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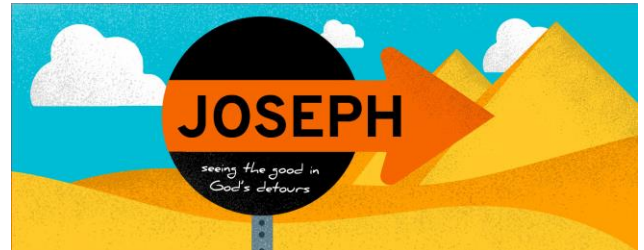
SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Joseph:

Seeing the Good in God's Detours

Part 2: When Bad Things Happen to Good People

Tim Badal | October 9, 2016 | Genesis 37:12-36



We're going to be in Genesis 37 as we continue looking at the life and times of Joseph, understanding that God's detours in our lives are good detours. That is an incredibly difficult principle for us to learn. Many times, especially in our lesson today, we'll see that God's detours can be hard, taking us places where we don't want to go. They can involve pain and sorrows, trials and tribulations.

But I'm so glad James reminds us that we can count those difficult detours as joy because God is at work. In Joseph's life, He is in the process not only of changing the life of this young man, but also changing the destiny of the entire world. Just as God prepared Joseph, so He is also preparing you and me through our difficult circumstances.

If you missed the sermon last week, you missed a ton. We set the whole back story of Joseph's life. We learned about the history of his father Jacob, and the chaos that characterized Jacob's life which would later impact Joseph's view of his own life. Like we did last week, I want you to imagine that Joseph walks into your small group and introduces himself.

"Hi, I'm Joseph. I'm from the Middle East. I want to tell you about myself. My dad had a tumultuous relationship with his twin brother since before they were born. In fact, for most of my life, my Uncle Esau was trying to hunt our family down. He hated my dad. In running from his brother, my father went to his Uncle's Laban's house. But instead of being a place of safety, Laban's home brought my father new problems. While Dad worked for his uncle, he fell in love with one of Laban's daughters, Rachel, who would be my mother. While it was love at first sight, that story didn't go as it should have. My great-uncle Laban deceived Dad into marrying the wrong daughter. So Dad first married my Aunt Leah, which was not what he wanted. Then he worked seven more years, and he did the unthinkable—he married a second wife, my mom.

"So now my dad, my mom, and my aunt were all one happy family. Then the children came along, and as my older brothers were born, the competition between my aunt and my mom began. As a result, both Mom and Aunt Leah gave Dad two other women as gifts, and other children are birthed as a result. The result was some absolutely crazy competition between all the brothers in the family."

Joseph would also tell you about his one sister, Dinah. "She was part of a terrible sexual assault, and was then told she would be marrying her rapist. It might have gotten better at that point, but it didn't. My brothers were the sort to never back down on a fight, so they decided to seek revenge. They went to the man's city and conned all the men into being circumcised. Then when the men were at the most painful stage of recovery, the brothers decimated the city. They killed all the men and took the women, children and all their goods for themselves.

"If you think that was the end of the chaos, it wasn't. My mother Rachel then died giving birth to my younger brother Benjamin. As you can tell, my home life has been difficult. But to make it even harder, my father showed a greater love for me than for all my brothers. Because of that, my brothers absolutely hated me.

"But I believe God had some great things in store. You see, Dad showed me amazing love. And my heavenly Father had given me some amazing dreams. I believed these dreams told a greater story, showing me that He had a plan for me. But when I started

sharing the dreams with the people closest to me, I didn't receive affirmation. I received hatred. So that's who I am. Thanks for inviting me to your small group."

Quite frankly, while most of us aren't dealing with quite this much in our lives, we can find parts of Joseph's story that do resonate with us and hit close to home. Today we're going to see how far envy, jealousy and hatred can go, in what has been deemed one of the most heartbreaking chapters in all of Scripture. It is the story of abuse, mockery and slander, all wrapped up in the devious plans of sinful men.

