

JOSEPH



And his life of many **colors**.



A series of devotionals.

by: Christine Wyrzten

FAVORITISM IS COMPLICATED

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors.

Genesis 37:2-3

Favoritism can be complicated. Take Jacob and his son, Joseph. Jacob didn't make Joseph his favorite to spite other righteous sons. Many of the others had proven themselves to be troublemakers, bound up in foolishness. They had spurned their father's ways and had left a trail of disappointment and hurt. Jacob didn't spoil Joseph either by giving him a life of ease. He trained him to work hard and to do so with godly ethics.

I'm not defending the fact that Jacob showed favoritism. It wasn't right. He acted unwisely and set things up for the other sons to hate their brother. From a sibling's perspective, favoritism never works out well.

But from a parent's perspective, the heart is a complicated thing. It can be difficult to have the same affection for each of your children. If one is bent toward evil, disrespects authority, and has no regard for family, isn't it difficult to love that one as much as another whose heart clearly belongs to God? It can be hard to disguise the pleasure you feel over the one that is righteous. It's equally hard to hide the pain the other one inflicts when they act out against members of your family.

This is where each mother and father needs Jesus desperately. Only He can daily heal the hurts caused by a wayward child. Only He can give the spiritual fuel necessary to love the renegade wisely. Only He can show parents how to bestow unconditional love to two kinds of children. How will the child who loves rebellion not see the delight in his parent's eyes over the 'good' sibling? God is the only one who can write the relational roadmap for these dynamics.

In the long run, Jacob should have learned from his own troubled childhood. Favoritism didn't work out well between he and Esau. Now, he repeats it again by failing to disguise his deep affection for Joseph. He will give him a coat, the kind of coat only a royal child would wear. This will fuel the other's hatred for their brother. In spite of Jacob's mistakes, God's purpose for Joseph and the future of Israel will not be thwarted. That is comforting, isn't it?

You are the God of grace and redemption. Bind our families together in righteousness so that we still stand in the last day. In Jesus' name, Amen

TAUNTING

He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" Genesis 37:6-8

Rhetorical questions in scripture are posed by someone incredulous. Consider the brothers' outrage? Time answered the question with more than a touch of irony. In Genesis 41:43, Pharaoh set Joseph in the chariot behind him and called out to the people, "You've got to be kidding, Joseph. You mean to tell us that you're going to rule over us?" "Bow the knee!"

The Philistines laughed and posed their rhetorical questions to Saul about the absurdity of a small boy, unarmed, taking on their Goliath. Chief priests, Pharisees, and the likes of Pilate posed similar questions to Jesus about His claim to be a King. All the questions follow a similar theme and are answered by a God who reminds us that He is not predictable and nothing is impossible when He is behind it. He uses the foolish, the uneducated, the weak, the stuttering, the outnumbered, the shamed, the forgotten, the underdog, and the smallest...to glorify His name.

Let me bring this home to each of us today. Who is laughing at you? Perhaps you've heard rhetorical questions already today. "Who do you think you are!" When God's child knows that he is called, loved, blessed, and empowered by the Spirit of God, such confidence offends most. It can even rub against the grain of those in the church. There is always an irony. No one should be threatened. Each of us is called, loved, empowered, and invited into a holy confidence if we are willing to do the hard spiritual work that precedes it. Few love God enough to seek Him on that level though. Instead, spiritual laziness abounds. God's children feel entitled to the blessing, like Joseph's brothers, without having to engage in the spiritual disciplines.

For each who has been taunted today, know you are in good company. Do not let any man steal your confidence. Time will write your story and silence the voice of every accuser. Walk humbly with your God and that doesn't mean apologetically.

Do not let accusers undo me. In Jesus' name, Amen

HOW DO OTHERS EXPERIENCE ME?

Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?”
Genesis 37:9-10

Joseph shared his first dream with his brothers and it didn't go well. They despised him for it. Didn't he notice their reaction? Didn't their rejection of him make an impact on his heart? Why in the world would he tell the second dream to this same unreceptive audience? Perhaps in his enthusiasm, he just couldn't help himself.

When I'm excited about something, the need to tell someone is strong. I want those I love to share the joy with me. But I can share my jewels indiscriminately and experience the same kind of reaction Joseph got from his family. I repeatedly put myself in a setting where rejection is going to be the outcome. I do this for a couple of reasons. 1.) My need for approval is so strong that discretion goes out the door. And, 2.) I suffer from magical thinking. “This time they'll listen!”

Becoming a person of self-awareness is critical if I'm going to be successful in relationships. Do others receive my words and stories eagerly? Is my point of view welcomed? What is the track record with these people? If Joseph had considered what happened when he related his first dream, perhaps he would have stopped himself before sharing the second. Timing was everything but maybe the power of rejection urged him to speak prematurely. He needed them to value him as much as God did. I can be so much like Joseph. If I know something, I just have to say it.

There are some things I believe passionately and I'm tempted to keep speaking them to the same group of people. So far, they haven't listened. Truth be told, they may be rolling their eyes when I start my speech for the umpteenth time. They are closed to me and it would be wise for me to acknowledge that. A season of quietness and prayerfulness is needed. God needs to heal the rejection my soul suffers. He also needs to show me if my words are framed by a need to be right. That repels people. What I speak may be true but no one will hear it if it comes with ‘attitude’.

No mission is more important than being God's spokesman. Getting the message right is only half the challenge though. Getting the timing and attitude right will cause the words to roll off my tongue the way Jesus would speak them. There may still be rejection but at least I'll know it's the message they're rejecting and not me.

So, what do I do with my need to be liked, respected, validated and accepted? Prior to any speeches, I take my needs to the One who makes me whole in His presence.

Put a watch on my tongue until it's time for me to speak. In Jesus' name, Amen

DO I LEARN FROM MY MISTAKES?

Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.” But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. Genesis 37:20-22

There is a father who will take out his anger on his children today. He will cut them to shreds with a sharp rebuke and they will shrink and go into hiding. He’s done it before. He even saw the damage in their eyes but that did not deter him.

There is a middle-aged woman who will see dreaded circumstances repeat themselves. She will say, “Oh no, not again!” but she will make the same disastrous choice she made the last time. She does not see that God is giving her another chance in order to do something different.

Reuben, for all his faults, did make a different choice. (Although not one that was drastic enough.) He had sinned against his father many times throughout his youth and had experienced the stab in his own heart as he saw his father’s pain. The last offense he committed was sleeping with Bilhah, his father’s concubine. With this fresh in his memory, he will not agree to take the life of Joseph, his father’s favored son. He cannot bear the thought of Jacob’s grief yet again.

Do I really learn from my mistakes? The magical answer is ‘yes’. Who is going to repeatedly put their hand over an open flame? That is naïve. When bad behavior is generational, thoughts of stopping happen long after the deed is done. By default, we live as our fathers did.

Jesus told Nicodemus two critical things. 1.) ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh.’ We are like whom we came from. I am a product of a mother and father and will possess not only their physical characteristics but their holy and sinful bents as well. I will not deviate without spiritual transformation. And, 2.) ‘That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.’ I am to be like my new Father because I was born of His Word and His Spirit. So here’s the question that replays in my mind? Am I more like my new Father than my earthly parents? I should be if the new birth and the things of the Spirit are nurtured.

How does this relate to learning from my mistakes? When I repeat the foolishness of my youth, the Spirit of God calls to me. “Why are you doing that? You’re now my own daughter and I’m calling you out to be like me, not them.” Past mistakes are a mirror. I see the reflection of my former self against the reflection of my brother, Jesus, standing next to me. With just a glance, I walk away and have no appetite for the former things.

***Forget my last name today, Lord. I am Christine – of God’s heart. In Jesus’ name,
Amen***

YOU ARE WHO YOU ARE IN HEAVEN

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. Genesis 37:23

Joseph was stripped of his royal kind of robe. Jesus was stripped of his robe, too. The momentary humiliation didn't change the destiny or the spiritual identity of either. Jesus stayed in touch with that but I suspect that Joseph did not. History would prove that the brother's destruction of the robe of many colors and treating their brother like a criminal would do nothing to stop Joseph's ascension to a royal position in Egypt. Their sin against him only propelled it.

Jesus was God's Son whether anyone acknowledged it or not. If the accusation flew that he was only the illegitimate son of Mary, Jesus was still God. When the crowd publicly humiliated him by accusing him of demonic possession, Jesus was still God. When His family eventually turned on Him and believed Him to be mentally unstable, Jesus was still God. When He hung on a Roman cross and died the most degrading death in existence, His spiritual status did not change. Jesus was still God.

If ever there were a world in which I needed to settle my spiritual identity, it's this one. It is growing more and more unfriendly to the name of Jesus Christ and anyone who is associated with Him will experience discrimination. If a barb from a parent can lay me low for four decades, how will I survive if a community ostracizes me? If unfair criticism from a local spiritual leader sends me into hiding, how will I sustain the intentional diatribe of non-Christians who are looking for things to mis-represent?

No ill treatment in this world can change my status in heaven. Heaven is what counts; it is eternal. Earth should be discounted; it will pass away. Though I am hated here, not one ill feeling comes from the Father who calls me His. While earth bestows the basest kind of shame, God bestows the heavenliest kind of honor.

The only way to stay in touch with these beautiful realities is to read a Word that is eternal, not temporary. Whatever it says, I can stake on it being true forever and ever. Today, I may be Joseph in a pit. Tomorrow, I will be reigning with Christ.

Every time Jesus was crushed, He looked up until He felt Your favor. I lock my eyes on You. In Jesus' name, Amen

WHO DOES SUCH THINGS?!

Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him. Genesis 37:26-27

Older brothers sell their younger brother into slavery for money. The thought is repelling. I'm naïve to believe that only ancient cultures are this brutal.

Several years ago, when a poor family in Cambodia accepted money from loan sharks, they believed they had only one way to pay what was demanded. They took their 12-year-old daughter, Kieu, to a local hospital. Doctors issued her a 'certificate of virginity'. Her parents then delivered her to a hotel, where a man raped her for two days. Kieu fled her home many years later to find a safe house.

“That's in Cambodia!” many say. Consider Atlanta. Atlanta's illegal sex trade has grown to 290 million dollars. Some of these children were kidnapped but family members sold some to sex traffickers.

How hard does a heart have to be to sell a child? This kind of hardheartedness is not the momentary kind. The conscience of a family member who does such a thing died a slow death years ago. Child victims like Joseph all say the same thing. The worst pain is not the pain inflicted by strangers. It is the searing agony they experience because their family betrayed them.

For over two decades, Joseph will have to try to process his brothers' cruelty. They turned him over to strangers who carted him away as a slave. Never could he have conceived such a plot as he played on the plains of Hebron by day and slept under his father's favor by night.

Many will live and die and never experience such betrayal. But for those who do, pursuing God will have rewards the likes most in the church will never experience. To the degree any of us have been hurt, God gives the same capacity to know Him and experience Him. This is redemption. He is the Redeemer.

Man does the unthinkable and I shudder. You did the unthinkable by sending Your Son to die. I tremble in awe. You are my treasure of the darkness. In Jesus' name, Amen

“CAN’T YOU HEAR YOUR BROTHER CRYING?”

And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. Then they sat down to eat. Genesis 37:25-25a

A group of grown men seized their own flesh and blood brother, stripped him, threw him into a pit, and then commenced to sit down and eat a meal. They were immune to the despair they inflicted. It’s unconscionable, or is it?

Consider how callousness starts. Brothers and sisters, even very young, reach out to hit their sibling and discover a surprising sense of glee when they realize they can make them cry. Good parents come and try to instill empathy. “What you did hurt your sister. Tell her you’re sorry!” And yet, the apology is hard to muster. Cruelty is in our fallen nature.

How will I develop keen sensitivity to others’ pain? How will I feel another’s sadness when I see pools of tears in their eyes? How will I feel enough remorse when my need for revenge caused me to injure someone beyond human repair? How will I come to regret an angry outburst against my child when I hear him whimpering in his room? Without God, callouses of my heart grow thicker with the years. I can hear weeping and still walk away unmoved.

But with God, I am affected and changed by His Spirit that lives inside. When I see someone’s pain, His compassion rises up and challenges me to express it. When I wound another with my angry words, His Spirit convicts me and opens my eyes to see the damage. In this life, I will continue to sin but when I do, I will feel how God feels about it and try to quickly make things right.

As I’m writing this, I’m suddenly aware that I can be callous to God’s tears. Does knowing that I will hurt Him cause me to sin less? Or do I avoid sin because I hate the consequences? That should be a side issue. What should deter me is knowing that my sin hurts my relationship with Jesus.

So, how difficult is it to apologize to Jesus when I’ve hurt Him? Excusing or rationalizing my behavior creates spiritual callouses. The cure is to spend time in the presence of God. Being near Him will sharpen my recognition of good and evil and give me the tender, teachable spirit of a toddler. Spiritual regeneration is when God turns back the clock to transform the person with a hardened heart of stone into a person with childlike sensitivities. At rebirth, I am putty in His hands as He begins to awaken my heart to beat like His.

Keep nudging me, Jesus. Keep asking, “Do you see it? Do You feel it?” Make me more aware of what moves you. In Jesus’ name, Amen

FALSE COMFORTERS

All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. Genesis 37:35

This is a tough scene. It's hard to even read about as I picture a brokenhearted father being comforted by sons who were more enemies than family. They had dipped Joseph's coat into a pool of goat's blood, handed it to their father, knowing he could make only one conclusion. A wild animal had killed his son. Not one of them was going to tell Dad the truth, admitting that they had sold Joseph to slave traders. What did they do on the other side of their lying? Tried to comfort their father. But was it really comfort?

It's really quite something who turns up for funerals. Close friends, family members, acquaintances, and even various people with whom we have shared a strained relationship. Truth be told, it's curiosity that brings many. Some want to see how we are handling hard times. They might even enjoy seeing us so vulnerable. While this may only describe the motives of some, let's face it. For a brief moment, they are elevated to the powerful position of a comforter.

I should always comfort with integrity. There are relationships where there has been wounding. Things have never been mended. I might describe the status as 'tense'. I should comfort them in a way that is consistent with the level of our relationship. I shouldn't use their grief for my own gain. There is something in each of us that enjoys feeling powerful. When I'm in a position to give, to help, and to comfort, the gesture can be more for me than the one I'm supposedly helping.

I bear the burden to act with integrity. The one who is grieving is taken up with his grief. He is vulnerable and can't sort through the intentions behind the embraces he receives. He is also momentarily childlike and I am responsible to handle his powerless moment in a way where I can face Jesus without regret. Any comfort I extend is really on His behalf. Am I representing Him well?

Jacob refused to be comforted. I wonder if, in his gut, he knew that there had been foul play. The one who weeps should never be put in a position to have to figure out the motives of those who appear compassionate. God holds me responsible for how I handle the one who is momentarily feeble.

Give me the courage to be 'true'. Always. In Jesus' name, Amen

A HUNDRED YEARS FROM NOW

Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard. Genesis 37:36

Do I ever consider what will happen to my family a hundred years from now? If I'm wise, I will remember the story of Isaac and Ishmael. Why bring up them in the story of Joseph? Because the Midianites is an overlapping term for Ishmaelites, the descendants of Ishmael.

What is really happening here is this ~ Joseph was sold to blood relatives. If ancestry.com had existed, and if everyone involved had done a genealogy study, they would have discovered that they were related. Did the slave traders know that they purchased their own flesh and blood? No way.

