



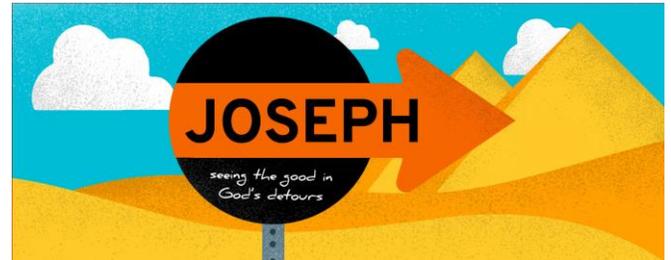
VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Joseph: Seeing the Good in God's Detours

Part 12: Series Finale

Tim Badal | December 18, 2016 | Genesis 50:15–26



We've been looking at the life and times of a man who has more written about him in the book of Genesis than anybody else—more than Adam and Eve, more than Noah, more than Abraham, more than his father Jacob. Joseph has 14 chapters of the first book of the Bible dedicated to his life. And rightly so, because Joseph was an amazing man who continues to teach us amazing things.

We have learned three things about him in this series.

First, we learned how God used the good, the bad and the ugly in his life to show what a model of faithfulness an average man like Joseph can be when God has hold of him. In the same way, we as Christians can do amazing things when God has hold of us, when we live according to His Word and will.

Second, we've learned about ourselves. In spite of the distance between Joseph's life and ours in America today, we can resonate with many of the characters and events in his story. I've heard frequently from many of you that you identify with certain aspect of his story. One of the most frequent connections is that, in the face of wrongs such as Joseph experienced, you are learning that you have been called to forgive. Even as Joseph did the hard thing in forgiving his brothers for their mistreatment of him, we too need to learn how to suffer well and forgive those who wrong us.

But third, and most importantly, we have learned that we serve an incredible God. As we'll see later today, Joseph's story is about God and His faithfulness, how He is able to take the garbage in our lives and bring a beautiful ending to our stories. We can put our faith, trust and hope in this God Who does all things well, even when times of trouble come our way. We have learned that God can be utterly relied upon to take those things which have damaged us and use them for our good and the good of those around us.

In the New Year we will embark on the letter of James, covering five chapters of practical Christianity: Real Faith for Real Life. But today we'll be in Genesis 50:15–26—the end of Joseph's story. We will see how Moses closes out this first book of the Scriptures. These verses will span about 50 years. There is much continuity from the beginning to the end of the story.

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." ¹⁶ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died, ¹⁷ 'Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. ²¹ So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

²² So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's house. Joseph lived 110 years. ²³ And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph's own. ²⁴ And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but

God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”²⁵ Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.”²⁶ So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

In the TV world, a series finale is an important marker for any show. If you’ve ever been a fan of a particular sitcom or drama that has lasted for several seasons, you know that at some point the producers and directors will bring the storyline and characters you’ve come to love to an end. Somehow they need to tie the story up with a bow. The series finale gives the producers and directors the opportunity to clear up some of the mysteries or unresolved events in the story. Perhaps the characters will be transitioning from one part of their life to another. Maybe they will deal with the major issue that the characters have dealt with over the many episodes of the show. Whatever they do, series finales are inevitably popular with TV audiences. People want to know how stories end. They want to know that the hours upon hours they’ve invested in watching the program were somehow worthwhile.

But to be honest, sometimes it’s not worth it. You may have watched a program for years, only to have the series finale ruin it all. Let me give you an example. While I never watch this show, I was looking forward to it because everybody said it was awesome. It was the show “Lost.” As those of you who watched it know, it was an awesome show until the series finale. But the finale was so bad that people complained all over the internet about how many hours they had wasted on this show. Had they known it would turn out like it did, they never would have watched any of it.

A series finale needs to be done well, because people are expecting the story to end well. And in our day, series finales have been some of the most-watched television programs. Let me give you the top five—maybe you watched them yourselves.