Turn please to Genesis 37. Here's what we are told, starting in verse 12:

¹² Now [Joseph's] brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. ¹³ And Israel [that's Jacob] said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am." ¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word." So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. ¹⁵ And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" ¹⁶ "I am seeking my brothers," he said. "Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." ¹⁷ And the man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

¹⁸ They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹ They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams." ²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." ²² And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; cast him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"— that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. ²⁴ And they took him and cast him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. ²⁸ Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

²⁹ When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes ³⁰ and returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?" ³¹ Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. ³² And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not." ³³ And he identified it and said, "It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." ³⁴ Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him. ³⁶ Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

Author and Rabbi Harold Kushner was told by his doctors that his three-year-old son had a degenerative disease, a disease from which he would not recover. He might live another ten years, but that would be stretching it. Rabbi Kushner went home and grieved over the news. He realized the hopes and plans he had for this son he dearly loved were probably for naught.

In his book *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*, he wrote, "I cried out to my God, 'Why, God? Why? What have we done? Where did we go wrong, that You would allow such affliction, such pain, such sorrow in the lives of Your people? Why do You allow bad things to happen to good people?'" Those words became part of an epic book to which millions of people have turned in their own times of questioning.

If you've been a Christ-follower for any length of time, you've asked that question. I'm here to tell you it's okay to ask these questions. David, a man after God's own heart, asked that question numerous times when bad things were happening in his life for which he had no explanation.

As I shared last week, I asked those questions as a 14-year-old when my older brother died. My parents were godly people then, and they're godly now. "Why in the world, God, would You hurt people who love you so very much?" It didn't make sense to me at 14, and it doesn't make sense to me at 40. But then God spoke to me through the pages of Genesis, saying, "My son, be still, and watch what I'm going to do. You will see how I use the most horrific human events for My good and My glory."

I want to outline today's lengthy passage by using four words. We will see that Joseph is *sent*, that he is *sold*, that because of what took place there are people who are *sad*. Then we will learn at the end of the story that Joseph is *safe*.

1. Sent

Beginning in verse 12, we are given the setting of the story: *"And Israel said to Joseph, 'Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.' And he said to him, 'Here I am.' So he said to him, 'Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word.'" So Jacob sends Joseph off.*

As we look at this passage, it's easy to go right to the brothers' treacherous act toward Joseph. But Moses, who is writing this story, doesn't want us to miss an important part of the story as though it's insignificant. Joseph was sent. He was sent by his father to do what many people in that time would have understood was an everyday task. "Go check on your brothers." I can't tell you how many times I've said that to one of my own children. "Go check on your brothers. It's too quiet down there. Something is going on."

So Joseph is sent. He didn't dilly-dally. He didn't complain. There was no, "Gee whiz, Dad, I'm finishing my 'Clash of Clans.' Give me a second." He says, "Dad, I'll go." He didn't delay. As I've told you so often, delayed obedience is instant disobedience. But there's none of that in this story. He simply said, "I will go."

Whenever we are sent, we must be obedient.

So our first lesson from this passage is that we must be obedient. Joseph was under the authority of his father, and he realized he had to obey. He knew, "When my dad says, 'Go,' my response is, 'Okay, Dad, I'll do that.'"

What a lesson for us as people. Sometime this week, someone in authority over you will ask something of you. Maybe your boss, or your parent, or someone in leadership over you will say, "I need you to do this thing." I want you to compare your response to Joseph's. Maybe your first thought is, "Come on. I'm better than that. I have a more important spot on the organizational chart. Send someone else to do that menial task. I want to do what I want to do, and you're infringing on my rights and privileges. I want nothing to do with it."

But Joseph reminds us that when people are in authority over us, we should respond, "Yes, I will do it." We should notice that Joseph's task was not an easy one. He's already had some run-ins with his brothers. In Genesis 37:2 there is mention of another bad report regarding his brothers that Joseph brought to their father. Most scholars believe it was another past occasion when Joseph was also asked to check on his brothers, and again he reported to Jacob, "Hey, Dad, they were up to no good." His brothers hated him.

So Joseph knows he's going to check on a group of guys who hate his guts. "I'm doing what Dad asked me to do. I'm middle management now, and I'm to evaluate what's taking place. I'm going to be sure they have everything they need, and if I see something that's not right, I'm supposed to report that to Dad." Do you think the older brothers are going to enjoy his company? No. Still, Joseph obeys his Dad and goes to where he expects his brothers will be. But they're not there. He doesn't stop looking for them, however. He could have said, "Well, I've done my job. I went, but I didn't find them."

I recently sent my 13-year-old son to look for something in a closet. We're talking about a five-by-five-foot area. I told him exactly where it was in that closet. He came back, "Dad, I didn't see it." I asked, "Did you even try to find it?" He said, "I looked." "But did you really look?"