Ishmael was once the favored son of Abraham; a firstborn and an heir. But through no fault of his own, he found himself in disfavor once Isaac was born. He and his mother, Hagar, were turned away to an unforgiving desert existence. God did not forget them and they not only were spared, but went on to prosper. Ishmael had 12 sons and they populated much of the Middle East.

Whom did God use to get Joseph to Egypt? Ishmael's descendants. In God's grand redemptive narrative, there are unexpected twists and turns that are really quite stunning. Even though family plots are complicated, God's purposes are never thwarted. As badly as we can mess things up, God is never stumped in how to save, how to redeem, and how to accomplish what was written before time.

Joseph couldn't appreciate what his slavery meant. Neither can we. But consider how rich his worship was at the end of his life. As he looked back, he could see the threads of God's glory throughout his own storyline. Amazed, his view of God had to be enlarged beyond comprehension.

Can I trust God enough today with the seeming dead ends, tragedies, and unresolved conflicts in my own life? I cannot even begin to imagine how He will work with the dark threads of my own story to bring about another Joseph-kind of narrative worth reading.

On the way to Egypt, Joseph lay in the back of a caravan. He was bound, dirty, nameless, and despairing. Later, he was crowned royalty, given a new name to match his level of leadership, and went on to save his entire nation from extinction. Oh, the difference of a few decades.

What often casts me into unbelief is downright ludicrous. Bind me to the miracles of my spiritual ancestors. In Jesus' name, Amen

GOD'S PRESENCE IN HOSTILE PLACES

The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. Genesis 39:2

Joseph was called a successful man. How can that be? He was in hostile territory with limited influence. He was a slave. He was the victim of his brother's scheming. He was far from home. He was trying to process an exorbitant amount of pain and yet this emotional challenge did not preclude him from 'success'. Could the reason be that Joseph sought the Lord in the midst of his confinement?

It's difficult to dwell in a place where I don't belong, a place where freedom is absent. When confined, the default response is to fight and to live in angst. The discomfort of slavery is consuming and all energies are spent trying to figure out how to get out! The thought of making 'Egypt' home and working with God for spiritual success is usually the last thing on my mind. Instead of seeing God as an ally, I view Him as an adversary and blame Him for bringing me to a place of internment.

If anyone had good reason to struggle with God's sovereignty, it was Joseph. He could have been bitter and turned his back on the faith of his fathers. He could have taken up ranks with the rest of the slaves and become nondescript. But his heart stayed open to God and he cooperated with purposes of God's design on his life.

Can I be a Joseph in the place where I'm churning? What would it look like for God to make me successful right here? Can I take all the energies I'm currently spending trying to escape and invest them in Egypt? Would those who oppress me be moved if they saw me joyful in affliction instead of bitter? What if I took my little corner of influence and infused it with the glory of God?

May it be! As God's child, I must learn to thrive in captivity. The world is an anti-kingdom. The culture is foreign and I am peculiar. However, everything I touch and my very demeanor can stir up confusion and wonderment. God's presence begs to affect everything I happen to graze with spiritual success.

***May it be said of me, "The Lord was with her and she became a successful woman."
In Jesus' name, Amen***

WHEN I WALK INTO A ROOM

The Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. Genesis 39:5

I don't think I fully grasp what it means for the Holy Spirit to live inside me. He begs to affect everywhere I go and everyone I serve. He will keep leaking out, blessing, loving, wooing, and even convicting. I am a container of His Spirit but I must be a clean container so that His influence is not quenched.

Potiphar, a heathen man outside of God's covenant, experienced blessing throughout his entire estate because of the effect of God's Spirit living through Joseph. But here's the thing ~ If Joseph had gotten bitter and distrustful of God, spurning His voice and maligning His character, God's influence would have been squelched.

If I am right with God, living a life of passionate worship, then I wear Christ like a cloak. He is draped around my shoulders and is on full display. The effect will be the same as when Jesus entered the temple court or walked the streets of Judea. Some will swarm, some will see the light and investigate the claims of Christ, and others will be repelled and persecute me. But as for my household and those whom I serve, they will be blessed because God's blessing on me has leaked out into their territory.

Who needs a visitation of the Spirit of God today?

My child? I'll walk in his room, pull up a chair and praise God for a while. The Spirit will bless long after I leave.

My church? I'll drive onto the church property, sing a song or two in the car, and then speak some scripture over the church body. The Spirit will bless long after I leave.

My struggling friend? I'll knock on her door, stay 10 minutes, speak the words Jesus prompts me to speak, and then pray with her. The Spirit will bless long after I leave.

Does this sound like magical hocus-pocus? The frightening thing is, many would say 'yes'. But it's biblical! When Paul told us to put on spiritual armor, he clarified what the armor was when he said, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." (Eph.13:14) When Jesus enters a room, things change. When God's Spirit hovered over a dead planet, look what happened.

This is not about my influence but about the power of Christ's influence living through me. I am Spirit-possessed. Oh, the possibilities! Can you feel it? Can you dream it? May it be.

You, in me, is a mystery. You, in me, are a treasure. Help me grasp what it means to have You living inside and then dream big. Bless wherever the sole of my foot treads. In Jesus' name, Amen

KNOWING MY PERFECT STORM

And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." But he refused. Genesis 39:7-8

God has Satan on a leash. He can't do more than God allows. Temptations, whether from God directly, or from Satan, test my faith. I'm required to dig deeply and use spiritual faith muscles that need strength training. Satan never tempts me just once, either. When I take hold of God's grace and flee one kind of temptation, Satan will come back with yet another variety. He is relentless and doesn't play fair. He is intent on concocting the perfect storm so that I will have no willpower. He's after my kryptonite.

Satan tried to use pain to drive a wedge between Joseph and his God. It didn't work. (But it does with most people and it certainly did with me. A low threshold of pain causes strong Christians to fall into disbelief.) Yet, Joseph stood strong. He stayed tender, teachable, and resolute in his faith.

When the catalyst of pain failed, he turned to pleasure. Day after day, Potiphar's wife wooed Joseph. She was probably beautiful and Joseph was, most likely, lonely. That he didn't give in to her was nothing short of miraculous.

Satan is intuitive. He is also strategic, cunning and patient. He spies, watching my life to assess where I am vulnerable. He knows my story and knows my wounding patterns. I can't afford for him to know more about my weaknesses than I do. Perhaps this is why David was so intent on asking God to search his heart. Knowing himself as God did was critical to his spiritual victory.

Under what circumstances would you fall? Do you know? What are your unique longings, and if someone or something could fulfill them right now, would you bite? It's not a mistake that Paul defines sin as trading the glory of Christ for something else. For Joseph, it could have been a forbidden affair with Potiphar's wife. What trinket holds allure for you over the value of treasuring Christ?

Don't let me run from the truth about myself. Show me who I am through Your eyes. Deliver me from any evil that is being customized for my defeat. In Jesus' name, Amen

WHEN WILL THE CHARLATAN BE EXPOSED?

She {Potiphar's wife} called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house." Genesis 39:14-15

Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce Joseph, not once, but day after day. When Joseph fled from her presence, she grabbed his tunic and the charade began. She concocted a convincing story where she was the victim and Joseph was the sexual aggressor. Her cries amidst very artful storytelling put Joseph in prison.

There is a day of discovery coming when all people will be revealed for who they are. No more pretenses. The exposure will shock some who were once fooled by them but it will be a comfort for others who were their innocent victims. For now, many deceive. If you are being harassed and betrayed by someone others admire, if you have been falsely accused and presently suffer a ruined reputation, you are not the first believer to suffer such things. Perhaps you have lost everything. God is with you just as He was with Joseph. There will be advancement in your future, if not here, then in heaven, and no plot against you can thwart it no matter how convincing the lies spoken against you.

Did you know that sometimes the exposure can come early through the prayers of God's people? If there is a wolf among the sheep, if a spiritual charlatan is leading the church astray, I can pray for the truth to be revealed. I can ask God to prevent the deceiver from spinning his tales. I can also ask God to remove the demonic glitter that makes him convincing to the crowd so that he is seen as he is. Have I seen this happen? Numerous times.

I can also pray that the untrue person intent on hurting others will tell on himself. At some point, he often feels a need to boast about his ability to control and manipulate. He just can't help himself and will often tell me who he is.

What do I do while I wait for the truth to be revealed? Until the unveiling happens, waiting is involved. I ask for the grace to suffer well. I remember that Jesus walked the road of betrayal most of all. He was spurned, lied about, accused unfairly, and eventually crucified for calling himself God. He told the truth but most couldn't see it. TRUTH hung on a cross while waiting for God's vindication and advancement to glory.

God promises grace. It is this grace that enables me to soar on eagle's wings while vendettas are being waged against me. I don't need to wallow in the mire of bitterness. I am seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus and am already vindicated in heaven's court. Jesus is pleading my case and He never loses.

My peace is not dependent on whether justice has yet been done. Peace is knowing that justice will be done and I can be as sure of it today as if it's already happened. This is faith at its best, fueled by the assurance that the promises of God are never nullified.

Come Holy Spirit, and reveal all things. While I travail in hopeful waiting, don't let my spirit become jaded. In Jesus' name, Amen

FINDING GOD IS HARD SOMETIMES

And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

Genesis 39:20-21

Finding evidence of God's presence is difficult when life appears to have fallen apart. Joseph was tricked by Potiphar's wife. Accused of rape, he had to stand before his master. The end result was imprisonment. But the writer of Genesis still said that the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love. Aren't you asking the questions so many ask? 'If the Lord was really with Joseph, why didn't He spare him from prison? Why didn't He expose the scheme of Potiphar's wife?' And, why does God allow bad things to happen to me?'

The problem is that I expect to live a different life from Jesus. His birth was shadowed by a cross and so is mine. He said so. 'You must pick up your cross and follow me.' Was God with Jesus as He was with Joseph? Absolutely. He walked His Son through all His afflictions and stayed with Him all the way to the cross. He sent angels to minister to Him. He sent handpicked disciples to help carry the burden of His mission. But He still had to face Calvary because that was His calling.

So how was the Lord with Joseph? Potiphar must have doubted his wife's story because the punishment for rape was death yet Joseph was sentenced to prison instead. And he was assigned to the king's prison, a less severe environment. Did Joseph see evidence of God's presence? I'm confident he had to battle for his faith just as I have to battle for mine.

I don't care for the phrase 'count your blessings' because those who refuse to confront suffering on a deep level often recite it. It's their method of denial. So let me rephrase it. When life seems to fall apart and it would appear that God has abandoned me, there are evidences that the Lord is with me. I must ask God to help me see them. If I remember that I have taken up a cross to follow Jesus, then I won't expect God to prevent hardship. I will know that what appears to be a senseless tragedy is simply a means to glory being revealed. My life and Jesus' life mirror each other. Because the cross was a means to His glorification, I can rest in the assurance that darkness will never have the last word in my life either.

In every valley, You are with me and are blessing me with gifts of grace. Open my eyes to find them all. In Jesus' name, Amen

FAVOR IN CAPTIVITY

But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. Genesis 39:21

Really? God gives favor in captivity? I thought they were mutually exclusive. Another reminder that what is logical to me is not logical to God. He turns a concept on its end and constantly surprises.

Joseph sat in prison for a crime he didn't commit. He probably had moments when he felt utterly forsaken by God. And yet, the reality was that his prison was the doorway to leadership. The story is about to take an amazing turn when Joseph shares a cell with men that came from the royal court. Their crimes, and their time in Joseph's company, will bring Joseph's name before the Pharaoh.

Has God blessed others in captivity? I was surprised to find direct proof. "And the Lord gave his people favor in the sight of the Egyptians." Ex. 11:3 Many generations after Joseph, the Hebrews will believe that their God has forgotten them. For 400 years, they will doubt His goodness. Yet history will prove that God gave them favor in the midst of slavery.

I'm old enough to have had significant periods of captivity. The one who is confined never feels favored. I can think of 3 reasons: 1.) Pain can obscure my vision of blessing. 2.) My view of my life is limited by time-bound perspective. And, 3.) My expectations of what favor looks like blinds me.

If I'm in a prison today from which I can't escape, how do I surmount these three challenges? Faith and trust in the character and promises of God. I've got to live beyond myself by reviewing God's legacy of faithfulness in the lives of His children. His reputation does not begin and end with what He is doing in my life. If I did nothing but read the story of Joseph to get to know the heart of God, I would cease to be tormented. Captivity is the narrow pathway to the gateway of advancement.

Every time I accused You, You were fashioning something beautiful. I'm sorry and I will remember! In Jesus' name, Amen

WHEN SOMEONE NEAR ME SINS

Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. Genesis 40:1-3

God does not redeem sin when the person who committed it is an unbeliever. He is not their Father and they are not in relationship with Him. But when someone sins who is nearby, especially someone whose sin affects me, then I can know that God is active somehow and that the redemptive process is working for my ultimate good.

Joseph is in prison, a place where it would be easy to believe that God is inactive. His privacy is interrupted when he is given two cellmates, both strangers to him. They have sinned against Pharaoh and while Joseph doesn't have a relationship with Pharaoh, nor does he have a relationship with the cupbearer and the baker, their sins will have direct impact on Joseph's life.

When will I fully grasp that God is involved in everything that has anything to do with me? He is providentially tying all perceived loose ends together. I have met no one by mistake. I have worked for no one by mistake. I have not suffered at the hands of anyone by mistake. I have not been betrayed by mistake. The sins committed by all those in proximity to me are woven into my redemptive storyline.

The sins of the baker and cupbearer will eventually result in Joseph gaining an audience with the Pharaoh. If Joseph had known that their sins would somehow be useful to him, he could never have guessed how. Nor can I predict how the sins of those around me will impact my future. At the very least, they will afford me wisdom as I learn the patterns and progressions of sinful choices.

Here's what I need to remind myself of today. Yes, I am grieved when I watch other people sin, whether in my family, my church, or within my circle of friends. Because I have no control over them and their sin is hurting others, it can feel hopeless. In this web, however, are God's hidden gifts. Someone who is sinning nearby me may be used by God to advance me, or to teach me, or to wound me so that I can experience the double fold blessing of God's healing and redemption. My faith should swell at the announcement of such good news.

My life is in such good hands, Father. In Jesus' name, Amen

THEIR NEED? YOUR OPPORTUNITY

When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, "Why are your faces downcast today?" They said to him, "We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me." Genesis 40:6-8

Many royal courts employed dream interpreters since, in the near East, dreams were a way of foretelling the future. The royal cupbearer and the baker, because they were in prison, had no access to him when they had troubling dreams. But Joseph was intuitive and read their body language the next morning. He asked them why they were downcast and they admitted their need of an interpreter. This was a divine appointment and Joseph instantly recognized it. He ascribed the power of interpretation to God only and made himself available for discerning the mind of God on their behalf.

How many divine appointments do I miss? Would I have lived in my own world if I had been Joseph? Would I have interacted with my two cellmates? Would I have seen their need as an opportunity for God's power to be on full display? God knows who will be in proximity to me on a certain day and He will put someone in distress at the very moment our worlds intersect. My part is to live prayerfully so that I recognize a divine appointment when it's staring me in the face.

Who is downcast nearby? Who is sick? Who lives in chronic pain? Who was up all night churning because they lack wisdom about a decision? Who has been crying alone? Who is afraid of the future and wants to rehearse the latest headlines about Ebola? These are all opportunities. God's kingdom begs to come to the people God has put in my path.

Fear keeps me from reaching out. If I don't have answers for myself, I won't have them for others. If I live in crippling fear about the future, how will I comfort others with the promises of God! I can't give away what I don't possess for myself.

