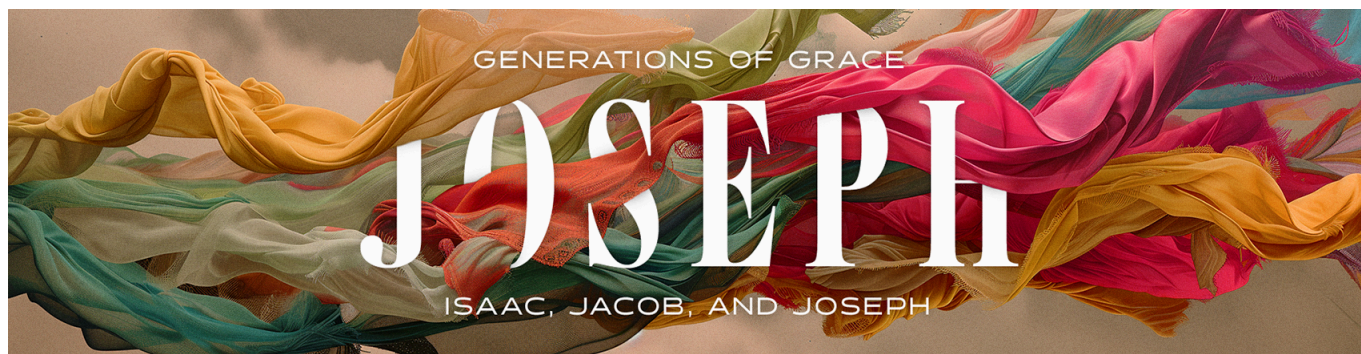




Genesis Part III (Week 5/8) The Present God

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *Where in your life do you need to remember “God may seem invisible, but he is never absent”? How might looking at Jesus, his work, and his promises change the way you respond, pray, or trust in God?*

Warm-Up

1. Have you ever felt hopeless, that you have wondered where is God in all of this?

Read Genesis 39:1-12

2. Where did Joseph end up after being bought by the Ishmaelites? In what ways would this be different and challenging, compared to living with his family?
3. Why might it be tempting for Joseph to think the Lord has abandoned him? What, instead, is the reality of the situation? In what tangible ways was it clear that the Lord was with Joseph?
4. What pressure does Joseph face in his work? How would differences in power and influence make it challenging for Joseph to reject Potiphar’s wife?
5. Joseph was approached “*day after day*” (v.10). Why can repeated pressure be challenging to face? What resources are needed to face such situations?
6. What reasons does Joseph give for refusing Potiphar’s wife? What does this reveal about his character and priorities? How might his God-centred perspective change the way we face pressure?
7. How does Joseph respond to Potiphar’s wife’s final advance? What types of situations should we flee, rather than stay?

Read Genesis 39:13-23

8. What happens to Joseph because he chooses to do what is right? Why might we also experience a high cost for honouring God and his ways?
9. What repeated statements do you notice about God (vv.2-6 vs. vv.20-23)? Why is this repetition significant, given Joseph’s circumstances?
10. When have you known the Lord’s kindness in the midst of difficult situations?
11. Are you ever tempted to think the Lord’s presence will mean removal of difficult situations? How does Joseph’s experience inform our understanding?
12. How is the Lord still at work saving his people, even though Joseph’s own situation is getting worse?
13. How did the Lord also use unjust condemnation, for the saving of his people in Christ?

Apply *Where might it be costly for you at the moment to follow God’s ways?*

Pray *Gracious Father, thank you for your continual presence with us in Christ through the Spirit. Please give us courage and conviction to honour you and live according to your ways, and even when it is costly. Amen.*

GOING DEEPER

Genesis Part III (Week 5/8) The Present God Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Frontline this Week

Is your frontline changing at the moment? Here is a helpful article to ponder:
<https://licc.org.uk/resources/lessons-from-monty-don/>

For Families

- Download: some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- Listen (sermon): “The Present God” by Glenn Nesbitt:
<https://stebbes.org/sermons/the-present-god/#sermons>
- Listen (sermon): “Temptation” by Tim Keller:
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/temptation-4/>
- Listen (sermon): “Genesis 39” by Ian Hamilton:
<https://tinyurl.com/bdhxfd9k>
- Watch (sermon): “The Worker Who Refused to Sin” by Luke (All Souls):
<https://youtu.be/T8I4pyVdcjs?si=0x3OUTTdlwGI-y8&t=90>
- Watch (workshop): “Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife” by the Bible Project:
<https://bibleproject.com/classroom/joseph/sessions/10>
- Read (sermon transcript): “The Temptation of Joseph” by D. A. Carson:
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/part-2-the-temptation-of-joseph-genesis-39/>