So often we do the bare minimum. We want to have a good conscience, knowing we tried. Joseph didn't do that. He keeps looking, and eventually comes across a man who can tell him where his brothers went. He could have gone home and honestly told his father, "I couldn't find them where you told me to look." But even though there was no guarantee that he would find them in the place the man told him about, he still made the extra effort to go there.

Joseph did a hard task, going the extra mile, with no complaining in his heart. What a great message for us as we start a new work week, amen? Christians and Christ-followers should be the best employees our bosses have. They should be able to say, "Man, there's something about those employees. No matter what we ask of them, they're willing and able to do it." So we see from Joseph's life that when we're sent, we must be obedient.

Whenever we are sent, we must see the obstacles.

Jacob knew Joseph was hated. Twice we read in Genesis 37 that the brothers hated him. Once Moses tells us they were jealous of him. And then after Joseph's dreams, we are told that they could say nothing good of him. As a parent, it would be very unlikely if two of my sons hated the other son that I would not notice it. But for some reason, Jacob doesn't seem to recognize the horror into which he is sending Joseph.

Jacob sends his son on what appears to be an everyday assignment. Unless he was fully absent as a father, he no doubt recognizes, "I'm sending my son, who is hated by his brothers, on a task that could end in no good. But I'm going to send him anyway." He knows that the gift he gave Joseph, the coat of many colors, was a point of angry resentment with the brothers. He may just have been thinking, as we often do, "Boys will be boys. It can't be that bad. They won't do anything really harmful."

Listen, the job of parents is to see any potential danger our children face and to protect them from it. Did it never dawn on Jacob that the brothers might harm Joseph? Let's say he never even imagined such abuse. Should he not at least have considered when sending a 17-year-old into a group of older men—Reuben was probably in his mid-30s by then—that they might not at least bully or haze or emotionally hurt their hated brother? Could he not have sent someone else? Or maybe even gone with Joseph, or at least provided some kind of protection?

But apparently none of these thoughts occurred to Jacob. He never imagined something bad would happen—but it does. This reminds us as parents that we must be wise as serpents and as gentle as doves (Matthew 10:16). We need to get our heads out of the sand and look outward to see the dangers our children may be in.

A few weeks ago we talked about how the world presents all sorts of images and advertisements designed to incite lust. We must be aware of these traps. Our church elders recently had a discussion with the parents of our students regarding "Parenting in the Digital Age." Why? Because we don't want you to be Jacobs. We don't want you to be asleep at the wheel, not recognizing the terror the world is bringing to our children. We have to see the obstacles.

Whenever we are sent, we must see the once-in-a-lifetime opportunities.

When Jacob sent Joseph out, I wonder if it was like he'd been sent out many times before. "Hey, son, you'd better head out before dark. Make sure you've got enough food and grab your good sandals. Do you have enough to drink? Do you have enough money for the journey?" These are things we say to our teenagers as they head to their various destinations. "Son, be good. Come back soon. Bye-bye."

I wonder if, as he was leaving, Joseph looked back to see his dad waving goodbye from the tent. As he walked farther and farther away, his dad's form got smaller and smaller. "Bye, Dad." "Bye, son." Little does Jacob know that that would be the last time he would see his son for 20 years. Twenty years! And during those years, Jacob believed Joseph was dead.

If we had Jacob here, we might ask him, "How would you have done that moment differently, had you known it was the last time you would see your son?" He'd probably answer, "I would have said this. I would have said that." How many of us have experienced the unexpected death of a loved one? Our response is always, "I wish I could have done this. I wish I could have said that. If I only knew my time was short, I would have done things differently."

Again, I can tell you that was the lament of my family in the loss of my older brother. To this day, my mom grieves over an argument she had just two days before my brother was killed. "Why was it so important?" she'll say. "Why couldn't I just hug him? Why couldn't I just tell him I love him? Why did I have to argue about his room? Why did I have to argue about these small things in life? Didn't I know I was on borrowed time? Didn't I know that Chris was going to be gone? I would love to go back, if I could, and change that point in time, so I could tell him again that I love him."

What a great reminder for us—in a passage that we tend to move past quickly—that God speaks to us in the mundane circumstances of life. That moment when you tell your spouse, "I'm heading off to work," should be a time of expressing great love. "Honey, I love you and want you to know what you mean to me." I'm as guilty as any of us of just giving a glancing goodbye, because all of us think we'll have more moments with our spouses. I assume Amanda will be around for the next 70 years, so I'll have a thousand more goodbyes to say to her.

