

For the Love of God

Sin, Suffering, and the Sovereignty of God

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SIN, SUFFERING, AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD **Genesis 50:20**

If you have His Word, and I hope you do, open with me to Genesis 37. The first book in the Bible—Genesis—chapter 37. Let me invite you to pull out the worship guide that, hopefully, you received when you came in this morning that will help direct our time this morning in the Word. Genesis 37.

“Why is this happening? Why is this happening to me? Why is this happening to my family? Why is this happening to these people around me—these people around me that I love?” I’ve got a feeling that most, if not all, of us in this room have at some point asked questions like this—maybe based on something that has happened years ago in your life, or in someone else around you—or maybe you’re asking questions like these in your life right now, or in the lives of people around you right now.

Or maybe just in general. We live in a world of evil, and we live in a world of suffering, and both affect our lives. So we all come to points in our journeys where, if we believe in God, we find ourselves looking up and asking, “Why is this happening God? What is all this for?” For some in this room, this may even be the primary reason you don’t believe in God, or at least one of the primary reasons ... because of all the evil and suffering in the world. You struggle to comprehend a God who can be good and allow all of this. And whether you are or you aren’t a believer in God, for most, there’s almost no category in us for a God—a good God—who would actually ordain suffering in the world.

So what I want to do today is to bring the Bible to bear on real questions we wrestle with in a world of sin and suffering. I want to show you what Scripture teaches about who God is and how God works in a world of sin and suffering. And in the process, I want to give you what I call “mammoth foundations to stand on.” I use that word intentionally. I want to give you foundations amidst situations and circumstances represented in your past, your present—maybe your future—where it just feels like quicksand all around, and you’re sinking in it. I want to give you mammoth foundations to stand on—to bank your life on—in a world of sin and suffering. And just to let you know where we’re going in this, at the end of our time in the Word, I want us to pray specifically for men and women in this room who, right now, are walking through things where they’re asking, “Why is this happening? What are you doing in this, God?”

Now, I’m cheating a bit in our Bible reading, if you could use those words together in a phrase—cheating and Bible reading—because we don’t actually get to Genesis 50, which is the place where we’re going to land today, until tomorrow in our daily Bible reading plan. It’s where the story of Joseph ends. But we’ve read through Genesis 37 through 49 over the last two weeks, and I just couldn’t help—and I was praying over what to preach on this Sunday, asking the Lord as we’re reading through the Word, “What are you saying to us?”—I couldn’t help but to believe that he is reminding us of foundations that we’ve talked about. Maybe this will be the first time you’ve seen some of these things in the Bible. Maybe you’ve seen some of these things before. But I believe God is calling us as a faith family to

remember them, to apply them to the circumstances in our lives right now, and to bank our lives on them.

So we're going to start here in Genesis 37. We're going to walk through the story of Joseph, all the way from Genesis 37 to Genesis 50, and we're going to just look at different passages along the way, so just be ready to flip and turn. I want to show us, in a real quick summary, who Joseph is, and I want us to step back and look at who God is in the story, and then let that lead us to three foundations that I want us to see, know, and feel in our lives in a world of sin and suffering. So let's start with reading the very beginning of the story, Genesis 37. We'll start in verse one; we'll just read the first part of the story here and then I'll begin to fill in some of the gaps after that between here and where we'll end in Genesis 50:20. Genesis 37:1 says:

Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.

These are the generations of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind. (Genesis 37:1-11)

The Many Faces of Joseph

Okay, let me stop there. So here's my best shot at a quick overview of Joseph's life, starting here and then going forward. I put in your notes, "The Many Faces of Joseph." So walking from Genesis 37 through 50, I want to show you eight quick, different pictures of Joseph that we see that kind of paint a portrait of him. So, the many faces of Joseph ...

The favorite son.

First, he's the favorite son. The story starts off when Joseph is 17 years old, but it's clear from the first day he was born that Joseph was the golden child in the family. We've read in

past weeks how Jacob loved Rachel. Rachel was barren for many years. Finally she gave birth to a son in Jacob's old age and named him Joseph. And so verse 3 says Jacob "*loved Joseph more than any of his other sons.*" And he showed it to him by giving him this multi-colored robe, a picture of his special relationship with Joseph—even more than his other sons.

The despised brother.

So, as a result of being the favorite son, the second picture we see of Joseph is of the despised brother. When it comes to Joseph's relationship with his brothers, we are introduced to him as a tattler. And nobody likes a sibling who is a tattler. When you're a kid and you do something wrong, and your brother or sister sees it, the first thing you say is, "Whatever you do, don't tell mom or dad." And oftentimes, the first thing they do is tell mom or dad.

I remember when I was little and a friend of mine and I ... we were playing with scissors—which is not a good idea—but my little brother Adam, who was sitting in the first worship gathering, was nearby, so we decided to give him a haircut. The funny thing is, after giving him a haircut, we told him, "Now, don't tell mom," as if it was not abundantly clear in our artistry on his head that we had done something there.

