



**Theme – Reconstruct:**  
**Building on Solid Ground in an Unstable World**  
***“Breaking the Power of the Past”***

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber, March 25-26, 2023, at Summit Church, Durango

**Weekly Memory Verse:**

***<sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. – Jeremiah 29:11***

**VIDEO      Reconstruct Sermon Bumper**

**SLIDE      *“Breaking the Power of the Past”***

Last week I shared with you the story of my first funeral for Tommy the Turtle, a pet of one of the kids in the church I served while I was a student pastor in the Denver area. My next funeral was a bit more complicated. My dad’s parents, grandma, and grandpa Huber, both had been lifelong smokers and had multiple health issues, including being on oxygen in their later years. They lived in Denver not far from where I was going to graduate school, so when grandma went to Rose Medical Center, I was able to be there with my dad and family in her final days. Grandma seemed to be in better health than grandpa, so we were all a bit surprised when she was the one who went downhill

first.

## **GRAPHIC            Jeff with Grandma and Grandpa Huber**

I was in the room with her when she died, and it was the first time I sat with someone as they took their last breath. You could feel something leave the room in that moment and while grandma and I were not close, it was a holy and intimate moment. It wasn't until I moved here to Durango 20 years ago that I learned from my dad that she was born here at the old Mercy Hospital and lived here in Hesperus until she was a teenager.

After she passed, we then headed over to the apartment to tell grandpa as he didn't want to come to the hospital. My dad, his sister, and I told him that grandma had died and just looked at us and said something like, "Well, what do you want me to do about it? Just put her in the ground and be done with it." I remember visiting with them when I was younger and they always were an interesting and gruff couple, chain smoking, watching soaps during the day, and the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson every night.

My dad and aunt couldn't believe what grandpa had said, especially because they had made them go to Catholic schools their whole lives, so they really need to have a funeral. Grandpa said he didn't believe in any of that religion garbage, but they got a good education, so they should stop arguing with him. My aunt then turned to me and said, "Well, what if Jeff does the funeral?"

What? I never agreed to that and had never officiated at a funeral, except for Tommy the Turtle! I was caught off guard, but before I could share my opinion, grandpa said, "Fine, you can have a funeral, and Jeff can do it, but I ain't coming!" What do you do with that?

I left the apartment a bit shaken and called my supervising pastor immediately to get some advice on how to do my first funeral, and for my grandmother no less. I was concerned when my pastor told me it

wouldn't be too different than for Tommy the Turtle! He said the first step was to meet with my family and give them an outline of the service and then have them share some stories about grandma that we would share in the service. I arranged to meet my dad and aunt the next day at grandpa's apartment. When I arrived, my aunt was in the doorway and said, "Well, grandpa is going to the funeral after all."

I was relieved until she finished with, "He died last night in his sleep, so we'll just do a double funeral. How does that sound?"

Not great! But we proceeded anyway, and for the next couple hours I heard story after story of my grandparents that I had never heard before. Some I could not share at the funeral, and I won't share with you. Most were funny, like the time that grandpa came home after a night of drinking, and he missed dinner. This was before cell phones, and he didn't let grandma know by calling her, and she was mad. She put his dinner in a dog bowl on the front porch. He yelled and screamed and woke up the neighbors who were not happy, but she wouldn't unlock the front door. So, he proceeded to shout that if she was going to treat him like a dog, he was going to act like one, and he peed all over the front porch!

Let's just say I learned more than I needed than I planned on that day. I share that story with you because we all have family issues in our past. Some are more interesting than others, but we all have stuff, and today we're going to continue talking about how we need to deconstruct our faith by looking back at our past honestly so that we can move forward into a future with hope. There is this tendency in the church to sugar coat some of the stories in the Bible, and to sugar coat things in our lives, and if we are going to construct our faith on solid ground, we need be willing to be honest and see how our past shapes who we are today.

This season of Lent, the 40 days and 7 Sundays before we get to Easter, is a time to go deeper in our faith. Some of us are reading this

book by Pete Scazzero for this series, **Emotionally Healthy Discipleship: Moving from Shallow Christianity to Deep Discipleship**. As we venture into this idea of looking at our past to move forward, I want to begin with a caveat that your journey is yours and you are an expert on that. Each one of us is going to have a different experience as we reflect on our family history that has shaped us. My hope and prayer has been that you would take what it is that God is speaking to you through the daily devotions, readings and Scriptures and help you to really reflect deeply on your life with God. I have read through the book several times and each time I discover something new about myself and about God.

