

Good Intentions
Meant for Good Series Week 1
8/27/17: Fall Launch

Welcome/intro/Fall Launch Palooza post the bumper video

This morning we're kicking off a brand new series of messages called "Meant for Good" we're going to look at the life of one of the most tragic and at the same time most heroic figures in the whole Bible, his name is Joseph

And as we read this story, we're going to run the whole gamut of situations and emotions and it's likely that you'll connect very easily at some point in the story:

There's going to be lots of family drama—any of you ever experienced any family drama before? Good news, almost no matter how bad your family drama and dysfunction is, this story will make you feel better about your situation!

There's going to be times when Joseph himself is an idiot—any of you ever been an idiot before or is that just me?

There's going to be betrayal—any of you ever felt betrayed before? There's going to be wrongful and unjust accusation.

There's going to be some long stretches where Joseph feels abandoned and forgotten by God and everyone and everything else in the world—ever felt abandoned or forgotten before?

And at the same time, mixed in with all of that, there are going to be these wonderful opportunities and dizzying experiences of success all mixed in and places where God shows up in the story in wonderful and obvious and palpable ways

What we're going to do over these next several weeks as we soak in this wonderful story is come face-to-face with the two great big realities:

first, some of the things that have happened to us along the way have been awful, difficult, and painful.

In some cases, we're the victim. And in some cases, if we're willing to be honest, we have to take responsibility what's gone wrong, we brought it on ourselves

But overall of that reality is a larger reality: a God who is at work, redeeming, steering, guiding, and constantly moving to invite us into his purposes, the God who intends to work all things for good

Today we're going to talk about our own good intentions. Have you ever been in a situation where your good and your own good intentions just weren't good enough?

You wanted to help someone out on that project they were working on maybe at work or at home

and you thought you could help but it turned out to be more complicated than you or they realized and maybe you even made it worse

You worked really hard in a class at school or at a skill that you wanted to master but it just never quite came together.

You wanted to save the marriage, you did your best, but it just couldn't be saved?

You wanted to keep your kids from falling into that ditch, but all your best efforts and wise counsel just wasn't received?

Have you ever been in a situation where your good intentions and your efforts at doing good just weren't good enough?

Today we're going to see a guy who tries his best to save a situation that he just can't quite save.

Earlier we read the opening part of the story of Joseph in Genesis 37. The first snapshot we get of Joseph is of this 17-year-old tattler on his older brothers.

[Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.]

Some of you might have had a tattler in your family. Did anyone find that particular character trait endearing at all?

Now if you WERE the tattler, of course, you were a bit defensive: I'm only doing what's right!

My job is to make sure that everyone is complying with all the important rules, therefore I'm only doing my job!

And if just so happens to make ME look good and make OTHERS look like slackers or get them in trouble, well it's not MY fault that I DO look good and it's not my fault that they are, indeed slackers!

So here at the outset we get the first picture of Joseph, our main character in this story and it's a bit less than flattering: he's the kid in the family that drove everyone crazy

In part because Joseph's tattling isn't happening in a vacuum. It's happening in a family system where the relationships are already dysfunctional and unhealthy

[³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. ⁴ When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.]

The text tells us that the dad, Jacob or Israel, he'll be called by both names throughout this story, loved Joseph more than any of his other sons

Now Jacob's story was told earlier in the book of Genesis and part of what's so sad about this whole situation is that he himself came from a situation where favoritism in HIS family tore his family apart

Jacob was the favorite of his mom, his brother Esau was his dad's favorite, Jacob had tricked his dad into giving him the blessing that in that culture belonged to Esau as the oldest brother

Jacob ended up running for his life, an outlaw on the run from his brother for years and years and years--The whole thing was a train wreck!

And yet here he is, repeating the dysfunction of his family of origin. To which we can all sit here and roll our eyes, right?

"Jacob, can't you see that this is just repeating the same disastrous mistake they messed up your family?"

"Didn't you learn from your family upbringing experience that favoritism in families is always destructive?"

Jacob is in some ways doing the best he can, he loves his kids but he's stuck in the cycle of favoritism and his best intentions aren't enough, in fact, his best intentions are sowing seeds of animosity and discord

So we can sit here with the benefit of some perspective and easily identify this cycle of destructive generational relationships

But I want to propose to you that many of us who are parents are caught up on some level with this same problem, of passing along our family of origin's unhealthy to the next generation

and it's much, much harder to see it when it's your own situation than when it's someone else's.

And the first question for you to think about today is where might you be knowingly or unknowingly passing along generational dysfunction and unhealth to the next generation?

Are you willing to take a fierce moral inventory and maybe ask your spouse or your kids or even your parents where they might see something that you're passing along that you don't mean to?

Our blind spots are called blind spots for a reason. Would you be willing to allow other people to help you to see what you can't?

