



Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.

² This is the account of Jacob.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. ⁴ When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

⁵ Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. ⁶ He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: ⁷ We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

⁸ His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

⁹ Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

¹⁰ When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" ¹¹ His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

¹² Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, ¹³ and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."

"Very well," he replied.

¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

When Joseph arrived at Shechem, ¹⁵ a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

¹⁶ He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?"

¹⁷ "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'"

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. ¹⁸ But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

¹⁹ “Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. ²⁰ “Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.”

²¹ When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. ²² “Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don’t lay a hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the richly ornamented robe he was wearing—²⁴ and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? ²⁷ Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed.

²⁸ So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

²⁹ When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes.

³⁰ He went back to his brothers and said, “The boy isn’t there! Where can I turn now?”

³¹ Then they got Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. ³² They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, “We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son’s robe.”

³³ He recognized it and said, “It is my son’s robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.”

³⁴ Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “No,” he said, “in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son.” So his father wept for him.

³⁶ Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.

In my opinion, one of the best tools in the parenting toolbox is the tool of natural consequences. If your child leaves a toy in the driveway and your run over it with your car, what do you do? Do you buy them a new toy but then give them a long time out in order to teach them not to leave their toys in the driveway? Of course not. A wise parent will allow the natural consequences to serve as the punishment. If the child loses their favorite toy because they were careless they will learn the lesson much faster and more completely if you do not buy them a new toy. Many mistakes and sins have natural consequences attached to them and are generally one of life’s best teachers, for children and adults alike.

But sometimes consequences don’t merely teach good lessons but rather they follow you around for the rest of your life, gnawing at your soul like a dog devours a bone. Even if you have been forgiven and even if you have learned your “lesson,” some consequences are non-erasable—they stay with you permanently. If you rob a bank, you do prison time. If you kill a person you may never get out of prison. But then we all know that consequences follow us around for far less

serious sins than these. Many of you carry the consequences of bad decisions with you always—whether on your body, your heart or your mind. But sometimes consequences follow us through no fault of our own. We suffer them due to the sins of others. If a drunk driver takes the life of a loved one, we have to suffer the consequences of the other person’s sin. The story of Joseph and his brothers show the result of both types of consequences—those of our own choosing and those thrust upon us by someone else. If we listen and learn we may be able to avoid some of their mistakes and some of our own as well.

For review, tell me how many chapters there are in the book of Genesis according to the original author. There are ten chapters as outlined below. Minor characters like Ishmael and Esau only get a few verses of print while major characters get many chapters. Chapter six, the account of Terah is really about Abraham. Likewise, the account of Isaac is mostly about Jacob and now this tenth chapter, the account of Jacob will focus predominantly on Joseph. Therefore, in one sense we are in the last chapter of our study in Genesis, even though we have a ways to go.

- Ch. 1—2:4** This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.
- Ch. 2—5:1** This is the written account of Adam’s line
- Ch. 3—6:9** This is the account of Noah
- Ch. 4—10:1** This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah’s sons
- Ch. 5—11:10** This is the account of Shem
- Ch. 6—11:27** This is the account of Terah
- Ch. 7—25:12** This is the account of Abraham’s son Ishmael
- Ch. 8—25:19** This is the account of Abraham’s son Isaac
- Ch. 9—36:1** This is the account of Esau
- Ch. 10—37:2** This is the account of Jacob

In this story of consequences of sin we should realize one thing immediately—the young boy Joseph almost certainly was too young to have participated in the genocide and looting of Shechem in chapter 34. Joseph did not have blood on his hands and therefore began his life with a cleaner slate. We know that Jacob loved Joseph the most. There was no debate in their house about who was the favorite son. All of the other brothers were painfully aware that it was Joseph. Jacob showed his love by giving him special gifts like his colorful coat. Jacob may have kept Joseph from working as hard as his brothers as evidenced by the fact that Joseph was not with them while they were tending the flocks. Through no fault of his own, Joseph was pampered and preferred over all of the other brothers.