One of the reasons this idea is so important when it comes to the number of people deconstructing is because, as we learned the first week, many are leaving Christian faith because of low trust in institutions like the church, often because of how leaders and pastors have betrayed people's trust and acted in ways that not consistent with Christian teaching. In other words, they see hypocrisy, like inappropriate relationships and abuse of money and power, as well as seeing leaders who call themselves followers of Jesus and then lie or cheat or call people names and act in very unloving ways. This behavior is disheartening and leads to a lack of trust.

**GRAPHIC          Jesus Revolution Movie Poster**

**GRAPHIC          Time God is Dead - Jesus Revolution Covers**

I recently saw the movie Jesus Revolution, depicting the spiritual movement from the early 1970's as our nation saw revival OUTSIDE the church. I was struck by how human the leaders were depicted as we saw their life story and their backgrounds, which mostly included imperfect and broken families. What I have seen is that when we don't acknowledge those broken and painful realities of our history, we often act out of those places and it leads to moral failings by leaders in a variety of ways. I have learned that most of us, because we are human,

mortal, fragile, frail, and imperfect, will act in not so good ways if we don't deal with our past. Much like we talked about grief last week, when it is unresolved, or when we try to ignore it, or stuff it, our past can control us if we are not humble enough to claim it as part of who God made us to be.

We see great examples of this in the first families of the Bible in the book of Genesis. Today, we look at the story of Joseph, who was born into a very broken family. Joseph's story wraps up Genesis and speaks to us about the need to go back and deal with our family of origin to move forward in life. This story of Joseph, which is almost 25 percent of the Book of Genesis, is about the family of Joseph. Just like Joseph, each of us has a family and parents who brought us into the world. No matter how dysfunctional our family might have felt, they are still ours and we must figure out how to deal with them.

Each one of us is made in God's image and we were made by God to be loved by God. We were made to experience love—to give love and receive love. Every one of us and every person we meet has parents. We were created in God's image to engage in a healthy family as babies and children growing up, and to experience that kind of love. All of us come into the world with a hunger for stable, deep loving relationships. In my psychology class, I learned about Albert and Diane Pessio and their idea that we humans have five basic needs that need to be met for healthy development.

**SLIDE                    The Need for ... Place** (have the next 4 add to this list)

There's a need for a place that is met when a child comes into the world. The need for place is met when we're born into an environment where our parents are excited in their hearts and their thoughts. It is a wonderful sense of belonging in a world that welcomes our arrival. The need for place is satisfied when we are born into an environment where a nest had already been prepared for us in our parent's dreams, hearts, and thoughts.

One author, **Maggie Scarf** was asked, “If you were going to write or tell the story of your life, what would be the first sentence of your autobiography?” She expressed the antithesis of this need for place when she wrote, **“I was born, and nobody noticed.”** We all need to be noticed when we are born. If we don’t receive this, then life is challenging until we find that place where we belong and are wanted.

#### **SLIDE                    ... Nurture**

The second is there’s a need for nurture. We all need words and gestures of appreciation. We need affection and touch which are met when we are being held emotionally and physically.

#### **SLIDE                    ... Support**

Thirdly, there’s a need for support in a loving and caring environment. When this need is met, we are encouraged, and we can solve problems and ask for help when needed.

#### **SLIDE                    ... Protection**

In a perfect world we are protected physically and emotionally and spiritually and sexually from harm. It’s the kind of protection we cannot provide for ourselves as a child, and this enables us to be launched out into the world.

#### **SLIDE                    ... Limits**

Parents, in a healthy way, can provide limits and boundaries as we grow. We need limits and boundaries to survive. When we don’t grow up with boundaries, we have challenges ranging from narcissism to risky behavior which leads to all kinds of damage.

The Pessos talked about what it looks like when each one of these needs is met in a child’s life AND recognize the problems that we can experience as adults when these needs are not met. They also found that certain body parts are affected as adults when these needs are not met as children, once again pointing to the truth that our body, minds, and spirits are interconnected.

In a perfect world, we all grow up having each of these needs met. God wired us to need these things and to receive these things, ideally from our biological parents. That's a perfect world and that's what God dreams for each of us. But none of us live in a perfect world. This is described as our human condition in Genesis 3 as sin enters humanity's story. Sin is when our relationships are broken because of choices we make to try and be like God. We see after Genesis 3 what happens to families when sin and brokenness enter human life. Relationships are distorted from God's original intention. They're broken.