The amazing thing about Joseph is that despite the multiple decades of slavery and imprisonment, he did not take a spiritual vacation. He stayed engaged with his God. His spiritual skills were sharpened, not dulled. This prepared him to recognize, and then to act, when God brought opportunity.

Don't let me live today by what is convenient. Give me the eyes to recognize what has been sent by you. In Jesus' name, Amen

LET'S TALK ABOUT DREAMS

So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, "In my dream there was a vine before me, and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes. Genesis 40:9-10

I know one thing for sure – God communicates far more than I hear. I was told growing up that God only speaks through scripture. Any other claim was heresy. And yet, the same people who policed what constituted a genuine word from God were the first to say that God had spoken to them in the night and called them to Peru as missionaries.

I grew up Baptist and I attend a Southern Baptist Church. However, I am much more progressive in my quest for experiencing God. Over a decade ago, I asked God to open my ears to hear Him in ways I had previously been closed. That began a new chapter for me. While I am a conservative person, careful to sift everything through the grid of scripture, I have now had many dreams. I share them when God nudges.

The cupbearer dreamed about vines, branches, blossoms, and clusters of grapes. Had he been hallucinating? Joseph never suggested that. Dreams are sometimes literal, sometimes allegorical, and when they are from God, they are powerful and life shaping.

Are all dreams from God? No. Satan also gives dreams. Dreams can also be quirky and full of silliness, quickly forgotten in the morning. Not all people dream, either. God speaks differently to each child, according to how He wired them. But for each of you who do dream, I share some thoughts. I keep a journal by my bed. When I wake up with details that are fresh, I get them down on paper. If the dream fades by the time I have the pen in my hand, I know it wasn't important. If the dream was from the enemy, I know it because it was tormenting. At that point, I ask God to wipe the effects of it from my heart and mind and protect the rest of my night from Satan's interference. If the dream was from God, it was vivid, unforgettable, instructive, intriguing, and came with an urgency to pray and seek clarification.

Many years ago, there was a period of time when I was in counseling. I was in denial about some of the people in my life and their true nature. God used dreams to show me their character. Night after night they acted out and I began to see that their behavior in my dream was quite consistent (though exaggerated) with how they behaved in real life.

The bottom line is this ~ none of us want to miss God's voice in our ear. He speaks far more than we know. He will help us discover the hidden meanings behind many of our dreams by guiding our search for wisdom. And most importantly, if a dream is from God, it will be completely consistent with the character and behavior of God from scripture. As soon as a dream deviates, I am quick to let it go or I will be led into deception. The Word of God is always my plumb line for truth.

For each person who has been afraid of Your voice, give them courage. Instruct, comfort, and enlarge their experience of You. In Jesus' name, Amen

YOUR PLACE OF HONOR

Then Joseph said to the cupbearer, “This is its interpretation; the three branches are three days. In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh’s cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer. Genesis 40:12-13

Have you been shamed? No matter what the context, the experience is gut wrenching. Every part of your being feels it. Your emotions plummet. Your mind runs tapes of the accusations. Your body language turns inward.

Joseph told the cupbearer, who was falsely accused, that Pharaoh would lift up his head in three days. The Hebrew idiom paints a beautiful picture. It is when the one shrunken in shame is restored to his position of power. It’s used other places in scripture that expand its beauty.

God speaks to His people and joyfully commands them to lift their heads. He has gone out to battle on their behalf and has come back victorious. Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Psalm 24:7

King David, betrayed by his son Absalom, on the run with just the clothes on his back, turns to God for vindication. He climbed the Mount of Olives, covered up his head, wept, and said, “You, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high.” Psalm 3:3 As king, he could have formed an army, or at least a posse, to get back his throne. He abandoned all ideas of conniving, of battling, and of manipulating. He recognized that God was his rescuer.

Who has stripped you of your honor? How long have you been brought low? Have you accepted your fate and given up all hope of restoration? Perhaps you even abandoned prayer.

Or if you’re a fighter, you’ve vowed to take revenge and battle it out. You intend to get back what you’ve lost no matter who has to pay. Turning aside from God as your Redeemer, you’ve taken up your own cause.

David left the battle to God. So did Joseph. They did the thing that is the hardest for any of us when betrayed ~ they waited on God to move. He always will. We just don’t know when. In the meantime, the waiting is never wasted. God draws near, comforts, teaches us what He suffered under the same circumstances, and pours out treasure upon treasure that is only found in the darkness. He is, and will be, the lifter of our heads.

Satan offered you a way out of waiting when he offered you the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worship. Thank you for not caving. Everything would have been lost. So teach me to wait! In Jesus’ name, Amen

WOULD I SPEAK IT?

When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, “I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head.” And Joseph answered and said, “This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days. In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a tree.” Genesis 40:16-19

I am one from whom others often seek advice. Questions like, “Why am I like this?” “What do you think the problem is?” “Why am I stuck and not progressing?” “Have I done something wrong?” “Is God punishing me?” I love to take someone’s life puzzle and make divine sense of the pieces.

But having said that, the hardest thing for anyone with a gift of mercy is to give bad news. If a mercy gift is accompanied by a prophetic gift, obedience becomes difficult. God gives insight that can be difficult to speak. Mercy wants to minimize the damage and cushion the blow.

Joseph’s obedience was put to the test so many times on his rise to blessing. Two cellmates, both former servants to the royal court, share two different dreams. Joseph happily told the first that he would be blessed and reinstated to his former position. Upon that good news, the other man shared his dream. Joseph was instantly in a dilemma. There was no good news about the 2nd dream. He would not be restored to honor; he would be hung. At that point, Joseph could have claimed ignorance but he didn’t fail to give the fateful interpretation.

Can God count on me to speak the truth when truth is unwelcome? Can He depend on me to paint an accurate picture of what’s ahead for a person, or an organization, if being honest threatens relationships? I will admit that this is a struggle for me. I’d rather stay silent and pray than speak up to inflict life-saving wounds. I’m faced with a number of these dilemmas right now. It seems that no matter where I turn in ministry at the moment, I need an infusion of holy boldness.

For any like me, know that I am praying for you.

Make me Your prophet. Trembling but obedient. In Jesus' name, Amen

HOW TO HANDLE A COMPLIMENT

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” Joseph answered Pharaoh, “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.” Genesis 41:15-16

False modesty plagues the church. So does insecurity. These appear God-honoring when; in fact, they rob God of opportunities to showcase His glory.

When Pharaoh told Joseph that he had heard of his ability to interpret dreams, Joseph didn't say that he wasn't worthy of such attention. He stepped up to the plate and put God at the center of his answer. He made it clear that it would be God, working through him, to interpret the dreams.

One of the biggest pitfalls of any platform person is succumbing to pride. Standing ovations, fan letters, and whispers of your name as you pass a group, all swell your sense of worth. I am sure that God gives major thorns in the flesh to visible leaders to counteract this. He makes sure that ministries are not ruined by inflated egos.

Compliments are very hard to know how to handle. “You're such a great teacher.” “You are one gifted manager.” “No one can organize an event quite like you!” To simply say, ‘thank you’ can appear to mean, “I agree with you. I am this great.” Shouldn't any child of God shun any kind of praise? But here's another question, shouldn't any child of God realize that what people often praise are the anointed giftings that are straight from God's own hand? If I keep telling people that their observations about me are inflated or untrue, I'm missing the opportunity to tell them how great God is. When I say, “It's not me, its God,” that's not true either. I am part of the equation. I have embraced the gift, developed it by His grace, and dedicated it to the glory of God. It is God – in and through me.

So what is a good alternative? Let's say that you teach a small group. It is being blessed and people are growing. One night after the meeting ends, someone comes to you and says, “You are such an anointed facilitator. I've never understood this much about Jesus before.” You answer by saying this. “I'm so encouraged to hear this. Thank you for telling me. Please pray for me that I would always depend on Jesus in my teaching. He is so gracious to give me this opportunity.”

No matter where we excel, people should know that ‘we know’ the gift came from God. The grace to do it well is because of His faithfulness.

One final thing. You and I should know and acknowledge where we are gifted. If we fail to know, how can we be effective? Is it possible to name 3 things you can do well and still be humble when giving God the glory for it? Absolutely.

I am confident today because of Your anointing. I've lived without it and there was no spiritual power. You are at the center of all I am and I am nothing without you. In Jesus' name, Amen

AM I REALLY HEARING GOD'S VOICE?

Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. Genesis 41:25

God gave Pharaoh two dreams that meant the same thing. Why did He do that? I suspect so that Pharaoh wouldn't miss the message.

Has God been trying to speak to you about something? You're stuck in inertia because you fear you're reading into things. Perhaps it was a dream and it was so allegorical that you lack the confidence to act upon it. Perhaps it was a word in prayer but you wonder now if it was just your own inner voice. Maybe it was a set of 'coincidences' that seemed too incredible not to be divine. All of these scenarios lead us to ask, "Did I really hear God's voice?" Until we know for sure, we dare not embrace the message as truth and we certainly dare not endeavor on something risky.

What I've come to realize is that God is for me, not against me. He wants me to get it even more than I do. If I suspect He is speaking to me (and in a way that is outside my box), I ask Him for confirmation. I confess again that I am small and blind, unable to perceive spiritual things well. I ask Him to have mercy on my spiritual condition. I ask Him to treat me as He treated Moses. He made it His will so plain ~ When the cloud moves, move. When the cloud stops, stop.

I must say that I experience a Father who confirms and confirms. More than just twice; sometimes three and four times. And each in a different way. Just as God gave Pharaoh two dreams, each dream different but bearing the same message, how much more will God lead a child whose heart is bent to covet His voice and respond with obedience!

I pray for each one this morning who is discounting what You've spoken to them. They are afraid. Repeat Your message, Lord, and confirm it in a way that is unmistakable to their tentative faith. In Jesus' name, Amen

HE LETS ME SEE SO I CAN ACT!

Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years. 35 And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. Genesis 41:34-35

Joseph didn't just interpret Pharaoh's two dreams. Because Joseph possessed an administrative gift, he offered a plan to counteract the dismal prediction of famine. Joseph was a seer but also one whom God chose to implement a righteous plan.

God never gives divine insight just for mere intrigue. He discloses His thoughts to someone who is then responsible to find out why they were given such information. Are they to pray? Are they to step forward with information? Are they to expose? Are they to encourage? Seeing is proactive.

The gift of divine sight is built on the culmination of thousands of life experiences. Spiritual understanding is not something bred overnight. God shapes His servant through years of practice runs. The gift is sharpened through suffering. If you are a prophet, one who can prayerfully discern the mind and heart of God about a person or situation, that gift has been personally expensive. But know this too ~ the gift of divine eyesight is usually paired with another strong gift.

- God revealed the dream so that Joseph could step up with a wise plan.
- God reveals danger so that His child can pray.
- God reveals the root of a problem so that truth can be proclaimed and unrighteousness exposed.
- God reveals the broken heart of another so that they may be strengthened by compassionate words and actions

God reveals where people perish for lack of knowledge in order for a teacher to arise.

What has God been showing you about a person or a situation? Perhaps that revelation has been painful, arrested you in place, and you feel helpless. Assess your giftings and ask God to show you how you are to channel what He has revealed. God, in your story, has prepared you for such a time as this.

I have been tormented by what I see. Give me Your action plan. In Jesus' name, Amen

HOW FAR WILL I GO TO EARN OTHER'S RESPECT?

And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah. And he gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On. So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt. Genesis 41:45

I can learn a lot from watching the lives of heroes like Joseph and Daniel. Both stood strong in a foreign land. Both paid dearly. But both were eventually honored by heads of state and given new names. They graciously accepted them but managed to keep themselves from embracing a pagan religion. To further honor Joseph, Pharaoh gave him a wife from a region called On. This city was the worship center for the sun god – Ra. Joseph was surrounded on all sides by people who lived and practiced idolatry. How could he rule this nation without becoming like them? To be followed, wouldn't he also have to be popular?

Throughout history, God has been generous with instructive protocol when we find ourselves living in alien territory. Learn to dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. These seem mutually exclusive but it is possible to be among the people but not of them. To dwell and still be faithful. Poor leaders, however, feel they must blend in and become like the people they serve. Otherwise, they fear they won't be respected and certainly won't be elected again.

I don't have to move to a foreign country to feel like a foreigner. I can feel that way in my church, at work, and I can also feel that way in my own family. I am God's daughter before I am anyone else's friend, employee, daughter, wife, or sister. I am called to be true to Him and do things His way first. If it rubs against the grain of others in my environment, I leave the outcome to God. Like Joseph, I may feel like I live in a prison of rejection and peculiarity. It may be permanent but it may also be temporary. When hard times come and others languish for good leadership, people may look to me for the same strength they rejected yesterday.

Trying to fit in is not the way to lead. In a world where true disciples are harder to find and churches are slowly descending into apostasy, it becomes even more critical that I become a leader others can trust even though they may not understand me. The results are up to God. Am I willing to share the stigma Jesus suffered? No one could own Him. His allegiance was heaven bound and his hallmark was faithfulness.

I often fear those who don't understand me. Help me stand under the pressure. In Jesus' name, Amen

CAN I REALLY FORGET HARDSHIP?

Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.” The name of the second he called Ephraim, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.” Genesis 41:51-52

If you are someone who has spent major chunks of your life in hardship, then you know how long life feels. Pain has become your ‘normal’ and the thought of living life any other way is inconceivable. Not only that, but the possibility that you would ever forget your affliction seems unlikely. Hardship has been your constant companion.

I suspect that the word for ‘forget’ is the same word that is used when God puts my sins behind his back and ‘forgets’ them. He puts them out of sight and they are no longer held up in front of my face as a reminder of what I’ve done. Memories of my sin take a back seat to the joy of walking in forgiveness.

In light of that ~ To forget former hardship is to have painful memories eclipsed by something infinitely more powerful ~ the kindness and redemption of God. It is impossible to feel the wonder of such exhilaration and, simultaneously, feel the depth of my former despair. God’s redemption is that powerful. But while I wait, all I know is the all-consuming agony of distress.

I’ve seen the fruits of powerful prayer. Some were answered overnight and others within a few months time. Many of them, in fact. But others accompanied me in God’s waiting room for a decade or two. The pain of waiting made God appear uncaring and I feared that life would never be any different. I had to fight for my faith and sound theology had to war against the reality of my emotions. But when the tide turned, when God came sweeping in with the redemption I sought, it exceeded all that I had asked for. My prayers were of one dimension; his answers were as deep as the ocean. Even now, I cannot plumb the depths of all that He has done – and will do – as a result of persevering prayer.

If you fear that the joy of answered prayer would pale in comparison to the ways affliction has ravaged your soul, expand your hope in God. If God could cause Joseph to ‘forget’ betrayal of his brothers, being sold into slavery, being unjustly accused and imprisoned for a decade, could He not surprise me with unspeakable joy?

For all the pain that still consumes me, I know that coming redemption will eclipse it all. Your love is that powerful. In Jesus' name, Amen

WILL THE DISTRESSED COME TO YOU?

When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do." Genesis 41:55

Who better to turn to than a Pharaoh for help? People in high positions should have had all the answers and the keys to all the storehouses. Yet, Pharaoh was in over his head. He was not God's child and his stone gods weren't talking.

Seemingly overnight, Joseph was brought out of obscurity to a place of prominence. He couldn't have guessed that he would sleep in a palace instead of a prison floor, or that his administrative and prophetic gifts would be implemented for the salvation of his people. Yet, when God decided it was time for his advancement, nothing and no one could stop it. Who did the famished people turn to? To the one whose name they didn't even know the day before.

