

Genesis 50:15-21 “The God Underneath”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! I'd like to start by talking with the kids up here for just a minute. Some of them who left are coming back in right now. Parents, if you're confused, that was my fault.

But we will send them right back where they're going. Kids, if you want to come sit on these steps, we're going to talk for just a minute this morning. And then we will let our kids worship kids.

Go back out that way. Yeah, just sit right there on the step. Just wherever you're comfortable. There you go.

Can everybody see me? I'm trying something new out here. Because there's so many of y'all sometimes that I can't see all of you. You know, a lot of times at church we talk about happy things, don't we?

[1 : 04] Like heaven and God's love and forgiveness. And I do want to remind you kids today that God loves you. All right?

Can you all see me over here? All right? But I want to do it in a little bit different way than we often do. I want to ask you, can you think of something that sometimes makes you sad or scared?

Can anybody think of something that makes you sad or scared? Go ahead. You can just call it out. When one of your family members gets cancer. Okay. So somebody that you love might get really sick.

And that's scary and sad, isn't it? What else? The dark. The dark. Is anybody else scared of the dark sometimes? I sometimes get scared in the dark. That's a lot of us. Okay.

What else? That my brother, Caleb, went off to college. Oh, do some of you have brothers and sisters that have already had to move away from home and go to college?

[2 : 06] That's hard, isn't it? You miss him? Yeah. One more thing. Anybody else? Go ahead, Jared. You got hit on the forehead and it really hurt, didn't it?

For a long time. Has anybody else ever gotten hurt? Maybe you get a boo-boo. Maybe you even fall. It just makes you sad, doesn't it? And it's really hard. All of those things. There are a lot more things.

I'll let you can all talk about it later, okay? But we're going to stop with just those examples for this morning. Those are things that are really hard, aren't they? You ever been left out before by friends?

It makes you feel sad. You know the song, Jesus Loves Me? Do y'all know that song? How do you know that Jesus loves you in that song? Jesus loves me, this I know, for?

The Bible tells me so. You mean it doesn't say that everything in your life is good and easy and that's how you know Jesus loves you?

[3 : 06] No. No, it says the Bible tells us that no matter what is going on in our lives, whether it's hard or sad or scary or hurtful, that Jesus still loves us.

Isn't that amazing? All of the time, the Bible tells us God loves those whose hearts are broken because they're so sad. The Bible says God loves those who are poor.

The Bible says God loves those who are scared, who are afraid, and that we can trust Him when we are. Isn't that wonderful? Because sometimes we're sad, aren't we?

Sometimes we're scared. And God still loves us. God still loves you. When? All the time? Did we sing that earlier? All the time, God is good.

Now when you go back to your seats in just a minute, we're going to talk about a story of someone in the Bible named Joseph. Does anybody know about Joseph? Joseph goes through a lot of really hard things and a lot of really sad things.

[4 : 10] And even though he might get scared sometimes, he learns that God still loves him. So when y'all go back to your seats, will you listen carefully about how the Bible teaches us about that in the story of Joseph?

Can y'all listen with me? And then those of you who are in kids' worship, y'all are going to learn too, okay? What's the question? Which Joseph? This is the good question. This is Joseph in the Old Testament, not Joseph who's Mary's husband and the father of Jesus, okay?

Joseph in the Old Testament who has a special coat and whose brothers are not very nice unlike yours, all right? Let's pray and then you can go back. Jesus, thank you so much that you love us all the time.

I thank you for these kids. I pray when they are afraid that they will learn they can trust you. That they will know they can turn to you and that you still love them and that the hard things in their lives are not evidence that you've quit loving them, but that you keep being with them.

And I pray that you will teach us that from your word, God, as we open it today. Would you speak through it to our hearts? We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you all so much.

[5 : 25] If you were back there with kids' worship, you see Miss Katie waving to you, go right back where you just were and others of you can go back to your parents if that's where you were staying for the sermon.

Okay. Looks like you got them all.

Excellent. As we've started our journey through these old stories to see the big story that God's telling, we have heard repeatedly of God's blessing, haven't we?

All the way back from the beginning when He blesses us in the greatest way possible, creating us in His image for relationship with Him. And then God repeats that blessing, doesn't He, to Noah after the flood.

Last week, Abraham, whom God blesses and promises to make a blessing to others, in fact, to all nations, right?

[6 : 33] He promises Abraham a special relationship. He promises Abraham a promised land. He promises Abraham a seed, a great nation that will come from him, a people through the child of promise.

