim His forgiveness and His grace.**
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Week 6 - Wednesday: Forsaken

Genesis 40:23

The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

Matthew 27:45-46

From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Joseph can't seem to catch a break. He is steady, conscientious, and faithful. But just when things seem to be turning a corner, he is let down again, each time compounding the last. It is easy to think of him as jinxed, snake-bit, or ill-fated. How is it that these terrible things keep happening to him?

As we consider parallels between Joseph and Jesus, we notice an important difference. Jesus will move from hosannas to crucifixion in the span of one brief week. Like Joseph, just as things are looking up and the people would make Him king, He is captured, beaten, and killed. Jesus, too, will cry out in pain at being forgotten and forsaken.

There is, however, a major difference. Joseph remains faithful despite every disappointment that comes his way. He endures trials, abuse, and broken promises. But the pain Jesus experiences is unique. These things aren't merely happening to Him as circumstances beyond His control. No. Jesus chooses the pain, deliberately walking toward the cross.

In John 10:17-18, Jesus says, "*I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily.*" Yes, Jesus can relate to the desperation in Joseph's life. He experienced rejection, cruelty, betrayal, false accusations, and the suffocating loss of connection to His father. But there is something that sets Jesus apart. He didn't merely suffer these things. He chose them, knowing He must do so to rescue us.

If you are going through a day when everything goes wrong (or maybe it's a year or a decade), take comfort in knowing that Jesus understands what it feels like. Not only

that, He would rather endure torture, alienation, and death than lose you. He's got you.

- 1. Were you ever left behind by your parents as a child? Have you ever accidentally left one of your children somewhere? What happened?**
 - 2. What recent experience seemed to be going well but then took a sudden turn for the worse and ended badly?**
 - 3. What are you experiencing that could use a "rescue"? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?**
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Week 6 - Thursday: Provision

Matthew 6:26-33

"Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?"

"And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?"

"So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."

I grew up in the household of a mom who was a professional worrier. Whenever I had a plan that needed her permission, I knew I couldn't just ask and get a quick answer. No, no. She would list everything that could go wrong and all the reasons it might not work out. But I am a hopeful optimist. I was her match. I would ask the question and then let her work through each worry without assuming the answer would end with a no. In fact, if I paid my dues by weathering the storm of worry, I nearly always got to do what I had hoped.

Some people worry without cause, borrowing trouble that never materializes. That's not the case in Joseph's story. A very real famine is coming, and it will be severe. However, by sending Pharaoh's dreams and providing Joseph as interpreter and leader of logistics for Egypt, God has created a way through the famine. Purposeful planning during the years of plenty will be enough to meet the people's needs. Not only that, but the surrounding nations will also be fed by God's preparations. Worry would have been a fruitless distraction.

As Jesus walks among the Hebrew people, He notices the powerful grip of worry. He offers an argument that may be helpful to you and me today. Jesus points to how completely God has provided in nature. He asks, "Can you see how purposeful our Heavenly Father has been in every little detail of nature? Hasn't He provided food for the tiniest animal or bird? Don't the flowers have beautiful clothing to wear?"

To this refrain, Jesus adds a reminder to consider how God has provided for His people throughout history. "If I made clothing for Adam and Eve, won't I do the same for you? If I led Joseph to prepare for famine, can't I do the same for your family? Don't forget that I parted the sea, felled the walls of a city, and freed prisoners from jail cells. I have healed the leper, restored sight to the blind, made the lame walk, and raised the dead to life. I will take care of you."

So let go of worry about all the things that can paralyze you with fear. "*These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.*" (Matthew 6:32) Instead, refocus on the one who says, "*I am the LORD, the God of all the peoples of the world. Is anything too hard for me?*" (Jeremiah 32:27)

- 1. What is the longest you have gone without food? Why did that happen?**
 - 2. On a scale of me to my mom, how much of a worrier are you?**
 - 3. What is something that consumes you with worry that Jesus may be inviting you to give to Him? What would you like to say to Him about that?**
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Week 6 - Friday: Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:19-21

For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

Romans 5:8

... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

I have spent years listening to people share their hurts, failures, pain, and shame, including stories of betrayal and abuse, and of broken relationships and separation. In the rarest cases, forgiveness is sought, grace is extended, and relationships are restored. Repair and healing in this broken world are hard work that most refuse to undertake.

What happens to Joseph, regardless of his own fault, predicts a life of bitterness, loneliness, and despair. That is, if he is left to sort things out on his own. The presence

of God introduces an alchemy capable of shifting perspective, nurturing love in a desert of hate, and, frankly, making reconciliation the most unsurprising outcome.

You see, if “God is love” (1 John 4:8) and we are talking about the kind of love that sacrifices self, doesn’t keep score of wrongs, and offers reconnection to the broken, then He is the most powerful force in the universe. This power is innate, instinctual, and the core of who Jesus is.

“The Christ” means “the anointed one.” But anointed for what? Jesus was set apart to bring us home, no matter the cost. He accepted the mission to cross the divide, close the gap, heal our brokenness, and reconcile us to our Creator. At the core of this kind of healing is immense grace and forgiveness – “no longer counting people’s sins against them.” (2 Corinthians 4:19)

Now, here is the craziest part of this story. Having carried us back home, we immediately become part of His love, not merely absorbing and consuming His tenderness. No, we are suddenly His instruments of reconciliation. “... *we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us.*” (2 Corinthians 5:20)

So now may you know the calming peace of forgiveness; forgiveness received and forgiveness given. May you know the joy of loving well.

- 1. What kinds of teams have you been a part of? Which ones have you enjoyed most? Why is that?**
- 2. Is anything keeping you from the love of Jesus today? What do you need to say to Him about it?**
- 3. Who do you think of who seems far from God? How could you be used to bring them home?**