How many righteous are sitting in low places today? They are gifted, overlooked, even ridiculed. They have turned down opportunities for advancement because the pathway to the top meant compromise. The sacrifice, made out of love for God, has cost them dearly. There will come a time that others will turn to them for life-saving advice. Their quiet lives of steadfast faithfulness to God will speak volumes when those they formerly trusted shrivel in the flames of adversity. It is only suffering that exposes the difference between the two. It is only suffering that reveals the golden qualities of the ones they once despised.

I must not weary of the quiet and steady journey of the true disciple. Drawing near to God is never the popular agenda. I will stand out like a sore thumb and bear the insults of those who have much more interesting lives. Yet, when famine affects the landscape of those around me, it might just be the hour for which God has prepared me. I may not sleep in a palace but I will be sought after for the treasures I've cultivated in secret with my God.

John the Baptist, a peculiar recluse, lived three decades for a future, though short, time of influence. Most of his life was preparation for the short burst of glory when he was privileged to prepare others for the arrival of Jesus. Such is the way of discipleship. You and I must never assume that obscurity will be our 'normal'. Ever ready, we are looking for the time when the seeds God has sown into our hearts in private will be poured out in others time of need.

I never fit in the mainstream. You made me unique and I know that my time with You will bring a beautiful harvest. In Jesus' name, Amen

WHAT GOD DOES WHILE I WAIT

When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” And he said, “Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.”

Genesis 42:1-2

While I'm praying for many years about something that breaks my heart in two, it can appear as if I have a Father who withholds intervention for no good reason. He could act today, couldn't He? Doesn't love come running? If a parent can do something to alleviate a child's suffering, won't he? This is the human side of praying. God's side is much more expansive, however.

So much happened behind the scenes while Joseph waited in slavery. His tearful cries for deliverance weren't deaf to his God. Though Joseph didn't see immediate results outside of the daily grace God provided, there was so much happening behind the scenes. The right Pharaoh had to be in power to dream the dream that Joseph interpreted. The brothers had to live with their sin and come to a place of humility so that the forgiveness Joseph would eventually extend could be effective. The land outside Egypt's borders had to move toward famine so that desperation would make Jacob turn his eyes toward Egypt. Joseph needed the humility and wisdom only borne of suffering in order to one-day lead a nation well. Good leaders are cultivated in a crucible.

Could Joseph have guessed that God was this active? No. No more than I can while I sit in my waiting room. But God was moving history around with His index finger and all to bring about the salvation of His people. Can I not trust Him with my life? Can I dare to believe that His love for me, and His church, is that great? Waiting always has purpose.

As I review the activity of an active, powerful, all wise and loving God on behalf of Joseph, may I see my own story with the eyes of faith.

Write the stories of spiritual brothers like Joseph on my heart. I need to review and review how Your unfailing love works. In Jesus' name, Amen

CLUTCHING MY TREASURE

So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. Genesis 42:3-4

I wonder what God felt as He watched Jacob's sons, all except one, leave for Egypt. He saw them pack for the long journey. He saw Jacob clutch Benjamin protectively and heard him declare that this child would not go with them. He read the thoughts in this old father's heart. "I entrusted one of my favorite sons of Rachel to you on another long journey and I never saw him again. You're not taking Benjamin, too!" God saw this father's inability to entrust the one who was precious into His care. Though the loss of Joseph happened two decades earlier, the wound was still like it happened yesterday.

Jacob had not gotten over his sons' carelessness with their younger brother. He had nursed the hurt and distrust had grown with the years. Ultimately though, his issue was not with his sons but with God. He could not see, though he would see shortly, that God is trustworthy and does all things well. For now, Jacob overprotected Benjamin and trusted no one, not even the God he'd given his life to.

What wound from the past are you hanging on to? What wound still defines you to the point that you over-correct today's decisions based on yesterday's heartbreak? You are able to live most of your life quite normally but your 'Benjamin' is still in your clutches. Release him to God? Never.

We know how the story of Joseph ends. We know that God oversees, with great care and vengeance, the lives of Joseph and Benjamin. In reviewing His sovereignty and faithfulness, can we not ask for the grace to stop clenching what we feel we need to protect? Perhaps today is the day each of us can acknowledge our need to play God. Can 2015 be the year we move toward setting free what we have entrapped? God can be trusted.

***Gently pry my fingers loose. Reassure me that You are trustworthy. In Jesus' name,
Amen***

LOVING TRUTH MORE THAN PEACE

Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. “Where do you come from?” he said. They said, “From the land of Canaan, to buy food.” Genesis 42:7

How painful would that moment be? Joseph has been far from home since he was a young boy. He’s missed his family but was also betrayed by most of them. Now, out of nowhere, the brothers who sold him into slavery are standing in front of him. I would imagine that part of him wanted to run and embrace them. They were a connection to home. Ah, but there was another part of him ~ the spiritual part that God had tutored. He was more God’s son than Jacob’s son. Time had broadened his perspective and he was able to find restraint; to inflict a wound that would lead to reconciliation.

Have you ever had to wound someone for their own good? If you’ve been a parent, the answer is automatically yes. But how about a sibling, a friend, or someone you’re mentoring? Inflicting a saving wound out of love is difficult, especially when the other person has hurt you. How do you wound them without having a personal agenda to take vengeance? Only time with God, a long time, will prepare any of us to deal with them for their spiritual good, not our need for justice.

I can imagine that Joseph was conflicted. He wanted to hurt them. He wanted to hug them. He wanted to make them pay. He wanted a family again. But he knew there could be no reconciliation without true remorse. A quick tearful reunion would not require them to search their own hearts. Only severe testing would unearth true feelings. Joseph was willing to inflict it and delay his own gratification. He set aside embraces for more estrangement.

Righteousness is often the dividing line in relationships. It fractures as one chooses Jesus and the other chooses his own passions. There can be no reconciliation without both parties being on the same page. If I love peace more than I love truth, I will rush in to make things okay when it’s entirely premature. Inflicting a wound by speaking the truth will delay any chance for intimacy but it will also give a wayward soul time to reflect and deal with his own heart.

To be a Joseph kind of leader takes courage – the kind of courage born of an adversity that cast us on the breast of God for survival. The wisdom learned there is far more precious than the cheap embraces of those who aren’t ready to pledge true fidelity.

This is graduate school in biblical application. How am I doing, Lord? Only You can show me. In Jesus' name, Amen

SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND HEAVY PRICE TAGS

Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. Genesis 42:6

How fun it is to be a child and have a dream that someday everyone will bow down to me. It's hedonistic to picture it coming to pass. Power such as this is an opiate for a kid.

Joseph's dream was from God but the way he perceived it might happen was not; it would take many years. Joseph needed the maturity to handle spiritual power and his brothers needed the humility brought about by years of failure and hardship.

Spiritual gifts are wonderful things but my flesh quickly skews how they should be used. I don't realize that I'm to exercise my gifts as Jesus would if He lived through me. Instead, I am self-centered as I use them only to feel good. I am a young Joseph. I am wide-eyed and immature, unwilling to embrace the heavy price tags associated with them. Here are a few.

Teaching ~ I can teach what I want to teach and enjoy the accolades of others recognizing my giftedness. But God is supposed to choose the topics, choose the audience, and craft every word. I will be loved and I will be hated but He promises grace.

Shepherding ~ I can shepherd those I'm attracted to and feel good when I'm appreciated. But God wants me to restore the broken and confront the ungodly. I must relinquish my need for acceptance.

Leading ~ I can wear my power recklessly and lead others where I think they should go. I can enjoy being up front and having people answer to me but what about servant leadership? God calls me to lead by example. True spiritual power is about laying my life down.

Showing mercy ~ I am gratified when I am able to extend mercy to those I feel need it and deserve it. It's rewarding to dry their tears. But God also asks me to show mercy to those I feel are undeserving. He will also call me to withhold mercy for someone's good until He says it's time to act. Drying another's tears too quickly interferes with what He is trying to tell them.

Spiritual gifts are wonderful things, aren't they? Yes, but joy is found when I use them in a way that earns my Father's approval. I follow Jesus by doing only what His Father tells me to do. Every gift is under His control. I will be loved and I will be hated. I will be embraced and I will be shunned. When I rise up under God's anointing, I commit myself to experience every mountaintop and valley on the narrow road to glory.

Your gifts, Your way, through me. In Jesus' name, Amen

SHREWD FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST

By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.” And he put them all together in custody for three days. Genesis 42:15-17

When I hear the word shrewd, I don't naturally think of it as a Christ-like attribute. It has negative connotations but there is such a thing as Spirit led shrewdness. Joseph made use of it here, not for self-protection, and not for revenge, but for kingdom purposes. He withheld information about his true identity and then went on to manipulate events for his brothers' ultimate good. One theologian suggests that 'Joseph played the role of a detective conducting a tough interrogation. He could not proceed with full transparency and expect to get accurate information from them.'

The Hebrew word for shrewdness 'ormah' is translated as 'good judgment', 'prudent' or 'clever'. (Proverbs 12:23; 13:16; 14:8; 22:3; and 27:12) Shrewdness is called for when I must do God's work in hostile circumstances. Jesus instructed His disciples to be 'shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves'. Although this is a life-saving spiritual skill, there is little instruction on how to do it. And without it, many Christians are led into danger. They lack critical discernment; they trust the wrong people and end up in captivity. I know. I was in such captivity for 22 years as I trusted wrong people in ministry.

We are taught that a Christian should always be transparent, always be nice. If asked a question, we should be up front and answer it completely. But there are for varying circumstances. Openness and transparency should be reserved for those who earn it. I am to walk wisely as, once in a while, I am in proximity to someone who does not have God's interest at heart. They have a track record for dealing treacherously with others. In my gut, I feel it would have negative consequences to be fully upfront with them. I find myself giving them partial truths, a kind of Joseph-answer, in order to protect kingdom enterprises that are fragile. If I am prayerful, void of personal agendas, I can rest in the assurance that shrewdness is wisdom.

The danger here is to read this superficially and conclude that to be on God's side is to condone all deceit. It should be the exception rather than the rule. Anger, unforgiveness, and personal agendas are signs that plans made with good judgment are skewed. I remember that Joseph had worked through betrayal. He had suffered well. The deception he employed was for his brother's good, not for his need to make them pay. Ultimately, he knew that God making all of them into a nation hung in the balance. What he did, he did for God, not Himself.

Don't let false guilt get in the way of sharp judgment. In Jesus' name, Amen

AGE AND GUILT

Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us." And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood." They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. Genesis 42:21-13

It appears at this point that Joseph's brothers are accepting the responsibility for the hard times they are experiencing. They are reviewing their past sins against Joseph and are connecting the dots between wrongdoing and consequences. Wouldn't everybody, given the same circumstances? That's the question. Don't most people, with age, own their mistakes?

I can't even count the numbers of people I've talked to who decided, after many decades, to confront an abuser from childhood. There was a kind of magical thinking that people in their senior years would admit the truth. It's assumed that godly guilt would have set in at some point in their lives. But hopes for fairness and justice are smashed when the confrontation goes poorly. I've heard a comment like this more than I can count. "How could a man, at 67 years old, still deny that he did anything wrong?!" He does, and we will too if we've not bent our heart to the Teacher over the years. Truth can be shunned no matter what the age. Only a truth seeker will own his mistakes.

One of the hardest parts of growing up is to see the adults of our lives; teachers, pastors, lawmakers, etc. with adult eyes. Our childhood vision begins to clear. With it comes the painful realization of someone who sinned against us. Thoughts of confrontation soon follow and when anger drives the timing of it, instead of the prompting of the Spirit of God, the results are usually heart-rending.

Is there a way to tell ahead of time whether someone will be receptive to truth when confronted? While not entirely ironclad, I believe there is. Does that person have a track record of owning truth? Is the person humble? Have there been smaller things that the person has been willing to own and apologize for?

The sad truth about people in general, even the elderly, is that 'men love darkness rather than light'. And, 'the way is narrow and few there be that find it'. In the midst of this reality though, you and I can pray for the Spirit of God to open blind eyes. God is powerful and prayer can till up hardened soil of unbelief. One last thing ~ confrontation should always occur on the other side of forgiveness When the heart is hot ~ keep silent.

Older doesn't always mean wiser. Keep us from cynicism. In Jesus' name, Amen

WHEN TEARS ARE COMPLICATED

And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood." They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. Genesis 42:22-24

The meaning of tears is often complicated. If someone pinned me down and asked me why Joseph cried in this scene, I couldn't definitively say. There are probably many reasons. He heard his brothers discuss their sin against him in person. He loved them but was sad about their sin. He was grieved over the testing he was about to inflict. These are just three possible causes for why he turned his back to weep privately.

Jesus asked Mary, "Why are you crying?" I often don't know myself. I've used all the clichés. "I just need a good cry." "I don't know why I'm crying." "I don't know whether to laugh or cry."

How much weeping is done without knowledge of what's buried down deep? A lot. We really don't know ourselves as God knows us. I often ask Him, "Why am I so upset by this? Show me, please." I have a Father who, not only sees every tear but, could write a novel on what each one means. When emotions swirl in my head and form nothing but cobwebs, Abba can sort them out. Strand by strand, he disentangles the web and gives insight into the matters of my own heart. If I don't know myself through God's eyes, I don't know myself at all.

Is there anything more painful than to cry and to experience ridicule while doing it? "There she is – crying again." They believe a mountain is being made out of a molehill. They think they know why there are tears when, in fact, they often have no idea. No wonder we are trained so young to hide our tears and stuff the bulk of them into the dark places of our soul. There, they stagnate, accumulate, and turn us into stoics.

When betrayals are as personal and complicated as Joseph's, tears will be plentiful. For any today who can't find an end to their weeping and can't seem to find resolution, the Counselor promises joy in the morning. Closure is promised if I'm willing to put myself into His safe hands.

***I don't need to protect my heart from You, Father. I submit it fully. In Jesus' name,
Amen***

WHEN I'VE REACHED MY LIMIT!

And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me." Then Reuben said to his father, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol." Genesis 42:36-38

Have you ever had a "That's it, I quit!" moment? Over the long haul, you had held your tongue, you kept functioning, you stayed civil in a strained relationship, and you weren't even aware that you were so fragile on the inside. But then it happened. It might have even been a little thing that sent you over the edge but there was no more elastic in your spirit to assume the weight of it. You snapped.

Jacob's breaking point was in this part of the story. Joseph is dead. Simeon has been seized by an Egyptian ruler and imprisoned. (None of them knew that the ruler was Joseph.) Now, in order to release Simeon, they must bring back another brother, the prized child of their father. Jacob's soul rips the rest of the way. This was his limit and he declares there is no way that he will release Benjamin to anyone's care but his own.

Everyone has a limit. The issues vary. The amounts of stress vary. The ways each person abdicates his hope vary. Some cry. Some erupt with strong words. Some just walk away and never look back.

Reaching the end of my limits is emotionally and spiritually complicated. Have I been holding myself together and now find that my personal strength is gone? Or has God been holding me together but now I can't seem to be able to find adequate grace to continue the journey? Either way, limits are felt and terror marks the moment.

I've had a half dozen such junctures in my life. Some limits were God-given, bringing me to a point of failure to make different choices. Others were instructive limits, showing me that I was doing things in my own strength. The last set of limits was simply low places in my journey of obedience. I didn't feel I had any more strength to continue. What was the cure? Getting off the treadmill, getting quiet, and spending intensive time with God.

There is a lot in today's devotional to ponder. For every one who is stretched thin, take stock now of what's happening in your soul before you hit the brick wall. The ways of the soul are a complicated maze but God discloses the deep and hidden things of the dark. Light and clarity dwell with him.

