

genesis: the real story



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genesis: the REAL story

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242 guide

This guide has been created as a tool to help you study and live what you are learning from the Bible and weekend services here at RiverGlen.

In Acts 2:42 we are told that the people in the first church were living out what they were learning from the apostles' teaching. *The purpose of this guide is to equip you to put into practice what you learn.*

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ABRAHAM

Big Idea

God is in the process of restoring the world and wants me to be part of what He is doing.

Icebreaker

Bring to mind and share with the group one of the most memorable “leaving home” experiences. Perhaps it was your first sleep-over at a friend’s house or leaving for college or the first time you traveled over-seas without your family.

Introduction - Wide Open Spaces

My dad and I still get a bit teary-eyed when we hear the Dixie Chicks singing “Wide Open Spaces.” It was my theme song as I began my personal journey out of the nest. Leaving home is something we all can relate to, whether it was the first day of school, our first week at summer camp, going off to college, getting married or simply moving out on our own! There are some of us who have also experienced this from a different perspective – the ones being left behind and watching our loved one go into “Wide Open Spaces.” Leaving the town, home, family and environments we have grown up in and depended upon so much results in a wide range of feelings and emotions for both those leaving and those staying.

Abraham was 75-years-old when God called him and his family into “wide open spaces.” Abraham’s call was about so much more than stretching his wings and finding his place – Abraham had been called by God to enter into a covenant relationship with God that would eventually set the stage for the coming of Christ and the birth of the Church.

Contrasting Biblical figures like Job or Noah, Abraham is just as well known for his flaws as he is for his great faith. However, despite the many character flaws in Abraham, God’s decision was to bless him and his family and to use them as a catalyst to bless the nations – including us today! In effect, the mission of the Church – our mission as Christ-followers – “Helping People Find Their Way Back To God” - began with “Father Abraham” stepping out and blindly following God’s call.

1. Read Genesis 12:1-4. Have you ever experienced a time that you felt clearly God was asking you to make a bold move (either geographically, relationally or in some other way)? Share your story with the group.

Although Abraham is a man of great faith, he drops the ball on more than one occasion. Scripture gives a clear depiction of Abraham’s faulty character.

2. Read Genesis 12:10-20. What are some small areas that we are tempted to compromise what God has called us to on a daily basis?

3. Has there ever been a time when your character kept you from obeying a clear command from the Lord? What were the repercussions?

Ironically Abraham was called by God to be a blessing to all nations and here his sin is causing diseases to fall on Pharaoh and his household! Being called by God does not ensure that our marred characters will not continue to throw obstacles in our paths as our hearts long to faithfully follow. However, Abraham is praised in Scripture for his faith in God – not his moral perfection. Hebrews 11, often referred to as the “faith chapter”, recounts the faithful actions of many of the early Biblical characters. Abraham gets the largest focus in this chapter by far and numerous times his faith is celebrated!

4. How can you relate to Abraham's moral handicap? Do you find yourself encouraged by Abraham's "human" side or frustrated that he couldn't keep his act together?

5. How can Abraham's failure encourage us in our own pursuits in becoming men and women of authentic faith? How does the faith of Abraham described in Hebrews 11 challenge us to live in faith despite our current struggles and failures?

The life of Abraham shows us clearly that our God is concerned with the hearts of His followers. It is through our faith in Him that He uses us, despite our character flaws and short-comings.

Re-read Genesis 12:2-3.

Beginning with Abraham, God set aside a group of people to be His spokespeople to the rest of the world. Today, as Christ-followers, we are all "children of Abraham." The words God spoke to Abraham are the same words He speaks to us today. We have been blessed to be a blessing."

Paul states it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:17-20:

17"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

The "blessing" we have been given is ultimately reconciliation to God through Christ.

6. How are you and your family currently blessing others out of your own received blessings? Share a specific situation where you have been used recently to bless someone else out of your abundance.

7. What does the “ministry of reconciliation” practically look like in daily life for the Christ-follower?

8. In what ways are you being challenged to be a blessing out of the abundance you have received?

What’s Next?

This week, identify one way you have been blessed by God and ask Him to show you how to be a blessing to others through that.

