

Life Rerouted
Genesis 45:1–15, 50:18–26
Sunday, August 9, 2026

Let us pray: Speak to us, Lord, that we might *know you*, and in knowing you, better know ourselves and our neighbors, in Christ. Amen.

Last week we started looking at Joseph's story. We saw that Joseph is the favorite son of his father Jacob, and his brothers *hate* him for that. So they attack him, throw him in a pit, and *sell* him into slavery. Last week was just the *beginning* of Joseph's story. It spans 14 chapters, the most of anyone else in the book of Genesis. But for the sake of time, we are skipping right to the *end* of Joseph's story. So let me give you a quick summary of the 20-plus years in between.

Joseph gets sold as slave and taken to Egypt, while his brothers tell their father Jacob that a wild animal has killed him. In Egypt, he spends three years as a slave to a man named Potiphar, until Potiphar's wife makes advances on Joseph, and then when he *rejects* those advances, she makes false accusations against Joseph, and he is thrown in prison for ten years. While he's in prison, two of the other prisoners there with him have dreams that they can't understand. Joseph is able to interpret their dreams, which end up coming true. So Joseph gains a reputation for being able to interpret dreams.

A while later, Pharaoh has a dream that he can't understand. Well, one of the prisoners whose dream Joseph interpreted now works for Pharaoh, so he tells Pharaoh about Joseph. Pharaoh sends for Joseph, and he interprets Pharaoh's dreams, and they turn out just like Joseph said. Pharaoh comes to trust Joseph, and he makes him second in command in Egypt, placing him in charge of all the food stockpiles. There are seven good years where lots of crops are produced, and Joseph stores up a lot of food. Those seven good years are followed by seven years of

famine, where the whole region around them does not have enough food. But because Joseph stored up all that food during the good years, there is plenty of food in Egypt. The famine eventually reaches the land where Joseph's family lives, and they are suffering. But they hear that there is plenty of food in Egypt, so Jacob sends his other sons to Egypt to get food.

When they arrive, Joseph sees them, but *they* don't recognize *him*, because he looks like an Egyptian now. Remember, it's been 20 years. Joseph has taken on Egyptian customs, he has an Egyptian wife, and the brothers all think Joseph is dead. They have come to believe the lie they told their father about him. So since Joseph is a very powerful man in Egypt, he decides to have a little fun with his brothers; get a little payback for how they treated him all those years ago. He plays all these tricks on them, accuses them of stealing, and they think that they are going to be thrown in prison or killed. They are so scared that they are literally bowing down before him, just like in Joseph's dreams at the beginning of the story. That's when we reach the point of today's reading, where Joseph can no longer contain himself, and he reveals himself to his brothers.

Joseph sends everyone else out of the room, so it's just him and his brothers. He weeps loudly and says, "I am Joseph." But it says his brothers could not even respond to him, because they were so dismayed at his presence. That Hebrew word that we translate as *dismayed* is the word *bahal*, and it's not just like they were *upset*. It means, "anxious, afraid, terrified." Joseph's brothers are *terrified* of him. Because they remember what they *did* to him, and now he is in a position to get revenge. They have no idea what he is going to do.

What would *you* do if *you* were in that situation? Someone has caused you immense pain, and now you are in a position to get revenge. Maybe you *have* been in that situation. You can either

keep holding onto the grudge, or you can let go of it. Sometimes we are so immersed in the hurt that we can't see anything beyond that, and we *act* from that place of pain. But that's not what Joseph does. Joseph calls his brothers closer and says to them again, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or afraid or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; *for God sent me before you to preserve life...* So it was not *you* who sent me here, but *God*."

Now, we *hear* that, and the way a lot of people understand that is that this was all God's plan. That God *destined* Joseph to go to Egypt. That God made all of this happen. And what is *implied* there is that *God* is the cause of Joseph's suffering. That's the way we understand *our own* lives a lot of the time. We get sick or lose a job or something bad happens to us, and we say, "Did I do something wrong? Is God angry with me? Is God punishing me?" Or we lose someone we love, and either *we* say it or someone *around* us says, "It's all part of God's plan."

A few years ago, we had lost a good friend to cancer; a 37-year-old woman named Marissa, who left behind a husband, a four-year-old boy, and a six-month-old girl. Jen and I went to her funeral, and the message that we heard over and over again from the pastor and the musicians who were leading the service was, "This is *so hard*, and we can't understand it, but this is part of God's plan." Not long after that, I was having breakfast with her husband, and we were talking about everything, and he asked me, "Did God *destine* Marissa to get cancer?" Well, I could not say, "No," fast enough! And you might say what *he* said, "But how do you *know*? How do you know what God's plan is?" Because I look at Jesus.