But there will be a point in your life that will be the last time you'll say goodbye to a person you love. And Jacob casually sends his son off, saying, "We'll see you soon." He had no way of knowing that "soon" would be 20 years away; years filled with great grief. We have opportunities to show love and affection, yet many times we fail to do so.

2. Sold

Next, the story tells us that Joseph was sold. What does he get for his obedience? He did exactly what his father asked him to do. You would think that would bring affirmation—but instead, he gets hatred. We don't know how long his journey was, or what he went through to get to his brothers, but he eventually found them. Verse 18 tells us that they saw him from afar and they hated him. We don't know what "afar" is, but it probably was a great distance.

What would distinguish their brother so they could recognize him? It was that blasted coat. "Here comes that dreamer," they would say. "Here comes our dad's favorite son. He's coming to check on us, to tattle on us." And so while he was still afar, they began to have murderous thoughts in their hearts.

As we'll see, murderous, hateful thoughts don't take long to go from the heart to the hands. Some of you have great hatred toward someone, but you think you've got it under control. "I won't actually do anything, but I hope they die. I hope something terrible happens to them. They're good for nothing."

Here we see the scheme of the brothers.

It's amazing how quickly those thoughts can go through our heads. And the "object lesson" in this story shows us how quickly such thoughts can turn to action. Jacob's sons conspired to kill their brother. There was a scheme, a premeditation. They had a deliberate discussion of how they would accomplish it. They began to think through scenarios: "We could do this." "Ah, well, we could do that." We are not given many details, but Moses painted a picture that indicates their discussion was ongoing. And it seems all ten of the brothers were involved. There wasn't just one guy at fault. Maybe there was even some sinister laughter. "Yeah, that would feel so good."

Joseph has no idea of the ambush he was walking into. But we're told that they had a scheme. They had a motive: "We want to get rid of this dreamer." There was crime: "We're going to kill him." Alibi: "We're going to say an animal devoured him, and that will keep us out of trouble." It was the perfect murder plan.

But then some things began to unfold. As we mentioned last week, their conspiring against Joseph indicates that the brothers believed his dreams would come true. If they thought he was simply crazy, they would not have been threatened. Nobody kills a crazy person. But instead they said, "We'll see what becomes of his dreams when he's dead."

So not only were their thoughts directed murderously toward Joseph, they were also rebelling against the providential plans of Almighty God. "God, we know where these dreams came from. But we're going to get rid of him, and we'll also get rid of You. If You think we're going to bow the knee to our younger brother, You've got another think coming. We're going to take care of this. We're going to thwart Your plan and Your will. You may want Joseph to be number one, but we'll show You who number one is."

Here we see the self-preservation of Reuben.

In verse 21, Reuben, the oldest brother, speaks up. "Let's not take his life." I can imagine that they might be starting to beat on Joseph. They've already mocked him at a distance, so they may be verbally abusing him now too. And Reuben says, "Okay, let's just stop for a minute. Time out. Let's not take his life. Let's do something else. Let's throw him into a pit."

Let me remind you from last week: Reuben is not a very nice guy. He's done some bad things. He was the one who led the genocide on the city because of Dinah's rape. Reuben, as the oldest son, tries to usurp his father's birthright by sleeping with one of his father's concubines. So he's a bad character.

But now it seems that Reuben has a new lease on life. "Let's not kill Joseph. Let's get rid of him, but we can spare his life." And we're told that Reuben has a plan to release Joseph from the pit: "When my brothers aren't watching, I'll get him out and return him to my father."

Why would he do that? First, it could be that Reuben is repentant over his sins and is now showing godliness. I don't want to paint him in a bad light, because I wouldn't want that done to me. But it's a struggle for me, because his response is muted. A response of true repentance would have more directly protested the plan. "Why would we do this? I've sinned greatly against my father. I've gone against his wishes. I've killed an entire city. I've slept with a woman who is my dad's wife. I've done terrible things and I don't want to add to them. So stop this evil scheme. Let's leave our brother alone."

But he doesn't say that. He formulates a plan—which, by the way, doesn't go the way he wants it to—but I believe it's for another reason. He sees an opportunity for a new lease on life with his father. "If I bring his favored son home, I'll be in good graces. I can

take this opportunity to be restored to my firstborn position.” Perhaps he hoped to regain his birthright, which apparently was given to Joseph as evidenced by the coat of many colors.

