Unit 4, Session 3

God Overrides Evil with Good

Summary and Goal
In this session, we wrap up Joseph’s story and the Book of Genesis and see how God’s plan all along was to redeem His people through Jacob’s favored son. Joseph was about to make sense of the suffering he had endured, and his brothers were about to experience the beauty of forgiveness. And through Joseph and his brothers’ reunion, God was about to preserve His people. Joseph’s suffering was painful. The brothers’ sin was evil. But God was going to bring beauty from ashes to reveal His purposes. And in revealing this to Joseph and his family, God also reveals to us that He is a God who can do anything—even override evil with good.

Session Outline
1. God is faithful to fulfill His plan (Gen. 42:1-6).
2. God is faithful to prompt forgiveness in His people (Gen. 45:4-8).
3. God is faithful to bring good from evil (Gen. 50:15-21).

Session in a Sentence
God works even through the evil actions of people to bring about good.

Christ Connection
God took the evil deeds of Joseph’s brothers and used them for His greater plan of providing salvation from the famine. In the same way, God used the evil injustice of those who crucified His Son, Jesus, to bring about His master plan of providing salvation from sin and death.

Missional Application
Because we are a forgiven people through Christ, we forgive those who sin against us, recognizing that God is working everything for the good of those who love Him.
Group Time

Introduction

**SAY:** Authors use a number of literary devices to write compelling, well-crafted stories. Literary devices turn good stories into great stories. Stories you enjoy reading into stories you love reading. Memorable stories into unforgettable stories. They turn “My question is if I should exist or not” into “To be, or not to be: that is the question.”

**EXPLAIN** why the Bible should be understood as a literary masterpiece by using the following paragraph on page 29 in the Daily Discipleship Guide (DDG).

The story of the Bible has been expertly written because the master Storyteller wrote it. The story itself is engrossing: Humanity sinfully destroys the perfection of God’s good creation, but God enacts a sweeping plan of redemption driving toward the climax of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. But the story is even more powerful because it is true. And the way God tells this story is also engaging, using literary devices that have not lost any of their power and punch across millennia, languages, and cultures. God’s Word is far from antiquated; it is indeed living and effective, sharper than a two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). It’s a story that not only touches lives but also changes hearts.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

What are some reasons we should find reading the Bible a meaningful and enjoyable part of our day? (it confronts and challenges us on what we believe and how we should live; it helps to shape our worldview so we see the world and the events of the world through God’s perspective; it shows the sovereignty and goodness of the God we worship and obey)

**SUMMARIZE:** Joseph’s story has been building in a crescendo over the past two sessions, and in this session it reaches its powerful moment of resolution as the story comes full circle. The dreams that started so much of Joseph’s turmoil would come to pass and help Joseph’s brothers see how God is faithful to redeem His people and override evil with good.

For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit www.GospelProject.com/additional-resources.
**Point 1: God is faithful to fulfill His plan (Gen. 42:1-6).**

**SAY:** Foreshadowing is one of the most powerful literary devices in Joseph’s story. When Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery and he was taken to Egypt, they likely mocked the dreams he had shared with them: “There’s no way he could rule over us now!” Roughly twenty years later, however, the brothers would see just how wrong they were about Joseph and his dreams.

**READ** Genesis 42:1-6 (DDG p. 30).

1. When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you keep looking at each other? 2. Listen,” he went on, “I have heard there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us so that we will live and not die.” 3. So ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. 4. But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he thought, “Something might happen to him.” 5. The sons of Israel were among those who came to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan. 6. Joseph was in charge of the country; he sold grain to all its people. His brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the ground.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the following paragraph in the DDG (p. 30) to show that God was bringing about a reversal leading to a reunion.

Twenty years earlier, Jacob had sent Joseph to his brothers, and they devised a plan to end his life but sold him into slavery in Egypt instead. Now, Jacob was sending the brothers to Egypt, where God was arranging a divine appointment with Joseph so that he might preserve their lives. Once again, we see God using redemptive reversal. God was at work bringing Joseph’s brothers to him to restore this family and provide for them during the remainder of the famine.