But this is the picture we see from the beginning. And the narrator in the story is telling us that Joseph's brothers hated him. Now it didn't help things when Joseph would come down to the breakfast table in the morning and say, "You'll never guess what dream I had last night: all you guys bowing down at my feet; the sun, moon, and the stars bowing down at my feet." This is not the way to gain rapport with your brothers.

So one day—and we're going to fill in the blanks here ... this is what happens at the end of chapter 37—Joseph's brothers were out in the field. Joseph comes walking out to them wearing his multi-colored robe, and the brothers decide, "This is our chance to do something with him." And initially they're saying, "Let's kill him." Then Reuben steps in and says, "No, let's not kill him. Let's take a pit and throw him in there and leave him there to die." And Reuben was thinking he was going to come back later and save Joseph.

But it wasn't ultimately Reuben's plan that came to fruition. Instead it was a plan that Judah proposed. A caravan of Ishmaelites comes down the road, and Judah says, "Let's sell Joseph off into slavery." So these Ishmaelites—they're called Midianites in the story—pay 20 shekels for this despised, and now robe-less, brother. The brothers take his robe, dip it in blood, and make up a story about how an animal had devoured Joseph. Jacob mourns, and in a sense he mourned for the next 22 years, thinking that Joseph was dead.

The slave in a foreign land.

So after chapter 37, you get into chapter 38. There's a pretty brief and shady interlude there, with Judah and Tamar. (jokingly) If you have any questions about that, then go to Jim Shaddix, and he would love to answer them for you. This sets the stage for next face of Joseph, the slave in a foreign land. So he's been sold off to the Ishmaelites, they go back to Egypt, and Potiphar—an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard—gets Joseph from the Israelites and makes him his slave in his house. Pick up what we read, Genesis 39:1:

Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD

caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. (Genesis 39:1-6)

A slave in a foreign land.

The very next part of verse six says, "Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance," which sets the stage for Potiphar's wife to begin to flirt with him, to begin to make passes at him, approaching him. And one day when nobody else was around, she comes to him—after he had resisted time and time and time again—she comes to him and tries again to persuade him to come to her. And we see Joseph running.

The pure servant.

Which is why the next picture is the pure servant, which is a total contrast from what we read in Genesis 38. But really not just Genesis 38—all these other stories in Genesis where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were compromising at various points, even giving their wives to foreign rulers. Well now, here's Joseph, sought by the wife of a foreign ruler, and he runs.

Just a side note here. For men in this room who right now are indulging in a variety of sexual temptation or sexual immorality, in thought and desire and deed, I'm confident that the Lord's will for you today is clear: run, run, run ... as fast God's grace will enable you to run. To any women in this room who are flirting with or desiring, in any way, a relationship with or fulfillment in a man who's not your husband—run. This is the grace of God to bring you to here this morning to hear this word: run. Joseph could have made any number of justifications for being with Potiphar's wife. Nobody else was around, nobody would know, Potiphar had given everything else in his house to him, look at all he'd done for Potiphar ... don't justify, don't rationalize—run.

The slandered prisoner.

So Joseph runs. Unfortunately when he runs, he forgets his coat, and as a result, he is framed by Potiphar's wife. Subsequently, he quickly becomes the next face of Joseph: the slandered prisoner. Through no fault of his own, he's righteous, pure, and holy ... and imprisoned. Imprisoned for 13 years in a dungeon. Now, slandered and imprisoned, Joseph rose to leadership during those 13 years.

And after years had gone by, the king's cupbearer and baker are sent to jail alongside Joseph, and others of course. One night, the cupbearer and the baker don't sleep well. They both have dreams that leave them feeling pretty confused the next morning. And it just so happens that Joseph walks by, sees them confused, and asks them what's wrong. They tell him about their dreams, and Joseph interprets them. One of them—the cupbearer—he said would live. The other—the baker—would die. And Joseph tells the cupbearer, who's going to live, "Hey, when you get out of prison, don't forget me. Tell Pharaoh about me down in this prison."

What Joseph interpreted would happen, did happen. The baker dies and the cupbearer lives out of prison—but the cupbearer forgot Joseph ... that is, until a couple of years later. One night, Pharaoh didn't sleep well. He had a dream. And nobody in all of Egypt—none of his magicians—were able to interpret that dream. And it just so happened that while these magicians were unsuccessfully trying to talk with Pharaoh about his dream, the cupbearer

walks by and realizes, "Hey, I know a guy who can help you." So he tells Pharaoh about Joseph. Pharaoh summons Joseph before him to interpret this dream. And Joseph does so—a dream that foretold seven years of plenty in the land of Egypt, to be followed by seven years of famine. And Joseph said, "Based on this dream, you need to store up a reserve right now."