So in my estimation Reuben is still doing what he’s always done: looking out for number one. He’s using this opportunity to get back on the right track. But it doesn’t work out. In verses 29–30, he comes to the pit to rescue Joseph—but Joseph is gone! Notice his response, which again I believe is selfish: “What will happen to me? What am I going to do?” He doesn’t give a rip about what happened to Joseph. He cares only about himself.

What a great reminder to us as Christians that we are not number one. Our plans and our prerogatives aren’t first. Reuben reminds us of how selfish a person can be.

Here we see the sinfulness of men.

The story now gets uglier. The brothers throw Joseph in a pit. Let’s contemplate how evil that is. It has been said that there is not a more evil group of men in all of Scripture, other than the mob who yelled to Pontius Pilate, “Crucify Jesus.” Can there not be at least one good apple in this rotten-to-the-core group of brothers? Is there not one who will stand up and say, “Joseph is innocent. We’re the ones with a problem”? No, all ten in one accord are saying, “Let’s get rid of him.”

Their evil is compounded by a couple things. First, instead of killing him quickly, they choose a more excruciating form of death. “Let’s throw him in a pit.” Moses tells us that the pit has no water in it. Why would he tell us that? Because if there’s no water, Joseph would become dehydrated and mercilessly die of thirst. It would have been better for him to actually be violently killed by a lion than to die a slow, excruciating death.

No doubt this was a deep pit. Let’s say it was a ten foot drop, or maybe 20–30 feet. What would happen to a body as it falls? Does it hit the side a couple times on the way down? Does it bang its head, or crack some ribs, or break a leg? What did that thud sound like when Joseph hit the ground? What are the screams of anguish of a 17-year-old boy who has been thrown down a great ravine? They’re evil. After all they’ve done to Joseph, we are told they are so callous to his pain that they sit down to eat. No doubt they hear his cries for help. They know the harm they’ve brought him.

Can I tell you, my older brother and I harmed our younger brother numerous times? We once told him he could swing so high that he could do a total flip around the bar and he would be okay. He tried. The chain buckled, and he fell off the back of the swing, over the bar, and onto asphalt, resulting in a concussion. I can assure you in that moment, as sinful as we were—and we were sinful—we didn’t stop while he was lying on the ground and take out something to eat. “Pass a hotdog, Chris.” “Got some mustard for that?” “What’s that noise? Hey, Joel, quiet down. We’re trying to eat here. Don’t you get it? Keep your mouth shut.” How could grown men hear the cries of their brother—and sit down to a meal?

Finally, we see the sinfulness in a group of men who go home and lead their father to believe their brother is dead. As we’ll see in a moment, it brings great sorrow to Jacob. And we read in verse 35 that “all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him.” All his sons. It’s hard to believe what Moses is telling us, that the same guys who did all this harm to Joseph, who have told Jacob that he’s dead, are now trying to comfort their father. “Oh, Dad, don’t be so sad. It’s going to be okay”—all the while they know they’re lying through their teeth.

Let me tell you something. If you ever hear from a pulpit that man is good and that he needs just a little enlightenment to gain right standing with God, they are preaching a doctrine of the devil. It’s from the pit and smells like smoke. The heart is deceitfully sick, the Bible says (Jeremiah 17:9). Who can understand it? What a reminder of our absolute, total depravity.

Now you are probably thinking, “I would never do that.” Pride comes before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). Just give your hatred a little time to take root, to be cultivated and grow. Allow your jealousy and envy to ripen, and you will eventually reap a harvest of unrighteousness. Scripture tells us that what begins in the heart comes out of our mouths, and what comes out of our mouths will defile our bodies (Matthew 15:11). If you give sin enough room to grow, it will destroy you.

Here we see the selfishness of Judah.

Beyond the sinfulness of the group of brothers, we also see the selfishness of Judah. One final point in this story is in verses 25–28. There we’re told that Judah speaks up. We might hope that finally someone will say something kind. Maybe at last somebody is feeling queasy about what they’ve done. Maybe there’s a trace of remorse.