Make a purposed attempt this week to live with your eyes open to the foundational need for reconciliation and ask God to grow your understanding of what it means to be a minister of reconciliation in this world.

Decide as a small group how you can put into effect the “ministry of reconciliation.” Identify one action step you can take as a group this week to act on this call.

SARAH

Big Idea

Being a person of faith means waiting and trusting in God.

Icebreaker

What are some classic songs written about waiting?

Introduction

My dad has coined many phrases that he used so often in my life that they have become bricks in my foundation. “Stick-to-itiveness,” “It builds character,” and “know-so-hope” are three of these bricks. I can recall when I finally understood the difference between a whimsical, “hope-so” hope and a confident “know-so” hope.” The Hope that we have as followers of Christ is not a “hope-so” hope built upon chance or potential or even deep desire; it is a know-so hope built on the promises of a faithful God. We may know the promises of God, but it is up to us to choose to trust in them with a firm hope rooted in God’s faithfulness or to settle for a whimsical hope that God might really be who He says He is.

1. Discuss the differences between confident hope and whimsical hope. Which promises of God do you find it easy to have confident hope in, and which ones leave you with more of a whimsical hope?

Last week we talked a lot about Abraham. Despite Abraham’s issues, God set him apart to be the father of a great nation – Israel. Through Abraham’s offspring, God promised to bless the world. This week we are taking a look at Abraham’s wife, Sarah. Much like Abraham, God chose Sarah not because of who she was but because of how He intended to use her!

Sarah is a great woman of faith, yet she has many struggles. She has a husband who's not always exactly a stand-up guy. She gets tired of waiting on God's promise and tries to make it happen on her own timeline by having a surrogate child through her handmaid Hagar, which results in all sorts of conflict. When God tells her He is still going to give her a child despite her advanced age, she laughs. She struggles with jealousy and spite with her handmaid Hagar even after God fulfills His promise. All of Sarah's problems seem to be rooted in her struggle to wait on God to do what He said He would do.

2. Is it easier or harder for you to wait for something when you know how long the wait is going to be?

3. Have you ever gotten tired of waiting on the Lord and tried to make something happen in your own power? Share your story.

In taking matters into her own hands, Sarah "made" things happen, but ultimately those things did not fulfill the promise of God. In fact, there are continued ramifications in today's world from Sarah's choices made in impatience. By giving Hagar to Abraham to conceive an heir, Ishmael was born, but Ishmael was not God's intended seed of Abraham to carry on the covenant relationship with God's people. Today, the genealogical and religious lines of Ishmael and Isaac flow into the Muslim and Jewish faiths. Sarah's unwillingness to trust in God's promises with a confident hope continues to yield horrible consequences in our world today. The conflict that began in the home of Sarah and Abraham continues to be played out worldwide.

After Sarah goes about having children in disobedience to God's plan, God still reaffirms His promise to make Abraham into a great nation through his offspring with Sarah. God chose Abraham and Sarah out of His grace, not because they were great role-models for all generations to follow. God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah is about God's character.

4. God's promise was going to be fulfilled with or without Abraham and Sarah being rooted in an unshakeable know so hope. What do you think the purpose is in God choosing them to be the father and mother of His people?

When God finally ends the wait and tells Abraham and Sarah about His plans to bless them, check out Sarah's response in Genesis 18:10-15

10 "Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. 11 Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master [d] is old, will I now have this pleasure?" 13 Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD ? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son."

5. Waiting is hard! What helps you get through difficult times of waiting?

6. Are there any promises of the Lord's you have read in Scripture or felt in your heart were given to you that have caused you to laugh in disbelief? What drives that initial disbelief?

Have you ever heard the question, “Can God make a rock so big that He can’t pick it up?” Growing up that question used to keep us elementary aged kids’ minds reeling for what seemed like ages! Here, in Genesis 18:14, God Himself asks a grown-up version of that question. God asks Abraham; “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” The obvious answer here is, “no.” However, all logic and understanding that Abraham and Sarah have leave them hopeless even with the possibility of reproducing.

7. Is there a situation in your life that logically has no hope? How could God’s promises be challenging you to stand firmly in a know-so hope? Humbly encourage each other with solid truth about God’s character that speaks to the illogical situation.