- Number five was the show “Friends” in the 90s, about a group of friends in New York City. After years of watching the lives of these people, 52 million people watched the finale. That is 60% of all TVs in America were tuned in to see how this show would end.
- Number four: “Seinfeld.” Seinfeld had 76 million viewers—68% of American TVs—who watched to see how it ended. You may recall that it was a rather odd ending. I particularly remember that they end up in a jail cell. The camera pans back—and that’s the end. What happens next? We don’t know.
- Number three goes a little farther back: “The Fugitive.” A show in the 60s, “The Fugitive” is the story of a man who was wrongfully charged with a crime and is on the run. The question was: how is Dr. Kimble going to be captured? That series finale garnered 78 million people, or 78% of all TVs in America, to view its ending show.
- But that pales in comparison to the “Cheers” series finale, which revealed how life would end up for a gang in a Boston bar. On that Thursday night in the late 80s, “Cheers” received a 94-million-person viewership. Three-quarters of all Americans tuned in to find out what would happen at a bar in Boston.
- Still none of these come close to the number one series finale. Can you guess what it was? “Mash.” Some of the kids have no clue what we’re talking about. It was a show about a field hospital during the Korean War. I was a young kid and can remember how excited my parents were about the end of “Mash,” a show that had lasted 11 seasons and ended on February 28, 1983. Listen to this: 125 million viewers watched on the night of its finale—84% of all American televisions. No program, no Super Bowl, no World Series game has ever come close to having 125 million people watching.

Series finales are important. They can put a cherry on top of the sundae, telling us that all the hours we’ve invested in the show were worth it.

Today we come to the series finale for the life of Joseph, and I believe we have not wasted our time. We have learned a great deal. While Moses could have ended the book of Genesis in any number of ways, his choice might have been a surprise. Of all the things that took place in Genesis, he ended with “Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.” Period. End of story.

What a way to end! But I will tell you, since we now know the story of Joseph, it’s a perfect ending. What a great place to not add any more superfluous words. Joseph was this model man and model citizen, who followed God on the roller coaster of life, who seemingly did all things well. Even though he was a man like us—a man of sin and struggles—his ending became the captivating point of this incredible book, a book that would set the trajectory for the other 65 books of Holy Scripture. From this series finale we can draw out two main truths.

1. The series finale gives us a lesson in forgiveness.

Last week we were spectators to the death of Jacob, Joseph's dad. We watched the funeral. Genesis 50:15 says, *"When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.'"*

So imagine it. The funeral is over. They're back in the family's home. They have 5-Bs Catering serving them a luncheon. Everybody is enjoying the food. As they're eating, the ten brothers say to each other "Hey, let's talk about something. Guys, Dad's dead. You know what's going to happen now? Joseph is going to come after us. He's finally going to repay us for what we've done."

You might ask, "Why would they think that?" You need to remember that that's exactly what their Uncle Esau did when Isaac died. Remember, Esau and Jacob had issues with each other. But Esau didn't do anything to pursue revenge on his brother until after his father died. He didn't want to grieve his dad by what he intended to do to Jacob to repay him for the evil he did. So Joseph's brothers remember what Uncle Esau did and feared that was what Joseph would do as well, thinking "He didn't want to grieve Dad, so he's been Mr. Nice Guy. But now that Dad is gone he can bring his revenge."

But that's not what Joseph did. This text instead brings us a picture of forgiveness. We discussed forgiveness back when Joseph first revealed his identity to his brothers. He told them then that he loved them and would care for them. And he had indeed shown his forgiveness through all he had given them through the years while they were in Egypt. They knew nothing but benevolence from their brother.

But today we're going to look at a spiritual truth that applies, not to our forgiveness in our horizontal relationships with each other, but rather to the forgiveness which God has shown us. We need to think about how we respond to His forgiveness, and how at times we dismiss it because we think our sins are so bad they can't be forgiven.

Forgiveness is necessary because our sin is severe.

After all those years, and after all the love Joseph had extended to his brothers—he's forgiven them, provided for them and protected them—they still think it was a trick. They think he's just waiting in the weeds for an opportunity to pounce on them.

Verse 14 tells us the reason they're worried about this: *"It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him."* That phrase acknowledges that great evil had been done. This was not you stealing your sister's blouse so you might have an outfit that works. This isn't your brother stealing a basketball or a pair of sneakers without you knowing about it. These aren't misdemeanors. These are high crimes. The things Joseph's brothers did to him were unconscionable.

Many of us have suffered abuse from family members, but surely Joseph could be a poster child for massive family abuse. The bad blood took their family off course. That fateful day when they threw their brother into the pit and then sold him into slavery was a day that changed everyone's relationships. It changed Joseph's relationship with his brothers, the brothers' relationships with each other, and their relationship with their father.