And for those of us who are Christ-followers here this morning, hear this good news: part of the power of the cross of Jesus Christ who has taken away the sins of the whole world

Is that Christ in you has the power to ABSORB any dysfunction that you received as a kid instead of passing it along to your kids

One of the greatest gifts you can give to your kids and your grandkids is to be the one who STOPS cycles of generational sin and pain rather than perpetuate them, to allow Christ in you to absorb it rather than pass it along

This is the power of the gospel, one of the many very practical and specific ways that a relationship with Jesus can change not just your little life but a whole family!

But in order to get to that, there has to be a willingness to name the patterns of brokenness that you've inherited,

to surface those things and then got to work to ask Jesus to swap out the dysfunction you inherited for his redemption, healing, and wisdom.

Jacob here is doing the best he can, he's not necessarily ill-intentioned

but as the dad he's replicated the dysfunctional family culture that destroyed his own relationship with his own brother

And the brothers of course hated Joseph as a result of it—and Joseph doesn't help the situation by telling them about his dreams!

[⁵ Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. ⁶ He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: ⁷ We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

⁸ His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

⁹ Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."]

He's not only is a tattle-tale on his brothers, he also shares these two dreams where his family is bowing down to him

These are important dreams that foretell where this whole story is going, so please make a note of them

However, it might not have been the wisest decision to share these dreams in quite this way with his brothers who already hated him

He could have kept the dreams to himself, could have shared them maybe just with his dad or someone outside the family

Instead, he boasts about the dream to his brothers, making his relationship with his brothers which was already tenuous even worse

So here's our introduction to Joseph: a tattletale and a braggart, in a family dynamic that is not exactly healthy or good.

Joseph is in a dysfunctional family situation, it's not all his fault, Jacob has created this monster, but he is complicating his dysfunctional family situation with a bad decision to be a tattletale and a braggart

And so here we come across another opportunity to say something that I say a lot around here: *do not complicate a hard situation with a bad decision*

A dysfunctional family, that's a hard situation. Bragging to your brothers that you had a dream where they all worshiped you, that's a bad decision that merely complicates a hard situation.

A bad decision in a hard situation often offers temporary relief but in the end it always only complicates a hard situation and inevitably makes things worse.

You've got your own hard situations—at home, at work, with your finances or your health and in every hard situation there are unique opportunities to make uniquely bad decisions

And they LOOK so so so very enticing in the moment but long-term would only complicate matters!

This morning, if you're in a hard situation right now and you're contemplating making what on some level you know is a bad decision, maybe this is why you're here this morning:

do not complicate a hard situation with a bad decision! Making a bad decision always takes a difficult situation and always only makes things worse, not better

Joseph makes a bad situation more complicated and worse with his own behavior, and it brings him and us to the point in the story where we left off a few minutes ago:

[¹⁹ "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. ²⁰ "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."]

I said earlier that no matter how dysfunctional your family is, Joseph's story would likely make you feel better about your situation, here you go!

So let's pick up the story right here as one of the brothers steps in and tries with his own best intentions to do something good in the midst of this very dysfunctional situation:

21 When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. 22 “Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don’t lay a hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing— 24 and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

25 As they sat down to eat their meal, [Love this line: you work up an appetite when you’re considering killing your own sibling! Wonder what Joseph is doing while this is happening: “C’mon guys, jokes over!”] they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

26 Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? 27 Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed. [You know things are bad when this is the nicer alternative!! Judah is the clearly the entrepreneur or the finance guy in the family]

28 So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

29 When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. 30 He went back to his brothers and said, “The boy isn’t there! Where can I turn now?”

A number of years ago I was meeting with someone who was in a difficult situation in his life and we met almost weekly for a couple of months as I was trying to help him process and pray and find God in the midst of all of it

But there was this thing that kept happening and it doesn’t happen that often, fortunately, or else I would have to quit this job and go be a Wal-Mart greeter

About every other time we met, there would be some part of the conversation that just infuriated him. I’d try to say something that was helpful, and he’d hear it as an accusation.

I’d try to just empathize with him, not offer anything too instructive or help at all and he’d feel like I wasn’t being helpful enough

You know that if you ever get stuck in quicksand, the more you move and thrash around the quicker you sink?

It felt like conversational quicksand. Every time I said anything it felt like I just got more and more in the hole

Until finally I suggested that he go see a counselor because it was clear that I was just making things worse!

I didn't MEAN to make things worse, but all my best intentions for good just weren't enough. Here we come to the point we opened with: Have you ever been in a situation where your good intentions weren't good enough?

Reuben had a well-intentioned, good plan: save my brother from being killed by convincing the other brothers to merely drop him into the well for now and I'll come back to get him later

But while he's gone, his brothers come up with a different plan and they make a little bit of spending money by selling Joseph out to some slave traders to be trafficked and sold in Egypt

And when Reuben comes back to rescue his little brother, he realizes his well-intentioned, good plan wasn't enough. His brother is gone.