Don't let me waste my visit to a place of despair. Strengthen my faith muscles for next time. Increase my stamina through increased wisdom that only comes from You. In Jesus' name, Amen

WHEN GOD HEMS YOU IN

***Now the famine was severe in the land. And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little food." But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.'* Genesis 43:1-3**

Does God sometimes confine His child? Yes. Perhaps you object. "What happened to the God of spacious places?" He's that, too. There's a time and a season for everything. When it's time to train and direct a child's steps, a Father confines. When it's time to deliver, confinement ends and spacious places begin. For our good, God initiates both.

There were a few times in my life when God asked me to do something extremely difficult. I objected and had many reasons why it wasn't possible; I didn't feel I could handle it, I felt it was a mistake deep in my spirit, and/or I didn't want to face a certain issue. Jacob knew this kind of dread. He swore that Benjamin would never go to Egypt. He made this paternal declaration to his sons; the kind that children know is definitive. They knew not to argue.

But then God overruled. Famine increased; food decreased. Options disappeared. God hemmed him in so that the only option was Egypt. I'm sure it seemed to Jacob like he'd never see Benjamin again. Was he frustrated that God didn't provide another way? Probably. It probably seemed like God was cruel. Yet, eternal purposes prevailed and confinement initiated a lifesaving journey for the tribes of Israel. Egypt was the doorway to their future.

There are so many ways God confines for my good. He can make me so uncomfortable in a job that I realize it's time to leave. Misunderstood, rejected, unappreciated....these are often the catalysts for ultimate change. He can also cause this discomfort so that I learn to treasure Him above my own comfort.

Oh, how He can hem me in emotionally. For my good, there may be an issue it's time for me to confront. I may have run from it for a lifetime but God places me in the path of others who stir up this old wound. I can't escape the triggers. With nowhere to run but God, I am forced to deal with something I'd rather forget.

I don't like to feel trapped. By nature, I recoil from the one who won't let me escape. My last instinct is to draw closer to the very One who hems me in. Yet, that is what I must do with a Sovereign Father. I must intentionally run to the One who is wounding me. I hang on to the theology of God's love and goodness. Through my tears, I know that the wound he inflicts is a life-saving one. Every step I take toward Egypt moves me closer to life, not death.

On the other side of every confinement has been abundant life. Help me remember that in this place of frustration. In Jesus' name, Amen

WHAT I LONG FOR

May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.”
Genesis 43:14

Since Joseph’s disappearance, Jacob had held Benjamin close. He wasn’t going to let him out of his sight for fear that some bad end would also come to him. Years of playing God had become normal but in his old age, God tested him. For all to live, Benjamin must go to Egypt. Jacob didn’t give in easily. At the first suggestion, he adamantly refused. Only famine and the threat of extinction wore him down. He finally abdicated. “If I lose all my children, then so be it.”

Are you tired of fighting? You’ve held on to hope and clutched your dream. You’ve not let anyone too close for fear that your resolve would be challenged. You’ve controlled things quite artfully. No one knows that your iron will is fragile. I know. I’ve been a dreamer, too.

No one can predict the moment when I will stop fighting. My resolve to make things work crumbles. The hardened exterior of sheer grit melts away and surrenders to God’s providence creeps in. The humility of true surrender marks a stunning turning point in my life as I open my hands toward heaven. “I place all I am, all I have, and all I want, into Your hands, God.”

Dreams are fragile things as long as I live in a fallen world. Perfection here on earth is impossible. The cancer of sin metastasizes and touches everything I want. While good things do happen and pleasurable seasons come for a time, everything is meant to be a taste of things to come. I am to smell their aroma but acknowledge that the feast is still out of reach. My hope is deferred.

Ultimately, if I don’t learn to invest all my dreams into the storehouses of heaven, I will feel sorry for myself. Loss and grief will consume me as, with age, I see all hopes of things being different slip through my hands. David said, “And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.” Psalm 39:7 Abdicating my dreams, whether for health, relationship, acceptance, intimacy, or vocational fulfillment, and placing each into the hands of a God who will give me all things, brings me peace. I can let my Benjamin go.

The cataclysmic moment of surrender is messy. It is, at first, tentative. There is despair as I acknowledge that my dream is broken. There is a season of grieving. But then misplaced hope gives way to rock solid hope, the kind that will culminate in the restoration of Eden and restored perfection. Every single thing I long for will be mine.

Help me understand that longing is to mark the life of every saint. Let it be joyful confidence, not discontent. In Jesus' name, Amen

GETTING CLOSE ENOUGH TO MERCY

When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon." The man did as Joseph told him and brought the men to Joseph's house. And the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, "It is because of the money, which was replaced in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may assault us and fall upon us to make us servants.

Genesis 43:16-18

The brother's history of sin against Joseph makes them skittish. Rightly so. How many would forgive being sold into slavery by a family member? (And it's happening today all over the world.) Though it has been nearly two decades, to them it feels like yesterday. Though they didn't know Joseph's identity yet, their guilty conscience causes them look for God's judgment anywhere it can be found. They assume that this ruler in Egypt will be the instrument of God's discipline. While they prepare for hardship, Joseph prepares a feast in their honor. Mercy is not rational.

When I consider my past sins, I can turn away from God in fear. I cannot conceive (though I know a lot about the cross) that God will have the face of mercy instead of judgment.

There's a new song out by Big Daddy Weave called Overwhelmed. It's currently my husband's favorite song. Here is the part of the song that I hear him singing throughout the day.

***God, I run into Your arms
Unashamed because of mercy
I'm overwhelmed, I'm overwhelmed by You.***

It is not possible to describe the gift of God's mercy. He brings me close when I should be alienated. He forgives when I should be punished. He makes me a friend when I have proven to be His enemy. He opens His arms wide when I'm convinced that all access to Him will be locked.

Joseph is a type of Jesus. He shows us what unthinkable mercy looks like. My part is to dare to believe such good news. How tragic to run from God my whole life, only to discover that I ran from mercy. In His hands, He holds the robe of His son. He waits to put it around my shoulders. When I wear it, I am as sinless as His Son, Jesus. Mercy not only forgives, it removes my sin completely.

Mercy is free but it's on the other side of true remorse. Show me the difference between remorse and living with a guilty conscience. In Jesus' name, Amen

WHEN IT FEELS LIKE THE END

And when we came to the lodging place we opened our sacks, and there was each man's money in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it again with us, and we have brought other money down with us to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks." He replied, "Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them. Genesis 43:21-13

Who would have thought that too much money in their sacks would be a problem? That's a good problem unless the ruler of Egypt has your future in his hands and will perceive that the money is stolen. Then you have some explaining to do. It appears that fast-talking will be your only salvation. How limited their spiritual perspective is! They do not know that the ruler they fear is Joseph. They do not know that God is writing the plotline of this severe testing of character. Ignorance is a good thing. If they knew, perhaps their people pleasing would kick in ~ in order to gain favor. After all, they, and their children, were hungry.

Ah, God does all things well. A spiritual test is never enjoyable. It takes me to edge where, for a moment, everything hangs in the balance. What I think, what I do, all seems so critical and so fragile. Never is the war of the flesh stronger than when I am reacting to a customized test from God. He knows just how to take me to the end of myself in order to confront what is in my heart. When I arrive at that 'ugly thing' I've not been willing to see before now, I expect His hand to come sweeping down to pronounce a death sentence. I'm positive that it will be my ultimate humiliation.

But then, upon humble acknowledgement and prayers for grace, I hear the same words the brothers heard from Joseph. "Peace you to. Do not be afraid."

"Search me and know me. Try me and see if there be any wicked way in me." Ps. 139:23 is not a prayer for the fainthearted. I am spiritually dull and don't know myself well at all. And since "God desires truth in the inward parts." Ps.51:6, arriving at it is arduous. But a God who accepts humble sinners is at the other end, bent down with his arms open to me. The painful discovery I made is only new to me. He knew it all along and, oh, how he loved me in spite of it.

Just yesterday, you revealed an ugly truth and today there is peace. I wouldn't want to belong to anyone else. In Jesus' name, Amen

RE-GROUPING FOR THE NEXT PHASE

And he inquired about their welfare and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" They said, "Your servant our father is well; he is still alive." And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves. And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!" Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there. Genesis 43:27-30

Joseph had it all planned out. He would test his brothers, temporarily incarcerate Simeon, send them back to Canaan and then return to Egypt with Benjamin, and all the while, none of his family would know who he was. The next phase would be more personal, more difficult to play out without disclosing his own identity. How would he serve them a meal, see Benjamin, and then talk of their father without his heart giving way? Years of pent up grief and homesickness were bubbling at the surface, begging escape. The only recourse when weeping was close to exploding was to excuse himself to re-group in private. He kept them waiting while he wept in the next room.

Knowing when to re-group can be tricky. When emotions are strong, whether grief, anger, or frustration, it's hard to rein them in for a better time. I don't believe I have the restraint to keep overwhelming feelings in check instead of express them.

The brothers did need to see Joseph's tears. Benjamin did need to hear the lament of his older brother for all the lost years they had experienced. Whether or not Joseph should share his heart was not the question. It was when he should do it.

Navigating relationships where there has been much hurt is so very complicated. Often, I need to reign in everything I want to say until considerable time has passed. Trust may have been broken. Immaturity may exist and there is no foundation for honest sharing. Remorse may be missing and any tears will be wasted. There are many reasons for regrouping in private but finding the strength to do it is difficult. I must restrain my emotions in one setting so that in my private space, I can let it all go. I am not alone there. God is with me. Until there is safety with those who have hurt me, I can pour out my heart to the only One who can receive everything I long to say. For any of you who realize at this very moment that the emotional exchange you've been rehearsing is ill timed, know that I am praying for you today.

Lord, pour out the grace my friend needs right now to step back and be still. Woo them to come to You instead and assure them that you will receive them just as they are. In Jesus' name, Amen

ARE YOU SPIRITUALLY INTUITIVE?

And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement. Genesis 43:33

God's child is meant to be spiritually intuitive. Though God is a communicator, much of the time He is subtle. If I'm dull instead of intuitive, I will miss the signposts that are significant to my journey.

Joseph prepared a feast for his brothers. When they arrived, they were seated in order of their birth. Who was the first to notice? We're not told. But eventually, all of them were stunned and speechless. They couldn't imagine what was going on but they knew that the moment was pregnant with implications.

What creates a pregnant moment conceived by God? Prayer. I see the need for change. I commit myself to pray over a long period of time. It will appear that God is inactive but I keep my eyes on the horizon. By faith, I know that my prayers are being heard. By faith, I know that God answers the prayers of His children. Though I will walk through the wilderness of waiting, there will come a moment that will cause me to draw in my breath. Everything will feel like it's shifting. Fragile. Tenuous. I dare not mess it up. If ever there is a time for me to stay quiet and watchful, it will be this moment.

But there is another kind of pregnant moment. It's the kind wrought by human hands. I set out to make changes I believe need to be made. With my charisma and ingenuity, I set in motion a chain of events that stir things up. I'm nothing but a troublemaker without the hand of God leading me. What I bring about might be good but it won't be divine.

Right now, in a major area of my life, there is a moment being shaped by God through many prayers and many tears. The air is electric and the outcome is unknown. It's time for human hands to be restrained and God's hands to be loosed. Since spiritual intuition is a gift from God, I am a poor beggar this morning, asking God to open my eyes to everything I can't see, yet discern. I'm praising Him as I hold my breath.

Something momentous, something of heaven, carved by You. That's all I want. In Jesus' name, In Jesus' name, Amen

THE PERFECT STORM

Then he commanded the steward of his house, “Fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man’s money in the mouth of his sack, and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain.” And he did as Joseph told him. Genesis 44:1-2

Just about the time the brothers believed that all was well, the fires of testing rose to a new peak. They had dined at Joseph’s table. (Though they did not yet know it was Joseph.) The meal had been sumptuous. They had begun to feel the hand of blessing and the knot of guilt that they had carried in their gut began to recede. But God, through Joseph, was not going to leave any past issues unresolved. There was a history of unspoken evil that needed exposure. For the brothers to be free of their past sins and to know the mercy that forgiveness brings, they must suffer again.

Joseph set them up to fail. He had his servant place the royal silver cup in Benjamin’s sack. Joseph could foresee the moment when it would be discovered and the brothers would understand that their youngest brother, the other favorite son of their old father, would be imprisoned for stealing. The Father’s second beloved son would never return home. This time, it was not their fault. But to their father, it would feel identical to what happened so long ago.

Joseph represents a beautiful picture of how God brings a sinner home. God knows how to refine me. What I think I can hide away can so easily be revealed when He shapes the circumstances in my life. He concocts the perfect storm, for my good, in order for bring about a cleansing. Though it is ultimately a life-saving wound, it will feel like my demise. God will not appear kind, but cruel. I might be so angry that I vow never to draw close to Him again. I will not understand at first that this is the path to my blessing, not a curse-filled future.

The key to all spiritual blessing is coming to Christ with empty hands. As long as I think I’m good, I’ll forfeit the joy of mercy. As long as I think I’m innocent, I’ll forfeit the joy of forgiveness. As long as I believe I have no need of Him, I’ll forfeit the joy of grace. The brothers will have to face Joseph again as criminals under arrest. They will appear guilty and their entire future will be at the mercy of a leader they do not know. Prosperity, reconciliation, and blessing are all waiting for them but for now, they faint under the burden of past sins, which have caught up with them.

To live with Christ, each of us has to know this moment. If I have no need of a Savior, I will not cherish salvation and the God who extends it.

Your parenting is not vindictive, but entirely driven by perfect love. In Jesus' name, In Jesus' name, Amen

GO AHEAD. SPEAK IT!

Then Judah went up to him and said, “Oh, my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord’s ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself. Genesis 44:18

The brothers are cornered. Joseph planted treasure in Benjamin’s sack, knowing that upon discovery, he would have legal right to claim Benjamin as his servant. This would bring his brothers to the breaking point. They would either rend their clothes in guilt over their past sins or their hard hearts, even for Benjamin, would be revealed. The spiritual test was about to do its work and only God knew how it would work out. When crushed, Judah repented for himself and his brothers. Still not knowing that Joseph was the brother they had betrayed, Judah confessed the guilt, which had only compounded over the years.

Oh, the power of confession. Not only am I to confess my sins to God but scripture commands me to confess my sins to a brother or sister in Christ too. This is so that I may know the release that comes from speaking of my own guilt. I can also ask for prayer and know the power of another’s intercession over me.

This is hard for each of us. Having been given the choice of free will, I rarely tell my story to another. I will carry the guilt of what I did long ago for decades. I’ll rationalize that I’ve asked God to forgive me. And He has. But the weight of my story presses in on me in ways I can’t even measure. Not until I tell it, speak it, and feel the release, can I understand how much of a burden I have carried.

Speaking my story to just one safe person, one who has the heart of Jesus for me, adds years to my life. Until I tell it, it isn’t real to me and it has little clarity. The narrative is trapped in my own head and swirls around like a pool of sludge. Forcing myself to speak of the unspeakable gives it form. As I pour out the contents of my heart, I am lighter. As love and reminders of God’s forgiveness are returned from the one who is listening, I am free.

The bonus of confession is the gift that comes with self-disclosure. I think of the things I’ve said after talking of something private. “I never knew I felt this strongly about that.” “I’m surprised about how much I’m crying about this.” “Things make sense for the first time!”

