

As Joseph prepares for the end of his life, he demonstrated the faith which is the harvest of a life of trusting his Heavenly Father. As believers, we too can have hope for that same fruit in our final years of our pilgrimage, including strength to resist old temptations and the confidence to entrust our souls to God as we die. Knowledge of how well-provisioned we are to face the last chapter of our lives also encourages us to pass on our spiritual inheritance of faith to those who follow after us, as we will see in this week's Bible notes.

Monday: Read Genesis 50:18-21 & Galatians 5:19-23**Not in the Place of God**

After the death of his father, Joseph reassures his guilty, terror-stricken brothers that he is “not in the place of God.” Though he had all the power of Egypt at his disposal, and his brothers at his mercy for what they had done to him, Joseph refused to vengefully lord it over their lives. What an alluring temptation such vengeance would be for Joseph, and for us! There is a reason more than half of the sins of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21 have to do with emotions well-suited to harming others, especially if they harmed us! “Hatred, discord... fits of rage...,” all describe plausible responses which we, with Joseph, could easily levy against Joseph's brothers! After all, couldn't Joseph rationalize taking matters into his own hands? *He* had been the one given dreams from Heaven! *He* had been the one sent to Egypt to suffer years of slavery and imprisonment; *He* alone won the favor of Pharaoh so that his family were permitted to stay in Egypt! But Joseph refuses to claim any privileged position over his brothers. He will not in any fashion “be in the place of God.” Thank God for the humbling and fruitful work of the Spirit even in this mighty Prince of Egypt!

Meditate and Pray: Ask the Lord to create within your heart the sweet fruits of his Spirit from Gal. 5:22-23, fruits which were lost when Adam and Eve so recklessly declared, “we will be like God.” Thank Jesus that, on the Cross, He purchased *all the character traits of a godly life, all the fruits of love, patience and self-control* such as Joseph displayed, so that we can learn to bear fruit – even in the barren land of “Egypt,” and even if others use us and harm us for years.

Tuesday: Read Genesis 50:22-23 & Romans 8:29**Predestined to Be Conformed**

Joseph kept his promise to care for his covenant family, including his grandsons who were placed on his knees (Gen. 50:23). Being placed on his knees, these grandsons were claimed by Joseph as *his* – just as earlier his father Jacob had “adopted” Ephraim and Manasseh for *himself* in Gen. 48:5-12. What would such an adoption entail for these grandsons of Joseph? Surely, the first prayer which Joseph would utter for these lads would be that they would grow up with the “family likeness” of faith, having that faith impressed on their lives by the Holy Spirit of God. How was that possible in the dark spiritual world of Egypt? Well, remember how Jacob was able to endure living in Egypt 17 years, keeping his profession to the very end. And Joseph? Surely we have seen how God restrained him from soul-destroying sin - both in his youth in Egypt, when the Spirit enabled him to resist the almost constant temptation to adultery in the house of Potiphar (Gen. 39:10), and in his old age, when the Spirit saved him from vengefully lording it over his guilty brothers, who cowered in his presence after the death of their father (Gen. 50:18). His soft-heartedness, unto tears (Gen. 50:17), and his reassurance, “Don't be afraid,” along with his humble confession, “Am I in the place of God?” (Gen. 50:19), were all fruits of the work of the Spirit of God in his life; fruits which Joseph would desire to be passed on to his grandsons in Egypt as he adopted them as his own.

Meditate and Pray: Thank God that all believers, Old Testament and New, including Joseph as well as ourselves, have been “predestined to be conformed to the likeness of God's Son...” (Rom. 8:29). This is our inheritance, and our highest family privilege. Ask the Lord to deliver us and our churches from an individualistic view of salvation, as if our primary goal is personal happiness and success.

Lord, give us the faith to pass on your blessings to the next generation, as Joseph took his grandsons on his knee in order to pass on to them – not the riches of Egypt – but the covenant wealth of your promises. Give us opportunity to see that “faith once for all delivered to the saints” taking root for the future, after we are gone. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Genesis 50:24-25

Man of Sorrows

Right to the end, Joseph was careful to provide literally “for every mouth” (which is how Gen. 47:12 reads in Hebrew) of the families of his reconciled brothers. But even while he was busy nourishing and building up the sons of Israel so that future generations could return to inherit the Promised Land, he did so under the painful realization that he himself would never see the fulfillment of the promises in his own earthly pilgrimage. Only his bones would return to the Promised Land. This is why Moses describes Joseph in Deuteronomy 33:16 (New King James translation) as “separate from his brothers,” that is, isolated in his servant role, never able to enter into the full joys of his Hebrew family, always living between the world of Egyptian royalty and his blood relatives, who were lowly Hebrew shepherds. A lonely path indeed, and one of the great proofs of how conformed Joseph was to the likeness of Christ. For did not Jesus labor all alone, as the “Man of Sorrows,” so that we would enjoy all the rich “togetherness” of faith?