We see in that first family what we like to call today dysfunction, as Cane becomes jealous and murders Abel. We find this brokenness and distortion in our families because of brokenness. We find things like destructive criticism, abuse of authority, lying, secrets, emotional withholding, broken promises, intimidation, and blaming in families. We find pressure tactics and shaming and putdowns, even in the best of families. Some of us came from very good families, and even in them we find pain and hurt. I have found that nobody emerges from our family life unscathed, without our true self in some way damaged. We all get wounded and end up with scars—all of us.

When we become a follower of Jesus, the Scriptures encourage us that we're born into a new family, God's family. We have new brothers and sisters, a new name as a Christian, and a new inheritance because now we're in a new family, the family of God in Jesus Christ. But as we come into the family of Christ, we bring to it issues and hurts and habits and hang ups that come from our families of origin because of whatever happened, or didn't happen, for us as kids growing up.

It's like we have stuck in our brains and bodies a certain way of being in the world that comes out of growing up in our families. We might come to Christ be adopted into the family of Jesus, but we're used to functioning a certain way. It's like a magnetic pull. It pulls us back to certain behaviors and ways of being. It's so powerful because it shaped us for many years, especially our formative ones. It's like a



blueprint for living that is imprinted upon us. How we form relationships, how we process our feelings, our self-worth, how we view the world, all come from our family system. We have been deeply shaped in our early years, growing up in our families, and it affects us as we become adults whether we want to admit it or not.

The Christian faith recognizes that when we come to Jesus Christ, we have a whole new destiny and we become part of a new bloodline. That blood determines who we are is no longer the biological blood of our family, but it's now the blood of Christ. We're born anew. We meant to cast off the old, broken patterns of our biological family. There are good things we get from our families which line up with Christ's dream for our lives, and we meant to keep those. But we must cast off the old patterns which are destructive. Spiritual health and maturity mean putting off the old so the new can grow inside of us.

The image we have from Christ is that we need to allow that old stuff to be crucified. Everything from the past which is our blueprint for living from our biological family and our culture gets taken to the Cross by Christ. Then we can truly be transformed to become our authentic self in Christ. Only then can we be the blessing to the world and fulfill the purpose God dreams for us. This is the ultimate deconstruction that Christ longs to do in our lives.

Here's the big idea from today's message. God put us in the world for a reason, but we must go back to go forward.

**SLIDE      We must go back to go forward.**

Not knowing these issues in our family which often drive our behavior and how we live is dangerous. Our living in Christ and following Christ partially depends on us knowing what really went on in our past and what's going on deep beneath the surface from our family life. We must be willing to look at our past and our family history and how it impacts who we are, so we don't crash, and life gets wrecked!

That's why our Biblical story today is Joseph. Joseph was born into



a family, and I would like us to look at his genogram, which is basically his family tree.

### **GRAPHIC            Joseph Genogram**

### **GRAPHIC            Genogram 2**

A family genogram is a way of mapping out families. Some of you have done this before. Joseph is on the lower right box that is shaded and next to him is his wife. Joseph is one of twelve brothers and one sister and he's the eleventh child. This is his family going back three generations and how it relates to Joseph. Notice that his grandparents are Abraham and Sarah. In their relationship alone you have lies, sibling rivalry of Isaac and Ishmael, favoritism, and an unhealthy marriage.

### **GRAPHIC            Genogram 3**

Joseph's grandparents are Isaac and Rebecca, and, in the relationship, we find lies, sibling rivalry, favoritism, and an unhealthy marriage. Then we look at Joseph's father Jacob and his mother Rachel and you have lies, sibling rivalry and favoritism. Are you seeing any patterns?

Joseph's father Jacob has two wives and two concubines, so by the time they get to Jacob in the house he's going to have issues! Just imagine, in one house you have two wives and two other women, and your dad has kids with each of them! That's a blended family to the max! You have all these kids born of different women in the same family. Joseph is the favorite son to Rachel and Jacob. Each of the women has their own favorite so you have favorite kids and favorite women. Jacob loves Rachel a lot and she seems to be his favorite, so it would make sense that Joseph is his favorite.

Joseph is the number eleven son and favored by his father Jacob who is a pathological liar. If you read the story of Jacob, you will find he lies constantly. He also does something as a parent that those who are parents can appreciate. It's not great for a parent to favor one child

over another and it can be a challenge as a parent to treat each child equally when you have several children. They come with different temperaments and different personalities, and some are more like you than others.

