

Joseph: God's Providence in Suffering

— Men Meant Evil, But God Meant It Unto Good —

- Human Wrongdoing Brought Real Suffering
- The LORD Was With Joseph Through Every Change
- God Meant It Unto Good
- Understanding God's Providence Shapes Our Response

In our previous lesson, “Jacob Changed by God,” we saw Jacob humbled, dependent, and changed. Jacob’s family still faced envy, betrayal, and years of suffering. Yet the wrongdoing of men, did not remove God from the story.

For this lesson, Joseph’s record, describes providence in the following Biblical words:

- “the LORD was with Joseph” ([Gen.39:2,21](#)),
- “God did send me before you” ([Gen.45:5](#)),
- and “God meant it unto good” ([Gen.50:20](#)).

Providence is God’s faithful working through events, to carry out His purpose, without approving or causing the sins, committed by men.

- It does not make evil, good, or excuse sinners;
- **It shows that human wrongdoing, cannot defeat God’s purpose.**

The question is: When suffering is real, when people have acted wickedly, and or the answer is delayed,

- **How should God’s servant, see the situation and respond?**

This morning, God willing, we will consider:

- real suffering, • the LORD’s presence, • God’s good purpose,
- and Joseph’s forgiveness, patience, and trust.

A simple way to remember the lesson, is this:

- Men harmed Joseph, • the LORD remained with Joseph,
- God preserved life through Joseph, • and Joseph answered evil with good.

Before we speak about the good, God accomplished,
Let’s consider the truth, about the evil Joseph suffered.

I. Human Wrongdoing, Brought Real Suffering

Joseph’s suffering, began close to home.

A. Joseph Was Betrayed by His Own Brothers

Joseph came to his brothers in the field, at his father’s request.

Instead of receiving him as their brother, they stripped him, cast him into a pit, and sold him into Egypt.

- The Biblical record states: “And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours, that was on him; And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.

And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead, with their camels, bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt.

And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it, if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content.

Then there passed by, Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and **sold** Joseph to the Ishmeelites, for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.” ([Gen.37:23-28](#))

Explanation:

- “**Sold**” means — they treated their own brother, as property for a price.

Stephen later summarized the moral cause of this betrayal, and immediately showed, the great contrast in the story.

- The Bible says, “And the patriarchs, moved with **envy**, sold Joseph into Egypt: **but God was with him**, And delivered him out of all his **afflictions**, and gave him **favour** and **wisdom** in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor, over Egypt and all his house.” ([Acts 7:9-10](#))

Explanation:

- The word, “**Envy**” — is resentful jealousy. Scripture says envy moved them to sell Joseph.
- The phrase, “**But God was with him**” — is the turning point: The brothers’ action, changed Joseph’s place, but Not God’s presence.
- “**Afflictions**” means — sufferings or troubles. God’s deliverance, did not deny the pain; it brought Joseph through it.

Betrayal hurts deeply, because it comes from someone, who should have loved us. Joseph was not harmed by a stranger — he was harmed by his own brothers.

Joseph suffered, because others hated him.

He also suffered later, because he refused, to join another person in sin.

B. Joseph Suffered, for Doing What Was Right

In Potiphar’s house, Joseph was tempted by his master’s wife. Joseph’s answer, shows that his first concern, was faithfulness to God, even when no family member, was nearby to see him.

- Scripture says, “And it came to pass, after these things, that his master's wife, cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. But he **refused**, and said unto his master's wife,

Behold, my master **wotteth not**, what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath, to my hand; There is none greater in this house than I; Neither, hath he kept back any thing from me, but thee, because thou art his wife: how then, can I do this **great wickedness**, and **sin against God**?” ([Gen.39:7-9](#))

Explanation:

- The word, “**Refused**” means — Joseph said NO, and would Not consent to the sin.
 - “**Wotteth not**” means — does Not know; Potiphar trusted Joseph, with the affairs of the house.
 - “**Great Wickedness**” means — serious evil. Joseph measured the act, by God’s standard and called it “**sin against God**.”
 - Joseph fled from the temptation — but the woman falsely accused him.
 - Doing right, did Not produce, an immediate easy outcome.
- The Bible goes on to say, “And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner, did thy servant to me; that his **wrath was kindled**. And Joseph's master took him, and put him into **the prison**, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.” ([Gen.39:19-20](#))

Explanation:

- The phrase, “**Wrath was kindled**” means — Potiphar became angry, after hearing the accusation.
- Joseph was put in “**the prison**”, although the record has shown, that he refused the wicked act.

Faithfulness does not guarantee, that every person will understand us, or that every earthly result, will be fair. Joseph obeyed God, and still lost his position and freedom.

- Telling the truth, does not become wrong, because someone becomes angry at the truth-teller.
- Joseph's suffering, did not prove that his obedience had failed.

Joseph's suffering, was not imaginary.

- Envy, betrayal, slavery, temptation, false accusation, and imprisonment, were real.

Scripture never excuses the brothers or Potiphar's wife.

- God's providence, does Not make evil, good — it shows, that evil cannot prevent God, from doing good.

Human wrongdoing, changed Joseph's circumstances, again and again.

Now we must ask: where was the LORD, while Joseph was suffering?

II. The LORD Was With Joseph, Through Every Change

The first answer is repeated plainly in Genesis 39:

the LORD was with Joseph, both in a servant's house and in a prison.

A. God's Presence, Did Not Mean an Easy Life

After Joseph was sold into Egypt, he became a servant, in Potiphar's house.

The Bible calls him prosperous, while also saying, that he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

- Scriptures says, "**And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. And his master saw, that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did, to prosper in his hand.**" ([Gen.39:2-3](#))

Explanation:

- The statement, "**The LORD was with Joseph**" means — Joseph was not abandoned by God, in a foreign land.
- The word, "**Prosperous**" here, does Not mean — Joseph was free from hardship; he was still a servant, in another man's house.

After the false accusation, the location changed, from the house to the prison, but the repeated truth, did Not change.

- The Bible says, "**But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour, in the sight of the keeper of the prison.**"

And the keeper of the prison,
committed to Joseph's hand, all the prisoners, that were in the prison;
and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it.

The keeper of the prison, looked not to any thing, that was under his hand;
because **the LORD was with him**, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper." ([Gen.39:21-23](#))

Explanation:

- The words, "**Mercy**" and "**favour**" — describe the LORD's, compassionate kindness, and the keeper's, favorable regard for Joseph.
- The words, "**the LORD was with him**," are repeated, while Joseph was still in prison.
- God's presence, was seen in mercy, favour, responsibility, and faithful work.

Joseph's brothers, could take his coat — Potiphar, could take his position.

A false accusation, could take his freedom — **None of them, could remove the presence of the LORD.**

We should Not measure God's presence, only by comfort.

Genesis says, the LORD was with Joseph, in places Joseph would never have chosen.

God was present, but Joseph still had to endure a long delay.

Scripture let's us feel the weight, of being forgotten by man, but...

B. Joseph Was Not Forgotten by God

Joseph correctly interpreted, the chief butler's dream, and asked to be remembered.

The butler was restored, but Joseph remained in prison.

- Scripture says, **"Yet, did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him. And it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river."** ([Gen.40:23 — Gen.41:1](#))

Explanation:

- The word, **"Forgot"** means — the butler failed to remember Joseph;
- **"two full years"** — shows, that Joseph's delay, was long and real.
- Pharaoh's dream, began the chain of events, that would bring Joseph out of prison.
- The butler had forgotten Joseph, but his failure, could Not prevent God's purpose, from moving forward at the proper time.

Psalm 105 gives an inspired summary of Joseph's suffering and helps us understand those years of delay.