Pharaoh was so overwhelmed by the Spirit of God in Joseph that he said, "Not only did you tell this dream, you need to be the one to oversee this storage. You, be over my house—you, be over all the people of Egypt—in order to lead us through this." Fast forward to chapter 41, and I want you to just think about what a transformation had taken place here. So Joseph—once a slave imprisoned in a dungeon—now gets this picture, in verse 42:

Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck. And he made him ride in his second chariot. And they called out before him, "Bow the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. (Genesis 41:42-43)

The leader over all the land.

See how this favorite son, despised brother, and slave in a foreign land, now becomes the leader over all the land. Joseph basically became Prime Minister in Egypt, with authority over all the people of Egypt. And not just in Egypt. Because of this impending famine and the preparations made under Joseph's leadership, many peoples from beyond Egypt would come to Egypt to beg for food. Which sets the stage for chapter 42, verse one. In the middle of famine,

When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. (Genesis 42:1-3)

The restorative brother.

So here's the picture of what Joseph had dreamed now coming about, which sets the stage for this next face of Joseph: the restorative brother. If you read these chapters, you know what happened and all the winding plot. These sons of Jacob, Joseph's brothers, were unknowingly brought before Joseph. Even when they got to him, they did not recognize him; they had no clue that this is the brother they had sold into slavery. And they find themselves begging for food from him. Through a series of circumstances leading up to chapter 45, which we'll look at in a minute, Joseph finally reveals his identity to his brothers. And he says, "Now go get your father, Jacob. Bring him and all your families here so that you can be provided for."

The reunited son.

Which leads to the last face of Joseph we see, where Joseph becomes the reunited son. We'll come back to chapter 45, but look at chapter 46, verse 28. This is where Jacob, the father, is united with Joseph the son. Verse 28 says,

[Jacob] had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to show the way before him in Goshen, and they came into the land of Goshen. Then Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father in Goshen. He presented himself to him and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while. Israel said to

Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive." (Genesis 46:28-30)

In chapter 47, Jacob and all of his sons settle in Goshen, in Egypt, while Joseph ruled. Chapter 48—Jacob blesses Joseph's two sons. Chapter 49—Jacob blesses all of his sons including Joseph. And then in the end of chapter 49 and the beginning of chapter 50, Jacob dies. We see Joseph on his face, weeping, as this reunited son.

Now that's a quick summary of a variety of chapters in a long story in Scripture. But just look at those different faces of Joseph. I want to just help us to think for just a second about this story and the points of identification with our lives. This story can seem distant from us, but look at these faces of Joseph—the favorite son and despised brother. Has anybody in this room ever been a part of family conflict? You don't have to raise your hand. Maybe you were the favorite. Maybe you weren't the favorite. Maybe you had a close relationship with your mom and your dad and your siblings. Maybe you didn't or don't have a close relationship with your mom or dad or siblings.

A slave in a foreign land. Have you ever found yourself at a point of hurt and pain, even at the hands of people you loved and trusted? A pure servant becomes a slandered prisoner. Have you ever taken a stand for purity, done something you know to be right, only to be penalized for it, and you find yourself worse off? Leader over all the land, the restorative brother, the reunited son. Have you ever longed for resolution in your life or reconciliation with someone? There's so much in this story that we can identify with on various levels.

What I want to show you is, it's all setting the stage for what is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, punch line in all the Old Testament. It's Genesis chapter 50, verse 20. It's on the front of your worship guide. I'm going to put it up here on the screen, because I want us to read it together. This is the end toward which the entire story of Joseph comes to. Let's read this out loud together. Genesis 50:20. This is Joseph speaking to his brothers at the end of the story, after their father Jacob has died and they're settled and provided for in Egypt. Joseph says to his brothers—let's read this together—*"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today"* (Genesis 50:20).

The Many Facets of God

He is the ever-present Lord.

Now, everything we're about to talk about unpacks that reality in different ways. Many faces of Joseph ... now step back. There are many facets of God in this story. In the Joseph story, we learn these things about God. One, he is the ever-present Lord. The always present Lord. Go back to Genesis 39. This probably most clearly, beautifully illustrated here in this story about Joseph in Potiphar's house (Potiphar's wife) and then in prison after that. Right after Joseph was sold as a slave to Potiphar, listen to what the narrator tells us in this story. Look at verse 2. Genesis 39:2. You might underline this. *"The LORD was with Joseph ..."* So underline that phrase.

"The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that," here it is again, *"the LORD was with him,"* you might underline it there—the Lord was with him—it's the same phrase, *"and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.* (Genesis 39:2-3). So two times we hear of

Joseph, when he was a slave in Egypt, that God was with him. Separated from his family ... God was with him. Betrayed by his brothers ... God was with him.

Now look at the end of the chapter. Once he flees temptations, gets slandered, and is thrown into prison, listen what the narrator tells us. Starting in verse 20. *"And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. But ..."* underline the phrase, *"... the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because ..."* here it is one more time, *"... the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed"* (Genesis 39:20-23).