What’s Next?

If there was a promise of God revealed to you through this study that spoke to an issue you are struggling to wait patiently in, write that promise in 3 different places that you are sure to be in each day. (ie: your car, mirror, planner)

Find ways this week to encourage those around you who are clinging to a shallow “hope-so-hope” in the deeper truths of a faithful God. Find Scripture-promises that will help them find firm footing as they face their painful circumstance.

Make it a discipline to ask yourself in the face of your daily doubts, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?”

ISAAC

Big Idea

The story of Abraham and Isaac teaches us to trust God to provide what we need when what He is doing is making no sense.

Icebreaker

What is the most precious, loved personal possession in your life? What would be your response if God asked you to give it up?

Introduction

Isaac was not just the son that Abraham loved. When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to him, changed his name to Abraham and gave him the covenant of circumcision, which is a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham, the covenant of God to be the God “for the generations to come, for Abraham and the descendents after him.” To his 90 year old wife, Sarai, God changed her name to Sarah, and promised her that she would bear a son, Isaac, with whom God would establish his covenant. Isaac was loved, yes, but don’t forget the significance of Isaac in God’s developing story: Isaac was the child of a promise, the child with whom a covenant was to be established by God with Abraham.

1. Read Genesis 22:1-2, 22:10-14. Discuss the emotions both Abraham and Isaac might have been feeling during the stages in the above story.

At first glance, some might think God to be evil or twisted because of the command to Abraham. This is not the act of divine child abuse, as some might suggest, but a necessary act in God’s developing story of redemption, an act of unparalleled and unmerited love.

If God had asked anything less from Abraham, say, his house, or his favorite donkey, we as readers would automatically respond, “well sure he gave up his favorite donkey, but he surely wouldn’t give up his son.” As Oswald Chambers explains, “God has to refine and perfect Abraham’s faith and God knew that there was no other way for him to do this.”

2. Read Genesis 22:12. In what ways has God tested you in the past? Did the testing “make sense” to you? How did this feel at the time, and how did you respond to the testing?

3. How did Abraham respond to God’s call?

4. How has God’s testing of you developed and strengthened your faith or changed your view of God in a positive way, a way more accurate and faithful to the true God of the Bible?

5. Have there been times of God’s testing in your life that to this day, you are bitter, resentful, or angry toward God? How might God use these times of testing for good?

Read 1 Peter 1:7-9:

“Your faith will be like gold that has been tested in a fire. And these trials will prove that your faith is worth much more than gold that can be destroyed. They will show that you will be given praise and honor and glory when Jesus Christ returns. You have never seen Jesus, and you don’t see him now. But still you love him and have faith in him, and no words can tell how glad and happy you are to be saved. That’s why you have faith.”

From the story of Abraham and Isaac, we, as observers learn that Abraham was prepared to do anything for God. Abraham didn't try to resolve the conflict, but moved ahead on faith, realizing that an infinitely perfect God does not make mistakes. Not only did it not make sense for God to ask Abraham to offer the son he loved, but it must have confused him immensely – God had promised a blessing through Isaac – and now he was asking him to sacrifice him. Nonetheless, his trust in God is exhibited through his unwavering obedience to the call to action.

6. Its one thing to say you trust God with your whole life, but as a good tree does not bear bad fruit, the fruit that our lives bare often suggests otherwise. In what areas of our lives do we say we trust God, but our actions might suggest otherwise?

It's interesting that in this story we don't know what Abraham is thinking or feeling. He just does what he is told. And they head out on the journey to Mt Moriah. Was Abraham sure he was really going to have to do this horrible, unthinkable thing?

The fact of the matter is, it doesn't matter what Abraham is thinking here. Whether he responded to the command with a deeply troubled, anxious, saddened heart and a gut-wrenching sense of sadness or not is not the point in this story. Abraham responds, and responds immediately, in obedience. There will be times when we don't immediately "like" what God is testing us with. It doesn't matter – our faith is grounded in a God

Read Ephesians 2:5:

“...who made us alive in Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions”

Big Idea Revisited

The story of Abraham and Isaac teaches us to trust God to provide what we need when what He is doing is making no sense. Abraham is following God's call for his life – not blindly, but by faith. We too are called to follow God, not blindly, but by faith. We can be sure that even when God is working in ways that seem mysterious to us – this God is trustworthy. The same God behind your trials and testing is the God who sacrificed his one and only son Jesus for you, out of sheer love for you. That is how we know we can trust God no matter what.

