

SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR GROWN UPS
Part Five: Joseph
Pastor Rick Henderson June 29-30, 2024

I want to start with a question. And this is for more than personal reflection. If you answer yes, I would appreciate it if you would hold up your hand and make clear to me and everyone in this room that your answer is yes.

QUESTION: Are there chapters of major difficulty in your past, that you would have never chosen, but because of what was developed in you, you wouldn't change them, even if you could?

Look around this room and see how many hands are raised. This is not a room of people who love to be miserable. This isn't a gathering of folks who are gluttons for punishment. And yet, many of you, me included, we would never have chosen the pain, AND we wouldn't go back and undo it—even if we could. What does that tell us?

It seems to me that we've got a handle on the fact that who we are becoming is a big deal. Maybe we don't always see it. Maybe sometimes we forget because of the urgency of life. But when so many of us would prefer the good that's developed in us OVER avoiding pain and difficulty—that tells me that we know there's not much that's more important than who we are becoming. So, can we reach out with both hands and grab a hold of this question together?

QUESTION: Who am I becoming?

We are all on a trajectory of becoming more like something. And there are factors and forces working on us all the time. So, we must decide, are we going to be passive or are we going to be intentional?

You're being intentional right now. When we gather and fixate on what God has to share with us through his word, that's a deliberate break with being passive. We're being intentional about who we're becoming. If it's important to you to become more like Jesus, and I hope it is, that requires careful, deliberate, engagement with his word. Let's take a quick look at something the Apostle Paul once wrote to a young pastor who he mentored.

2 TIMOTHY 3:14-15 *But as for you, **continue** in what you have **learned** and have become **convinced** of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how **from infancy** you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you **wise** for **salvation** through **faith** in Christ Jesus.*

Continue. Be deliberate. Be intentional. There's something very rich here, but it's subtle. It's started when he was a what **[infant]**? Back when Timothy was just Timmy, his mom and his grandmother taught him the biblical stories that we're studying together.

Moms and dads. Grandparents. Guardians. There is no substitute for how you shape and participate in who your kids are becoming. No matter how great our Family Ministries may get, it will never rival the unique role that only you can play. We would never try to replace you. But we do want to resource you on this becoming-journey with your kids.

Where are my parents and guardians at? Do you know that ecstatic feeling you get in your gut when your kids open up and have unedited, real-life conversations with you? I'm talking about those moments when you do your best to keep it cool in the moment, because you're afraid if they see how excited you are it will ruin it. After those kinds of conversations Heather and I are high fiving each other. *Can you believe what we just got to talk about?!*

I love those kinds of conversations. I think one of my responsibilities as a dad is to have as many of those as I can get. Here's what I know about you. You want to have those conversations too because you want to be intentional and responsible in shaping who your kids are becoming. Spiritual conversations are a big deal. But there is a reality check. How many of us have learned this lesson?

REALITY CHECK: It's easier to schedule **SPEECHES** than **CONVERSATIONS**.

Am I the only parent in here who's had the experience of watching my kid's eyes slowly glaze over as I'm talking about something important? That's not a conversation. That's a speech. I want conversations. Isn't it solid gold, isn't it priceless when our kids fully engage with us, in conversation, about the most important things? What if I told you that our kids ministry was gearing up for something this fall that practically guarantees fantastic spiritual conversations with your kids. Would you be interested? If you have elementary aged kids, stay tuned for what's coming this fall.

With the kids that have been entrusted to us, we want to be intentional with them on the journey of who they are becoming. And with ourselves, we want to be intentional about who we are becoming. Looking again to what Paul wrote.

2 TIMOTHY 3:14-15 *But as for you, **continue** in what you have **learned** and have become **convinced** of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how **from infancy** you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you **wise** for **salvation** through **faith** in Christ Jesus.*

These Old Testament stories that we're talking about, they have the ability to form us and shape us so that we are wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. God, because he's a loving father, is using them like intentional conversations to shape who we are becoming. Will you write this down?

These are sophisticated stories written to **SHARPEN** our minds and **SOFTEN** our hearts so that we **TRUST** in Jesus.

My invitation to you is to lean in and fully engage with that expectation. Today we're talking about my favorite Old Testament story, my favorite person from the Old Testament. Grab a Bible and open it to Genesis 50. It's a going to be a minute before we read it. There's a story we must understand first.

Joseph was the second to the last of 14 kids. He had 11 older brothers, one older sister, and one younger brother. His dad was Jacob. Last week we talked about Abraham and Isaac. Jacob was Isaac's second born son. What you need to know is that Joseph's older brothers didn't like him very much. Even though he came much later than almost everyone else, he was the first-born son of his dad's favorite wife. Not only did Jacob have two wives at the same time, but he also had kids by two of his wives' servants. There's no way Jacob kept up with all the anniversaries and birthdays. It's not really a joke, is it? This is full of messy drama and heartache.

It wasn't lost on anyone that Joseph's mom was the favorite wife, and that Joseph was the favorite kid. He wasn't just elevated over everyone else in their dad's heart. He was promoted over everyone else in the family business. Jacob gave Joseph a special article of clothing. What was it? (Joke about his hair.)

