

Monday, January 14, 2019—Genesis 43-46

God asks us to surrender what we consider valuable in order to receive true life. We give up our pride, our idols, and our flawed identity when we confess our sin and embrace who Christ is and what He has done. The surrender makes us vulnerable and is scary but leads to real living.

God was working in a similar way with Jacob and his sons. Jacob had to send Benjamin with the boys in order for them to receive more grain. They were taking what seemed to be a huge risk, yet they were doing what would give them temporary relief from the famine and long-term prosperity in Egypt. They were also preparing the way for a nation.

When they arrived, Simeon was released, they washed, and they received gifts and food. What a great picture this is of salvation—the freedom from sin, the washing away of sin, the gift of the Spirit, and the promise of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

When the brothers, Judah specifically, fully acknowledged their sin and expressed remorse, Joseph revealed his identity and helped the brothers see how God had orchestrated good out of evil (45:7). When Jacob heard the news, he rejoiced, and the entire family journeyed to Egypt. On the way, he worshiped once again at Bethel, and God assured him He was going to build Israel into a great nation, even in the foreign land of Egypt (46:4).

Praise God for His ability to work good from evil. Thank Him for His guiding, protecting, and providing presence (46:4).

Sunday, January 13, 2019—Genesis 40-42

Joseph faced hardship after hardship. He endured injustice at the hands of his brothers and the wife of Potiphar, and when he did what was right, he ended up in captivity. Each time, Joseph trusted God more than his

circumstances, and God reminded him of His presence and used Joseph in his discomfort to make his world a better place.

While in his Egyptian jail, Joseph met the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. Both had dreams which troubled them, and they discovered Joseph was able to tell them the meaning. Joseph told the cupbearer his personal story and asked the cupbearer to remember him when he returned to Pharaoh, hoping the official might be able to help Joseph out of jail.

The injustice continued, however, as the cupbearer promptly forgot about Joseph (40:23). That is, until two years later, when the Pharaoh himself had a troubling dream no one could interpret. Joseph said God Himself was the one who provided answers, and Pharaoh was so pleased that he appointed Joseph as his vice-regent, being more powerful than anyone Egypt except Pharaoh. In a moment, Joseph's status changed, but this came as a result of a deepening faith grown by years of challenge.

Some years later, Joseph's brothers arrived seeking grain. Joseph went through an uncomfortable process—for him and his brothers—that would eventually benefit them all. Those years of trusting God in difficult circumstances was absolutely vital at this point for Joseph.

Thank God for difficult times which develop faith and maturity.

Saturday, January 12, 2019—Genesis 37-39

“So Jacob settled again in the land of Canaan, where his father had lived” (37:1). Imagine how Jacob had changed. A deceiver on the run from his brother with no possessions except his father's ill-gotten blessing was returning with a large family and vast wealth. God had been faithful even though Jacob was imperfect.

God then revealed His next move, and no one understood it. Joseph was Jacob's favorite, and he had two dreams pointing to his ruling over his brother

and father. Most wonder why he would share this. Was he boasting? Was he being faithful? Regardless of his motivation, his brothers hated him like never before and plotted to kill him.

Rather than killing him, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. Sometime later, Judah, rather than following tradition, left his daughter-in-law to fend for herself. Both Joseph and Tamar knew the pain of being abandoned. Both of them saw God provide in unusual ways.

Joseph arrived in Egypt and found himself a slave of Potiphar, the captain of the pharaoh's guard. "The Lord was with Joseph and blessed him greatly as he served in the home of his Egyptian master" (39:2). As in his biological home, Joseph became a favorite in his Egyptian home, and as in Canaan, this made him a target. The wife of Potiphar had plans to use Joseph for her sexual pleasure. Joseph fled temptation, but once again, an article of clothing told a false narrative, and he landed in jail.

Praise God for His faithful provision and protection in hardship.

Friday, January 11, 2019—Genesis 33-36

God is always at work, but we may not see the evidence of that in the moment. His handiwork, in fact, may take years or generations to become fully apparent. His work, once visible, is astounding.

For at least 20 years, Jacob and Esau had been estranged. Jacob's deception had driven them apart, and Esau's thoughts toward him had been threatening. As they saw one another for the first time in two decades, much had changed. Jacob was humble. Esau was affectionate. Time had not healed their wounds. The grace of God and His provision had changed these men, helping them see what was truly valuable. Bitterness had given way to forgiveness because of the powerful work of God.

