



# The God Who Overrules Evil for Good

Behold Our God! – Read the Bible for Life Series #4

Genesis 50

Pastor David Sunday

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We trust in You confidently, Lord, that You are leading us all the way so we thank You Lord for these songs. We thank You for the music that speaks to our hearts. We thank You, Lord, for the story of Joseph's life—a story that testifies to us of these truths. Lord, we know that whatever was written in the Scriptures in the past was written for our instruction so that through the encouragement and comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope. I pray that You would do that today for Your people. Enliven our hope in You so we would live with in confidence and joy that whatever befalls us, You are going to work it out for good. Open our eyes, Lord. Speak to us through Your Spirit. Let us behold wondrous things now in Your Word, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen

Let's open our Bibles this morning to Genesis—the first book of the Bible—and to the last chapter of Genesis, chapter 50. If you've been reading along with the Bible reading plan, you read the story of Joseph this week. This story has been called the most artistic and the most fascinating of Old Testament biographies. I agree; I love the story of Joseph. I've loved it since I was a child.

If you have not been reading along, this week is a great time to get into the reading plan. We're starting the book of Job now. Don't feel like you have to get caught up on everything; just start in right where we are. It's God's Word wherever you look and it's really worth your time and attention. It will be so rewarding to you. If you've fallen behind, don't be discouraged. Let's keep on going as we read through God's Word. One of the benefits of reading the story of Scripture from cover to cover and reading it chronologically as we're doing, is that we see God's Word is one grand story as it unfolds according to a glorious design.

I want to just read to you one thing that God said to Abraham back in Genesis 15 many years earlier so you can see how God is fulfilling what He said to Abraham. Listen to these words:

*“Then the LORD said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.’”*

God is prophesying to Abraham that his people are going to end up in Egypt as slaves. There’s going to be affliction but then they are going to be brought out 400 years later. The story of Joseph shows us how God brought His people into Egypt. At the time Genesis ends, they are living in Egypt as the people of God and they are starting to multiply there. We’re going to come in at the climax of this story in Genesis 50 and read verses 15 through 21. Hear God’s Word:

*“When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, ‘It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.’ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, ‘Your father gave this command before he died: “Say to Joseph, ‘Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.’” ‘And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.’ Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, ‘Behold, we are your servants.’ But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 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. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.”*

This is God’s Word.

Here at the end of the story, Joseph is telling us what sustained him through the middle of the story of his life. He’s opening his heart to us and he’s saying to us, “There has been a conviction in my heart. There has been a truth that I have hung on to that has shaped and molded my life and my way of living throughout the last many years.”

This truth will help us as we live in the middle of the story of our lives because one thing about being in the middle of the story is you don’t know what the end is going to be. And in the middle of that story will come perplexities, disappointment, overwhelming pressures, sadness, heartache, betrayal, false accusations, bondage and surprising reversals. But in the middle of the story of our

lives, there is a truth that will sustain us. There is a truth that will keep our hope alive and buoyant. A truth that will help us say with the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:18, *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”*

I want to know how to live like that. I want to know what the truth is that I need to hold on to; the truth that needs to function in my life; the truth that needs to be marinating in my mind in order for me to live in the middle of a story that is full of difficulty even when I don’t know the end. I want to live with hope in the midst of that story.

So this truth is provided for us in a very clear and concise way in Genesis 50:20. Listen to what Joseph says. This is his testimony. This is what he believed: *“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.”* There it is. This verse unlocks the whole plot of the story. The story of Joseph’s life is the story of a man who believed in a God who overrules evil for good; a God Who continually took the evil that was being done in the life of His servant and Who faithfully brought good out of every bit of that evil. He does this, not only for Joseph’s sake, but for the salvation of countless lives for the glory of His great name.

We have a word for this truth. It’s the capital of Rhode Island. Providence is what we call this truth. This word literally means “to see beforehand.” When we speak of God’s providence, we’re speaking of the fact that God sees the end or the purpose for everything that is taking place in your life and in the universe.

When we say God is a God of providence, we are confessing that we believe God governs His creation with absolute sovereignty. He’s ruling over all things.