**Commentary:** One brother did not go to Egypt initially—Benjamin. Jacob’s favoritism shifted from Joseph to his younger brother, Benjamin, also the son of Jacob’s beloved wife Rachel. Jacob did not send Benjamin to Egypt because he feared something might happen to him, foreshadowing what was to come.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

Joseph’s brothers coming to Egypt was an important part of God’s plan to save them from the famine, but God was also at work to restore this broken family. What can we learn about God’s heart from this? (God’s desire is for peace and unity among His people; God’s heart is for people to be reconciled to Him and with one another; God cares not only about the big details of His grand plan but also about the daily concerns of human beings)
EXPLAIN that Joseph’s dreams from his youth came true. And tell the group the next part of the story about Joseph’s interactions with his brothers.

- When the brothers stood before Joseph, the first thing they did, unbeknownst to them, was fulfill Joseph’s dreams. They bowed low to the ground before their brother. Joseph’s first dream was about sheaves of grain: his stood while his brothers’ bowed down to his. And here were his brothers, bowing down to him because they were in need of grain.

- While the brothers did not recognize Joseph, he recognized them. Joseph treated them like strangers, not letting on that he knew who they were. Joseph accused them of being spies (42:7-9). They pleaded with him to believe they were not spies and meant no harm; they were merely ten of twelve brothers with the youngest at home with their father and another who was no longer living (42:10-13). In this heart-wrenching moment, we see God’s work of redemptive reversal once more. The last time Joseph was with his brothers, he had been the one pleading. He had begged them not to harm him (42:21). Now the brothers were the ones in distress, begging for relief.

SAY: Like Joseph, we may find ourselves in situations that seem hopeless. But we can know that as followers of Christ, hope never need run out. God was at work in the pit. God was at work in the prison. God was at work in the palace. And God is at work wherever we are.

READ the “Voices from Church History” quote. Then ask two volunteers to read the two bullet points in the DDG (p. 30) that help to put our circumstances and the actions of humanity into perspective and give us hope.

- Romans 8:28 reminds us that we can trust God’s plan because He works all things together. And this plan is always good, even if, as in Joseph’s case, it doesn’t feel good all the time.

- Our hope rests in knowing that God uses every situation we face for His glory and our good. We can be assured that whatever happens, we win. As Philippians 1:21 tells us, to live is Christ and to die is gain.
**Point 2: God is faithful to prompt forgiveness in His people (Gen. 45:4-8).**

**SUMMARIZE** the story from Genesis 42:14–45:3 with the following bullet points:

- Joseph imprisoned the brothers for three days. Then he released them and sent them home with the bags of grain they purchased—and all of their money secretly returned to them. But he kept Simeon in prison and demanded they return with the younger brother to prove their story.
- When Jacob heard what happened, he refused to allow Benjamin to go, but eventually the severity of the famine changed his mind. The brothers returned with Benjamin for more grain and for Simeon.
- Joseph welcomed the brothers to a meal and favored Benjamin in his portions. Then he had the brothers’ bags filled with grain along with their money once again, but he also instructed his servant to place his cup in Benjamin’s bag. After the brothers left, Joseph sent his steward after them, the cup was discovered, and the brothers returned to Joseph in grief and terror. Because of this “theft,” Joseph threatened to enslave Benjamin, but Judah intervened and pleaded with Joseph to imprison him instead of Benjamin because of what it would do to their father to lose his youngest son. This was what Joseph waited to see.

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 45:4-8 (DDG p. 31), and tell group members to highlight each reference to “God” as they read along.

> 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Please, come near me,” and they came near. “I am Joseph, your brother,” he said, “the one you sold into Egypt. 5 And now don’t be grieved or angry with yourselves for selling me here, because God sent me ahead of you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there will be five more years without plowing or harvesting. 7 God sent me ahead of you to establish you as a remnant within the land and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. 8 Therefore it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household, and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

**EXPLAIN** that Joseph worked with his brothers to bring about repentance, and show how they demonstrated their repentance for betraying Joseph. Though the brothers’ spoken repentance is not recorded, when Joseph sentenced Benjamin to slavery, Judah offered himself instead (44:18-34). Twenty years earlier, Judah had conspired to rid himself of a favored brother—he was the one who suggested selling Joseph to the Ishmaelite traders. Now Judah stepped in to take the punishment for a favored brother. Judah’s heart had changed, a hallmark of repentance.

