

# Joseph – “Suffering in God’s Hands”

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Our Savior’s Way Lutheran Church  
Genesis 37:1-11

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“This is the repeated pattern in Scripture: Evil. God. Good.”

Max Lucado, *You’ll Get Through This*

Have you ever had a bad day? A bad week? Month? Thirty-five days of being forced to “stay at home?” Have you ever felt like joining in the chorus from the old TV Show, *Hee Haw* – “If it weren’t for bad luck | I’d have no luck at all | Gloom, despair, and agony on me!” At that point in your life, you were suffering – maybe a little, maybe a lot – it did not matter how much you suffered (or, are still suffering) – it still hurt...perhaps, it still does!

Often, we believers suffer, they will turn to the story of Job as a source of solace. Job was a righteous man who got caught up in a “that’s nothing, watch this” contest with Satan and God. There is a lot of good stuff we learn about suffering from Job. But he is not the only one who’s suffering is recorded in the Scriptures.

A person I would like to introduce you to is Joseph. His story begins in Genesis 37. If you have your Bibles with you, please turn to Genesis 37 – it is easy to find...the first book in the Bible. We start at verse 1: ***“Jacob lived in the land of his father’s sojourning’s, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob.”*** Joseph’s story begins with the mention of his father, Jacob. He was one of Isaac’s twin boys, which made him one of Abraham’s grandsons. He is the last of the Old Testament’s “Patriarchs,” a much-storied character in the Biblical narrative. He conned his brother, Esau, out of Isaac’s blessing and deceived his father into giving him the all-important blessing before he skipped town to avoid Esau’s wrath. His life was a series of dramatic twists and turns usually resulting from his attempts to cheat and steal his way through life. Yet he always seemed to survive and even thrive because God chose to carry him in the palm of His hand. No matter what trickery or shady endeavors should have blown up in his face, they did not; God saw to that. Even as he struggled, literally with God, and with his place is God’s story, God cared for him and loved him, even giving him a new name – “Israel.” Jacob was a scoundrel. But the story of God moves us through Jacob to his son, Joseph.

Picking up at verse 2: ***“Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his***

***father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him. Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more."***

Already on their bad side, being their father's favorite and having "tattled" on them, the rift between Joseph and his brothers was fast becoming a chasm. ***"He said to them, 'Hear this dream that I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.' His brothers said to him, 'Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?' So, they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words."***

Joseph was not endearing himself to the rest of his family. Favorite. Tattle-tell. Now, visionary. One might not blame his brothers for what is going to happen. But Joseph could not really help himself. As we will see as we make our way through his story, Joseph was a good kid. You cannot blame him for his father's favoritism. As Alistair Begg writes in his book, *The Hand of God*, "Joseph's brothers were flat-out jealous of him."

We understand that God works through our families to make us who He wants us to be. Although Joseph told on his brothers, that came more out of his heightened sense of right-and-wrong than just trying to get his brothers into trouble. Again, Begg observes that "Joseph had determined to do what was right, no matter the cost and no matter where it took him."

Picking up at verse 9: ***"Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, 'Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, 'What is this dream you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?' And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind."***

One might have suggested that Joseph should have kept his mouth shut when it comes to his dreams, but they were not just *his* dreams. They were God's dreams for him. Later, five chapters and twenty-plus years in the story, Joseph will be called upon to interpret Pharaoh's dreams that were keeping him up at night: ***"And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that you hear a dream and you***

***can interpret it.’ Joseph answered Pharaoh, ‘It is not me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.’”*** (Genesis 41:15-16) Joseph knew and understood that both his dreams and the ability to interpret dreams were a gift from God. And when God gives such gifts, He means for them to be used! Hence, he tells his dreams to his family because they are given to him by God to prepare everyone for what was coming. What God foreknew, He foretold through Joseph. Even though Jacob rebuked his son for telling his dream to the family, we note that ***“his father kept the saying in mind.”*** Jump decades and chapters later into the story and we see ***“Joseph’s brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground because Joseph was governor over the land.”*** (Genesis 42:6)

To recap: Joseph was Jacob’s favorite son. He was a righteous young man who refused to be quiet when something was not right. And, he was a dreamer through whom God chose to work and to communicate. His father may not have fully comprehended what his son was about, and his brothers may have resented him, but God spends 25% of the first book of the Bible telling us the story of Joseph. His story is one of a multi-colored robe, great misery, majesty, and mercy.

So, why take the time to study Joseph?

I turn to Max Lucado, a pastor, and prolific author, for his insight from his book, *You’ll Get Through This*: ***“Let me be clear. You are a version of Joseph in your generation. You represent a challenge to Satan’s plan. You carry something of God within you, something noble and holy, something the world needs – wisdom, kindness, mercy, skill. If Satan can neutralize you, he can mute your influence.”***

In other words, people suffer – Christians suffer – but they do not suffer at God’s hands. When we suffer, it is often the result of a lot of bad choices combined with the sin of the world. You do not suffer *at* God’s hand. When you suffer, you remain *in* God’s loving, gracious, caring providence. Look at the difference between Jacob and his son, Joseph. Jacob was a scoundrel, yet God took care of him. Joseph was a saint, and though his life was miserable, as we will see, God took care of him. And the point to all this: God takes care of you, too.

Let’s bring this home.

**Everyone suffers. Suffering and struggles come to us all.** The reality is that sometimes we suffer because of the decisions we have made. Sometimes it is because of decisions that others have made. And sometimes, we suffer simply because we live in a broken world saturated and stained by sin. Most of the time,

our suffering is really a mixture of all three. As Max Lucado observes, ***“Life turns every person upside down. No one escapes unscathed.”***

Some of you are “Jacobs”; others of you are “Josephs”; all of you are carried through your struggles by God. Joseph’s story is to be understanding as a living illustration of what St. Paul tells the Romans: ***“And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”*** (Romans 8:28) These words are one of God’s great promises; that we are not hapless victims of life, at the mercy of fate or chance. We are God’s children because God decides to make us so. Though we deserve nothing, God comes to us in His providence to be our “all in all.” For both scoundrel Jacob and saintly Joseph, God did not desert them to their own devices. Joseph was not protected *from* his unfortunate circumstances but was provided for *in* the midst of his circumstances. He did not suffer *at* God’s hands but was carried through his suffering *in* God’s hands.

And so are you.

So, as we consider for the next few weeks what it means to suffer in life, I want you to keep this advice in mind. It is what we discover in Joseph’s story, and it comes to us from Max Lucado, who sums up Joseph’s life-lesson for us like this:

**You’ll get through this.**

**It won’t be painless.**

**It won’t be quick.**

**God will use this mess for good.**

**Don’t be foolish or naïve.**

**But don’t despair either.**

**With God’s help, you’ll get through this!**

Amen.

## Sermon Notes: Joseph – “Suffering *in* God’s Hands”

1. Joseph...wasn’t protected \_\_\_\_\_ the circumstances, but \_\_\_\_\_ the circumstances...
2. \_\_\_\_\_ suffers. Suffering and struggles come to us all.
3. Life turns every person upside down, \_\_\_\_\_ escapes unscathed.
4. ***“And we know that for those who love God, \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”*** – Romans 8:28
5. \_\_\_\_\_ get through this.
6. It won’t be \_\_\_\_\_.
7. It \_\_\_\_\_ be quick.
8. God will \_\_\_\_\_ for good.
9. Don’t be \_\_\_\_\_ or naïve.
10. But don’t \_\_\_\_\_ either.
11. With God’s help, \_\_\_\_\_ this!