- He does this with wisdom so He does all things well.
- He does this with power so there is nothing God desires that He is not able to bring about.
- He rules over everything that comes to pass...
  - from the greatest things to the least things
  - from the rising of the sun and the falling of the rain

- from the raising up of kingdoms and governments to the bringing down of others
- from the number of hairs on our heads
- from the growth of the minutest cells in our bodies
- and every detail of every day of our lives

It's all being guided and governed by God. That's providence. We spoke of it this morning in the Heidelberg Catechism:

**Question 27.** What do you mean by the providence of God?

**Answer:** Providence is the almighty and ever-present power of God by which He upholds us with His hand, Heaven and earth, and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty. All things in fact come to us not by chance but from His Fatherly hand.

Do you believe that? Is that true? How is that truth functioning in your life? For those of us who receive, believe and respond to the message of God's love in Christ—the gospel—this truth of God's providence is very comforting to us. We hold on to this truth with all our might.

The Apostle Paul expresses it so well in Romans 8:28. I don't ever want to hear anyone at New Covenant say, "Oh, that's just a cliché." It can be used as a cliché, but this truth is not a cliché. This is the bedrock of our lives. This is what gives us comfort in chaos. This is what prevents us from sinking into utter confusion in the dark days. Romans 8:28 says, "*And we know [we're sure of this] that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*" No exceptions.

"Every joy or trial falleth from above.  
Traced upon our dial by the Sun of Love;  
We may trust Him fully all for us to do.  
They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true."

*Like a River Glorious by Frances Havergal*

We believe this. "*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*" There are no

accidents. Nothing escapes His attentive care, guidance and governance. According to John Calvin, “We believe that whatever poison Satan produces, God turns it into medicine for His elect.” Wow! I want that truth ringing in my mind! “Whatever poison Satan produces, God turns it into medicine for His elect.”

We see this in Joseph’s life. We see it! Joseph believed this. He probably didn’t believe it all at once. When he was 17 years old and kind of gloating over the fact that he was his father’s favorite... When he got that special robe... When he had those dreams with all of his brothers coming down and falling before him... If there is any time in Joseph’s life when he makes a mistake or we see him in sin, this would probably be it.

I don’t think it would be very comforting to you if you came to breakfast in the morning and your younger brother who has just tattled on you and all of your other brothers to your father about how you were misbehaving in the field, came down to breakfast and said, “He guys, guess what I dreamed last night. I dreamed that you all were falling down before me and honoring me.” That probably was not the brightest move.

We don’t want to judge Joseph’s motives there because the Bible doesn’t really tell us what his motives were. But I don’t think Joseph got the doctrine of providence all in one nice deposit. It was something that was worked out in his life as he observed God’s dealings with him. He began to see the truth that God was with him.

Did you notice how as we read through this story this week, that truth keeps getting underscored? God was with Joseph.

- God was with him in the pit.
- God was with him in the prison.
- God was with him in Potiphar’s household.
- God was with him as the Prince of Egypt.

God was with him and Joseph saw that God was with him and was leading him and guiding him by His own hand—that God was working together all the

events of his life, the good and the bad, for his good. Joseph said, “I believe this.” And he was shaped and molded by the way he responded in these circumstances. This is the secret to the faithfulness and fruitfulness in Joseph’s life.

As we survey just a little bit of Joseph’s life, I want you to consider this question: What difference would it make in your life today if you really believed and applied this doctrine? If you not only believed it intellectually, but actively applied it in your life? If you not only said, “Yes, I believe that God is working everything together for my good and His glory,” but you actively applied that in your life situation today—if it really functioned in your life? If you fed on that truth and derived joy and comfort from that truth? If His provident really was sustaining you, what difference would it make in your life today?

### 1. **Would You be More Thankful?**

I want to explore that question in three different areas? First of all, would you be more thankful today? Would you be more thankful if you really believed and actively applied the doctrine of providence? Would it make you a person who is abounding in thankfulness? We know this is God’s will for us, right? First Thessalonians 5:16 says, “*Rejoice always.*” “O church of Christ, rejoice!” That’s how we opened our service this morning. “*Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*” Wow.

“*Give thanks in all circumstances.*” That’s easy to do when things are going well, but what about when things aren’t going well? I remember three years ago at Thanksgiving time I read an article by one of my favorite writers in World Magazine. Her name is Andree Seu. Whenever I get World, I look for her article first. They’re always so good. This one is about Joseph and she reflected on how these early years of Joseph’s life can teach us about thanksgiving in good times and in bad. She said it very creatively and memorably so I’m going to read some of it now. Listen. Listen to how the doctrine of providence changes the way we think about thankfulness.