One developmental task for parents is to love each child equally, regardless of their performance or their capabilities or their personalities. But when a parent doesn't do that, when there's favoritism, it creates all kinds of problems. Jacob is a bit off the charts because Joseph is so overtly his favorite son. He loves Joseph so much that he makes a special robe of status and authority and bestows it on Joseph, the youngest son. If you think of a business model, this robe of many colors makes Joseph management, and the rest of the brothers are labor! So, here's Joseph, the youngest, but he's given the authority by the father as the favorite kid. As one might expect, his brothers hate him, and why wouldn't they? As a matter of fact, they can't stand him. They're jealous. They're envious.

One of Joseph's gifts is that he has dreams. One night Joseph has a dream where he sees everybody bow down to him. Having the dream is not so bad, but then he shares it with his brothers who already despise him. The brothers say, "That's enough!"

**SLIDE                      Trauma 1: Joseph is thrown into a well.**

Joseph then experiences three traumatic events at the hands of his family. Some of us in this room have had trauma. "Trauma" is a startling experience in your life that has a lasting effect on your mental life. Shock is a synonym for trauma. Trauma shatters one's sense of safety in the world and it has huge reverberations through our lives.

Joseph has three major traumas that we read about in Genesis and the first happens when he is 17. In Genesis 37 we read that his brothers hate him at this point so much that they throw him into a deep well. This well didn't have water in it at the time, but these wells are very deep. Imagine being thrown into a deep, dark well with total

blackness by your own family! You can't see anything and you're screaming. You're yelling, "Help me!" Here we find Joseph screaming in the darkness in that well and nobody answers. Who knows how long that went on, but no matter how long, that's trauma, with the feeling of helplessness and being out of control. We hold trauma in our body and Joseph has this trauma now in his body.

**SLIDE                      Trauma 2: Joseph is sold into slavery.**

The second trauma occurs when Joseph is finally pulled out of the well by some of his brothers who feel bad for him, but then he is sold to the Egyptians as a slave. He is sold for the equivalent of two years wages, around \$200,000 which means the brothers now have a pretty good chunk of change.

The brothers then go back to their elderly father Jacob and do, ironically, what Jacob did best. They told him a lie. They tell their father that Joseph's been killed by lions, and they show him the coat of many colors which they have torn and placed blood upon to make it look like an accident. A funeral is held, and his father is made to believe that Joseph is dead for the next 22 years. During that time Joseph's mother dies and so Joseph loses his mother. He loses his father. He loses his culture. He lost his country. He loses his language. He loses his nurture and his place, his support, his freedom, his friends. He loses everything, which in addition to being chained and suddenly enslaved.

Joseph experiences trauma after trauma. Imagine the scars that Joseph is carrying inside of him. "Who do I trust? I can't even trust my own family. I have been burned and abandoned." Imagine how vigilant one would be after something like that? Who could blame him if he said to himself, "Something must be wrong with me. What did I do that this is my life?" Maybe you know that feeling of like, "I'm screwed up. It's all me. I'll never heal or be well again."

**SLIDE                      Trauma 3: Joseph ends up in prison.**

A third major trauma is his experience of being thrown into

prison. We don't know how long he was in prison, but it was somewhere between 11 and 13 years. Prisons are no picnic today, let alone 3000 years ago in Egypt. You might remember Joseph's story, and that he was a slave for this fellow named Potiphar. Potiphar's wife thinks Joseph's attractive. She tries to go to bed with him. He refuses and she lies about him and says he tried to rape her. He's unjustly accused and then thrown into prison. The prison door key is lost, and he really has no hope of anybody finding him. No hope that anybody's even looking for him.

Talk about carrying profound deep baggage from your family! You must ask yourself the question, "**How can Joseph go forward?** How do you take these kinds of blows in life, this kind of a beating, this kind of an upbringing?" Those 5 nurturing tasks we talked about either didn't happen or they were short circuited. How is Joseph going to move forward with that kind of past?

Joseph clearly grew up in an unhealthy and troubled family, not unlike many of our families. When he came into adulthood, Joseph had every right to say, "You know my family wrecked my life! Years of my life have been wasted. Where did it go? If I ever get the chance, I'm going to get even with my family!" And who could blame him?

