

God Providentially Cares for People Who Don't Deserve It
Message 6 of 7 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 cared for Joseph when he was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers.

- Providentially, 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." Genesis 37:5-8 (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 interpreted some troubling dreams Pharaoh had about seven years of plenty and seven years of famine coming in the near future.
- Providentially, Pharaoh appointed Joseph Prime Minister of Egypt and empowered him to direct Egypt's Famine Preparation Program.

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. God providentially cared for Joseph's jealous brothers by allowing them to sell Joseph into slavery.

- Twenty years before the famine started, God providentially sent Joseph to Egypt to save the people of Egypt and all of Joseph's family. "He (God) called for a famine on the land of Canaan, cutting off its food supply. **Then he sent someone to Egypt ahead of them—Joseph, who was sold as a slave.** They bruised his feet with fetters and placed his neck in an iron collar. Until the time came to fulfill his dreams, the Lord tested Joseph's character. Then Pharaoh sent for him and set him free; the ruler of the nation opened his prison door. Joseph was put in charge of all the king's household; he became ruler over all the king's possessions." Psalm 105:16-21 (NLT)
- Although he spent 13 painful years enslaved and imprisoned, after Joseph became a ruler in Egypt, he realized that God had placed him there so he would be able to save his entire family from starvation. "But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. **It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives.**" Genesis 45:5 (NLT)

Life Application: "The Lord directs our steps, so why try to understand everything along the way?"
Proverbs 20:24 (NLT)

C. In response to his awareness of God's providence, Joseph tested his brothers' character in order to know how to best help them through the years of famine ahead.

Test #1: Joseph tested his brothers to see if they were still willing to sell a family member into slavery for money. "**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... Then he chose Simeon from among them and had him tied up right before their eyes." Genesis 42:19-20 & 24b (NLT)

Test #2: Joseph tested his brothers to see if they were filled with jealousy and murderous hatred toward Benjamin (Rachel's other son) just as they had been with him. "But the famine continued to ravage the land of Canaan. When the grain they had brought from Egypt was almost gone, Jacob said to his sons, 'Go back and buy us a little more food.' But Judah said, 'The man was serious when he warned us, "You won't see my face again unless your brother is with you." If you send Benjamin with us, we will go down and buy more food. But if you don't let Benjamin go, we won't go either.' ... So their father, Jacob, finally said to them, 'If it can't be avoided, then at least do this. Pack your bags with the best products of this land. Take them down to the man as gifts—balm, honey, gum, aromatic resin, pistachio nuts, and almonds. Also take double the money that was put back in your sacks, as it was probably someone's mistake. Then take your brother, and go back to the man. May God Almighty give you mercy as you go before the man, so that he will release Simeon and let Benjamin return. **But if I must lose my children, so be it.**" Genesis 43:1-5a & 11-14 (NLT)

Life Application: Our understanding of God is determined by what we trust. We will either trust God's Word or our circumstances. "I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: **The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.** I say to myself, 'The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!'" Lamentations 3:20-24 (NLT)

"When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the manager of his household, 'These men will eat with me this noon. Take them inside the palace. Then go slaughter an animal and prepare a big feast.' So the man did as Joseph told him and took them into Joseph's palace... When Joseph came home, they gave him the gifts they had brought him, then bowed low to the ground before him. After greeting them, he asked, 'How is your father, the old man you spoke about? Is he still alive?' 'Yes,' they replied. 'Our father, your servant, is alive and well.' And they bowed low again. Then Joseph looked at his brother Benjamin, the son of his own mother. 'Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?' Joseph asked. 'May God be gracious to you, my son.' Then Joseph hurried from the room because he was overcome with emotion for his brother. He went into his private room, where he broke down and wept. After washing his face, he came back out, keeping himself under control. Then he ordered, 'Bring out the food!' ...Joseph told each of his brothers where to sit, and to their amazement, he seated them according to age, from oldest to youngest. And Joseph filled their plates with food from his own table, **giving Benjamin five times as much as he gave the others.** So they feasted and drank freely with him." Genesis 43:16-17, 26-31, & 33-34 (NLT)