But no. Judah sees some traders from afar and he gets an idea. “Why are we doing this to ourselves?” Talk about absolute selfishness! “Why are we causing ourselves such consternation? We don’t need to deal with the guilt of killing our brother. We don’t

need that on us. Let's just sell him instead. It will accomplish two things. First, we'll know he's alive, and whatever happens to him after this is not on us. And second, we'll put some money in our pockets—20 shekels. That's two for each of us. So maybe we can stop at MacDonald's on the way back from Dothan and enjoy a twin cheeseburger or something." "Let's do that!" "That sounds good, because I don't want to carry a guilty conscience, and at least I'll be able to sleep at night, because I know I've done the right thing."

So they sell their brother. I want you to imagine what that sale must have been like. Get the Sunday School flannel graph out of your mind. Joseph is grabbed out of the pit; he's bound up and handed over to these strangers—a 17-year-old boy. His brothers say, "Twenty shekels? That works. Here you go. Take him." Joseph is chained to a cart or to an animal, and as he's walking away he's calling, "Guys. Come on. I don't want to go. I learned my lesson. I'll never, ever say a bad thing about you again. I want to go home. I want to see my dad."

As he gets farther and farther away, the cries of this new slave, who has been trafficked by his brothers, begin to fade. But this is just an ancient version of something that is happening all the time today. Young people are being taken away from their families against their will to do ungodly things.

3. Sad

The sinfulness of men leads to sadness. That is the most understated concept in this entire chapter. We have seen how terrible things can happen to good people. Joseph deserves none of this. Remember, he's going there to care for his brothers, to make sure all is well with them. He deserves their gratitude. What does he get? He gets mockery and abuse. He gets injured. Then finally he gets sold. What a treacherous, traitorous act. It sounds like what happened to Jesus, doesn't it? He came for our good, but we esteemed Him not.

This is seen in the screams of Joseph.

The brothers heard the screams of Joseph. I cannot tell you how important this is to know in this story. Seventeen years old. You say, "Tim, nowhere in this chapter do we read that Joseph is screaming." No, you're right. "Tim, you can't go past what the Scriptures say." You're right. You're a good Berean, asking the right questions. But turn to Genesis 42:21 for a moment. His own brothers give us part of the story we usually don't think of here. The brothers said to one another, *"In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us."*

When they threw him into the pit, he was crying out. "Come on, guys. My leg—it's broken. Guys, come on. Don't leave me here. I don't want to die!" I was typing these words last night with tears in my eyes—and I am not a crier. I'm going to turn my man card in. I was broken for this man. How can they do this? They hear the cries of a 17-year-old kid being sold into slavery. "Guys, don't do this to me. I want to go home. Guys, come on. The joke's over. This is a nightmare." The screams of Joseph.

How many of us have found ourselves at the hand of mistreatment, and we have cried out with all our hearts—screams of pain, screams of sorrow, screams of fear? And no one listens. No one hears us.

This is seen in the sorrow of Jacob.

Just imagine the next scene. The ten brothers come home and Jacob's all excited. "Hey, guys, welcome back. Ah, where's your brother? Did Joseph find you?"

"Yeah, Dad. We've got to tell you something..."

"Well, where is he? Where is he? You have the flocks okay. Where's Joseph?"

"Dad, we need you to sit down."

"Why? What happened?"

"Dad, we found this coat as we were coming back from Dothan. It's all bloody, Dad. Is this Joseph's coat?"

What a stupid question, by the way. Can I interject that? "Can you identify this coat?" As if they didn't know what it looked like. Remember, they knew it was Joseph from afar because of the coat. And now they're asking their dad? I'm telling you, these guys are sinful to the core. "Hey, can you identify this jacket? We haven't seen it very much. We know you have."

Their father begins to shudder. He falls to the ground and begins to weep. I want you to understand that he was not just shedding a few tears. One of the most vivid memories in my entire life was when I was 14 years old, on September 17, around 10:00 a.m. After my father came to pick me up, telling me of my brother's death, and I came home to the weeping sobs and screams of a mother who wailed for her son. I want you to know it makes my skin crawl even thinking about it now. One of my first memories of that day was my mother at the feet of three DeKalb County Sheriff Department agents, pleading with them, "Bring me my son! You're lying. I know he's in trouble. I know he's in jail. Just take me to my son." She wept. She sobbed. She groaned. She muttered. And that's what Jacob is feeling. If you've lost a loved one, you know that darkness of that sorrow. Jacob is on the ground, weeping, and his stupid, moronic, deceitful sons stand there—and they do nothing. What a horrific story.