So do you see the bookends here in chapter 39? Two times in the beginning; two times in the end. The narrator is intentional to show us here that in this high point in Joseph's life—now a leader in Potiphar's house—and then this low point in Joseph's life—as he's thrown into prison—in both places, the Lord was with him. Don't miss this. In everything that Joseph went through, he was never alone. Never alone. Traveling with Ishmaelites—God with him. In Potiphar's house—God with him. In the prison—God with him. Raised up by Pharaoh to lead in Egypt—God with him. At every point, the Lord was with him. God is the ever-present Lord in this story.

He is the ever-subtle King.

Second, God is the ever-subtle King. It's interesting ... when you read this story, you don't see overwhelming, breathtaking displays of supernatural power. Instead you see—and that's why I use the word "subtle" here—subtle details that are happening that point us to the invisible hand of God, who is overseeing and orchestrating all of these things that are happening. Even the worst things that are happening.

Think about Joseph's life. Who's behind all that happens to him? He's sold into slavery and thrown into prison. Was all of that because of his brothers' hatred for him and their evil against him? Well, yes and no. Look at chapter 45. I mentioned we were going to come back to chapter 45. Look at chapter 45 when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. At this point, as I'm reading the story, what do I expect? Let's think about it. What do we expect Joseph to do when he finally gives the reveal to his brothers? I'm expecting him to bring the hammer down. "Remember those breakfast dreams I told you about? Well, here you are. You sold me into slavery."

That's not what he does though. Listen to verse 4. *"So Joseph said to his brothers,"* (they still don't know it's him), *"Come near to me, please."* So this royal ruler is saying, "Come to me; come close to me." *"And they came near. And he said, 'I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.'" Do you see the looks on the brothers' faces as he's saying this? "What is he going to do to us?" And Joseph immediately says,*

And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord

of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.' (Genesis 45:5-11)

And he goes on and on and on. Ah, see this: So I put in your notes, "unexplainable friends." We see this all over Scripture. We talk about this at different points, but I just want to remind us—because we have a tendency to forget this—about these unexplainable friends. On one end: divine sovereignty, divine control, and divine authority over all things. You heard it there in verse 5, "... you sold me here, for God sent me ...". Verse 7, "... God sent me before you to preserve for you ...". "It was not you that sent me here," verse eight, "but God." Verse nine, "Hurry and go to my father and say, 'Thus says your son, God has made me Lord over all Egypt.'"

Do you hear the language here? God did this. God sent me here. God sent me to be a slave. God sent me to be prisoner. Notice what he doesn't say. Joseph doesn't say, "You sent me here and so God responded by trying to figure out a way to use this bad situation and turn it into good." No, Joseph says, "God is the one who did this. God did this." It's what we just read in Genesis 50:20. God intended this. God meant this. God purposed this. God did this. You might write down, when you get to Psalm 105:16 and 17, looking back on this story, the psalmist says (paraphrased), "God is the one who summoned a famine on the land, broke all supply of bread, and sent a man—Joseph—ahead to be sold as a slave." God did it all. Divine sovereignty. God did it all.

Now, on the other hand, it's not that the brothers had no part in it. So there's divine sovereignty here—at the same time, there is human responsibility. So here are the friends: divine sovereignty and human responsibility. He says (paraphrased), "You sold me into Egypt, into slavery. You sold me in a way that brought me to Egypt. You sold me, but God sent me." So how does that work? Unexplainable friends. It's a mystery how this comes together. This is not divine sovereignty and all humans down here are just robots doing whatever he has programmed us to do. No, it's divine sovereignty—it's control, God ultimately doing it all—and humans are responsible for what we do.

So follow this. Ultimate conclusion is: the responsibility of man cannot be ignored. All throughout the story, Joseph's brothers are held responsible for what they did to Joseph and in other facets of their life. This is so humbling, when you get to Genesis 49 and you see Jacob blessing his sons, or in some instances cursing them because of what they had done, they are responsible for evil and sin in their lives. So the responsibility of man cannot be ignored.

Every single one of us in this room is responsible before God for our actions and our choices and our decisions and our thoughts and our desires. We're all responsible for what we do, what we think, what we feel. We're responsible for that. The responsibility of man cannot be ignored. At the same time, don't miss this: the will of God cannot be thwarted. God will carry out—do—what he intends. And even in the worst of circumstances—sold into slavery, imprisoned in a dungeon—Joseph can say, "God sent me here. God did this." God is the ever-present Lord and the ever-subtle King.

He is the ever-faithful Savior.

And finally, God is the ever-faithful Savior. So don't miss where God's sovereignty is leading, what his will that cannot be thwarted is. This story shows us very clearly two things

here. One, when I'm talking about God being the ever-faithful one, God keeps his promises. That's evident in what we were just saying—the dreams that God gave to Joseph early on in the story came about. And it's very interesting how they come about, isn't it? These brothers, in their efforts to destroy the dreamer, end up fulfilling the dreams. What God has said will come about.

