

Read also Romans 12:1-11. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Joseph is now 56 years old. He was 44 when the famine ended. He was still employed by Pharaoh as second-in-command and it was now 12 years after the famine. He had been in Egypt since he was 17, so for 39 years now he has lived there. He was well enculturated and able to manage his job.

The day came when his father died at age 147. Jacob had been in Egypt for 17 years. 147 was certainly a ripe old age, yet in grief Joseph threw himself on his father and wept over him and kissed him.

He went through the same that we go through when a loved one dies.

Jacob was embalmed, a funeral was held, then the whole family went to bury him in the family plot in Canaan. Returning to Egypt, it was time to settle the estate.

Have you ever been executor of an estate? Sometimes there's land to divide, possessions, and assets. Has your family ever fought over a settlement? (Don't answer that!) After Jacob died, this family became filled with anxiety over what would happen now. Hear the story. READ Gen 50:12-21

Did Jacob actually tell them to plead for mercy? Or, did the brothers lie *just in case*, in order to prevent retaliation on Joseph's part?

Kind of like when your child comes to you and says to one parent that the other parent told them they could do something that they want. "Dad told me it would be okay if I spent the night, or quit my job, or ate the steak that was your leftover."

Thus the message from the brothers: "Dad said don't blame us for the evil and the crime we did to you!"

Joseph could have said, "Oh yeah? Why didn't he tell me?" But Joseph didn't say that.

He wept.

Were the tears because he felt sorry for them? Was he hurt that they didn't trust him? Was he sad that guilt consumed them so much that they couldn't see what God had been doing all along? It is much better living with an awareness of God's purposes for you.

Joseph wept. The brothers wept. They threw themselves down on the floor before him. They said, "We are your slaves!" The dream was once again fulfilled. Joseph knew it; the brothers seemed unaware that the dream actually helped them. They only realized the water under the bridge.

Guilt blinds you to God's reality. It's hard to believe God works for you when you are laden with guilt. To be free you must let go of past guilt and then you can better trust God's love.

Joseph had figured out that their evil against him did not mess up the plan of God. Their ill intent to harm him was not able to stop God. This is how he said it:

You planned it for evil, but God planned it for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. (v. 20)

He must have seen this quite early, because he kept going with God, even when no one was looking.

- When he was sold to Potiphar, he worked hard and did the right thing.
- When he was put into prison, he interpreted the baker and wine steward's dreams by relying on God.
- He told Pharaoh to act on the message of his dreams because God would help him.
- Here, now, were his brothers, desperate to know Joseph would not hold this crime against them. Joseph had compassion on them and told them he would continue to take care of them.

His father wasn't there. He could have paid them back for their meanness. He had the power. But he didn't.

What is your faith like when no one is looking?

Joseph's faith was unswerving; consistent; solid. He embraced his faith concretely—he acted on it.

- He activated his faith in his vocation.
- He generously took care of his family, the family of God.
- He pointed others to trust in God's presence, plan, and power.

Yet he was a man who had experienced terrible abuse as a youth.

If he clung to the abuse, if he refused to forgive, if he let his abuse define him, he would have never seen what God had in mind.

Perhaps you have lived in or experienced abuse yourself. Don't let it define you.

God uses bad experiences, abuse, injustice, evil—all those things that happen to us and shouldn't—for a positive future. Those experiences often cause us guilt, or anger, or cause us to think poorly of ourselves, and that often causes bad choices.

But God's plan is to turn those bad experiences around for good; for life, not death.

Joseph could have been angry. God's good dreams led to his being attacked by his brothers, sold, thrown into prison, and left there, forgotten. Would you have reacted by being angry? Would you have hated your abusers? Anyone could justify being angry.

But Joseph believed the dreams were plans from God. He told everyone, from his family, to the men in prison, to Pharaoh. He even advised Pharaoh to take concrete action based on the dreams. “God’s telling you how to avoid disaster,” he said.

Some people call the believer naïve. They say, “You’re dreaming.”

What if you said to yourself, *yeah, there’s some bad stuff that’s happened to me. But God has a plan for good.* God’s plan is not just a little good but really good.

What if you said, *I believe it enough to let go of the bad crap.*

What if you said, *God’s using all of this to help me.*

That’s how every person of faith in the Bible approached their lives. They were not defeated but trusted God to lift them up. We can be that way, too.

God said in Isaiah,

“Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. Don’t be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand” (Is 41:10).

The church moves forward on this faith. Do you want to be more solid in your faith when no one is looking, like Joseph?

The brothers, on the other hand, let guilt shape their lives. Joseph had forgiven them before, but they didn’t believe it. They must have been so used to guilt. Yet the dream was for them, too.

Are you used to guilt? Those who live in guilt either try really hard to be perfect or you get up most mornings with a nagging sense of self-condemnation—or both! But we must never cling to guilt or hold on to other’s wrongs against us. Both must go to be a transformed Christian.

If Joseph had clung to his rights to be treated fairly, he would have never done the right thing when no one was looking.

If he had said to himself, *no, I’ve been the right one and they have done me wrong-the heck with them,* he would never have put his all into trusting God’s dreams, or loving God, or working his heart out, giving, believing God had a plan to use him for good to save many people. Retaliation was not important to him.

Do you desire faith like Joseph?

C. S. Lewis wrote a book called *The Great Divorce*. In that book he said that no matter what ill we have suffered at the hands of others, when we cast our lot with God wholeheartedly, abandoning all earthly ways we are inclined to follow, then as we look back, all life will turn out to become good and everywhere is heaven. But if we choose earthly ways over heaven, earthly life will turn out to be simply a region in Hell.

We have reached the end of Joseph's story. READ Gen 50:22-26. It is the last chapter of Genesis. But Genesis means "beginning." So this is the beginning, not the end. It looks ahead to the promise—to the exodus, and it believes, in the midst of all circumstances, both good and bad, that life is good.

Exodus 13:19 – "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear to do this."

Joshua 24:32 – "The bones of Joseph, which the Israelites had brought along with them when they left Egypt, were buried at Shechem, in the parcel of ground Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor for 100 pieces of silver. This land was located in the territory allotted to the descendants of Joseph."

God's people are people who believe the promise. Do you?

AMEN