

When you fear that the worst will happen... your mind can do strange things — like the Chicagoan... who was driving on a lonely country road one dark and rainy night... and had a flat. ... He opened the trunk. No lug wrench! ... The light from a farmhouse could be seen dimly up the road. So he set out on foot through the driving rain. ... Surely the farmer would have a lug wrench he could borrow... he thought. ... Of course... it was late at night. The farmer would be asleep in his warm, dry bed. ... Maybe he would not answer the door. ... And even if he did... he would be angry at being awakened in the middle of the night.

The city boy... picking his way blindly in the dark... stumbled on. ... By now his shoes and clothing were soaked. ... Even if the farmer did answer his knock... he would probably shout something like, "*What's the big idea waking me up at this hour?*"

This thought made the city boy angry. ... What right did that farmer have to refuse him the loan of a lug wrench? ... After all... here he was stranded in the middle of nowhere... soaked to the skin. ... The farmer was a selfish clod — no doubt about that!

The man finally reached the house and banged loudly on the door. A light went on inside... and a window opened above. A voice cried out, "*Who is it?*" ... His face white with anger... the man called out, "*You know who it is. It's me! And you can keep your lug wrench. I wouldn't borrow it now if you had the last one on earth!*"

Negative expectations... of then get us into trouble... don't they?

That story describes the mind-frame of Joseph's brothers in our passage of study today. ... They had just returned to Egypt... after burying their father in the family tomb in Canaan... and they feared the worst. ... They had hated Joseph when he was a boy, and now they could not believe that he did not hate them.

(LISTEN!) Isn't it our human nature... that we often suspect in others what we'd do ourselves if we had the opportunity!

Genesis 50:15

Their fears were utterly unfounded and irrational.

Warren Wiersbe writes:

We who read this account centuries later want to say, "Men, what's the problem? Didn't Joseph forgive you, kiss you, weep over you, and give you every evidence of his love? Didn't he explain that God had overruled for good all the evil that you had done to him? Didn't Joseph make every provision to bring you to Egypt and take care of you? Then why are you alarmed?"

The answer is simple: They didn't believe their brother. The gracious way he spoke to them and the loving way he treated them made no impact on their hearts. But Joseph's brothers are no different from some professed Christians today who are constantly worrying about God's judgment and whether or not He's really forgiven them and made them His children.

It certainly is human nature... to suspect in others ... (even in God!)... what we'd do ourselves if we had the opportunity!

Joseph had done nothing to fan their fears. Clearly it was guilt that drove their apprehension.

Sin has the ability to soil the mind in a way that destroys sound reasoning. Instead of returning to the memory of Joseph's forgiveness... and his explanation... they thought only of their sin... and reasoned according to the way they understood human nature. ... The thought that Joseph might actually forgive them was foreign to their thinking. ... They could suspect only the worst.

The ability to accept forgiveness requires a spiritual touch. ... Whenever we cannot accept forgiveness... the results can be devastating. ... One of those results is constant fear. ... Now that Jacob would not be a factor in Joseph's decisions... Joseph's brethren were afraid for their lives.

There are many Christians whose lives are filled with fear... based in sins of their own past. ... Every slight disappointment... every setback... is seen as God's punishment.

Such fear ultimately translates into a kind of Christian paranoia. .. It causes a loss of joy... a loss of decision-making ability... fearing God will punish us by making the choice turn out bad... and a loss of power in our spiritual life. The life becomes paralyzed.

When fear and guilt rule the life... sin will be king. ... The subtle lesson here is that the answer to fear and guilt... is the acceptance of God's forgiveness.

Fear in Joseph's brothers led them to fabricate a lie (50:16-17). They resorted to unnecessary scheming.

Genesis 50:16-17

Panic caused them to devise some means to secure protection from Joseph's retaliation.

Did Jacob actually speak the words they quoted? ... Probably not. If Jacob had wanted to intercede for the guilty sons... he could easily have done it when he was alone with Joseph. ... And he had seventeen years in which to do it! ... It's likely that the brothers concocted this story... hoping that Joseph's love for his father would give him a greater love for his brothers. Jacob had no need to make such a request... he trusted Joseph.

However... even though the brothers resort to a lie... their plea contained a full confession of their sin... and accurately described their desperate desire for forgiveness. ... Four times they label their treatment of Joseph as evil. This is true repentance. Toning down the sinfulness of our sin is not repentance.

They employed no euphemisms. They did not call their sin "*a mistake*" or "*a lapse*" or "*an error in judgment*" ... as we sometimes do. ... And Joseph saw their plea for what it was. ... Despite their deception... it was the cry of their guilt-ridden hearts for forgiveness.

How did Joseph respond to their message? ... When their message came to him... Joseph wept. ... He was deeply hurt that his own brothers didn't believe his words... or accept his kind deeds at face value as true

expressions of his love and forgiveness. ... What **more** could he have done to convince them?