Remember? That child of promise whom Abraham almost had to sacrifice until God sent a substitute? Pastor Derek so helpfully opened that story up for us last week, Abraham and Isaac. And he reminded us that God often gives us a compass rather than a GPS, right? That we might not understand everything God is doing in our story, in our walk with Him.

Well, Isaac is the child of blessing. His son Jacob hears that same promise, the relationship, the land, the seed.

And when we get to Jacob's family, it's not just that we have only a compass to follow. Y'all, the compass seems shattered, broken.

[7 : 46] What in the world is going on? This is the family of promise. This is the blessed family. And Jacob's name becomes what? Israel.

His 12 sons will more or less be the 12 tribes of Israel. So how are things going with the blessed family? Well, the snapshot we get in Genesis 37 is that Father Jacob Israel himself is playing favorites.

It's only getting a special gift for his one favorite son. And then that favorite son, who's that? Joseph. He decides to rub it in to all his brothers.

He has dreams and he tells them about how he's better than they are. And so they respond, maybe understandably, by deciding what? We want nothing to do with this guy.

They plan to kill Joseph. They throw their brother into a pit. They sell him away. They treat him as though he is dead.

[8 : 56] They lie to their dad about what happened. How's that for a blessed family? Is that the family whose Christmas card you get and you think, man, what a blessed family.

Hashtag blessed. That's them. I hope this story will be an encouragement to you this morning. If your present snapshot of your family feels anywhere distant from your expectations, hopes, dreams, as theirs would have.

Maybe your life feels that way personally, where you hear about God's love and grace and blessing, but you just don't see it in your life personally.

If you're honest, this doesn't feel like that at all. There's a lot of that in this room. Some of us are parents grieving where your kids are right now. They're not where you long for them to be. Others of us feel like almost every day we're at a lunch table by ourselves, so to speak.

[10:14] We're alone. Others of us are facing physical pains and struggles that you wouldn't wish on your worst enemies. You describe them to me, and I can hardly imagine what it must be like to feel the pain you're feeling and not know if it's going to change.

How will this play out? Will there be relief coming? Others of us feel the shame of divorce. Someone said to me just last week, Pastor, his marriage was really disintegrating before his eyes. I guess the way I've handled the blessings that God has given me in my life, I shouldn't expect God to bless me anymore. You know that feeling?

For any reason? This is not what blessed was supposed to look like. I must have missed a turn somewhere with Jesus.

How did I get off track? How did my life end up here? It feels like there is just no way back to the promises of God. The blessings, right? Life with God.

[11:31] If you have been there, or if you are there today, I want to tell you two things as we get started. The first is, I'm so sorry.

You were made to feel the full face of God shining on you, unhindered, all the time, every moment being that close to him and knowing his full delight.

And you're feeling like the clouds are so thick and so dark that you can't even see him at all. It's an awful place to be.

It's not what you were made for. I'm sorry. The second is this. God wants you to know, in the midst of that, that he is at work.

He won't fail now. He hasn't lost control. He hasn't given up on you. He is at work to rescue and to restore even when we can't see it.

[12:43] And that is good news because a lot of times we can't. He's in fact weaving this beautiful tapestry, a wonderful story that you're a part of, but you can only see from the backside the knots, the frays, the ugly streaks that are on the back of that tapestry.

Right now, it's all you can see. And God wants us to see this morning more of who he is. We may not see the whole picture still of what's going on in our stories, but if we're gonna have hope, we have to see who he is because he's in your story.

I wanna read to you what Joseph tells his brothers at the end of the story. It's gonna help frame the story for us. It's in Genesis chapter 50 starting at verse 15.

I'm gonna read just this section of God's word even though Joseph's story is about 14 chapters. 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.

Seems reasonable. So they sent a message to Joseph. They made this up. 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.

[14:10] And now please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father. And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, behold, we are your servants.

Echoes of a dream. But Joseph said to them, do not fear for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me.

But God, but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today.

So do not fear. I will provide for you and your little ones. Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. I really want us to see two things in this story that I think will help us in our chapter of this same story.

The reality of evil and the goodness of God. These verses point us to both of them. First, evil.

[15:24] Evil. Sin. Evil. Transgression. Evil. Evil. Consider the evil done to Joseph. And let's call it what it is.

Right? I don't want to soft sell it. We have the tendency to miss the heart of this story entirely for a couple of reasons. One is we miss the real pain because we love comfort, don't we?

Anybody else like being comfortable? And if we're honest, when we read this story, sometimes when we tell it to our kids, Joseph seems to come out pretty well. Right?

Second in command in the whole country. All the food he wants, all the money, all the power, wife and kids. Plus, we really like morality tales.