Note: Joseph created ideal circumstances for his brothers to betray Benjamin just as they had betrayed him twenty-two years earlier. "When his brothers were ready to leave, Joseph gave these instructions to his palace manager: 'Fill each of their sacks with as much grain as they can carry and put each man's money back into his sack. Then put my personal silver cup at the top of the youngest brother's sack, along with the money for his grain.' So, the manager did as Joseph instructed him. The brothers were up at dawn and were sent on their journey with their loaded donkeys. But when they had gone only a short distance and were barely out of the city, Joseph said to his palace manager, 'Chase after them and stop them. When you catch up with them, ask them, "Why have you repaid my kindness with such evil? Why have you stolen my master's silver cup, which he uses to predict the future? What a wicked thing you have done!"' ...They all quickly took their sacks from the backs of their donkeys and opened them. The palace manager searched the brothers' sacks, from the oldest to the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack! When the brothers saw this, they tore their clothing in despair. Then they loaded their donkeys again and returned to the city. **Joseph was still in his palace when Judah and his brothers arrived, and they fell to the ground before him.** 'What have you done?' Joseph demanded. 'Don't you know that a man like me can predict the future?' Judah answered, 'Oh, my lord, what can we say to you? How can we explain this? How can we prove our innocence? God is punishing us for our sins. **My lord, we have all returned to be your slaves—all of us, not just our brother who had your cup in his sack.**' 'No,' Joseph said. 'I would never do such a thing! **Only the man who stole the cup will be my slave. The rest of you may go back to your father in peace.**'" Genesis 44:1-5 & 11-17 (NLT)

Note: Joseph's tests revealed that God had radically changed his brothers. "Then Judah stepped forward and said, 'Please, my lord, let your servant say just one word to you... I cannot go back to my father without the boy. Our father's life is bound up in the boy's life. If he sees that the boy is not with us, our father will die... I guaranteed to my father that I would take care of the boy. I told him, "If I don't bring him back to you, I will bear the blame forever." **So please, my lord, let me stay here as a slave instead of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers.** For how can I return to my father if the boy is not with me? I couldn't bear to see the anguish this would cause my father!'" Genesis 44:18a & 30b-34 (NLT)

Life Application: God still radically changes people through a personal relationship with Jesus. "Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;** old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)

D. Joseph revealed his secret identity to his stunned brothers and reassured them of God's providential care even though they didn't deserve it.

"Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, 'Out, all of you!' So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was. Then he broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh's palace. 'I am Joseph!' he said to his brothers. 'Is my father still alive?' But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. 'Please, come closer,' he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, 'I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt.

But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. **God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. So it was God who sent me here, not you!**" Genesis 45:1-8a (NLT)

Life Application: God providentially cares for us even though we don't deserve it, and He wants us to pay it forward. "From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another." John 1:16 (NLT) "We love because he first loved us." 1 John 4:19 (NIV) "Freely you have received; freely give." Matthew 10:8b (NIV)

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Connect Group Discussion Questions:

Read Genesis 43:1 through 45:8, and then discuss the following questions:

1. Describe a time in your life when you suddenly realized that God placed you in a position to make a difference in someone else's life (relative, co-worker, neighbor, etc.). Why do you think such situations are often hard to anticipate? (Proverbs 20:24)
2. Joseph put his brothers through some difficult tests to see if they were still lying, jealous, treacherous men. How had God changed them over 22 years? (Genesis 44:18-34) Does God still change people?
3. How has a personal relationship with Jesus changed you? (2 Corinthians 5:17)
4. Compare Jacob's reaction to the possibility of losing his son Benjamin (Genesis 43:1-14) to the OT prophet Jeremiah's reaction after the Babylonians had burned Jerusalem to the ground and had murdered, tortured, or taken captive nearly everyone in the city. (Lamentations 3:20-24) What's the difference between faith in God's providence and fatalism?
5. Read John 1:16, 1 John 4:19, & Matthew 10:8. What are some practical ways we can pay forward some of the love, care, and blessings God has providentially bestowed upon us?
6. If you had been one of Joseph's brothers, how would you have reacted when he revealed his identity?
7. Some more verses on God's providence to consider:

"You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!" Psalm 139:5-6 (NLT)

"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,' says the Lord. 'And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.'" Isaiah 55:8-9 (NLT)

"Grain for bread is easily crushed, so he doesn't keep on pounding it. He threshes it under the wheels of a cart, but he doesn't pulverize it. The Lord of Heaven's Armies is a wonderful teacher, and he gives the farmer great wisdom." Isaiah 28:28-29 (NLT)