Series Resources

- Read: “Genesis” by Derek Kidner. 
- Read: “Genesis for Everyone: Part 2” by John Goldingay. 
- Read: “How to Read Genesis” by Tremper Longman III
- Read: “Genesis: Story of God Bible Commentary” by Tremper Longman III
- Watch: “Genesis 12-50” by the Bible Project:
<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/genesis-12-50>
- Watch: “How should we read the Old Testament?” by Dan Paterson:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJtba-IyPVg>

 Available to borrow from the St Bart’s Library (Toowoomba): stbarts.com.au/library

GENESIS III: Generations of Grace

Week 05/08 “The Present God”

by The Rev'd Mark Fairhurst (01/11/2026)

현재 함께하시는 하나님 | 同在的神 | நம்மோடு இருக்கும் தேவன்

Bible Passage: Genesis 39:1-23

WHY O LORD? WHERE ARE YOU?

하나님은 이 상황 속에서 어디에 계시는가? | 在这一切之中, 神在哪里? | இவை அனைத்திலும் தேவன் எங்கே?

This year I reached 20 years of service with CMS – service across a variety of roles both here and in NSW – service that, in so many ways, has been a joy to be a part of.

And yet, in the midst of that joy – there have been many, many times, when I have found myself asking the question:

“Why, O Lord?”

- Why is it all so hard for our missionaries?
- Why don't you bring so much more fruit?
- Why have you allowed this to happen?

Quite a few years ago now, before my time here in Qld, we sent a missionary family to help begin a new Bible College in a part of Europe that is now *thoroughly post-Christian*, and there were very few gospel hearted Christians.

It was a *crucial work* to help regrow gospel witness in that area.

They were so *suited and gifted* for the role.

The husband, at the suggestion of CMS, had spent 3 extra years getting a Doctorate, so they could give themselves long term to the work.

They went – and things started well – they built language skills and began to shape how the college would work,

But all the way through one of the members of their family struggled with health issues.

After struggling on for another year or two, they found that the cause of the health issue was a condition unique to that part of Europe,

And it became so serious that they had to make the decision to return to Australia permanently.

And they, and we, were left asking *“Why, O Lord? Why did you put them through all that training and work only for them to have to leave?”*

Where are you in all this mess?”

It’s a question Joseph must have found himself asking again and again, as we read his story in these final chapters of Genesis from 37 to the end.

3

It’s a question which I’d be surprised if all of us haven’t asked at some stage in our lives – some of us, perhaps, many times.

Because life for all of us in this world – is filled with its share of pain, and confusion, and suffering.

And we often ask ourselves, “If God is a good God...why??”

You saw it last week, didn’t you?

As you looked at the *terrible breakdown in Jacob’s family* caused by Jacob’s favouritism, Joseph’s arrogance and pride, and his brother’s jealousy and hatred.

So, from being the favoured son, at the beginning of the chapter – receiving dreams of future glory from the Lord,

He ends it stripped of all his honour, and sold as a slave in a foreign country.

And he, and we, are left asking, *“Why?! Where is God in all of this?”*

Which brings us to our chapter – Genesis 39, where *we begin to see hints of an answer* – so let’s look at this chapter, and we’re going to do it by *peeling it back in layers*,

- Seeing it, if you like, with different sets of eyes.

4

THE EYES OF HUMAN SIGHT - WHERE IS GOD?

사람의 눈으로 - 하나님은 어디 계시는가? | 以人的眼光来看——神在哪里? | மனிதக் கண்களின் பார்வையில் - தேவன் எங்கே?

And I want us to begin, by seeing it from an entirely human perspective – with purely human eyes– and you'd have to say from that perspective, there's *not a lot of reason for hope*.

Yes there's *some steps forward* – but every time he takes a step forward, he seems to take *two steps backwards*.

He is **bought to be a slave in Potiphar's household** – and 'Yes', things begin to look up.

