

fruitful AFFLICTION

Truths Gleaned from the Life of Joseph

a 6-week Bible Study
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about the author



Lara Williams has experienced the beauty of freedom in Christ and desires to lead other women into a powerful walk of faith with their Lord. As a speaker and author, Lara has a way of candidly sharing her real-life struggles with a touch of humor, while leading the listener into places of deep theological truths -- truths meant to affect our Mondays and Tuesdays.

Lara has also authored *To Walk or Stay, Life Giver*, and *Then Came Jesus*, and co-authored a number of Bible studies available at QuenchBible.com. You can connect with Lara online at LaraWilliams.org.

introduction

Unless I write out of the place of worship, it's nothing to me. Don't get me wrong. God can still use it. His Word won't return void. His ability to change hearts and redeem souls doesn't depend upon mere humans. But for *me* as the author, writing is nothingness unless it's the overflow of Him working in and through me. So in my own flawed ways, I've written this study as an overflow of worship.

I've spent time praising Him and praying to Him and confessing my sin and dancing before Him -- *alone and without human witnesses. You're welcome.* And then I've asked Him to speak. I trust, that by His absolute grace, He will take the words that I've typed on these pages and use them to minister life to your sweet soul. I trust because He promised. I trust because He has a deep, pursuing love for you. I trust because His Word is alive and active.

Over these next six weeks we're going to dissect what the Word of God teaches us through the life of a man named Joseph. Not Jesus' earthly daddy "Joseph," rather the Joseph we meet in the book of Genesis. And because we're going to camp out in the Old Testament I have to make one thing really clear.

All Scripture points to Jesus.

All of Scripture ultimately points to Jesus. He's the hero of the Bible. Every Old Testament story foreshadows what God the Father eventually reveals in and through Christ. We'll talk more about this idea in the first day of our study. But I pray that God would give us eyes to see Jesus even as we study this man named Joseph.

The story of Joseph is "descriptive" rather than blatantly "prescriptive." Meaning we will read the *descriptive* account of Joseph's life and then spend time uncovering deeper *prescriptive* truths about what it means to be called a child of God through faith in Christ.

The title "Fruitful Affliction" came from the name of Joseph's second son, "Ephraim," meaning "twice fruitful." When Joseph named his son he said, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." It resonated with me because as long as we live on planet earth, we *will* walk through seasons of affliction. But those seasons don't have to be defined by hopelessness and defeat. We have a God who is able and willing to make us "fruitful" even in the midst of earthly challenges. *I love that.*

As you dig into the Word through these pages, it would absolutely delight me if you had to step away from what I've written and spend time conversing with your God. If this study serves as a diving board into intimate conversation with Him, well...then...I would be ecstatic. Even if you didn't finish every single question that I've asked. *Gasp.*

I've designed each week to have five study days, which allows you two "free" days to either catch up or dig further on your own or...sleep. Also, I primarily use the English Standard

Version of Scripture. There will be a few times when I ask you to note specific words from that version. If you don't have a copy, no worries. You can easily pull it up online when those occasions arise. *Or check it out from the library if you're old school retro. I like that.*

But before we go any further, let's begin our journey with a prayer. I encourage you to get in a quiet space, take a deep breath, and speak the words on the next page from your heart. Don't just read them. Speak them by faith from your heart to your God. He's listening.

p r a y e r

"Father, you are my **DADDY-GOD**. You are on Your throne. There is no one higher or stronger or greater than You. And I **WORSHIP** You. I ask that Your kingdom would **COME** into my life, into my day, into my corner of the world.

May You be glorified in how I **LOVE** those around me. I trust that Your will is being done, right now, even in my most challenging of circumstances. I open my hands to You, willing to **RECEIVE** what You have for me, because You are good.

Grace me today with everything I need. *Need*. Not want. I **TRUST** Your will.

FORGIVE me, Father, even now for the selfishness that so continually entangles my heart. Prompt me quickly to repent by the **POWER** of Your Spirit when I sin against You and against the people around me. I want to **REMEMBER** Your great **GRACE** over me so I'm ready to forgive those who hurt me today; because people are just

people. We're all needy for You. **LEAD** me not into temptation, Lord God, but instead, **DELIVER** me from the evil one. Remind me throughout my day that I wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities of darkness.

Yours, Lord, is the **KINGDOM** and power and glory forever and ever and ever. Use me to proclaim Your greatness out of the **OVERFLOW** of communing with You intimately and continually. In **JESUS** name and by His power, I give you again my land of affliction and ask that You make it **FRUITFUL**. Amen."

Adapted from the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13

Joseph's Family Tree

(to be completed together on day two of week one)

<hr/>			
(patriarch)			
<u>L</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>Z</u>
(wife)	(wife)	(wife)	(wife)
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
(son)	(son)	(son)	(son)
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
(son)	(son)	(son)	(son)
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(son)			

week one :: day one

point to ponder

All Scripture points to the eternal Hero, Jesus.

God's Word is more than an instruction book. God's Word is His conversation to His children, revealing His gracious redemption of His people. I pray that as we go through these pages of Scripture, we would hear God's voice and genuinely respond to Him.

We'll start dissecting Joseph's life tomorrow. But before we do that, we need to lay a firm foundation. I mentioned in the introduction that all of Scripture ultimately points us to our Savior, Jesus. Let's dig into that idea.

Read Luke 24:13-27 aloud. *I'm going to always encourage you to read the Word aloud. It's kinda my thing because something in us needs to physically hear God's Word. So if at all possible, read the passages with your physical voice.*

What did Jesus teach them, according to verse 27?

Starting at the beginning of Scripture, Jesus reveals *Himself*. He reveals the prophecies concerning His coming, His death, and His resurrection. He opens their eyes to redemption's plan.

Read Paul's description of Christ in Colossians 1:15-20 aloud.

Describe Jesus as revealed in these verses:

Write out Colossians 1:17 below:

Jesus is the hero of the Father's redemption story as seen on the pages of Scripture -- from the creation account all the way to Revelation. Jesus was *always* the Father's plan A. Creation happened through Him and by Him. He will one day come to fully redeem His people. And right now, in whatever season marks your life, Jesus holds it together.

In what present situation do you need to remember that Jesus holds all things together?

Spend a minute thanking Him for holding you and that situation together, even if you cannot see or feel Him at the moment. We as Christ-followers walk by faith.

So who's the hero of all Scripture? *Just making sure we're all listening.*

Before we close out today, let's dip our toes into the story of Joseph.

Read Matthew 1:1-2 aloud.

Whose genealogy is given in this text? *I know. A duh question. Just humor me.*

List the four men in the order that they are given in verse 2.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

These are the first four men in Jesus' earthly lineage -- the first four "patriarchs" of Israel. And Joseph -- the man with whom we'll become very familiar -- was one of Judah's brothers. **Circle "Judah" above and in parenthesis beside his name write "Joseph's brother."**

From the beginning, God planned for His one and only Son, Jesus, to clothe Himself in human skin. He planned for Jesus to come to this selfish earth *within* the generational line of this particular people -- the Israelites. He planned for Him to come and rescue man from the curse of sin.

God didn't choose the Israelite lineage because the Israelites were better or bigger or smarter or prettier or stronger or righteous-er (*not a word*) than other peoples. We'll vividly see that as we

study Joseph's family. Rather, out of God's extravagant grace, He chose to begin the earthly revelation of Himself to and through the Israelites. *Extravagant grace.*

The Israelites didn't begin righteous. *God* made them righteous, by grace through faith. From beginning to end God makes humankind righteous by grace through faith, not by lineage.

Read Romans 4:2-3 aloud.

How was Abraham made righteous?

How are you made righteous?

Nothing we do makes us righteous. No family line. No church ministry. No casserole or clothing donation. Nothing we *do* makes us righteous. We *become* the righteousness of Christ when we place our faith in Him.

As we study Joseph and his family -- the family from which Jesus would eventually come -- we'll see that we're all messy and needy for the great grace of God. It isn't our works that make us righteous. Faith in the finished work of Christ alone makes us righteous. He saves us from the judgment we all deserve.

All of Scripture ultimately points to the hero, Jesus. I'm praying that as we glean from the life of Joseph, we see shadows of the coming Christ.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week one :: day two

point to ponder

There's a time to speak and a time to be silent.
Maturity is knowing the time.

Before diving into the Word each day, take a couple of minutes to evaluate your heart before the Lord. Identify any anxious places within you. Identify any fears that try to entangle your mind. And then speak those things to your God. Ask Him to graciously minister to your soul specifically regarding those heart struggles. And then read His Word with listening ears.

Today we're going to dive into the story of Joseph. Remember to keep your "Jesus glasses" on as you read. We won't always be able to recognize the shadows pointing us to Christ, but all Scripture ultimately points to God's plan of redemption.

Read Genesis 37:1-4 aloud.

Write "Jacob, a.k.a. Israel" on Joseph's family tree (page 7) as the patriarch.

Before we go any further, let's take a minute to document the rest of this (dysfunctional-dearly-loved-by-God) family. **Read Genesis 35:23-26 and fill in the blanks on the family tree.**

Put a * next to the first-born son. Circle "Joseph." Put a box around "Judah." These are a few of our key characters.

We don't have time to go into all the dysfunctional details, but we can be fairly certain that there was a big ol' bunch of feelings going on between these four women -- the good, the bad, and the ugly. And to add to the glob of feelings, Jacob made it very clear that Rachel held the "favorite wife" membership card; hence Rachel's sons made the favorites list. *A first millennium soap-opera of sorts.*

Describe the relationship between Joseph and his father and his brothers. (Gen. 37:2-4)

What do you think *may* have been Joseph's heart motivation for bringing a bad report of his brothers to their dad? *Here is where we start speculating. We don't know Joseph's heart, we can only suppose.*

If I were to speculate, just based upon Joseph's actions and family climate, I would venture that a mixture of immaturity and pride motivated that 17-year-old Joseph. He knew that his dad favored him. His brothers knew that their dad favored him. And Joseph moved out of that preferred status. *He tattled.*

Here's where I move forward out of my speculations. Again, we don't know Joseph's heart. But we can still apply speculations from his life to our own everyday situations. So let's begin some personal application with a look at pride -- a *possible* motivator in Joseph's young heart.

Pride is messy. It forgets that we're all needy for grace. *All of us.* It elevates self and rejects Jesus. It insists that *you* serve *me*. It stands tall and haughty demanding retribution of everyone in its path. And we as humans are *all* susceptible to falling into its deceptive trap. If we don't uproot pride from our wayward hearts, it will eventually end with a tragic fall. Because the God of the universe opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Read James 4:6-10 aloud.

What are we to *do* according to this text?

According to James, what does God do?

I'm sure we all agree that ain't no one want to be in opposition to God. *That's my fiery, Southern voice.* If pride makes its home in our hearts -- if our flesh and the enemy tempt us to think of ourselves as better than others -- then I pray that we confess and humble ourselves today.

Can you identify anyone in your life that you're tempted to think of yourself as "higher than"? Someone that you often "tattle on" to God? Ask God to reveal any pride that may lie at the root of that tattling. If He reveals pride, confess it as sin and rejoice in His cleansing.

Sadly, I know I have a couple people that come to mind. I hate to think that pride motivates my "tattling" but if I'm really honest with myself, pride lingers at the root. May He dig it out.

Read Genesis 37:5-11 aloud.

How did Joseph's brothers respond to Joseph's dreams?

How did his father respond to Joseph's dreams?

We'll eventually learn near the end of Joseph's story (*spoiler alert!*) that those dreams prophesied the future. They were from God giving Joseph a glimpse of what would one day unfold. However, when Joseph shared his revelation from God, relationships suffered. Jealousy arose. And anger flared.

God has taught me something about the *secret place* with Him. At times He may speak to us through His Word or through prayer, and He means for us to proclaim that specific word to the world. At other times He means for that word to stay quiet in our hearts. Or to put it simply, there's a time to speak and a time to be silent. Maturity is knowing the time.

Read James 1:19 aloud.

Slow. To. Speak. So many of our relational troubles could be extinguished if we would put a purposeful pause between our thoughts and our words -- in that pause, turning to the Lord and praying for wisdom. *Slow. To. Speak.*

Share a recent time when your words may have come out of your mouth too quickly.

How did you rectify that situation? Or what can you do *now* to help rectify the situation?

Relationships can get messy because of our words. But God is bigger. He can redeem. If your words have caused a recent rift with someone, ask the Lord to show you the steps you can humbly take to stir up healing. Regardless of the other person's stance, we can find freedom for our souls in confession and repentance.

Joseph was not slow to speak. He was young. He was favored. He may have had some pride going on. *Like all the rest of us.* He had powerful, prophetic dreams from God. And when he shared those dreams, relationships suffered.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week one :: day three

point to ponder

God looks at the state of my heart before He looks at the work of my hands.

As with each of our study days, take a couple of minutes to identify any fearful or anxious places that entangle your heart. Lay those things before God, asking Him to speak to you through your time in His Word.

Read Genesis 37:12-17 aloud.

What did Jacob, a.k.a. Israel, ask Joseph to do?

Read Genesis 37:18-20 aloud.

What did Joseph's brothers want to do?

Why?

When given the chance, bitterness, jealousy, and anger can bury themselves deep within us causing dramatic consequences. That's why it's vital that we pay attention to what we meditate upon in our hearts and minds.

Read Matthew 5:21-26 aloud.

With what does Jesus equate anger when it comes to judgment?

What does Jesus teach us about the heart in this text? (see 1 Samuel 16:6-7)

I grew up as a preacher's kid. And though I loved my upbringing, from an early age I put an internal pressure upon myself to *externally* measure up to moral goodness. *That's called the Law.* And to be honest, I did pretty well at obeying the rules. That is, until I started resenting the goal of external morality and decided to run hard in the other direction. *But that's an ugly-beautiful story for another day.*

External morality is not God's ultimate goal for our lives. External goodness will never satisfy the true need of our souls. God desires complete redemption for us, from the inside-out. He looks upon the heart.

Joseph's brothers reveal a dangerous progression that led to their apparent hardened hearts. Jealousy unconfessed led to bitterness unconfessed led to anger unconfessed led to conspiracy unconfessed led to murderous, deceptive desires. And if we're not diligent, jealousy and bitterness can lead our own hearts astray as well.

Can you identify any unconfessed anger in your spirit towards someone? *If so, I would encourage you to spend some time with the Lord regarding that particular relationship. Anger left to simmer in our souls binds us with chains not meant for us in Christ.*

Consider beginning the road to soul-freedom by writing in your own words what you think Jesus might say to you based upon His words in Matthew 5:

Read Genesis 37:21-22 aloud.