Read Hebrews 11:17-19. This passage by the writer of Hebrews gives a glimpse of Abraham's mind behind his action "Abraham REASONED that God could even raise the dead" - this suggests a future looking hope, in what God can do with currently "dead" circumstances.

7. Do we have that kind of hope? That no matter what we give to God, God can be trusted with it?

Read Romans 8:32. We need not worry, the fruit and benefit of our obedience may not be immediately obvious to us, but it will most certainly be eternally beneficial to us, and most satisfying and glorious to God. Our hope is not grounded in emotion or circumstances or events of our life, but in the immutable, unchangeable love of God. No matter what the circumstances look like in your life, we have the promise of hope, which does not disappoint.

Next Steps

Until you admit and acknowledge the areas in your life that you don't trust God with, the areas where God is working and it doesn't make sense, the areas that you aren't willing to sacrifice and consecrate to the Lord, you will not and can not grow in Christ. When Jesus says to deny yourself and follow him, he does not make the offer contingent upon anything.

Even when it does not make sense, we are called to follow. Why? Because our father in heaven has proved himself a loving, trustworthy, merciful God who "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" Romans 8:28. Don't miss that last point – HIS purpose – we are living for the purposes of the Lord. Not our own.

Make a list of the things that you struggle with sacrificing to the Lord – the things you do not trust God with. Then, share them with the group.

jacob

Big Idea

Through our struggles God changes us into the people we are meant to be.

Icebreaker

Can you recall a time in your life that you fought with another person? How did this affect/impact you?

Introduction

The story of Jacob reveals that he has been a deceiver, a con- niver, and a con man since day one. He does whatever he has to do to get what he wants, even if it belongs to someone else. Jacob deceives his brother, his father, and nearly meets his match as a deceiver in his uncle Laban. He had been wrestling with everybody since in the womb and in the story today he ends up wrestling with God, but this wrestling is different. In the scripture that follows we see how this wrestling plays out in Jacob's life.

Read Genesis 32:22-26:

“That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.”

Jacob becomes “crippled” when he wrestles with God. Throughout Jacob's life he fights to attain what he wants for himself, but finds out quickly that you cannot do this with God. We all wrestle and fight God for control. God is always present and always pursuing

us, but often times we push him away trying to take control of any and all situations.

1. What does it mean to wrestle with God?

2. How do you wrestle with God?

It is not until we have come to complete desperation that we cry to God for help. Jacob is desperate. Jacob has come to the point in his life where he has reached the end of himself and is now completely reliant upon God. He has to give up control of his circumstances and allow God to take it from here. We must understand that God has the authority and the ability to change his people and acknowledge that it is through him alone that this happens. Jacob tries to do it himself when he says, “I will not let you go unless you bless me,” but we quickly see Jacob wounded and defeated in this effort.

3. Why did God touch Jacob’s hip and wound him the way he did? Was this necessary?

4. In what ways do you fight God for control in your own life?

The struggle that Jacob faces while wrestling with God is the point of the journey. It is not just that God spares him, but that he has been transformed through the process. In his struggle Jacob sees God face to face and through this understands who God created him to be.

Spiritual development/growth/formation is a lot like 12 Step recovery. AA is never intended to be just about getting sober. It's about what they call, "character defects" and the focus becomes the person that you are, not just what you do and don't do as an addict in recovery. It's a process of personal transformation and change, and not primarily a process of fixing problems. A person's problems, hang-ups, and habits on the outside are a reflection of the need for change on the inside. We can see this transformation take place through Jacob in the following scripture.

5. Read Genesis 27:31. How did Jacob's encounter with God affect him and change him? How is he better for it?

6. Is it significant that Jacob's name is changed to Israel? Why?

7. How have you seen God positively change your own life through struggle?

What's Next?

In the following week prayerfully consider the following questions and refer to the scripture that follows:

What would it look like to allow God to have control of our lives and transform us in our struggles? Through the process of struggle who is God calling you to be?

jacob to joseph

Big Idea

We're all messed up, but God sticks with us.

