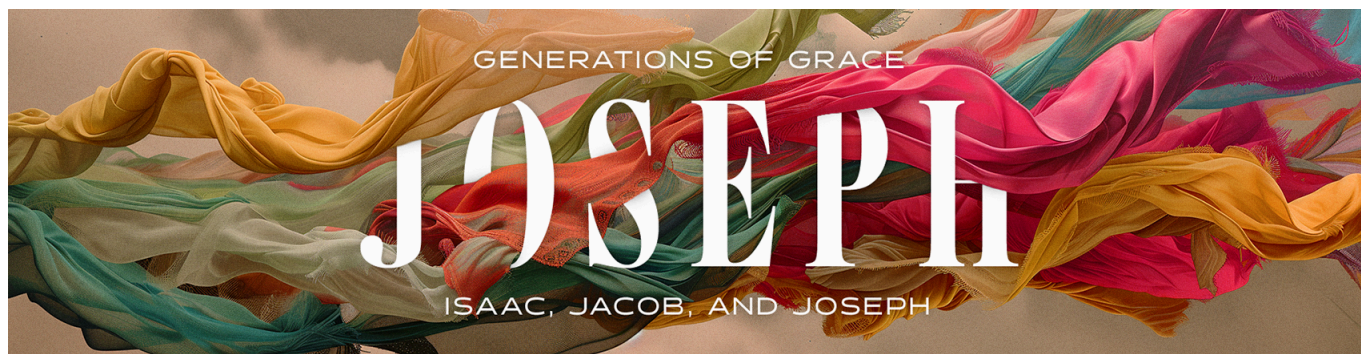




Genesis Part III (Week 4/8) The Invisible God

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *Where have you seen in the past week that God's grace is at work in areas of weakness in your life?*

Warm-Up

1. Have you experienced something difficult or confusing that only made sense when you look back?

Read Genesis 37:1-11

2. How does the chapter begin, and what do we learn about Jacob's family relationships?
3. What do Joseph's dream suggest about the future? How do his brothers and father respond?
4. Favouritism and jealousy appeared repeatedly in the covenant family (Gen 25:28; 29:30-31). What ugly consequences can we see, and why do you think these patterns are so difficult to break?
5. How might favouritism, comparison, or resentment quietly damage relationships in our families, friendships, or church community?

Read Genesis 37:12-28

6. What do the brothers' words and actions reveal about how their jealousy has developed?
7. What strikes you most about the brothers' treatment of Joseph?
8. How might the brothers' action of gaining their father's affection destroy the very thing they want?
9. Jealousy usually begins small. What are some subtle ways you think people can grow resentment or bitterness in their hearts? How should we recognise and address them before becoming destructive?

Read Genesis 37:29-36

10. How do the brothers deceive their father? What consequences does it have for the whole family?
11. What strikes you about Jacob's grief? And might it teach us about the reality of grief?
12. Like Jacob, we can sometimes see the painful consequences before us. How can we care for people who is grieving or struggling to see God's goodness, without offering simplistic answers?
13. The chapter ends with the word "*meanwhile*" (v. 36). Why is this final verse significant, given everything Jacob believes has happened? What "silent hope" does it point us to? (cf. 45:8; 50:20)
14. Joseph's story points us forward to Jesus Christ (Col 1:15; Acts 2:23). How do Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection assure us of God's love and faithfulness when we can't see what he is doing?

Apply *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?*

Pray *Faithful God, thank you that even when you seem invisible, you are never absent. When we cannot see your hand at work, help us to look to Jesus to see your assurance. In his name, Amen.*

GOING DEEPER

Genesis Part III (Week 4/8) The Invisible God Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Frontline this Week

What work are you finding tiring at the moment? How can you invite God to give you strength at this time?