He's *successful in what he's given to do* – and Potiphar gives him more and more responsibility and authority.

But then *he's faced, not just with the invitation – but the command of Potiphar's wife*, for him to commit adultery with her.

This isn't just some tempting invitation amongst consenting adults – there's **no equality of relationship here** – he is just a possession for her to use.

His only choice, is obedience to his master, Potiphar, or to his wife.

What a terrible position to be put in! **Where is God in that?**

5

Well, as we know, **Joseph refuses to obey**,

But, his refusal eventually *leads her to anger and revenge*,

He's *falsely accused of attempted rape and he's thrown into prison*.

So now, he's **not only a slave, but a disgraced, imprisoned one**.

And, **even though things do look up in prison** – he's put in charge of all the other prisoners,

He's still a despised foreign slave, living without any hope of release in an Egyptian prison.

From a purely human perspective – you'd have to say, that there's not a lot of reason for hope here – **if anything, there's every reason to be in despair!**

rather than getting better, *things get progressively worse!*

And it's **not just a momentary setback**, Joseph was in that prison for years, not just months and days.

I've spent time on this, because it's so easy to just see the Joseph narrative as a good news story – but *it's good news that comes in the midst of deep suffering, apparent hopelessness*, and perplexing experiences that continue for long periods of time.

6

And in that, **it's little different from many of our lives** – where good and evil come mixed in ways we often don't understand.

And like Joseph, we have to work out our faith in God in the midst of that suffering and pain and confusion.

And *if your life is a mess at the moment* – and you don't understand why God isn't doing something – *then you're in good company*,

Because that's how we see the life of God's people in the Bible.

It doesn't 'sugar-coat' life for us – it shows us life as it really is.

And, so often, **the Lord doesn't save us from the pain and confusion** – he works, and **calls us to trust him – in the midst of that pain and confusion.**

Just as Joseph was called to trust him in his pain and confusion.

7

THE EYES OF FAITH - GOD IS WITH ME

믿음의 눈으로 - 하나님은 나와 함께 하신다 | 以信心的眼光来看——神与我同在 | விசுவாசக் கண்களின் பார்வையில் – தேவன் என்னோடு இருக்கிறார்

And so now, let's turn to this story – as Joseph did, with eyes of faith.

For Joseph didn't come to these years with a blank slate.

Proud and arrogant he may have been – but he comes to it with *the history of God's dealing* with **his father**, Jacob, **his grandfather** Isaac, and ultimately, **Abraham.**

He knew the stories of God's promises to them.

And how that had worked out in the messiness of their lives.

And indeed, **he had his own experience of those promises** – he had the dreams God had given him of his family bowing down to him – as impossible as that may now seem.

And, even as he lives in slavery and prison, **he still sees the signs of God's hand at work in his life,**

– as *God keeps on granting him kindness and success* in the midst of all the turmoil

8

– **he knew that the Lord had not abandoned him**, and that his good hand was upon him.

The writer wants us in no doubt about that, does he?

– he says it over and over again in the first verses of the chapter:

“²The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, ⁴Joseph found favour in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.”

And when you come to the end of the chapter – even in prison you find the same story:

“But while Joseph was there in the prison, ²¹the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warder. ²²So the warder put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there.”

The Lord, in the midst of his slavery and imprisonment, is showing him kindness – loving kindness – which is the Old Testament’s word for ‘GRACE’.

And Joseph clings to that.

9

So, **when the time of testing comes** with Potiphar’s wife – **he can respond with faith**, rather than the self-serving pride he had shown his brothers.

“‘With me in charge,’ he told her, ‘My master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?’”

It could have been very easy at this point, for Joseph to respond with arrogance and pride against his master?

– to perhaps see a sexual relationship with Potiphar’s wife as a way of gaining more power and influence.

He *certainly could have given in to her to avoid the revenge* she exacted against him.

But at this point, Joseph has learned to trust God, and responds by faith rather than self-seeking.

Can I say, **in a congregation of this size, it's very likely that some of us are being tempted by sexual sin like this** – whether it be an adulterous relationship, or pornography, or just allowing our eyes to wander.

Or it may be some other sin that is pulling us away from the Lord.

And the times when we'll most be tempted to give in to those desires, are when we're under pressure – when God just doesn't seem to be turning up for us – and those things seem at least some respite from the pain or confusion we're feeling.