- **"He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him."** ([Psa.105:17-19](#))

Explanation:

- The phrase, **"He sent a man before them,"** means — Joseph was brought into Egypt, ahead of Jacob and his family, where God would later use him, to preserve their lives.
- The words, **"Until the time"** — shows that the hardship, had a limit, known to God.
- **"Tried him"** means — tested or proved him.
- The years were not easy, but they were Not outside the LORD's purpose, or beyond His appointed time.

The **butler forgot Joseph** — but Scripture **NEVER** says, **God forgot Joseph.**

Two full years passed, yet the LORD was still working, toward the appointed purpose.

The LORD was with Joseph, in Potiphar's house, in prison,

through the years of delay, and when the door finally opened.

- God's presence, did not remove every hardship immediately.
- The LORD's presence, gave Joseph mercy, favour, opportunities for faithful service, endurance through the delay, and the outcome God had purposed in His time.

We have seen that God was with Joseph.

Genesis now tells us, what God was accomplishing, through the events, that men had meant for harm.

III. God Meant It Unto Good

The heart of the lesson is found in one sentence,
that places the brothers' purpose and God's purpose, side by side.

A. Two Intentions Were at Work in the Same Events

After Jacob died, Joseph's brothers feared revenge.

Joseph answered, by recognizing God's place as Judge,

and by distinguishing, their evil intention, from God's good intention.

- The Bible says, "And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for **am I, in the place of God?** But as for you, **ye thought evil** against me; but **God meant it unto good**, to bring to pass, as it is this day, **to save much people alive.**" ([Gen.50:19-20](#))

Explanation:

- The question, "**Am I, in the place of God?**" shows Joseph would Not seize God's place, as the final Judge and avenger.
- "**Ye thought evil**" and "**God meant it unto good**" show two intentions: their harm and God's saving purpose.
- The stated good was "**to save much people alive.**" God's purpose was larger, than Joseph's personal advancement.

Because Genesis says, God meant the events for good,

we must also hear Scripture's plain teaching, that God does not entice anyone, to commit evil.

- James wrote, "**Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God:** for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He, any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of **his own lust**, and enticed." ([Jas.1:13-14](#))

Explanation:

- The word, "**Tempted**" here means — enticed or drawn toward committing sin.
- God is never the source, who lures a person into evil.
- The phrase, "**His own lust**" — identifies human sinful desire.

The brothers remained responsible, even though God brought good.

- Genesis 50:20 does Not say, the brothers' evil, was secretly good.
- It says they meant evil, while God meant good.

This truth, gives both warning and comfort.

- The sinner cannot blame God for sin,
- and the sufferer, should Not believe that human evil, has become stronger than God's purpose.

Joseph did Not merely say, that some unknown good had occurred.
He identified the good purpose, God had accomplished.

B. God Sent Joseph Before the Family, to Preserve Life

When Joseph first revealed himself to his brothers, he spoke plainly about, both their act and God's purpose.
The words "whom ye sold" and "God did send me", stand together without contradiction.

The brothers were responsible for the sinful act,
while God governed the outcome, toward His saving purpose.

- Scripture says, "And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you.
And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, **whom ye sold** into Egypt.

Now therefore, be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither:
for **God did send me** before you, to **preserve life**.

For these two years, hath the famine been in the land:
and yet there are five years, in the which, there shall neither be, earing nor harvest.

And God sent me before you, to **preserve** you, a **posterity** in the earth,
and to **save your lives**, by a great deliverance.

So now it was Not you, that sent me hither, but God:
and He hath made me, a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house,
and a ruler, throughout all the land of Egypt." ([Gen.45:4-8](#))

Explanation:

- The phrase, "Whom ye sold" — preserves the brothers' guilt,
- While "God did send me" — identifies God's larger purpose.
- "Preserve," "save your lives," and "posterity" — show that God kept, a surviving family line, alive.
- The statement, "A father to Pharaoh" — describes Joseph's place, of trusted counsel and authority; it does Not mean, he was Pharaoh's literal father.