“Joseph is Daddy's favorite. Daddy has given him a multicolored tunic, and God has given him a dream. The future looks rosy. Let us thank the Lord for His amazing gift!

“Not so fast. The multicolored coat makes the brothers see red. They have stripped Rachel's son of his tunic, thrown him in a pit, and are cold-bloodedly eating their boxed lunch near the hole. After dessert they will kill him and be done with his dreams. Take back that thanksgiving prayer; nothing to be thankful for here.

“But wait. In the nick of time, big brother Judah (whether from compassion or cold feet) pitches an alternative plan: Sell Joseph's prideful hide to the company of Ishmaelite traders that, coincidentally, is trundling down the king's highway from Gilead to Egypt. The day is saved! Praise God for His impeccable timing! Thanksgiving is in order.

“But ‘his feet were hurt with fetters; his neck was put in a collar of iron’ (Psalm 105:18). Joseph's heart hurts worse than his feet. How has he been so dense? Now he will never see Dad again, and little Ben. And the dream is over... Thanksgiving for what?

“It so happens, though, that Joseph has been bought by a certain Potiphar, a high muck-a-muck in Pharaoh's entourage. A new gift...begins to emerge, and the Jewish kid is eventually in charge of everything in the estate. He sees important people coming and going and is a quick study in politics. ‘The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man.’ Let us recommence to thank God, who sees around corners, and who is already waiting there for us.

“Whoa, what is this? Potiphar has not been minding the store or his honey-cakes. And she is now minding Joseph. What a revolting development, just when things were finally looking up. Joseph does the right thing, and what does he get for it? Thrown into the hole again. I thought you said a few verses back that ‘the Lord was with Joseph’? Now I say, ‘It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping His charge?’ (Malachi 3:14). Joseph is in prison, and that's bad.

“No, that's good. Because God, undaunted by bars and walls and concertina wire, is present everywhere men lift up holy hands to seek Him. ‘Where shall I go from Your Spirit? . . . If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there’ (Psalm 139:7-8). It's the king's prison, besides. So maybe something interesting will come of this (if I am starting to learn anything from this topsy-turvy tale). Lo and behold, God has given our boy favor with the COs and other inmates. Before long, he's practically running the joint. Let us thank the Lord for His wisdom and unfailing love.

“The perfect scenario has arisen to spring Joseph from this bit. He has interpreted a dream for the king's baker, and the grateful cookie-maker promises to put in a good word for Joseph. But you know how it is when you're back on the outside. The baker forgets for ‘two whole years’ (Genesis 41:1). Joseph does not collect his get-out-of-jail-free card. What shall we call this—betrayal Number Three? Disappointment Number 33? Call this ‘count me out of thanksgiving dinner.’

“But the king has had a nightmare (wouldn't you know). The baker is saying ‘oops.’ And Joseph is the only man in town who can give old Pharaoh the skinny on skinny cows. Things are looking up. The reason it has taken all this time is because, while you thought Joe was suffering to no purpose, ‘the word of the Lord tested him’ (Psalm 105:19) and was developing his character.

“Who knows where all this will lead? It's so messy in the middle. But a pattern begins to emerge, and *it is getting to the point that I am embarrassed to be thanking God only when appearances are auspicious*. The bad things in my life keep turning for my good. May as well be pro-active and thank God for everything, good and bad. Set me a place at the table this year. Bring on the pumpkin pie.”

That's what God's providence does. It seasons your life with faith, with trust, so that you learn in all circumstances, good and bad, God is worthy of your thanks! Without this doctrine in this topsy-turvy tail of our lives, we're going to be up and down and all over the place with thanksgiving. We're going to be thanking God when things feel good and right and we're going to be keeping at a distance, muzzling our mouths, hardening our hearts when things don't look so good.

But the doctrine of providence enables me in everything to give thanks, "*for this is the will of God for me in Christ Jesus.*" Be clear on this point, friends. It's not that we're thankful *for* evil. God's Word does not command you to be thankful for sexual abuse. God's Word does not say to be thankful for murder, for betrayal, for war, for thievery, for disease, for sin. But God does command you to be thankful *in* all these circumstances. Not thankful *for* the evil, but thankful that even the evil cannot thwart God's perfect plan or smother God's goodness—thankful that He is a God who overrules evil for my good, that He sees the end—the purpose—for which everything in my life is taking place. And He is with me *in* every circumstance. He is working *in* every circumstance. If you actively applied this truth, would you be a more thankful person today?