If you go back further in Genesis, you'll see Genesis 12, where God promised (paraphrased), "I'm going to bless you, Abraham, and your line (Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are from the line of Abraham). I'm going to bless you in a way that you'll be a blessing to all nations." So God takes this one, Joseph, from the line of Abraham, and leads him through this path to Egypt, where he is a blessing to Egypt and all the surrounding nations who come looking for grain, looking for help. Even in Genesis 15, when God promised Abraham there (paraphrased), "Your offspring will be sojourners. You will journey in a land that's not yours for 400 years." That's exactly what's playing out as they go into Egypt. They're going to be there for 400 years. And God's going to bring them out, just like he promised.

Don't miss it. This story is not ultimately about Joseph's success. It's about God's faithfulness to keep his word—to do what he says he'll do. It's why God says to Jacob in chapter 46 (paraphrased), "Don't be afraid to go to Egypt. I'm going to make you into a great nation. I will go with you to Egypt; I'll bring you out again." It's what's going to happen as we read the book of Exodus in the next couple of weeks. Mark it down: God keeps his promises.

And God preserves his people. "You intended this for evil, but God intended it for good, to bring about the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20, paraphrased). This is how God is preserving the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—through sending Joseph as a slave, prisoner ... ultimately to be in this position where God's people are now provided for.

These facets of God are on display in the story of Joseph: ever-present Lord, ever-subtle King, and ever-faithful Savior who keeps his promises and preserves his people.

Three Mammoth Foundations for Us

So what does this mean for us? What does this mean for you, right where you're sitting, at this moment, in light of things that have happened in your life, in light of things that are happening right now in your life?

I want us to see three mammoth foundations for us in this story. And by "us" there, I'm talking about the church. These are foundations for those who have put their faith in God through Christ. And I'll explain in more detail in just a couple of minutes how that looks, but for those who have put their faith in God through Christ—three mammoth foundations to stand on, to bank your life for eternity on.

We have a Lord who is with us.

Number one: Church, we have a Lord who is with us. Just hear this. Feel this. The same God, the same God whose presence was with Joseph in the pit from which he was sold into slavery, the same God who was with Joseph in the house in which he served, the same God who was with Joseph in the prison into which he was thrown, the same God who was with Joseph when he was summoned before Pharaoh—that same God, the very same God—is with you. He is with you in your highs, when things are going great. When you are prospering, God is with you. And He is with you in your lows, when things are at their worst

and when nothing is going right. When you feel like you are alone, know this: you're not alone.

Child of God, you are never, ever alone. It may feel like nobody else around you is there. It may feel like 2 Timothy 4:16 when Paul says, there came a point when "*no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me.*" And then he says, "*But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me,*" (verse 17). Brothers and sisters, we have a Lord who is always with us. No matter what you have walked, are walking, will walk through, know this: you will not be alone. We have a Lord who is always with us.

We have a King who is guiding us.

Second, we have a King who is guiding us. So we learned in Genesis 37 through 50 that God is the ever-subtle King, which means—now apply this to your life—that God is not overlooking some of the details in your life. Do you ever wonder if he is? If he doesn't realize what's going on here? Does He miss this or that? He's not aware of this or that? All these things. Do you begin to even wonder if God cares sometimes? Or maybe that he's involved in others' lives, but not your life in the same way?

And this is where I want to remind you, brothers and sisters: God is not overlooking some of the details in your life. God is orchestrating all of the details in your life. Now get this. Keep those unexplainable friends together here. Don't separate them. Don't start to think in a way that you're not responsible, or that other people aren't responsible—this robotic control. That's not at all what we see Scripture teaching at any point, this story included. Instead, we see a God who's working behind the scenes at every second to bring Joseph to the right place at the right time.

Just think about this: In our life, God is orchestrating a variety of circumstances. When you think about Joseph's life, this story that we just walked through, you can take any number of these incidents alone that happened to him, and you could write "tragedy" over the top of them. Sold into slavery, imprisoned in a dungeon 13 years—tragedy. But then when you put them all together, you see a beautiful picture of what God was doing in it all. Think about Joseph in prison. He tells this cupbearer what his dream means, and he says, "Please don't forget me." And the cupbearer forgets him.

Well, praise God he forgot Joseph so that at just the right time, when Pharaoh needed a dream interpreted, this cupbearer just happens to know where Joseph is. He's standing there before Pharaoh, and he says, "I've got the guy that you need to talk to." You don't plan that. We say all the time around here, "God has this thing rigged." And he does. He's orchestrating a variety of circumstances, in a variety of people—in a variety of people. Do we realize that your life or my life is not the only life that God is working in? Huh, who could imagine? The world does not revolve around us, around you or around me. God's not just working in your life; he's working in all kinds of lives. Everybody's life. All over the place.