The New Testament, gives the same broad assurance.

- Paul said, "And we know, that **all things work together for good**,
to them that love God, to them who are the called, according to His **purpose**." ([Rom.8:28](#))

Explanation:

- The verse does **Not say** all things are good — Joseph's betrayal and false accusation, were **evil**.
- The phrase, "**Work together for good**" does Not mean, every individual event is good.
It means, God can use even painful events, together with other circumstances,
to accomplish His good purpose.
- The word, "**Purpose**" — keeps the focus on God's will,
and the promise, belongs to those who love God, and are called according to His purpose.

God's good, was larger than Joseph's comfort — He was preserving life.

- We should Not presume, that every faithful person, will receive Joseph's earthly position.
- Scripture reveals Joseph's particular purpose.
- **The lasting principle, is that No act of man can overthrow, what God has determined to accomplish.**

The brothers meant evil — and **God meant good**.
Their guilt remained — and **God's holiness remained**.

Human sin, did Not become the author of God's plan, and human sin, could Not cancel God's plan.

When Joseph understood, that God had been working for good,
that truth shaped, how he treated the very people, who had wronged him.

IV. Understanding God's Providence Shapes Our Response

Joseph's belief in God's providence, did not remain an idea in his mind.

A. Joseph Refused Revenge and Chose Kindness

Joseph had authority, food, servants, and opportunity.
His brothers were afraid, because he now had the power to repay them.

Listen again to what he chose to do.

- “And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I, in the place of God?
But as for you, ye thought **evil** against me; but God meant it unto good,
to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

Now therefore, fear ye Not: I will **nourish** you, and your little ones.
And he **comforted** them, and **spake kindly** unto them.” ([Gen.50:19-21](#))

Explanation:

- Joseph refused to act, as though he occupied God's place, as the final avenger.
- He still called their intention “**evil**”
Forgiveness, did not require pretending, the wrong never happened.
- The words, “**Nourish**,” “**comforted**,” and “**spake kindly**”
show practical care, reassurance, and continued provision.

Paul later commanded Christians, to leave vengeance with God, and to overcome evil with good.

- He said, “Dearly beloved, **avenge Not yourselves**, but rather give place unto wrath:
for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink:
for in so doing, thou shalt heap, coals of fire on his head.
Be Not overcome of evil, but **overcome evil with good**.” ([Rom.12:19-21](#))

Explanation:

- The statement, “**Avenge Not yourselves**” means — do not take personal revenge;
righteous vengeance, belongs to the Lord.
- Feeding a hungry enemy — is active goodness, Not passive bitterness.
- “**Overcome evil with good**” means — evil must Not be allowed,
to shape us into people, who return the same evil.

Joseph called evil, evil — yet refused personal revenge and chose good.

- Forgiveness tells the truth,
- Leaves vengeance with God,
- and Resists bitterness.

Joseph's brothers, had once watched him, hunger in a pit.

- Joseph later nourished them and their little ones.
- He overcame evil with good.

Joseph's forgiveness, showed how he responded to the wrong, that had already been done to him.
But what should a servant of God do, while the hardship is still continuing, and the outcome is not yet known?

He must patiently...

B. Trust God and Keep Doing Right in Hardship

James teaches, that trials can produce endurance, when faith is allowed to continue under pressure.

- He said, "**My brethren, count it all joy, when ye fall into divers temptations;**
Knowing this, that the **trying** of your faith worketh patience.
But let **patience**, have her perfect work, that ye may be **perfect and entire**, wanting nothing." ([Jas.1:2-4](#))

Explanation:

- The words, "**divers temptations**" mean — various trials.
- "**Trying**" means — testing or proving.
- "**Patience**" means — endurance or steadfast continuance, under difficulty.
- "**Perfect and entire**" means — mature and complete.
- The joy, is Not that pain is pleasant, but that faithful endurance, can produce spiritual growth.

Peter tells suffering servants, what to do,
when the whole reason for their hardship, has not been revealed to them.