Back in January of 2010, Kate and I took a group of students from Westminster Christian School to the Billy Graham Center Museum at Wheaton College. I was leading a class that week on the life of Jim Elliot, one of the five missionaries who were martyred—he was killed for his faith in Ecuador. We went to the museum on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their death. I remember being very moved as the curator of the museum showed us documents and in particular a letter that Elisabeth Elliot, Jim's widow and the mother of their infant daughter, wrote to her parents that same month shortly after her husband's murder. Listen to what she said in that letter.

"I know you're all wondering how I'm getting along. I can only say that the peace I have literally passes all possible understanding. The Lord, Jehovah, is my strength and song. I have learned I believe the lesson which Amy Carmichael speaks of in her poem: 'In acceptance lieth peace.' How true. I accept gratefully from the hand of

God this experience. I think again of the lovely prayer of Phillips Brooks, given to me by Grandpa years ago. "Lord, by all Thy dealings with us, whether by joy or pain, (and this is both) of light or darkness, let us be brought to Thee."

That's a woman who believes and who is actively applying the doctrine of providence. She understands that providence does not preclude pain but in the pain God is working to draw us closer to Himself Who is our highest good. So pain is necessary to the process. We can trust that even the pain, even the evil, even the murder of my husband will be turned for good; will be overruled for good by the God Who does all things well. Would you be more thankful right now if you really believed that? If you really applied that truth?

## 2. **Would You be More Triumphant?**

I need to move through this section very quickly. This is the problem with preaching through the Bible this way because there are so many things I can't say that I want to say. But I want to say this: Romans eight is a chapter of Scripture that speaks of the providence of God. This is where Paul says, "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*" It's the chapter that says that God is working *all things together for our good* and for His glory. It's a chapter that tells us that His unfailing design is that we would be predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

So God is taking everything in our lives to make us more like Christ. Romans eight says that when we really believe this and when we really believe that nothing "*can separate us from the love of God in Christ,*" then we can say with confidence, "*In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*" More than conquerors.

Let's look at two instances in Joseph's life where he conquered something that weaker men would surely have succumbed to. The first is in Genesis chapter 39. Turn back there for a moment to the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. This is when he was a young man in his twenties and Potiphar's wife notices that "*Joseph*

*was handsome in form and appearance” (39:6). This would have been flattering to this young man. Then, “...after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, ‘Lie with me’” (39:7).*

Here he is—a normal, red-blooded young man—away from his father’s house in a place where this would have been readily accepted and there’s no one to report it. She didn’t just do this once. Verse 10 makes it clear that this is a repeated proposition, over and over again. Just think of the temptations that were wrapped up in this proposition.

Of course, there’s the sexual temptation. Do you know what’s going on in every heart that succumbs to sexual temptation? **Self-pity**. “You know, I deserve this after all I’ve gone through. My brothers threw me in that pit. I heard them out there having lunch—laughing. They were going to kill me and then they sold me into slavery. That was humiliating! That hurt! I didn’t like having my neck in that collar of iron. You know, I deserve better. I deserve pleasure.”

Also wrapped up in a lot of sexual temptation is the **flattery of our ego**. “Someone notices me! Someone wants me! My brothers cast me off. My father rebuked me in front of them. No one has really cared for me and now this woman is noticing me! She desires me!” But I love Joseph’s answer in verse eight. *“But he refused and said to his master's wife, ‘Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you.’”*

There was another time in the book of Genesis where God had given to His son and daughter everything in the garden except one thing. Adam and Eve did not respond the way Joseph responds here. *“Nor has he kept back anything from me except you because you are his wife.”* Now look at this phrase at the end of verse nine, *“How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”*

There it is—the doctrine of providence! He sees that God is with him. He hasn’t forgotten the God of his father. He has the fear of God before his eyes; he recognizes God’s presence in his life; he has not succumbed to self-pity but instead

at some way in his heart he's been speaking the truths that we sang of this morning.  
"He leadeth me, O blessed thought."

"All the way my Savior leads me.  
What have I to ask beside?  
Can I doubt His tender mercy,  
Who through life has been my guide?...  
Jesus doeth all things well."