**READ** the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 31).

Joseph helped to guide his brothers to repentance; in this we see a picture of the greater way God works to bring us to repentance of our sin. In God’s kindness, He convicts us of our sin to draw us to repentance, even if that requires that we endure difficult and painful circumstances. But God is faithful to transform pain from the process toward repentance into joy from the position of being forgiven.
INSTRUCT: Have group members plot their response to the following question on the scale in the DDG (p. 31) and to consider what their response means for how they should move forward in their faith.

1. Where on this scale would you put yourself in this moment?

Conviction __________________________ Repentance

EXPLAIN that Joseph also had to live in a state of repentance to extend forgiveness to his brothers and be reconciled to them. Any anger Joseph may have felt quickly faded as he overheard his brothers arguing about the apparent cause of their circumstances: their act of selling their brother into slavery (42:21-24). Any hardness in his heart gave way to the greater power of love and forgiveness. Joseph did not minimize his brothers’ sins against him. He reminded them of what they had done years before not to hold it against them but to reveal his forgiveness and God’s plan to preserve their family.

INSTRUCT: Have group members use the scale in their DDG (p. 31) to respond to the following question.

2. Where would you put your readiness to forgive others on this scale?

Callous __________________________ Measured __________________________ Graciously Eager

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

How should God’s forgiveness of our sin in Christ change the way we extend forgiveness to others? (we should be ready and willing to grant forgiveness to those who have hurt or harmed us; no sin against us should be considered beyond forgiveness because we have been forgiven of all our sin; we should not make people work to earn our forgiveness)

SAY: Because we are a forgiven people through Christ, we forgive those who sin against us, just as Joseph did. All have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23). We all are in need of the Savior who was sinned against and yet died so that sinners could be forgiven.
Point 3: God is faithful to bring good from evil (Gen. 50:15-21).

SAY: Joseph and his brothers were reconciled. Then at the request of Pharaoh, the brothers returned to their home to bring Jacob, their families, and all their possessions back with them to Egypt so they could be cared for throughout the famine (Gen. 45:16–47:12). All seemed well within the family, that is, until Jacob’s death.

READ Genesis 50:15-21 (DDG p. 32).

15 When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said to one another, “If Joseph is holding a grudge against us, he will certainly repay us for all the suffering we caused him.”

16 So they sent this message to Joseph, “Before he died your father gave a command: Say this to Joseph: Please forgive your brothers’ transgression and their sin—the suffering they caused you.’ Therefore, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when their message came to him. 18 His brothers also came to him, bowed down before him, and said, “We are your slaves!”

19 But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people. 21 Therefore don’t be afraid. I will take care of you and your children.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

EXPLAIN the details of this passage: the fear and actions of the brothers and the response of Joseph.

• With their father Jacob buried, the brothers’ mourning gave way to fear: What if Joseph hadn’t forgiven them? What if Joseph decided to pay them back for the evil they had done to him? The brothers believed their best hope was that Joseph would forgive them on account of their father. So the brothers schemed once more with a made-up letter from their father asking Joseph to forgive them.

• Joseph, however, had a greater reason to forgive them—because of what God the Father had done through their sin and his suffering. Joseph understood that God had brought good from evil. Salvation had come to his people through his suffering. Joseph was in the place God had planned for him all along. That was why the brothers should not fear; that was why Joseph could forgive.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read the following paragraphs in the DDG (p. 32), showing how God took the evil actions of humans and brought about redemptive good.

Joseph kept his eyes on God and not on his circumstances or the people who had sinned against him. He did not hold his exalted position over his brothers or nurse a grudge against them. He did not lament the time lost with his father and brothers or the time he spent in jail. He looked toward God and trusted God’s plan for his life. He knew God took the evil deeds of his brothers and used them for His good and greater plan of providing salvation for his family from the famine.
PACK ITEM 3: THANK GOD: Use this DeMoss quote poster to help your group understand the importance of a humble and thankful heart for the proper perspective on our trials in life. Then connect this posture with the ability to forgive with the following question.

How does believing God brings good even from evil give us the ability to forgive others when they wrong us? (God is constantly working in His people to bring good out of our own evil hearts and actions, so we can appreciate the forgiveness He has given us and pass it on to others; we recognize that vengeance is God’s to repay so we can forgive and move on; if we can thank God for trials, then we can forgive those who hurt us)

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 32).