This reality is articulated by the brothers themselves: "We have done evil against our brother." They realize during their first meeting with the prime minister of Egypt, whom they don't recognize, that God was judging them for what they had done. They knew it was a great offense. They know now that Joseph had every right to come after them for their abuse and betrayal of him.

This is now a great time for us to pause and recognize that we too have sinned and that our sin is severe. Not only have we sinned against one another, but ultimately we have sinned against our God. Like Joseph's brothers, we have betrayed our God. In fact, if we take Joseph and his brothers out of the story line, the brothers could easily be replaced by us—and Joseph can be viewed as a picture of God Who has all the blessings and opportunities. But instead of falling in love with Him or pursuing Him, we get jealous of Him. We ask, "Why does He have all the good things? Why does He get to make all the decisions? Why can't I do some of the commanding?"

And like the brothers, we can get angry and shake our fists against Him. "You're not going to tell me what to do. You're not going to interfere in my life. You're not my Boss." As He continues to stay in our lives, we mock Him. When He gets too close and personal, we do what we can to rid ourselves of Him. Just as Joseph was handed over to a group of traders, never to be seen again in Canaan, we tell God we want nothing to do with Him. And sadly, we think we're done with Him.

But God, like Joseph, keeps coming around. He keeps inviting Himself back into our lives. And either we will bow down and worship Him, or we're going to fight Him to the end of our days. You see, you and I need forgiveness because, like the brothers, we have

sinned severely against the God of the universe. We need forgiveness, because if we're really honest with ourselves, we have done evil. We have transgressed.

The Apostle Paul says, "But all have sinned, all have transgressed and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He also tells us, "The wage of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). As sinners, every one of us has sinned against the holy God. We've done what the brothers did to Joseph. And as a result, our punishment is coming. And unless we receive forgiveness, we will not be able to stand.

Forgiveness isn't brought about by our schemes.

What do Joseph's brothers do? "Hey, we have done evil against our brother. Now that Dad is no longer around, he's going to come at us. We have to do something." Verse 16 says, *"So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this command before he died. 'Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.'"*

They write all this down and hand it to a messenger, who many commentators think may have been Benjamin, the beloved brother of Joseph. He was not part of the betrayal. So whoever the courier was, he took this message to Joseph: "Don't hold this sin against your brothers. Forgive them and let bygones be bygones. Move on."

Here's the problem. I believe, along with most scholars, that this is the brothers up to their old tricks again. It was just like the story they told Jacob to cover their rear ends: "Hey, Dad, we found this multi-colored garment that looks like it was Joseph's. An animal must have gotten him." That protected them from any heat in that situation. Now they want to escape any possible heat again, so they come up with another story. We know Joseph will want to obey any command from their father.

Here's the problem. I don't want to impugn the brothers unless we can prove something, but here's some proof. If Jacob wanted this message told, then why didn't he share it in Genesis 48 when he was talking to Joseph? He could have said, "I'm going to bless your children, Joseph. I know I'm going to die soon and I want to be buried in Canaan. So promise me you'll bury me there. And by the way, son, forgive your brothers. Don't hold it against them. I know you've been hedging your bets all this time. So when I die, don't come after them."

He doesn't say anything like that. Then in chapter 49, when he has the twelve brothers around him and is blessing each of them, why doesn't Jacob add, "And while I've got you all here, I know you've been holding back your vengeance. Hey, in front of your brothers, commit to me you won't do this"? Why doesn't he say it then? I believe the brothers are concocting a scheme to force forgiveness from the one they've offended.

Now, how does that work in our lives today? Human beings do this all the time when it comes to God. You might ask how: "God, I know I've wronged You. I know I'm sinful. But to make sure I can go to heaven, I will do all these good deeds. If they outnumber my bad deeds, then I'm okay." You've heard that many times. "How do you know you're going to heaven?" "Well, I do more good than bad."

But that's a scheme. "If I just do enough goods and try to limit my bads, God's going to have to let me into His Kingdom. God's going to have to give me heaven, not hell." Churches are filled with people today who will come to the communion table. They will take the body and blood of Jesus Christ, thinking if they do that every Sunday, then God has to let them into His Kingdom and forgive their sins. How many people have walked into the waters of baptism and said, "Well, because I got sprinkled or because I got dunked in water in a church, surely God is going to forgive me." How many of us have said, "If I just serve God or if I give God money, surely He will release me from my sins. Surely that will take care of it." All of these are schemes that say, "God, You have to forgive me of my wrongs because of X, Y and Z that I've accomplished for You." But Scripture says, "That's junk. That's not what forgiveness is all about." Forgiveness is not based on our schemes; it is a gift that is given to change our standing.