For Families

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

Listen, Watch, and Read

- Listen (sermon): “The Invisible God” by Glenn Nesbitt:
<https://stebbes.org/sermons/the-invisible-god/#sermons>
- Listen (sermon): “The Hiddenness of God” by Tim Keller:
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/the-hiddenness-of-god/>
- Listen (sermon): “The Boy with Big Dreams” by Dan Wells:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=140795&show_file=151845
- Listen & Read (study): “Joseph the Exile” by The Bible Project :
<https://bibleproject.com/podcasts/joseph-exile/>
- Read (podcast transcript): “Instruments of God’s Providence” by Sinclair Ferguson:
<https://learn.ligonier.org/podcasts/things-unseen-with-sinclair-ferguson/instruments-of-gods-providence>
- Read (podcast transcript): “The Mystery of Providence” by Sinclair Ferguson:
<https://learn.ligonier.org/podcasts/things-unseen-with-sinclair-ferguson/the-mystery-of-providence>

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-JyPVg>

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

GENESIS III: Generations of Grace

*Week 04/08 “The Invisible God”
by Justin Lai (25/10/2026)*

보이지 않는 하나님 | Nhialiny cii Tiiŋ | 看不见的神 |
கண்ணுக்குப் புலப்படாத தேவன்

Bible Passage: Genesis 37:2-36

Heavenly Father, as we come to your Word, open our hearts and minds to hear your voice.
By your Spirit, help us to see your faithfulness and trust in your sovereign purposes.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Introduction

- *Last week, in Genesis 32, Jacob met God face to face.*
 - He wrestled with him; he received a new name;
 - and said, “*I saw God face to face.*” (32:30)
- *This week, in Genesis 37, something feels quite different:*
 - God does not appear - God does not speak;
 - In fact, God's name is *not* mentioned even once in the whole chapter.
- Perhaps that feels familiar to some of us:
 - There are times when we can see God clearly at work;
 - And there are times when life falls apart: family under strain, a child drifts away, someone betrays our trust, or we experience a devastating loss...
 - And we might ask: “*Where is God in all this?*”
- That question sits underneath Genesis 37:
 - Here we see a deeply troubled family - favouritism, jealousy, hatred, betrayal and grief.
 - But this is just any family - this is the family God promised to bless and through whom He would bring blessings to the nations!
- We shall explore this through 3 movements:
 - Controversial dream;
 - Jealous brothers;
 - Grieving father.

[1] A Controversial Dream (vv. 1–11)

- The chapter opens, “*This is the account of Jacob’s family line.*” (v.2)
 - The family of God promised to bless continues — and meet Joseph!
- Joseph, a young man of 17.
 - Out of all the things to introduce Joseph, we’re told he is a boy who used to bring his father a “*bad report*” about his brothers. Interesting...
 - Verse 3: “*Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons.*” Israel is Jacob’s new name, the one God gave him last week in Genesis 32.
 - He favours Joseph and made him a special robe, almost like a public announcement: “Hey everyone, this is my favourite one.”
- Imagine how the other brothers would feel?
 - Verse 4: “*they hated [Joseph] and could not speak a kind word to him.*”
 - The ‘kind word’ here means ‘shalom’ (peace)
 - Here marks the beginning of the next generation of God’s covenant family: *they can’t even speak peace to each other!*
- Then come the dreams - which become a nightmare!
 - We read from **37:5-9**

5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. 6 He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: 7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.” 8 His brothers said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. 9 Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”

- In both dreams, the implied message is clear: Joseph will rule over his family in high status - his brothers and even his parents - what a line Joseph has crossed!
 - Rule over the brothers, that’s arrogant. But over the parents?! In this shame-honour culture, it’s like blasphemy against the authority of the clan!
 - So the father rebukes Joseph. But the brothers’ hatred are even more.
 - What a family! A father who plays favourites - A young son who, perhaps, doesn’t think about how his words will land - And brothers whose resentment has grown into hatred.
- And sadly, this is nothing new in this family of God.
 - Previous generation: Issac favoured Esau, Rebekah favoured Jacob (25:28);
 - Jacob himself loved Rachel and *not loved* Leah (29:31) - the term ‘not loved’ is the same root word that describes the ‘hatred’ of Joseph’s brothers [Matthews, *Genesis* 11:27–50:26, NAC, 690].
 - One generation’s hurt becomes the next generation’s hatred...
 - This is solemn, and should make us pause and think:
 - “Who in your family wears that special robe?” Do we tend to praise a “good” child as the standard: “Why can’t you be more like Jonny next door?” Or “Is there someone in your family you can’t speak a *kind word* to?”

