

Sermon Series: When Relationships Collide
To Be Used With: Session Six “The Big Picture”
Sermon Title Possibility: “God Meant It For Good”
Sermon Text: [Genesis 37:5-8,26-28](#); [50:15-21](#)

Introduction

Eugene Peterson said, “A friend showed me a series of pictures he had taken. The subject matter consisted exclusively of household items found in an ordinary kitchen: a matchstick, a pin, the edge of a knife. Household utensils are not ordinarily thought of as possessing much beauty, but all these photographs of very ordinary objects were quite astonishingly beautiful. The beauty was suddenly visible because the photographs had all been made through a magnifying lens. Small, ugly, insignificant items were blown up to great size, and we could see what we had overlooked in our everyday routine. And it turned out that what we had overlooked was careful, planned details that produced exquisite beauty” ([Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience In The Same Direction*, 78](#)).

The Christian life works that way sometimes. We don’t always know how beautifully God is working in our lives until His plan is zoomed in and we see it for what it is. We spend many of our days waiting, often anxiously, for God to reveal what He is doing. During this time we have to trust that God is working in the midst of our circumstances to bring about His good will for us. One of the classic examples of this is Joseph. His story is one of pain and prosperity, triumph and trial. Yet in the midst of it all, he looked to God’s hand and trusted God’s sovereign purposes. Let’s look at a few window’s into Joseph’s life from the book of Genesis and see how we can learn to trust God’s plan for our lives.

[Read Genesis 37:5-8, 26-28; 50:15-21, narrate briefly to fill in the gaps of the story]

Joseph’s story is rich with wisdom and insight into our own struggles and conflicts. The same God who was with Joseph, is with us. What can we learn from Joseph and how he looked to God’s hand in the midst of conflict and trials?

1. Know that you play a role in your own suffering (37:5–8, 26–28).

The opening verses of Genesis 37 reveal a bit about Joseph’s character, at least at the outset. We learn that Jacob loved him the most (37:1), and that Joseph brought bad reports to Jacob about his brothers (37:2). We want to guard against going where the narrative does not take us in this chapter, but neither do we want to justify all of Joseph’s actions. Bruce Waltke says the word *report* (v.2) denotes news slanted to damage the victim (Prov. 10:18). He says, “At the very least the young Joseph seems to be a pestering, tattletale little brother” (Bruce Waltke, *Genesis*, 499).

We see further evidence of dysfunction and conflict between the brothers when Joseph retells his dream to them. They rightly understand it to mean that Joseph will reign over them one day. When they heard it, “They hated him even more for his dreams and for his words” (v.8). This of course led to their betrayal of Joseph which sent him eventually to Egypt. We cannot overlook Joseph’s own role in the conflicts he faced. God is sovereign over all things, as we will see. But

humans are responsible for their own actions. We don't want to place all the blame on Joseph, but we should not overlook the fact that he provoked at least some of the hatred from his brothers.

You can cause conflicts. James 4 says, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (James 4:1-3). The causes of the conflicts here are one's own passions and desires. We can say things, buy things, go places, visit website, and pursue relationships that damage us. We cannot always claim innocence when it comes to conflicts and suffering. Sin causes conflict. Let us not overlook this sobering fact.

Application: Paul Tripp says, "We are the biggest danger to ourselves" (Paul Tripp, *Whiter Than Snow*, 39). How are you prone to overlook this truth? Do you tend to always blame God or others for your conflicts and trials? What are some ways you cause your own suffering?

2. Resist the temptation to revile back (50:15-21).

At the end of Genesis, after Jacob's death, Joseph's brothers begged him to forgive them of their transgressions against him. When they spoke to him, Joseph wept (50:17). He said, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God" (50:19)? He then assured them that he would take care of them and their families (50:21). Joseph, one of the most powerful men in Egypt, refused to harm his brothers. The hurt they caused him was real. The evil they meant against him was real. But Joseph saw a greater plan at work which led him to forgive them, and seek their good.

One of the greatest evidences that we really trust God is that we refuse to harbor bitterness and anger toward others during a conflict. During seasons of suffering and conflict, blaming others feels natural and powerful. We can find creative ways to blame-shift and retaliate against those closest to us. Or we can blame external forces like our upbringing or our job. We must resist this. We must look deeper and trust that a bigger plan is at work. We must look to the Lord Jesus who "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1Pet. 2:22-24).

Application: In what ways have you retaliated against others who meant evil against you? Will you instead trust Christ's love and example to overcome this temptation?

3. Look for God's hand in everything (50:20).

What Joseph said to his brothers in chapter 50, verse 20 is amazing. What he did *not* say is even more amazing! He did not say "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God *used* it for good." Nor did he say, "As for you, you meant evil against me, *but I overcame it for good.*" Rather he saw God working *through* their sin and evil intentions. God mysteriously worked through the wickedness of his brothers to bring about Joseph's triumph in Egypt and the saving of many lives through the famine. This is only something God can do.

This raises many philosophical and theological questions about the nature of God, free will, sovereignty, and the nature of causation. But Joseph never engages these issues. He saw God at work in everything. God's hand moved and guided Joseph's life, and Joseph trusted this. He knew what we learn later from Proverbs "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord" (Prov. 16:33). God is sovereign over all the details of our lives. He upholds, sustains, and governs everything. Scripture is clear, God does not sin and He is not the author of evil. Rather, He is good and does good (Ps. 119:68). We can trust that all the details of our lives are in His hands (Rom. 8:28).

Application: Are you trusting God's sovereign plan for your life? Be reminded and encouraged that He always works for good.

Conclusion

The evil Joseph experienced at the hand of his brothers is heart wrenching. But it is nothing compared to the evil the Lord Jesus experienced. He, the sinless one, suffered and died at the hands of sinful men. Yet Luke reminds us that God predestined this to take place (Acts 4:26–27). The death of Christ was God's plan to bring about the salvation of many people. And if God did not spare His own Son, how will He fail to give us all things (Rom. 8:28-32)? This is our hope and our trust in the midst of conflict.

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