But the story of Joseph doesn't finish that way. After almost 13 years in prison, the Pharaoh of Egypt hears about a young man in prison that interprets dreams. This is important because the Pharaoh has had dreams, well, they are really nightmares which keep him up at night and no one can tell him what they mean. Joseph is brought to the Pharaoh, and he interprets the dream correctly, that there will be great famine in the land after a great time of blessing. Joseph is elevated by the Pharaoh to be one of his advisers and is made number two person in this superpower nation of Egypt.

Joseph is put in full charge of Egypt. He becomes administrator of the food at the age of 30 and helps Egypt save up food during the time

of great blessing. Famine does eventually break out, not just in Egypt, but all over the surrounding area, including Joseph's homeland where his family lives. Joseph's brothers are living in neighboring Canaan and forced to come to begging to Egypt for food.

But Joseph now looks Egyptian, and he's grown into a man. He is physically unrecognizable to them. 22 years have now passed without him seeing his family. That's a long time. Some of you have been cut off from your family for 22 years or longer so you know how it feels. Joseph's family finally shows up and our scripture today picks up at the very, very end. The brothers had seen Joseph a couple of times when they finally recognized him. The brothers know at this point they're cooked...they're done! Joseph now can really give it to them and get back at them for all their cruelty.

Joseph could have killed them at this point, or at least made their lives miserable. He could have been what we call passive aggressive. "Here's some food, Twinkies, and Soda for you...that's all you get! Here's a little extra for the way back. Love you. Goodbye." He could have done that. He could have said, "I told you so. I told you that you would bow down to me. Clearly, you're crummy children of our Heavenly Father, and I'm not. That's why I'm blessed and you're not!" Or he could have put them in jail for a good 10 plus years for dropping him in the well and selling him as a slave. "You taste it for a while and then we'll talk!"

He could have said, "My family at this point is just not that important to me. I don't need you. It's over. God bless you and here's some food. Go have a great life. But I have my own family now. I'm past the trauma and I'm on my way and there's really nothing to talk about."

It's interesting that Joseph's oldest son is named Manasseh, which means, "making forget." Joseph could have said to his brothers, "I got a son named 'making forget.' I forgot you guys. Goodbye. I'm done with you."

But Joseph has learned that he can't carry that stuff and be resentful and he can't just forget about it. He must go back and break the power of the past to go forward. Here's what we read happens as Joseph has gone back to Canaan, what would become Israel, to be with his father before he dies, and then doing his funeral.

## **BIBLE**

***14 After burying Jacob, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had accompanied him to his father's burial. 15 But now that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers became fearful. "Now Joseph will show his anger and pay us back for all the wrong we did to him," they said. 16 So they sent this message to Joseph: "Before your father died, he instructed us 17 to say to you: 'Please forgive your brothers for the great wrong they did to you—for their sin in treating you so cruelly.' So we, the servants of the God of your father, beg you to forgive our sin." When Joseph received the message, he broke down and wept. 18 Then his brothers came and threw themselves down before Joseph. "Look, we are your slaves!" they said. 19 But Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. 21 No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children." So, he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.***

There is so much in this story, but let's look at three things that are important takeaways if we are going to break the power of the past to move forward and reconstruct faith after we have been hurt or disillusioned.

## **SLIDE                    Recognize we all have family issues, even me!**

It's very easy to either ignore it or underestimate it, especially as we get older. Most of us who follow Jesus focus so much on being part

of the new family in Jesus, that we forget we still have a past we need to deal with. When we say “yes” to Jesus, our past doesn’t magically go away. As a matter of fact, some of that past may be what God wants to use to help accomplish his work in the world THROUGH us, just as it did for Joseph. But we first must claim it and own it. Let’s be honest, we don’t like to look at the past because we want to quickly jump to being this new thing in Christ.

In this story, the idea of Joseph going forward while trying to make believe the trauma from his family never happened is absurd. If we are unwilling to look at our past and how our families have shaped us, and be honest about it, then we are doomed to faith that’s skin deep and will crumble and deconstruct easily. We can talk all we want about doing conflict differently than our family did it and doing it the “Jesus” way, but the truth is that it’s in our bloodstream is to do it the way our family did it.

We can learn Bible verses about what to do, but it won’t really change our behavior until we go back and break the power of the past by looking at what is going on inside of us that we often are not even aware of because of its hold on our heart. We must be willing to ask some hard questions.