God’s Plan and Human Action: God’s sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God’s overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus.

Essential Doctrine “God’s Plan and Human Action”: God’s sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, “Many plans are in a man’s heart, but the Lord’s decree will prevail.” In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord’s plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God’s overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge and yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

SAY: The message of the gospel centers on God bringing good from evil at the cross. Joseph lived centuries before the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to pen Romans 8:28, but he captured the heart of that message in his response to his brothers in Genesis 50:20—God can work all things, even evil actions, together for good.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

How should God bringing good from evil affect how we share the gospel with others? (we share regardless of the consequences; we share in any and all circumstances; we share believing no one is beyond God’s reach)
EXPLAIN: Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Moses recorded the true events of Joseph’s life, one of the most compelling stories in all of literature. Yes, Joseph’s is a beautiful, true story of forgiveness and reconciliation, but it is also more. It is a story of reversal—of God bringing good from evil, joy from pain, and abundant life from suffering. Joseph’s story teaches us that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, and it also foreshadows the cross of Christ. Our salvation from sin and death rests on this truth—God brings good from evil. Because of this, we have some choices to make:

• Because we are a forgiven people, we choose to forgive others.
• Because God took evil in the world and brought good from it, we choose to trust God.
• Because others need to experience God’s forgiveness, we choose to carry the message of the cross to the nations, calling all people to be reconciled to God through Christ’s suffering and sacrifice.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 33), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we are a forgiven people through Christ, we forgive those who sin against us, recognizing that God is working everything for the good of those who love Him.

• Identify the people you need to forgive, believing that God is working all things together for your good.
• How can your group provide comfort to others in their times of distress and call them to live with hope that God is at work?
• What are some ways you have experienced God using your suffering for good that you can share with others to point them to the gospel?

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, thank You for remaining faithful to Your promises despite our sin against You. We praise You for remaining good even as You use evil to work out Your redemptive purposes in the world. Help us to maintain a forgiving heart toward others as we proclaim the gospel of Your Son, Jesus the Messiah, who died and rose again so that sinners could be forgiven. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 34-36), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 37) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 34-36) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 37) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 34-36) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 1 as a part of point 2 in the session: That is the beauty of God’s work in us—He is after our complete, not partial, transformation by the power of the gospel. He wants all of us—and only the gospel can bring such total transformation to pass.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 3:** “God calls on us to forgive in light of the gospel, in light of the forgiveness we have received in Christ.”
- **Day 4:** “In Christ, we have been given the privilege of declaring the gospel to the nations, to play a role in seeing people reconciled to God.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member’s DDG (p. 37) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- **Encourage group members to help one another look for ways throughout the week to exercise a gospel-saturated attitude of forgiveness toward others.**
- **See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.**
Additional Commentary

Point 1: God is faithful to fulfill His plan (Gen. 42:1-6).

“News of Egypt’s willingness to sell grain to outsiders reached Jacob. Since he was the patriarch and chief decision maker of the clan, it was Jacob’s responsibility to look out for the clan’s welfare. He had the right to order the rest of the adult males to go down to Egypt to buy grain. In a virtual replay of chap. 37, Jacob sent ten of Joseph’s brothers out to do the family’s work, but he spared a son of his beloved late wife Rachel (Benjamin). Jacob’s sons joined a stream of others who came to Egypt to buy grain.”  

“Because Joseph oversaw the selling of the grain to all who came looking for it, on their arrival Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down before him (42:6). Obviously, they did not recognise him, in part because the man in front of them seemed to be an Egyptian. He was clean-shaven, dressed in Egyptian clothing and spoke the Egyptian language. Moreover, they would hardly have been expecting to see the one they had sold as a slave in a position of power! They had never dreamt that God would raise him up to become the governor of a foreign land.”

“Joseph’s brothers had betrayed him and sold him for money. They thought they had rid themselves of their brother, the dreamer. But long afterward, their consciences still accused them of the sin they committed. They were men without internal peace when they met Joseph (Genesis 42:21-22). A Rwandan proverb says, ‘You can outdistance that which is running after you, but you cannot outdistance that which is running inside you.’ The wrong they committed many years earlier still haunted them. We can commit sin and hide from people, but we cannot hide from God. Those sins will always catch up with us. Let each one of us live in such a way that our conscience is clean and bears testimony of our innocence.”