- The Bible is not naive about family life - messy and complex relationships - even in the very family God chooses through whom to bless the world. They are not some perfect, happy family - *they hardly get along with each other!*
- In the end, Jacob rebukes Joseph.
 - But notice something in verse 11: *"his father kept the matter in mind."*
 - Jacob can't quite dismiss these dreams. After all, he himself had encountered a divine dream. Could it be that God is revealing something - something far greater than anyone in the family could imagine?
 - Joseph's brothers, however, certainly aren't interested in finding out. Jealousy has grown into something far more terrible...

[2] Jealous Brothers (vv. 12–28)

- The brothers keep Joseph's dream not with wonder, but with hatred.
- And now, far away from their father, they get their chance!
- In verse 14, Jacob sends Joseph to check on his brothers, *"Go and see if all is well with your brothers."*
 - "Well" is again "shalom" - the very thing this family doesn't have!
 - Joseph responds, "Very well!" And off he goes.
- He travels to Shechem, the very place where his brothers Simeon and Levi previously massacred the men of the town (Genesis 34).
 - But his brothers are not there!
 - Joseph is *"wandering around in the fields"* when an unnamed stranger redirects him further north to Dothan, near a trading route to Egypt. [Matthews, 697]
- But verse 18: *"The saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him."*
 - Perhaps they recognise that "flashy" robe from afar! Rubbing salt in their wounds of jealousy! Then they become a mob, verses 19-20: *"Here comes that dreamer...come now, let's kill him...then we'll see what comes of his dreams."*
 - Can we hear their hatred!?
 - They don't just want Joseph gone - they want his dreams destroyed!
- Reuben, the eldest, intervenes and stops the killing.
 - So instead, they take hold of Joseph and strip off his special robe, and throw him into a cistern - a deep pit. Verse 24 adds: *"The cistern was empty; there was no water in it."* Joseph is alive, but trapped and helpless.
- Then comes perhaps one of the most chilling details in the whole chapter - verse 25: *"they sat down to eat their meal..."*
 - Imagine- they've thrown their own brother into a pit, and now they sit for lunch! While this little brother is crying out in distress and pleading for his own life! (cf. 42:21)...they wouldn't listen.

- Then, Judah notices traders heading to Egypt:
 - “*What will we gain if we kill our brother?*” (v.26) - “How about let's make some money out of this guy.” Verse 27, “*After all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.*”
 - What a terrible irony! He appeals to brotherly loyalty while proposing to sell his own brother. And for 20 shekels of silver - a human trafficking deal done!
- What has happened to this covenant family?!
 - They remind us of Cain, who murdered his own brother Abel. And Esau, who once wanted to kill Jacob. And we're not talking about fighting for toys or blocking each other on Facebook - but killing!
 - Reuben tries to save Joseph, but only through a secret plan, probably with mixed motives to protect his reputation before his father. [Currid, *Genesis 25:19–50:26*, 197.] Judah appeals to brotherly loyalty, yet sells his own brother into slavery for profit.
 - Jealousy has hardened their hearts so much that they can sit and eat while their brother cries out.
- And here is the tragedy of jealousy: As Longman observes, “This is the irony of these dark desires: they actually destroy what we want.” [Longman, *Genesis*, 465.]
 - The brothers longed for their father's love. But will getting rid of Joseph make the father love them more? No. It will only tear their family further apart.
 - Perhaps we see ourselves in the brothers - not in such violence, but in resentment when someone else receives the attention, affection, or recognition we long for. Bitterness can take root in our hearts *quietly*, and break trust with others. So, perhaps gently we might ask:
 - *Is there a bitterness I have been holding onto?*
 - *Is there someone I need to seek forgiveness from?*
 - Or sometimes, it isn't easy to recognise the hurt we've caused others, especially when we ourselves have been hurt...
 - Perhaps we share the pain of Joseph:
 - Maybe we have been betrayed and hurt by someone we love or trust; we cry out, but find no one seems to listen.
 - The Bible doesn't minimise that pain or excuse the wrongs.
 - Nor does this story offer a quick resolution.
 - We'll come back to that.
- And verse 28 ends with Joseph being taken by “*the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.*”

[3] A Grieving Father (vv. 29–36)

- So, the crime is done! But now the brothers must cover it up:
 - In verse 29, Reuben returns to the cistern, only to discover Joseph is gone!
 - How are they going to explain this to their father?
 - And we read from **37:31-35**

31 Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. 32 They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe." 33 He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces." 34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. 35 All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave." So his father wept for him.