Forgiveness is a gift given to change our standing.

Notice that when Joseph gets their message, he weeps. Why does he weep? Because, he tells them, "Brothers, you were forgiven a long time ago. Why won't you forgive yourselves? When I said you were forgiven, you were forgiven. When I said I loved you, I loved you. When I said I would care for you, I cared for you. Nothing I've done from that point to this has shown you anything else. Yet now you think you can do something to garner my forgiveness. It was already given."

Then look at what he says: "Because I'm willing to forgive you, I'm telling you not to fear. Don't be afraid in your relationship with me. I'm going to provide for you. I will provide everything you need out of my riches." Then he comforts them, speaking kindly to them and assuring them of the love and forgiveness they have received.

That's what God does with those of us who have bowed the knee to Jesus. When we have confessed our sins, 1 John 1:9 says, "*He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" We might come back and say, "But God, what about this sin? But God, surely I've done so much bad that You can't right it. But God, the circumstances of my life and what I've done—surely I can't be forgiven of that."

But here's the crazy thing: you've been forgiven by others, you've been forgiven by God—but you won't forgive yourself. Then God comes to you saying, "Don't fear. Don't be afraid about your relationship with Me. You're My son. You're My daughter. I love you. I provide for you. I care for you." And by His Holy Spirit He inspires Paul to write in Romans 8:35, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*" He comforts us, saying, "Listen, there's nothing you can do that will separate us." Jesus says, "No one can pluck you out of My Father's hands" (John 10:28).

God assures us over and over again by providing for us. He gives us the Holy Spirit. He gives us His Word. He gives us the local church. He gives us all we need to know as a member of His family. And He speaks good to us. He's a loving Father, caring for us. This is what Jesus has done for everyone who has bowed the knee to make Him Savior and Lord. Believe that and affirm that. Don't allow your emotions to get in the way. Don't allow the devil to accuse you of your past and tell you your past has not been forgiven. God doesn't want us to live in fear. He wants us to live in faith, not concerned about what may separate us but to believe by faith that nothing can come between us.

Joseph endured all manner of struggles in order to be his brothers' savior. When they presumed that his forgiveness wasn't real, they in essence trampled underfoot the forgiveness he extended to them. We do that with Christ regarding what He did on the cross: "Jesus, my sin is worse than the cross. Jesus, what You did on the cross wasn't enough. It didn't pass muster. What I've done is far worse."

No, listen, brothers and sisters. When Jesus said it was finished on the cross, your sins were taken care of...period. They were dealt with. Jesus forgave you and He forgave me. We shouldn't second guess it.

Forgiveness doesn't dismiss the evil, but saves us from its wrath.

Numerous times in the text we see evil, sin, transgression. In fact, Joseph even says, "What you meant for evil..." He calls it out. He doesn't say, "I don't even remember what you did. It's all worked out and everything is fine, so let's not bring it up again." No, he says, "What you did was evil. It was painful and harmful. You broke my heart. You hurt my body. You caused me great grief. It was sinful and evil."

But Joseph brings this up, not to cause them grief, but because he wants them to know that what they did was evil and they need to never do such things again. When we read the Scriptures that say God will forget our sins—"He'll remember our sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12)—we sometimes do some weird theological gymnastics with that. "Okay, the omniscient God has a case of dementia. He forgets our sins." No, God is omniscient and doesn't forget things. He knows all things. It's not like He turns off part of His brain, saying, "Now that Tim is 40 years old, I can't remember what he did as a teenager. I wish I could...but I can't." No, God remembers full well what I did. God was there when I did it and He remembers today, just as He remembered back then. And God doesn't want me to forget that either. God doesn't want me to have dementia and forget what I did. Rather, God says, "What you did, Tim, was evil. I don't want you to forget how evil that was. I want you to remember where you were, so you will be able to see what you've become." Does that make sense? God wants us to realize the depths of where we were so we can understand how far He's brought us. It isn't that God is still holding our sins against us, but He hasn't forgotten them or had them erased from His memory bank. He wants us to remember them so we can see how far we've come by His grace and mercy.

