

You'll Get Through This: A Good Story

Big idea: God is writing a good story and we can trust him with ours.

Purpose: To help people listen for, trust, and live into God's good story.

Passage: Genesis 50:12-21

Verse: Genesis 50:20-21

Lucado Chapters: 12-15

Overview: Stories are like maps. The stories we believe shape the way we live our lives. The story of Joseph reminds us that God is writing a good story—even out of our messes and pains. It's vital we stay oriented to this good story and recognize the places we are prone to lose our way.

Opening

When I was in college, the Residence Life Department thought it would be a good idea to take a group of 60 in-training RAs out to the wilderness for 7 days. We were divided up into groups of 10 and sent out for the Three Sisters Wilderness in central Oregon. It was actually a super cool, hands-on, leadership development experience. One of the aspects of our training was this thing called *Leaders Of The Day*. Each day, a different pair of 2 people would carry the map, the compass, the coordinates for where we were headed, and they were responsible for getting our group safely to our campsite before the night. The Leaders of the Day had to be sure people were doing ok, drinking water, taking breaks and covering enough ground.

When it was my time to be Leader of the Day, I felt pretty confident. I love maps (you can ask my housemate) and I have a pretty good sense of direction. My co-leader and I did pretty well...until it was almost dinnertime and we were still not at our campsite. **I have a vivid memory of pulling out the map, trying to orient ourselves on it, and deciding to take our tired group down just one more path that I was pretty sure about this time.**

Except that I led us to a cliff. We ended up needing to ask for help from our actual wilderness guide in order to reorient ourselves toward where we actually needed to go.

Anyone else been in a situation like that before? You thought you knew where you were going - only to find out you were totally lost?

Today we are finishing up the story of Joseph. We've spent the last 5 weeks following this story of an immature boy, sold into slavery by his brothers. We've seen his development over a decade— maturing from a young boy into

a man through a series of unfortunate events. **We've watched him anchor his hope in the presence of God—whether he was in the pit, in the prison, or in the palace of Pharaoh.** We've watched him overcome temptation, trust in God's calling, learn how to wait on God. And last week, we watched him live out God's heart for reconciliation as he struggled through the process of forgiving his brothers who betrayed him.

The teaching series we're in is called "You'll Get Through This." We've been exploring how Joseph got through the highs and lows of his life. Today, I want us to look at Joseph as kind of like the wilderness guide on my RA backpacking trip. No matter what life threw at him, Joseph oriented his map in light of God's good story, and he trusted God with his own story.

Turn or scroll with me in your Bibles to Genesis 50 verse 12.

Ok, so before we jump into this part of the story, we've gotta backtrack a little bit. Last week, Mike walked us through Joseph's brothers coming to Egypt seeking refuge from the famine. After that initial encounter and eventual reconciliation, Joseph's dad and brothers were welcomed to settle in Egypt. **The story we're about to read is over 17 years later.** Jacob (Joseph's dad) has died, but he made Joseph promise to bury him back in the land of his ancestors, rather than in Egypt. So the brothers made the trek to Canaan to bury their father. Genesis 50:12 picks up there.

Genesis 50:12-21

So Jacob's sons did as he had commanded them: They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre, which Abraham had bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all the others who had gone with him to bury his father.

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.

Commentary

Ok, lots of interesting stuff going on in this story! We’re going to start with Jacob’s burial. Why did he insist on being buried in Canaan?

When Joseph’s brothers went to Egypt for the first time seeking refuge from the famine, they came without their dad, Jacob. When they saw that Joseph was alive and well and promised to take care of them, they returned to Canaan to get their dad and the rest of their people. Jacob was like “What? This is amazing! I get to see my son again!?” and started packing up. As they departed, he stopped to worship and offer sacrifices to God. That night of the journey, God spoke to Jacob. God said,

“I am God, the God of your father,” he said. “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph’s own hand will close your eyes.” (Genesis 46:3-4)

Notice the promises God makes:

I will make you into a great nation.

I will go with you.

I will bring you back.

God is continuing the same promise God made to Abraham, Jacob’s ancestor, that God would make his offspring a great people and give them their own land to settle in forever. God is reminding Jacob that *he is part of a bigger story* and that going to Egypt is not the end of the story, nor is it the end of God’s faithfulness.

We also see God telling Jacob to not be afraid. This command “do not be afraid” occurs over 80 times in the NIV version of the Bible! We are fearful people and I think God knows we need a little reassurance. By leaving the land of his ancestors, Jacob might have felt like he was abandoning God’s

story, God's plan. After Jacob's critical moment of faith and decision, God reassured Jacob that He was with him. What a huge gift. In essence, God was saying to him:

Don't be afraid. I am writing a good story. You can trust me with yours.

This promise of God's unfolding story completely oriented Jacob's life. It was his map—how he made sense of his story in light of God's story. He trusted that God was leading the way. As he was about to die, Jacob passed his "map" off to Joseph, telling Joseph about his God-encounter in Canaan and reassuring him of God's presence and promises.

