

The God of Heartbreak
Our Heartbreaking God
Genesis 50:19-21

But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. ²¹ So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

If you read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation you know that the Old Testament precedes the New Testament.

The law comes before grace.

Thunder appears on Sinai before tenderness appears in the face of Jesus.

Conviction comes first and compassion follows

John 1:17 - For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Romans 7:7 - if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.

The law is as important as grace. Conviction is as important as compassion. Thunder is as important as tenderness.

This overarching meta-narrative of the Bible also demonstrates how God works in our lives personally

You have your own personal experience of this progression

ILL - I became a Christian at the age of seventeen during an extremely tumultuous time of life. Circumstances of my own making caused great pain to me and others whom I loved. On reflection, I recognize that God orchestrated those events to savingly checkmate my soul. The emotional pain was divinely intentional, serving God’s greater plan in my life. The Bible clearly teaches that God uses sin and sorrow, pain and heartache to corner people for his glory and our good.

The history of Joseph’s life

- Genesis 30 & 37-50 (minus 38)
- 11th son of Jacob, next to the last son and firstborn of Jacob and Rachel
- Lived in Canaan with 11 half-brothers, one full brother and one half sister
- He was his father’s favorite
- He abused his father’s favoritism
- His brothers hated him
- At 17, his brothers threw him in a pit to let him die
- Instead they sold him into slavery to Ishmaelite traders
- The Midianites sold him to Potiphar, the Egyptian captain of Pharaoh’s bodyguards

- God favored Joseph and Potiphar put him in charge of his house
- Joseph was handsome and Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce him
- He rejected her advances, so she told Potiphar that Joseph attacked her
- Potiphar placed Joseph in the king's prison
- God favored Joseph there and the warden put him in charge of the prison
- There, Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker
- Pharaoh killed the baker but reinstated the cupbearer
- Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him but the cupbearer forgot him
- Two years later Pharaoh dreamed a dream his magicians could not interpret
- The cupbearer told Pharaoh about Joseph
- Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream
- The interpretation prophesied 7 years of feasting and then 7 years of famine
- Pharaoh then put Joseph in charge of all Egypt
- 7 years later, when Joseph was 37, Joseph's father Jacob sent his all his sons except the baby, to Egypt looking for bread
- Joseph recognized them, gave them limited bread and demanded they return with the youngest son, Benjamin, to get more bread. He also kept Simeon as a hostage.
- Jacob initially refused Joseph's request but eventually complied
- All the sons of Jacob – all of Joseph's brothers ended up in Egypt
- As they left, Joseph placed his own silver cup in their bags
- His soldiers intercepted the brothers as they left Egypt, found the cup and returned the men to Joseph
- Judah pleaded for mercy, informing Joseph that their father had already lost one son – a story Joseph knew to be about himself
- At that point, Joseph revealed himself to them. They were all concerned Joseph would seek revenge
- Instead, he encouraged them to bring his father to Egypt so the family might be reunited.
- Once there, Pharaoh honored Jacob and all his sons, giving them the best land and making them shepherds over his flock
- Once there, Joseph endured the other end of his father's favorite son mentality when Jacob blessed Ephraim instead of Manasseh
- 17 years later, Jacob died and Joseph's brothers once again feared for their lives but Joseph responded -

Genesis 50:19-21 - *But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?"²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.²¹ So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.*

God meant it for good

First: People Hurt Us and We Hurt People

Genesis 37:4 - *But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.*

Genesis 37:19 & 26-28 - *They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer.²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits.^[b] ²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him. ²⁸ Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels^[c] of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.*

There is no mention of God in these passages. His name and noted presence is absent from this portion of Moses’ story about Joseph.

Joseph’s brothers acted freely and maliciously toward him.

We sin against others and others sin against us. We do so

- Freely
- Maliciously

No one can blame God for sin or the repercussions of sin. People do intend to harm us and we act evil toward others.