Some of us have been saved and forgiven for quite a while and we can allow ourselves to forget the depths from which we have been pulled. We have forgotten what the Word says we were before we came to know Christ. We can know when we've forgotten, because we look at unbelievers and say, "How dare you do that? That's sick. That's evil. I would never do that." You've forgotten the evil you did—the evil that was in you.

Joseph says, "I want you to remember that day you sold me into slavery, because it will make my forgiveness today all the more sweet." The brothers were full of grief and guilt for what they had done. And now they stood before the prime minister of Egypt, their brother, and he says, "*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.*"

The greatest contrast that Scripture lays forth is personified in Joseph's life. Ephesians 2:3–5 tells us that all of us were like the world, "*by nature, children of wrath.*" And it leaves us there. It doesn't say, "You used to be, but God forgot about it." No. We were children of wrath because of our disobedience, because we followed the devil instead of God. But the greatest word written in all

of Scripture is the three-letter word b-u-t. We were children, of wrath, *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved.”*

We were there. He’s brought us here. We need to never forget where we came from, because we will never fully appreciate where we are now. Joseph tells his brothers, “What you intended was evil, but look how far my forgiveness has come. Now you no longer have to live there, but you can live here with all the blessings and privileges of being in my family.”

What we do with God is fall on the ground like Joseph’s brothers, saying, “We’re Your slaves.” And like Jesus did with the woman caught in adultery, He raises us up and says, “You’re no longer slaves. You’re My sons and daughters. You get to experience all the blessings and privileges of being in the family of God.” He saves us from the wrath, but He wants us to remember how far He’s brought us by His grace.

2. This series finale gives us a lasting farewell.

Between verses 21 and 22 my Bible has a subtitle that reads, “The Death of Joseph.” Verse 22 picks up the story 54 years later. It says, *“Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father’s house.”* They continued to do what they were doing. Nothing in the text tells us Joseph did anything different from the time he was 17 until he was 110.

This gives us three truths about the farewell of this great man. It says his life was blessed. He would not live as long as his grandfather did or his father did. In fact, he would not live as long as his brothers did, because it says his brothers gathered around him. So, being one of the youngest, it seems he died before at least some of his brothers did. At 110, he had lived a good life. He lived to see not only his grandchildren, but his great-grandchildren. He died a fully contented man. God had used him in powerful ways. And like all the great men before him, and those who followed him, he was taken from this life into the presence of God.

As we look at Joseph’s life, we remember his theology.

As we look at this great man’s life, we have to ask what allowed him to accomplish all he did. In the good times and bad, what allowed him to be faithful to God? What can we learn from his life and legacy to put into practice ourselves? What enabled him to accomplish all he did when seemingly the world was pitted against him? I’m here to say it was his theology; his understanding of Who God was in his life. Because he had a right view of God, he had a compass pointing to true north. He knew Who God was, and as long as he kept his compass focused on God he would know how to navigate whatever God brought his way. Here’s why I know his theology was right: As his brothers were worried about what Joseph might do to them, he tells them in verse 19, *“Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?”*

What a huge theological statement that is. He is telling them, “I am number two in everything in my life. God is number one. I do not trespass against Him or tell Him what to do. I’m middle management. When my Boss tells me to do something, I do it. So when God told me to suffer like a good soldier when I was sold into slavery, I did it. When He told me to serve my earthly masters well, no matter what came my way, I did it. When I was charged with a crime I didn’t commit, I remained faithful even though it cost me my freedom. I did what God called me to do. I ran from temptation. When I found myself in prison, I didn’t bellyache or complain. I honored God and served my earthly masters well. I honored God before Pharaoh. I honored and served God when I was called to take care of the needs of the Egyptian people during the famine. And when I was called to forgive my brothers, I did so. When I was called to care for my family, I did—because God is number one. I take commands from Him. I will not take the place of God.”

Some of us want the life of Joseph, but we are unwilling to listen to the theology of Joseph. We want to be number one. “I want to do with my time what I will. I want to do with my money what I will. I want to do with my life what I will. God, You take orders from me.” You will never live the life that Joseph lived when you think you’re in charge. But when God is in charge, it will do two things.