Icebreaker

Go around the room and share the best prank you ever pulled on a sibling when you were younger. If you don't have any siblings share about a thing you did to a friend or cousin.

Introduction

Looking throughout history, it seems as though there is a defining moment in peoples lives that leads them to making a change. It is a moment that renames them, that changes the core being of who they are. For some people it happens in an instant, for others it happens over a period of time. Theodore Roosevelt lost his wife and child and spent time in The Badlands of South Dakota before moving to New York, becoming a commissioner and going on to become President of the United States. Gandhi was on a train in South Africa when he was kicked off for being a minority which was the defining moment in his life to stand up for those who are oppressed. Each of these men had to wrestle with something in order to be changed. Neither of these men were perfect. Both had their flaws and brokenness. Likewise, Jacob was on his way to meet his brother and spent a night wresting with God. It was a life changing and name changing event.

1. Read Genesis 32:22-32. What do you think was the purpose of this moment in Jacobs life? Why would God have chosen to pick a fight with Jacob at that time?

2. Why was this moment so significant for Jacob?

Jacob was known throughout his entire life by the name he was given which in Hebrew means “one who supplants, trips up another and takes his place.” He lived up to that name by choosing to be a deceiver, a liar and a cheater to get the things he wanted. Multiple times he took advantage of his family members’ weaknesses. When Jacob was confronted with his family again, he spent the night wrestling with God. After, his name was changed to Israel so that he was no longer a deceiver but “one who wrestles with God and has overcome.”

No one can dispute that Jacob was a sinful man. He was a liar and a cheater, but God still used him to bring His grace to the world. Regardless of Jacob’s serious mistakes in his past and the wrongs God knew he would do in the future, God still desired for him to be used.

3. What are the things in our lives that keep us from accepting that God desires to do the same with us? What keeps us from following God to where He might be calling us to go or to what he might be calling us to do?

4. Give a recap of the family dynamics in the story of Jacob and Joseph? What was going on in the story that led to Joseph being sold into slavery? And what did the brothers do to cover up their actions?

5. Read Genesis 37. What was missing between Israel’s family members throughout this story?

6. What do you think could have prevented the situation between Joseph and his brothers?

7. In your own life, what are things that you have seen happen in your family or circle of friends, past and present that have led to broken relationships?

8. Have those relationships been reconciled? What did it take or what would it take for reconciliation to occur?

I think more often than not we struggle to admit we are wrong and the difficulties we face. We have trouble admitting it to our spouses, our children, our friends and our community. But as we can see through this story, not confessing our sins can lead to bad things.

James 5:16 reads:

16"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."

James was the brother of Jesus. He knew Jesus better than most. He grew up with him, lived with him and believed him when he said he was the LORD. James most likely knew his Old Testament. It would be hard for James to write this verse and not think of all the situations that occurred throughout the Old Testament that could have been avoided by listening to what the Lord is saying through James in this verse.

9. Do you find this verse easy to obey? What keeps us from heeding the advice that James gives us in this verse?

All of us are broken. Like Israel, we all encounter God in different ways and at different times and we still fail, we are still broken and we still deal with the sin and brokenness of others that affect our lives. If nothing else, it's a relief that we have a God who desires

to use us despite our sin and brokenness.

Next Steps

1. For the next week think of all the experience you have had from broken relationships, and think about how God wants to use them for his glory.

2. Think about your brokenness and the things you are scared to share with others, and think of the people who you can share those things with so that you can find healing.

3. Think about what God is asking you to do next in your walk with him. Where is He leading you and what it will take to accept that you can be used by God.

One last thing, take a look at what was said about the line of individuals that Jesus comes from:

Noah was a drunk
Abraham was too old
Isaac was a daydreamer
Jacob was a liar
Joseph was abused
Moses was a murderer
Samson was a womanizer
Rahab was a hooker
David was an adulterer and had someone killed
Jonah was a racist
Peter denied Christ
Paul persecuted the church and had people killed
Lazarus was dead.

It is doubtful that anyone could read this list and honestly believe that they are too horrible to fit in. These are the people God used. These are the people who were special enough to have their name in the most important story ever written. If your name was on this list what would it say?