This symbolized that Joseph was a manager, an overseer of his older brothers. They worked hard, out in the land as shepherds. Joseph got to keep his hands clean and was responsible for giving reports to his dad. Would that get your blood boiling?

Jacob, the dad of this bunch, he has big responsibility for what he contributed. The older brothers are going to do a pretty despicable, evil thing. They're responsible for what they contributed. And you know what, Joseph is responsible too. He wasn't innocent in all of this.

He was naïve and arrogant. He had no problem with flaunting his privileged position. And yet, God had his hand on Joseph. God had a plan for him. And God gave him a glimpse of what was coming through some dreams. He dreamed that he and his brothers were harvesting wheat. And all of this brothers' wheat bowed down and worshiped his wheat. How do you think that went over with the brothers?

Then he had a dream that the sun and moon and stars bowed down and worshiped him. That one made his dad angry. The implication was that even his dad would bow to him. Do you know someone who is pompous and arrogant, and they just wreak of superiority? That's the dynamic. When we mix that in with all the favoritism and family drama—it's going to explode.

One day Joseph went looking for his brothers and their flocks of sheep. Before he could see them, they saw him coming. Do you know what it's like for your body to react as soon as you see *that* person? I'm sure that's going on. One of the brothers said, "let's kill him." And they were all in.

When Joseph arrived, they roughed him up and threw him in a well. But one of them noticed an opportunity. "You know...we could just sell him to some slave traders. We'd be rid of him, and we'd have a few bucks in our pocket." And that's what they did.

They took his special coat, ripped it and put some goats blood on it and brought it to their dad. I'm sure they did their best to pretend to be sad. They told dear old dad that Joseph was killed by a wild animal. Meanwhile, Joseph is a victim of human-trafficking, on his way to Egypt.

When he got there, he was sold to a guy named Potiphar. He was a high ranking official, the captain of the guard. He went from being the boss to a slave. But God's hand was on Joseph. And you know what, Joseph trusted and honored God. For his own good purposes, God decided to bless Joseph and ensure that everything he did was successful. Potiphar became a fan of Joseph. He put him charge of his entire house.

Meet Potiphar's wife. Potiphar wasn't the only person who noticed ol' Joe. She liked what she saw, and she was on a mission to get down. It would be so easy for us to view her one dimensionally. I don't her backstory. There's a lot of details we don't know about her. But no one is one dimensional.

Back in seminary I had to translate Genesis 25-50 from Hebrew to English. When I got to Potiphar, I discovered that the word for official is the exact same word for eunuch. It wasn't uncommon for those who worked in the palace, who were in regular proximity of the pharaoh's harem, to be eunuchs. There are examples from antiquity of eunuchs who were given wives. Is that the case with Potiphar? I don't

know, probably not. But back when I was digging in and studying this possibility, it led me to something that I think is worth talking about.

Let's just imagine Potiphar was a eunuch. That means that this woman was trapped in a sexless marriage. Her life is unfair. Here you have Joseph. Nothing about his life is fair either. He's lost his family. He lost his status. Things are going well, but he's still a slave. No freedom. No family of his own. You've potentially got two people who are trapped in a deeply unjust situation, with no hope that it will ever change.

Can we be adults about this? How many of us could find ourselves thinking, "I'm not saying it's right. But I can understand them looking to each other for comfort." The chaotic, destructive nature of sin often begins with subtle deceptions. Could we write this down?

We are all vulnerable to making **EXCUSES** for things for which there is no **EXCUSE**.

Some of us in this room have been toying with a decision that we know is not right. You know it's wrong. And what you're telling yourself is that you don't deserve whatever unfair or unjust situation that you're in. You probably do deserve better. And yet, you are so vulnerable to using that as an excuse to engage in behavior that is going to eventually bring chaos and destruction to your life.

This happens with money. This happens with sex. This happens with addiction. My job right now is to love you enough to tell you, don't believe the lie. You don't want to invite that chaos and destruction into your life. C'mon. We are all vulnerable to making excuses for things which there is no excuse. Who do you want to become?

Joseph loved, honored, and trusted God. So, he rebuffed her advances. One time she came on so strong that he had to literally run away. She grabbed his garment; he left it behind. In the anger and shame of being rejected, she told her husband that he assaulted her. Potiphar got angry and threw Joseph in prison.

Once again he finds himself in pit, at the very bottom. And yet, God's hand was on Joseph. The warden of the prison became a fan. Eventually Joseph was running the prison. One day the pharaoh's baker and cup bearer were thrown in prison. It appears Pharaoh believed someone was trying to poison him. So, he threw these guys in prison while he could sort it out.

Oddly enough, both the baker and the cup bearer had dreams that they couldn't understand. God gave Joseph the ability to interpret the dreams. He told them what was going to happen to them in the future. Sure enough, he was 100% right. His only request was to tell Pharaoh about him.