Who wanted to rescue Joseph?

What do you think motivated him? *note: Reuben was Jacob's oldest son*

Read Genesis 37:23-28 aloud.

How do you think Joseph may have felt at this point?

Read Genesis 37:29-36 aloud.

By God's grace, at this point in my life, I have not lost a child to death. I did miscarry one of our babies. I have walked with loved ones who have lost a child. I've read articles from those who have lost a child. But I personally haven't lost a child to death. And though I cannot fully empathize, I know *that I know* that it's an excruciating journey.

I have, however, walked through the "valley of the shadow of death" with my dad and with a dear friend. And over the years, I've learned a couple of things about grief. First, it's a process.

When we lose someone or something we love, the loss pains us in unseen places. Places hidden from the passers-by. Those hidden places take time to heal. God slowly unveils them as we walk through memories or thoughts of broken hopes. And He tenderly touches them in love. Grief is a slow process.

Second, in that process, we ride the waves of emotion that inevitably come. We acknowledge our pain when it wells up. We voice our hurt to our God. We press into Him when the wave crashes down. And we allow Him to faithfully minister hope and healing by His Spirit through His Word.

Read Psalm 13 aloud.

What happens in verses 5 and 6?

It's as if the Psalmist has a personal preaching session in the last two verses. Yes, he feels deep sorrow. Yes, he feels alone. Yes, he feels neglected. But then he remembers that he trusts the love of the Lord. He trusts that nothing can separate him from his Father's love. And the depth of that reality causes him to praise.

Back in the Genesis text, Jacob "refused to be comforted." He probably felt some of the same things that the Psalmist felt. But at this point in the story, it doesn't appear that Jacob turns to the Lord for comfort. And when we don't go to our God for comfort and refuge, we dig a deep hole for our pain and protect it from the balm of healing. *Always a bad idea.*

For what or whom are you "grieving" a loss? *It may be the physical death of someone you love or even the death of a dream or aspiration. Whatever the loss, God wants to meet you right in the middle of it.*

As a personal preaching session, write Psalm 13:5 below:

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week one :: day four

point to ponder
God is grace, over and over again.

Not to sound like a broken record, but before digging into the study, spend a few minutes being honest before the Lord. Give voice to your anxious places and ask God to wash those heart struggles with the truth of His faithful character.

Now, back to Joseph. The next chapter of Genesis actually feels like an interruption to the story of Joseph. And part of me wanted to skip it so we could hurry and see where Joseph went and what he's up to. But I couldn't. This next chapter gives us a scandalous taste of the amazing grace of our God. So hang on. We've got a fairly shocking story to read about Judah -- you remember, Judah the one in Jesus' lineage. Yep. That one.

Read Genesis 38:1 aloud.

First of all, let's remember. **What just happened in the previous chapter of Genesis?**

Now we're going to utilize our speculation skills. **Why do you think Judah left his family "at that time"?**

Adullam was a nearby city, about 12 miles from Bethlehem. And Judah traveled there to stay a while with a friend named Hirah. *Have you ever tried to run from your pain? Interesting how it follows us, huh.*

Read Genesis 38:2-5 aloud.

What were the names of Judah's three sons?

Read Genesis 38:6-7 aloud.

How does the text describe Er and what does God do?

Read Genesis 38:8-11 aloud.

I told you it was a bit "wow." Basically, "levirate marriage" required a man to marry his brother's childless widow and give her children. (*see Deuteronomy 25:5-10 for more details*) And, well, Onan wanted nothing to do with that, so he spilled his semen on the floor. *Seems...reasonable?* But God saw his heart and from it flowed wickedness. So, he put him to death.

I want to pause here because I know it can be hard to read things like, "God put him to death." We live on the other side of Christ's death and resurrection for our sins. So we more easily see the love and mercy and pursuit of God. But sometimes in the Old Testament, we come face-to-face with the judgment of God and it makes us squirm. We too quickly forget the heinousness of sin. We too quickly forget the holiness of God Almighty. Our sin -- yours, mine, Onan's -- is wicked in the sight of God. *Wicked*. It's only by His grace and mercy that He hasn't put *us* to death by now. *Believe me. I know me*. It's only because of Jesus.

Whenever we read difficult passages in Scripture, it's vital that we remember one important thing: we must begin with God. *Begin with God*. We *begin* with the fact that God is good, love, mercy, holy, perfect, omniscient, omnipotent, grace, faithful. We begin there and then we read the text. And when the text makes us squirm, we go back to where we began and we say something like, "Lord God, I don't understand why You did things this way, but I know You are good, grace, holy, mercy, love, perfect, faithful. So I trust that as You saw the beginning from the end *this* was the thing that had to be done to fulfill Your good purposes." *Begin with Him*.

Ok. Moving on. **Read Genesis 38:12-19 aloud.**

I know. Soap opera-ish. **Briefly summarize what just happened.**

Read Genesis 38:20-26 aloud.

What did Judah want done to Tamar when he heard of her "immorality"?

We naturally do this, don't we? We quickly judge the sin of others without first recognizing the tangled places of our own hearts. *Or at least, I do this*.

Read Matthew 7:1-5 aloud.

What does Jesus call us in verse 5 when we judge others for their sin rather than first looking at our own hearts?

What does Jesus tell us to do in verse 5?

Is there anyone in your life that you've been quick to judge?

I get it. I get that we like to pronounce people "guilty" for their mess, especially if their mess touches us. I get that we naturally maintain a "I deserve better" mantra. But that mindset will never usher in the freedom and love found in Christ.

I know it's hard -- *it's downright crucifixion of self* -- but the life Jesus intends for us is the life marked by grace and forgiveness. Just think about the One we follow! If you find yourself in a place where it's easy to judge someone for their sin, I would encourage you to replace that judgment with intercession. Instead of dragging them through the proverbial mud, remember the great grace that covers you in Christ and, in love, pray for that person. Pray for soul healing. Pray for repentance. Pray for mercy. **Begin by writing a prayer below:**

Read Genesis 38:27-30 aloud. Read Matthew 1:3 aloud.

Who is in the line of Jesus?

God chose Judah's son, Perez -- conceived while he was on the run from his pain, by Tamar when she was acting like a prostitute -- to be in the line of Jesus. *What the what?!* It's called amazing grace.

How does it make you "feel" to know that God chose Perez to be in Jesus' line? Praise Him.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week one :: day five

point to ponder

In Christ, nothing can touch me apart from God's steadfast love.

Per usual, begin with a few moments before your God in prayer. He's with You. He sees You. He hears You. He knows You perfectly. And He wants to be Your peace.

So yesterday's passage was a bit on the cray-cray side, huh. But don't all of us have something in our past (or present) that's a little on the crazy side? And honestly, I'm thankful my jacked-up messy parts aren't written in the Bible for generations to read. *Can I get an "amen"?*

Today we join Joseph in Egypt.

Read Genesis 39:1-2 aloud.

Who bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites?

Who was with Joseph according to verse 2?

The Lord? Wait. Joseph was enslaved in a foreign land because he (speculatively) flaunted his favoritism until his brothers sold him to some passers-by, and the Lord was with Him? Yep. The Lord was with Him.

If there's anything you get from this study, I pray you get this. The Lord is with you. If you are in Christ, adopted as a child of God, then the Maker of heaven and earth promises to constantly be with you. He hasn't forsaken you. He hasn't forgotten you. He hasn't misplaced you. He remains present-tense in your life, even if you can't feel or see Him.

Read Genesis 39:3-5 aloud.

Why did Joseph find favor in Potiphar's sight?

The Lord's presence brings blessing. Sometimes that may mean tangible blessing like Joseph experienced with position and power. But often times God's blessing can't be measured with physical scales.

I've never been physically imprisoned -- *though I probably should have been in my prodigal college days*. But I have walked through situations and seasons that have felt like a prison, successfully crushing dreams and hopes. And the Lord walked with me. His presence brought blessing to my soul that this world couldn't steal. He gave peace in the midst of seeming chaos. Joy in what should have been despair. Endurance when my strength didn't exist. He did that. He does that.

His presence brings immeasurable blessing. And people notice when God's blessing rests upon us, just as Potiphar noticed the presence of God in Joseph's life.

Share a time when you (or a friend) walked through a devastating or difficult situation yet sensed the presence and blessing of God.

Read Genesis 39:6-20 aloud.

Contrast Joseph with his brother Judah that we met in Genesis 38:

Joseph

vs.

Judah



Why did Joseph reject his master's wife according to verse 9?

We don't know what happened to Joseph on that camel ride to Egypt after his brothers betrayed him, but I would guess that he had a good, old-fashioned, tearful, one-on-one with his God. Based upon his response to what I'm sure was a very tempting, sweet-smelling offer from his master's wife, he stood firm upon his convictions. He didn't want to sin against his God. And his master threw him into prison. *Yet the Lord was with him.*

Read Genesis 39:21-23 aloud.

What did the Lord show Joseph in the midst of prison according to verse 21?

If there's anything that can squash discouragement or despair, it's meditating on the steadfast love of the Lord. And being on this side of Christ, we have a grand, physical display of His vast love.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21 aloud.

The words penned in this text to describe these life-changing truths may be some of my most favorite words in the Bible. I pray this prayer for the people in my own life and as I read these words again today, I pray them for you.

Describe the love of God as revealed in this text.

It's not some magic pill. It's more than that. Knowing the love of God -- truly *knowing* -- surpasses knowledge and is a work of God Himself, through the power of His Spirit, within us. I would encourage you to pause here and make this text a prayer for yourself and for those you love. A personal version may sound something like this:

"Father, You alone are God over all the earth. According to the riches of Your great glory, remind me, in every circumstance, to surrender to You and receive the strength and power You have already given me through the gift of Your Holy Spirit. I want to be rooted and grounded in Your love. I want to comprehend the depths and width and height, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. I want to live today filled with all Your fullness. You are able to do more than I could ever ask or imagine according to Your power at work within me. To You alone be glory in the church and in Christ throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

In that unwanted, un-asked-for prison, God remained present and showed Joseph His steadfast love. And dare I say, God *appointed* that imprisonment as a testament to His steadfast love by using it as a catalyst for glorious soul-change in Joseph's life.

May you know -- *truly know* -- the steadfast love of your God waving as a banner over your sweet head today.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

discuss week one

1. Can you identify any "shadows" of or similarities to the coming Christ from this week's text?
If so, what are they?
2. Looking at your own life, how has jealousy ever led you astray? (day 2)
3. Share a time when God comforted your "grieving" heart. (day 3)
4. How have you seen God's grace in your own life? (day 4)
5. Share a time when you sensed God's presence and blessing in the midst of unwanted circumstances. (day 5)
6. What one thing do you want to remember from your time with the Lord in His Word this week?

week two :: day one

point to ponder
God never forgets me.

Begin today as we did last week. Acknowledge any anxious places taking up residence in your soul and voice those to God. Then ask Him to minister to those places by the power of His Spirit through His Word.

Read Genesis 40:1-4 aloud.

Who joins Joseph in prison?

Read Genesis 40:5-8 aloud.

What do we learn about God from verse 8?

Read Hebrews 4:13 aloud.

What does this verse teach us about God?

Nothing can be hidden from God. No sin. No hurt. No dream. No future event. No past mistake. Nothing. Every thought we think, every intention of our heart, He knows. And in His infinite knowledge, out of His pursuing love for His children, He graces us with wisdom when we seek Him.

Read James 1:5-8 aloud.

From whom do we gain wisdom?

How are we to ask for wisdom according to verse 6?

What does it look like to ask God for wisdom "in faith, with no doubting"?

God isn't a genie in a bottle. He's our Father-God. And He wants to walk *with* us through the twists and turns that come with living on planet earth. *And yes, the twists and turns will keep on a comin'*. God designed us for a daily, hourly, *minutely*, intimate relationship with Him. As we learn to walk *with* Him -- inviting Him into the moments -- He graciously guides. He guides with wisdom marked by peace.

Share a time when God guided you as you sought Him for wisdom.

How did you know it was God's guidance?

We can test the wisdom we *think* we have received from God with the Scripture test. Granted there will be times when the Bible doesn't specifically address His guidance. But, like I tell my kids, we look at life through our (*super-cool, always-glittery*) Bible glasses. That means that we evaluate the wisdom we *think* we have received from God through the lens of Scripture. For example, if we feel led by the Lord to murder someone, then we're probably mistaken because God says, "Thou shalt not murder." We begin with God as revealed in His Word.

Joseph knew where to go for wisdom. He knew that God alone had the answers.

Read Genesis 40:9-22 aloud.

In three sentences or less, describe what happened in this text.

God gave Joseph wisdom. So Joseph correctly interpreted the cupbearer and baker's dreams -- *dreams ultimately given by God* -- with the hope that one day kindness would be extended to him, setting him free from bondage. Kindness didn't happen quite yet.

Read Genesis 40:23 aloud.

The cupbearer forgot Joseph. He forgot him. But even though people had forgotten Joseph, God hadn't forgotten him. Just like God hasn't forgotten you.

Read Isaiah 49:15-16 aloud.

In this text, God is speaking to His people. And though we may not be Israelites, if we are "in Christ," then we *are* His sons and daughters. We are adopted as His own. So according to verse 16, **what has God done with us if we are His?**

He cannot forget you and me. He cannot. He will not. It may feel like we have been forgotten. Everyone in your life may appear to have forgotten you. But your God has not forgotten. He has not forsaken. He sees every single tear you cry. He knows every single fold of your heart. He could never ever forget you, *nor does He want to*.

I know it's a bit of a leap, but when we talk about shadows of Christ in the Old Testament, I can't help but see Jesus stretched across that bloody cross, his body engraved with nails for you and for me. Though God may have been speaking figuratively in this Isaiah text, Jesus shows us a physical, literal expression of God's words. In Christ, He engraves us on His palms. He cannot and will not forget.

What does it do to your spirit to remember that God doesn't ever forget you?

In what specific situation do you need to remember that God will never leave or forsake you?

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week two :: day two

point to ponder
God has uniquely and purposefully gifted *me*.

Prepare your heart to hear from your God today.

Read Genesis 41:1-13 aloud.

Are we seeing a trend yet? **What is one way God "speaks" or works through Joseph?**

Even as a boy God used dreams to reveal His plans to Joseph. Part of me can read that and think, "I want dreams. I want to interpret dreams. I want that kind of encounter with the God of the universe." And it's not wrong to desire. I'm certain it glorifies God when we desire to experience Him in fresh ways...as long as we remember one important thing: He embroidered you and me with great care and has specific gifts for you and me to steward.