It helps us get to the point faster. We can have a quick takeaway. So what we conclude is that Joseph was faithful, he trusted God, and life went great. Now, I'm not saying there aren't some good lessons to learn from Joseph.

[16:29] there are, but let me show you what this text says to Hebrew ears, not American ears. Okay? The end of Joseph's story, the end of the book of Genesis, is Joseph was put in a coffin in Egypt.

That's bad. Okay? In case you don't understand that, when you, even American ears get that, right? But it's even worse when they read it.

Joseph and his family have been promised the land of Canaan, not Egypt. Joseph even calls Egypt later in his life after he's risen to power and he seems to have everything that you could possibly imagine in Egypt.

He says, Egypt is the land of my blessing? No. The land of my affliction. You don't have to remind the original recipients of the book of Genesis of that reality, do you?

What's Egypt been like for them? They just made it out of Egypt by the skin of their teeth. Barely alive. They have felt the pain and they have, they're the ones who've carried Joseph's bones with them as he made them promise to do because his hope lay where?

[17:50] Elsewhere, not in Egypt. So please hear me, especially if you're hurting right now. The Bible does not tell you to deal with your pain by saying the evil is good.

That's not the message. We are going to talk a lot about the good this morning, but it's not in an effort to say that the bad thing is a good thing.

You don't have to say to feel like a good Christian. It was a blessing in disguise. Is that what blessings do? Dress up? No.

God is good. When? All the time. All the time. God is good. Not all the time is good. Not all the things are good.

No. Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, God says. The Bible says there are tears in this story that are not just happy tears and you don't have to pretend that's what it is.

[19:00] It's really sad. when a kid says someone in my family has cancer.

It's really bad when somebody abuses you. Let me just hit some of the darker moments in this story with you.

The evil done to Joseph. His brothers, the family of promise, the blessed family, attack him, bully him, throw him into a pit.

Listen to the description if it's not bad enough already. When Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, that special robe, the robe of many colors that he wore, and they took him and threw him into a pit.

The pit was empty. There was no water in it. This was not a five-star pit. They threw him in the pit without water. They weren't trying to do him a favor.

[20:03] They sell him to Gentiles who take him away as a slave far from the promised land. Can you imagine the sadness as he is dragged away from his parents perhaps forever?

In Egypt, even though he works hard and he lives faithfully, he is falsely accused by his boss's wife, he is thrown in prison, and then he's forgotten about for multiple years there in prison, even by the people he helps out.

When he finally gets out and he comes to power and position in Egypt, even then, Joseph has not arrived, right? This is not where he longs to be. He's far away from his beloved father.

He's separated from all his family. He's isolated from people who love Yahweh. It's the land of his affliction. He longs for home, doesn't he?

Can you feel some of his pain living on this side of heaven? Do you long for home? This is not some fairy tale prince of Egypt. Can you relate to how Joseph might have been tempted to believe a lie about God when he was in that pit without water?

[21:26] When he was in that prison without a friend? When he was in that land without a family? When you're in a pit, there are some lies that are easy to believe, but really important to reject.

The first is the one we've already been discussing. It's the lie that this, where I am, means God has removed his blessing from me. And that makes sense to us in our culture because we've defined blessing as comfortable circumstances and material prosperity.

So to us, the pit by definition means I'm missing out on the blessing. Unless we're defining blessing wrong. So that second lie that I sometimes believe is that God has abandoned me.

Certainly this wouldn't happen to someone God loves, we might think. Maybe God was with my grandfather or my father, but apparently I'm on my own here.

And yet, the text points out, even in being sold to Egypt, God was with Joseph. Joseph. But he still got thrown in prison unjustly.

[22 : 52] But even in prison, God was with Joseph. And so it all got better. No, but he still got forgotten. You see what's happening? God is with Joseph and things are still going bad.

God is with Joseph and he's still in a pit. And we've got to connect the dot because you don't have to get out of the pit for God to be with you. Amen? You don't have to get out of the pit for God to be with you.

And this is the blessing, right? Listen to me. Corrie ten boom learned this one in one of the lowest, darkest pits, Ravensbruck concentration camp in Germany.

It doesn't get much lower and darker than that, right? The rejects, the abuse, the fleas, the death, and who was there in the midst of all of it?

God. She said, God was there. There is no pit so deep that he is not deeper still. We've got to realize that in this story.

[23 : 51] No pit so deep that he is not deeper still. That is our God. That's what he wants us to know about him. Listen, I don't know how far you have fallen.

I don't know how low you feel, but you have not fallen beyond him. underneath, wherever you are, are the everlasting arms.