Jesus Christ is God in human flesh. Scripture calls him the image of the invisible God. When we look at Jesus, we see who God is and what God is like. If we want to know what God's *will*

is, we look at Jesus. And what we *see* in Jesus is that God is a God of healing and wholeness and blessing. God is a God of compassion and forgiveness and love. God is a God of resurrection and new life. God does not *make* us suffer. When we suffer, God suffers with us. *That* is what we see in Jesus. *That* is who God is. God *does* have a plan for creation, an end goal toward which we are all moving, but suffering and sin and pain and death are not a part of that plan. They are an attempt to *thwart* God's plan; to *disrupt* God's plan and God's good will for creation.

When Joseph tells his brothers that God sent him before them to Egypt in order to preserve life, he is not letting his brothers off the hook and saying that his suffering was all a part of God's plan. He is very clear in reminding his brothers of their role in all of this when he says, "I am your brother Joseph, whom *you sold into Egypt*," and, "Do not be angry with yourselves because *you sold me here*." And later on, at the *very end* of Joseph's story in chapter 50, he says what I think is one of the most theologically important statements in all of scripture, when he says to his brothers, "What *you* meant for *evil*, God meant for *good*." What Joseph's story shows us is that God does not *cause* suffering, but God *takes* the suffering and pain that we experience and *uses it* to further God's purposes of healing and wholeness and life; to get us to where God is ultimately calling us to be.

It's like Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to God's purpose." This doesn't mean that everything *is* good or that God *causes* everything that happens or even that everything works out *in this life*. It means that God can *take* the bad things that happen – the pain and sin and suffering of life – and God can *use* those things to fulfill God's ultimate purpose for us.

I always talk about it in terms of a road trip. Let's say you are taking a car trip across the country. You start here in Devon, and you're driving to California. You have the trip all planned out, programmed into your GPS. You start off, and everything's going fine, but then you get into Ohio, and there's construction or a detour, or there's an accident somewhere, and you have to find another route. Your GPS says, "Rerouting." You're still going to get to your ultimate destination. It just might not look like you planned. There are a lot of different ways to get there.

God has an ultimate destination for us, for all of creation. A purpose. A big picture plan for where God wants all of this to end up. But along the way, there are mistakes and detours and sin and pain and suffering and all kinds of things that get us off track. Those things are not a *part* of God's plan, God's purpose for us, but God keeps rerouting, so that eventually we will get to the goal that God has for us. There are a lot of different ways to get there. The path that you end up taking, the *life* that you end up *living*, might look very different than the one you imagine. But God does not *cause* suffering. Sometimes *we* are the cause of suffering in this world (our own suffering or the suffering of others). Sometimes suffering just *happens*. God does not *cause* it, but God can *use* the suffering that we experience to do something *good*.

We see that in Jesus, where God turned crucifixion into salvation and death into resurrection. *God* did not cause Jesus' crucifixion and suffering. *We did. Humanity* did. Jesus' crucifixion is not about God's wrath toward humanity. The crucifixion is about humanity's wrath toward God. When we were confronted with the very author of creation, the giver of life in human flesh, the response of humanity was not to *love* him but to *kill* him. And God's response to *that* was to forgive us. It seemed impossible at the time that anything good could come from Jesus' death. But all things are possible with God. It might seem impossible for anything good to come from

this situation that *you* are facing or this person you love is facing. But all things are possible with God. And God will not let a detour derail the whole journey.

The challenge for us is to trust that. Not just *after* the fact when we can look back and *see* the good thing that has come from this bad situation, but to trust it *while we are in it*. It is to open ourselves up to this bigger picture, this bigger understanding of what God is doing in creation, of what God is *able* to do in us. Not to force our own way out of anxiety and fear. Not to hurt others out of our own hurt. Not to give up in despair. But to say, in the moment, “I trust, Lord, that you can do something good with this.”

The last thing that Joseph says in this whole story, he is 110 years old and says to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will surely come to you and bring you up out of this land to the land that God swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” *I am about to die, but God will come to you.* Because it is precisely in our pain and suffering and loss, in our hardest times, that God comes to us, transforming our brokenness into blessing, and leading us to the place that God has promised to take us, in Christ. Amen.