The problem arises when we as Christians with good intentions see Sally teach powerfully or Jane deliver unspeakable wisdom or John physically heal the lame, and we compare ourselves. Even as good-intentioned, Jesus-followers, we can allow comparison to creep up to the point that we neglect the ways God has gifted and called you and me, individually and purposefully.

The Lord God, in His infinite power and wisdom, has things set aside for *you* to do; things ordained to be accomplished with *your* personality mixed with His Spirit's outpouring. You may be used in the context of a physical church or in the home with toddlers or in the jungles of Africa. Wherever the locale, whatever the gifts, comparing ourselves and coveting someone else's call negates the way our Father God desires to uniquely pour out His Spirit through you and me. *And what a devastation that would be.*

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 aloud.

Why does He gift us differently?

How has He gifted you? To whom has He called you to minister in your current season of life?

God spoke to and through Joseph in dreams. It was a gracious manifestation of His Spirit. For you and me, on *this* side of Jesus' death and resurrection, if we've come to faith in Christ, we're forever sealed with the very same Spirit who spoke to Joseph. And God's Spirit empowers us for our unique calling. May we not wish away what He has for our days.

Read Genesis 41:14-16 aloud.

What does Joseph's response to Pharaoh reveal about his heart?

It's important to remember who gifts us to do what we're called to do. **Fill in the blank below:**

Father, my gift or ability to _____
is directly from You. I give You all the credit. I give you all the praise.

Read Genesis 41:17-32 aloud.

According to Pharaoh's dream, what will happen over the next 14 years?

What do we learn about God in this portion of the text? Who's in control? (see verses 25, 28, 32)

In what current life circumstance does that truth about God encourage you?

Read Genesis 41:33-36 aloud.

How would you describe Joseph in this text?

When I read this text I hear a quiet confidence in Joseph's spirit. Not confidence in himself, but a confidence in who *God* is and who *Joseph* is because of God's covering. With that mindset, there's no place for insecurity.

When we fall into the comparison trap, we walk hand-in-hand with insecurity. Comparison and insecurity are BFFs. And they plague us. Insecurity in who God is and who we are because of Jesus steals the confidence God intends for us in Christ. Believe me. I know. I lived years and years as an insecure girl -- wanting to say the right thing and do the right thing and be the right thing so that people would like me. It's an absolutely draining way to live. *But God.*

Over time the Lord has graciously revealed Himself to me, from one glory to the next. And as my eyes open more and more to His awesomeness -- in the truest sense of the word -- there remains little room for insecurity. Knowing that the God of the universe who slung stars into place indwells me, empowers me to walk in confidence. Don't get me wrong. I still fall into the comparison trap at times but I don't seem to flounder there as long. *Thank you, Jesus.*

Joseph stood before the ruler of Egypt, and because he knew his God, he spoke boldly and plainly. He didn't move in fear or doubt. He chose his words with confidence because the Lord God was with him.

In what area(s) of your life do you currently wrestle with insecurity?

What do you think God would say to you? (read Psalm 139 for some ideas)

The same God who created worlds knows you and me by name. In Christ, He indwells us. He makes us new. He makes us righteous. He empowers us to love. He infuses boldness into our step. Insecurity? It has no rightful place in a child of God.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week two :: day three

point to ponder

God can make me fruitful even in my land of affliction.

Begin with a few minutes in prayer. Don't forget to voice any anxious places to your Father God. He gives peace that guards our hearts as we lay those anxious places before Him in prayer.

Read Genesis 41:37-40 aloud.

Why did Pharaoh promote Joseph to such a high position?

Read Genesis 41:41-43 aloud.

I just have to stop here because this amazes me! Joseph spent years in a smelly, hot, prison pit but the ruler of the land brought him out, put a royal ring on his finger, clothed him in fine linen, placed a gold chain around his neck, and called for the people to bow the knee before him. Amazing. And in a "shadowy" way, it reminds me of Jesus.

Read Philippians 2:5-11 aloud.

What similarities do you see -- foreshadowed in Joseph, displayed perfectly in Jesus?

Humbled from the holy courts on high to be born in human form as a lowly baby in a dirty stable to a gruesome death to the pits of Sheol, Jesus descended. Down. Down. *Down*. But then the Father exalted him for our redemption! Out of the pit, out of the grave, placing upon Him the name that's above every other name so that at His name every knee will bow. He is the highly exalted One! *That's worthy of a little shoutin'.*

OK, back to Joseph. **Read Genesis 41:44-45 aloud.**

Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name and Egyptian wife, symbolizing Joseph's full assimilation and acceptance into the royal courts.

And it got me thinking. There's a lot in a name, isn't there? When someone knows me by name, *especially* if that person is well-known or prestigious *or the ruler of Egypt*, it affects me. I feel seen and important. *Or I assume I would feel seen and important if Pharaoh had known my name.*

But someone bigger than Pharaoh and bigger than the President of the United States and bigger than...Taylor Swift (*me trying to be relevant*), knows your name. But He doesn't just know your name. When we come to faith in Christ, the God of the universe gives you a *new* name.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10 aloud.

What were some of our "names" before we came to faith in Christ?

What are some of our "names" after coming to faith in Christ?

A radical transformation happens in Christ. We go from death to life. We go from slave to free. We go from stranger to daughter (or son). We go from enemy to friend. All because of Jesus. The names that God calls you and me flow from the identity found in Christ alone. He names you and me, "Freedom. Beautiful. Loved. Gifted. Adored." All those other names we like to call ourselves at times, "Shame. Enemy. Betrayed. Worthless. Unloved," are null and void.

Read Genesis 41:46-57 aloud.

We see in this portion of text that God brings about what He had revealed years ago through a dream. *He's always faithful to His Word*. But if there's anything that I want us to glean from this text, it's the truth contained in the names Joseph gives his sons.

What did Joseph name his two sons and why according to verses 51-52?

So, *for emphasis*, what do these names tell us that God is able to do?

In what "land of affliction" do you currently dwell?

If I could use strobe lights and blinking lights and confetti and neon arrows in this study, they would all point to this. I believe with everything in me, based upon God's promises in His Word and what He's proven through my own trials on planet Earth, that our Father in heaven absolutely wants to make you and me fruitful even in our land of affliction.

We need to soak here for a minute. So you may want to pause and reread that last paragraph.

Read Galatians 5:22-23 aloud.

What is the fruit of God's Spirit within us?

When we come to faith in Christ, God seals us with His Spirit. His Spirit literally comes to indwell us. Not figuratively. *Literally*. But even though God *seals* Christ-followers with His Spirit, we're not always *filled* with His Spirit. We still have our flesh to contend with. And it puts up a good fight.

I can always tell when I'm not "filled" with His Spirit. *And so can everyone else*. If I'm not filled, then unlove, impatience, rudeness, or bitterness marks my heart. That's when I need a good talkin' to. That's when I need to press into Him. *Like every second of the day*. I may worship Him by singing (not beautifully, but loudly), preaching truth to myself, confessing my sinful choices to Him, praying with a friend, crying to Him. *Crying is always a good choice*. But whatever the mode, I worship. And He stirs. The fruit of His Spirit grows.

But here's the thing. We can be fruitful -- marked by love, joy, peace, patience, etc. -- regardless of circumstance. We can be fruitful in the midst of affliction because God makes us fruitful from the inside-out.

What "fruit" do you hope to see in your own land of affliction?

I want to encourage you to keep pressing into your God. The fruit of His Spirit is our inheritance in Christ, even in our land of affliction. *Lord God, may it be so.*

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week two :: day four

point to ponder
Fear is not my inheritance in Christ.

I know, I know. I always begin the same way. But we all need reminding to slow down and tune into our heart. So...pause. Ask Him to reveal any anxious places and then invite Him to speak. I'm praying that He tenderly unveils even more of Himself to us today.

Read Genesis 42:1-5 aloud.

Why does Jacob not send Benjamin with the rest of his sons? What does this possibly reveal about the state of Jacob's heart?

Jacob was afraid of losing what he loved most. So *it appears* he clung to Benjamin in efforts to control the outcome.

What do you most fear? What do you cling to in efforts to control the outcome?

Fear. Fear is real. We fear what we can't control. But here's a little secret. You ready? We're not the ones in control. We *want* to be in control. We like to *think* we're in control. But God alone reigns; and His job isn't up for grabs. *Thank You, Jesus.*

I've wrestled against different fears throughout my life. As a little girl I was afraid of dark rooms. As a grown woman I've been afraid of dark seasons that I can't seem to change. But fear is not our inheritance in Christ.

Fear shouts, "God, I don't trust You with this one. I don't trust that You love me enough to know what's best for me. I don't trust that You have my good in mind." And then fear swallows up our peace like an after-dinner mint. But our God says over and over to His children, "Fear not."

Read Psalm 118:1-9 aloud.

According to this passage, why do we need not fear?

Yes, fear will come. We're human. We're forgetful. We're short-sighted. But if we are in Christ, fear does not have to be our dwelling place. Nothing can touch our lives as God's children without being filtered through God's might and love. He can be trusted. He sees the beginning from the end and everything in between. And He's doing a love-thing in our lives, even if we can't feel it at the moment. *We'll talk more about fear in the weeks to come.*

Back to our Genesis text. Jacob lived in fear of losing what he cherished most. So he clung.

Read Genesis 42:6-11 aloud.

Why do you think Joseph was rough with his brothers and didn't immediately reveal his identity?

And did you catch it? One of Joseph's dreams was fulfilled. God knows the beginning from the end, forever and always.

Read Genesis 42:12-17 aloud.

What did Joseph want his brothers to do?

Describe Joseph's attitude at this point in the story.

Read Genesis 42:18-20 aloud.

Three days have passed between verses 17 and 18. **Describe how Joseph's attitude has changed.**

This is only speculation, but I would guess that Joseph spent those three days before his God. I sense a heart change. The initial hurt, shock, and gruffness that understandably arose in him at the first sight of his brothers has diminished. He appears softer in verse 18. He remembers his God.

I can get gruff. My sister never sold me to a foreign land -- *thank you, sister* -- but things can catch me off guard and old feelings can arise, leaving me rough and bothered. It's a natural, human response when something touches the scars left from wounds in our lives. But there's a place we can go for healing. For softening. We can go to our God. Just as the Psalmist does over and over, we honestly and vulnerably lay our emotions and struggles before the Lord in prayer. And then we wash our emotions with the truth of His character.

I think that's what Joseph must have done. I think Joseph allowed the Healer to remind him of His steadfast love and faithfulness. And it showed up in how he responded the second time to his brothers.

Share a time when something touched a tender scar in your own life and how you allowed God to heal your heart and change your perspective. *If you don't have an example, then write below what you can do the next time something touches a tender place in your soul so that bitterness doesn't overtake you.*

Life will happen. Things will touch us. People will remind us of past wounds. But God wants to meet us right there in the midst of the pain and minister His healing *if we will allow Him*.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week two :: day five

point to ponder

The Spirit of God intercedes for me according to the Father's good will.

Spend a couple of minutes preparing your heart to hear from your God. Right where you are -- physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually -- He is there.

Read Genesis 42:21-22 aloud.

Describe the mindset of the brothers in these two verses, specifically noting Reuben's attitude.

They all seemed to agree that this whole situation was judgment for what they did to Joseph. Reuben, however, started the blame-game. We, as people, like that game. It makes us feel better to pinpoint someone else as the "issue." But what if, *what if*, God *always* has something He wants to do in us, for our good and His glory, with every "issue" that arises.

Read Romans 8:26-30 aloud.

We don't have time to dive too deep into these life-giving verses, but I pray we grasp one vital truth. **According to verse 26, how do we know that "for those who love God all things work together for good"?**

The Spirit of God Himself intercedes for us *according to the will of God*. Yes, we're called to pray. Yes, we need constant conversation with God. *Need*. But in-between our short-sighted prayers and the omniscient, omnipotent God, His Spirit intercedes for our lives according to the good will of the Father. Therefore, it doesn't leave much room for blame and bitterness. Because God is working all things, *all things*, together for the good of those who love Him.

What does the truth of the Spirit's intercession do to your soul, especially in regard to that "issue" for which you're tempted to blame others?

Read Genesis 42:23-25 aloud.

What adjectives would you use to describe Joseph at this point?

Read Genesis 42:26-28 aloud.

To whom did they attribute this seeming judgment according to verse 28?

It appears that Joseph's brothers were bound up in guilt, which would hint to the fact that they hadn't experienced the forgiveness and grace of God through repentance. Instead of defining life through the lens of God's character, they defined God's character through the lens of their guilt. And it left them fearful and ashamed.

Every second of every day we get a choice. Like I mentioned last week, we can choose to begin with the character of God, defining the circumstances we face through the lens of His truth. Or we can begin with our ever-changing circumstances and unstable feelings, defining God through the lens of what we feel and see. Only one way brings the abundant life Christ promises.

For me, beginning with God means I start with who He is, "Lord, You love me with an everlasting, pursuing, costly love. And as Your child, nothing can touch me apart from Your love. I don't understand what you're doing, but I trust You. I *want* to trust You. Help my heart to begin with the truth of Your character rather than the fear that wants to creep up and lead me."

Think of your most challenging circumstance these days. **Which lens are you most likely to begin with regarding that situation?** *God or the feelings that situation brings?*

What words come out of your mouth when you choose to "begin with God" when evaluating that particular situation?

Whatever binds up our heart will determine the lens through which we evaluate life. If pride or anger binds us up, then we will see life through the lens of entitlement. If unforgiveness or

bitterness binds us up, then we will see life through the lens of condemnation. If guilt or shame binds us up, then we will see life through the lens of fear and judgment.

But there's another way. Jesus sets us free to look at life through the lens of God's character. We can begin with Him and trust that His extravagant love and grace hangs as a banner over us.

Read Genesis 42:29-38 aloud.

How would you describe Reuben at this point in the story?

Why do you think he offers his sons as "collateral"?