The God-given desire for justice is strong, and the pursuit for justice can develop into bitterness and rage when not properly channeled. Dinah's brothers were angry over her being raped, and they devised a plan to heap insult and punishment on the one who violated her. Their rage led them to murder and theft, and their father was extremely angry. Righteous anger will find righteous justice only when trusting the Righteous Judge.

The reunion of Jacob and Esau allowed them to return home to their father and to be with him once he died (35:29). Esau was humble enough to move his people and possessions outside Canaan so Jacob could live and flourish there. The promises of God were continually coming true.

Thank God for His continually working, even when we can't see. Pray for growing trust and obedience.

Thursday, January 10, 2019—Genesis 30-32

As God works in His people, He makes them more like Himself—ideally. Something in the heart of Jacob, however, made it difficult for him and the people around him not to play favorites and not to be prone to jealousy as a result. Leah was jealous of Jacob's love for Rachel, and Rachel was jealous of the number of children Leah bore. In trying to solve the emotional hurt, Rachel opened the door to more by giving her servant Bilhah to Jacob so she could bear a child for Rachel. Jealousy and retribution are never solid motives. They rarely result in anything righteous. God asks His people to trust in Him, His provision, and His timing.

After serving Laban 20 years, Jacob asked for permission to gather his family and possessions and leave. He and Laban came to an agreement, but jealousy reared its head, and Laban's sons complained (31:1-2). God urged Jacob to return to his home, so Jacob gathered everyone and everything and began the journey secretly (31:20), and God warned Laban in a dream not to harm him

(31:29). Despite Rachel's theft (31:19) and Jacob's haste, God was protecting and providing. He is sovereign.

Jacob was now open to the direction and demands God had for him. He prayed humbly (32:9-12) for direction, restoration, and protection, and asked God directly for blessing (32:26). He was physically weakened but spiritually empowered for the remainder of his life.

Pray for daily growth in your trust of God's protection and provision. Recognize and repent of jealousy and fear.

Wednesday, January 9, 2019—Genesis 27-29

Isaac should have known better. He grew up in a home where he was favored over his half-brother Ishmael. Maybe he never realized it. The tension between his mother and Hagar, and the teasing he received from Ishmael were unhealthy for everyone involved.

This unhealthy relationship was magnified between Jacob and Esau. Esau had years earlier surrendered his birthright for a bowl of stew, and the parents displayed favoritism—Isaac for Esau and Rebekah for Jacob. When Isaac prepared to give Esau the traditional blessing from father to first son, Rebekah and Jacob deceived him. A stolen blessing was more important than trusting God to fulfill His promise (Genesis 25:23).

Selfishness is at the root of most sin. Prideful placement of self above all leads to poor decisions. Poor decisions lead to victims. Esau begged to receive what was rightfully his, and Jacob fled his home. Neither one could be joyful because of Jacob's and Rebekah's selfishness.

Esau did not help the situation. He did not react with grace or patience. In frustration, Esau rebelled against both his parents' wishes, marrying a Canaanite woman, one who would likely have no desire to follow the ways of Yahweh. He should have known better.

Despite his flaws, Jacob had a dream where God promised His presence and provision. Then, he found a wife in a similar setting as his father's servant had discovered his mother. God was fulfilling His covenant based on His character, not the character of His chosen ones.

Thank God for His grace and provision despite our flaws.

Tuesday, January 8, 2019—Genesis 23-26

Abraham loved the Lord, and he loved the place where God had placed him even though it wasn't his "home." He wasn't from there, but God promised him his descendants would inherit the land, so this was now home. He bought a cave to make a permanent burial place for his family, and placed Sarah's body there when she died.

Abraham loved the Lord and the land, but he did not love the culture in which he lived. He made his servant swear he would not let Isaac marry a Canaanite woman. He sent him back to his people to find a wife, and God's providence provided Rebekah. (He didn't want Isaac to go himself because he might not return to the land of promise.)

The servant brought Rebekah back to Isaac, and they married. They began a family, and God's promise to Abraham moved another step forward in its fulfillment. Being human, Isaac was flawed. He, like his father, lied about his relationship with Rebekah trying to protect them both rather than trusting God. Their boys—Esau and Jacob—were flawed as well. Esau was a man of the wild and ruled by his passions. Jacob was more calculating, and their trust in self exceeded their trust in God.

Despite the flaws, God blessed Isaac. He became rich and flourished. God appeared to him in a vision and affirmed the covenant He made with his father and said he would continue the blessing through him.

Thank God for His holiness and consistency working in you.