God is lower than wherever you have gone. He has not abandoned you. His goodness is running after, running after, running after you, and he will reach you.

He's there with you. Finally, you might wrongly conclude in your pit that God has failed to keep his promises. promises. It may be you've misunderstood his promises.

Happens to us a lot. It also may be that you are trusting his promises, but you can only see the back of the tapestry right now. So you can call where you are evil and still trust him to be good and faithful and at work.

[25 : 00] Let's see this part of Joseph's story. What's so amazing in this story is how much good God does here in the face of so much evil.

This story is a case study in what we refer to as God's providence. It's his sovereign work to do good no matter how much bad there is.

That he's in control. There's no maverick molecule in the universe. He didn't just create the world. But he upholds it and sustains it by the word of his power in every moment.

God is always working to rescue and restore because he is committed to blessing, isn't he? Have we learned that about him here? You remember what was going to happen when God blessed Adam and Eve?

His blessing was going to flow through them to all of his good creation, right? And then we came to Abraham and he said I'm going to bless you Abraham. He promises that all nations will be blessed through Abraham.

[26 : 12] Sometimes I get so focused on my own circumstances that I forget God's blessing has a bigger scope than I see. So far from removing God's blessing from Joseph in the pit, what's happening?

God's blessing is overflowing from Joseph. How does he say it to his brothers? To save many lives. It's happening all through this story. See not only is Potiphar's house blessed when Joseph, the man of God, shows up, not only is the prisoners that Joseph interprets their dreams, they're blessed when the man of God shows up in prison, but also through the wisdom of God.

Joseph's interpretation of dreams, Joseph's plans to store grain during the good years. Egypt prospers, the whole nation, and many, many nations are blessed, fed, spared, because Joseph is in Egypt.

When we're in the pit, may we have the eyes of faith to see God is up to something much bigger than our circumstances so we can actually rejoice in blessing overflowing to others.

God's But there's more here because if that's all that's going on, then we might rightly be afraid that God might trample on me and his promises to me so that he can bless others more because he's really like that.

[27 : 45] He likes to bless. Maybe he's going to leave me in the pit and others will be blessed. What about when my life keeps being hard? When from all I can tell my prayers aren't being answered?

When my life is ending and there's still so much to grieve? That as we've seen is Joseph's story isn't it?

In a coffin in Egypt. The promised land is as far away as ever. The promised seed, the great nation, they're spared, they're alive but not looking so great.

right? Maybe brother Judah being less selfish and more sacrificial is foreshadowing hope. It is. But it's generations away.

Those promises that are repeated in blessing of the next generation are a long time to develop.

Regardless of how far away all of that seems, God's blessing has a longer view than I grasp.

[28 : 51] grasp. Listen to Joseph on his deathbed to his brothers who are fearful that their sinfulness, their selfishness has messed up this whole promise and blessing thing.

What does Joseph say? I am about to die but, that's not the end, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

He's promised. Joseph made the sons of Israel swear saying, God will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here.

This is going to happen. I don't know when it is but you're going to carry my bones with you.

Someone here I believe needs to hear this today. God's sovereign providence is such that even after you have died, God will still faithfully work to bring you where he's promised.

Even if you don't get to see it here, even if his faithfulness to his promises to your family is not something you get to witness or experience, he's faithful. His story, your story, your family's story does not end with what we experience or see in this life.

[30 : 14] He's just bigger than that. That is how good he is. That's how much you can trust and cling to his promises. May we have such an eternal perspective of his greatness and his grace to us.

I don't know about you but when I'm really hurting those two truths that we've just talked about can be tough to embrace.

what I mean is it can seem a little pie in the sky to tell me when I've been cheated on and left alone again that it'll be better in the next life.

It can seem a little callous when I've been left out again humiliated publicly constantly battling depression to tell me someone else is getting blessed through all this.

Cheer up. Both true but often hard to process. In other words I don't want you to think less than that but I also want you to hear this third reality that's for all of us even if those two can't come home to your heart today.

[31 : 38] I intentionally wrote the third promise differently. God is with you. God is with you full stop.

Simple perhaps but this is the heart of being blessed. The Bible tells us this. Remember the blessing promised from the beginning was relationship with God.

It's what we broke. It's what God is restoring to us. So let me show you again here. I already showed you this God's presence was what anchored Joseph in Egypt in Potiphar's house in prison.

It's also the only thing that gets his father Jacob even to come to Egypt. Leaving the promised land was so counterintuitive to Jacob that even though it was the only place he could find food in a famine even though his beloved son was there he stopped at the boundary of the promised land and wouldn't leave until God himself showed up personally to tell him to keep going.