I sway between the hope that Reuben has changed -- determined to "make things right" -- to the sorrow that his love for others is so very small, "Kill my two sons if I don't come back." I'm not sure what was going on in his heart at this point. But regardless of his motive, it looks like another trip to Egypt is on the horizon.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

discuss week two

1. Can you identify any "shadows" of or similarities to the coming Christ from this week's text? If so, what are they?
2. In efforts to put on "Bible glasses," what verse(s) of Scripture could you commit to memory in the coming days? (day 1)
3. How has God uniquely gifted you? Why is it important to identify our individual gifts? *Remember, there's no room for pride. He is the Source of all gifts.* (day 2)
4. Share a time when God made you fruitful -- full of His Spirit -- even in a land of affliction. (day 3)
5. Think about your prayer life. Would you describe your prayers as more fear-based or faith-based? Fear-based means they are motivated by fear. Faith-based means they are founded on the faithfulness of God. Discuss how a faith-based prayer might sound. (day 4)
6. What most often binds up your heart in opposition to Jesus? (day 5)
7. What one thing do you want to remember from your time with the Lord in His Word this week?

week three :: day one

point to ponder

Peace. Jesus gives peace.

I pray that by this third week God is starting to uproot some of those heart struggles that try to steal peace and hope from you. Spend a couple minutes talking to the Lord -- praising Him and thanking Him that He meets us right where we are.

Read Genesis 43:1-10 aloud.

First of all let's think "timeframe." It would have taken about ten days to travel from Canaan to Egypt. And Judah says that they could have returned twice by now had they immediately gone back to Egypt with Benjamin. That means, at the very least, forty days have passed since they had first returned from Egypt. *This is a loosely, don't-quote-me, educated guess.*

I can only imagine the awkward silences around the homestead over those forty days. Jacob with his, "You ain't takin' my Benjamin," attitude. And everyone else with the, "We're literally going to starve to death," attitude. *Awkward.*

Finally Jacob agrees. They need food. And Judah tries to speak some wisdom into the situation.

Think back to the Judah we met in chapter 38. **How does Judah seem different in this text?**

If I were to describe Judah based solely on this text, he appears more selfless and compassionate. He's willing to take responsibility and bear any blame should something happen to Benjamin.

Read Genesis 43:11-15 aloud.

I hear Jacob's desperation in these verses. He's thinking of every possible gift he can send with his sons in hopes of winning over that "Egyptian man." Then it appears he tacks on a semi-desperate, "May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man..."

Granted, as I've said on other days, I'm totally speculating as to the state of his heart. Only God knows. But it does appear that prayer -- the deep communing, depending upon God kind-of-prayer -- wasn't Jacob's first choice. And because his relationship with God feels a bit cold to the reader, we can understand why fear seems to drive Jacob.

Have you ever walked through a season of prayerlessness? Describe how it affected you.

What can we do to restore a vibrant prayer life with God?

Back to the story. **Read Genesis 43:16-23 aloud.**

What does Joseph's steward say to Joseph's brothers in verse 23?

Again with the speculations, but this steward sounds like he believes in Joseph's God. I imagine that Joseph's faith has spread. Because that's what genuine faith does. It catches fire. Out of his faith, this steward pinpoints the struggle of their heart. *Fear*. "Peace to you," he says. Peace. Not fear.

Read John 14:27 aloud.

What does Jesus give?

I love Dr. Bill Bright's words, "Jesus gives us *peace with God* through the forgiveness of sin. He provides *peace of mind* through an unhindered relationship with Him. He shows us how to have *peace with man* by teaching us how to love others. When He is in control, no situation, heartache or sorrow can ever disturb that peace."

That kind of peace doesn't depend upon our circumstances. Stuff will happen. Fears will tempt our hearts. People will hurt us. Money will vanish. But Jesus remains the same yesterday, today, and forever. And His promise of peace doesn't depend upon the happenings of our world. It depends upon His presence in our lives.

Share a time when you experienced Divine peace in spite of circumstance.

Read Genesis 43:24-30 aloud.

And everyone who likes a good, ugly cry say, "Amen!" This is such a precious scene. Joseph hadn't seen his baby brother in years and his love completely overwhelmed him.

When was the last time that compassion and love for someone overwhelmed you?

May God grace us with tender hearts for the people He places in our path.

Read Genesis 43:31-34 aloud.

How does the text describe the brothers in verse 33?

Describe a time when God's unfolding, gracious plan amazed you.

It's good to remember God's past faithfulness and past grace in our lives. Because, as John Piper says, remembering God's *past* grace stirs up our faith for His *future* grace.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week three :: day two

point to ponder

Rend my heart.

Begin by preparing your heart to hear from God. Then, let's dive in.

Read Genesis 44:1-5 aloud.

What happens in this text?

Why do you think Joseph did this?

Did verse 5 catch you off-guard? It did me when I first read it. Divination? Really? To be honest, we don't know why Joseph used that word. But I would lean towards the notion that this is part of Joseph's ploy to test his brothers' hearts -- using the word "divination" to incite more fear in efforts to see their response. But again, I suppose.

Read Genesis 44:6-13 aloud.

How would you describe the brothers at this point?

People would often tear or "rend" their clothing as an expression of mourning or anguish. Reuben did it and then Jacob did it when they each found out about Joseph's demise. (see Genesis 37) Now the brothers, after realizing that the beloved Benjamin would be enslaved, tore their clothes in deep despair. We don't know if they were truly repentant at this point or if they were overwhelmed with the thought of having to tell Jacob of this travesty. But regardless, they tore their clothes as a physical expression.

Read Joel 2:12-13 aloud.

What does the Lord tell us to do?

Why would we do these things according to verse 13?

Rend our hearts, not our garments because God is grace. Let's follow this thought-trail.

God isn't looking first for the outward expressions of righteousness. He isn't looking for a bunch of good, Christian people who read their Bibles everyday or go on mission trips or feed the hungry if our hearts are far from Him. He desires a tender, contrite, humble heart. He desires *true* worshippers. The good deeds He sets aside for you and me to do will follow worship.

Read Deuteronomy 10:15-17 aloud.

What did God do according to verse 15?

What, therefore, are we to do according to verse 16?

Israelites performed circumcision as an outward sign of being one of God's children. But God wanted them to understand that His greatest concern wasn't their outward obedience. He has always concerned Himself with the meditations of our hearts.

Read Deuteronomy 30:6 aloud.

What precedes the ability to love the Lord purely and completely?

I love how He associates whether or not we love God with whether or not we truly live. In other words, if we don't love God with all our heart and all our soul, we're not truly living. He designed us to find life in loving Him. *Teach me to rend my heart, Lord God.*

Read Romans 2:28-29 aloud.

How does Paul describe a Jew?

God concerns Himself with the meditations of our hearts. Our heart reveals whom or what we worship. Our heart reveals whom or what we most love. The heart reveals the man (or woman).

So what does it mean to circumcise your heart? How does that look, practically speaking?

Take a few moments and really ask the Lord for wisdom with this answer.

Of the things you wrote above, what one thing do you want God to press deep into your spirit so that it becomes who you are?

I almost forgot what led us down this trail. Ah, yes. Joseph's brothers rending their clothes because Benjamin was accused of stealing.

Maybe they were truly sorrowful. Maybe they were grieved because of what they would have to tell their father. Maybe the guilt from their betrayal of Joseph finally overtook them. Whatever the reason, may we be people who "rend our hearts" before our good God.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week three :: day three

point to ponder

I crush my heart's idols by becoming enraptured with my God.

Identify anything entangling your heart other than your God today. Ask Him to help you release your hands from that situation and cling to Him, trusting that He remains in control.

Read Genesis 44:14-31 aloud.

This is a big chunk to read at once. Judah is mostly recapping their journeys and happenings. We again see Joseph's mention of divination in verse 15. I tend to lean toward the idea that he's continuing the ploy to test his brothers -- whether that's right or wrong I don't know.

But the main thing I want to dive into today is the warning we see in verse 30.

Write verse 30 below:

The ESV says, "his (Jacob's) life is bound up in the boy's life." Bound up. That word in the original language means "to tie, physically or mentally (in love), join together, knit."¹ In Judah's understanding, Jacob's physical and mental life is knit together with Benjamin's. If something happened to Benjamin, then Jacob could not survive. There's a word for that. We don't like it. But it's called "idolatry." *Bear with me. This is a hard word for us, especially if we're parents.*

Anything that we are "bound up" in other than God is an idol. Anything. Anyone. Any dream. Any hope. Any plan. *Anything* that we would say, "If this was taken away, I'm not sure I could even survive." That, my friend, could be our idol.

Granted, *obviously* we would be devastated should something horrific happen to the people we love. We would be crushed if our dreams fizzled into dust. Grief is real. It can be a pure and intimate process. But the beauty of faith is knowing that we *will* be devastated about certain losses in this broken world, while simultaneously believing that God will meet us right there and be grace and love and healing and hope.

So let's answer a tough question. Because even though this line of questioning pains us, crushing idols sets us free.

¹ Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, H7194.

Think about your life -- your relationships, your plans, your hopes, your stuff. **What "binds you up" or at least tempts you towards binding? What does your heart tell you that you could not survive without?** *Be honest with yourself. God has freedom for us.*

Read Psalm 16:4 aloud.

What multiplies when we run after another god?

Read Jonah 2:8 aloud.

What do we forsake when we cling to idols?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13-14 aloud.

What does Paul tell us to do?

How would it practically look to "flee from idolizing" that person or thing or dream you identified above?

Most of our idols arise out of fear. *I'm going to say that again.* Most of our idols arise out of fear. **So, what fear is at the root of your idol(s)?**

We crush our heart's idols -- purposefully and persistently -- by becoming enraptured with our God. We flee from idolatry by loosening our grip around that thing or person or dream that binds us up and grasping tightly to our Lord. His love is sufficient. His presence is fulfilling. His power is unmatched. His glory is eternal. His grace is breathtaking. His plans are good. *His plans are good.*

And before you start thinking that I'm preachin' to you, no ma'am (or sir). I'm preachin' to myself. My own heart's idols of days and years past try to raise their ugly heads all the time. And I've been known to grab onto them for a while, not remembering that they literally suck the life from me. I periodically get momentary amnesia, until God jolts me awake and shows me Himself yet again.

There are a thousand verses I could choose to point us to the beauty and glory and sufficiency of our God. But, alas, our time is short. So I chose one passage. And I want you to read this Psalm as a prayer of your heart. I pray that you (and I) would see afresh the beauty of the Lord. I pray we would seek His face with new fervor. I pray we would know His love deep down in the marrow of our bones. He's that good.

Read Psalm 27 aloud as a prayer to your God.

Which verse from that text spoke most loudly to your heart?

Back in the Genesis text that led us down this idolatrous trail, we learned that Jacob's life was bound up in Benjamin. May it be said of us that we are bound up in our God.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week three :: day four

point to ponder

The Lord God Almighty is completely and totally in control.

I always lead us to voice any anxious places in our spirit because anxiety births from fear. And if we're brutally honest, fear arises out of some twinge of unbelief. Not believing God is good. Not believing God is faithful. Not believing God is love. Not believing God will lead. So we voice those anxious places and we ask God to minister His character and promises to those folds of our heart.

In today's first reading, we're picking up at the end of Judah's plea with Joseph.

Read Genesis 44:32-34 aloud.

What is Judah willing to give in order for Benjamin to be released?

It appears that real change has happened in Judah's heart -- from self-seeking to self-sacrificing. And truly, that's something to celebrate.

I was a prodigal. I went from a self-seeking, insecure girl to a woman (mostly) surrendered to the love and will of God. *Granted, I kick and scream at times but I'm still in process, under grace.* Jesus changes us from the inside-out. And if we've walked with Him for a number of years, it's refreshing and empowering to see how far we've come. *And to know He isn't finished with us yet!*

Looking at your own journey with Jesus, what big changes has He made in you? Fill in the blanks below with some descriptive words.

From _____ To _____

From _____ To _____

From _____ To _____

We're all in process. All of us. And with each experience on our adventure with Him, He's actively shedding things in us that ultimately steal the abundant life He intends for His children. And that's definitely something to celebrate.

Read Genesis 45:1-3 aloud.

This scene chokes. me. up. Joseph couldn't hold his identity back any longer. He wept so loudly that the household of Pharaoh heard him. I tell you; there's something beautiful about giving into mercy.

Joseph could have kept up the charade. He could have kept his identity disguised. Part of him probably wanted to for vengeance sake. But grace and love overtook him and he rode their powerful waves. He revealed himself in love to his utterly shocked brothers.

Read Genesis 45:4-9 aloud.

Here it is. One of the main points of this entire study on Joseph's life. *I feel like we need a drumroll or something.*

Three times Joseph tells us something *vital*. **Who placed Joseph in Egypt?**

For the sake of our memories, **quickly summarize the things that Joseph had to walk through to get to this position in Egypt?**

Friend, God is sovereign. *Sovereign*. That means that He is on His throne and in complete control of every single thing that happens. Everything. *This is when our minds explode a little bit.* To help us even slightly grasp this theological complexity, let's look at what Scripture says.

Read Psalm 115:1-3 aloud.

What does God do according to verse 3?

Read Matthew 10:29-31 aloud.

As God's children, what reason does Jesus give for us not to live in fear?

God is in absolute control. *Amen. Hallelujah.* But have you seen the news lately? Have you ever read a history book? There's lots of jacked-up stuff that goes on in this broken world. So if I'm totally honest, knowing that God is sovereign doesn't comfort unless I also know the fulness of His character. When we marry the Lord God's absolute sovereignty with His perfect, pursuing,

immeasurable love -- expressed to us through Christ Jesus -- we have a solid, hopeful place upon which to stand.

Put another way, God's extravagant love defines and guides His sovereign rule. That doesn't mean bad stuff won't happen. Being sold to strangers in a foreign land must have straight up stunk for Joseph. Seeing the devastations plaguing this planet can tempt any sane person to near insanity. *But God.*

As I mentioned earlier in the study, we have to begin with God. To live in the hope and victory Christ died to give us, we have to begin with God and filter everything else through the lens of His character. We have to remember that this world is not our home. It's not. We're only sojourning here. And in the meantime, while we walk out our time here on planet earth, tough stuff will happen. But God is sovereign. He is love. He is working all things together for the good of those who love Him and for His great and awesome glory.

He can be trusted.

Read Psalm 62:5-8 aloud.

What do we learn about God from this text?

Years ago I heard John Piper say something in a sermon that has stuck with me. He said, "God does not play catch up with the enemy." The sovereign Lord God doesn't go behind Satan or sinful man cleaning up their messes. He's God. He's above and in control. He's able to work out His good will even in the midst of the enemy's divisive ploys and man's rebellious choices.

Joseph learned something vital to overcoming any "land of affliction." He didn't blame his brothers. He didn't allow his suffering to define him. He didn't fall into victim mentality. He learned that *ultimately* it was God who placed him in Egypt, not the sins of man. And if Joseph had been graced with God's eternal vantage point with all-knowledge and all-love and all-power, Joseph himself would have chosen this exact path. *Lord God, bury this truth deep in our souls.*

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week three :: day five

point to ponder

Faith revives my soul.