- Can we feel the weight of this father's grief?
 - The robe comes home, soaked in blood.
 - Torn are not just Jacob's clothes, but his heart! He mourns not just a few days, but many!
 - Refusing the children's comfort, he says he will continue to mourn until he joins his son in the grave...
 - And some of those very sons know exactly what happened to Joseph!
- The brothers could remove Joseph from the family, but they could not remove "the love of the father for his son." [Mathews, 701]
 - What have they gained? Not the peace they were longing, but a heartbroken father and a family torn further apart.
 - What's even more painful: While Jacob mourns for the loss, Joseph is very much alive. But Jacob cannot see him; he does not know the truth, and he has no explanation!
- Perhaps Jacob's grief is close to home :
 - Some of us know the pain of losing someone we love;
 - Some carry wounds within the family: a marriage tension, a sibling who no longer speaks to us, a betrayal by someone we trusted. Some grief is tangled up with family wrongs.
- The Bible doesn't hurry past Jacob's grief; and neither should we rush to explain away someone's pain. The sorrow is unresolved, *yet* real.
 - And Scripture even gives us words for moments like that: "How long, LORD?... How long will you hide your face from me?" (Ps 13:1). Such a cry isn't a failure of faith. Sometimes it's an expression of faith in deep anguish...
 - For Jacob, all he can see is that blood-soaked robe. That's all grief can see. He cannot see what lies ahead.

Conclusion

- **Meanwhile**... notice how Genesis 37 ends:
 - Verse 36: "*Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.*"
 - Jacob weeps in Canaan; Joseph is alive in Egypt! Yet, God's name is not mentioned. If this chapter is all we got - dysfunctional family and devastating tears- we'd ask: "*Where is God in all this?*"

- But here's the wonderful truth: **God may seem invisible, but he is never absent!**
 - Human evil is real, and the people are responsible for what they have done;
 - Yet their sin and brokenness cannot defeat God's saving purposes.
 - God later uses Joseph's arrival in Egypt as a key stage to preserve this very family. Years later, Joseph can say to the brothers, "*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good*" (50:20).
 - God was working through what they could not understand. He is never absent.
- Now, how God works in every moment - we do not know.
 - We cannot always explain why God allows particular suffering, or promise that every painful relationship will be repaired in this life.
 - Joseph couldn't see the whole picture as he cried from that pit.
 - **And sometimes, neither can we.**
- **So how can we be sure that this seemingly "invisible" God is for us?**
 - **Look to Jesus Christ, "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15).**
 - Another beloved Son, sent by his Father, rejected by his own people.
 - Betrayed by his closest and sold for silver,
 - Stripped of clothes, and at that cross - he cries out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Matt 27:46)
 - Yet Acts 2:23 says that this happened according to "*God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge.*" Foreshadowed by Joseph's story, God turns human evil into the means of salvation! Jesus died for our sins, and God raised him from the dead!
- **And what does that mean for us in our struggles?**
 - Perhaps we are hurt by others -
 - *Jesus* knows the pain of rejection; we can bring him that burden. His grace gives us courage to take faithful steps towards healing.
 - Perhaps we have hurt others -
 - *Jesus* died on that cross so we may receive forgiveness. His grace invites us to repent and gives strength to reconcile. Guilt is not the last word.
 - Perhaps we are grieving -
 - *Jesus* himself wept with those who mourn. His grace does not erase sorrow, but because he is risen, death will not have the final word.
 - Friends, we may not see God's hand in all that happens;
 - *But in Jesus*, we see his heart. Romans 8:32 says: God "*did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.*"
 - By His Spirit, Jesus says, "***I will not leave you as orphans***" (John 14:18).

When God seems invisible, look to Jesus!

The God who gave his Son for us will **never abandon his people.**

Heavenly Father, thank you that even when you seem invisible, you are never absent.
 When we cannot see your hand at work, help us to look to Jesus. In his name, Amen.