If you go back to the cupbearer deal, the reality is that the only reason the cupbearer was in prison was because he had done something relatively minor that had upset Pharaoh. So God used a bad mood in Pharaoh's life one day to send a cupbearer to prison so he could have a dream one night, look confused the next morning, and at that moment, for Joseph to walk by and say, "Hey, what's going on?" So this is not just God working in Joseph's life. This is God working in Pharaoh's life. This is God working in the cupbearer's and baker's life—and candlestick makers—all these different people. God's working in their lives.

Now realize this. When you or I ask, "God, why are you doing this in my life?", the answer may actually point to what he's doing in someone else's life that you have no idea about.

What God is doing in your life may be an integral part of what God is doing in somebody else's life, and vice versa. God is orchestrating a variety of circumstances in a variety of people for a variety of goals.

Think about what he's doing in different people's lives. God's bringing Joseph to a point of humility and joy and gladness. God's bringing Joseph's brothers to a point of confession. God's bringing Jacob to a point of fulfillment. Different goals in different people's lives. For God's people, the whole point—Genesis 50:20—all these goals are ultimately good. It's Romans 8:28 in action: God's working all things together for the good of his people.

Think about this in small things in our lives. Here's a way the Lord brought this word to bear on a tiny thing in my life yesterday. So, I've been studying this passage, we've been reading through this text and its truth, and yesterday, I'd been out of town for about 24 hours and got home, and had a variety of things I needed to do. I'm headed out of the country this week, so I needed to do a variety of things, emails and other things, on the Internet. So I get home, and the Internet's not working. The signal says it's working, but there's nothing there.

So, frustrated, I start going into the garage, and I'm like looking at the box and pressing buttons and unplugging and trying to, you know, be "Mr. Fix-It." And it's clearly not working. So after being frustrated, going back and forth trying to do things, finally I said, "All right, I'm going to call." And you know how these calls go ... this endless conversation with a machine on the other line that doesn't understand what you're saying when asked.

So finally, after all this time on the phone, I finally get to a real person. And with this real person, I start talking about the problem. He says it could be this or that, and starts walking me through all these different steps. I'm walking around the house doing this or that, and we get to one of these steps where he says, "Alright, this is the last thing we can do. If it's not this, we're going to have to send somebody out there to help." So I said, "Alright." He says, "We need you to unplug, try this, and then we're going to wait about three, four, five minutes. And then this should happen after three, four, five minutes." I said, "Okay. So I just sit here for the next three, four, five minutes?" He said, "Yep."

So it just got quiet—just me and him, a box in the garage, and silence on the phone. So, the Lord, in his grace, just brings his Word to bear: maybe he's doing something here. So, I say, "Well, since we've got time, man, where are you?" And he said, "Well, I'm actually in Manila, in the Philippines." I said, "Ah, that's cool." I started talking to him about how Heather, my wife, had been to the Philippines at one point. And he said, "Well, what was she doing over here?" I said, "She was visiting a friend who's serving as a missionary there." He says, "Oh, yeah, I know some missionaries." I said, "Well, are you involved in church?" He says, "Well, I'm a Roman Catholic, but not a very good one."

I said, "Well ..." and it was just so obvious. "We've got time, let me just remind you that the beauty of God's love for us in Christ is that he loves us on our best day; and on our worst days. His love is not based on what we do for him." I'm thinking, "Catholic background," and I just began to share the gospel with him. And he's responding, saying, "That's really encouraging." And so I'm sharing with him, he's responding, and we're talking. And then finally he says, "Alright, is everything working alright?" I said, "Oh yeah, the box. It's blinking here ..." and we weren't able to fix it. He said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Platt, that we couldn't get that fixed." I said, "Man, you don't have to apologize. I'm trusting that maybe this whole thing was orchestrated by a God who loves you and wanted you to hear this." And I shared the gospel one more time.

Little things. God's working. God's doing different things for a purpose, and he knows what he's doing. He's sovereign over wireless Internet, to set up a conversation about the gospel with a man in the Philippines, from Birmingham, Alabama. God loves this man. God loves me. So when we begin to look at our lives through that kind of lens, it changes our perspective, doesn't it? Nothing by accident, everything by plan.

Not that we can always figure out exactly what it is or that we need to go around saying, "Well, I know it was this, this, this and this." Sometimes the Lord gives us glimpses that are really clear along those lines, and sometimes He doesn't. But trust that he's doing this, he's working, he's orchestrating the events of our lives in a variety of different people's lives for a variety of goals. So our perspective is based on that. And I want to remind you of that.

So that's something minor. Petty. Wireless out for 24 hours, okay. Now go to the deep questions—pain and our hurt in our lives. So what about that? This is where I want to remind us that God's providence—his sovereign provision—is the only foundation for embracing the depths of life's pain. So take this, and now let's go deeper here. Because there's a lot of people today, even some who claim to be Christians, who just immediately step back in the middle of evil and suffering and say, "Well, God's not sovereign over everything. God's not in control of everything." Even, "God doesn't know what's going to happen in the future."