It was as if all he had done had been in vain. ... Despite their sins against him... he had loved them and forgiven them. ... Everything he had done had been with an eye to their well-being. ... How pitiful as his eleven brothers groveled before him... as if he had just threatened to take their lives.

Genesis 50:18-19

(You know)... **So much** of our relational trouble comes from our attempting to be God... in other peoples' lives. ... “*Oh, if we were only God for a day—we would set so many evils right!* ... In our bad moments we imagine that we know what God ought to do with others. ... And at our very worst moments... we take correction into our own hands... (because God apparently has not had the wisdom to do so.)

Joseph left all the righting of his *personal* wrongs to God and set the example for the faithful in every age. ... As Paul would TWICE write...

Romans 12:19 (ESV)

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

And

1 Thessalonians 5:15 (ESV)

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

Genesis 50:20-21

Joseph not only forgave his brothers... but he also assured them of his constant care. ... Joseph's response is a clear methodology for forgiveness.

Like Joseph... we must realize that nothing ever comes into the life of any believer... that God has not approved first. ... There are no accidents.

This driving force in Joseph is what the apostle Paul wrote about eloquently hundreds of years later.

Romans 8:28 (ESV)

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

God is working for the *good* of those who love him. ... This is what Joseph saw. ... On the surface he saw much that looked bad.

Last week I quoted extensively from Elisabeth Elliot... who saw numerous reversals in her early years as a missionary... and then endured the loss of two husbands... one murdered by Auca Indians... and the second slowly destroyed by cancer. (I want to briefly quote from her again.) ... Reflecting on these experiences... She wrote:

“The experiences of my life are not such that I could infer from them that God is good, gracious and merciful necessarily. To have had one husband murdered and another one disintegrate, body, soul and spirit, through cancer, is not what you would call a proof of the love of God. In fact, there are many times when it looks like just the opposite.”

But this is not how a Christian judges things – by sight. Not at all! My belief in the love of God is not by inference or instinct. It is by faith.”

Joseph and Romans 8:28 teach that *all* things are controlled by God and therefore work to our good. ... Can you say that? ... Can you say with confidence that all things are working together for good in your life... whoever you are and whatever the circumstances of your life may be? Do you believe Romans 8:28... and Joseph's perspective to be true? ... Do you believe God can... (and will) overrule people's evil intentions to bring about his intended results.

James Montgomery Boice has written:

If "all things" really mean "all things" and God is not a liar, then there is truly nothing in your life that can possibly be excluded. "All" includes the experiences of your childhood and whether they were affirming or destructive. It includes who your parents were (even if you did not know them) and where you were born. It includes your education, your present employment (or lack of it), the house in which you live, the furniture you have, the car you are driving, your friends, your church, even your appearance—the face that stares back at you from your mirror in the morning—and whether it is attractive, as the world measures attractiveness, or whether it is not. Every one of these things is included in that word "all." So are many more besides. Whether you can see it or not—and often we cannot—everything is being used of God for your good as well as the good of others.

The prophet Jeremiah voiced this same truth to encourage his people when they were about to go into captivity in evil Babylon:

Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV)

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

When it appeared that life was out of control... that the darkness was just about to engulf God's people... when a wicked culture was in the driver's seat... God said, "*I know the plans I am literally planning for you. No one*

else knows them, but I know them fully." ... And these plans were good—that is... for "wholeness" (*shalom*, peace, well-being)... and "not for evil."

From this we understand that God can have no evil thoughts toward his own—no thoughts of calamity. He never has had an evil thought toward a child of his, and he never will.

This does not mean that God's servants are shielded from hardship or misery. ... What it does mean is that God's plans are never for evil in the believer's life... but with an eye to their well-being and wholeness — always! ... Even the apparent evil we suffer is for our good. And this means that as believers... whatever our circumstances... we can and must be optimistic... because we have "a future and a hope."

Joseph's brothers had treated him cruelly... the Lord had caused him to experience severe trials... and the people he helped forgot about him in his hour of need. ... "*If that's what a life of faith is all about*"... he might have argued... "*then I'm not interested.*" ... But Joseph's faith... though tested... didn't falter. ... All he had to go on were his dreams... but he clung to the promise that one day his brothers would bow before him... ... and the Lord didn't disappoint him.

This all shows that faith can grow strong in adversity. God grows faith in difficulty... and the faith grown like this... is a hearty faith. If you want to grow mushrooms... you can grow them quickly in protected conditions. But if you want to grow an oak tree... it must be in the open where it will stand against the storms of summer and the snows of winter. ... Adversity makes the oak tree strong.