First, it will humble you. Notice that Joseph has a humble theology. He knows God is the main character in the story. He knows he’s a small part in God’s plan. As this play progresses and the spotlight falls on Joseph, he says, “No. Put it on God. It isn’t about me—it’s about Him.” He humbles himself and we need to humble ourselves. Should the spotlight come on us, brothers and sisters, it’s not for us. It’s for Him. To God alone be the glory—great things He has done. When we realize this, it enables us to accept the hard things that come.

A lot of us are unwilling to forgive people because we put ourselves in the place of God. We begin to think, “I’m a holy and righteous individual, and when you offend me, I’m going to pour out my wrath and indignation on you, because I’m perfect and you’re not.” But when we’re humble, our forgiveness of one another is a whole lot easier. We realize we’re the middle man between a holy God and an offending brother. When someone wrongs us, we turn to God and say, “He offended me, but I offended You. And since You

forgave me, likewise I now forgive my brother.” Joseph knew he was a sinner and needed God’s grace, so he could then extend what he had received to his brothers. Right theology humbles us.

But right theology also makes us hopeful. Twice Joseph says, “God will visit you.” He knows that at the end of his life God isn’t done. Do you realize all of us are replaceable? Our guiding elder team is reading a book now about succession and that staff members are replaceable. So when Tim dies (that’s not in the book, thank God)...but when Tim dies, Village Bible Church should not say, “Oh my goodness, what are we going to do?” You’re going to get another guy up here, maybe even better looking than the last guy, and he’s going to preach the Word. He’ll fill the gap.

So we should never think, “What is God going to do when I’m gone? Does He have a plan?” His plan is to keep going. He will keep drawing people to Himself and growing them in the faith. Each one of us is replaceable. The only One Who wasn’t replaceable died on a cross and He now resides at the right hand of the Father. Everybody else is only a small part of God’s plan. So our hope lies in the reality that God’s plan won’t fall apart when we’re gone. At the end of his life, Joseph sees the hopeful calling of God—that God will be with His people for years to come.

As we look at Joseph’s life, we remember his consistency.

We looked at Joseph’s theology, but we should also consider his consistency. He lived to be 110, and nowhere throughout those years does Moses write a bad thing about him. Does that mean he was perfect? No. But it means he lived life well. He was consistent in three arenas of life.

First, he was consistent in life’s troubles. Whether he was being beaten up or knocked down or persecuted or falsely accused—through it all he remained faithful.

Second, he was consistent throughout the temptations he faced. When Potiphar’s wife hit on him, he responded, “Why should I do this evil thing before God?” Both in times of trouble and times of temptation, he acknowledged that God was in charge. Joseph was determined to do what God had called him to, living a consistent, obedient life before Him. Third, Joseph was consistent, faithful and obedient to God. We might think that surely in the triumph of life he would do what he wanted to do. When everything turned out well for Joseph—when he became prime minister in charge over all Egypt—surely then he could allow himself some indulgences. No.

Some of us think we simply need that once-in-a-lifetime experience where we bow the knee to Jesus and tell Him we love Him—and then we can walk away from it all. But God does not want a false commitment from us. He wants consistency. He wants to live faithfully in all life situations. He wants us to live consistently when we’re alone, when we’re in front of the entire church and when we’re with non-believers. Joseph shows us that.

As we look at Joseph’s life, we remember his legacy.

Moses dedicated the last 14 chapters of the great book of Genesis to the story of this man and how God used him. But the legacy of this story isn’t so much about Joseph as it is about God. God has two unforgettable attributes that we see throughout this story. If you’re living in hard times, as Joseph did, these two truths are important to remember.

First, God has a plan. If we go back to Genesis 37, we see that God had a plan. When Joseph walks up to his brothers to check on them, they grab him and say, “Hey, you dreamer. We’ll show you a thing or two.” They beat him, throw him into the pit and sell him into slavery. But in all of this, God isn’t up in heaven going, “Oh, no! What are We going to do now? That was our guy. But now he’s down in Egypt.” God never reacted that way and we need to remember that if God’s not panicking, neither should we. Even though trials come, God’s plans are never thwarted. God uses the good, the bad and the ugly to accomplish His plans.

The providence of God is a mystery. How does He take the sinful acts of sinful creatures and use them for good? Why does He allow them to happen in the first place? I don’t know. It’s one of my first questions to ask God when I get to glory.