- He said, "**Wherefore let them that suffer, according to the will of God,**
commit the keeping of their souls, to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." ([1Pet.4:19](#))

Explanation:

- Suffering "**according to the will of God**" — does Not mean, God approves the sinner's wrongdoing;
it describes faithful sufferers, entrusting themselves to God, while continuing in well doing.
- The phrase, "**Commit the keeping**",
means — entrust the soul and its safekeeping, to the "**faithful Creator**".
- "**Well doing**" means — continue doing what is right, while suffering.
- Trust is Not inactivity — It keeps obeying God,
while leaving the unseen outcome, in His faithful hands.

Joseph's confidence in God's providence, helped him:

- Refuse revenge, nourish his brothers, comfort them, and speak kindly to them.
- Biblical patience is steadfast endurance.
- And biblical trust, keeps doing right, while committing the outcome, to the faithful Creator.

Let's now gather the whole lesson in some,

V. Final Thoughts

Joseph's life, moved through the pit, slavery, false accusation, prison, delay, release, famine, and reconciliation.
Scripture never calls the evil, harmless.

Yet the repeated testimony, is that:

- The LORD was, with Joseph,
- God sent him, before the family,
- And God meant, the events unto good, to save much people alive.

This is not merely another lesson about waiting — Its distinct emphasis, is that:

- God worked through suffering and human wrongdoing, **without approving** the wrongdoing,
- and Joseph's understanding of God's purpose, shaped forgiveness and good conduct.

Lessons Learned

- **Providence does Not deny suffering.**
 - Joseph's pit, slavery, false accusation, fetters, and delay — were **real**.
- **Providence does Not excuse sin.**
 - The brothers "thought evil," and James says, God does Not tempt any man with evil.
- **God's presence is Not measured, only by ease or speed.**
 - The LORD was with Joseph in the house, in prison, and through two full years of delay.
- **God's good purpose, may be larger than our personal comfort.**
 - Joseph was placed to preserve life and save a posterity.
- **Forgiveness does Not call evil good.**
 - Joseph named the evil, refused revenge, nourished his brothers, and comforted them.
- **Patience and trust continue doing right,**
 - while committing the soul and the unseen outcome, to the faithful Creator.

Questions for Reflection

- When I am hurt, do I tell the truth about the wrong, without letting bitterness rule me?
- Do I measure God's presence, only by comfort, quick answers, or human remembrance?
- Am I taking personal revenge, or can others see forgiveness, in my words and deeds?
- Will I commit my soul, to the faithful Creator and continue in well doing?

The previous lesson, showed Jacob, humbled and changed.

This lesson, has shown God preserving Jacob's family, through Joseph's suffering.

God willing, the next lesson, "Bondage in Egypt and the Need for Deliverance," will show the affliction that arose, under a later king.

Remember the lesson:

- Men meant evil.
- The LORD was with Joseph.
- God meant it unto good.
- Joseph forgave and did good.

When hardship comes, through betrayal, injustice, or delay,

Remain faithful to God, **Refuse revenge**, **Continue** in well doing, and **Trust** the care and purpose of God.

Joseph was able to preserve **physical life** during famine, but the gospel directs every sinner to Jesus Christ, for **spiritual life** and forgiveness of sins.

The lesson is yours!

It is the Lord, Who invites, and we await to assist.

Won't you come...

- Desiring to **Hear** the gospel ([Rom.10:17](#)), • **Believing** in Christ ([Heb.11:6](#); [Jn.8:24](#)),
- **Repenting** of sins ([Lk.13:3](#); [Acts 17:30](#)), • **Confessing** your belief ([Acts 8:37](#); [Rom.10:9-10](#)),
- and Be **Baptized** for the forgiveness of sins ([Acts 22:16](#); [Mk.16:16](#); [Acts 2:38](#); [1Pet.3:21](#); [Gal.3:26-27](#)).

...While we stand and while we sing.