All the Way My Savior Leads Me by Fanny Crosby

"How could I do this thing and sin against God?" Joseph says. It is providence that keeps him from sinning. It's active recognition of God's providence in his life and there's a very instructive lesson for us here. When we are confronted with these kinds of temptations, we need to be very aware of the fact that these kinds of sins flow out of self-pity. Whenever we give into sexual fantasy and sexual temptation, what we're saying is, "God's presence in my life does not satisfy me. God is not good to me. God does not take care of me. God is not enough for me." And when we're faced with those kinds of temptations, the only antidote is to do what Joseph did in verse 11. Flee. Run. Get out of there! Don't even go back to get your coat! Get out of the house! Leave.

John Piper said it well. "To be caught in secret sin is a horrible thing. There is only one thing worse—not to be caught." To be given to it. Not to be caught."

So the providence of God makes Joseph triumphant over self-pity, over self-indulgence, and then another area of his life (this is big), makes him triumphant over **resentment and bitterness**. Think of all the people who let Joseph down. His own brothers hated him. Potiphar's wife, who after attempting to seduce him and unsuccessfully doing so, frames him for the crime of rape. And she is successful in getting him thrown into prison for a crime he didn't commit. What would that be like? Can you imagine the wrestling with resentment that would fill your heart as you're sitting there in that jail cell with the indignity of having been accused and convicted of a crime that you did not do? And then there's the cupbearer who forgot him and let him waste away for two more years.

In all these things, Joseph did not get bitter. He didn't get resentful. He knew his life was being guided and governed by God—a good and gracious God. He

experienced God's presence with him. He trusted in God's leadership of his life. He knew that the Word of God would be faithful—that after he was tested he would *"come out as gold."* He knew it.

How do we know that he triumphed over his bitterness? Look at chapter 41. There's an indication here in chapter 41 that pretty early on in the process, God in His grace and goodness had purged Joseph's heart from any bitterness. Joseph somehow recognized that whatever poison Satan conjured up for him, God was using to be medicine in his life. We know this because after he gets married, he's now the Prime Minister of Egypt. He has a wife who is an Egyptian named Potiphara (41:50). He has two children and what does he name them? Genesis 41:51 says, *"Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh [which means 'making to forget']. 'For,' he said, 'God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.' The name of the second he called Ephraim, 'For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.'"*

He realizes that here in all these troubles, "I'm not going to focus on what's been done wrong to me. I'm not going to dwell the rest of my life on the evil that's been done. Instead, I'm going to dwell on the God Who overrules the evil for my good. I'm going to look at how He's using all this, even these afflictions, to make me fruitful."

It's very interesting that at the end of Jacob's life in chapter 49, when he blesses Joseph, what does he say about him? *"Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall."* There's an old saying that goes, "Does trial and affliction make you bitter or better?" In Joseph's case it made him better.

Then we see his freedom from resentment and bitterness in his response to his brothers. Let's look at chapter 45. This is a beautiful, beautiful story. Can you read this without tears coming to your eyes? Can you read this story without your heart being moved deeply? He finally reveals who he is to his brothers after having been estranged from them all these years. Look at verse chapter 45:1:

*"Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him.*

*He cried, 'Make everyone go out from me.' So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence."*

Then in verse four, Joseph said something to his brothers. And what he says to his brothers is so evocative to me. It reminds me of Someone else Who had been sold into slavery, stripped of His dignity, falsely accused, sentenced unjustly and suffered in the place of those who were His enemies. Now that He is at the right hand of power, instead of using that power to crush His enemies, He uses that power to lavish blessing on His enemies. He says to them, *"Come near to me please."*

Come to Me. *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden..."* That's what Joseph reminds me of. He reminds me of Jesus here in verse four when he says 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. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves..." And here we see the inner workings of Joseph's mind and heart. This is what he was thinking throughout this time, that freedom from bitterness and resentment. Look at these words: *"Because you sold me here."* "You did this. It was evil. I'm not going to minimize that fact. I'm not going to say, 'Sure, it was fun down in that pit.' I'm not going to say that I enjoyed prison." *"You sold me here for God sent me before you to preserve life."*

In my Bible I underlined those two phrases. *"You sold me."* *"God sent me."* You sold me. God sent me. *"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."* Here it is again, verse seven. *"And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors."* And again in verse eight: *"So it was not you who sent me here, but God."* He believes in the providence of God and that allows him to be free from resentment and bitterness. We see the genuineness of his love in verse 14. *"Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him."* A beautiful reconciliation.