Point 2: God is faithful to prompt forgiveness in His people (Gen. 45:4-8).

“This passage does not minimize the responsibility of Joseph’s brothers in selling him into slavery. Joseph’s statement, though, is beautifully balanced. While he holds his brothers responsible for their actions he nevertheless offers forgiveness and urges them to forgive themselves (vv. 4-5), since God used the circumstances to accomplish His wider purposes (vv. 5,7-8). His words anticipate his assurances in 50:19-20.”
“‘But God sent me ahead of you’ (v. 7a) reiterates Joseph’s interpretation of his travail in Egypt. The term ‘sent’ … often describes someone dispatching a person on a mission (e.g., 28:5; Neh. 6:5), as when God sends forth his prophets (e.g., Deut. 34:11; Jer. 19:14). Unknown to Joseph and his brothers, God had sent Joseph on a divine undertaking … Joseph gives two reasons for his travail: ‘to preserve … a remnant’ and ‘to save your lives by a great deliverance’ (v. 7b). The language ‘remnant … on earth’ is unique, but the word group … is widely used in the Old Testament to indicate a nation’s surviving residue (e.g., Jer. 25:20; Amos 9:12), especially the survivors of Israel’s purging (e.g., 2 Kings 19:4//Isa. 37:4; 2 Chron. 36:20). The term … in this context indicates two nuances. (1) The word refers to future ‘descendants’ (2 Sam. 14:7); the plural pronoun ‘for you’ … shows that the descendants in mind are the offspring of Jacob’s twelve sons. (2) The description ‘on the earth’ sets the descendants in a wider context; Joseph viewed the families of Jacob as the surviving ‘remnant’ of the world’s populations (cp. the Noah imagery, v. 5). If the Jacobites fail to survive, the whole of the human family will die without salvation hope. Joseph’s role as savior of the world from starvation typifies the salvation of the nations that the promises call for (e.g., 12:3).”  

**Point 3: God is faithful to bring good from evil (Gen. 50:15-21).**

“Joseph’s brothers may have assumed that it was only because he loved his father that Joseph had taken care of them. They had failed to grasp that he had forgiven them and that he loved them and their families. Consequently, now that their father was dead, they were afraid that he might take his revenge (50:15). So, wily as ever, they pretended that their father had left him a message asking that he forgive his brothers (50:16). Weeping and calling themselves the servants of the God of your father, they sought his forgiveness once again.”

“Joseph … spoke solemn words of comfort and assurance to them: ‘Don’t be afraid’ (50:19a,21a). He understood the grounds for his brothers’ fear, but was anxious to give them inner peace. Next he explained that his response to them was sincere because it was rooted in his beliefs about God: Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives (50:19b-20). Finally he assured them that he would continue to support them and their children (50:21b).”

**References**

The Books of Genesis and Exodus are meant to be read together, providing an important clue for our approach to the rest of Scripture. The story begins in Genesis and unfolds with breathtaking speed, but then the pace slows as the rest of the book tells us the story of four generations of the one family through which God promised to bring blessing to the world.

As Genesis winds down, we encounter Joseph, one of Abraham’s great grandsons, and see that God’s promises are not always easy for His people. But through Joseph’s difficulties, we encounter the vital concept of redemption. His life was one of setbacks, frustration, and disappointment. But all the while, we see that God was at work through Joseph’s adversity, not despite it. God brought about redemption for Joseph and his family: God is always bringing glory to Himself and good to His people through their hardships, even by overriding their sins.

Then as we move from Genesis to Exodus, we pass over nearly four hundred years to a time when God’s people are enslaved. The stage is set for an even greater display of God’s desire and ability to redeem His people. When they cry out to God for deliverance from their slavery in Egypt, He provides a rescuer in Moses to free His people and to provide for them.

God’s deliverance of Joseph and the nation of Israel were the early stages of a beautiful crescendo of God’s plan to redeem His people that culminated in Christ Jesus. In Him we have experienced redemption from the slavery of sin and death. As we study these sessions, let us pray that the Holy Spirit stirs our hearts anew so that we are captivated by the love, grace, and mercy of God made known to us in our redemption through Christ so we can share Him with others.
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