Genesis 50:20a - *As for you, you meant evil against me,*

We all act freely and are thus, fully responsible for our actions.

Second: God, not People Rule Heartbreak

Joseph’s brothers acted freely and maliciously toward him. But an older, more mature Joseph also recognized that God worked behind the scenes of their sin to do good things for him and even for his brothers.

Genesis 45:4-8 - *So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And he said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for **God sent me before you** to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ And **God sent me before you** to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So **it was not you who sent me here, but God**. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.*

Joseph's statements draw back the curtain on human life to reveal God's behind-the-scenes oversight of everything that happens in life.

Jesus is the *"Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end"* (Revelation 22:13).

We are quick to acknowledge that God has the last word in our heartache but slow to confess that God has the first word – that he orchestrates our heartache

When he wrote the Psalmist wrote the history of Israel in one Psalm, this is how he reflected on God's work in Joseph's life and Joseph's own words

*When he [God] summoned a famine on the land
and broke all supply of bread,
¹⁷ he had sent a man ahead of them,
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
¹⁸ His feet were hurt with fetters;
his neck was put in a collar of iron;
¹⁹ until what he had said came to pass,
the word of the LORD tested him.
- Psalm 105:16-19*

Look closely at what the Psalmist divinely claims -

- God created the famine that threatened life on two continents (16)
- God sent Joseph ahead of Israel into Egypt (17)
- God did this knowing the pain it would cause Joseph (17-18)
- God did all of these things to advance his own agenda (19a)
- God tested Joseph through it all (19b)

What is the alternative?

- a) God did not know
- b) God did not care
- c) God did not have control

None of these can be true about God. Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal claiming this is true of false gods

1 Kings 18:27 - Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing (does not know) or he is relieving himself (too busy), or he is on a journey (does not have control), or perhaps he is asleep (weary) and must be awakened."

Our God has all-control over everything

Job 1:12 - *And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand."*

Job 2:6 - *And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."*

- a) Satan had to gain God's permission
- b) God controlled the timing, objects and extent of Job's heartache

Isaiah 45:7 - *I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.*

The God who broke Jacob's thigh so that Israel would walk with him (Genesis 32:28) and blinded Saul so that Paul could see Jesus (Acts 9) does the same thing in your life (James 5:10-11).

Jesus' death is the ultimate expression of this reality-shifting truth

Acts 2:23 - *this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*

God sinlessly uses the sin of Christians and unbelievers redemptively for good

This means

- purposeless,
- randomness,
- senselessness,
- risk or
- accidents

do not exist in God's world.

God's sovereignty and providence means that you are not a victim and certainly not powerless, either to survive your heartbreak or to forgive the person who hurt you.

Instead, **like Joseph, you are an agent of God's saving grace to the world**, able to and capable of glorifying God in every heartache, even if you don't presently see its value or purpose (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Three: God Uses (temporal) Heartbreak to Cure us of (eternal) Heartbreak

Genesis 50:21 - *So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.*

Joseph's comfort and forgiveness were grounded in the soil of God's sovereignty. The God who meant him only good, and not his brothers, orchestrated and

This changes everything about heartbreak: how we receive it, how we endure it, how we talk about it, how we share it...

However, you will never thrive in the heartaches of life until you unreservedly embrace God for who he truly is; the God who is sovereign in every aspect of your life.

The incredible news is that *“though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love”* (Lamentations 3:32).

This strength-exchange of God’s power for his weakness moved the apostle Paul to *“boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me”* (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Conclusion:

Read Psalm 105:16-19.

- Does the Psalmist see God’s sovereignty in Joseph’s heartache?
- For what purposes did God send Joseph into Egypt

Re-read Genesis 45:7-8, 50:2.

- How did Joseph re-interpret heartbreak of his life?
- How does this truth move you from being a victim to an agent of God’s saving grace?

Read Genesis 50:20-21.

- How might God’s sovereignty comfort you in your heartache?
- How might it affect your ability to forgive anyone who caused your heartache?