4. Safe

So what do we do? The final word is a word of hope: safe.

Joseph's in Egypt. At the end of the chapter we read that he is in Potiphar's house. His dad thinks he's dead. Joseph must have thought, "They're going to come get me. They'll come to their senses and they'll look for me." I wonder if Joseph is thinking, "Maybe it will be Dan. Maybe it will be Naphtali. Maybe it will be Reuben. Someone will come to their senses and tell my dad what they've done. They'll come to find me in Egypt and we'll be reunited."

Twenty years—no one comes. Twenty years—he's as good as dead. But he's safe. Safe amidst trials and tribulations. None of the family knew where Joseph was, but I want you to understand: God did. And maybe today you're suffering mistreatment or struggles, and you're wondering, "Does anybody know?" You're screaming cries of sorrow and you're wondering, "Does anybody listen?" Maybe no human is listening, but God is.

We are safe no matter what happens because of God's positioning.

I want you know a couple reasons why even in your hardship you are safe. When bad things happen to good people, they are safe, number one, because of God's positioning. We can see the sovereignty of God in this entire story. I'll mention a couple details that might seem to be happenstance or coincidence, but it was God's sovereign plan to put Joseph exactly where he needs to be.

First, there is the man who "happens" to hear that the brothers have taken their flocks to Hebron, and Joseph "happens" to run into this stranger. Second, Reuben formed a plan that kept Joseph from being killed. Even though the plan never worked out for Reuben, it worked out for God. And then just at the right moment, traders from Egypt show up. Not just any traders, but traders who are willing to buy their brother.

What if they hadn't done that? Joseph would have been left for dead. What a "convenient" out—a group of traders who are willing to take Joseph. Then there's Potiphar, whom we'll learn about next week, as he looks at Joseph on the slave block and says, "I'll take that boy. I'll take him"—because God, unbeknownst to him, wanted Joseph in his house.

Please recognize that God is moving all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). He is moving and directing Joseph's circumstances, and in the same way, nothing happens to you or me that doesn't first go by God's desk for His express written consent.

So that trial you're struggling with—the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, the mistreatment at work—God has punched with His stamp: Approved. The devil can't touch you—people can't hurt you—without God saying, "I'm going to allow it to happen. I know where you are and I've got you in My hand—and you're safe."

God's positioning. God is sovereign. No man can thwart the will of God. Not even the devil can thwart the will of God. Take solace in that. Find hope in that.

We are safe no matter what happens because of God's promises.

Finally, I'll close by drawing your attention to the promises of God. Joseph learned about the promises of God through his experiences, but we know them because of the black and white writings of Scripture. No doubt Joseph wondered if anybody cared, if his dad would ever come to find him and if his trials would ever end. We too have asked similar questions. But God has promised several things.

1. God cares for you. Peter says, in 1 Peter 5:7, *“Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”* “God, I’m scared. God, I’m hurt. God, I’ve been betrayed. God, I’m broken. God, I’m so tired.” He wants us to throw those things to Him, to cast them on Him, because He cares for us.

Who grieved for Joseph? God did. God will care for you when you’re hurting. God will comfort you. Psalm 23 could have been written for Joseph. *“Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”* God comes through big time, in ways we will never know. I don’t know when Joseph got it, but at some point in his life—on that journey from Dothan to Egypt—he figured out, “It’s going to be okay. It hurts. It stinks. But God’s with me, and He’s going to comfort me.”

2. God comforts you. I’ve seen this comfort in the lives of my parents. I’ve seen this comfort as I’ve visited hospital rooms at the death of newborn children. I’ve seen it with the death of an aged individual—the peace that comes over a spouse as they watch the ravages of cancer take the one they love. I have watched the peace of God transcend all understanding, a peace that guards hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7). He will comfort you.

3. God is committed to saving you. This is not the end of the story. This is not the end of the book. There’s more to come. It’s a reminder of what Paul says in Philippians 1:6, that He Who began a good work in you is faithful to see it to completion. The pit is not the end for you. God has another chapter for you. As long as there’s air in your lungs and function in your brain, God has a new day for you and He will be with you every step of the way. He will not leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). And He has you safely in the palm of His Father’s hands so that one day you may be taken from this life into the arms of Almighty God.

Why do bad things happen to good people? I don’t know. But I know that it is a good and right thing to trust God in those times, and I pray, as I’ve learned this week, that you’ll trust Him in the hard times as well.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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