And, indeed, some of us may have fallen – and fallen hard.

But I want to say, **if that's you – don't give up. God has not abandoned you – and now is the time to repent** – to turn back to him and find hope.

Like Joseph, remember the promises he has made to you – and to all his people – *promises like those to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3* – when they had lost their footing:

¹⁹ *Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.* ²⁰ *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.*

11

We do not have to keep on walking in sin and hiding it – talk to a Christian friend and ask them to help – talk to one of the staff team here,

And choose FAITH – no matter how bleak things may seem.

Well, we've seen this story through human eyes, and through the eyes of faith,

12

THE EYES OF SALVATION - GOD IS WORKING TO SAVE

구원의 눈으로 - 하나님은 구원을 이루어가신다 | 以救恩的眼光来看——神正在施行拯救 | இரட்சிப்பின் பார்வையில் - தேவன் இரட்சிக்கச் செயல்படுகிறார்

*But there is another lens in this chapter that looks wider than Joseph and his circumstances,
It's the lens of the Lord's wider purposes of salvation.*

And so now let's look at this chapter with **the eyes of salvation**.

You'll see this theme of salvation much more clearly when we move on to chapter 40 and beyond,

But *we have a glimpse of it here* in the way God's blessing of Joseph overflows to Potiphar and his whole household.

⁵*From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field.*

Potiphar the Egyptian, finds himself blessed, because of Joseph's blessing.

Does that remind you of something we've heard earlier in Genesis?

Does it remind you of *God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12?*

13

²*'I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'*

Here, in just a very small way we see that blessing beginning to be poured out on Potiphar,

And, in few chapters, we'll see it poured out on Pharaoh and the whole of Egypt.

And, indeed, it's **why even Joseph's imprisonment has good purpose behind it** – as evil as it may have been – because he's imprisoned in the 'king's prison', where he is eventually brought to the notice of Pharaoh through his cupbearer.

Joseph may not see it yet – though he very clearly sees it later (more of that in the weeks ahead!),

But *the Lord is using him to bring his salvation blessing to the world.*

It was to be a *temporary and very physical salvation* for the people of that time – bringing safety through drought and famine.

But, like so many of the Old Testament stories – it stands as a glimpse of the far, far greater salvation that the Lord has given us in the Lord Jesus,

Who – far more than Joseph – trod the path of suffering and shame in order to win forgiveness and freedom and eternal salvation for us who believe in his name.

14

THE GOD OF SALVATION KINDNESS

구원의 하나님, 선하심 | 施行拯救的神, 祂滿有恩慈 | தேவனின் இரட்சிக்கும் கிருபை

Remember my missionaries from the beginning of the sermon – forced to leave just as they were becoming effective.

With them, and us, crying Lord *“Why Lord? Where are you in all of this?”*

Before they returned to Australia they had befriended a refugee from the Middle East.

In the time they were there he came to Christ – and he *introduced them to a number of his friends* who also turned to Christ,

And a small active, outreaching group of Christians formed – reaching out to other refugees from the Middle East.

Their ministry in Europe may have had to end

– *but the gospel hadn’t failed – indeed it began to advance in a whole new direction.*

And what about us?

Well, like Joseph, like our missionary friends, we live in a world that has its own share of joy and suffering, clarity and confusion.

15

And there may be many time when we cry out for ourselves or others *“Why Lord? Where are you in this?”*

This world is unfair – there is real pain and suffering – we don’t have to sugar-coat it as Christians,

And pretend that somehow or other, God makes it better than it is for us.

But like Joseph – we are called to remember the promises of God – and *know that he hasn’t abandoned us* – even when all is confusion,

And we can respond with faith – confident of the Lord’s presence with us – and knowing that nothing this world can throw at us can separate us from his love.

That was Paul’s conviction, as he wrote those famous words in Romans 8:

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And we, as Christians, are called to see and respond, by Faith – and not just by sight.

16

And like Joseph – I hope, we not only respond with the eyes of faith – but also the eyes of salvation.

For *the gospel that gives us hope* – is also the hope of the whole world,

And I want to encourage you – like Joseph, to not only accept God's blessing for yourselves

but long that it may bless others also.

And **allow your faith to be seen and heard**, so that others can discover our God, of salvation kindness, through you.