Main Point: God calls believers to forgive others, as God in Christ forgave them.

Hook:

New Year’s Eve 1999, across the globe, people were anticipating the fallout with bated breath. A 1998 article described the problem:

"The bug at the center of the Year 2000 mess is fairly simple. In what’s proving to be a ludicrously shortsighted shortcut, many system programmers set aside only two digits to denote the year in dates, as in 06/15/98 rather than 06/15/1998. Trouble is, when the computer’s clock strikes 2000, the math can get screwy. Date-based equations like 98 – 97 = 1 become 00 – 97 = -97. That can prompt some computers to do the wrong thing and stop others from doing anything at all."¹

In the face of such potential catastrophe, America took action. American businesses and the government spent an approximate $100 billion preparing for the Y2K problem (that’s $153 billion today with inflation).²

Q: Did you prepare for Y2K? Were you personally concerned that there would be significant complications attached to the Y2K problem?
Q: Do you remember waking up on January 1, 2000 and learning that everything was okay? How did you feel?

Q: Have there been times in your life when you waited for disaster and it never arrived? How did the anticipation affect your thinking and actions?
Week 15: *Genesis 50*

**Book**

**Main Point:** God calls believers to forgive others, as God in Christ forgave them.

**Text Summary:** When Jacob died, Joseph had him embalmed, according to Egyptian custom. Then, after 70 days of mourning, Joseph, his brothers, all the servants of Pharaoh’s household, all the elders of Joseph’s household and all the elders of Egypt went to Canaan to bury Jacob with his fathers. When they entered the land of Canaan, they mourned him for seven days. After they had buried Jacob, they all returned to Egypt. When they returned to Egypt, Joseph’s brothers were afraid he would finally take revenge on them now that Jacob was dead. They told Joseph that Jacob had told them to tell Joseph to forgive them. Joseph wept and told them not to be afraid, that he believed that even though they had meant evil against him, God had meant it for good. Then he promised to provide for them and their families. Joseph lived to be 110 years old and saw his great-great-grandchildren. When he did, Joseph promised that God would bring the family of Jacob out of Egypt to the land of Canaan as He had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Then he made them swear to carry his bones to Canaan when they went. They embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

*Genesis 50:1-14 [Read]*

**Talking Point 1:** When observing the traditions and customs of the culture in which a believer lives, one must remain faithful to God.

**Q:** Why did Jacob want to be buried in Canaan?

**Q:** How did Joseph show respect to the Egyptians while still honoring his father’s wishes about his burial?

Again Joseph weeps several times in this passage (vv. 1, 3, 10, 17). By his weeping, we see Joseph’s great love for his father (vv. 1, 3, 10) and his deep emotions regarding his brothers and all that has happened between them (vv. 17). Nothing about this chapter is casual for Joseph. It is all deeply emotional for him.

Jacob’s father had an honorable funeral and burial process, worthy of Egyptian royalty. Embalming was the standard practice in Egypt for all who could afford it, but it was not the norm for Israelites. It is only found in this passage and only for Jacob and Joseph.

Jacob and Joseph were embalmed as a nod to the Egyptian custom, but it also preserved their bodies for later burial in Canaan. The 70 days included the 40-day embalming period (v. 3) plus
the traditional 30 day mourning period (Deut. 34:8). All of the Egyptians mourned for Jacob, not just his family, because he was Joseph’s father. Because Joseph was second in command to Pharaoh, they treated it like a death in the royal family. This is why the funeral procession was so large and noble (vv. 7–8).iii

Yet, even with all of Joseph’s power and authority, honor and nobility, he still asked Pharaoh’s permission to go bury his father in Canaan (vv. 4–6). The Cave of Machpelah (v. 5) was located in Hebron, where Abraham had lived for much of his time in Canaan (23:1–9). Through this entire burial ritual, Joseph showed honor to his father and his God without showing disrespect to Pharaoh and Egyptian customs and traditions.