I can only imagine the relief Judah felt when He told Joseph the story of his past sins. Even if he had to pay with his own life, it felt worth it. Burdens of the heart crush us and it need not be so.

For the one who is crying reading this, the one who cannot take another day living in silence, give them the grace to tell their story. And show them who should be the ears of Joseph. In Jesus' name, Amen

WHEN A CHILD BECOMES A PARENT'S FRIEND

And we said to my lord, 'we have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.' Genesis 44:20

Oh, the painful journey that a child must travel to finally become his parent's friend. For a child, youth is complicated. Their parents are god-like, by divine intention. It takes a good chunk of adulthood for that child to see a parent's humanity, forgive the imperfections, and come back to embrace friendship.

And oh, the painful journey that a parent must travel to finally become their child's friend. Without a willingness to adapt from a parent to a peer, true friendship will be impossible. Parents will always see their child as a child, even in their 60's and 70's. What is needed for a parent to see their child as a mature adult? Humility. Parents can learn a lot from grown children if we're willing to be taught by them.

Look how long it took for Judah to talk respectfully of his father and his father's affections. Nearly two decades. When he was a young man, he despised his father, and Joseph, for the love they shared. The scripture today is a tender display of admiration, respect, and acceptance of who his father is and whom he loves.

Jaime, my daughter, and I work together in this ministry. She is in her mid-thirties and our relationship has evolved over the years. Mother/daughter relationships are wonderful and also complicated. We will be the first to admit that. But it can become a work of glory when both are committed to grow amidst the challenges of getting older together. When people learn that we work together, most will show a measure of surprise. "Really? And you get along?" We laugh but we understand. We think of all the family businesses that operate in an environment of family strife.

Just this week, Jaime made an observation about my pace of life and my health. Instead of objecting and continuing to go about my day, I listened. God confirmed to me that very day that she was right. Yesterday, I called to thank her for it. I affirmed, again, her as my friend. How precious it is to walk together with God!

What is the secret of true fellowship in a relationship, whether friend or familial? Both have to love God first. Seek God first. Then ask God for His eyes for the other person. Discoveries will be wonderful and, at times, painful. But with God's eyes, grace will prevail. Under God's wings, relationships thrive.

Looking back, Your work of grace is a masterpiece and all glory goes to You. In Jesus' name, Amen

FEELING BADLY ABOUT MYSELF

We said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' Then you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.' Genesis 44:22-23

I want peace but I don't naturally want it God's way. I take shortcuts to protect my pride. I'm much like Joseph's brothers who will do anything Joseph asks except go get Benjamin. But, it must be Joseph's way or no way. Joseph knows that by producing Benjamin, sins and emotions of their past deeds will be unearthed, the topics they're trying to avoid with their bargaining.

Ever think God is unreasonable? God requires full and honest confession. And it's steep. Like Joseph, He will not settle for a generalized admission. I want to say, "Yes, I've done some things I regret." God will never leave it at that. "Like what?" He'll ask. Unless I open my heart to give a full disclosure, peace eludes me. My sins were specific. So must be my confession.

This happens in human relationships all the time. If a friend tells me that I offended her, I'm prone to want to declare that I'm just a bad friend. That's lazy and inept. I need to hear the specifics of my injury against her and apologize with as much detail.

Pride is what created a breach between man and God in the Garden and pride is what keeps me from making peace with God. My sin offends Him and He calls it like it is. But if I own it, won't I end up feeling badly about myself? What will it do to my ego to call myself a sinner? So, I avoid it and make a plan to come to God on my own terms. I set out to prove that I'm good by doing good things. Eternity is at stake while I play with His terms.

God's pathway to peace is through the cross. The way is steep – as evidenced by the fact that it cost Jesus His life. Today, He may be asking something steep of me. I'm encouraged to face something in the past, own it, ask for forgiveness, and make some kind of restitution. Prideful excuses abound in my heart. But shouldn't the One I've offended be the One who decides what it will require to make peace? I can trust God with this weighty decision. The terms are based on holiness and empowered by perfect love.

When I come on Your terms, it's for my good. In Jesus' name, Amen

SHOULD I BE OPEN OR PLAY IT SAFE?

Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, "Make everyone go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. Genesis 45:1-2

Joseph tested his brothers severely. It might have appeared that he had no mercy when he kept Simeon, imprisoned him, and gave the remaining brothers the stiff terms of his release. Joseph's heart was unreadable, safely concealed, until such time as the nature of their hearts would be revealed. Once they showed the agony of true remorse, his heart would be on full display. He would weep so loud that the sound of it would penetrate the grounds of his vast residence.

What is my response to a sincere apology? If I've been in a relationship that turned treacherous, one that required that I prudently step back for time, it might appear to the other person that my heart is cold. But, in fact, I am praying for us both. I'm praying that their hardened heart will eventually soften because of the conviction of the Spirit, and I'm also praying that mine will not become hardened because of unforgiveness. The only reason Joseph could handle his brothers with such wisdom is because he had many thousands of hours alone with God. He, a Hebrew, lived as an outsider in Egyptian territory. Loneliness was God's gift and the perfect training ground for impartial leadership.

Who has offered, what appears to be, a sincere apology? If God speaks to me and tells me that true remorse is present, what will my heart do? Will I keep it imprisoned in my tower of self-protection? Or, like Joseph, will I be willing to pour out the tears that have been hidden? Letting another see my heart is only possible when pride is put aside. How many times have I said, "I'll never let them see me cry!"

Joseph offers me wise counsel in matters of the heart. He, like Jesus, has vast emotional capacities. He had many faces as he related to others. There were moments when he would have been called stoic but underneath was a current of tears that gave away the heart of a broken man.

There's a time and a season for everything. There's a time to conceal and a time to reveal. I have to be careful that I don't live a life of concealment; ever protecting a heart that has been hurt one too many times. I also have to be careful that I don't live a life of complete openness; allowing anyone and everyone access to my thoughts and emotions. Real maturity is knowing what Jesus would do in the midst of complicated and ever shifting relationships.

Without instruction of whispers from You, I'm chaff in the wind and continual prey. In Jesus' name, Amen

DREAD OR ELATION?

And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Genesis 45:3-4

The difference between Joseph appearing to his brothers and Jesus appearing in the clouds to take us home is that we know He's coming. The brothers did not expect to see Joseph and they were shocked at his disclosure. Dismay and dread were their instant reactions.

Dismay and dread will also characterize the reactions of many in God's family. It's tragic to me that such a wondrous event will be clouded by lack of enthusiasm. Jesus told us that He's coming. He told us that the timing would be a surprise. He told us to prepare in every way to see Him. Joy is meant to be the prevailing emotion at His arrival, not sorrow.

There are three categories of people within the family of God who react differently at the thought of seeing Jesus.

Some dread seeing Him because they are not ready. Their flesh rules their lives and they forget that their old man has been crucified with Christ. While living by the Spirit is made possible for every child of God, it requires daily investment. Not wanting to engage in the effort, they indulge in pleasures that eventually eclipse the beauty of Jesus entirely. They are not ready to see Him. They are not looking for Him. They are hoping that His coming isn't imminent on God's timetable.

Some dread seeing Him though they need not to. They came to the cross long enough to get saved but not long enough to get loved. Still caught up in legalism, they believe that they must work tirelessly to keep God happy. They do not know how much they are cherished. They do not understand grace. The thought of seeing Jesus makes them feel like taking cover. However, Jesus cannot wait to see them and His heart longs for their company.

There are those who live looking up. Jesus is their treasure and their heart is saturated with thoughts of Him. They took Jesus at His Word to keep the lamp lit – anticipating when He would appear as a Bridegroom coming to claim His bride. They dressed and waiting. Any other lover pales in comparison and they live on every Word of their coming bridegroom, by faith.

Joseph's brothers had no way to prepare for the reunion with the brother they betrayed. They would need to see Joseph extend His arms to them in mercy to know where they stood. But you and I can prepare for the coming of Jesus. We can know where we stand with Him by a review of the cross and an honest reflection on our level of discipleship

***Help me admit, and then probe, every trace of shyness in my spirit. In Jesus' name,
Amen***

WHEN WILL ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD?

And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. Genesis 45:5

Under what conditions could I say to the one who betrayed me, “Don’t be upset with yourself because you hurt me. God’s wonderful plan eclipses all of it.” Oftentimes, I can see some good that God has brought out of betrayal but I still want the one who inflicted harm to remember and live in regret! What kind of mercy wants offenders to know joy after remorse? (And I take into account that Joseph first tested them to know if remorse was present.)

Perhaps I don’t really understand what it means when God promises that all things will work together for my good. My good is synonymous with His good. I have been called according to His purpose. Joseph wasn’t brought to power to compensate for the pain he suffered. The story wasn’t about Joseph but about God’s plan to save His people. Joseph was privileged to play a part in God’s redemptive story. Joseph’s goal was not to receive validation from old family biases.

I am considering the largest wounds of my life. I can think of two. Has God worked things together for good? Yes. But have I interpreted Romans 8:28 to include my own vindication? Or, do I see that the wounds I sustained were for God to bring about a larger plan of redemption? Am I to strengthen the church? Am I to bring wisdom to the next generations in my family so they can secure their spiritual calling? The possibilities are limitless for what ‘called according to His purpose’ can mean.

I must love God more than myself. I must realize that I’m not the point of my own story. I will wait forever to see things work together for good if I think God is going to reward me for what I’ve suffered, if I believe that God is going let me see justice now for the evil done against me, and if I feel entitled to vindication. Today, yet again, I offer Him my story for the expansion of the kingdom.

The miracle of Joseph’s story was not that he was promoted to power in Egypt. It was the stunning work of grace, humility, and wisdom brought about he waited for redemption. Not visible to human eyes, Joseph and God dialogued, wrestled, communed, and birthed a faith that not only forgave a family of wrongdoing but also made it possible for them to live in the joy of God’s extravagant mercy.

In whatever ways my perspective needs more truth, bind my mind to Yours, Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen

THE STUMBLING BLOCK OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

So it was not you who sent me here, but God. Genesis 45:8

Really? Joseph believes that God sent him to Egypt? I thought it was the sins of his brothers that sent him there and God just made good out of it. No. Joseph dared to tell the ones who hurt him, "You didn't do this to me, God did!" Such is the stumbling block of God's sovereignty.

One of the most disturbing messages I heard when I was wrestling with the sovereignty of God was from John Piper. He said, "Who crucified Jesus? God did!" Admittedly, it took a good year for me to make peace with a God who gives free will, knows ahead of time the choices of sinful humanity, and weaves a glorious plan of pain and redemption into the life of every child.

But here's the thing. If I've never trusted God with my story and pressed in close over time to see redemption, the truth of His sovereignty will be a stumbling block to me. This sad reality characterizes most of the church. We are deeply angry with God for what He did not prevent.

Because His suffering had meaning, ours can too, when we realize that we can go through horrendous experiences with the same purpose He had, trusting and then magnifying the worth of the Father. Christianity is a wildfire when spread by the hot winds of adversity. I will miss it if I'm eaten away with the anger of injustice.

Today, someone watches a loved one wither away with cancer. The loss will either cripple them or cause them to more fully embrace the joy that life is eternal. And today, a parent's heart breaks over the path of a rebellious child. They will be tempted to disown their own son or daughter or they will choose to explore the truth of their own past rebellion against God. They will trace, once again, his never-ending supply of lovingkindness and tender mercy.

With each cross comes a choice. Meaningless suffering or the opportunity to find the heart and purposes of God in our tears. Joseph discovered the latter. Oh, the sweetness when it's framed in the comfort of God's sovereignty and the power of His redemption.

There is not one thing I have experienced, or ever will experience, that can be called a meaningless tragedy. Be lifted high over my life and as I look up, let others follow my lead and see Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen

WHO BENEFITS FROM MY REDEMPTION?

So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Genesis 45:8

In my opinion, this is an overlooked part of Joseph's story. Because I'm self-focused, I get caught up with how Joseph felt on the other side of imprisonment. I imagine him being reunited with his brothers, and mostly, with his father. I never think about how Pharaoh benefitted from crossing paths with Joseph, that Joseph's influence over Pharaoh was fatherly.

To be a father is to be in a position to advise, to take care of or administrate. The day Joseph was dragged into Pharaoh's court, Pharaoh gained a confidant; someone without an agenda. This was a priceless gift for a ruler. Never knowing who to trust and never allowing one too close, kings and pharaohs lived lonely lives. Consider what Pharaoh witnessed as he became acquainted with someone who walked with God.

- He met a man who was willing to tell the truth and put himself at risk when he interpreted Pharaoh's dream.
- He met a man who came out of a prison environment with a gentle spirit.
- He met a man who had no trace of anger or revenge seeking.
- He met a man who possessed wisdom so unique that his ideas could only be attributed to his God.
- He met a man who was not power hungry.

All of Egypt was saved from famine because God brought Joseph to Egypt. His redemption from imprisonment to power saved more than just the Jewish people. So widespread was his influence that even Egypt was able to preserve its people through the drought.

My redemption never stays in a closet. People close to me watch it unfold and God's power is on full display. His glory falls on those intimate with me but also to my acquaintances. You and I become 'fatherly' or 'motherly' to those who've never trusted before, to those who have waited to see something beautiful displayed in a world that is savagely broken in two. When I give up on God before a stunning breakthrough, I deny myself, and everyone around me, from seeing God's kingdom come to earth.

I wait on You, God. My hope is not in vain. Your glory, waiting to be revealed, is just out of sight. Give me spiritual grit to see this through. In Jesus' name, Amen

SHORT MEMORY OF MY SIN

You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you. Genesis 45:10-11

What a promise. Family members that acted out against Joseph were forgiven to such an extent that promises of provision and protection were made for the rest of their lives. How easily would it have been for the brothers to distrust Joseph's promises? Joseph could change his mind as he remembered their sins against him. They acted like his enemies after all.

I was once God's enemy. My acts against him were punishable by death. Yet, because of what Jesus did, God made me right with Him and called me His friend. Like Joseph, He has made sweeping promises of love, care, and protection toward me for the rest of my life and throughout eternity. How can I trust Him? I remember my sins, often walk in the shame of them, and shyness overtakes me. Confidence with God can be shaken on a daily basis.

Humanly speaking, I'm nervous to claim God's proclamations of love. I'm skittish to own the promises He's made. Standing in faith is impossible if I am unsure of what God's forgiveness really means. If I believe that God forgives like people forgive, I will be waiting for the other shoe to drop. I will have a short memory of my sin and believe that God does too.

Joseph was a type of Jesus. He forgave and chose to put the brother's betrayal behind him. Jesus does the same. He forgives, puts my sins behind His back and never takes them out again to rehearse my past. Salvation gives me a priceless gift, the gift of a clean slate. My history of enmity is buried at the cross and a covenantal love relationship is born. It is ironclad, not because of me, but because of Him. Jesus Christ speaks wedding vows to me that will be consummated in heaven. A Bridegroom who desires and longs for the one He loves keeps every promise.

If I'm plagued by the memories of my sin, the rehearsal of my past is not a holy thing. It is a satanic attack. I'm called, as Jesus' beloved, to grab my self-condemning thoughts and speak, out loud, His very Words that prove that I am a forgiven and cherished bride.

May my short memory take me back to the cross, not my sin. Give me more confidence in our relationship. In Jesus' name, Amen

BLESSED BY ASSOCIATION

And you, Joseph, are commanded to say, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. Genesis 45:16

Would Pharaoh have honored Joseph's brothers if he'd known them as Hebrews visiting Egypt? Never. The blessing came because of how much he loved Joseph. Whom Joseph loved, Pharaoh loved.