In verse two we get a one phrase description of an important event—“[Joseph] brought a bad report about [the brothers].” Some have said that Joseph was a spoiled brat and a tattletale. He ratted out his brothers in order to lower his father’s care for them and increase his own position in the family. But I don’t see any evidence for this. From previous chapters and from this one we know that the brothers were bad dudes. They murdered all of the men in one town, enslaved everyone else and stole everything in the town and in the fields. They committed incest, attempted to kill Joseph and eventually sold him into slavery, which by itself was worthy of the death penalty. These brothers seemed to do whatever they wanted to do. Perhaps they did another awful deed and Joseph merely reported the crime as any law-abiding citizen would have done. If you saw your brother crawl into the window of your neighbor’s house and exit a few

minutes later with thousands of dollars of stolen goods, wouldn't you call the police? Rather than point to Joseph being a spoiled brat his reporting on his brothers might well have been a sign of his righteousness and sense of justice, which was completely lacking in his older brothers. People have drawn the same conclusion about Joseph telling his dreams to his family. The accusation is that he wanted to get the upper hand and brag about his dreams and future status as ruler of the family. Given the nature of his dysfunctional family it may have been imprudent and unwise for Joseph to have shared his dreams, but I do not get the impression at all that he was bragging. I think it was a case of a young man living righteously in the midst of unrighteousness and honestly sharing about his amazing dreams.

Speaking of these dreams, they were identical except for the location—one was in the fields and the other in the heavens—and the participants—the second dream included Joseph's mother and father. Thirteen years later Joseph would appear before mighty Pharaoh in Egypt in order to interpret his two dreams and would reply, "The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God and God will do it soon" (Gen. 41:32). For Pharaoh two nearly identical dreams were interpreted to mean that the fulfillment of the dream was certain and near at hand. I think we can draw the same conclusion here—Joseph's two dreams were a sign of their certainty. God only needed to give one dream but he graciously gave him two. Can you see the significance of this for Joseph in the coming years? Over his years of captivity and suffering, these two dreams would have served as a great encouragement to him. He would have eventually realized that the two dreams were a sign from God of their certainty. Joseph would survive. He would see his brothers again. He would see his parents again and all of them would one day bow down to him. How God would accomplish the fulfillment of his dreams he did not know but was granted the grace of their certain fulfillment. God would keep his promise.

Do you realize that this is all we need in life—to know that God will keep his promise, to be assured of his perfect faithfulness? Every page of Scripture testifies through story, song, poem, sermon and letter to the faithfulness of God and his word. It is somewhat redundant to say that God and his word are faithful because if you establish the faithfulness of God's character you also have established the character of his word. But interestingly, we primarily know of the character of God through the word of God, therefore these two are inseparable. You and I need



to breathe in the air of God's faithfulness in the same way that we breathe oxygen into our lungs with every breath. If you go without oxygen, what part of your body is affected first? Your brain cannot go more than three to four minutes without experiencing permanent tissue damage. In the same way I am convinced that if we do not breathe in the air of God's faithfulness we damage the tissue of our brain. What I mean is that our thinking is starved of its life-giving supply of the oxygen of God's faithfulness. Our thinking becomes clouded and muddled. We start to have doubts. We start to have more fears. We become hopeless and despondent.

No one is exempt from this fate. Even the famous preacher Charles Spurgeon was plagued by a lifetime of depression. It

started when he was 24 years old. It was 1858, and Charles Spurgeon later recalled, “My spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for.” Spurgeon battled against “causeless depression” his whole life. This “shapeless, undefinable, yet all-beclouding hopelessness,” he wrote, “cannot be reasoned with.” Fighting this type of depression, he said, is as difficult as fighting with mist.

But Spurgeon did fight it—with faith. He wrote, “I am heartily ashamed of myself for falling into [despondency], but I am sure there is no remedy for it like a holy faith in God.”¹ Do you see, Spurgeon concluded that the only remedy to his depression was to breathe in the air of God’s faithfulness. And how do you breathe in this pure air? What did I say a minute ago about God’s faithfulness? God’s faithfulness is inseparable from God’s word, therefore we breathe in God’s faithfulness by taking in his word. The topic of the Wednesday men’s study this week was sanctification. How does one continue to grow in holiness, righteousness and Christ-likeness throughout one’s life? We concluded that there are many helpful ways to do this but ultimately, the necessary starting point is the Word and prayer.