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for the great inheritance which we even now share with the pioneers of faith who went before us, namely, the privilege of being...“predestined to be conformed to the likeness of God’s Son” (Romans 8:29). It is a marvelous thought to realize that our fellowship in Heaven with believers like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph will be all the more enhanced because they will resonate with our pilgrimage and, yes, our times of loneliness in this world. Be encouraged. You are not alone in travelling the road of faith.

Thursday: Read Ge 50:24-25 and Heb 11:1-6 & 11:22 & 39-40

Reward! Reward!

Hebrews 11 insists that the lives of all the ancients, from Abel onwards to our day (Hebrews 11:4 to v. 40) – are to be understood without exception as “lives which were commended for their faith” (Heb. 11:39). For, “without faith it is impossible to please God, because **anyone** who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He **rewards** those who earnestly seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). In this way, therefore, we are to understand the allusion to Joseph in Hebrews 11:22. He was commended by God for his faith in “speaking about the exodus of the Israelites” and “giving instructions about his bones” (Gen. 50:24-25).

But we may question such language of commendation. How could God commend *great* men like Joseph for their faith, let alone, *lesser* folks like us? Isn’t faith in its nature by grace, not by works? How can anyone be commended for something they received as a free gift? Moreover, which one of us could say that our faith was particularly strong or commendable? Nevertheless, Hebrews 11:39 is emphatic: “These were *all* commended for their faith...”; literally, they all “obtained a good report through faith.” It was a witness to the faith of believers like Joseph and is a witness today in approving our faith as well, as imperfect as it may be.

Does that mean that part of our faith in God *must include* the belief that He is a **rewarder** of those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6)? Absolutely. If God in Grace chooses to give *us*, though always undeserving sinners, rewards for our halting efforts to seek Him; if God desires to give *us* credit as a loving Father for what He bestowed freely upon us, who are we to argue? Such is the superabundant generosity of our God. He *wants* to be sought after, so much so that He *moves* us to seek Him in the first place, and then *rewards* us generously for doing so!

Meditate and Pray: Thank God that you are included with the great heroes of the faith in receiving blessings and even rewards from God's Fatherly hand, a God who exalts the importance of faith even in our weak lives by promising to reward its presence in every believer. As the hymn writer puts it in # 466 in our Red Trinity Hymnal:

*I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me.
It was not I that found, O Savior true;
No, I was found of Thee.*

*I find, I walk, I love, but oh, the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee!
For Thou were long beforehand with my soul,
Always Thou lovest me.*

*Thou didst reach forth Thy hand and mine enfold;
I walked and sank not on the storm vexed sea.
'Twas not so much that I on Thee took hold,
As Thou, dear Lord, on me.*

Friday: Read Genesis 50:24-26 and Psalm 104:27-33

Every Detail Essential

It would be more than 200 years until Joseph's bones found their resting place (Joshua 24:32), at the time when Israel buried the great conqueror of the Promised Land, Joshua. Joseph's faith spoke of God's continuous care, just as his mummified body was kept safe in Egypt until that time. What attention to detail the Lord displays in arranging that His people should end up living for hundreds of years in the only country of the ancient world with the technological skill and climate to ensure the preservation of even Joseph's bones! That is the specificity of care which God always shows when it comes to ensuring the preservation of His own people! After all, Joseph promises (Genesis 50:25) that God would "come to his people's aid" during their sojourn in the land of Egypt. In this way, Joseph by faith "spoke about the exodus of the Israelites" (Heb. 11:22).

The word to "come to the aid" of His people literally means to "visit," and such "visits" of God mean perpetual care from Him! Just as God took care of even the smallest bone in Joseph's body through the process of mummification, so He cared about each day in the life of even the lowliest Hebrew slave among His people! Psalm 104:27 says that even the lowliest part of creation looks to the Lord for its daily food; how much more we His people, created in His image! If He were to hide His face, or remove His Spirit of loving care from us for even one day, we would simply perish (Psalm 104:29-30). No, the reason we can praise Him "as long as we live" – even if we be strangers in a strange land like Egypt – is because His care for us is perpetual. "Morning by morning new mercies we see."

Meditate and Pray: Let us reaffirm with joy this day that we have confidence in God's Providential and Beneficial control of all things in our lives. Even after hundreds of years in Egypt, God's people could say with Joseph: "What men meant for evil, God meant for good" (Gen. 50:20).

As The Heidelberg Catechism, Q 27, puts it: *What do you understand by the providence of God?*

A. The almighty, everywhere-present power of God, whereby, as it were by His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth with all creatures, and so governs them that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things come not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.

Hallelujah!