I want you to think about what a hollow worldview that is. Put that kind of worldview in Joseph's perspective, just thinking of himself as a victim of hopeless chance. His brothers sell him off; he's thrown into prison. God's with him, but what does that really matter? Because God couldn't keep him from being thrown in there. There's no guarantee he'll ever get out. God himself is unsure of how this story's going to end. So Joseph would have no reason to hope in any kind of better future. "We'll just see what happens," he thinks.

But no, that's not what Joseph was thinking, because Joseph knows the sovereignty of God. Joseph knows that God is orchestrating every detail of his life toward a good and glorious purpose—even the worst details toward a good and glorious purpose. So after years in slavery, after 13 years in a dungeon, he doesn't go off and slander Potiphar's wife, who had lied about him. He doesn't bring down the cupbearer for all the years he'd forgotten him. When he sees his brothers, he doesn't even condemn them for selling him into slavery. Instead, he says (paraphrased), "Come near to me. Come near to me. Listen. God did all this. God sent me here. God led me here. God has been in control."

So know this. Whether it's a malignant tumor, or an unexpected miscarriage, or sudden and tragic loss—know this: God is in control, even of the worst things. God takes evil, and he turns it into good. This is who God is. To bring this to bear on your life right here: he'll take evil and turn it into good. Think about this story. Even the wicked words and actions of sinful men who want nothing but to harm you, God will ultimately use for your good. God uses the sinful words and actions of brothers who wanted Joseph dead—He uses that, and He turns it into good.

God takes suffering and turns it into satisfaction. Look back at chapter 41 with me, quickly. Chapter 41, verse 50. Joseph had these two sons, and listen to what he names them. Genesis 41:50. The Bible says, "*Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, bore them to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. 'For,' he said, 'God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.'*" Then verse 52, "*The name of the second he called Ephraim, 'For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction,'"* (Genesis 41:50-52).

God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction. So maybe on a deeper lever, there's another illustration of this truth in my own life. And some of you know this—many of you know this—but I'd like to bring it to bear even on what, Lord willing, I'll do tomorrow and the next couple of weeks. I've shared before how Heather and I struggled with infertility for years—about five years, month to month to month, praying and longing and pleading for God to give us children, and hearing what seemed like silence from heaven. And we're wrestling through that: Why do we have this desire? What are You doing? Why? Why do we want children like this, and You're not providing? You have the power to provide ... all the questions that go with that.

And the Lord, in his sovereignty ... So this wasn't the Lord, five years into that journey, saying, "Well, I guess ... let me figure out some way to turn this into good." This was God, from the very beginning, ordaining that five-year journey to lead us to an obscure city in Kazakhstan, on the other side of the world, to adopt our first son, Caleb. And then, God, in his sense of humor, when we returned from Kazakhstan two weeks later, had put a baby in Heather's womb, and nine months later Joshua was born.

We knew we wanted to adopt again—God had changed our hearts completely about adoption through that journey. So we began a process of adoption from Nepal. We put a map on the table, did research, asked "Lord, where are you leading us to adopt?", and really believed he was leading us to Nepal. He put Nepal on our hearts in a strong way. And so we began this process and invested in that process—spent time, money, and energy, praying for two years, praying every night, with our two boys at the time, for a little sister in Nepal. And we were to the point that our next step was being matched with a little girl in Nepal—this country filled with massive poverty, many little girls sold into sex slavery. And so we're about to be matched with one of these little girls. And all of a sudden, Nepal shuts down the country for adoption, shuts the whole country down when it comes to adoption, and says, "No more." And that hasn't changed since then.

Step back—and now it was about three years after Joshua was born—and we were thinking, "Why did you lead us to Nepal just to get that shut down? Why no more kids during this time? What are you doing?" And the Lord uses that process to redirect us to adopt our precious daughter from China, Mara Ruth, who's now in our family. And then, in his sense of humor, three months after we get back from adopting Mara Ruth, he brings Isaiah along into her womb. And nine months later, he's born.

And all that leads to the reason I even share that today. Tomorrow, Lord willing, I, and a few other pastors, will get on a plane. Over the last couple years, after that Nepal process shut down, I kept running into this one particular guy who leads a ministry in Nepal. And one day I'll tell you the story about this ministry, but it's focused specifically on children in Nepal, rescuing children from trafficking, on addressing massive poverty, and all of this among 24 unreached people groups at the height of the Himalayas. They're unreached. Nobody has gotten the gospel to these people groups.

And I kept running into this guy, and finally, about the third time, it hits me—maybe the Lord had put Nepal on my heart to prepare me for this. And so, Lord willing, I, and some of our pastors, will fly over to Nepal to explore partnership with how we can be a part of reaching these unreached people groups with the gospel and addressing their massive needs among children in Nepal. So I'm looking at a week where I'm going to go and have the opportunity to share the gospel with people who have never heard it before in Nepal and have an opportunity to serve villages and think through how we can partner together to address these massive needs. So I'm overwhelmed with joy thinking about this next week and a half in these villages.

