

The Gospel Project® for Adults

Daily Discipleship Guide CSB, Unit 4, Session 3

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God Overrides Evil with Good

Session in a Sentence: God works even through the evil actions of people to bring about good.

Main Passages: Genesis 42:1-6; 45:4-8; 50:15-21

The story of the Bible has been expertly written because the master Storyteller wrote it. The story itself is engrossing: Humanity sinfully destroys the perfection of God's good creation, but God enacts a sweeping plan of redemption driving toward the climax of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. But the story is even more powerful because it is *true*. And the *way* God tells this story is also engaging, using literary devices that have not lost any of their power and punch across millennia, languages, and cultures. God's Word is far from antiquated; it is indeed living and effective, sharper than a two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). It's a story that not only touches lives but also changes hearts.

What are some reasons we should find reading the Bible a meaningful and enjoyable part of our day?

Group Time

Point 1: God is faithful to fulfill His plan (Gen. 42:1-6).

1 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you keep looking at each other? **2** Listen," he went on, "I have heard there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us so that we will live and not die." **3** So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. **4** But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he thought, "Something might happen to him."

5 The sons of Israel were among those who came to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan. **6** Joseph was in charge of the country; he sold grain to all its people. His brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the ground.

Twenty years earlier, Jacob had sent Joseph to his brothers, and they devised a plan to end his life but sold him into slavery in Egypt instead. Now, Jacob was sending the brothers to Egypt, where God was arranging a divine appointment with Joseph so that he might preserve their lives. Once again, we see God using **redemptive reversal**. God was at work bringing Joseph's brothers to him to restore this family and provide for them during the remainder of the famine.

Joseph's brothers coming to Egypt was an important part of God's plan to save them from the famine, but God was also at work to restore this broken family. What can we learn about God's heart from this?

- **Romans 8:28** reminds us that we can trust God's plan because He works all things together. And this plan is always good, even if, as in Joseph's case, it doesn't *feel* good all the time.
- Our hope rests in knowing that God uses every situation we face for His glory and our good. We can be assured that whatever happens, we win. As **Philippians 1:21** tells us, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Voices from Church History

"The Scriptures are divine charms, let us then apply to ourselves and to the passions of our souls the remedies to be derived from them."¹

—John Chrysostom (circa 347-407)

Point 2: God is faithful to prompt forgiveness in His people (Gen. 45:4-8).

4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please, come near me," and they came near. "I am Joseph, your brother," he

said, “the one you sold into Egypt. 5 And now don’t be grieved or angry with yourselves for selling me here, because God sent me ahead of you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there will be five more years without plowing or harvesting. 7 God sent me ahead of you to establish you as a remnant within the land and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. 8 Therefore it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household, and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Joseph helped to guide his brothers to repentance; in this we see a picture of the greater way God works to bring us to repentance of our sin. In God’s kindness, He convicts us of our sin to draw us to repentance, even if that requires that we endure difficult and painful circumstances. But God is faithful to transform pain from the process toward repentance into joy from the position of being forgiven.

1. Where on this scale would you put yourself in this moment?

ConvictionRepentance

2. Where would you put your readiness to forgive others on this scale?

CallousMeasuredGraciously Eager

How should God’s forgiveness of our sin in Christ change the way we extend forgiveness to others?

Point 3: God is faithful to bring good from evil (Gen. 50:15-21).

15 When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said to one another, “If Joseph is holding a grudge against us, he will certainly repay us for all the suffering we caused him.”

16 So they sent this message to Joseph, “Before he died your father gave a command: **17** Say this to Joseph: Please forgive your brothers’ transgression and their sin—the suffering they caused you.’ Therefore, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when their message came to him. **18** His brothers also came to him, bowed down before him, and said, “We are your slaves!”

19 But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? **20** You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people. **21** Therefore don’t be afraid. I will take care of you and your children.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph kept his eyes on God and not on his circumstances or the people who had sinned against him. He did not hold his exalted position over his brothers or nurse a grudge against them. He did not lament the time lost with his father and brothers or the time he spent in jail. He looked toward God and trusted God’s plan for his life. He knew God took the evil deeds of his brothers and used them for His good and greater plan of providing salvation for his family from the famine.

How does believing God brings good even from evil give us the ability to forgive others when they wrong us?

God’s Plan and Human Action: God’s sovereignty over all of life encompasses the _____ of human beings. Even freely chosen _____ actions are factored into God’s overarching plan, as is the case with the _____ of Jesus.

How should God bringing good from evil affect how we share the gospel with others?

My Mission

Because we are a forgiven people through Christ, we forgive those who sin against us, recognizing that God is working everything for the good of those who love Him.

- Identify the people you need to forgive, believing that God is working all things together for your good.

- **How can your group provide comfort to others in their times of distress and call them to live with hope that God is at work?**
- **What are some ways you have experienced God using your suffering for good that you can share with others to point them to the gospel?**

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Genesis 42

Joseph was a smart guy. We see this in how he managed Potiphar's house, the prison, and the distribution of grain in Egypt. More importantly, Joseph trusted in God. We see this in how God blessed him and gave him wisdom in what he did. Surely, then, Joseph connected the dots of his life. Surely he understood how God used each link in the chain of events of his life—even the painful ones—to bring him to his position of authority, beneath only Pharaoh.