After visualizing your name on this list with what ever baggage or sin is next to it. Put the words “deeply loved and completely forgiven by Jesus Christ.” That is the deepest truth that we all need to hold on to.

Joseph & Potiphar's Wife

Big Idea

Doing the right thing will often lead to suffering.

Icebreaker

Share one person in history you greatly admire. How did that person handle difficult decisions that had the potential to bring less than ideal consequences?

Introduction

Many people who are admired or respected have earned that admiration through difficult choices they have made despite opposition. You'd be hard pressed to find an honorable historical figure who did not suffer greatly for the exact thing for which they made history.

The 2006 movie *Amazing Grace* tells the inspirational story of William Wilberforce, a key figure in the abolition of slavery in Britain. One of the most memorable scenes is at the end of the film when Lord Charles Fox addresses the entire House and the gallery saying;

“When people speak of great men, they think of men like Napoleon - men of violence. Rarely do they think of peaceful men. But contrast the reception they will receive when they return home from their battles. Napoleon will arrive in pomp and in power, a man who's achieved the very summit of earthly ambition. And yet his dreams will be haunted by the oppressions of war. William Wilberforce, however, will return to his family, lay his head on his pillow and remember: the slave trade is no more.”

Wilberforce fought one of the world's ugliest evils, human slavery, during a time when few were willing to speak up against it and entire nations built their empires upon the trafficking of people.

1. Responding to Charles Fox's statement regarding Wilberforce, how was Wilberforce to be compensated for his battle?

2. Do you personally know anyone who has given their entire lives to fighting peacefully for a cause you thought was silly? How about a cause so great you are in awe of their willingness to battle

Read Genesis 39:6b-19. There's really no other way to look at this story – Joseph was wronged. He took a stand of integrity and honor and he was determined to honor his master and chose not to be around Potiphar's wife. Joseph did everything right and he spoke honestly with authority to the woman. He put strong boundaries between them and when physically accosted, he ran for his life.

3. Can you relate to Joseph's story? Have you ever done everything in your power to remain innocent in a situation only to have to suffer the consequences of someone else's deception?

There is no guarantee that obeying God will keep us out of trouble. This goes against most of what we were taught as children, but as Joseph's story illustrates, sometimes we have to suffer the consequences of actions of others.

4. Consider the alternative. How might Joseph's story have ended differently had he given into Potiphar's wife and slept with her? Is it possible that the ultimate outcome could have been better than what Joseph faced?

Every day we are faced with decisions. If we make our decisions based upon the initial response of those around us without taking into account our own moral values, we may fall short. Joseph knew God's law. He knew what it meant to be an honorable man and he chose to keep himself pure and honest before God and Potiphar. The consequences of this choice were dire. Joseph was in prison for years, forgotten and alone. He paid a high price for obeying God, but the Lord didn't forget him.

Read Genesis 39:20 - 23:

20 "But while Joseph was there in the prison, 21 the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. 22 So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. 23 The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did."

The Lord was with Joseph. Had Joseph turned his back on God's commands, he would not have carried the blessing of God into that prison cell (and you can bet he would have at least ended up there – if not dead had he given into Potiphar's wife).

Considering how God not only was with Joseph, but also made him successful, could it be that when we take the easy way out (disobeying God to please man and avoid conflict or persecution) we also miss out on the blessing of God?

5. Identify and share any areas in your life that you know God is making you successful because of your decision to sacrifice in obedience to Him.

6. Can you recognize an area in your life where you are missing out on the blessing of God because you are choosing to play it safe? Share your situation and encourage and challenge each other to risk.

What's Next?

As you go through your day tomorrow, try to remain aware of who you are living to please. Is it others or God?

Identify where you are hiding from doing the right thing for fear of persecution and purpose to obey God.

Ask someone in the group to hold you accountable to taking an action step you are convicted you need to take to become a person of obedience.

Joseph & his brothers

Big Idea

God is always at work, even when I have no idea what He is doing.

Icebreaker

Have you ever played a practical joke on someone and then suffered the agony of waiting for retaliation? Share your stories with the group.