So, all this gives us the backstory for the passage we read about Joseph's brothers in Genesis 50. **We see how God oriented Jacob to God's story, Jacob oriented Joseph to God's story, and now Joseph, with his brothers who are wrapped up in their own stories of fear and what-if, reorients them to God's story, too.** *Brothers,*

Don't be afraid. God is writing a good story. We can trust him with ours.

Life Lessons

What did God give us to make sense of our existence here? A book of rules? An algorithm like on Facebook? God gave us *a story—a book of stories* with settings, characters, plots, drama, beginnings, middles, and ends.

God wired us to be story people. We use stories to navigate our lives the way we use maps to navigate the wild. They orient our whole lives and are vital to our flourishing as people and communities. God's good story shaped the life of Joseph, and it's meant to shape our lives, too. So, how can we practice living even more fully into the story that God is authoring? What are ways we can check the story-map of our lives? I'm so glad you asked! I love to get practical. Let's talk about that.

First, we must recognize that there are other stories competing for our attention. Part of the work of orienting our lives to God's good story is to recognize our false stories.

Recognize our false stories.

We all listen to stories that aren't true. There are narratives we have about God, ourselves, and others that we've picked up along the way and that need healing. It had been 17 years since Joseph's brothers' so-called reconciliation

with Joseph, and yet when push came to shove, they still had this deep, false, fear-based story in the driver's seat.

Genesis 50:15-17

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.

Brene Brown is a Research Professor at the University of Houston. She's also a New York Times Best Selling Author and has one of the most watched TED Talks of all time on the Power of Vulnerability. Her work around storytelling and meaning making has been and continues to be TRANSFORMATIVE for me. She writes,

Our brains are wired to help us survive. When the brain senses danger or stress, it craves a story that will help make sense of the situation. Who is against us? Who is on our side? Who is dangerous? Who might hurt us? Most of us make up stories that exaggerate our fears and anxieties. Our brains love those stories, and they chemically reward us with a sense of calm for having a complete story, even when the story isn't accurate. - (Brené Brown)

I love that language of making up stories. It's so helpful in seeing where my thinking has gone bad and takes the judgement and shame out of it.

"Oh I'm making up the story that I'm not a good pastor if this sermon doesn't go well..."

"Oh, I'm making up the story that if I lose ten pounds I will be more lovable..."

"Oh, I'm making up the story that if I follow all the rules I won't get hurt..."

"Oh, I'm making up the story that my partner or my friend doesn't care about me..."

"Oh, I'm making up the story that _____" You fill in the blank.

Is this not EXACTLY what the brothers in our story are doing? They don't have all the information, they're scared for their survival, so they're making up

stories to fill in the gaps, and then they use manipulation to try to stay safe and in control. Anyone else just a little bit guilty of that sometimes?

Brené goes on to say,

When we learn how to get curious and reality-check the stories we make up, we can increase our resilience and reset faster after failures, setbacks, and disappointments. – (Brené Brown)

This is like getting out the map, right? This idea of reality-checking our stories is sooo helpful. **But in order to reality-check our stories, we have to recognize them.** Usually, our body comes into play here. That feeling of being hot in the face, stomach upset, panicky, mind-racing, the compulsion to reach for your favorite self-soother (online shopping, alcohol, food, working out, tv) – **that’s your cue. Get curious right there. Our bodies are telling us something. There’s a story buried inside that reaction.**

This happened just the other day in one of my meetings with our pastors, John & Mike. We were talking about a decision we needed to make and, as we went on, I noticed a big shift in my body—my heart started to beat faster, my chest got hot, and my blood started pumping. Since I’ve built trust with these guys, when Mike asked me what I thought about whatever we were talking about, I said, “Well, I’m not sure what I think, but I can tell I have a lot of feelings, so I might need to process that a bit.” And then they held space for me to actually identify some of the other internal and external stories and what-ifs that were at play for me—and then for Mike and John, too—surrounding that issue. Once those were all on the table, we could see more clearly and take steps forward that truly aligned with our vision and values.

Joseph’s brothers were caught up in their reactions and false stories. Joseph could see it and wept.

I guarantee that each of us—right now, today—is caught up in a story that isn’t fully true. Will we let that story lead us to manipulation, control, and wounding those we love? Will we let that story lead us to a cliff or a dead end? Or will we recognize our false stories so we can begin to see what’s true?

And that’s the next step! When we recognize we’re heading the wrong way, we can change direction. We can turn from our fear-based stories and reorient ourselves to God’s good story.

Reorient to God’s good story

When I was in seminary, one of my professors had us do a semester-long assignment called a **“Rule of Life.”** Those of you who have taken Emotionally Healthy Spirituality at New Hope know this term.

Creating a Rule of Life means you take time experimenting with and identifying the daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly practices and rhythms that help keep you oriented to God’s good story. I update mine as I grow and as seasons change, but when things start feeling a little wonky or I feel like I’ve lost my way, I check in with my Rule of Life. *When was the last time I shared my heart with a friend? When was the last time I checked in with God? Did I look for beauty today? Did I get outside and move my body this week?* Those are just a few examples from my Rule of Life.

Jacob had a sacred rhythm of sacrifice and worship that created room for God to reorient him to God’s good story.

