

God Providentially Helps Us Deal With Guilt and Face Our Fears

Message 5 of 6 in the series: "Providence: The Story of Joseph"

Providence = "God's faithful and effective care and guidance of everything which He has made toward the end which He has chosen." Holman Bible Dictionary

A. God providentially prepared Joseph to become a great leader in Egypt despite setbacks, injustice, and his brothers' best efforts to keep him from realizing the dreams God had given him.

- Providentially, at the age of 17, Joseph was sold into slavery by his ten older brothers and taken to Egypt. "One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever. 'Listen to this dream,' he said. 'We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!' His brothers responded, '**So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?**' And they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them... 'Here comes the dreamer!' they said. 'Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, "A wild animal has eaten him." **Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!**' ...'What will we gain by killing our brother? We'd have to cover up the crime. Instead of hurting him, **let's sell him to those Ishmaelite traders. After all, he is our brother—our own flesh and blood!**'"
Genesis 37:5-8, 19-20, & 26b-27a (NLT)
- Providentially, Joseph learned how to manage resources in Egypt while serving as a slave.
- Providentially, Joseph was imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit.
- Providentially, Joseph interpreted dreams for two of Pharaoh's officials who were imprisoned with him.
- Providentially, Joseph later interpreted some troubling dreams God had given Pharaoh about the future. "God is telling Pharaoh in advance what he is about to do... **The next seven years will be a period of great prosperity throughout the land of Egypt. But afterward there will be seven years of famine so great that all the prosperity will be forgotten in Egypt.**" Genesis 41:25b-30a (NLT)
- Providentially, Pharaoh appointed Joseph Prime Minister of Egypt and empowered him to direct Egypt's Famine Prevention Program. "**Since God has revealed the meaning of the dreams to you, clearly no one else is as intelligent or wise as you are.** You will be in charge of my court, and all my people will take orders from you. Only I, sitting on my throne, will have a rank higher than yours.' Pharaoh said to Joseph, '**I hereby put you in charge of the entire land of Egypt.**' ...He was thirty years old when he began serving in the court of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt." Genesis 41:39b-41 & 46a (NLT)

Life Application: "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." Romans 8:28 (NLT)

B. After the years of famine began, God providentially brought Joseph's ten older brothers to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph.

"When Jacob heard that grain was available in Egypt, he said to his sons, 'Why are you standing around looking at one another? I have heard there is grain in Egypt. Go down there, and buy enough grain to keep us alive. Otherwise we'll die.' So, Joseph's ten older brothers went down to Egypt to buy grain. But Jacob wouldn't let Joseph's younger brother, Benjamin, go with them, for fear some harm might come to him. So Jacob's sons arrived in Egypt along with others to buy food, for the famine was in Canaan as well. **Since Joseph was governor of all Egypt and in charge of selling grain to all the people, it was to him that his brothers came.** When they arrived, they bowed before him with their faces to the ground. Joseph recognized his brothers instantly, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. 'Where are you from?' he demanded. 'From the land of Canaan,' they replied. 'We have come to buy food.' **Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they didn't recognize him. And he remembered the dreams he'd had about them many years before.**" Genesis 42:1-9a (NLT)

Life Application: God always keeps His promises, and everything He has revealed to us is trustworthy and true. "I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, 'Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.' And the one sitting on the throne said, 'Look, I am making everything new!' And then he said to me, '**Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.**'" Revelation 21:3-5 (NLT)

"He said to them, 'You are spies! You have come to see how vulnerable our land has become.' 'No, my lord!' they exclaimed. 'Your servants have simply come to buy food. We are all brothers—members of the same family. **We are honest men, sir!** We are not spies!' 'Yes, you are!' Joseph insisted. 'You have come