I descend from those whom people honored. My father, a principal in our public school system, was well loved and respected. Because of that, honor was given to his family. My father-in-law, an iconic evangelist, well loved for his passion for reaching the lost, was also well loved and respected. By carrying his last name, I am blessed on the road more often than I remember. My husband, Ron, is well loved. He leads well, has never made an enemy, and because of His reputation, I am blessed. Even today, because he is held in high regard with the owners of the company he works for, Daughters of Promise will receive a gift toward our office computers.

Do I need to have an honorable family on earth in order to be blessed by association? No. That would be unfair if that were the only criterion. Today, you and I are blessed because of our association to Jesus. God, His father, loves those whom the Son loves. Because reconciled us to His Father and made us brothers and sisters, God beckons us from the land of famine to the land of plenty. He provides everything we need for the journey. Our future and inheritance is guaranteed because Jesus has taken care of it.

And my deliverer? Like Joseph, he was spurned and rejected by men. He was sold for financial gain to end up in chains before Pilate. His hardship paved the road for my redemption.

Father, I enjoy the smile You have for me today because I love Your Son. Bless those whom I love – because I am Yours. In Jesus' name, Amen

A LIFETIME OF WAITING

So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. And they told him, "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. Genesis 45:25-28

When Joseph disappeared from Jacob's life, something broke inside of this father's heart. Hope died. His spirit withered. It would be this way for another 20+ years until he got the news that Joseph was not dead but very much alive in Egypt. When he heard it, he could not believe it was true. He had already grieved his son's death. Disillusionment had been his companion. His heart had grown cold to good news. When enough evidence had been presented however, Jacob's heart revived. It came to life after a lifetime of learning to live with disappointment.

Can God do a new thing in my later years? Yes. When something catastrophic happens in my teens and I learn to adapt by closing off my heart, can God introduce something called hope years later? Yes. When I've been a dreamer in my twenties and one disappointment after another causes me to shove my dreams underground, can God resurrect them decades later? Yes. In my mortality, decades seem like an eternity and fool me into believing that life is always going to be this way. Trust in a God who can write a new plotline no longer seems like an option.

What is it you're waiting for today? Or, should I ask what you've stopped hoping for? Longevity has revealed a trail of disappointment and it would suggest that it's futile to trust God for anything different. You believe that prayer and hope in God's promises is for someone still enjoying the dreams of their youth. Oh, it's not so. Not everything is as it appears. Jacob held what he thought was bloody coat of his son Joseph, but the evidence of his supposed death was a sham. Joseph was very much alive and living out his faith a day at a time until some future day when he could send word to His father that all was well.

This could be the very day of your breakthrough. Tell your heart to stand at attention to see the miraculous hand of God write the next chapter of your life.

I lived to see my own resurrection. All because of You. In Jesus' name, Amen

SETTLED AND CONTENT

The spirit of their father Jacob revived. And Israel said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die." Genesis 45:27b-28

It's amazing how, with Christ, my heart can adapt to a place of contentment. Jacob was thrilled with the news that Joseph was alive, so much so, that he was willing lay all other hurts aside and focus on the joy of seeing his son again. Joseph's supposed death had only been one of his many griefs. The way he died, the brother's treachery, these were nearly as crushing as losing his son. At this point in the story however, the joy of being reunited with Joseph eclipsed the pain of all else that took place before.

Nothing replaces the payoff that comes when I take time to grieve. Like Jacob, my tears are spent and I am open to a new perspective. God's perspective. I am willing to settle for something different and am empowered by the Spirit to adapt to see life differently.

A neighbor had to leave her home of 43 years to enter an assisted living facility. She grieved over all the familiar things she would have to leave behind. With time however, she grew to cherish the handpicked things she would take with her to her new home. God gave her the grace to settle in new surroundings and find contentment.

It is human nature to look at what I lost rather than what I have left. I want what I once had and overlook the treasures still in my hand. God will help me re-align and re-adjust. All grief gives me an opportunity to lift my eyes to what is eternal. I find comfort, and I find joy, as I review the promises of God for the future. Only this perspective can lead me from the throes of unending grief and bitter tears. When I think my hands are empty, God shows me that they are, indeed, full of blessings I couldn't see before. The child of God is never without riches even in the worst of times.

Change is certain. Security is also certain. Show me what is in my hands. In Jesus' name, Amen

DOING SOMETHING DIFFERENT FROM OUR FATHERS

And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. Genesis 46:2-3

God fathers each child differently. His path is a solitary one and my journey will never imitate that of my parents. If my parents were iconic in their faith, the expectations for me to follow in their footsteps will be impossible to attain. I am not either parent nor should I try to be.

Isaac, Jacob's father, was told by God to avoid Egypt during his time of famine. God made it clear that Egypt was off limits. But God's plan for Jacob was different. In his famine, Egypt was the place he was to go and settle. Doing something different from his father had to feel frightening at first. Jacob must have been confused as he embarked on a journey so peculiar.

God stretched me out of my family's mold sometime in my mid-forties. My views of some peripheral biblical issues differed from that of my father and the legalistic church I was raised in. There were some tense discussions and feelings from his disapproval created a shadow over our relationship. With time, it improved as it became clear to him that God had His hand on my life. Before he died, God moved us on to the same page through some 'end of life' experiences and I am so thankful for this move of God's grace.

To complicate matters, I married young into a well-known Christian family whose patriarch was a famous evangelist. Things were harmonious throughout the early years of our marriage because both Ron and I held to the family's views on most every biblical issue. Eventually though, God began to take us on the journey He had planned for us. It meant leaving home and the ministry his father started. Though we still agreed on the tenets of the Gospel, our interpretations of secondary issues of grace didn't gel. Again, we experienced feelings that we were outsiders and it was painful to no longer fit.

God's message to each disciple is clear. We are His children first and members of our earthly family second. Egypt may be denied to our fathers but permissible for us. God is a kind Father who leads deliberately ~ giving His child the courage to take steps away from our 'family's way of doing things'. The fallout can make us second-guess our new direction but God gives grace with the call to go where He sends us. His voice is wild and wonderful; his ways are peculiar and solitary. Any price we pay is long compensated by the joy of hearing God say, "Well done!"

My heart begs to be shaped by You, and by no one else. In Jesus' name, Amen

THE REUNION

[They] came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him. Genesis 46:6

A movie was made twenty years ago, called JOSEPH, a powerful representation of the entire story. You watched his life unfold from a young boy to the ruler of Egypt. My favorite part of the movie is the reunion between Jacob and Joseph at the very end. The scene is forever etched in my memory and several times a year, I will put in the DVD and watch that three-minute clip again. Let me paint the picture for you.

Jacob and his entire family are walking in the desert toward Egypt. There are several hundred of them. Jacob is out in front. He is old, slowly plodding along with the help of a cane and a son on each side. His face is determined but the weariness of such a long journey is evident.

The scene changes and Joseph is leaving the gates of Egypt in a royal entourage. In the chariot with him are his two sons, both under the age of ten. In the other chariot are Pharaoh and a few of his leaders who go to support Joseph. You see them come to the crest of a hill that overlooks the desert floor below.

The dust settles and as it does, the scene of several hundred nomads in the distance fill his view. Joseph knows who they are. Though a mile away, Joseph cannot wait. He leaves Pharaoh and drives his personal chariot at breakneck speed downward into the valley to meet them. As he nears his father, horses are recklessly pulled to a stop. Joseph jumps out, sees his father a few dozen feet away, and is overcome. He loses all strength and crumbles to his knees. Jacob rushes to him, draws his head into the folds of his tunic, and engages in an embrace that is unforgettable. "My son. Praise be to God. My son!" There is weeping for a long time as everyone else stands at a distance to give father and son this moment.

Jacob finally looks up to see two young boys in Joseph's chariot. He understands. "These are your sons. My grandchildren. "Come," Jacob says. "Come, so I may bless you." He speaks prophetic words over each boy and kisses the tops of their heads. Joseph dries his father's tears and tells him that God brought him to Egypt to save their lives. There is joy ahead and a good life in Egypt.

Now, maybe you have to see the movie to be moved. (I've provided a link below so you can purchase it for yourself.) I can never watch this reunion without being moved. And I can never see it without thinking of the reunion that is coming between Jesus and me. I believe it will be like this. Finally, our eyes meet at a distance. Finally, the embrace I've been waiting for all my life. What about bowing at His feet in worship? Afterward.

I've only caught a nuance of how you feel about me. I get a sense of it each time we talk in prayer. But I'll see the full effect at our reunion. The pleasure of my company that you describe in Scripture humbles me, Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen

BEING CLOSE TO ONE WHO IS BLESSED

Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the days of the years of your life?" And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning." And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh.
Genesis 47:7-10

Writers in Jewish history say that when Jacob came to Egypt, the land was immediately blessed and began to heal from famine. So when Pharaoh saw that Jacob looked old, he feared that Jacob might not live much longer and when he died, the blessing would cease. If this were true, it would immediately explain a peasant rising up to bless a sovereign.

Someone who has spent a lifetime in the presence of God brings God's presence with them into a room, a land, a home, and an environment. To those who are discerning, the impact is immediately felt. Have you experienced seeing someone come through the door and instantly feeling like everything was going to be all right? I have. I can name a half dozen people that make me feel that way. But God wants me to focus, not on these 'others', but on myself. Am I the kind of person who brings heaven's blessing and order into a room? Every child of the kingdom is to be sanctified and have this spiritual effect.

Jesus teaches His disciple to pray 'Thy kingdom come.' But He also, by the indwelling of His Spirit, brings His kingdom to anywhere the foot of His disciple treads. Whether or not others feel it is dependent on whether or not the Spirit is quenched in that believer's life. Maturity is slowly growing into the person of Christ so that who I am and who He is looks more and more the same. When I walk in a room, it should have the same kind of effect as Jesus walking into the room.

Has God asked you to bless a superior? Would a secretary ask to pray for her boss? Would a nurse ask to bless the physician in charge? Would a parishioner ask to bless a pastor? In God's order of things, yes. When prompted by the Spirit, this is how the kingdom is ordered.

Jacob had a moment with Pharaoh. That's all. In that brief encounter, God's presence was left with the words of Jacob's blessing. I don't know all the places I will visit today nor do I know all the people I will encounter. But I'm going in more aware of the possible impact because I am a container for the Spirit of God.

In this stressed out world, purify me and prepare me to bring the blessing of Your presence to others today. In Jesus' name, Amen

WHAT I VALUE MOST

And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 years. And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place." He answered, "I will do as you have said." Genesis 47:28-30

Jacob's wish to be buried in Canaan surprises me on the one hand. He was living in, what could appear, to be the best part of his life. His whole family was reunited. Joseph was alive and blessed. His sons were older, wiser, and had repented of earlier deeds against their father and against Joseph. They had plenty of food. Their lineage was blessed and multiplying. Why not ask to be buried where you are the happiest?

When all is said and done, it is interesting what I value most. My mind travels back, as Jacob's did, to the places where God spoke. Jacob wanted to be buried near 'Bethels', where monuments marked the spots of God's revelation. Time in Egypt, in a period of plenty, did not alter what he cherished. I also remember, with passion, the places where the voice of God changed my life.

If I value the wrong things, I will be a bitter woman when I lay down to die. I will realize that I invested in things I have to leave behind. And, if I know my Bible, I'll also realize that they will eventually burn. At the end, I want my family near me. They are eternal. I want to bless them, give them last words they will remember, and hold their hands as we are temporarily separated. There will be one more thing I want in my grip ~ The Bible that went with me through the darkest period of my life. I had to put a new binding on it recently when it fell apart because I could not part with the pages. They are journals of my fears and God's faithfulness. Yes, at that time, let me touch my people and the Word of God. They are the only two things I take with me into the Kingdom.

Jacob left the land of plenty to be buried in some obscure barren place. Though it was nothing to look at, for him, it was rich with memories and a priceless location.

*Thank you for taking me through hard time to re-align my priorities. In Jesus' name,
Amen*

WAITING FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT TO DIE

After this, Joseph was told, “Behold, your father is ill.” So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And it was told to Jacob, “Your son Joseph has come to you.” Then Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed. Genesis 48:1-2

How Jacob reacted when Joseph and his sons arrived at his bedside. He was very ill, near death, but their presence gave him an uncanny strength to finish what had been unfinished. He needed to give Joseph the birthright of the family and adopt Joseph's two sons as his grandchildren. The future inheritance of Israel depended on this moment and Jacob knew it.

Have you known anyone who was near death and it was predicted they wouldn't last much longer? Then, they hung on and refused to die. Something was unfinished. There was someone they needed to see; something they needed to say. When that person arrived, they had a moment when they gained their full faculties. Like Jacob, they rose up to have a needed conversation.

After moving to Georgia, I made a connection with an older saint named Iris. She became a prayer partner and spiritual mother to me. Our bond was as deep as family and because the foundation was spiritual, our connection was like iron. Iris was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of breast cancer. It took her life in a matter of weeks. I was out of town when she lay on her deathbed in a local hospital. I kept calling home to get an update on her but got the news that she was holding on beyond what anyone thought possible. When I got back into town, I went straight to the hospital to see her. I can't say for certain that she was waiting to say goodbye to me but within an hour after visiting her, she died. I got to talk with her, sing to her, and express my thanks for all she had meant to me.

We will each say goodbye to someone we love. It's inevitable. We should tuck away the truth of this reality. A person will hang on at the end because of something unfinished in their heart. Oftentimes, they are in a coma and can't express what's wrong. Families need to be prayerful and intuitive to realize what is happening. Otherwise, there will be needless suffering for everyone.

Is there unfinished business in your family? Things that need to be expressed that haven't been said? Relationships that need to be reconciled that are currently estranged? The real tragedy is that we often waste the joy that could be ours if we made things right much earlier in life. The bedside of a dying loved one is not the ideal place for family communication but if it's the only option, it's the crucial option. Loved ones should die in peace.

Lord, give spiritual intuition to any who need to know how to wrap up unfinished business with family. In Jesus' name, Amen

PRAISE-TALK FOR THE FUTURE

And he [Jacob] blessed Joseph and said, “The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys; and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” Genesis 48:15-16

In retrospect, I can see how God provided and blessed. In the present, I fear that He will continue to do so. Words of faith are choked out. That's unfortunate because remembrance is meant to feed my faith. When things looked impossible, God did come through. When I tried to quit life, God brought new manna to breathe hope into the crevices of my soul. Why do I not think He will continue to provide? Either I have a short memory or present circumstances paint such a dire picture that I fear even God could affect any change.

Jacob embraces his two newly adopted grandsons. Half-Egyptian grandsons, I might add. He remembers God's promised covenant over his family. He remembers that God was faithful to preserve their lives when it looked like their line would be extinct. He praises God for the past but his language quickly changes to thank God for what He will do to bless his descendants. Faith is future.

Several decades ago, I was lamenting to a mentor that a certain portion of my life looked like it would fail. I had plenty of evidence to prove it. She listened to it all. Her reply was this, “Live joyfully confident!” When I questioned her further, she replied again, “Live joyfully confident!” I understood that she wasn't going to spoon-feed me the meaning. I was to prayerfully explore it until I made the meaning my own. Obviously, I haven't forgotten it and the phrase has been beyond special to me. It describes what faith is. When all things point to failure – I live joyfully confident that God creates options where I see none. When people I love are disinterested in the God I cherish – I live joyfully confident that God is a wooing God and has not forgotten to call them to Himself.

What ‘joyfully confident’ statement of faith do I need to make today about some area of my life that invites despair? I smell death but know that God is a Resurrector. I will say so, out loud, and ask for the grace to live in joyful anticipation.