Introduction

I have an older and much bigger brother. I was a girl and I was smaller, and growing up he was determined to treat me like the brother he'd asked for and never received. He'd ask me to be his target for his paint ball or BB gun practice. He'd shoot arrows at me with his bow and throw lit firecrackers in my direction. I didn't enjoy this, but what I gave me the most anxiety was when I would initiate the attack. There were times, typically during long car rides, when my brother would provoke me and I would punch him first. I knew, as soon as my fist touched his flesh I was done for. I knew I'd lost and he knew it too. Sometimes he'd punch me right back, but more often he'd hold on to his "right" to punch back for a while, building the anticipation as the attack became imminent, yet undeclared. The waiting was much more painful than the actual punch.

1. Can you relate to that feeling of imminent consequence? Give one example from your childhood and one from your life today. How do you respond differently today than you did as a child to these situations?

Hopefully we've learned the lesson of cause and effect in all aspects of life. What comes up must come down. You don't pay your taxes and you get in big trouble with the IRS. You let the gas tank run on empty and you eventually find yourself stranded. Indulge in eating out while on vacation, come home with a 10 pound souvenir you didn't plan for. Our parents, teachers, government and the physics of the universe have taught us well about the consequences of our choices and some situations are predictable.

The story of Joseph turns logic and traditional cause and effect on its head. Through the story of Joseph, we learn how God can take even the most painful situations and use them for His glory. Ultimately, what God did for Joseph and his family is what God is continuing to do throughout the world through His body of Christ-followers.

2. Read Genesis 50:15-18. Reflecting on all Joseph had experienced in his life, what do you think he was thinking and feeling as he wept?

3. From the perspective of Joseph's brothers, what might they have been expecting to happen once their father was dead? Where do you think this expectation was coming from?

4. Read Genesis 50:19-20. What does his response reveal about Joseph? What does it reveal about God?

Joseph's response to his brothers reveals a lot about Joseph but it also reveals a lot about God. Joseph most likely looked over his life with the humble reality that he never would have the position and power and favor with the Lord had he not been separated from his father, sold into slavery, falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and forgotten in prison.

Joseph lays out a solid belief system about God and the lives of those who follow Him. We can trust from this story that when we live our lives by submitting to the will of God, no circumstance we face in life will be exempt from bringing God glory.

5. Is there a situation in your life right now that seems to challenge this idea? Share it with the group.

6. Read Romans 8:28. Compare the above verse with the common expression; “Everything happens for a reason.”

Read James 1:2-4. As followers of Christ, not only are we promised that God will redeem the hardest and most difficult trials we face and use them for good, but in this Scripture we are exhorted to consider them pure joy. According to James, there is more to be experienced than just a resignation that “all things happen for a purpose.” We are to experience pure joy in the midst of our trials and hardships.

7. What does it mean to consider facing trials as pure joy? How can that look in our practical lives?

I was on the train into the city recently and on the furthest end of the car from me were some high school students. If you ever observe teens in public settings, it can be interesting and sometimes entertaining. For me however, it was a relief. What a JOY to be out of that stage of life. I remember how frustrating it was to be stuck in immaturity – to sit outside of myself aware of my awkward quirks, my obnoxious tendencies, my cries for attention and yet feel powerless against them.

According to James, when our faith is tested our character is reinforced with perseverance which develops us into mature, complete followers of Christ. Looking at those teens might remind me of a difficult stage in my life, but ultimately had I not gone through those years; I would not be the maturing person I am today.

8. Is it easier to find joy in your past trials than in the current trials you are facing today? Share one current trial with the group and encourage each other in the ways these trials can mold our character.

9. Take time to encourage each other in how you see God at work in your lives.


Joseph's story can be our story if we let it. What God was doing as the book of Genesis closes is still going on today in us and through us. God is still bringing the world back to Himself through His people.

Next Steps

This week spend some time with the story of Joseph. Try to identify with the difficulties he faced.

Set some time aside this week to search your heart and allow God to reveal any grudges you might be holding against someone. Ask God to give you the freedom to respond as Joseph did with kindness and compassion.

If there is a current trial in your life you are facing, share it with one person someone and ask them to pray for you this week to be able to find joy as you see how God can redeem the situation.



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