Has the truth of God's providence freed you from all resentment and bitterness? That brings me to the last question.

### **3. Would You Be a More Tender-Hearted Person Today if You Actively Applied This Doctrine in Your Life?**

Would you be more tender-hearted? As I read this story of Joseph, something that stands out to me is how often he weeps. Do you know any other person in the Old Testament or New Testament who is portrayed as weeping as much as Joseph is? I looked it up and there were several occasions where he weeps profusely. I think there's something very moving about seeing a strong man, a man who's not just feeling sorry for himself, but a man of strength and character so tender-hearted that he weeps. Doesn't that move you when you see a strong man weep? And Joseph is like that.

Turn now to that chapter where we started, chapter 50. Notice what happens. This is 17 years later now. They've been reconciled for 17 years. Joseph has been good to them for 17 years! He thinks all the bridges that were burned have been repaired—that the relationship is good. But then Jacob dies and what's really in the brothers' hearts comes out. They don't trust Joseph. They're suspicious of his motives. They don't really believe that he's forgiven them.

Just like we can experience steadfast love and mercy from God for many, many years and still find ourselves asking, "Has He really forgiven me? Does He really mean it when He says, '*For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.*' Is it really true that '*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*'? Can it really be that God can take the greatest evil that has ever been done by man in the history of the universe (which is the Crucifixion of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ) and God can take that evil, overrule it and bring about the greatest good that has ever come to the human race? Can it really be true?"

Some of us, though we've experienced the mercies of God for a long time, still

find ourselves in doubt far too often. That's the way his brothers were. As they fall down before him and plead with him that he just treat them as servants, it reminds me of the Prodigal Son, coming home to his father and saying, "Father, just make me one of your hired hands." And the father just falls on his neck. He runs to him and he weeps and he lavishes him with many kisses. And I see that character of God in Joseph: a God Who is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

Notice how Joseph responds when he hears their suspicions at the end of verse 17 says, "*Joseph wept.*" He wept. He wept when they spoke to him. He wept that they still did not know and they were not assured of God's mercies! Joseph, throughout his life, weeps not because he's bitter. He weeps because God has shown him that He has been with him in all these afflictions. His heart is moved. His heart is tenderized at the goodness of God in his life. He looks at the trials he's gone through and instead of being angry, he weeps at how God has worked those trials out to bring about good in many lives.

Joseph can do this because he understands something about himself. It's in verse 19: "*Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?*" He says, "I'm not God. I'm not running my life. I'm not in control of this story and I don't need to be in control of it. I trust in the providence of God. I trust in a God Who is working everything together for my good. That frees me. That frees me to be forgiving to those who have wronged me. That frees me to be thankful in every circumstance. That frees me to be tender-hearted and show kindness even to those who have been miserable toward me." Providence of God.

Would you be more tender-hearted today if you really believed in it? If you really applied it? Let me just ask you this: Have you gotten stuck somewhere in the middle of the story of your life? There's just something that's happened that you can't get over. You've been wronged. You've been hurt. You just keep going back to that place. It was evil that was done. It was wrong. And you're stuck. I want to ask you, what would it look like in your life today if you really actively apply this doctrine? If you really believe that what man meant for evil, God means for good. Not only for you, because your life isn't just about you. There are countless other

people in whose lives God is working through what He does in your life.

What if you really believed that? Would you become more tender-hearted? More trusting in the Lord? More thankful for His goodness? More triumphant over self-pity and resentment and bitterness? What will control your life today? Your own thoughts, your own interpretations in the middle of the story about why is God doing this to me? Why have these things happened to me? Will that control your life or will you let your life be controlled by a God Who sees the end from the beginning? A God Who is working together the greatest evil for your greatest good?

Join Joseph in saying, "Am I in the place of God?" No. I don't think so. I trust in You Father. You are sovereign. Let's stand together and worship Him.

The hymn we're going to sing acknowledges God's sovereignty over everything in our lives. All evil He overrides. All pain He purifies. Let's worship Him for that.

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## **New Covenant Bible Church**

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ [www.newcbc.org](http://www.newcbc.org)

*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

Text provided by [sermontranscribers.net](http://sermontranscribers.net) ♦ [emily@sermontranscribers.net](mailto:emily@sermontranscribers.net)