


LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION

- 1 Think of a situation in your life that reminds you of the Bible verse in Genesis 50:20. What have you learned from that experience?
- 2 What lessons did you learn from Joseph's life that have personally impacted you? How do these lessons shape your views on injustice, betrayal, and mistreatment?

WE DO LIFE TOGETHER!

If you haven't been involved in a LIFE Group yet, send us a message us thru Fb, and we will get you connected to a small group.

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SUNDAY WORD

JULY 23, 2023

FROM ORDINARY TO
EXTRAORDINARY!
PART 5 GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD

Of all the questions that trouble the hearts of God's people, none is greater than the question "Why"? No matter how many sermons we hear or how many Bible verses we memorize, the question returns again and again. Why did this happen? Lord, why didn't you answer our prayers?

When we see the pain of a fallen world, we wonder, "Where is God?" Over the centuries the greatest minds have wrestled with the problem of pain and suffering and still, the questions come: Why me? Why now? Why this?

Throughout our lives, God actively involves Himself in the worst moments of our lives. In every situation, God is able to bring good out of the worst that happens in this world. God in His wisdom knows what He is doing. In a world marked by sudden death and every sort of cruelty that man can devise, our God is not merely a passive observer. He works behind the scenes to bring about ends that are for our good and for His glory.

As we have journeyed through Joseph's story, the real hero of Joseph's story is not Joseph. It's God. Joseph's life illustrates maybe better than any other story in the Bible a profound truth: Romans 8:28 - "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (NIV)

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

There is a doctrine that helps us understand. It's the doctrine of the providence of God. In English, the word "PROVIDENCE" literally means "to see before". Though the word itself is not found in most modern translations of

the Bible, the concept is clearly biblical. It refers to “God’s gracious oversight of the universe.” Every one of those words is important. God’s providence is one aspect of His grace. Oversight means that He directs the course of affairs. The word universe tells us that God not only knows the big picture, but He also concerns Himself with the tiniest details.

In my study about Joseph in Genesis, I learned four statements that unfold the meaning of God’s providence in more detail: 1. God upholds all things. He supports and takes care of everything. 2. He governs all events. He controls everything that happens. 3. He directs everything to its appointed end. 4. He does it always for His own glory, to show how great and wonderful He is.

The doctrine of God’s Providence teaches us important truths: First, God cares about the tiniest details of life. Nothing escapes His notice for He is concerned about the small as well as the big. In fact, with God, there is no big or small. He knows when a sparrow falls. He even numbers the hairs on your head. He keeps track of the stars in the skies. He sets the day of your birth, the day of your death, and He ordains everything that comes to pass in between. Second, God uses everything and wastes nothing. There are no ACCIDENTS with God, only INCIDENTS. This includes events that seem to us to be senseless tragedies. Third, God’s ultimate purpose is to shape His children into the image of Jesus Christ. He often uses difficult moments and human tragedies to accomplish that purpose. In the words of R.C. Sproul, he said: “God doesn’t roll dice.” Nothing happens by chance. Ever. Think of providence as “the invisible hand” of God moving through the situations of life.

With that as background, we turn to consider the story of Joseph one final time. Because Joseph was the favored son of his father Jacob, he was the object of envy by his many brothers. The day came when his brothers conspired to sell him to the Midianites who happened to be passing by. They splashed his “coat of many colors” with the blood of a goat in order to make it appear that he had been killed by a wild animal. They showed the coat to Jacob, who believed their lie and sorrowfully concluded that Joseph was dead.

Meanwhile, Joseph was taken to Egypt by the Midianites. There he was sold again, this time to Potiphar, who was head of Pharaoh’s security force. Joseph gained favor with Potiphar because the Lord was with him to bless him. Eventually, Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his entire household. This was a high honor for a Hebrew slave. Because he was competent, confident, and good-looking, Potiphar’s wife approached him about having a sexual affair. Joseph refused, pointing out that he could not betray Potiphar and he would not sin against God. The woman persisted, to the point that one day when everyone else was gone, she attempted to pull him down on her bed. Joseph fled from the scene, leaving his cloak behind. Humiliated by his refusal, she accused him of rape. It was a false charge, of course, but Potiphar believed his wife and had Joseph thrown in prison.

In prison, Joseph prospered once again and gained the respect of his fellow prisoners and of the guards. This happened because the Lord was with him to bless him. Eventually, the cupbearer and the baker were thrown in the same prison and Joseph befriended them. One night they both had dreams they could not interpret. But Joseph was able to interpret them with the Lord’s help. The dreams came true exactly as Joseph had predicted—the baker was hung but the cupbearer was released. Joseph asked him to remember him after he was out, but he didn’t.

Two years passed and Pharaoh had a dream that he could not interpret. That’s when the cupbearer remembered Joseph’s amazing ability and mentioned it to Pharaoh who ordered Joseph brought before him. Joseph correctly interpreted his dream and was rewarded by Pharaoh, who made him the Prime Minister of Egypt.

Then, a famine settled in the Near East. Jacob told his sons to go to Egypt and buy some grain. They go and in the process meet Joseph—only, they don’t know it’s Joseph. This happens twice. Then Joseph reveals his true identity. They are shocked and then scared because they betrayed him and now he is in a position to get even. But Joseph doesn’t do that. In fact, he shocks them with these words:

Genesis 45:4-8 - “4 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! 5 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. 6 For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. 7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8 “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.

No getting even. No threats. He completely lets his guilty brothers off the hook. But that’s not the end of the story. The brothers go back to Canaan and tell their aged father that Joseph is still alive. He can’t believe it, but eventually, they convince him to come to Egypt with them. He makes the trip and is reunited with the son he had given up for dead many years ago. Then he meets the Pharaoh who offers to let Joseph’s family settle in Egypt for as long as they like. The family settled in Egypt and lived in peace there for many years. Finally, Jacob dies at the age of 147. Now it’s just Joseph and his brothers. They fear that with Jacob’s death, Joseph will be free to take revenge on them. So they tell Joseph, “Oh, by the way, before Dad died he told us to tell you to treat us kindly.” It sounds like just one more deception to cover their guilt. But here is Joseph’s response. These are the words of a man who believes in the providence of God. Genesis 50:19-20 - “19 Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.” (NKJV)

“God meant it for good”. This doesn’t mean that evil isn’t evil. It just means that God is able to take the evil actions of sinful men and use them to accomplish His plans. Joseph saw the “invisible hand” of God at work in His life. He understood that behind his conniving brothers stood the Lord God who had orchestrated the entire affair in order to get him to just the right place at just the right moment in order to save his whole family. Joseph is saying, “Though your motives were bad, God’s motives were good.” Here’s one for your FB or IG post: “People’s motives toward you may be bad. But God’s motives toward you will always be good.” Though it took years and years for God’s purposes to be clear, in the end, Joseph saw the hand of God behind everything that had happened to him.

It may not be so easy to see why God allows us to suffer or to be hurt when we are in the middle of things. It may only be years later, with hindsight that we can say “You did this to me, but God intended it for good – and this is the good that came out of that hurtful situation.” We may NEVER in this life understand why our loving Heavenly Father allows some things to happen to His children. But the Bible encourages us to trust like Joseph did in the love and wisdom and righteousness of our faithful loving God. God is sovereign. God is in control over every one of our lives. And we are encouraged to trust GOD and trust His heavenly master plan – even when we don’t understand what is happening to us.