**SLIDE      How did everybody do it in my family for generations?**

Then we can look at how we do it differently in the family of Christ. But it requires that I recognize there really is a past that is part of me, and it’s deep. It is profound. It is not little. We can’t think, “I go to a seminar, and I’m done with that now. I read the book. I’m moving on with my life.” In fact, the effect on us from our family is so much deeper and more profound than we realize. We never fully know ourselves and we never fully know God if we won’t go back and look at what’s in our past that drives our behavior. We never fully know ourselves. They’re all intertwined. It’s in us.

Think of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, the Hebrew



Bible. In this story of Joseph, the Israelites end up in Egypt and they eventually do become slaves and live there for 400 years. They learned to do life a certain way and many times, even after they came out of slavery in Egypt, they wanted to go back and live there because it was comfortable and familiar, even though they were slaves! Egypt was in them. It's all they knew. It was in their bones.

Please listen carefully to this. **In most cases, I believe our parents did the best they could with what they got from their own families.** I'm doing the best I can with my children, but I must go back, to go forward as well. I must become aware of the negative patterns because I too am a sinner. I'm broken and I fall short. I'm not perfect and I don't live in a perfect family. As I become aware of the negative patterns, I am then free to choose. But if I don't know what the negative patterns are then I simply reproduce them because I'm unaware of them.

In the book we've been reading, Pete talks about the Ten Commandments of families. These are 10 areas where families have spoken and unspoken rules that often can be negative. We often live this way, even as followers of Jesus, which is why many are deconstructing their faith these days, because these unwritten rules don't look like Jesus or what we see in the Scriptures. Here's just a few of them.

**SLIDE      MONEY** (have bullet points fly in on each of these slides)

- **Money is the best source of security.**
- **The more money you have, the more important you are.**
- **Make lots of money to prove you "made" it.**

But the Bible says God is our refuge and strength. God is the best source of security and that's a new way of living in God's family. We must be aware of messages we have received from our family, so we don't live like that anymore now as a believer in Christ.

**SLIDE      CONFLICT**

- **Avoid conflict at all costs.**
- **Don't get people mad at you.**
- **Loud, angry, constant fighting is normal.**

You know what? That's not in scripture. We're true peacemakers who don't just gloss over conflict but instead we do it constructively.

#### **SLIDE      SEX**

- **Sex is not to be spoken about openly.**
- **Men can be promiscuous; women must be chaste.**

In the family of God, we do talk about sex openly because God loves sex. God created sex! It's a beautiful thing. We talk about it on different levels appropriately with developmental stages. It's a gift from God and we don't talk about it now the way our family did because we're in the family of Jesus.

#### **SLIDE      FAMILY**

- **You owe your parents for all they've done for you.**
- **Don't speak of your family's "dirty laundry" in public.**
- **Duty to family and culture comes before everything.**

We want to honor our parents, but we're not in bondage to them either. We follow Christ first as we honor our parents.

#### **SLIDE      RELATIONSHIPS**

- **Don't trust people. They will let you down.**
- **Nobody will ever hurt me again.**
- **Don't show vulnerability.**

We're prudent and we're wise, but we love people, and we don't always have a wall up with people when we are in the family of Christ. Maybe you've made the vow, "Nobody will hurt me again." I know many of us have been hurt. I think if anybody could have said that it was Joseph, but he somehow went back and he broke it and he's obviously very loving and very affirming.

## **SLIDE      ATTITUDES TOWARD OTHER CULTURES**

- **Only be close friends with people who are like you.**
- **Do not marry a person of another race or culture.**
- **Certain cultures/races are not as good as mine.**

These thoughts are not part of the family commandments in Jesus family. We treat all people equally. We're one family in Christ and we don't act as if certain races or cultures are not as good as ours.

## **SLIDE      FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS**

- **You are not allowed to have certain feelings.**
- **Your feelings are not important.**
- **Reacting with your feelings without thinking is okay.**

In God's family, your feelings are very important. In fact, you, ALL OF YOU, is very important. And, the feelings of others are important, so we share those feelings in ways that are helpful and not hurtful.

Part of following Jesus is we're be able to go back and say what were my particular family commandments that I'm still carrying today? What are some of those things from your family that you need to replace with what it means to be in God's family? It is hard work following Christ. Some of us have begun this process. We've done some of this work. The sad thing is sometimes we stopped because we got over a couple hurdles. We feel better so we think we are done.

This is the Christian life and God moves us and leads us appropriately along the way to bring us to new levels of depth with him. Some of us need to begin and get started because it's scary. But the grace of God is so loveable and wonderful, and God promises to meet you there. That leads to this second practical application.