Let me clear up a common misconception about Bible reading and prayer. Many Christians think that the daily discipline of Bible reading and prayer are a bit like drinking a Red Bull. I can’t stand the taste of those energy drinks so I stay clear of them, but even the little two-ounce power shots promise that you will get this amazing boost of energy after drinking their over-priced bottle of goo that taste like cough syrup. So we decide to try this Bible reading idea but when we do, we don’t get this jolt of energy. We may not feel any differently after reading it than before. We must understand that the Bible is not some divine dose of Prozac that magically lifts your spirit. Prayer and Bible reading are a bit like tilling the soil, planting seeds and watering the ground. There is no guarantee that what you have planted will grow but if you do nothing you are certain to get nothing. The same is true with Bible reading and prayer—if you do nothing you are certain to get nothing.

Three years ago, Willow Creek made a fascinating discovery—despite the fact that they have 25,000 people in the pews and an annual budget in the tens of millions, they realized that they had been doing a poor job of making disciples. In a video about this discovery, Bill Hybels said, “We’ve made a mistake. What we should have done at about this point when people...become Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become “self feeders.” We should have gotten people, taught them how to read their Bible between services...”² The church had trained their people to be dependent upon the pastors and not on their own personal disciplines. Given their style of ministry, Willow Creek was especially susceptible to this kind of error, but any church can fall into the same trap.

This is a good point to explain what we are planning to do with our new Life Groups. We have mentioned them before but we have not fully explained what life groups are all about. You may have seen the weekly even called “Pilot Group” in the bulletin. This is a group that is preparing and training to form the leadership of life groups. Each Life Group will have four components—worship, study, fellowship and outreach. I want to talk about the study portion of the groups for a moment. Each Life Group will be studying the Scripture passage that I use for my Sunday sermons. This will not be an evaluation of the weekly sermons but rather a way for everyone to be on the same page so to speak. There is value in books studies but these will always be Bible

studies. Through the discipline of these weekly studies we will teach people how to study the Word on their own and we will learn together in a small multi-generational community.

I know some of you have been in Bible studies where the study leader says, “Sally, what do you think this passage means?” And then Sally gives her version of the truth and when she is done the leader asks, “Say Bill, what do you think this passage means?” Round and round they go until everyone who wants to share their version of the truth of the passage is done and the leader either combines everyone’s viewpoint into a type of exegetical soup or else he keeps them separate and you leave with the distinct impression that everyone’s version of the truth is correct, in other words, truth is whatever I think it true. I assure you that we will guard against this kind of wishy-washy Bible study. Together we will seek the true meaning of each passage and then encourage one another to apply it to our lives. In the process, each person will begin to learn or else continue to practice the discipline of daily Bible reading and prayer. This will be our meat and potatoes, the very air that we breathe. This is what is needed to have a continual vision of the faithfulness of God in our lives. God will keep his promises—because he is God.

This is what Joseph did. He did not have the complete word of God like we do but he clung to the promises that had been given to him. These two dreams assured him that he would survive his imprisonment. His dreams assured him that he would rise to a position of leadership over his family, no matter how improbable it seemed to him. He knew that his father Jacob had lived much of his life in faithlessness but he also knew that God was faithful despite the actions of his father. He carried with him the stories of his grandfather’s Isaac encounters with God. He carried the stories of great grandfather Abraham, how the Lord led him out of a pagan land and into the Promised Land.