You know, year one of infertility—I saw none of this. Year two, year three, year four, year five—none of this. Just month to month asking, “God, what are you doing? And why, why, why, why? Why are you not providing in this way? Why are you not doing it?” So I look back, and I give glory to God before you, because he has been orchestrating events in our lives and others’ lives for great goals. Great goals. And I’m not saying that whatever trauma you’re walking in right now or have walked through in the past is going to end up this way with this kind of picture. But I am saying this: there is a God who is with you in the middle of whatever trial you’re walking through, and he’s a subtle King who’s orchestrating details in that trial for your good, for others’ good ... ultimately for his glory. He’s doing this. This is our God. This is a mammoth foundation to bank your life on when everything is quicksand around you.

We have a Savior who has redeemed us.

Now, you may still not be convinced. You say, “You don’t understand what I’ve been through, what I’ve walked through.” And I don’t. I can’t imagine some of the things that people in this room have walked through or are walking through right now. And you’re still asking, “How can I really know that God’s going to take my affliction and make it fruitful?” That leads to the last foundation. Here’s how: because we have a Savior who has redeemed us. So lift your eyes to the big picture here.

Don’t miss the parallels in this story. God uses a dreadful sin to save his people in Genesis. God uses sons who want to kill their brother, sons who sell their brother into slavery. The horror of that sentence—to sell your own brother off to Ishmaelite travelers! And God uses that dreadful sin to save his people, setting the stage for one day when God will use a dreadful sin to save his people for all eternity. Isn’t it great to read the story of Joseph alongside the end of Mark this last week, where we see the story of how Jesus was crucified? How God used the sins of those who falsely accused and slandered Jesus to sentence him to death? Nailed him to a cross—God used their dreadful, murderous sin, ultimately, to make salvation possible for his people in all of eternity.

Think about this. In both stories, God takes the sins of the destroyers and makes them the means of their deliverance. It’s breathtaking. God used, in Genesis, the brothers’ sin to deliver the brothers ... to save the brothers. In the same beautiful, indescribable way, God used the sin—think about the cross—God used the sins of men who nailed Jesus to a cross—think about this ... in their committing that sin, and us with them, they were actually, in their sin, making the way for them to be forgiven of their sins ... for us to be forgiven of our sins.

Think about these brothers in Genesis, standing before the brother they had offended, and he weeps, and he says to them (paraphrased), “Come close. Come close. Because of your sin against me, I will now provide for you.” Hear this. All non-Christian friends who are here today, this is the message we pray—the invitation we pray—that you will hear loud and clear in this room today ... that this day, when God has brought you here, you’ll hear this:

You, I, and all of us in this room have offended God. We deserve judgment from God—condemnation from God—because of our sin against him.

But God says to you, “Come. Come near to me. Because of your sin against me, I have provided for you to be saved from it.” He has provided the sacrifice of his Son. God has ordained the most evil act in all of history—the crucifixion of his Son, God in the flesh. He’s ordained the most evil thing in all of history to make a way for your good, for your salvation. So we invite you—we urge you—to put your trust in his provision for you today,

to put your trust in his love for you today. Turn from your sin in yourself; receive the grace that he offers.

Don't miss the point of this story. The purpose of the story of Joseph is to point us to the supremacy of Jesus. Look at those many faces of Joseph. Look at them in your notes there, and then think about Jesus. The favorite Son—the one and only Son—who came to earth and was despised by his brothers, his fellow men. He humbled himself and became a slave in a foreign land. Pure and righteous in every way, he was slandered and sentenced to death. God did that. GOD DID ALL OF THAT. Sinful men were responsible for crucifying Christ—no question. God ordaining the crucifixion of Christ—no question.

God ordained the murder of his only Son so that he might be raised to be Lord over all the land. Bow the knee. And through his suffering, Jesus restores his brothers who sinned against him—you and me—only to be reunited with the Father. The parallels aren't perfect; the details aren't exact. But the purpose of the story of Joseph is to point us to the supremacy of Jesus and to give us this hope.

So, brothers and sisters ... all who, as I said, put your faith in God through Christ, through Jesus: hold onto this hope. At the end of the story of Joseph's life, his brothers are all surrounding him, enjoying the land. Know this—there's coming a day when we will be completely restored to Jesus our Savior, when we will join him and the Father in a land where there is no more sin and no more sorrow and no more suffering and no more loss and no more pain.

Knowing that, you can be confident of this: that God is using every circumstance, every occurrence, every detail—no matter what it is, no matter how hard it is, no matter how painful it is—he is providentially using it all to bring about the day when we will join him in his presence for all of eternity. The one who saved us from our sins will one day glorify us with him. Stand on these foundations. Lean on them. Trust in God, who is with you, who is sovereign over all things, and who is faithful to his people to the end.

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