I pray that as we move through these passages, those anxious places in your soul are slowly losing ground. Spend a few minutes voicing any stubborn fears to your God. He's so faithful to meet us right where we are, ministering hope and life by the power of His Spirit.

Let's pick back up in the midst of Joseph's emotional reveal of his identity to his brothers.

Read Genesis 45:10-15 aloud.

I mean, can you even?! I picture every one of his brothers with that deer-in-headlights look. Like, "WHAT THE WHAT?!" **What do you think Joseph's brothers were thinking at this point?**

Spend a couple of minutes remembering a time when God overwhelmed you with something completely beyond your imagination. Then thank Him for that amazing gift. *We have to actively remember or we will naturally forget.*

Read Genesis 45:16-20 aloud.

The favor just keeps increasing! **Why do you think Pharaoh gave so generously?**

Our witness in this world has an effect. Granted, we may not be given the "fat of the land" but God's light shining through us changes people. It affects the world around us, even if we cannot see it in the moments.

Read Genesis 45:21-24 aloud.

I laughed out loud the first time I read verse 24. *Literally*. "Do not quarrel on the way." He sounds like me in my house to my kids all day every day. *Can't we all just get along?!* And this, my friends, is where we'll camp out for few minutes. Because quarreling is beating us/me up.

What do these texts teach us about quarreling?

James 4:1-3 ::

2 Timothy 2:22-26 ::

Proverbs 20:3 ::

Proverbs 21:19 ::

Why do we quarrel with people?

We as humans like to be right. And we like to make sure other people know we're "right." But what if being right wasn't our primary end goal? What if, instead of being right, we used our energies to spill Jesus' love onto the people around us? *This is me preachin' to myself.*

Think about someone in your life with whom you're most tempted to quarrel. **If you had to narrow it down, about what do you and that person most often quarrel?**

How might it look like in that specific relationship to use your energy to show love rather than be right the next time you're tempted to quarrel?

Joseph instructed, "Do not quarrel along the way." Jesus says the same to us, "Do not quarrel along the way." Instead, be filled with His love so that love and intercession pours out instead of demands and rights. I know. It's easier typed out on paper than lived out in real life. *I'm human. I struggle.* But God's Spirit empowers us to beautifully crucify the self-life, moment-by-moment. *Lord Jesus, help us.*

Read Genesis 45:25-28 aloud.

Why did Jacob's heart "go numb" or "faint" according to verse 26?

How was his soul revived?

Faith restored his soul. Faith that what they said was indeed true. Faith that his beloved son was alive. Faith restored him. Likewise, faith restores *our* souls. Believing God to be the God He has revealed Himself to be through Jesus, believing the promises He makes to His children, believing that we're secure in Him -- this faith restores our souls, come what may.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:6-7 aloud.

How do we walk through this earthly life?

Not by fear. Not by control. Not by worry. We walk one step in front of the other by faith -- believing who God is and what He says.

How can we stir up faith in our spirit to overcome fear or worry?

For me, being in community with a handful of other sisters in Christ proves key to my own walk of faith. I have a few dear friends that I can call or text at any time to unashamedly say, "Girlfriend, speak some truth into me because I'm being tempted with fear right now." And they kindly yet boldly remind me of what's true. They pray for and with me. They help carry my burdens and "fulfill the law of Christ." *What a gift.*

Faith changed Jacob's heart from being numb to being revived. Faith can do the same for you and me.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

discuss week three

1. Can you identify any "shadows" of or similarities to the coming Christ from this week's text? If so, what are they?
2. How do/could you keep a vibrant prayer life, practically speaking? (day 1)
3. The heart reveals the man (or woman). How would you describe your heart these days? (day 2)
4. What verse/passage of Scripture can you commit to memory to combat the fear that lies at the root of your most persistent idol? (day 3)
5. In what current situation or relationship do you need to remember God's sovereignty? Why? (day 4)
6. What is God calling you to believe about Him? (day 5)
7. What one thing do you want to remember from your time with the Lord in His Word this week?

week four :: day one

point to ponder

My feelings are real, but they aren't always reliable.

Begin by preparing your heart to hear from God.

Read Genesis 46:1-4 aloud.

What does God tell Israel, a.k.a. Jacob, *not* to do according to verse 3?

What reasons does God give him according to verse 3 and 4?

We've already talked a bit about fear. But whenever God instructs us not to fear, He always refers back to one primary truth meant to combat all fear: HE is with us. The God of the universe. The One who parted waters and made dry ground upon which people could cross. The One who multiplied a boy's lunch to feed thousands. The One who defeated the grave. The One who knows how many hairs you have on your head (and their natural color). The One who spoke worlds into existence. That God. He is with us *wherever* we go.

So why do you think we can get stuck in fear?

Feelings. We *feel* fear. We're human. And stuff can be straight-up scary when we can't see past the now moment. Feelings have this uncanny ability to convince us of their validity. So, we feel fear and we're prone to believe it.

Though feelings are absolutely real and need to be processed, they are not always reliable. Yes, God designed us to feel. Yes, circumstances justify many of our feelings. But feelings do not always provide a solid place upon which we can stand. They're fluid and can be unstable. They're a thermometer, more than a compass. They reveal our internal "temperature." They show us the places in our soul we need to address. But if we were to always follow where they demand we go, we may end up hurtin' people. *Just sayin'.*

We as humans will have fear arise. But fear is not meant to be our dwelling place because the God of the universe goes before us and behind us and has His mighty hand upon us.

Read Psalm 139:1-6 aloud.

What does God do and know according to these verses?

Fear not. In Christ, the Lord God is with you wherever you go.

In what situation in your own life does this truth bring the greatest comfort?

Read Genesis 46:5-27 aloud.

I know that reading all those names can tend to make our eyes cross. But I love that God knows all of us by name. **How many people came into Egypt with Jacob according to verse 26?**

Who was *not* counted in this number?

As a woman, I can read some of the ancient traditions and wrestle against feminist empowerment *feelings*. And I know I'm not alone. Feelings about ancient female views have become the rift that divides many a church. We can read lots and lots of books and lots and lots of opinions. And giving one page to this highly debated topic of biblical womanhood does not do it justice. But for a few minutes, let's begin with God -- not tradition or opinion or feelings -- to get a glimpse of a woman's worth in His eyes.

God created male and female in His image. *Both* were created in the image of God. And in His creating, God made male and female to picture something bigger than themselves. He designed male and female to be in a creative, covenant marriage meant to tangibly illustrate to the world an image of His Son Jesus and His sacrificial relationship to the church. Marriage, at its core, is meant to be evangelistic.

God designed male and female to have beautiful, selfless, purposeful, individual roles -- *both* for the good of the other. *Both* to glorify an awesome, gracious God. He designed man to sacrificially lead and love his bride. He designed woman to graciously help her husband and willingly follow his good lead. But sin happened. The fall happened. And our hearts darkened. Sin tainted marriage.

God didn't instruct men to have multiple wives. He didn't create divorce. His original plan didn't include abuse and dominance and passivity and sexual distortion. Sin did that. Our fallen fleshly desires did that. Satan did that.

It wasn't until Jesus came that we get a glimpse into the fuller picture of God's heart for women. And for our purposes today, I just want to *briefly* mention two key truths with regard to biblical womanhood.

Read Galatians 3:27-28 aloud.

In whom is there no distinction according to verse 28?

This text refers to salvation and adoption as sons and daughters. *All* can come to Christ. *All* can be baptized into Him. *All* receive salvation by faith. *All* can become adopted as a child of the Father. *All* in Christ receive the gift of His Spirit. *All*. Salvation is for all.

Read Ephesians 5:1, 22-33 aloud.

What does Paul say that marriage represents?

At its core, God designed marriage to be evangelistic -- a tangible picture of Christ and the church. Yes, sin taints it. Yes, our flesh distorts it. Yes, we grow selfish and demand our "rights." But because of God's intended design, there remains beautiful, freeing, distinct roles for men and women in the context of marriage. *Lord, may we see with Your eyes.*

Men and women have equal value in God's sight. He loves and gifts and pursues and blesses and uses *both* men and women by the power of His Spirit. At the same time, God designed marriage to picture something bigger than ourselves. Meaning that the Father created different roles for men and women to carry out in marriage -- *both* meant to reflect different aspects of the love and grace and glory of Jesus.

God loves women. He designed women with precious tenderness. He created with the intent for husbands to sacrificially care for women. But sin distorted all of us, both in ancient times and today. My prayer is that you and I as women would know our value before a holy God.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week four :: day two

point to ponder

My Good Shepherd provides *everything* I need.

Start today by praising God for who He is and thanking Him for what He's done in your life. Be specific. He's worthy of all honor.

Read Genesis 46:28 aloud.

Who led the way to Goshen?

Read Genesis 46:29-30 aloud.

After not seeing one another for such a long period of time, I would guess that *many* thoughts and emotions arose with this reunion. From your experience with this unfolding story over these last few weeks, **how would you say that their time apart has changed Jacob and Joseph individually?**

Jacob ::

Joseph ::

Until now it appears to us as the readers that Jacob, in many ways, inwardly shut down after Joseph's seeming death. Whereas, Joseph focused on God's sovereign faithfulness, trusting that He was doing a new, good thing even in his "land of affliction." I'm sure the effects of those soul-stances added many emotional layers to this encounter. But regardless, both are overjoyed to see one another.

Read Genesis 46:31-34 aloud.

What was Joseph's family's occupation?

How did the Egyptian's view this occupation?

The word "abomination" literally means "something disgusting (morally)."² To the Egyptians, shepherding fell into a class in which no upstanding citizen would willingly join, *especially* the land's second in command. Isn't that just like God? He always chooses the simple things to

² Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, H8441.

confound the wise. He always chooses what the world calls "foolish" through which to reveal His glory.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 aloud.

Why does God choose what is low and weak according to worldly standards through which to reveal Himself?

What did Christ Jesus become for us according to verse 30?

Why did He become that for us according to verse 31?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 aloud.

In the previous chapter Paul made that point that if boasting in his human accomplishments were the end goal, then he could boast. And boast big. But then he concludes that boasting in our human accomplishments *or even in our righteous sufferings* is absolute nothingness.

In what does Paul say he will boast according to verse 11?

Why?

The only One worthy of our boasting is Christ Jesus. He alone deserves acclaim. He alone strengthens. He alone forgives. He alone sits on the throne.

God makes His power perfect in our weaknesses. He chooses the foolish things of the world through which to reveal His glory. He even did it through the image of a shepherd, something the world would call an abominable occupation.

Read John 10:7-18 aloud.

Jesus is speaking in this text. How does He describe Himself?

A shepherd knows his sheep. He cares for his sheep. He protects his sheep. He feeds his sheep. He leads his sheep. And though sheep aren't the smartest creatures on the planet, they know their shepherd's voice and find good pasture when they follow him.

Jesus is our *good* shepherd. Good. He faithfully leads His own to green grass. He doesn't leave or forsake us as we walk this treacherous land. He picks us up when we're lame.

What do you need your Good Shepherd to be for you these days? i.e. Guide, Protector, Provider, etc.

Whatever you need Him to be, He is. And the really beautiful thing is that He knows what you and I need Him to be more than we do. So even when it feels as if we need Him to be and do something different than what we perceive Him being and doing, even then He's faithfully, actively enough.

Those Egyptians may have defined shepherding as an abomination. But our God saw it differently. He saw it as yet another opportunity to confound the wise. He is our good Shepherd, faithful to the end.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week four :: day three

point to ponder

Life and death are in the power of the word.

Begin today by being real and vulnerable before the Lord, voicing anything that's trying to steal the peace Christ died to give you. Then ask Him to faithfully speak to you today by His Spirit through His Word.

Read Genesis 47:1-6 aloud.

If you had to give a title to this short section, what would you call it?

I think I would call it, "And more grace." God just keeps on lavishing His grace onto His people *even through* this foreign land and leader.

This is the point in the story when I start to ask God, "Why? Why did you do it this way?" I mean, He could have provided for His people in a thousand other ways. He could have. He could have kept the famine from devouring the land. He could have *not* given Joseph those original dreams. He could have done it totally differently. But He didn't. Because He's always doing thousands of things all the time. Things we cannot see or comprehend.

Singer-songwriter Christa Wells says it powerfully, beautifully, and poetically in her song "A Thousand Things." She sings,

A thousand things are happening in this one thing. Like a thousand fields nourished by a single drop of rain. So honey, wrap yourself in promise while you wait the morning light. A thousand things are happening tonight.

What situation or relationship in your life tempts you to ask God why?

So here's a hard question. What if, *what if*, our response to that unwanted "land of affliction" could actually affect the people around us, for God's glory and our good and also for the good of those beside us. Like Pharaoh and his household and the land of Egypt, in Joseph's case. *What if*.

God isn't intimidated with our whys. And it isn't wrong to go down the "why" path for a while with Him. But maybe "why" isn't the most productive question. Maybe the more productive question is, "OK my faithful, sovereign God, now what?"

If you were to ask God, "now what?" regarding the situation or relationship you mentioned above, what do you think He would say? *Make sure to filter what you think He would say through His Word. He never contradicts Himself.*

Back to this wild grace given to Joseph's family. **Read Genesis 47:7 aloud.**

Next week we will read how Jacob blessed his sons. But today we read that Jacob "blessed" Pharaoh. That means that Jacob spoke a blessing over Pharaoh's life. Throughout the Bible we see God's people "speaking a blessing" or "giving a blessing" to others. And honestly, I think it's a powerful gift that we as modern day followers of Jesus forget to give to others.

Think back to creation. God *spoke* the world into existence. He spoke and it became. And God created us in His image. Granted, we cannot speak physical worlds into existence. But Scripture clearly teaches that there's great power in the spoken word.

Read the following Proverbs and note what they teach us about words:

Proverbs 12:25 ::

Proverbs 16:24 ::

Proverbs 18:21 ::

Words have power. They can stir up life in another, or they can bring about death to a soul. *Lord, help us.* Jacob spoke a blessing over Pharaoh. He most likely spoke God's blessing over Pharaoh for his kindness and mercy to Jacob's family.

So often we're prone to think that God's blessing can be measured with numbers or money or scales, but knowing what you know about God, **what would you say is the greatest blessing?**

As far as I understand our gracious God, I would say that the greatest blessing is to know and love Him. *He* designed us. *He* knows us perfectly. *He* sees the beginning from the end. *He* raises the dead. *He* gives sight to the blind. *He* speaks and stuff happens. *He* calms storms. *He* loves fully and completely and mercifully. *He* meets all needs. Therefore, the greatest blessing we as mere humans could receive in this short blip of a life is to know and love Him. May we speak *that* blessing over those around us.