Chapter 46 God 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.

[33 : 04] I myself will go down with you. I am coming with you God says to Egypt and I will also bring you up again the land promise is secure because God is going with you and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes the seed promise is secure because God is with you and so Jacob goes even when it takes generations for those things to happen.

So that's the way God's presence in the pit works is that you find that you cannot fall so low that he's not there. Remember that? God was with Joseph.

God was with Joseph. God was with Joseph. Psalm 139 if I lie in the pit of hell you are there. If I say surely the darkness will cover me.

Well the darkness is light to you God. It can't keep you from me. You see me. You're with me no matter where I go or what I do. My life is like the famous runaway bunny.

Many of you know. I can go on a trout stream. I can climb up in a mountain. I can hide in a garden and mother bunny says I will come to you. I will find you.

[34 : 23] I will hold you. See it might just as well stay here and be mine. you start to experience that even though you're in the pit what you need even more than getting out is him.

You need God with you. If the one who is goodness himself is there then you have goodness even in your badness.

Right? The relationship that you were made for the comfort of his love the delight of never being abandoned because you found a friend who will keep chasing keep pursuing and never let you go. And if that friend is with you then whatever your bad situation is it can't stay bad forever. If his promise to be with you in the deepest pit is true then you can count on all of his other promises too. Then it really is true that the nations are being blessed through this then it really is true that eternity will be glorious and we need those promises and we know they're true because he's with us now.

[35 : 37] Joseph learns this. Paul experiences this in prison. Ask Job or Ruth or Jonah or Hannah what it's like to go so low that you think God will never hear you and all of a sudden you run into him.

He's there. His goodness running after me. God is at work rescuing and restoring even when we can't see it.

Will you believe that today not just for Joseph's story it's a nice one. Not just in general but in your pit. Will you believe it there?

Maybe you say I don't know about all that. I certainly don't feel God is with me. Maybe you're here this morning and you say I don't believe in God at all.

So why would I believe that he's with me when all the evidence I see is to the contrary? Or maybe you say somewhere in between I'm just not sure about God but I can tell you this pastor I'm sure if God is there he's not blessing me.

[36 : 47] No way. This is perhaps a hard request if you're hurting this morning but I'm asking you to stick with me for one more step.

There's just one more thing to connect the dots if you're struggling like that. See you can trust that God has not removed his blessing from you.

Not against all evidence but because he enters with you into the pit. to keep his promise to be a God who rescues and restores you to relationship with him.

He does that to restore you even when you broke it. Even when you threw yourself into the pit. See Jesus came as a man who was rejected by family.

Who was falsely accused. Who was unjustly imprisoned. Who was actually killed. He said that he was sent away by his father by God himself to preserve like Joseph a remnant on earth.

[37 : 53] Many survivors. A great people. God's not asking you to believe against all evidence that he stands high up in heaven somewhere with a magic wand to make the evil in your life go away.

It's not what he says. No he has stooped. He's shown himself to be with you. He's entered in to endure the ultimate evil.

The physical emotional social spiritual agony of the cross even when it wasn't deserved in order to accomplish the ultimate good the blessing of so many people including you.

Jesus endured evil to end it for you one day. Won't you trust him? Why stay alone in your fear and despair?

There is someone whose pit is deeper than yours who stoops to rescue you to restore you to catch you.

[38 : 59] His arms are underneath so you don't have to ascend to him. He's come down and his arms are there so you can just fall into them right now. You don't have to do anything else.

Call evil evil. Tell God it doesn't feel like you expected or like he would have designed in his perfect world. Declare as loudly as you want that there is no hope unless he's doing something that you can't see or understand.

And then when you do that I want you to hear the drum beat. The drum beat in the background of God's goodness. Running after Joseph.

Running after Jesus. Running after you. Tell him if he's gone to the cross and risen from the grave for you then all of his promises must be true.

There's no other hope. Declare that the eternal God is your refuge and underneath no matter how low you go are the everlasting arms.

[40 : 07] Let's pray. Father would you catch us and hold us and comfort us this morning.

There are hard things in this world. We grieve for ourselves for our children for our city for our country for this world because it's not the way we long for it to be.

We read your word and we realize it's not the way you long for it to be and we need hope. We need your help. We need you.

Thank you for entering in. Thank you for not leaving us alone. Thank you for the hope of your presence with us in the pit. Would we know the everlasting arms in a fresh way this morning and and know that you're holding us just as you've been holding this story together for generation after generation and century after century and you're taking us home.

Give us rest and joy in your goodness we ask in Jesus name. Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org. Nacho