to see how vulnerable our land has become.’ ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘there are actually twelve of us. We, your servants, are all brothers, sons of a man living in the land of Canaan. Our youngest brother is back there with our father right now, and one of our brothers is no longer with us.’ But Joseph insisted, ‘As I said, you are spies! **This is how I will test your story.** I swear by the life of Pharaoh that you will never leave Egypt unless your youngest brother comes here! One of you must go and get your brother. I’ll keep the rest of you here in prison. Then we’ll find out whether or not your story is true. By the life of Pharaoh, if it turns out that you don’t have a younger brother, then I’ll know you are spies.’ So Joseph put them all in prison for three days. On the third day Joseph said to them, ‘I am a God-fearing man. If you do as I say, you will live. If you really are honest men, choose one of your brothers to remain in prison. The rest of you may go home with grain for your starving families. But you must bring your youngest brother back to me. This will prove that you are telling the truth, and you will not die.’ To this they agreed. Speaking among themselves, they said, ‘**Clearly we are being punished because of what we did to Joseph long ago. We saw his anguish when he pleaded for his life, but we wouldn’t listen. That’s why we’re in this trouble.**’ ‘Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy?’ Reuben asked. ‘But you wouldn’t listen. And **now we have to answer for his blood!**’ Of course, they didn’t know that Joseph understood them, for he had been speaking to them through an interpreter. Now he turned away from them and began to weep. When he regained his composure, he spoke to them again. Then he chose Simeon from among them and had him tied up right before their eyes.” Genesis 42:9b-24 (NLT)

Note: Joseph’s brothers were NOT honest men, and there are few things harder to bear than a guilty conscience. “When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. **Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.**” Psalm 32:3-5 (NLT)

Life Application: “**If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth.** But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.” 1 John 1:9 (NLT)

“Joseph then ordered his servants to fill the men’s sacks with grain, but he also gave secret instructions to return each brother’s payment at the top of his sack. He also gave them supplies for their journey home. So the brothers loaded their donkeys with the grain and headed for home... When the brothers came to their father, Jacob, in the land of Canaan, they told him everything that had happened to them... As they emptied out their sacks, there in each man’s sack was the bag of money he had paid for the grain! **The brothers and their father were terrified when they saw the bags of money.** Jacob exclaimed, ‘You are robbing me of my children! Joseph is gone! Simeon is gone! And now you want to take Benjamin, too. **Everything is going against me!** ...My son (Benjamin) will not go down with you. His brother Joseph is dead, and he is all I have left. If anything should happen to him on your journey, you would send this grieving, white-haired man to his grave.’” Genesis 42:25-26, 29, 35-36, & 38 (NLT)

Note: Joseph’s brothers were terrified when they found their money returned to them because they feared being accused of theft as well as espionage. Joseph, on the other hand, was more than likely testing his brothers to see if they were still willing to trade the freedom of a family member for money.

Note: Everything was NOT going against Jacob. Jacob chose to live in fear instead of faith. God had appeared to Jacob in a dream many years earlier and promised to bless him, protect him, and always be with him. “I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants. Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. **What’s more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go.**” Genesis 28:13b-15a (NLT)

Life Application: We must choose to live by faith, NOT fear. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” 2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV)

“We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us.” 2 Corinthians 1:8-10 (NLT)

Connect Group Discussion Questions:

Read Genesis 42, and then discuss the following questions:

1. Describe a time in your life when you had a guilty conscience over something you had said or done. How did it make you feel? What kept you from confessing your sin? (Psalm 32:3-5) What did you do about it?
2. Describe a time in your life when you are convinced God brought you together with someone you needed to talk to. How did you respond? (Psalm 138:8)
3. Read Romans 8:28. How did God cause the events of Joseph's life to "work together" for good? Why do you think we tend to focus on individual events in our lives instead of trusting God to work all of them together for our good and His glory?
4. How do you think Joseph's brothers felt when they saw Simeon being tied up and led away? (Genesis 42:21-24) Compare their reaction with Genesis 37:26-28.
5. Read Genesis 28:10-22 & 32:9-12. Why do you think Jacob was so afraid and easily gave in to self-pity when he faced setbacks and painful circumstances? What is the biggest difference between Jacob and Joseph when it comes to facing trouble? (see Genesis 50:20)
6. Discuss 2 Timothy 1:7 and 2 Corinthians 1:8-10. What does it look like to live by faith rather than fear in our culture?
7. Quotations to consider:

"Security is a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing." Helen Keller

"Why are the nations so angry? Why do they waste their time with futile plans? The kings of the earth prepare for battle; the rulers plot together against the Lord and against his anointed one. 'Let us break their chains,' they cry, 'and free ourselves from slavery to God.' But the one who rules in heaven laughs. The Lord scoffs at them." Psalm 2:1-4 (NLT)

"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." Jesus in John 16:33 (NLT)