Read Genesis 47:8-12 aloud.

How does Jacob describe the days of his life according to verse 9?

I love that he uses the word "sojourning" or "pilgrimage" as in "the years of my sojourning." Because, truthfully, this world is not our ultimate home. As the writer of Hebrews describes, we as people of faith are "strangers and exiles on the earth." (Hebrews 11:13) In Christ, we're heading to our ultimate home with our Maker. Our ultimate home *is* our Maker.

It's so easy to get stuck down here on this planet. It's easy to focus our attention on this physical world and its physical problems, when ultimately *He* is our home and we're just passing through this physical place. May we keep an eternal perspective.

Joseph's family now resides in Egypt, as shepherds, and will take charge of Pharaoh's livestock. God has graciously provided.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week four :: day four

point to ponder

I need an arsenal of truths stored up to fend off the enemy's lies.

I know I sound like a broken record, but we're forgetful and rushed and slow to pause. *I know, because I'm human like you.* So as a gentle reminder, prepare your heart to hear from your God. Then let's dive into His Word expecting Him to speak.

Read Genesis 47:13-26 aloud.

Note the progression of what the people gave to Pharaoh:

1. _____ (verse 14)
2. _____ (verse 16)
3. _____ and _____ (verse 19)
4. _____ (verse 24)

Whose land was the only land not sold to Pharaoh according to verse 22 and 26?

What drove the Egyptians to eventually give everything, including themselves, to Pharaoh?

The people were understandably desperate, weren't they? Desperate for food. Desperate for life. Desperate for hope. And desperation *strongly* moves us as humans. Granted, the Egyptians didn't have many options. But in their desperation they gave everything away. *Everything*. And if I'm honest, I've seen it happen in my own life -- desperation leading me to give everything away. But if we chase after any desperation other than a desperation for intimacy with our God, our pursuits will lead us into ugly areas of bondage.

Complete this sentence (not with a churchy answer but with the answer that reveals the place where your flesh can be most tempted to wander):

I'm desperate for/to be _____
_____.

Why do you think you struggle with this particular desperation?

What thoughts most often arise when this particular desperation knocks on your heart's door?

If we're going to experience real freedom in Christ, we have to identify any roots of unbelief that tempt our flesh. We need to know which desperations we're most prone to fall into and the thoughts that accompany those desperations. We need to know so we're ready to battle them with truth. Otherwise, life will knock us down.

Personally, my flesh can fall into the lie that I'm desperate for earthly love and acceptance. But I have to remember the height and depth and width and sufficiency of *God's* love. I need Scripture that details the power and extent of His love in my "arsenal" so that when the lies arise, I'm ready to replace them with truth.

What truths can you have in your "arsenal" so that you're ready to battle any lies that arise regarding your own desperation?

Read Genesis 47:27-28 aloud.

The Egyptians lost everything during the time of famine. **But how do these verses describe the situation for God's people?**

In a foreign land, during a severe famine, God's people *gained* possessions. They increased. They were fruitful. They multiplied. Against all human odds, they succeeded. Only God can do that. *Fruitful affliction.*

Share a time when you *should* have been in despair because of your circumstances, but instead you experienced the blessing of God.

What does "fruitful affliction" teach us about our God?

Read Genesis 47:29-31 aloud.

I know. It seems a bit odd. But this is how they would take oaths between one another. We first see this "hand under the thigh" practice back in Genesis 24 when Abraham had his servant make an oath. It was a physical expression of a heart-felt promise.

What does Jacob ask Joseph to do?

Our text for today ends with Jacob bowing before Joseph. We're not told why but it's possible that this fulfills Joseph's boyhood dream. *God forever knows the beginning from the end and everything in between.*

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week four :: day five

point to ponder
We find rest in God's faithfulness.

I pray today that God graciously speaks to you as only He can. He knows exactly where you are. He knows exactly how you struggle. He knows exactly what you fear. I pray He overwhelms you with Himself.

Read Genesis 48:1 aloud.

Let's remind ourselves of why Joseph chose these names for his sons:

Manasseh :: "For God has made me _____ all my
hardship and all my father's house." (Genesis 41:51)

Ephraim :: "For God has made me _____ in the land
of my _____." (Genesis 41:52)

Read Genesis 48:2-4 aloud.

In this text, Jacob refers to something that happened to him years before.

Read Genesis 28:1-4, 13-15 aloud.

What did the Lord promise Jacob?

God didn't make these promises because of Jacob's faithfulness. Actually Jacob had deceived his brother, Esau, and his father, Isaac, in order to receive his brother's birthright and blessing. Yet in God's grace He chose to reveal His redemptive plan through the lineage of sinful man. He promised to bless. And the God of the universe always keeps His promises.

Read Genesis 48:5-6 aloud.

Jacob declared that Joseph's two sons would no longer be considered grandsons. Rather, he promoted them to full heir status. Ultimately, this meant that he gave Joseph "firstborn" status, now destined to receive all the benefits that come with it. (see 1 Chronicles 5:1-2)

Read Genesis 48:7-10 aloud.

What does Jacob want to do to Joseph's sons?

Read Genesis 48:11-14 aloud.

What does Jacob do in this text?

Old habits die hard, don't they? I'm not saying that God *didn't* lead Jacob to give the firstborn blessing to the second born. The text doesn't tell us. But looking at Jacob's upbringing and his deception of his own father to receive the firstborn blessing, plus his favoritism of Joseph, it *appears* that Jacob tends to take matters in his own hands.

I know I've been tough on Jacob. All we can do is speculate about his motives based upon his choices. But regardless of his heart, there's a lesson for us.

We as humans are quick to insist on the reigns of control. Or at least the reigns of *seeming* control. But there's beautiful freedom in resting. Resting in God's faithfulness. Resting in His plans. Resting in His sovereignty. Resting in His love. Instead of manipulating outcomes, we find rest as we follow the path *He* lays before us by faith.

What situation in your life are you tempted to "manipulate" or control in order for everything to turn out like it *should* be?

What would it look like in your everyday life to rest in God's faithfulness regarding that situation? What would you do or *not* do?

We don't know why Jacob chose to change Joseph's sons' status to heirs. We don't know why he chose to change their birthright order. But he did. And God knew he would. And God graciously, sovereignly worked through Jacob's choices, *just as He does ours*.

Read Genesis 48:15-16 aloud.

Jacob spoke blessing over Joseph and his sons. A blessing calling forth God's covering.

On day three of this week we looked at the power of the spoken word. We looked at how speaking words of truth into someone's day can stir up life and faith and hope. So we're going to take a minute to write out a blessing over someone in our life.

As a friend, you may want to write out a blessing for someone dear to your heart. As a parent, you may want to bless your child(ren). As a spouse, you may want to speak blessing over your husband or wife. **Take a minute to decide whom you would like to bless.**

Once you have someone in mind, **spend a couple of minutes praying for that person.** What is that person struggling to believe about God? How is that person wrestling with their faith? What God-given gifts do you see in that person? After you pray for him or her, **read Philippians 1:3-11 and make Paul's words into declarations for your loved one.**

_____ (insert name) _____, may you...

God will...

Once you have the blessing written, I would encourage you to speak it to him/her. Speak it as a blessing over his or her life. I promise, it will empower. *Even if you may feel a little weird doing it.*

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

discuss week four

1. Can you identify any "shadows" of or similarities to the coming Christ from this week's text? If so, what are they?
2. How have you struggled to accept or live out biblical womanhood? What does God say to you about that particular struggle? (day 1)
3. How has Jesus shown Himself to be a Good Shepherd in your life? (day 2)
4. Practically speaking, how do we maintain an eternal perspective? (day 3)
5. How can desperation sometimes lead your heart astray? What truths are you going to keep in your "arsenal" of truth? (day 4)
6. How have you wrestled for the reigns of control in your own life? How do we "rest" in God's plans while also actively walking forward in faith?
7. What one thing do you want to remember from your time with the Lord in His Word this week?

week five :: day one

point to ponder

The same God who holds the world together makes His home in me.

As usual, before we dive into the text, spend a couple of minutes with the Lord. He's willing and gracious to speak to His children.

Read Genesis 48:17-18 aloud.

We're picking up in the middle of Jacob's blessing over Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Describe how Joseph felt about Jacob's swap of the birthright.

Have you ever disagreed with the choices of someone in authority over you? I know I have. And maybe Joseph *didn't* wrestle against feelings of disrespect, but it's worth the mention.

It's challenging to respect someone when we don't agree with what they're doing, especially if that someone is older or in a place of leadership over us. And though there's a time and place for exerting Godly insight and warning, I've learned that it's wise to err on the side of loving submission. At least until we've had time to process our position before the Lord.

Read Ephesians 4:25-5:2 aloud.

Which of Paul's instructions most strongly resonates with you?

Ultimately, how are we to walk according to verse 2?

God hasn't created us to be doormats upon which someone keeps wiping their dirty boots. But we as humans can be so quick to defend our position and stand up for our supposed rights, that love flies right out the window. *Love.*

People will do things and say things with which we don't agree. It's going to happen. *Probably later today.* But we've not been left on this earth to pound people with the "I'm right, you're wrong" hammer. We're here to love. Sometimes love is roses and candy and quietness.

Sometimes it's a gentle but firm, "Enough." Sometimes it's open arms. Sometimes it's a line drawn in the sand. But regardless of how it looks, love draws others to Jesus.

What might love tangibly look like when we don't agree with the decisions of someone in authority over us?

Read Genesis 48:19-20 aloud.

In spite of Joseph's displeasure, Jacob blessed Ephraim with the blessing of the firstborn.

Read Psalm 78:67-72 aloud.

Whom did God reject as lineage to the chosen king of Israel?

Through whose lineage did God choose a king instead?

We don't know why God chose to bring David and then His Son Jesus into the world through the line of Judah. We don't know. We only know that He's grace. He's love. He's omniscient. He knows what and why He does what He does. And He can be fully trusted.

What in your life doesn't make much sense from your vantage point?

Read Job 38:1-11 aloud.

This is only the start of the Lord God's address to Job. Job -- who for the previous thirty-five chapters grappled with the despair that came with his intense suffering -- now heard from the God of the universe.

How would you summarize these 11 verses?

The God who holds the world together with His breath faithfully parents you and me. He sees things we cannot see. He knows things we cannot know. He plans things we cannot comprehend. The God who made heaven and earth lovingly holds our fleeting days in His mighty hands. He can be fully trusted, even when life makes no sense from our earthly point of view.

I don't understand why God chose to bring Jesus through the lineage of Judah instead of Joseph. But I don't need to know because I trust that His ways are perfect and good, always marked with His immeasurable love.

Read Genesis 48:21-22 aloud.

What does Jacob declare about God in verse 21?

Jacob spoke these words specifically to Joseph. But in Christ we can be sure that God will be with us wherever we go. Whatever seasons, whatever triumphs, whatever losses, whatever disappointments, the Lord God goes with us. But not only beside us, He goes with us *in* us. By His Spirit, He makes His home *in* us. (see 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 and Ephesians 1:14)

We live and breathe and walk around on planet Earth as a temple of the Holy Spirit of God. If we are in Christ, then His Spirit comes to indwell us. We will never go anywhere that He doesn't also go. *A sobering reminder.*

God will go with us -- just as He went with Joseph, just as He went with Judah, just as He went with David. In Christ, we're His. He promises to never leave or forsake.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week five :: day two

point to ponder
Jesus sits secure on His throne.

Lay those anxious places at His feet. Then ask Him to graciously wash them with the truth of His Word. *Speak Lord, we're listening.*

Read Genesis 49:1-2 aloud.

The vast majority of this chapter details the blessings that Jacob speaks over his sons.

Read Genesis 49:3-4 aloud.

How does Jacob describe Reuben?

Read Genesis 35:22 aloud.

Yep. There's Reuben's sin, all laid out for us in Bible-form. And to be honest, I feel a bit sorry for the guy. I would hate it if all my sin -- especially the shameful choices of my prodigal years -- were written in Scripture for all of humanity to read forever. Because the truth is, I'm just as sin-stained as Reuben, *except for the mercy of Christ.*

Read Colossians 2:6-15 aloud.

Describe us when we are *in Christ*.

Jesus saves us from *us*. He cleanses us from our sin. He delivers us from the wrath we deserve. He lavishes upon us the riches of His glory by grace through faith. *It's absolutely amazing.*

Back to Jacob's sons. **Read Genesis 49:5-7 aloud.**

What main issue does Jacob identify in Simeon and Levi?

Read the following verses and note what God says about anger:

Proverbs 14:29 ::

Proverbs 15:18 ::

Proverbs 29:22 ::

Ecclesiastes 7:9 ::

Galatians 5:19-21 ::

James 1:19-20 ::

I suppose there's such a thing as righteous anger -- anger over sin and hypocrisy. But as humans, righteous anger proves difficult to muster because we're so full of self. And because our flesh puts up such a fight, wisdom instructs us to stay on-guard to anger.

What most often stirs up your anger?

What is at the root of that anger? Or, what is it that you most desire when that anger flares?

Often our seeming need for control causes our anger to flare. People aren't doing what we want so our anger flares. Children are embarrassing us in public so our anger flares. Drivers aren't turning when we think they should turn so our anger flares. But situations and people don't *make* us angry, they simply reveal what lies dormant in our soul.

This may be a place in which you need to linger with the Lord. Anger may be an area in which you need accountability and prayer. We all have our stuff. We all have our issues. We all need one another to help us along in this faith walk. I would encourage you to enlist a faithful friend who could spur you along on the road to freedom from a quick temper.

Read Genesis 49:8-12 aloud.

These words get to me. What a legacy! What a calling! What a promise!

Note below some of the aspects of Jacob's blessing over Judah.

Put a star beside the ones that point to the coming Christ.

Numerous passages fill Scripture pointing to the "Lion of Judah" -- the Savior who will come through Judah's lineage. But let's go to the end of the Bible for a beautifully glorious truth.

Read Revelation 5:1-5, 9-14 aloud.

Is that not glorious?! The Lion of the tribe of Judah is Jesus!

Describe Jesus as seen in this Revelation text.

