

LIFE GROUPS

Genesis 50:15-26

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

ICE BREAKER QUESTION: Do you believe with your whole mind and heart that God is all-powerful? Do you believe with everything in you that God is spatially and specially present with you?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **What is your biggest takeaway? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?**

2. **Read Genesis 50:15-18. What does Joseph's brothers' response in this passage show about their own guilt, fear, and forgiveness? Are there any areas in your own life where you are being ruled by guilt and fear instead of forgiveness?**

Fear and guilt were the first emotions Joseph's brothers experienced when their father died. They believed that Joseph might seek revenge. Instead of being at peace, knowing their father was with God or grieving over his passing, they were consumed with guilt and were concerned primarily for themselves. This led them to invent a final command from Jacob to Joseph, asking him to forgive them. They made up this command because they believed that Joseph's loyalty to their father was the only way Joseph would forgive them.

Their fears were utterly unfounded and irrational. No clear-thinking person would forget, much less dismiss their stunning reconciliation with Joseph and Joseph's comforting words, "do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me

here, for God sent me before you to preserve life” (45:5), which was followed by his outpouring of affection as “he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them” (45:15).¹

And now they had just come from a fresh display of family solidarity and hope at their father’s tomb. Joseph had done nothing to fan their fears. Clearly it was guilt that drove their apprehension.²

The brothers feared that Joseph’s benign smiles masked a malevolence that would effect their destruction now that their father was gone. Hearts like this are slow to recognize grace.³

However, though the brothers sinfully attributed the request that they be forgiven to their father, the plea contained a full confession of their sin and accurately described their desperate desire for forgiveness. Twice they pled for forgiveness. And they described their wickedness in such forthright terms as “transgression” (twice), “sin,” and “evil.” They employed no euphemisms⁴

It was as if all he had done had been in vain. Despite their sins against him, he had loved them and forgiven them. Everything he had done had been with an eye to their well-being. How pitiful as his eleven brothers groveled before him as if he had just threatened to take their lives.

And Joseph could not hold back his tears.⁵

Relationships among God’s people may sometimes be tense, especially when, through death, leadership changes hands. But believers can use this to demonstrate God’s sovereign design, even through human failures. They may do so through forgiveness and kindness.⁶

3. Read Genesis 50:19. What do we learn about how God calls us to approach justice and vengeance from this passage? What areas in your life do you struggle with justice and vengeance?

¹ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 572.

² R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 572.

³ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 572.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 572.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 573.

⁶ Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 716.

He certainly was in a position to be “god” in their lives if he so chose. He had been hailed as the savior of Egypt, and in fact the world. And he had earned it. And more, at that very moment he may have had more actual power than Pharaoh. Thus to play God in his brothers’ lives and administer a little “divine justice” in behalf of God could have been tempting. But Joseph had a clear view of who God was, and he matched it with a clear understanding of who he himself was not. He had no desire to be God in their lives. Bless Joseph’s name forever!⁷

Joseph left all the righting of his *personal* wrongs to God and set the example for the faithful in every age. As Paul would later write, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’ ” (Romans 12:19). And again, “See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone” (1 Thessalonians 5:15).⁸

4. What areas in your life are you trying to be God? How much of our troubles in life are results from attempting to be God in our lives and others?

Putting ourselves in the place of God is the source of all our problems.

How much of our relational trouble comes from our attempting to be God in other peoples’ lives. Oh, if we were only God for a day—we would set so many evils right! In our bad moments we imagine that we know what God ought to do with others. And at our very worst moments, we take correction into our own hands—because God apparently has not had the wisdom to do so⁹

5. Read Genesis 50:20-26. What did Joseph reveal to his brothers about God’s sovereignty and providence in this passage? How had Joseph’s life shown evidence that he believed this?

Joseph recognized that his brothers were not the ones who had caused all of the events of his life. Despite their evil intentions, God was ultimately in control over all the events of his life—his slavery, his time in prison, his being placed in a high position of power. In these

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 573.

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 573.

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 573.

events God had worked to save not only Joseph, but also his family and many people in Egypt. In light of this, Joseph showed comfort and favor to his brothers as he had been shown by God.

Second, Joseph told his brothers not to fear because in addition to his having no desire to play God, he discerned God's good providence in their evil¹⁰

This is the mysterious heart of the Joseph story: Through the sins of wicked men, God works good.¹¹

Though no man could see it, God was holding all the strings, pulling them to effect his good purposes. "Don't fear," said Joseph in effect, "you did intentional evil to me, but God has used it for good—to keep you alive as well as many others." This astonishing revelation informs all of Genesis: God created everything "good" (cf. 1:4–31) and then—through all his dealings with his people before and after the flood and in the life of Joseph—he worked out his good plan.¹²

The jealous hatred of brethren; the dreams of a youth; the passage of a caravan bound for Egypt; the preparation of Joseph by a life of adversity; the anger of Pharaoh and the imprisonment of two officials; the strange dreams of these prisoners and Joseph's supernatural gift of interpretation; the dreams of Pharaoh; the change of rainfall in a fourth of Africa to bring about the two cycles of abundance and famine by the flood and failure of the Nile; the elevation of Joseph to the throne of Egypt—all of these things were brought about naturally by the supernatural work of God who is Lord of all, in order to fulfill the counsel of His will. (Barnhouse)¹³

"Why didn't God prevent Joseph from being sold? Why didn't he prevent the slander of Potiphar's wife? Why didn't he prevent the cupbearer from forgetting him for two years? Because God's way is to bring his people into peril for his wise purposes, all the while planning, through that peril, their deliverance...But one of the main points of this story is that *God brings his people into life-threatening peril, all the while preparing, in that very peril, their God-glorifying deliverance.*" – John Piper

¹⁰ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 573.

¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 573.

¹² R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 574.

¹³ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 623.

6. Read Jeremiah 29:11 & Romans 8:28. Do you believe that God is absolutely sovereign in all of life? Do you believe that God’s providence is working in and through your life to effect your good?

From this we understand that God can have no evil thoughts toward his own—no thoughts of calamity. He never has had an evil thought toward a child of his, and he never will. Theodore Laetsch, the Old Testament scholar, makes a most perceptive comment regarding this:

His plans concerning his people are always thoughts of good, of blessing. Even if he is obliged to use the rod, it is the rod not of wrath, but the Father’s rod of chastisement for their temporal and eternal welfare. There is not a single item of evil in his plans for his people, neither in their motive, nor in their conception, nor in their revelation, nor in their consummation.¹⁴

Now when you pile these three great texts together—Genesis 50:20, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good”—Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope”—and Romans 8:28, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose”—when you stack them theologically, they teach that the God of the Bible is so great that he not only breaks into life to do miracles but is involved concurrently and confluent in all that occurs in this world—without violating the nature of things. In other words, he is involved non-miraculously in everyday life, using all events for the good of his people. Any thoughts scaled down from this are not the God of the Bible but are idolatrous diminutions.¹⁵

“God brings his own promise to the brink of failure, only to show that he has been in charge all along.” – John Piper

“From the very beginning it is made plain to us the readers that God is orchestrating this entire story.” - John Piper

As the puritan John Flavel has been so frequently cited as saying, “providence is best read like Hebrew, backwards! Only then is it possible to trace the divine hand on the tiller guiding the gospel ship into a safe harbor. No matter how dark things get, His hand is always in control”.

¹⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 574.

¹⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 575.

Or, as the poet William Cowper wrote in verse:

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense
but trust him for his grace;

Behind a frowning providence
he hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast;
unfolding every hour.

The bud may have a bitter taste,
but sweet will be the flower.

7. What evil in your life may God be intending for good? How should this change the way you see and respond to it? How might He work good from that situation?

So, if you are “in Christ,” you can be sure that everything (even the apparent evil that comes your way) will work out for your good. “The doctrine of providence tells us that the world and our lives are not ruled by fate but by God, who lays bare his purposes of providence in the incarnation of his son” (T. H. L. Parker).¹⁶

If you have never truly believed this, it will change your life if you take it to heart. Joseph believed it and therefore comforted his brothers. He knew that all their evil to him and indeed all he suffered in this life was meant for good. The question I must ask is, *do you truly believe this?*¹⁷

The theme that emanates from Joseph’s life has its clearest expression in the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of our Lord. Christ suffered far more evil in his life on earth than did Joseph, and in his death the wickedness of us all fell upon him, “but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive.”¹⁸

Believers are convinced that their future in God’s program lies elsewhere and that this current world is but part of a pilgrimage to that land. They know that God will surely

¹⁶ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 575.

¹⁷ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 575.

¹⁸ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 577.

visit and deliver his people, in spite of death and discouragement. *Those who trust the Lord to bring about his promised blessings in his own inscrutable ways will demonstrate their faith through the adverse circumstances of life.* If believers wholeheartedly trust in the sovereignty of God, death will lose its power over them, and persecution and antagonism will fade into his sovereign plan, providing a spirit of confidence and kindness.¹⁹

“Bearing that in mind, Christ’s death is, therefore, the greatest fulfillment of the truth embodied in Joseph’s insightful words to his brothers in Genesis 50:20: “As for you, you meant it for evil against me, but God meant it for good.” The fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan in the death of Christ in no way mitigates the guilt of His murderers. While the Lord ordained and orchestrated every event to bring about His desired ends, the wicked human hands that accomplished the work are no less guilty for the sinful role they played.” – John MacArthur, “None Other: Discovering the God of the Bible”.

8. How can we encourage each other when we struggle to see evidence that God is at work in difficult situations? How can we encourage one another to consider our lives from God’s perspective and increase our trust in God?

“The gospel of our salvation was accomplished through the evil of sinful men as they killed the Son of God... This is not random evil against Jesus. This is planned. This is salvation.

There is no gospel, there is no salvation, if God cannot, in perfect holiness, govern the acts of sinful men in bringing his Son to the cross.

The message of Genesis, the life of Joseph, the death of Jesus, and the whole Bible is that God reigns in sovereign love over his people, bringing us into peril, all the while working our salvation from his own just affliction.” – John Piper

PRAYER

As a group, pray the following prayer: God, we ask that You help us identify any places where fear, guilt, or bitterness rule us. Soften our hearts and help us remain focused on You. If we are walking in guilt, allow us to find Your grace. If we are walking in bitterness, allow us to extend forgiveness to those who have wronged us. Remind us that You are constantly at work in our lives, in the good times and in the bad, to bring about our good and Your glory. May we be used to lead others to You. Amen.

¹⁹ Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 716–717.



FURTHER STUDY

<https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/reconciliation-5324/>

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-relationship-between-divine-sovereignty-and-human-responsibility>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/does-god-intend-evil-for-our-good>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/god-s-purposes-are-always-good/>

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/the-providence-of-god>

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