You will. You promised. I'm learning to dance before the party. In Jesus' name, Amen

GOD DOES NOT BOW TO CONVENTION

When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, "Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head." But his father refused and said, I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations." Genesis 48:17-19

One of the reasons men try to control religion, right down to the nitty-gritty of a church service, is a basic distrust of God. He is unpredictable. We say we want the Holy Spirit to come and have His way but do we really? He does things His way and what in the world would happen if we relinquished the reins? By holding on tightly, we forfeit God's blessing.

Mannaseh was Joseph's firstborn, the heir to the firstborn's blessing. But Jacob perceived that God wanted something different when he went to pronounce a final blessing on the two brothers. God intended to bless the younger over the older. History would reveal that Jacob heard God correctly. After the exodus, Ephraim became the leading tribe in the Northern Kingdom, much superior to the tribe of Mannaseh. Oh, but how Jacob's spiritual hunch offended Joseph!

God does not exalt whom we think he should. He is full of surprises as he chooses the overlooked, the weak, the average, the unsuspecting. Talent does not impress him. Stature in the eyes of men and family don't weigh in the decision either. God looks at the heart and if that heart has an inclination toward humility and utter dependence on God, that qualifies him for spiritual greatness. Why should Joseph have been surprised? He, himself, was in fact, far removed from the firstborn.

I'm reminded again this morning that I dare not live off of my knees. I cannot guess what God wants. I am to bless whom He blesses and withhold when He withholds. Who am I affirming today that may be far from God's blessing? Perhaps I'm impressed by their talents and charisma. And, whom would God have me encourage? That person might be unnoticed, living outside of the spotlight. It's the 'David' who tends sheep; the one the family has all but waved off as insignificant.

Align me to Your purposes. I forfeit my logic and declare that it is flawed. In Jesus' name, Amen

ICONIC FATHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN'S FAITH

Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers. Genesis 48:21

When good fathers are alive, their children dwell securely under their shade tree. God's favor is on the father, and by extension, the sons and daughters who share their faith. The children might not think about the day when their father no longer lives. If they do, they wonder if God's favor will shadow them in the same powerful way it has hovered over their father.

How reassuring were Jacob's words to Joseph. "I am about to die but God will be with you." Didn't Joseph already know that? God brought him safely through slavery, captivity, and enthronement. But ascending a throne in Egypt is not the same as stepping into the role of a patriarch within a covenant family. It was easier for him to follow in the footsteps of Jacob alive than to step into his shoes after death. This, every man of a larger-than-life father, feels.

In taking Joseph to Egypt, God gave Joseph distance between his iconic father and himself. He became his own person, a unique son of Yahweh. And this very thing, sons of famous fathers must do. Leave home. In their father's shadow, it is difficult to get to know themselves and give themselves permission to be different from what others expect. How unfair to hear, "He is not like his father. Or, he's going to be just like his father!" Either way, it's a pile of expectations. The problem with icons is that the public sees perfection. The family sees the humanity. We are god-makers and cast this heavy burden upon their children.

Like you perhaps, I'm aware that the story would be different if Reuben, or Judah, or Simeon had become the vice-chancellor of Egypt. Great fathers don't always raise great sons. Joseph was great because God had his hand on him and cast him into refining fires early in life. The others stayed in their father's shade, resented his faith, and acted out a kind of teenage rebellion throughout their adult lives.

I'm married to the son of an iconic father ~ a larger than life evangelist. No matter where we go, Ron is Jack Wyrzten's son. Expectations have always been high. At 32, God called Ron away from his father's organization to become the unique leader he is today. He was cast into great refining fires for two decades. Today, he is a great man much like his father but different from his father. He is a 'Jesus' in the business world while his father was in ministry. This metamorphosis would not have happened without time and distance. But one thing has proven true. As God was with Jack Wyrzten, God has been, and is, with Ron Wyrzten. I see God's favor on him every day as he brings the kingdom to our world with wisdom, holy restraint, and grace.

You made me. Only You should shape Your own creation. Strengthen the holy legacies with our fathers and break the back of idolatry. In Jesus' name, In Jesus' name, Amen

SEEING THE FUTURE THROUGH A PERSON'S HISTORY

Then Jacob called his sons and said, 'Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come. Assemble and listen, O sons of Jacob, listen to Israel your father.' Genesis 49:1-2

Is it possible to imagine someone's future based on their past behavior? Yes. Their patterns of righteousness or unrighteousness spell out their future. If I know the principles of the kingdom, I can pretty accurately predict their days ahead. What changes a dark prediction, however, is someone's repentance.

If someone has a history of anger, and I know him well, I can forecast what will set him off. I know his patterns from past experience. If someone is greedy, I know not to expect generosity. I've experienced him from our long history. Now, I am not a fortuneteller. I do not pretend to be able to call a person aside and declare, with certainty, how their days will unfold. I do not know if an unrepentant will repent. I also do not know if a faithful servant will throw in the towel and lead an ungodly lifestyle. I do know, however, the principles of scripture. God put us in a sowing and reaping world. What we sow, we reap. To be able to guess someone's behavior from past experience is not rocket science. It's biblical wisdom. To anticipate their future correctly is not judging, it is seeing someone with God's eyes.

Jacob knew the patterns of his sons. He knew that God often defined the destinies of His people by the bent of their hearts. He proceeded to reveal the future of the twelve tribes of Israel to each of his sons. His knowledge of them, coupled with the revelation of God, accurately forecasted their destinies. I wonder how it felt to each one as the truth sunk in ~ What I've done with my life is determining my future.

What do I do today if I see the shipwrecked life of someone I love? I know that without a spiritual turnaround, the days ahead of them are foreboding. I ask God to have mercy on them. I ask God to destroy the schemes of the evil one to 'blind the mind of my unbelieving loved one so that they might not see the glory of Christ.' 2 Cor. 4:4 I ask God to reveal Himself to them and bring them to a place of spiritual need. Each of us knows that our past does not have to define our future. With God, there is mercy. With God, there is forgiveness and a clean canvas upon which He can paint a glorious destiny of grace.

Thank you for not giving me what I deserve. Thank you for forgiving me. In Jesus' name, Amen

“I DON’T WANT TO BE ALONE WITH HIM”

When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.” Genesis 50:15

Is there someone’s whose anger you dread? In a group, you’re fine. There’s a pretension of peace. Everything seems okay. However, the thought of being alone sends chills to your bones.

This is the dread the brothers feel once their father is dead. A parent often keeps the lid on family tensions when they are alive and Joseph’s brothers feared that Joseph withheld revenge for the sake of his aged father. With him gone, his true feelings would emerge and making them suffer would be at the top of his agenda.

It grieved Joseph that they mistrusted his forgiveness. It grieves Jesus even more so when I mistrust His forgiveness. The joy of seeing Jesus in heaven can be ruined by my fear of being alone with Him in the same room. With no one else around, what will He really do to me? He said He forgave my sins but isn’t that wishful thinking? Certainly something I’ve done will bring the gavel of judgment down on my head.

Real forgiveness is always rare. And to further feed my nervous heart, I’ve experienced those who said they forgave but really didn’t. In some subtle way, they kept reminding me of what I did. Is this not the battle for faith? I must separate people from who Jesus is. So here is what He promises ~

When I confessed my sins and asked for forgiveness in order to become His disciple, He forgave everything I ever did, am doing, or will do. To ‘forgive’ doesn’t mean to turn a blind eye. It means to remove my sin from me and send it away. When God looks at me today, He sees no sin. The great exchange happened on Calvary. I gave Jesus my sins and He gave me His holiness.

Joseph’s brothers learned to relax. The radical forgiveness he extended to them painted a beautiful picture of how God forgives. And today, there is absolutely no reason I should dread eye contact with a holy God.

Being alone with You will be a dream come true. In Jesus name, In Jesus' name, Amen

MY RESPONSE WHEN OTHERS GROVEL

The brothers sent a message to Joseph, saying, ‘Your father gave this command before he died. Say to Joseph, “Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.” ‘ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servant of the God of your Father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Genesis 50:16-17

Joseph is seeing the fulfillment of his childhood dream. The brothers are bowing down to him and pledging to become his servants. Forty years earlier, God had given him a dream that showed every brother prostrate before him. Without stopping to think twice, he had shared it with his brothers. Perhaps he had gloated as he related it. Children do. Whatever his posture, it got him thrown into a pit and sold into slavery. But here’s the thing ~ What Joseph felt then and what he feels now are two completely different things. As a child, it was a fairy tale to think of subjects bowing down to you. As an adult, one refined by God through excruciating events, it is a tragedy to see brothers groveling. He has been in their shoes, loves them, and does not want to see them suffer.

It’s quite amazing how I can see the same event differently, depending on what stage of life I am in. As a young woman, I heard others predict that God would bless me with notoriety and influence. While it was hard for me to believe it, part of me dreamt it was true and made it all about me. Instead of seeing this as an opportunity for serving others, something God always intends when He confers a position of influence, I thought of what it would be like to be influential. I desperately lacked mentoring.

That was forty years ago and how my perspective has changed. What I failed to realize then is that when God calls one to lead, He sets about to shape that person through adversity. How I view the blessing today is entirely different than how I saw it as a twenty-one-year-old. In my youth, it fed narcissism. That quickly faded with suffering. I’ve learned to handle influence with trembling hands.

Joseph wept when he saw his brothers fall to their knees in front of him. His tears were not tears of sweet revenge. They were tears of empathy and compassion. Never could he imagine feeling such a thing when he was bound, thrown into the back of a cart, and dragged to Egypt as a slave. God apes every child and the needed changes never happen quickly. A bad month, or year, does not usually bring transformation. A decade in the wilderness does. Acting like Jesus can be easy if you’re an actor. Thinking and feeling like Jesus takes a lifetime of refining.

You do all things well. In Jesus name, In Jesus' name, Amen

GENESIS 50/20 VISION

Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.” Genesis 50:19-20

I’ve been waiting for get to this verse the whole time I’ve in Genesis. It’s taken two years. Oh, for me to have a Genesis 50/20 perspective on all things done against me, from the petty to the catastrophic. Oh, for my initial reaction to be confidence in God’s redemptive power instead of anguish.

There is no evil that wins in my life if I press in to seek redemption. No evil done against me takes God by surprise. Ever. He saw it ahead of time and planned long ago how to wield authoritative power in order to transform it from a ‘Calvary’ to a ‘resurrection’. To seek it, to expect it, to believe it, is my dilemma when it appears my life has been taken from me. This describes the ultimate battle for faith.

Does this mean that I don’t feel the pain of betrayal? Does this mean that my right to cry out from the pit (as Joseph did) is spiritually unbecoming? Not at all. Jesus cried so deeply that the stress He felt made Him sweat drops of blood. I, too, acknowledge loss. I grieve. But underlying all of it must be a trust in a God that does not let evil have the last word. Pain should never cause me to back up from God – just draw closer.

If two scriptures could marry, consider wedding together Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28. The first explains why the latter is true. Because any evil done against me God uses for my good, all things work together for good to those who love God.

At this very moment, you may be a victim of evil scheming. The perpetrator looks all-powerful. Your present circumstances predict defeat and a bleak future. This is the time to don the eyeglasses of faith. A Genesis 50/20 vision can be the lens through which you view your circumstances today. Through your tears, you can proclaim that this is not the end – but simply an invitation for God to pronounce new life.

Joseph was a dreamer ~ then a slave ~ then a prisoner ~ but finally a ruler. The one who lived this story is the one who preached to his perpetrators, “You meant evil but God meant it for good.” He realized this truth after his deliverance but Jesus, the One who makes all things new, predicted His own resurrection long before His death. Redemption ruled His perspective in the midst of His darkest times. It can also rule mine.

I cry but I don’t despair. Permeate my mind and heart with a default response of faith in Your goodness. In Jesus’ name, Amen

KNEES TO THE EARTH

And Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; [they] were born on Joseph's knees. Genesis 50:23

Then Joseph removed them from his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. Exodus 48:1

Ron and I are blessed enough to have my two grandsons nearby. I was there at the time of, or just after, their births. What priceless moments they were, as I witnessed the beginning of two new lives and imagined, with spiritual imagination, what they would be in the hands of a powerful God.

Joseph's great grandsons were born near to him and placed on his knees, a sign of ownership and investment. Just after blessing them, he lowered himself prostrate to the earth as a way of consecrating them to God.

How much heart and soul do I invest in the lives of my children and grandchildren? More and more as I get older. When they sleep under my roof, it begs an invitation to go in and pray over them, then speak scripture over them. The cries before God seem to have a theme. "Remember them. Keep them close to You. Reveal Yourself to them. Teach them to hear Your voice. Deliver them from all evil. Make them wise as Daniels. Fashion their tongues to be sharp swords of Your truth." How will they prosper in this darkening world without investments of prayer on their behalf?

Oh, and at bedtime, I would not trade the spiritual conversations we have. Their questions are so creative and wonder-filled. I often wonder what happens to us as we age. Where did that priceless curiosity about all things of God's kingdom go? I hear my grandsons talk. God is described as the 'lion from Narnia'. Lost people are characterized by those 'still under the curse from the Garden of Eden.' Both boys get it. They're spiritual diagnostic skills are honed and sharp.

'Knees to the earth' is the needed posture of all who raise children. It is an acknowledgement that complete and utter dependence on God is needed to grow a child who reveres God and is passionate to know His heart. I am not clever enough. I am not eloquent enough to birth anything lasting in their spirits. All that children are ~ only God sees. All that children are to become ~ only God knows. Bending each of them in the right direction will only be possible as I listen to my Father, the One who gives insight and direction about my offspring.

*Teach me how to pray, Holy Spirit, for the lives of my children's children. Then teach me how to walk my faith before them in living color. In Jesus' name, In Jesus' name,
Amen*

JOSEPH'S BONES WEREN'T THE END OF JOSEPH

Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here." So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt. Genesis 50:25-26

This is the last devotional from the book of Genesis. I could cry over the sadness of leaving this rich book. I could also cry over the joys that have been revealed about God.

Life does not begin and end with me. Live begins and ends with God. Though I may lie in a grave, life associated with me is far from over if I'm God's child. My faith, and all the promises of God that I embrace for my family, and myself, live on. Fulfillment of God's covenantal blessing over my people will unfold long after I'm gone.

The promises God made to Jacob and his descendants, realized through Joseph and his descendants, are still coming to pass today. Thousands of years later, Joseph's life and the choices he made matter. He is not only a teacher when I review his story, but he is also a catalyst for the coming redemption of Israel. His coffin hold the remains of his mortal body but heaven and earth feel the present effects of spiritual activity associated with Joseph's faith.

Genesis reveals the narrative themes of scripture. Creation. The Fall. Redemption. Restoration. Not only are these revealed in the overall storyline of the book, they are evident in the individual stories of God's chosen leaders. I can see this pattern in my own life, can you?

I am praying for you as I finish writing today. You are meant to see redemption in every area of your life ~ then restoration. To see God create, only to be defiled from sin, is to live bitter. Despair results from living in a storyline that is unfinished. Like Joseph, we are to wait for God to redeem what is broken. We wait for God to promote us on the other side of captivity. Yes, we faint under the 'waiting', but God will give us the grace to be tenacious in our faith. Just like Joseph. They bruised Joseph's feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the Lord proved him true. Psalm 105:17-19 Captivity never has the last Word for anyone determined to prevail in the promises of God.

To You, God of Joseph, be all the glory. To You, my God, be all honor and praise. In Jesus name, In Jesus' name, Amen