

WHEN LIFE STINKS

WEEK 4: GOD CAN TURN IT AROUND

Sometimes we can only understand parts of our story by looking backward.

For years, Joseph couldn't see how betrayal, slavery, prison, and waiting fit together. But when his brothers finally stood before him in Egypt, Joseph could see what he couldn't see before:

God had been at work through it all.

This week, we'll look at what it means to trust that God can redeem even the hardest parts of our stories.

LET'S GET STARTED

1. Have you ever had something go completely differently than you expected, but later realized the change of plans actually led to something good? What happened?

VIEW

Watch the Week 4 video together.

VIDEO NOTES

DISCUSS

READ ALOUD

Years have passed, and Joseph's life has changed dramatically. Pharaoh has placed him second in command over Egypt, and Joseph is now overseeing the distribution of food during a severe famine.

When Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to buy food, they find themselves standing before the brother they sold into slavery years earlier—though they don't recognize him. After several encounters with them, Joseph finally reveals who he is.

Then go into **Genesis 45:4–8**.

GENESIS 45:4–8 NLT

⁴“Please, come closer,” he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, “I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. ⁵But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. ⁶This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. ⁷God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. ⁸So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.

2. What do you notice about the way Joseph talks about what happened to him?

3. Joseph doesn't deny what his brothers did, but he can now see God at work beyond their actions. What do you learn from the way Joseph holds both parts of his story together?

READ ALOUD

Years later, Joseph and his family are still living in Egypt. After their father Jacob dies, Joseph's brothers become afraid of what Joseph might do to them now that their father is gone.

GENESIS 50:15–21 NLT

¹⁵But now that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers became fearful. “Now Joseph will show his anger and pay us back for all the wrong we did to him,” they said.

¹⁶So they sent this message to Joseph: “Before your father died, he instructed us ¹⁷to say to you: ‘Please forgive your brothers for the great wrong they did to you—for their sin in treating you so cruelly.’ So we, the servants of the God of your father, beg you to

forgive our sin.” When Joseph received the message, he broke down and wept. ¹⁸ Then his brothers came and threw themselves down before Joseph. “Look, we are your slaves!” they said.

¹⁹ But Joseph replied, “Don’t be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. ²¹ No, don’t be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children.” So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.

4. Joseph’s brothers are still living with the weight of what they did years earlier. **How do guilt and unresolved wrongs affect the way we relate to others—even when circumstances have changed?**

5. Joseph says his brothers intended harm, but God intended good through the same events. **What does this teach us about God’s ability to work through human choices without excusing or approving what was done?**

LOOK CLOSER

READ ALOUD

In Romans 8, Paul writes to believers about life in a broken world. In the verses just before this, he describes suffering, waiting, weakness, and even times when we don’t know what to pray.

Then he writes:

ROMANS 8:28–29 NLT

²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. ²⁹ For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

6. **What does Romans 8:28 actually promise? What does it *not* promise?**

7. **Look at verse 29. What does it tell us about the “good” God is working toward? How might that change the way we think about God “turning something around”?**

8. Looking back on your own life, can you think of something that didn't go the way you expected? Can you now see God at work—perhaps by changing you, providing for you, drawing you closer to Him, or allowing your experience to help someone else?

LOOK TO JESUS

READ ALOUD

After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, Peter speaks to a crowd in Jerusalem about who Jesus is and what had happened to Him.

As you read, pay attention to what Peter says about Jesus' death—and what happened next.

ACTS 2:22–24 NLT

²²“People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. ²³ But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. ²⁴ But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip.

9. What do you see in these verses about human actions, God's plan, and what happened to Jesus? How does this connect with what we've seen in Joseph's story?

READ ALOUD

Peter later writes to Christians who were experiencing suffering. In this verse, he points them to Jesus.

1 PETER 3:18 NLT

¹⁸ Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.

10. According to this verse, what did Jesus' death accomplish for us? What does it show us about the lengths God was willing to go to bring us back to Himself?

Joseph's story points us toward an even greater story of redemption.

At the cross, people acted sinfully and unjustly. Jesus was betrayed, rejected, falsely accused, and killed. But the story didn't end there.

Jesus rose from the dead.

What looked like defeat became victory. What looked like the end became the beginning of new life.

Because of Jesus, sin, suffering, and death do not get the final word.

11. How does the cross and Jesus' resurrection give us hope when we are still in the part of our story where we can't yet see what God is doing?

APPLY IT

Joseph could say, "God intended it all for good" only after many years had passed.

Sometimes we can look backward and see what God has done. Sometimes we're still waiting. And sometimes we may never fully understand this side of eternity.

Our hope isn't that every disappointment or painful circumstance will eventually make sense to us. **Our hope is that God is able to redeem what is broken, He is still at work when we cannot see it, and Jesus has already shown us that suffering and death do not get the final word.**

Think about something in your life—big or small—that hasn't gone the way you expected. It might be a disappointment, a delay, a closed door, a change of plans, a difficult relationship, or something much more painful.

Something I wish had gone differently is:

One way I can already see God working in or through it is:

Or, if I can't see that yet, one truth about God I want to trust is:

This week, bring that part of your story honestly to Jesus. Ask Him to help you recognize where He may be at work and to trust Him with what you understand and what you don't.

PRAY

Take a few minutes to pray together as a group.