## **SLIDE      Discern the good God intends, "in, through and, in spite of," our Family and Past**

***people.***

God intends to use even the pain in our lives and in our families for good, if we will let God do that. Some of us have had very difficult and abusive backgrounds. I don't believe God intended to harm us in those places, but I do believe that God can take our pain and hurts and bring about something good. This verse is the summary of the Book of Genesis.

## **BIBLE**

***20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many.***

The point of the story of Joseph's family is that God can and will work in mysterious ways through all this mess of life we experience. God is working to move Joseph to a place in Egypt to bless and save many people. God's working on a purpose through Joseph's brothers, who are in rebellion against God. God is working on a purpose despite Joseph's brothers and messed up father and grandparents. His brothers are unaware. They're in fear. They can't see God moving at all, which is why they say they will be slaves for Joseph. They don't see any good in what is happening, and **they can't see God**.

All they have is fear, anxiety, and guilt. That's all some of us have about our families. We have fear, anxiety, and guilt that we carry. We can't see that God can use imperfect people and their imperfect decisions to bring about another plan. Joseph says that his brothers planned it for evil, but God planned it for good.

In most of our families things happen that were not intended to harm, but sometimes we were intentionally harmed like Joseph. What we see and hear from God in this story is that God can take those moments of harm and bring good from them. While we may have experienced neglect and being ignored, God can bring good from it. We may not have felt support me and nurture in our families, but God can bring healing, especially through the family of Christ. We may have experienced shame in our family, but God promises we were made by

him to be loved by him and there is no shame in what God has created.

Let's be clear that Joseph was a realist. Joseph laments. He grieves what happened, but he clings to God, understanding at times that his relationship with God is all he has. He believes that God has a plan for him that is good. Joseph believes that God is weaving a plan, even when he can't see it. He's in prison. He's a slave. He doesn't know what's going on, but he knows one thing that brings him hope—God is good. God's weaving out a mysterious purpose, even through his broken family, so Joseph can be a blessing. Joseph can't analyze it or figure it all out, but he knows God. What sets Joseph apart is his relationship with the living God. He knows that these verses are true from Jeremiah 29:11.

#### **BIBLE**

***“I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”***

Romans 8:28 speaks to us this truth.

#### **BIBLE**

***“God works for the good of those who love Him, who’ve been called to go into His purpose.”***

Here's the great **mystery**. **God holds people responsible for their actions and at the same time, God is sovereign over all of history.** They're both true. God does not endorse evil by any means. But the evil plans of people unwittingly are used by God to bring about his plans and dreams.

We see this mystery in the life and death of Jesus. Christ suffered and died, but that horrific act became salvation for the world. The very worst things that may have happened to us can end up becoming a blessing as we offer it to God. God says to us in the story of Joseph and the actions of Jesus that many of the plans in human hearts may be

evil, but it's the Lord's plan that will prevail. What Joseph discerns is that God intends good through his life.

I want us to stop and think about this for a minute. We are put into a family because God good would come out of our life; that we would be a blessing to many people. But sometimes we look at our lives and our families and we say, "But nothing good happened here." I can understand why we get to that place because I've been to that place at times, growing up in an alcoholic home, living with siblings with mental illness, and losing a child. What I've discovered in my life, as I have moved through that pain, is that **despite whatever may have happened, or didn't happen that I wished would have happened, God wants me to know that he can take even those painful experiences and bring about blessing to many, just like God did for Joseph.**

I don't fully grasp it all and I certainly wouldn't have chosen those experiences and I wouldn't wish them on anyone else. I don't believe God causes that pain on purpose, especially those of you who have experienced much more abuse than myself and Joseph. But God did bring me through those moments of pain and because of that I'm a high feeler today. Men tend to be less feeling oriented than women, but I am a feeler. On a scale of 1 to 100, I'm like 100. I can speak to you and feel what you're feeling sometimes. I'm a high feeler because of the pain I experienced growing up.

I have a tremendous love for youth and children in the church. Do you know why? Because if it wasn't for the church when I was growing up, I'm not sure I would have survived. I know what it meant to have had a church like this as a young person. I know what it was like to have a mentor in those tough moments, and we need to be that for young people going through pain and trauma in their families.

The church, as imperfect as it can be because it's filled with imperfect people, can be an anchor in the storm. Growing up in an alcoholic home you also learn not to trust people or get too close. The

church is the place that taught me it's okay to be imperfect and that God works best through imperfect people. It's where I learned to be brutally honest with myself and others. It's called confession and we do it especially during Lent, not to beat ourselves up, but to be honest and then to be able to let it go and give it to God. It's why I love our Celebrate Recovery ministry, because we all need a place where we can be honest about our hurts, habits, and hang-ups.

