

SEQUOYAH HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Families Are Tough: For Good”

Dr. Jay Howell

Genesis 50:12-26

February 15, 2026

Today we wrap up this “Families Are Tough” series, looking at the gospel’s claim and comfort upon household dysfunction, which we all have some kind of dose of. We’ve been doing so through the lens of the story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis.

Short word on what’s coming next. Next Sunday, we’re looking forward to welcoming Rev. Dr. Steve Eason to worship, as part of our Winter Speaker Series. He’ll be leading keynotes also next Sunday evening and the following day, Monday evening, February 23. He’ll be kicking off a Lenten focus on the discipline and spiritual practice of prayer.

Today, we come to the end of Joseph’s story—and the end of the Book of Genesis for that matter. And we find some old worries resurfacing.

Let’s go to God’s Word together.

[Read passage, Genesis 50:12-26.] The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Gracious God, we pray for your promise to renew all things, to make all things new, to be with us this day. May this Word of providence and assurance stir us in a new way this morning. And for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

On my father’s dying bed, my sister and I sat around him a couple of days before he passed. Communication before that point had become more challenging, but this particular day, he rallied, and he, my sister, and I reminisced about fond memories and this and that.

Among those memories, I shared how grateful I was that he took guitar lessons with me when I was in 7th grade. Pretty impactful thing for me, as it turned out, because you could draw a pretty straight line from starting on guitar to playing music in front of people to speaking publicly, all pretty surprising for someone who was painfully shy and scared of being in front of people. I don’t claim to be any great orator now; it’s just something I do fairly often, and one could trace that path all the way back to 7th grade and starting guitar lessons. And you know the reason I started taking them? Because my Daddy wanted to do it with me.

I shared that with him, how much it meant to me. And he then added, “Well, by that point I knew you weren’t gonna be an athlete, so I wanted to see what was next.”

It took a long time for me, but I came to recognize my father as truly hopeful, optimistic man, on the lookout for what was next, even if what came before may have been discouraging. He and I had had some hard times, but then later in life, there seemed to have been some stages of reconciliation, of fences being mended, of tensions being resolved. Didn't all come at once, but we got there.

As we come to the end of Joseph's story, there's still some unresolved tension. Three, nearly four decades earlier, Joseph's brothers had betrayed him, sold him into slavery, and feigned his death to their father Jacob. Joseph, though, had risen to power in Egypt, so years later when Joseph first revealed his identity to his brothers, their first instinct was to be terrified, because surely their brother would enact retribution for their betrayal.

Except he didn't. Instead Joseph gathered his father and his brothers and all their households to join him in Egypt. And they did.

Seventeen years passed, and then their father Jacob died. Now the brothers are faced with another question: was Joseph just waiting for their father to die for him to take his revenge? You know, kind of Godfather Part 2, Michael Corleone, waiting for his mother to die before ordering that his brother Fredo be killed, that sort of thing. That's what they're worried about.

See, apparently, no matter Joseph's assurances years earlier, things still had not fully healed. Even after years of what would appear to be harmony, everyone living in the same land, presumably seeing each other on holidays, there was still hanging tension.

And so to them, Joseph said, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones."

Did hear what he invokes? "Though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good." Though his brothers in all their plotting and scheming wanted to hurt Joseph, God was at working within it to bring about something better. And Joseph was blessed to have seen that plan bear fruit. Just didn't all happen at once.

Even at the very end of Genesis, describing Joseph's death, there's still some lingering tension, something unresolved, with Joseph nearing his death but assuring his brothers that one day God would bring them up out of Egypt and back to their homeland. This was even before the Israelites were enslaved, that comes at the beginning of the next book, Exodus. But still there's this longing for their home, and by the end of Joseph's life that had not come to fruition.

Yet there's the hope for it. The promise of it. "God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

We hear a similar kind of promise out of Romans, which we read earlier, 8:28: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his

purpose.” Now some might take that to mean that God makes everything immediately good for everyone, but that’s not what it says. It says, all things work together for good for those who love God, another way of saying what may have caused harm or may have been intended for harm God will work for good in the end.

Still another way of thinking of that could be this: It is the promise of God to work everything together for good in the end, for those who love him, so if everything isn’t good, then it’s not the end.

When Joseph first revealed himself to his brothers there was this heartfelt, teary reunion, it was powerful, heartwarming, but not all was good; still things unresolved. Then when Jacob died and Joseph’s brothers still feared for their lives and Joseph again assured them of his care and love for them, even then, still things unresolved. Then when Joseph died and the brothers and all their households and the growing descendants of Jacob were there in Egypt away from their homeland, still things unresolved, but if everything isn’t good, then it’s not the end. The story goes on.

The same assurance comes to us in our families. The promise of all things working together for good for those who love God may not all happen at once. It may be hard to see God’s purpose for good in things that feel harmful to us.

Things with my father and me didn’t come together all at once, wave a magic wand and everything was better. Doesn’t work that way. Even now reflecting on our relationship, there are things I regret that I didn’t account for, things that still are painful either from him to me or me to him. Obviously in terms of working things out directly with him, that particular window has closed, but the story’s not over. Maybe (and hopefully) it stirs me to be a better husband, to be a better father, to not repeat the same cycles and habits. Maybe that’s how God can be at work on a generational scale, things that may have done harm to us don’t have to be the end of the story. Maybe that’s how grace guides us in a new way.

That day at my father’s bedside was the last time I really spoke with my dad. The next day the ability to communicate had more or less gone. And so I especially cherished that in that exchange was the recognition of hard times he and I had had. He said to my sister and me his regret, as he felt he had let us down in those hard times. I remember saying, “But we got there, Dad.”

And we did get there. And then more steps for peace to come.

In the end, all things work together for good for those who love God, so if all is not good, it is not the end.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.