Joseph reoriented himself to God’s good story by practicing the presence of God, even while in Pharaoh’s prison.

Jesus regularly went to a solitary place to reorient to God’s good story amidst many other voices and demands of ministry.

By God’s grace, even Joseph’s brothers were reoriented to God’s good story by Joseph’s reassurance and kindness.

Crafting a Rule of Life is a bit of an endeavor. I encourage you to begin that journey if you haven’t already. Here’s a link to Bridgetown Church’s Rule of Life Workbook (<https://practictheway.org/unhurrying-with-a-rule-of-life/workbook?fbclid=IwAR0HEPuleyaLQzBbHaKLIKIBtp0eTBMWjAm583HZ13PtWVdpXOCW1TtSN3gg>). It’s a great resource for starting to craft your own Rule of Life. But in the meantime, I want to challenge you with the most essential and immediate aspect of a Rule of Life: what I call ***The Must Dos.***

What are the 1 or 2 “must do” daily practices that keep you oriented to God’s good story and to who you are within it?

Think of these *Must Dos* like your little daily map-checks. *Am I living in light of God’s good story, or have I lost my way down a dead end path?*

Grab a sticky note and take 5 minutes to jot down one or two things. These should not be hard things that take a lot of time. For a while, one of my *Must Dos* was to take a deep breath every time I got into my car, just to remind myself that I’m okay, that I can breathe, that God’s got me. Another is taking

at least ten minutes each morning or day to turn toward God and practice God's presence.

These are simple, daily practices that serve to just make sure you're not looking at your map upside down. After you write down your 1-2 things, stick that sticky note on your bathroom mirror or on the dashboard of your car. Start small and practice reorienting from your false, clamoring narratives to God's good story.

What are the 1 or 2 “must do” daily practices that keep you oriented to who you are and to God's good story?

But how about the parts of my story that definitely aren't good? How about when everything feels dark and I don't know where the map is or who's has it? How about when my brothers throw me into a pit and then sell me to Pharaoh? **That's why this story of Joseph is so powerful. It urges us to believe that, even in the bleakest chapters of our life, we can trust God with our story.**

Trust God with your story.

Every good story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, but **most of our lives are spent in the middle.** We get glimpses of purpose and brief seasons of resolve, but so much is spent in a posture of waiting like John talked about a few weeks ago. **The promise of God's story is that our pain is not the end.** God's story ends with resurrection and redemption—all things whole, all things home, all things made new. But in the meantime, we live in the middle of the story—linking arms with faith, with hope, with love, and with one another.

On the other side of suffering, Joseph looked at the brothers who caused him so much pain and said, ***“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”***

Joseph is clear: *“You intended to harm me.”* I appreciate this, because God doesn't ask us to minimize or dismiss our suffering. Joseph didn't do that and the scriptures tell us that Jesus despised the shame of the cross. **But both trusted that their Father would make their sufferings matter.** And both saw that He did. We can trust God with our story.

What part of your story hasn't found its way into God's redemptive hands? What wound, grief, or pain still lurks in the dark of confusion, bitterness, and shame? What would it look like to let even just a little bit of God's light

shine in? To hold it before God in prayer, to talk to someone you trust, to seek help from someone who's had a similar experience, to find a support group, to make the call for a counselor.

A few weeks ago I was really feeling that ache of being in the middle. I have hopes and desires for the future and I have pains that still feel tender from the past. As I sat in my living room just kind of dwelling in that space, I was reminded of a song by Will Reagan. I opened up Spotify, found the song and played it on repeat for like an hour (don't judge me). The chorus goes like this: *"I give it all to you God, trusting that you'll make something beautiful out of me."* I let the chorus wash over me and fill me with courage as I sensed God was inviting me to trust Him with my story.

Closing

God holds each of us and each part of our story with great dignity and care. God sees our pain, knows our pain, and – in Christ – God actually *became* our pain. **The resurrection is the promise that all our experiences of suffering and death will be made into life!**

God will find room for *all things* in His good story of redemption. That includes our suffering. God will make it matter. It was true for Joseph, true for Jesus, and it's true for me and you.

Don't be afraid. God is writing a good story. We can trust him with ours.

Communion

At the Last Supper before his death, Jesus shows us the power of living in light of God's good story.

"The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him." (John 13:2)

Jesus knew who He was and the good story of which He was a part. It was this deep conviction that allowed Him the courage to trust and to love—even in His most trying moments. He knew that two of His friends and disciples would betray or deny Him just hours later, and yet "knowing that [H]e had

come from God and was returning to God”, He got up, looked at them with love, and knelt to wash their feet.

What kind of love is that? It’s a love that knows it’s story. And this is the good story we remember and we practice each week through communion.

On the night that he was betrayed—that same night he washed his disciples’ feet—Jesus took the bread and he said, this is my body broken for you. When you eat this, remember me, remember the good story. And in the same way he took the cup and said, this is the sign of the new covenant, my blood shed for you. Whenever you drink this, remember me, remember the good story.

Benediction

Don’t be afraid. Turn away from those stories of fear. God is writing a good story. We can trust him with ours.