



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
**12700 W. Hwy. 42, Prospect, KY 40059**  
**stjohnky.com**

**Message for May 21, 2023**  
**“By Faith: Joseph”**  
**Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: Hebrews 11:22, Geneses 50:15-21**

## **The Story of Joseph**

The Old Testament hero we consider today lived quite the life. It was filled with ups and downs, and more than its share of twists and turns.

Hebrews references that life with this brief note in Hebrews 11:22.

*By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.*

The story of Joseph is told over thirteen chapters in Genesis. Genesis 37-50 to be exact.

There we find an epic story filled with drama, jealousy, revenge, retribution, seduction, and more than a good dose of family dysfunction.

Through it all Joseph always seemed to land on his feet. He had a way of flowering where planted. We have a flower growing out of the mortar on our front steps. I have been contented to leave it there. It reminds me to bloom where planted.

Joseph was sold into slavery by his own brothers and shipped off to Egypt. Once there he rose to prominence in the household of Potiphar, the head of Pharaoh’s security force.

Potiphar’s wife had a thing for Joseph and when Joseph refused her advances, she cried rape, which landed him in prison.

Joseph was a dreamer. He was also adept at interpreting dreams. That ability to interpret dreams eventually led to his release from prison and landed him in Pharaoh’s court.

Always one to bloom where planted, Joseph rose through the ranks in Pharaoh’s court and landed the Prime Minister’s job. In a word, Joseph oversaw everything that went on in Egypt, including the storing of graining in the event it might be needed during a famine.

A famine did come and nations from all around, including Israel, came seeking Egypt’s help.

Jacob sent his sons to seek that assistance, which meant that the very ones who sold Joseph into slavery now had to beg for his assistance.

Upon seeing his brothers again, Joseph was overwhelmed with emotion. He wept so all could hear. His brothers, on the other hand, feared for their lives.

In the end, Joseph, was able to recognize that God was at work. Despite all he had to go through, Joseph was able to claim the sovereignty of God.

He would say to his brothers, *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”*

Let’s read about that just now as we read Genesis 50:15-21. Let’s hear this from God’s Word.

### **Genesis 50:15-21 NIV**

*When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?” So they sent word to Joseph, saying, “Your father left these instructions before he died: ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” When their message came to him, Joseph wept.*

*His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said.*

*But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.*

This is God’s Word.

### **God’s Purposes**

As much as anything, the story of Joseph is the story of God’s purposes being lived on the hard anvil of life. Even though Joseph always seemed to bloom where planted, his life wasn’t all that easy. In fact, at times, it was downright tough.

Interestingly, much of what God was able to do through Joseph was birthed out of personal animosity, a good deal of which Joseph brought on himself. Joseph was full of himself. He was his dad’s favorite. Joseph knew it and so did his brothers. Joseph strutted around in his coat of many colors, if for no other reason, to remind them of that. Eventually, Joseph’s brothers had had enough. They threw Joseph into a cistern, and worst yet, sold him into slavery to a group of Canaanites on their way to Egypt.

God had work to do both with Joseph and his brothers. God has work to do with us as well. God takes the worst in us and redeems it. God has a way of meeting us right where we are, in all our shortcomings and failings, to bring us to the place where he wants us to be.

Some of you will remember the first sermon series I preached upon returning to Saint John five years ago. It was a series called *Life Verses*.

My interest in that series was to share some favorite verses that had helped form my life. One of those verses was that great passage from Romans 8:28.

*“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*

That verse speaks to what we are talking about today. The *King James Version* has that verse this way, *“All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purposes.”*

Translating Romans 8:28 that way can leave us with the mistaken notion that things just have a way of working out. Nothing could be further from the truth. The right rendering of Romans 8:28 puts the subject of the verse right where it needs to be.

God is the subject of this verse. He is the active agent here. Things just don't work out. God is the one at work to bring about his good purposes. That was true for Joseph and his brothers. It is also true for us. God was able to take a cocky kid in Joseph and redeem him to where several nations were spared the horrors of a famine. Lives were saved, countless lives. God can take even the worst in us and redeem it.

### **God's Providence**

God is always at work to bring about his good purposes. What we are talking about here is God's providence. We believe this, or at least we should, that God is actively at work and has been since the beginning of time.

We believe that God didn't just rack up the pool balls and strike them with the cue ball, leaving us randomly bumping into one another ever since. God is actively involved. God didn't just wind up the clock at the beginning of time and let it tick away. God is actively involved in time.

God is the master designer of all that is, and continues to create to this day, even to the point of forming and fashioning our lives. Again, God is actively involved.

Albert Einstein once wrote, *“I don't believe God plays dice with the universe.”* And I will add, he doesn't with us.

God doesn't leave things to chance or happenstance. He is actively involved. God does things on purpose. While God is provident, he always gives us the opportunity to choose. If he didn't, we'd be nothing more than puppets on a string.

We know from experience that free will is very much a part of life. We choose whether to turn left or right all the time. We are not absolved of responsibility when it comes to God's will. Free will is always at play.

God allows plenty of room for our mistakes. In fact, God is a God of mid-course adjustments. There were plenty mid-course adjustments with Joseph, just as there are plenty when it comes to us.

In the end, God's way will prevail, but only if we will open ourselves to it. That's why Joseph was able to say to his brothers, *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.”*

Joseph had come to sense God's will, and not just sense it, but live into it, as tough as that was at times. It comes to us to get with the program, God's program.

We'd do well, as Henry Blackaby puts it, to *“look for where God is working and join him.”*

We called to join him faithfully in what he wants to accomplish with our lives. I talk often about God working in us and through us.

- God's every desire is to do a great work in us. He longs to make us new in every way.
- God's every desire is to work through us as well. He wants to bring about his good purposes through us as we relate to others and the world around us.

These things are very much a part of God's providence for our lives.

### **More Than Luck, More Than Chance**

Life is so much more than luck. Everything in life is not left to chance.

John Wesley said in so many words, *"I don't believe in luck, but rather in the providence of God."*

Life is so much more than the luck of the draw, a flip of the coin, or the roll of the dice.

Life is certainly more than us making plans and becoming frustrated when things don't go according to those plans.

Life, true life, hinges on faithfully allowing God to bring about his good purposes in our lives.

Such doesn't depend on luck or good planning. It resolutely depends upon us once and for all giving ourselves over to God and his will.

### **Past, Present, Future**

When it comes to God's providence:

- We can look back see God's handiwork. Hindsight is always 20/20. I look back and see that God has always been there. He has always been at work.
- We can even look forward and, with faith, affirm that God's good purposes will indeed prevail, particularly when it comes to the hope and promise of eternal life.
- It's the present day that becomes the ticklish matter. We are not always so sure about God's will in the present.
- It comes to us then to live by faith—to get out of God's way and let him do this thing in and through us. It is then and only then that we will recognize the long, providential arm of the Lord leading us day in and day out.