And yet, when Joseph saw his brothers, it appears that his reaction, treating them like strangers and speaking harshly to them, was visceral. It was his gut response—or more aptly, his heart response—to seeing his brothers who had hurt him so deeply. Twenty years had passed, but the wound was deep and seeing them reopened it. The old saying is not true: Time does *not* heal all wounds. But the gospel does.

As we continue reading through Joseph's account, we will see God working on his heart to bring it to the place his mind surely was. That is the beauty of God's work in us—He is after our complete, not partial, transformation by the power of the gospel. He doesn't just want our minds or our hearts or our hands. He wants all of us—and only the gospel can bring such total transformation to pass.

What are some areas of your life—thoughts, emotions, or behaviors—where you recognize your need for the gospel to change you?

Voices from Church History

"Let us not then be enslaved or become swinish; but, as true children of the light, let us raise our eyes and look on the light ... Let us therefore repent, and pass from ignorance to knowledge, from foolishness to wisdom, from licentiousness to self-restraint, from unrighteousness to righteousness, from godlessness to God." 2

—Clement of Alexandria (circa 150-215)

Day 2: Read Genesis 43–44

Joseph's test was nearly complete. He had placed his older brothers in a position where he would see how they treated their younger, favored brother, Benjamin. Would they abandon him as a slave in Egypt as they had sold Joseph into slavery two decades before, or would they stand by their brother?

When Joseph sentenced Benjamin to slavery and released the others to return home, Judah stepped up. Judah, the one who had played such a significant role in betraying Joseph before, stepped forward as an intercessor and a substitute. He would take the place of his brother. He would offer his life as a slave in place of Benjamin.

This sacrificial action by Judah was Joseph's breaking point. He could no longer keep his test going. Any lingering resentment within him was crushed. It was time to reconcile with his brothers. This is the power of a selfless mediator. This is the power of Christ. This is the power of the gospel.

In what ways has God positioned you to live sacrificially for someone else?

Day 3: Read Genesis 45

It's important that we pay attention to the reason Joseph gave his brothers for not being grieved or angry with themselves, the same basis for the forgiveness he extended to them. It was not because of what he had witnessed in their changed behavior. Yes, Joseph was testing them to discern if they had changed, but the forgiveness he extended to them was based on something else. It was based on his understanding of what God had done (vv. 5-8). Joseph was able to see his situation from a God-centered

perspective, and he realized that God used the sins of his brothers as part of His good plan.

Our willingness to forgive can at times look less like God's and more like the world's—that is, conditional. We might be willing to forgive if the person who wronged us seems contrite *enough* or at least apologizes to *our* satisfaction. Sometimes we want them to make restitution as well, and *then* we will forgive. But God calls on us to forgive in light of the gospel, in light of the forgiveness we have received in Christ. This is the forgiveness required of us and the forgiveness our hearts need to extend.

Do you need to extend forgiveness to someone? What step will you take to do that?

Day 4: Read Genesis 46–47

Jacob sent Judah ahead to prepare for their arrival in Goshen, where he would once again see his son Joseph. Here we see a beautiful picture of grace. Judah, the son who had played such a significant role in tearing apart father and son, was now given the opportunity to play a role in bringing them back together. No longer the agent of their separation, Judah was now the facilitator of their reunion.

We don't know why Jacob chose Judah for this task, but what we do know is that this foreshadows how God sent Christ ahead to facilitate our reunion and how we are sent out with the gospel. We were once estranged from God our Father, in open rebellion against Him and His Son. But in Christ, we have been given the privilege of declaring the gospel to the nations, to play a role in seeing people reconciled to God.

With whom can you share the gospel this week to facilitate their reconciliation with God our Father?

Day 5: Read Genesis 48–50

As we read the story of Joseph, the climax rests in Genesis 50:15-21. This is the moment where, if the story were a movie, the music would swell and the screen would fade to black as the brothers embraced and talked. But the story was still not complete. A post-credit scene is recorded in Genesis 50:22-26.

In these closing verses, we read that God gave Joseph a long life of 110 years. When he was about to die, he called his brothers together and told them something prophetic. God was going to come to their aid and take them from the land of Egypt back to their promised homeland. Then he made them promise to take his bones with them.

This postscript links ahead to the Book of Exodus. It also reminds us of the central truth of Joseph's life—God's sovereignty over all. Joseph knew that God had worked providentially in his life, and he knew that God was not done. God would continue working His plan to redeem His people—from Egypt, yes, but in an even greater way in Christ, as had been promised so long before to their ancestor Abraham and to Adam and Eve before that.

In what ways do you need to trust in God's sovereignty in the days ahead?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- God is faithful to fulfill His plan (Gen. 42:1-6).
- God is faithful to prompt forgiveness in His people (Gen. 45:4-8).
- God is faithful to bring good from evil (Gen. 50:15-21).

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

What can you do to cultivate in yourself a greater willingness to forgive? How can you help to instill this willingness in one another?

What would you say to someone struggling to come to terms with the mysterious relationship between God's sovereign goodness and the presence of evil in the world?

References

1. St. John Chrysostom, Homily XXXII, in *The Homilies on the Gospel According to St. John* (Altenmünster, Germany: Jazzybee Verlag, 2012) [eBook].
2. Clement of Alexandria, in *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, trans. William Wilson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867), 91.