But Joseph did not learn these lessons while sitting in a comfortable chair in a living room during a Bible study sipping a cup of tea. He would have to learn these lessons while being dragged as a slave from the land of promise to the land of oppression. The details of the story are striking. The little brother that they hated began to appear on the horizon. And how do you think they recognized him? How were they able to hatch their murderous plan long before Joseph was within ear shot? They saw his coat! The coat which was a sign of his favored status was literally a dead give away from a far distance. *“Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other.*²⁰ *“Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.”* That coat! It was the first thing the brothers stripped off of Joseph leaving him near naked and exposed to the elements. That coat! It was the thing that the brothers used to deceive Jacob into thinking that Joseph was dead. They tore the coat and dipped it in the blood of a slaughtered goat. Does that sound familiar to anyone—a borrowed coat and a slaughtered goat? These are the two things that Jacob used to deceive his father. His mother had dressed him in the borrowed clothes of his brother Esau and put the skins of a slaughtered goat on his arms and neck. If this isn’t a striking example of Jacob experiencing natural consequences, I don’t know what is. Jacob the heel-grasper who deceived his father was deceived by his sons with the same two objects.

Those natural consequences probably occurred to Jacob but what happened next would stay with the older brothers almost until their dying days. We know the story. Reuben tried to save Jacob and return him home. Judah had the idea of selling him to the merchants and slave traders. Did

you notice when they discussed their plan? After they threw Joseph into the pit they sat down and ate a nice lunch together. Isn't that disgusting? There they sat, eating a goat sandwich with a slice of goat cheese and a glass of ice cold goat milk and goat milk brownies for dessert while their brother cried out for mercy from the bottom of the cistern. But this chapter doesn't record anything about Joseph's plea for help, so how do we know he cried for help while they ate their lunch? Because the brothers tell us about it. Twenty-two years later when Joseph was second in command of Egypt and he required that one of their brothers be kept in Egypt while the rest returned home, they said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us." (Gen. 42.21) They carried the cries of their younger brother with them for 22 years. It's one thing to stab a man with your sword because they violated your sister, like they did in Shechem, but it's a whole other level to desire your brother's death and ignore his youthful pleas for help and mercy. This story demonstrates their ruthlessness and cold hearts, I think, even more than the genocide at Shechem.

The second way their guilt followed them around was through their father Jacob. When he believed that Joseph was dead, "*Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days.*"³⁵ *All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son." So his father wept for him.*" Jacob carried his grief over Joseph every day of his life. The brothers thought that had gotten rid of "the dreamer" but in reality, every day they saw their father's grief was a reminder of Joseph.³ Their enemy had been martyred and his martyrdom made his presence as large or larger than he had been in life.

Finally, we see the consequences of the brother's evil deed forty years later when Jacob was close to death. The brothers worried every day that Joseph had not really forgiven them and once their father Jacob was gone, Joseph would surely take revenge on them. They asked, "What if Joseph holds a grudge?"

We might be inclined to think how terrible it is that the brothers carried these natural consequences and guilt with them their entire lives. On the one hand, it is an awful thing, but on the other hand we must realize that natural consequences and guilt are God's gifts to sinful people. Unless you have seared and deadened your conscience then everyone feels guilt, shame and regret. The question is what you do with your guilt and shame. Do you hang onto it and continue to carry the burden for several more decades? 2 Cor. 7 says that worldly sorrow brings death, but Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.

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Joseph's Timeline⁴

Event	Age of Joseph	Genesis
Joseph's father Jacob moves family from Haran to Canaan	6	31:17-21
Joseph sold to Potiphar in Egypt	17	ch. 37

Joseph interprets dreams of cupbearer and baker in prison	28	ch. 40
Joseph's grandfather Isaac dies	29	35:28–29
Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams, is released from prison	30	41:1–36
Seven years of plenty; sons Manasseh and Ephraim born during this time	30–37	41:47–52
Seven years of famine; two years into the famine Joseph reconciles with his brothers and father	37–44	41:53– 47:26
Joseph's father Jacob dies	56	47:28
Joseph dies	110	50:22–26

¹ Taken from *Between Two Worlds*, September 16, 2010.

² “Watch Bill Hybels,” REVEAL, 15 Nov 2007.

³ One commentator wrote, “The brothers may have succeeded in removing the hated Joseph from their sight, but Jacob’s gestures will always remind them where his deepest affections lie.” (Wenham p. 360.)

⁴ ESV Study Bible notes.