Years go by and Pharaoh has recurring dreams that are haunting him. No one could comfort him. People tried to decode the dreams. They were useless. Then the cupbearer told Pharaoh, there was this guy who had a freakish ability to interpret dreams. You should talk to him. And that's what happened.

Joseph was brought in and Pharaoh said, "I hear you're the man who has the ability to interpret dreams." But something has happened to Joseph over the years. He is uniquely gifted by God, but he's no longer self-impressed. He's humble. He tells Pharaoh, "There's nothing special about me. I can't explain your dreams to you. But God can." He went to explain that these dreams were in fact, messages from God. The message was that for the next 7 years you're going to have the best economic growth and food production you've ever seen. After that, there's going to be 7 years of drought.

So Joseph said, "If I'm you. I put somebody in charge of saving everything you can for next 7 years. During the 7 years of drought that person can oversee food distribution and assistance programs to make sure you all survive. Because this is going to be devastating for anyone who is not prepared."

It didn't take Pharaoh long to recognize that Joseph was the man for the job. He made him Prime Minister. He was the second in command in the country. He gave him a house, land, wealth, and a wife. So the work began. Joe took all of Egypt through Financial Peace University. They got their emergency fund together. And over the next 7 years, they stockpiled so much food, that not only was all of Egypt provided for, people from other countries and regions were able to purchase what they needed to survive.

One day, during the horrible 7-year drought, Joseph was monitoring food distribution. Who do you think showed up, hoping to get assistance? He saw his brothers. Take some time to read Genesis 42-50. I just don't have the time to tell you everything that happened.

He recognized his brothers, but they didn't recognize him. He orchestrated a series of events to get information out of them about their father. He orchestrated and put his brothers in a series of challenging, morally difficult situations. He was trying to figure if they had changed. What are they like.

Eventually, he couldn't stand it anymore. He revealed to them that he was their brother. For Joseph, this was deeply emotional. He wept uncontrollably. For the brothers, this was terrifying. They were certain that Joseph was going exact revenge. But that wasn't his intent at all.

He had them go and get their father. The entire family was brought to Egypt and Joseph used all the power and privilege he had to bless them and provide for them. When the Pharaoh found out about it, he added to it and gave them land of their very own.

This is an incredible story of reconciliation and restoration. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to see how this points to Jesus. Jesus was rejected. He suffered unjustly. And yet, he generously gives abundant life to all who trust in him. This story points us to the hope and restoration that is ultimately and only found in Jesus. But our story with Joseph isn't over yet.

When Joseph's dad died, things got wobbly in a hurry. Now we're ready to read Genesis 50.

GENESIS 50:15-21 *When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.*

Why do you think that Joseph's instant reaction was that he wept? I think there were two things that ripped his heart in half. It's very likely that his brothers are lying. Their dad didn't make a deathbed proclamation, asking Joseph to forgive his brothers. It was obvious that he already had. The brothers

just couldn't see it. Even after all the extravagant generosity and kindness, they couldn't comprehend grace.

They could not image having all the power that Joseph possessed and choosing to not use it to get revenge. They couldn't imagine wielding power for the purpose of forgiveness and generosity. Here it is. They couldn't see and understand the heart of their brother because they didn't know and understood the heart of God.

GENESIS 50:20-21 *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.*

There is no way that Joseph would have chosen the evil was done to him. And yet, he wouldn't undo it if he could. All that time in the pit, all that time in slavery, all that time in prison formed and shaped Joseph into someone who deeply valued the plans and purposes of God vastly more than his own plans and preferences. He was becoming a truer and clearer reflection of what God is like.

One of my very favorite pastors was Tim Keller. This is an observation that he made.

The pattern of saviors and the pattern of deliverers in the Bible is that the very people the deliverer is sent to is not only rejected but saved through the rejection. –Tim Keller

Who does that sound like? Who does that point us toward? May we see the truth, goodness, and beauty of Jesus. And, may we become more like him. I don't think I'm being extreme; I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say there is war raging for your soul and mine. There is a war raging for the soul of the church in America. Either we are going to look like Jesus and become more like him or we are going to look like the world and become more like the serpent.

The way of the world is to battle wrongs and perceived injustices through force, through control, through imposing your view and your way on others.

- That can be done with violence.
- That can be done with legislation.
- That can be done with political scheming.
- That can be done with shaming.

I think you get the point. You've seen it. You've experienced it. God's way is different. The cycle of wrongdoing, chaos, and injustices are broken through suffering. And it's not making our enemies suffer, but voluntarily suffering on behalf of our enemies. Jesus breaks the curse and cycle of sin and chaos through sacrifice. And he has called us to be his ambassadors and to join him in that good purpose.

I want to ask you to write down one last thing.

We want to **WIN** the world, not **BEAT** the world.

Just a minute ago I said there is a war raging for your soul and mine. There is a war raging the for soul of the church in America. What do I mean? I think too many followers of Jesus have believed the lie that we want to win by beating the world. But that's not what Jesus has called us to. He called us to join him in winning the world by dying to ourselves in the same way that he died for us.

LUKE 6:27-36 *“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”*