But a friend gave me an illustration that I’m going to steal and use as my own. He said, “I see the providence of God like my GPS. It tells me the beginning and the end. It shows me the destination and how I should travel to get there. Right turn here, left turn here, around this curve, and eventually I get there.” But what happens when I sin, when I decide to go right but God said to turn left? What does the GPS do? “Rerouting. Rerouting.” I want the one that says, “Hey, moron, you went the wrong way. Turn around.” Every once in a while when we’re driving I like to just rebel against the GPS. “Make a U-turn. Make a U-turn. Make a U-turn.” It’s like it’s saying, “C’mon guy. Who’s in the car? I’m telling you where to go and you’re not going there.” But the GPS still gets me to where I need to go.

In God's providence, when you choose to turn right instead of left, God says, "Rerouting. It's going to take you a little longer. You might run into traffic. The road might be more hazardous. But I'll get you there."

I think that's true of God's plan for Joseph. You see, God's detours are good detours. When God says, "Rerouting," He's telling you, "Go this way. This way—though it hurts, though it seems difficult—is the right way to go. Because in the end, I will get you to where I want you to be." He's doing that in each of our lives.

But if you think He's doing this from a distance and without real concern about what's happening, let me tell you that God is always present. One of the things we learn early in Joseph's story, in the middle of the story, and in the last part of the story is that God is always present with him. God was with Joseph when he was with his dad, when he was in the pit and when he was taken into slavery in Egypt. God was with Joseph when he was in Potiphar's house, when he was in prison, when he was prime minister—and God was with him on the last day of his life.

Over and over again the text tells us, "The Lord was with Joseph." This reminds us that He is with us as well. Twice Joseph tells the brothers, "He will visit you." He was telling them that what had happened in his life would happen in theirs as well. And later God was with Moses, with Joshua, with the judges, and with the prophets. All through the Old Testament God was with His people.

Then in Matthew we come to what this week signifies: Emmanuel, God With Us. He visited us. He put on flesh and made His dwelling with us. He taught us what real forgiveness is all about. He taught us what living a life for Him is all about. He walks with us and talks with us and gives us assurance that He cares for us. And God brings about His plan in our lives. He's in the car with us and He says, "Go left. Now turn right. Now go straight." And He tells us, "I have plans for you. I have promises for you."

Joseph tells his brothers, "I want you to make a promise to me. I want you to take me out of Egypt when you go." The brothers wonder, "What are you talking about? We live in Egypt." But Joseph says, "Don't bury me too deep in the ground. Put me in a coffin, embalm me, but don't put me in the ground or in one of the pyramids." Why? Because Joseph remembered what his dad had been told by God Himself: "Your land is in Canaan. You have a Promised Land." Joseph said, "God fulfills His promises and He'll be with us every step of the way. So when God visits us and says Egypt is no longer our home, I want you to take me with you. I believe in the promise of a Promised Land."

Then later, as we read in Exodus 1:8, "There arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph." The people were put into captivity and became slaves to the Egyptians. They suffered great persecution. But 400 years after Joseph, God raised up another great man—Moses—who would by God's strength and power bring the ten plagues to Egypt. After Pharaoh would not let the people go, he would finally say, "Okay. Go. Get out of here." Three million Israelites walked out of Egypt without a shot being fired.

In Exodus 13:19, we're told that in the busyness of preparing for the great Exodus, Moses announced to the people of Israel, "Don't forget Joseph's bones. Go get his coffin." That had been a reminder to the people of God over all those years of slavery that great times were coming. We're told that Joseph's bones were carried around for 40 years in the wilderness. And then in Joshua 24:32 he is buried in the land his father gave him in Canaan.

God promises us that when we live by faith, when we obey and trust Him, He has plans for us and promises us a life of blessing in the life to come. Take heart from these words and from this story, applying them as sensible people would. Hear what God has to teach you from this great man, Joseph.

The words of a hymn are apropos for closing this series, because as we look at Joseph's life we are reminded to "Trust and Obey." It's what Joseph did and he was a blessed man. We can be too when we trust and obey.

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh or a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

But we never can prove the delights of His love
Until all on the altar we lay,
For the favor He shows, for the joy He bestows,
Are for them who will trust and obey.

[Trust & Obey by John H. Sammis & Daniel B Towner, 1887]