Here's what I have learned. If I can't stand up in front of you as your pastor and share my past and tough stuff, I can't really be your pastor. **Healing comes from being honest and saying, "This is my burden. This is my thorn in the flesh. This is how I hurt. This is my family. This is my past."**

When I do that, God can begin to take away the power of my past and family history that keeps me locked in a prison in Egypt. I no longer live in shame or fear that you all will find out and I can actually love my family deeper and in a more real way than ever before.

That brings us back to Joseph's story. God's sovereignty and power can be found in what appears to be the most horrific circumstances. Even when there's crimes and disaster, it doesn't mean that God approves of it. It's simply a testimony of God's ability to bring good out of evil. God did not approve of what Joseph's brothers did. They were responsible for that. God did not need their betrayal to get Jacob's family to Egypt so they would survive the famine in their region.

But in some way God was going to get Joseph to Egypt, so he could be a blessing, and God worked it this way for Joseph, using his brothers' evil plans. At one point in the story of Joseph we find his brothers coming to see him for the first time, not knowing who Joseph is as the leader in charge of food in Egypt. Joseph makes them leave their younger brother and he sells them grain to take back with them to their father and families in Canaan. When they arrive back in Canaan with the grain and open their sacks, they find the money they were



supposed to have left for the grain in the top of their grain sacks and they are terrified. The brothers and their father Jacob begin weeping and crying out, believing that everything is going terribly because having the treasure in their sacks makes it look like they've stolen the grain. They are horrified and fearful and believe they're paying for all their sins.

They don't realize the very opposite is true. They don't realize they're being blessed. Sometimes we think everything's going against us and we don't even know that we're on a path of blessing. Once again, we see in this story a profound truth that God wants us to know that may have been intended for evil, God intends for good.

Part of breaking the power of the past to go forward is so that we can discern the good that God intended in, through and despite our family and our past. That discernment flowed out of Joseph's relationship that he cultivated with God just like it did for David.

#### **SLIDE      Make the Decision to do the Hard Work of Faith**

That brings us to the final application of Joseph's story to our lives. We must make the decision to do the hard work of discipleship, and it is hard work. This is not easy, and this is not quick, as many of you know.

Joseph lives this as he is faithful in the prison and he's faithful as a slave. Joseph stays connected to God regardless of the circumstances, and then he has the strength and courage to engage his family when that door opens 22 years later. He does not deny the harm done to him. He grieves it well. He grieves it deeply as a matter of fact. He does not sweep anything under the rug. He even puts his brothers in prison for a few days before they know who he is. We can't sweep the pain and hurt of the past under the rug. You might feel like you don't want to do this work because the iceberg, the past and our family history, feels too big and too scary.

I want to encourage you not to give up because it's worth the risk.

God has promised to lead us step by step. This is also why we have small groups. This is why we have given you a list of counselors on our website and we have many caring ministries to support you. This is why we provide Meditation Moments and these devotional books which encourage silence and solitude and journaling.

I want to remind you that God works through human affairs. Listen, I don't know how to make sense of what's going on with the economy or with the weather or the war in Ukraine or challenges in many other places where there appears to be such pain and suffering that seems needless and pointless. These are all sad and tough situations. I do know that Jesus is Lord and Savior, working through even horrible human affairs. God is good and will work and bring about his dream for creation. God is for life.

I believe that if we do the hard work of going back to go forward, we will break the power of our past. We not even know how we got there, but God will bring us through. We'll know ourselves that we may know God. We'll be free and we'll be a blessing to many people. It does take work to get there, and it takes time—time alone to reflect and time with God.

**SLIDE                      Prayer**

## **March 25-26 Order**

1. Ely welcomes people and says, **“Today we will wrestle with what we do when our past seems to overwhelm us and how we might find healing so we can move forward in life.”**
2. Two Songs
3. Jeff welcomes.
  - a. Mention the QR code.
  - b. Invite people to greet each other, however we are comfortable.
4. Announcement Video
5. Sermon and Prayer
6. One Song
7. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
8. Offering SLIDE and Focus (Sound System)
9. Care Ministers (If any are present)
10. Meditation Moments
11. Prayers and Closing Thoughts
  - i. Prayer focus for March is Worship
  - ii. Books in the back
12. Closing Prayer