

## Wrestling With God 5) To See Everthing Work for Good

Genesis 50:15-21 • 2020-09-27 • Wrestling with God Series



Ten brothers were sent on a mission by their father. Their families were all beginning to starve. For many months, their crops had failed, and their herds had struggled to graze. They were absolutely desperate. They heard the report that Egypt was selling a surplus of grain and they could get some. Nobody wanted to go there begging for food. But they had no choice. If they didn't, they were all going to die. They had never experienced any famine like this before. Everyone was desperate and dying and nobody had any food to spare. To Egypt they went. They arrived and begged for mercy and for food. But things didn't get much better. The ruler in charge of the grain accused them of being spies. They all spent three days in prison. Imagine what was on their minds! "We are going to die in jail and our families are going to starve at home." On the third day the Egyptian ruler released them to let them return home. But one brother, Simeon, had been taken hostage and could not go home until they all returned with their youngest brother. They returned home, but their father, Jacob would not permit them to return to Egypt with the youngest brother and risk losing him too. He pessimistically stated, "If you take the youngest and anything bad happens to him, I will go down to my grave in tears." He had already lost the second youngest. He feared losing the next. But their food eventually ran out and they once again faced the prospect of starving to death. Things were not working out very well!

I don't think any of them had any idea that God was working all things, even the bad, for their good. Often, we don't see how God is working bad things for our good. Today we continue our series, "wrestling with God" and see a powerful, moving account of God working all things for the good of his people who carry his promises. He did this for those ten brothers and their father and all their families. And he does it for us. We wrestle with God to see everything work for good.

If Joseph's brothers had reason to struggle to see God's working, Joseph had many times more reasons! He faced some terrible turn of events that would have crushed the spirit of any young man. The young Joseph had two dreams which he excitedly took as a sign that God would place him over his brothers. But they hated him for it. In fact, their hatred of Joseph was so strong they plotted to kill him by leaving him to starve in a pit. Years later they would recall, "Remember how he begged us for mercy?" His cries for mercy haunted their hearts for decades. In the end they sold him to slavery to a caravan headed to Egypt.

What good could ever come of such hatred and betrayal? God has a way of working all things for our good. Even sibling hatred and being sold into slavery can turn for our good. Joseph ended up serving in a home of a high official in Egypt. He worked hard and God blessed all his efforts. As he was blessed Joseph didn't forget the Lord his God. He remained faithfully fearing, loving, and trusting in his God.

But then God allowed Joseph to face another terrible turn in life. Joseph was slandered by the wife of his master. She wrongly accused him of trying to rape her when he had refused to have an adulterous relationship with her. He was tossed into prison. This was the second great injustice Joseph faced. Imagine being sold into slavery by your own family who gets to go on living free? Imagine not only losing everything but being left to rot in jail for a crime you didn't commit while your accuser goes free? There was so much heartache and injustice for Joseph! How could God work this for good?

You and I might struggle to face extreme turnarounds and great losses. We might wonder how God is going to use a terrible event to work for good. One huge setback is enough to crush us. But what about two great setbacks? Do you still see God working all things for your good when you have to fight the cancer or forfeit the business on top of all the other pains and losses? You might lose a job, a close friend, or a spouse. You might lose your reputation or your home. Is God working all things for your good when you face repeated injustice and loss? We don't get to hear what Joseph is thinking. But you can be sure that those two dreams he had taken as a sign from God seemed like such faint hopes of the future. Who would ever lift up a foreign slave accused of rape from the very bottom rung of society? We can't say if he ever did give up hope in the Lord's mercy. But we do know how easy it is to entertain the thought that God might fail to rescue.

Joseph learned through years of hardship that God does not fail to rescue. Years later, another man had two dreams. It was the Pharaoh of Egypt. When a former fellow prisoner remembered how God gave Joseph insight into the meaning of special dreams, Joseph's life changed overnight. The Pharaoh called for Joseph to explain his two dreams. "God can tell you," Joseph said. He went on to explain the dream and that God was warning the Pharaoh of a seven-year famine that would be coming after seven years of abundance. Joseph advised the Pharaoh to appoint a man to gather and store grain to survive the seven-year famine. The Pharaoh could think of no better candidate than Joseph. His life was about to enter the biggest turnaround yet!