Jesus reigns. Jesus conquered death. Jesus defeated sin. Jesus is worthy of all praise. Jesus ransomed people for God from every tribe and tongue. Jesus makes us priests to our God. Jesus is the One worthy of all worship continually. Jesus -- the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

That same Jesus whom Jacob prophesied sees you and sees me. He's the One who knows your name. He's the One who won't leave or forsake you. He's the One who ransomed you to God. He's the King of all kings and Lord of all lords. And He's for you, not against you. I'm thinking we need to bust out with an, "Amen! And amen." *Thank You, Jesus.*

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week five :: day three

point to ponder

I've been given a ministry -- the ministry of reconciliation.

I pray that the beauty and grace and love of Christ allows no room in your soul for any anxious place today. In Jesus name.

Read Genesis 49:13-15 aloud.

Zebulun follows Judah -- *a tough act to follow* -- with a word regarding the land his descendants will inhabit. Then we read Jacob's words to Issachar.

How does Jacob describe Issachar and his descendants?

Read Genesis 49:16-18 aloud.

How does Jacob describe Dan and his descendants?

Jacob sees things in his sons -- positives and negatives -- that will bring both blessing and destruction respectively. In these words he speaks over his sons, he's calling out those positives and negatives. Which is why verse 18 blesses me, especially as a parent. It's as if the possible disaster sends him into a plea for God's intervention.

Write verse 18 below:

The ESV uses the word "wait." I *wait* for your salvation. That word *wait* however isn't a passive waiting. It's an active binding. It means to bind together with an expectant attitude. To say "I wait for the Lord" in this manner means that we bind ourselves to Him in hope. We press into Him for soul-healing -- healing for ourselves, our kids, our marriages, our churches, our cities, our nations. We actively bind to Him expecting Him to move, in His perfect way and His perfect time.

Read Isaiah 40:30-31 aloud.

The word wait in verse 31 is the exact same Hebrew word found in our Genesis text. So according to Isaiah, **what happens when we bind ourselves to God with an expectant attitude, believing that He will sufficiently meet all our needs?**

Jacob declared that his soul waited on the Lord's salvation. He saw the weaknesses and sin in his children's lives and something in him knew that the Lord God was their only hope. His salvation alone redeems the broken places.

In what area of your life do you most need to "wait" upon the Lord?

Read Genesis 49:19-21 aloud.

Gad's descendants will become warriors. Asher will yield a prosperous line. And Naphtali sounds like a tribe of kind peacemakers. *I'd want to be friends with them.*

Read Genesis 49:22-26 aloud.

Who kept Joseph strong and fruitful according to verse 24?

What does God do for His children according to verse 25?

I love that word "help." It means to surround.³ The Lord God Almighty surrounds His own. Think about your own life, especially the area you mentioned above. Right now, in Christ, the Almighty surrounds you.

Read Genesis 49:27 aloud.

Oh, the baby of the family. *Lord, help us all.* **How does Jacob describe Benjamin?**

³ Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, H5826.

I mentioned earlier that in these texts Jacob calls forth the things he already sees in his children. He, as their parent, has observed their ways and in turn declares their destiny. But one word of encouragement for those who don't particularly love their natural bent or those who don't want their past mistakes to define their future. In Christ, you and I are new creations!

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 aloud.

What does it mean to be "reconciled"?

In Christ, you and I are made right with God. Once we were estranged, but now we're home. Once we were enemies, but now we're daughters and sons. Once we were deserving of His judgment, but now our debt has been paid. We're reconciled to God *through* Christ.

Once reconciled, what ministry does God give us in this world?

Wherever God has us in this life -- our home, our job, our marriage, our friendships -- *there* He calls us to the ministry of reconciliation. To those people that our hands and words touch every day, we're given the ministry of reconciliation.

In the day-to-day, how have you seen God calling others to Himself through you? What are you inspired to do as you remember that you are in ministry everywhere you go?

The old no longer defines us. Jesus defines us. And in Him, the old is gone and the new has come. *Hallelujah.*

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week five :: day four

point to ponder

To live is Christ, to die is "far better."

Begin by uncovering anything trying to hide in your heart -- anything trying to steal your peace. Then remind your soul of the height and depth and weight of the love of God in Christ. I pray that His love seeps down deep within us today.

Read Genesis 49:28 aloud.

As a recap, according to Jacob's blessings, **which two sons (two tribes) stand out as being the leaders among the brothers?**

Yesterday I mentioned that Jacob called out the qualities he saw in his sons as determiners of their future. And we looked at how in Christ we're made new; the old is gone. Our old sin no longer defines us in Christ. However, God created each of us with particular "bends." When Christ redeems us, He also redeems our personalities.

Some of us are naturally funnier. Some of us are naturally bolder. Some of us are quieter. Some of us are gentler. Some of us are artsier. Some of us are riskier. When we're reconciled to God through Christ, He redeems our souls and works *through* our given personalities. He's a creative God who enjoys variety.

What adjectives characterize your God-given personality?

Don't wish away the personality He has given you. Our good God plans to use it for His great glory.

Read Genesis 49:29-32 aloud.

Read Genesis 23:1-9, 20 aloud.

Where does Jacob want to be buried?

Read Genesis 49:33 aloud.

I recently walked through the death of a friend. And though I had walked through the death of my dad when I was 19 years old, this journey with my friend through cancer caused different *stuff* to arise in me. It caused me to ask some tough questions about death and revealed some doubts lingering around in my soul. And God graciously, lovingly met with me.

Read Philippians 1:18-26 aloud.

Paul penned these words from prison to the church at Philippi. And I can just feel the passion rising from its pages.

To what/whom does Paul attribute his eventual deliverance according to verse 19?

Who will be honored in and through Paul regardless of his circumstance according to verse 20?

What does Paul give as the benefit for living on in the flesh according to verse 22?

What is his greatest desire according to 23?

How does Paul describe dying and being with Christ according to verse 23?

God used this very text to encourage me through the doubts and fears that arose in my recent journey with my friend. He didn't use it as an external reminder -- something I read and knew in my head. He made it a deep internal knowing. He pressed it way down that to be with Christ is "far better." Yes, there could have been more fruit from my friend's life if she had stayed here. But in God's sovereign, loving plans, the time came for her to go home to Him. And she is in the "far better" place. I needed to know that. I needed Him to stir up a rejoicing and confidence. And maybe you do too.

How have you wrestled against fears associated with death?

If we're in Christ, then we're heading to a far better place. When God calls us home, we'll step into a joy-reality that we can't even fathom from down here on planet earth. But if we still walk on this planet, then it means He has fruitful things for us to do. He has people for us to pour into. He has places for us to go. He has books for us to write. He has songs for us to compose. He has art for us to craft. All as a means of leading others to their Savior -- the ministry of reconciliation.

You're obviously still living and breathing on planet earth, *I'm super observant*, so **what has God called you to do while you're still here? To whom has He called you to minister?**

We all periodically lose sight of why we're here. **Can you identify anything in your life that may be stealing some of your time or focus? If so, what is it?**

We're only given one chance to live this life. One blip on the screen. And I don't know about you, but I don't want to waste these short hours. I want to pour myself completely out for the glory of God, because I've tasted and seen that He's *that* good. He's *that* worthy. He's *that* amazing.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week five :: day five

point to ponder

The question isn't *if* I'm leaving a legacy. The question is *what kind* of legacy am I leaving.

Open your time today by praising our God. Begin with the phrase "God you are...", then fill in the blank with words that describe our awesome God. Meditating on His character changes our perspective.

Read Genesis 50:1-3 aloud.

How many days did the Egyptians devote to mourning for Jacob?

The Egyptians held Joseph in high regard, evidenced with many days of weeping.

Read Genesis 50:4-11 aloud.

What other acts of the Egyptians evidence their high regard for Joseph?

How did the Canaanites respond to the "grievous mourning"?

The intensity of their mourning strikes me. It reveals the great impact that Joseph had on the Egyptian people. It gives us a glimpse into his legacy.

I've thought about my own legacy in recent years, wondering what imprint I'm leaving on the people around me. And honestly, it's convicting. I'm naturally bent to be task-oriented. I love to-do lists. I love checking things off. I love seeing stuff accomplished. And being productive isn't a bad thing. It can be good, as long as it's not to the neglect or despair of the hearts around me.

The wrestling against my natural tendency shows up most in my parenting. Three kids in under four years means I dove head-first into the deep parenting waters of no sleep and lots of dirty...everything -- toilets, dishes, bottoms, faces, clothes. *A zone of defeat for the naturally task-oriented.*

But over the years God has slowly chipped away at my natural bent and opened my eyes to their souls. He's allowed me the grace to see that my legacy will outlive me. I can either focus my energies first and foremost on tasks or on hearts. The choice is mine, day-in and day-out. Store up treasures in heaven by planting truths in the hearts around me or treasures on earth by checking everything off my list. Miraculously, when I begin with hearts, the stuff that *God* has for me to do gets accomplished in His perfect time.

Read the following texts and note what they teach us about leaving a faithful, godly legacy:

Deuteronomy 6:5-7 ::

Psalms 78:4 ::

Matthew 6:19-21 ::

2 Peter 1:12-15 ::

What kind of legacy do you want to leave behind you? *Don't rush. Spend a few minutes processing with the Lord.*

Whom do you most often pour into?

Practically speaking, what do you (or could you) do to purposefully build the legacy you desire to leave?

Back to Joseph. **Read Genesis 50:12-14 aloud.**

Joseph did as his father requested. He and his brothers buried Jacob in the promised land. Then they returned to Egypt.

We'll pause here until next week when we'll read the final portion of Joseph's story. I pray that our God continues to weave the truths of His character and faithfulness into the fabric of our souls.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

discuss week five

1. Can you identify any "shadows" of or similarities to the coming Christ from this week's text? If so, what are they?
2. What does it encourage you to do *or not do* as you remember that the Spirit of God indwells you? (day 1)
3. Practically speaking, how do we stay on-guard against a quick temper? (day 2)
4. In which of your relationships do you need to consistently remember that you are "in ministry" -- the ministry of reconciliation? (day 3)
5. Discuss some things that tend to steal your focus if you don't draw some boundary lines, i.e. social media, television, etc. How can we guard our time to help us stay focused on the ministry God has given us? (day 4)
6. What are some things you do to leave a godly legacy? Or what do you want to start doing? (day 5)
7. What one thing do you want to remember from your time with the Lord in His Word this week?

week six :: day one

point to ponder

Unforgiveness in my soul steals the life Jesus died to give me.

Our final week together. The last chapter of Genesis. May God, by His gracious Spirit, continue to speak to us, intimately and specifically.

Read Genesis 50:15 aloud.

What do Joseph's brothers fear?

Why do you think they are so afraid? *Because of Joseph's actions or their internal shame?*

When we haven't experienced the grace and forgiveness of God, we carry the burden of shame and judgment on our shoulders. And it's heavy. Joseph's brothers lived in fear because they hadn't fully encountered the mercy of God.

Read Psalm 130 aloud.

The psalmist penned these words *before* Jesus came to earth. Even in the Old Testament, forgiveness came from God to those who repented of their sin.

What does the Psalmist teach us about the Lord in this text? *Go line by line and note any truths you discover.*

What does the Psalmist *do* (and plead for others to do) according to this text?

We, on this side of Jesus' coming, have a fuller picture of the forgiveness of sin. Once we come to faith in Christ, our sin is blotted out. All of it -- past, present, and future. We stand before the Father clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. Yes, we will still sin, *every day*. But sin no longer calls us its slave. It no longer determines our destiny. Jesus makes us new, holy, accepted, and clean. It's a radically scandalous exchange -- our sin for His righteousness. He alone is our hope.

Joseph's brothers feared because they lived their lives waiting for judgment to fall. But Joseph showed them the mercy of the Father.

Read Genesis 50:16-17 aloud.

What did Joseph do when he heard their pleas?

Why do you think he did this? What do you think he felt?

I would guess that Joseph had a mixture of emotion. But the primary feeling I would place upon him, based upon what we've seen in his life thus far, would be sorrow over their "stuckness." *Not a word*. His brothers were stuck. They were stuck in their past sin. They were stuck in their condemnation. They were stuck in their fear. And I think it grieved Joseph.

Personally, I can identify with "stuckness." I've been there. Stuck in the past. Stuck in a sinful pattern. Stuck in bitterness, hurt, or anger. Just stuck. *I've officially said "stuck" way too many times because now it's starting to sound weird.*

How about you? Where is your heart stuck? What can't you seem to get over or past?

The only way I know to get unstuck is twofold. One, we have to identify the junk in our heart from which we can't seem to move forward. *You hopefully did that above*. Two, we have to wrestle those thought patterns to places of truth.

Often times we get stuck because of hurt -- hurt we have experienced or hurt we have caused. Either way, one necessary first step towards healing is the same. *Forgiveness*. Forgiving others as Christ forgives us or receiving the forgiveness that Christ offers.

Read Colossians 3:12-13 aloud.

In Christ, who are we according to this text?

It's because of *who* we are in Christ that we're empowered to do what Paul tells us to do in this text. **What does he tell us to do? Or in other words, because of who we are, what actions will flow from our identity in Christ?**

How has the Lord forgiven you?

Forgiving others is hard. And depending on the situation, it may also be constant. But bitterness, condemnation, anger, and contempt steal life from us. They make our faces all mean-like and give us wrinkles. *Reason enough to get unstuck.* Forgiveness sets us free.

When those old feelings about old hurts creep in -- *which they will* -- we have to remain diligent to take our thoughts captive to truth. Some days we may need reminding of God's grace every minute of the day. Other days we may lie down at night and realize we never thought once about those past pains. But regardless of the frequency, we need the height and depth and width of Christ's forgiveness on the tip of our tongue, ready to forgive again and again those who hurt us. *For freedom sake.*⁴

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

⁴ I talk at length about forgiveness in my book *To Walk or Stay: Trusting God through Shattered Hopes and Suffocating Fears*.

week six :: day two

point to ponder

As His child, God *means* things for my ultimate good.

Begin your time by laying your heart, honestly and openly, before the Lord. Then ask Him to mount up guard around you with truth today.

Read Genesis 50:18-19 aloud.

We're moving slowly because these last few verses of this Genesis account are dense with truth.

What reason does Joseph give his brothers for them to *not* be afraid?

Joseph knew that God had placed him in Egypt. Therefore, his brothers needn't fear. We've talked about fear a number of times throughout our study. But we forget truth, don't we. Fear cripples us at times. It lies. It hollers. It points. And ultimately it shouts, "God cannot be trusted with this one!"

Think about a recurring fear that you wrestle against. Write it below.

I fear...

Dig deep and identify what that fear ultimately says about God.