The threshing floor of Atad (v. 10) is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture; no one is exactly sure where it is. This threshing floor was along the way, and the whole large company stopped and mourned there for seven days (v. 10). Threshing floors were on high ground so that the chaff could blow away from the wheat during threshing.iv The Egyptians were very loud mourners and, being on high ground, their voices would have carried even further, so it is no surprise that the locals noticed their loud lamentations (vv. 10–11). Threshing floors were places associated with business, law and life, so it would have been an appropriate place to mourn a tribal leader (Num. 15:20; Ruth 3; 2 Sam. 24:16–24).v

This passage shows a beautiful blend of Egyptian and Israelite burial customs. Joseph embraces the Egyptian customs of embalming and loud lamentations while still honoring his father and God by burying Jacob in Canaan, in the family tomb. Joseph shows honor both to his father and to Pharaoh. He includes the Egyptians and his family together in the funeral procession. He shows respect for the Egyptian culture while still honoring his father’s wishes for his burial.

This is an interesting picture of what it means to be in the world but not of the world. Just as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Esther and the other Israelite exiles would later live in Babylon, Joseph had to live as a man of God in a foreign land—a land with different traditions and customs and even different gods. He had to figure out where to draw the lines—where was it OK to go along with Egyptian culture and customs, and where would doing so be unfaithful to God? For example, Daniel and his friends were willing to work in the king’s government, build his kingdom, and show him the respect he deserved as a human authority. But they would not eat his choice foods or pray to him or bow down to his statue—they would not treat him as divine or worship his gods. Joseph didn’t just throw out all Egyptian customs because they weren’t part of the Israelite tradition. He blended the two together, as long as the Egyptian traditions did not involve worship of a false god.

Today we, too, are living in a foreign land. We are citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20), but we are living here on this earth as ambassadors of Christ to this world (2 Cor. 5:20). We are called to
respect and submit to our earthly leaders, while remaining faithful to God (Rom. 13:1–7). As Jeremiah wrote to the exiles, we are to seek the welfare of the city in which we live (Jer. 29:7). We are not to be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2), but we are to be a light to the world (Matt. 5:16). We must also learn how to live in this world, but not of this world. Where to draw the line—how we can participate in the culture around us yet remain faithful to God?

Q: Give some examples of what it means to be in the world, but not of the world.

Q: In what ways could participating in the culture pull us away from faithfulness to God?

Q: In what ways can we use our culture to spread the Gospel? To build the kingdom of God?

Q: How can we show respect and honor to our human leaders (at our jobs, in our community, and in our country), yet still maintain our ultimate allegiance to God?

Genesis 50:15-21 [READ]

Talking Point 2: Believers must not seek revenge for a wrong suffered.

Q: Why do the brothers think Joseph will change his mind now and seek revenge?

Q: How does love and trust of God give Joseph a greater capacity to forgive?

Here the story brings us full circle, back to the overall theme of the story. Joseph repeats what he told his brothers when they first discovered he was the grand vizier of Egypt (Gen. 45:5–7) that God meant this all for good, to keep many people alive. He has to repeat it because the brothers think that now that their father is dead, Joseph will enact his revenge. They even fabricate a story that their father had asked them to tell Joseph to forgive them, hoping his loyalty to their father would last beyond his death (v. 17). If Jacob really had said that, there is no reason he wouldn’t have said it to Joseph directly; he had plenty of time with him at his deathbed (Gen. 48–49). Even though the brothers had shown repentance for their actions, they still aren’t above lying to protect themselves.

Again, the brothers fall down before Joseph and claim to be his servants, fulfilling Joseph’s dreams from the beginning of the story (37:5–10). Their actions cause Joseph to weep again (v. 17). He is saddened that they would think he hadn’t really forgiven them. That he had only been waiting until their father died to exact his revenge.

It had been 17 years since he had forgiven them. Seventeen years of living in peace as a family. Did they really think that he had been secretly harboring anger and hatred all of that time? Does that mean they thought the last 17 years was all a lie from Joseph’s perspective? Or only out of love for their father? But Joseph’s forgiveness isn’t based on his love for their father, but
his love for God (v. 19). He didn’t forgive them out of obligation, but out of true, agape, God-like love. His forgiveness of them was authentic, and it broke his heart that they didn’t see that.