Suddenly Joseph was given authority over all of Egypt. He rode around in a chariot while people went before him saying "Make way for the Pharaoh's man, Joseph!" No one could lift a finger in all of Egypt without Joseph's permission. He held the special signet ring of the Pharaoh and everyone had to bow before him in all of Egypt.

And he had success! The stores of food gathered by Joseph in the seven years of abundance were beyond count. Then came the seven years of severe famine. That brought Joseph even more fame and power! People everywhere sought permission to buy the food which he had amassed for the Pharaoh. All the people bowed before Joseph.

Eventually, those ten men, Joseph's brothers, came from the land of Canaan. And they too bowed. They couldn't recognize Joseph, who was now speaking and walking like an Egyptian. But Joseph recognized his own goat-herding brothers right away. He last saw them as he begged for his life. Now they were begging before him for their lives. They were bowing down to him!

"Then Joseph remembered his dreams." That is the moment of Joseph's life which was the greatest epiphany! He wasn't in charge of all of Egypt and in position to punish his brothers by mere fate. God was working out his predetermined plan. God had a good plan despite the evil of this world. And Joseph was meant to carry out his role in that plan. God brought him to power not to punish his brothers, but to save them. When he revealed himself to his brothers *"I am Joseph."* *"His brothers could not answer him, because they were terrified by his presence."* (Ge 45:3)

Joseph provided for them all. But his brothers lived in fear for years that he was going to enact his revenge on them. Many years later when their father died, they cowered in fear before Joseph. They once more bowed before Joseph fearing for their lives. But Joseph had come to see God's working in it all for good. With tears in his eyes he heard his brothers still thinking that everything was working for their bad. But Joseph explained the working of God for everyone's good. *"Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring this to pass and to keep many people alive, as it is this day."*

God took the horrible evil of Joseph's brothers, the slander of the woman who had Joseph thrown in prison, he used it all for his purposes. God had made known to Joseph ahead of time this was his goal. When he remembered his dreams, I'm sure that became clear to him. God was behind it all. God has a good plan to save his people. There was a terrible famine coming. God worked behind the scenes to make sure the sons of Jacob would all survive.

This is only one small account of the history of the working of God for the good of those who carry his promises. The history of the Bible records God working out his good purposes and his promises over and over. And he works out his good plans for you -no matter what may come.

The reason God spared the sons of Jacob in the famine is because he has promised through their offspring a man would be born. That man was going to accomplish more than Joseph. He would provide salvation for all the earth. You wouldn't have thought he was going to accomplish God's purpose when you saw what he endured. He was betrayed by the sons of Jacob. He was sold for money into the hands of foreigners. He suffered slander and mockery as they beat him and whipped him. Did it look like God was accomplishing good as the greatest injustice of history took place? Jesus, the Son of God hung on the cross, suffered, and died.

But in a far greater way than Joseph he accomplished God's purpose. Wicked men intended to harm and kill him. But God accomplished what is still being done to this day, the saving of many lives. By his death he rescued us all from our guilt. He paid the sacrifice to set us free from the curse of sin.

Jesus has much more than the signet ring of Pharaoh and a huge store of grain to disperse. He holds the keys to forgiveness and eternal life, and he sits in glory at the right hand of God the Father. He rose from the grave so that he could say to trembling sinners afraid that they will suffer for their sins, "Do not be afraid. It is I, Jesus. Peace be with you." He opens our hearts and minds to understand the prophecies of Scripture. He helps us see that God used everything to work for his good purpose for us. God worked all things to save through the man Jesus.

When Joseph was dying years later, he told the children of Israel, "God will visit you and will bring you up out of this land." We are told the same thing. Jesus, our God will return to bring us out of this land. He will bring us to the land promised where we will live with him forever!

I don't know what major setbacks you have faced in your life. I can't say what lies ahead for you. There may be great troubles and evils that will cause you to wonder if all things are working for your good. But for those who trust in the Lord a sure confidence remains. He who sent his Son will work out his good plan for you. Along with Joseph and all who trust in the Lord we will see our God come to visit us. He will come to this world so torn by sin and trouble, and he will bring us his deliverance. Then, when we rise out of our graves, he will give us a royal robe. He will bring us to a new home of glory and eternal life. Until then we will wrestle, hold to his promises, and trust in him until we see everything work for our good.