It's humbling, isn't it. It's humbling to see that our fears shout lies about God. Because the truth is that God loves us. He can be trusted. He is sufficient. He is *for* us. He is *with* us. He is on time.

Read Genesis 50:20 aloud.

If there is a single verse in this entire study that sums everything up, this is that verse. **Write verse 20 below:**

Joseph repeats the truth that he already declared back in chapter 45. He's not at the mercy of the enemy's schemes. His situation was not governed by chance or sin. He is not only where God wants him; God meant Joseph's journey for good!

What situation or relationship in your life doesn't feel "good"?

Maybe sickness has touched you. Maybe sin has touched you. Maybe evil has touched you. *But God!* In Christ, we are not at the mercy of the enemy's evil plots. The Lord God Almighty governs our lives. He means things for the good of His people and the glory due His name. He can be fully and completely trusted.

We're going to take the rest of today and all of tomorrow's lesson to dive into this profound, perspective-changing truth -- that God is in control and He's actively, lovingly doing good things in His children's lives. So hang on. I pray God absolutely rocks our little worlds.

Read Job 1:1-5 aloud.

List four adjectives to describe Job.

Read Job 1:6-12 aloud.

Who suggested the sifting of Job?

Honestly, I'm so glad that God included the book of Job in the Bible. Mainly because it crushes the box into which we try to neatly stuff the Almighty God.

God allowed Job to be sifted by Satan. Knowing the beginning from the end, God allowed it. And if you know the end of the story, He allowed it in order to draw Job into an even deeper, more intimate understanding of God's character. He allowed it in love.

But we don't like that definition of "good." To me, "good" *feels* good. It's pretty and happy and usually comes with a grande Starbucks vanilla latte. Good should feel...good. But God's definition of good isn't that simple. God defines good from an eternal perspective. He defines good as holy and pure. Which is why He allows things into our lives that chip away at the things that ultimately steal from us.

In Joseph's case, God meant his journey for good. The slavery didn't feel good. The prison didn't feel good. But it did a good thing in Joseph and it did a good thing for God's people. It broke Joseph. It humbled him. His God-ordained journey molded him into an honorable man of God. And that, my friends, is the absolute greatest good we could ever experience in this short life -- clay in the Potter's hands.

I know, *I know*, that some things don't feel good. Some things feel really really really (infinity) bad. But what if wishing away the hard stuff meant wishing away the woman or man God intends for us to be. A woman (or man) free and full in Him.

That kind of thinking changes me. It makes me sigh a little but it also makes me gear up for the journey. Yes, it may be hard at times -- this world and the people in it are just as broken as you and me. But hard doesn't mean bad. God means things for the good of His children. Victory comes when we press into Him in the midst of the messy places.

Think about that thing you mentioned above that doesn't feel "good." Pray this prayer below by filling in the blank with that situation or relationship.

Father, I am Yours by faith in Jesus. You are *for* me, not against me. You are good. Your plans for my life are good. The enemy may have intended _____ to harm me, but You *meant* it for my good. My eternal good. And for the good of those to whom I'm called to minister. I don't know what exactly You are doing, but again today I declare that I trust You. If this is what I need to walk through in order to experience a more intimate walk with You, then so be it. Empower me. Strengthen me. Help me. Speak to me. Use me as a vessel for Your glory. In Jesus name. Amen.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week six :: day three

point to ponder

Christ equips me to resist the lies of the enemy.

Ask God to continue to confirm in the very fibers of your soul that He *means* things for the good of His children. For *your* good. In Jesus name.

Yesterday we read from Job's account in efforts to further understand what Joseph meant when he told his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." (Genesis 50:20)

I want us to press into that truth a little further. Because for us to see fruit in our "lands of affliction," we have to know *that we know* this foundational truth about our God. And once we know it, we have to continually remind our hearts. Because the enemy is relentless.

Read 1 Peter 5:8-11 aloud.

According to verse 8, what does the enemy want to do to us if we are in Christ?

Satan isn't nice. He doesn't see our tears and feel compassion. He's mean. And he's ruthless. But we learned yesterday that he has to go *through* the Father's love to get to us as God's children. And when God allows him to touch our lives, He has eternal-good reasons for His allowance.

What does Peter tell us to do when the enemy attacks?

Girlfriend! (Or guyfriend!) If we are in Christ, sealed with the Holy Spirit of God, we're empowered to resist the enemy. Resist. Oppose. Stand firm. Because the One in us is greater and more powerful than the one in this world.⁵ *This (again) is me preachin' to myself.*

Read John 8:42-44 aloud.

How does Jesus describe the enemy of God?

⁵ See 1 John 4:4.

Practically speaking, based upon Jesus' words, how does the enemy most often attack us?

The enemy continually lies to us. *Continually*. And we resist or oppose him by putting on our armor in Christ and wielding the sword God gives us. *I'm still preachin' to myself with this one.*

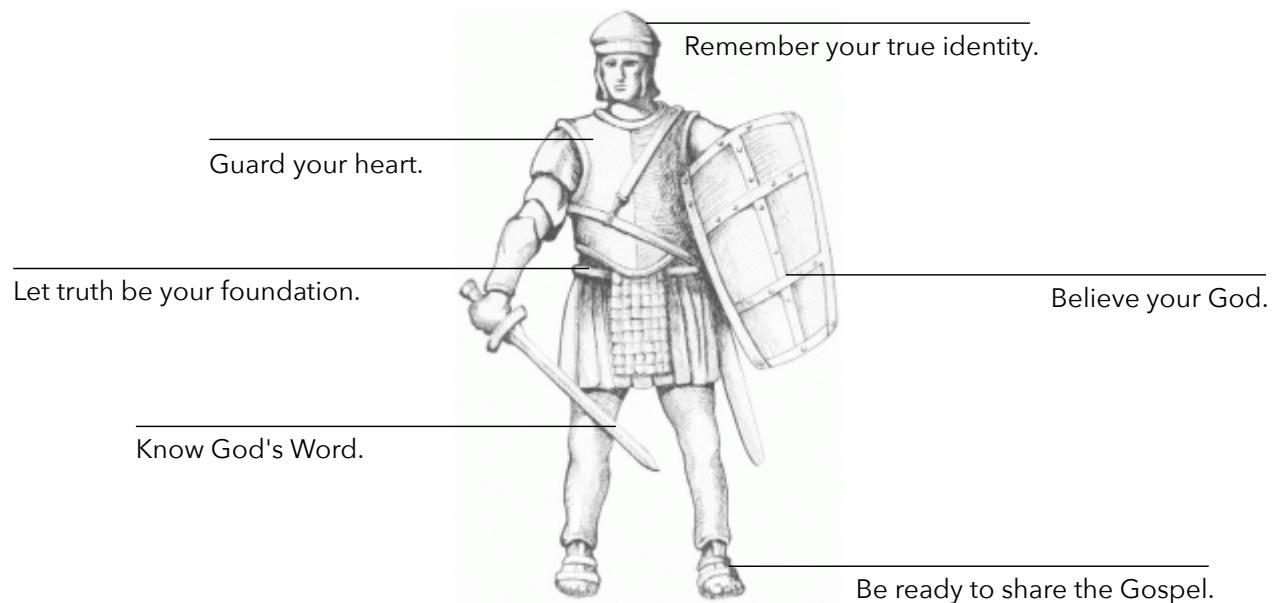
Read Ephesians 6:10-18 aloud.

What does the armor of God empower us to do according to verse 11?

Against whom are we ultimately wrestling according to verse 12?

It *feels* like we're wrestling against flesh and blood. It *feels* like we're wrestling against our spouse or our child or our parent or our boss. But ultimately we as Christ-followers wrestle against Satan and all his demon cohorts. Therefore, we take up the whole armor of God.

Now for a third grade assignment. *Humor me*. Label this warrior with the pieces of God's armor.



It's time to hike up our cute little skirts (assuming you wear skirts), and give the enemy a *real* fight. No more wimping out under the weight of lies. No more living in places of defeat, forgetting that God is good and His love motivates His allowances into our lives. The enemy lies, but God's Word stands as a secure foundation.

We're equipped to fight against the enemy's lies. In Christ, His Spirit empowers us to bring our thoughts captive to what's true. And the truth is, if we have been adopted as a child of God through faith in Jesus, then what the enemy means for evil, God in His sovereign love means for good.

But it gets even better. It's not an egocentric goodness. God doesn't just do good through us and in us individually; He does good through us and in us *for the good of many*.

Back in Genesis, Joseph says, "...God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive." Obviously Joseph was specifically referring to the famine and literal aliveness. But for our purposes we need to see the bigger picture, that God redeems our own brokenness for the good of many.

To put it simply, the people God intends for you and me to minister may *need* to see God's testimony in us through that affliction. Or in other words, that affliction that we're quick to wish away may be the necessary road for the eternal impact God intends to have through us.

List some people that your life currently touches on a regular basis.

Those people are only a few of the "many" God means to touch through you. Those people watch your response to life. They watch how you handle affliction. They watch how you trust your God. And they're affected.

We may not understand why God does what He does. We may not even agree with His methods or allowances. But He *can* be trusted. The enemy will lie, continually, but in Christ we're equipped to resist him, standing firm in our faith.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week six :: day four

point to ponder
God faithfully keeps His promises.

Thank the Lord that He will graciously speak to you today. Then expect that He will.

Read Genesis 50:21 aloud.

What did Joseph do with his words?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 aloud.

How does Paul describe God according to verse 3?

Why does God comfort us?

The original meaning of the word "comfort" from this text absolutely blesses me. It means "to call near." The God of the universe calls us near. *Little 'ol us. Little 'ol me.* In all our affliction, all our sorrow, all our struggles, He calls us near in order to heal our souls. He calls us near because in His presence we find peace. He calls us near to fill us full *so that* His comfort will overflow onto others.

Share a time when God comforted you in a season of affliction.

Share a time when you comforted someone else out of the comfort you received. *Maybe someone in your life needs comforting. Consider writing them a note of encouragement.*

Joseph comforted his brothers with the comfort he had received from his God. He spoke kindly to them, lifting them out of their fear.

Read Genesis 50:22-26 aloud.

As I write this study, these final verses fall heavy on me. Like I need to stop for a minute and pay due respect. I've grown attached to Joseph's story. *To Joseph*. And I feel a bit sad to read of his death. Not sad for him; the Lord blessed his life and he's now with his God. But sad that our journey with him is coming to an end.

What does Joseph tell his brothers about God in verse 24?

Read Genesis 17:1-8 aloud.

What promises did God make to Abraham?

Our God is a promise-keeping God. If He says it, then we can consider it done.

Read Titus 1:1-4 aloud.

What does Paul teach us about God in the introduction of his letter to Titus?

What did God promise before the ages began according to verse 2?

Then verse 3 uses a phrase we don't particularly like as humans: "at the proper time." God makes promises. And He will absolutely fulfill His promises...*at the proper time*.

God made promises to Abraham that His people would one day inherit the land of Canaan. But it would be hundreds of years before God would fulfill that promise. Likewise, God promises many things to us as His children, but often the fruition of those promises takes time.

Which promises has God made to you as His child that haven't yet fully come to fruition?
Think scripturally.

We as humans will break our promises. We will. But God never breaks a promise. He remains faithful even when we're faithless.

Read Hebrews 10:19-25, 11:1 aloud.

What is faith?

How can we encourage one another to walk by faith?

God promised that kings would come from Abraham's line. He promised that His people would one day inhabit the land of Canaan. He promised and Joseph believed, even though he could not yet see the promises fulfilled. *We walk by faith and not by sight.*

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

week six :: day five

point to ponder

I may be afflicted, but in Christ I will not be destroyed.

Wow! Our final day together. May our God use His Word to refresh your soul today.

Read Exodus 1:1-7 aloud.

Do you read these verses with a new understanding -- as if you personally know the people mentioned? I know I do. Like we're BFFs...*but not*. **Describe God's people according to verse 7.**

Read Exodus 1:8-12 aloud.

What do we learn about the new king of Egypt according to verse 8?

Gasp. The travesty. He didn't know Joseph so he dealt harshly with the Israelites out of fear.

Even under the king's oppression, how are God's people described according to verse 12?

This reminds me of Paul's words to the church at Corinth. **Read 2 Corinthians 4:6-10 aloud.**

What "treasure" is Paul talking about?

When we were still enemies of God, the Father sent His Son to this earth to be light in the darkness. He sent His Son to die for my sin and your sin. He sent His Son to redeem His people from impending judgment. Jesus took the wrath that we deserve and gave us His righteousness in return. He then places in all who believe a foretaste of what's to come. He sends His Spirit to indwell all who come to faith in Christ.

The same Spirit that raised up Jesus out of that grave. The same Spirit that made blind eyes see and deaf ears hear. The same Spirit that hovered over the earth before God spoke worlds into existence. The same Spirit comes to make His home in us.

Therefore...

What *won't* happen to us in Christ as we live in the knowledge of the glory of God according to verses 8-9?

Affliction of every kind *will* come, but in Jesus we will not be crushed. The actions of others and the circumstances God allows *will* perplex us, but we will not be driven to despair. Followers of Jesus *will* be persecuted for righteousness sake, but God will never forsake His own. Unexpected calls and unwanted hurts *will* strike us down to the dirt, but we will not be destroyed. Because of Jesus!

He makes us strong. He gives us hope. He intercedes on our behalf. He calls us His own. He makes us fruitful in the land of our affliction. He is worthy to be praised, now and forevermore.

Let's close with prayer:

Father, You alone are the God who can make me fruitful in the land of my affliction. Where I've let hopelessness settle in, Father, make hope arise. Where I've let bitterness take root, Lord Jesus, replace it with joy. Where I've let hardness mark my heart, God Almighty, breathe new life. In Christ, Your mighty Spirit lives within me. Make me fruitful even now, even here, in the land of my affliction. Amen.

The one thing from today that I want to meditate upon:

discuss week six

1. Can you identify any "shadows" of or similarities to the coming Christ from this week's text? If so, what are they?
2. Share a time when unforgiveness or bitterness left you "stuck." How did you get "unstuck"? (day 1)
3. Identify a situation or relationship in your life that doesn't "feel good." Then, testify about some "good" that God has brought from that difficulty. (day 2)
4. With which lies does the enemy most often tempt you? What truths can you meditate upon so as to fight off the enemy when he comes? (day 3)
5. What scriptural promise are you clinging to by faith these days? (day 4)
6. What fruit are you seeing in the midst of your "land of affliction"? (day 5)
7. What one thing do you want to remember from your time with the Lord in His Word this week?