Joseph doesn’t excuse their behavior. He is clear that they meant what they did for evil. But he forgives their behavior with a quite profound statement – “Am I in the place of God?” Only God is the judge of mankind (James 4:12) Our role as humans is to forgive one another as God has forgiven us (Matt. 6:14–15; Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:32). Like the parable with the two servants of the king, we cannot accept the great forgiveness of God and then not forgive the much-smaller-by-comparison sins that others have committed against us (Matt. 18:21–35).

Q: Why does vengeance belong to God? Why is it best left up to God?

Q: Why is it good for us to forgive those who have hurt us? How can it help us heal? (Note: Forgiveness doesn’t always mean letting someone back in your life.)

Q: Read Matthew 18:21–35. Why should we forgive other people?

Talking Point 3: God doesn’t cause or delight in suffering but He uses it as a tool for our good.

Q: Looking back now on the whole story of Joseph, how would you describe what happened to him? Where and how do you see God in his story?

Q: Where else do you see the theme “God meant it for good” in the Bible?

God doesn’t cause evil or delight in evil or suffering, but He uses it as a tool for our good. When we understand that, we can have this incredible peace in trusting God, both for our eternal security and for this life—knowing that He will work out all things, even our sufferings, for good (Gen. 50:20). This is peace; this is joy; this is hope.

This is how Paul can have contentment in all circumstances, whether in plenty or in hunger, abundance or need (Phil. 4:10–13). This is how James can tell his people to consider it all joy when they face trials of various kinds (James 1:2). It is how Paul can tell the Romans that they rejoice in their sufferings (Rom. 5:3–5). Because suffering produces endurance—being able to handle more. Endurance produces character—the word in Greek translates as “proven character” —character that has been forged through trials and difficulties. And that character produces hope – the kind of confident hope we have because we have been through trials and seen God’s goodness through it. This hope is not based on statistics or odds, but of knowing God’s character—that He is good and that He loves us. So He can only do good in our lives. He will work all of this out for good.
This hope in the Lord comes from the character that comes through persevering through trials. Confident hope, real hope, not pie-in-the-sky wishing for something, cannot come without suffering. You cannot get to character without suffering. Just as you can’t get strong physical muscles without going through the tough work of exercising (“no pain, no gain!”). Helen Keller, who had extreme physical difficulties, but an incredible attitude about how they shaped her into who she was, said, “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”

Joseph learned so much through the sufferings in his life. He learned humility, trust in God, and patience. He learned how to effectively run a household and then a prison, which prepared him to lead a whole country. He learned to stand up for what is right no matter the consequences to himself. So God used all of his sufferings for good for the nation of Israel—to keep many people alive. But He also used it all for good in Joseph’s life: to make him more like Jesus, to mold him and shape him into the man of faith, love and forgiveness that he becomes.

Q: What sufferings have you been through in your life and how have they shaped you? What have they taught you? How have you grown through them?

Q: Looking back, what good came out of the difficult times in your life, not just good for yourself, but for others, too?

Genesis 50:22-26 [Read]
Talking Point 4: We are just one very small part in God’s overall story, His plan of salvation for the world.

Q: Why does Genesis focus back on the bigger picture of God’s covenant and His plan here at the end of Joseph’s story?

Q: How does Joseph remind them of God’s promises to them?

Joseph had 13 chapters of the Bible dedicated to his life—more than any other person in Genesis and more than most persons in the Bible. Yet, his name is not listed among the patriarchs. God is “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” Joseph’s name isn’t even the name of one of the 12 tribes—his sons received those titles. He isn’t in the line of David, who was of course, in the line of Jesus—that honor goes to Judah. Joseph accomplished amazing things, but he was just one small part of a huge story of God’s covenant with mankind.