If you have never truly believed this... it will change your life if you take it to heart. Joseph believed that all of his brother's evil to him... and all he suffered in this life... was meant for good. The question I ask (again) is, *do you believe this?* [P A U S E]

The story of Joseph's death and burial is told in five short verses... and with that death... the book of Genesis ends. ... It was a significant death... because in Hebrews 11... the Holy Spirit passes over scores of things (He could have said about Joseph)... and fastens on the fact that Joseph... (when he died)... made mention of the departing of the children of Israel... and gave commandment concerning his bones. It was the greatest and most illuminating act of faith in a life that was ablaze with faith.

Genesis 50:22-26

How eagerly the brothers must have gathered around him when he told them he was about to leave them something in his will. ... But what he left was not a mansion on the Nile... or a stable of Arabian racehorses... or jewels worth a king's ransom. ... Such things would be worthless to a people soon to be reduced to slavery. ... He left them something worthless to the Egyptians - but priceless to them... (his bones!) ... In other words... he left them *a memorial body*.

Joseph knew that dark days were coming... and that God would eventually intervene to rescue His people. ... But precisely because he believed that... Joseph did what he could to provide encouragement for those who remained behind.

He allowed his body to remain in Egypt temporarily for the benefit of the Israelites. You see...Joseph *was not buried!* ... His coffin was not deposited in some Egyptian pyramid or tomb. ... His coffin stood above ground... awaiting its removal to Canaan... when the time should come. He wanted all who looked at it... to be reminded of that anticipated day and destiny.

F. B. Meyer has written:

"What a lesson must those unburied bones have read to Israel! When the taskmasters dealt hardly with the people, so that their hearts fainted, it must have been sweet to go and look at the mummy case which held those mouldering remains, waiting there to be carried forward; and, as they did so, this was doubtless their reflection, 'Evidently, then, Joseph believed that we were not to stay here always but that we should sooner or later leave for Canaan; let us brace ourselves up to bear a little longer, it may be only a very little while!'"

Yes, and when some were tempted to settle down content with prospering circumstances and to feast upon leeks, garlicks and onions, it was a check on them to think of those bones and say, 'Evidently we are not to remain here always; we should do well not to build all our hopes and comfort on the unstable tenure of our sojourn in this place.'

And, oftentimes, when the people were ready to despair amid the difficulties and weariness of their desert march, those bones borne in their midst told them of the confident hope of Joseph—that God would bring them to the land of rest."

[P A U S E]

You know the way that the author of Genesis brings us to Joseph's death is not at all what we might expect. ... It seems ... well... rather dull.

For many years... Joseph had served God whole-heartedly. During extreme hardship... he never backed away from obedience to God. ... He trusted God in the darkest of days. ... There was great wisdom given to him in the interpretation of dreams. ... He had accomplished many wonderful deeds. What is his reward? ... It is seen in the fact that his final 50 years and more... do not have any accomplishments (to speak of). There are no more wonderful deeds recorded for us. ... He ends his life very normal! The picture that Genesis gives to us... is of him enjoying his children... and his children's children.

There were many times in Joseph's early adult life... when the spectacular was his norm. ... (You know)... It is the nature of human beings to long for and desire the spectacular as the *ideal* life. ... But stop and consider what the ending of Genesis seems to be teaching us. ... It is the opposite! It is the normal (we would call it dull) that is the *ideal*. ... Someone might sarcastically say that Joseph was rewarded for his heroism - with dullness... and no excitement for the rest of his life.

But we all know how much God's way of thinking... differs from the thinking of fallen man. ... (LISTEN!) There is no greater reward than being able to live our life... in simple accord with God's stated purpose for us.

As the story of Genesis ends... Joseph characterizes God's perfection for men... as he enjoys his own contribution to God's command. ... It may seem dull in the light of all of Joseph's great adventures. My guess is that Joseph would say it was the greatest part of his life... that he saw his ordinary life as his reward!

When we pause and deeply consider our own pursuit of the spectacular... we will probably come to the conclusion... that the greatest part of our life... was the wonderful... simple times... when the best relationships of our lives... were established and developed. ... If our story is told... they would be the duller moments. ... It is only in most thoughtful understanding... that they are known as the best.

Our lesson is to better appreciate those dull moments.

In coming to the end of Genesis, it would be good to take a moment of reflection and thank God for the moments of our lives when rest occurs... and we are not longing for the spectacular... but are simply enjoying the wonderful fruit of our knowing Christ.

[P A U S E]

And so ends Genesis. ... It begins with creation... and ends with a coffin. ... It begins with the glory... and ends with a grave. ... It begins with the vastness of eternity... and ends with the shortness of time. ... It begins with the living God... and ends with a dead man. ... It begins with a blaze of brightness in heaven... and ends with a box of bones in Egypt.

That is the Holy Spirit's final comment in the book on the nature and tragedy of human sin.