We see here at the end of his story that Joseph lives a good long life, 110 years, which is more than twice the lifespan of the average Egyptian at this time (40–50 years). We really don’t
hear anything else about the last 60 years of Joseph’s life, after his father died. But it can be assumed that he continued to rule in high leadership with Pharaoh, because it is not until a new king “who did not know Joseph” arose over Egypt that the Israelites became enslaved (Ex. 1:8). Joseph lived so long that he is able to meet his great-great-grandchildren (v. 23). But when he was about to die, Joseph’s words to his family weren’t about his wife and children or anything personal to himself. His words were about the covenant promises of God to the nation. He prophesied to the people what God had already told Abraham, that He would take them out of Egypt and to the Promised Land (Gen. 15:13–16).

Joseph’s words were about the promises of God because he saw the big picture. Just as he did when he talked to his brothers about their treatment of him. If Joseph had been focused on himself and his own personal life, he probably would have sought revenge on his brothers. He certainly could have, with his position of power and authority. But he was looking at the big picture—what God was doing for the whole nation of Israel and the other nations through his life. Joseph was more focused on God’s kingdom than his own life (Matt. 6:33). Though his story was significant and we can learn a lot from it, he was just one small part in the big picture of God’s redemptive history: how God will rescue mankind from sin. Genesis means “beginning”—this is still only the beginning of the story. There is a whole lot more to come.

This ending of the book of Genesis sets up the next big part of the story—the Exodus from Egypt. Joseph even predicted it would happen (v. 24). So, in this conclusion, we see that this story of one man is really the story of a whole nation, and the story of all of mankind. At several points throughout the story, Genesis has reminded us that this story is not just about Joseph, it’s about all of Israel, and about God’s blessing the world through Israel.

Modern culture can lend itself to be egocentric. That kind of thinking can lead to our making our lives all about ourselves and the amazing things we are doing for Jesus, instead of really being about God and His will. Joseph did huge, amazing things for God. But his life was just a small part of God’s plan. It’s God’s plan, not ours. It’s God’s kingdom, not ours.

Q: How does it change your thoughts about your life to think of your life as a part of God’s overall plan?

Q: How is God calling you to take your part in Christ’s body? To use your unique gifts, skills and passions to serve His kingdom? In big ways or small ways?

Q: How can your ordinary life become extraordinary in Christ?
**Week 15: Genesis 50**

**Took**

**Main Point: God calls believers to forgive others, as God in Christ forgave them.**

Teacher: Present a baked good to the class. Challenge them to guess how many ingredients went into the product, then share with them the actual number. Challenge them to consider all of the elements that were required; many ingredients that went into this treat would not be good on their own. However, when blended together, and heat is applied, the sweet and the not-so-sweet pieces come together to create something that is good and useful. As we come to the completion of our series on the life of Joseph, may we remember that God truly can and does use all of the elements in our lives for good. He is turning our lives, whether viewed as extraordinary or ordinary to the world, into beautiful offerings to Him.

**CHALLENGES:**

**THINK: How can I be faithful?** – What does it look like for you personally to be in the world but not of it? How can you remain faithful to God while still participating in your culture and your community? How is God calling you to seek the welfare of your city? What lines is God calling you to draw, to remain faithful in the midst of a fallen world? Are there ways you have been letting the world mold you instead of being transformed by the Spirit and God’s Word (Rom. 12:1-2)? How can you encourage other believers to stay faithful to the Lord?

**PRAY: For those who have hurt you in the past** – whether you have forgiven them yet or not. If you have not yet forgiven them, pray for yourself to have the strength and love to forgive them. Then pray for them, because often praying for them can be the first step toward really loving them enough to forgive them. If you have already forgiven them, pray for them, pray for their families, and pray for God to work in their lives.

**ACT: Encourage someone** – Think of someone who has been an important part of God’s story in your life, whether something big or something small, someone who has impacted your spiritual life in some way. Write that person a letter or an e-mail or take him or her out for coffee or lunch and tell that person how he or she has impacted you, how God has used him/her in His plan for your life.
i https://time.com/3645828/y2k-look-back/
ii https://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/03/opinion/the-wisdom-of-y2k-planning.html
viii ESV Study Bible (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).