And all he can do is tear his clothes in agony and guilt and sadness and weep—his good intentions weren't powerful enough to overcome his family's dysfunction and brokenness

There comes a point in most of our lives where our good intentions come up against something like this, don't we?

we come up against a problem or a dysfunctional person or family member or workplace or neighborhood that's too messy, too complicated, or too far gone for even our best efforts to bring good out of them

Sometimes we can just shrug it off, right? No big deal, time to move on.

But other times and in other situations, our hearts are broken, we weep, we curse our limits and our situations and sometimes we even curse God

Reuben's good wasn't good enough. And here's how this part of the story concludes:

³¹ Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. ³² They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe." ³³ He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.

³⁴ Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave." So his father wept for him.

³⁶ Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

Sometimes when our best intentions fall short, it's not just painful or frustrating or embarrassing for us, it's painful for people around us

Jacob, Joseph, and Reuben's best intentions and best good wasn't good enough to prevent this story from taking this turn

In fact, in their humanness and brokenness they have contributed to the problem, sometimes knowingly, sometimes unintentionally

But as the story takes this turn, Jacob and Reuben are both heartbroken and Joseph is sold off into slavery in Egypt

And the rest of the brothers have some measure of temporary relief and victory—the dreamer is gone! But all they've done themselves is take a hard situation and complicate it with a bad decision

They are going to carry the guilt of what they've done here with them for decades on end and into the rest of their lives, which is going to become clear much later in the story

And as we end this part of the story with Jacob weeping, Joseph in slavery, and his brothers hiding their misdeed, this whole thing is a giant dysfunctional mess

And conspicuously absent to this point in the story is any mention of God. God is completely absent from this part of the story, not mentioned once

Have you ever experienced mess like this? Where you tried your best and/or the people around you tried their best but:

- the mess was too messy?
- The situation was too far gone?
- Or it was just quite simply too late to do anything about it?

And God seemed to be totally absent, totally outside the picture, not doing anything at all to stop this mess?

And the question if we're engaged at all with faith or God can be "if my good isn't good enough, and everyone else's good isn't good enough, **will God's good be good enough?**"

First off, Will God do anything at all to help me? He seems to be letting things just fall apart without doing much about it

And secondly if he's going to let this train continue to go down this awful, painful track without stopping it, **if he ever does get around to intervening will His good be good enough to make this painful experience worth the pain?**

All of us have mess in our lives, for some of us that mess was or is one the most defining experiences of our entire lives

Is God's good good enough to bring good out of that mess and to even maybe make experiencing all that pain worth it?

Over the next weeks we're going to wrestle with that question and watch as God very slowly and very painfully, but ultimately answers this big, huge, over-arching question with his generous, wonderful yes.

This is the good news for each of us this morning:

No matter what your mess is. No matter how long ago it was. No matter whose fault it was, no matter if you've made a whole bunch of bad decisions to complicate the mess,
No matter the sequence of events that have transpired since that mess went down that

God is at work and if we will give all the mess over to him and submit to his instructions, do things his way, fully and even recklessly

he can gather up our mess and direct it and shape it and redeem it and re-make it and mean it for good

It's not necessarily going to be easy. Not always neat. Not always fun.

And sometimes what it means for God to intend something for God or make something good out of a hard situation isn't exactly what we would say looks like or what we wanted at the outset

And not every question gets answered and not every loose end gets tied up, we're talking about real life, not a sit-com.

But if we'll willingly submit ourselves to the God who loves us, and if we will walk in his ways and follow his lead over and over and over again

he will work his power to bring good out of the mess, any mess, even your mess,

If you're here this morning, and there's a hot mess happening all around you, if there's a hot mess in the immediate future that's brewing

If there's a hot mess in the rear-view mirror in the immediate rear view or way back there many miles ago but it still plagues you just like the hot mess of previous generations impacted Jacob and Joseph and this family

Hear the good news: there is a God who is bigger than your hot mess. There is a God who has the power to take your hot mess and my hot messes and bring good out of them. That's the good news this morning

Joseph is going to have to learn to trust that God, just like you and I have to learn how to trust that God.

But we've got a huge advantage that Joseph didn't have. We've got the story of another Joseph, a perfect Joseph, who shows us how committed God is to redeeming our mess

See, a couple thousand years after these events, God sends his own favorite and beloved son into a messy situation full of dysfunctional and broken relationships, a situation that was created beautiful and loaded up with all kinds of potential

But now was riddled with almost nothing but brokenness and sin

And God sends his favorite son into the mess not to be a giant tattletale, not to talk merely about how great he is and how messed up everyone else was

God sent his son into the mess in order to redeem the mess, to bring healing, forgiveness, grace, mercy, and love into that mess.

Just like Joseph, his brothers and sisters, the people around him were deceptive, sometimes lying, sometimes cheating, and not entirely trustworthy.

And just like the Joseph we just read about, this perfect Joseph received visions about the future

and just like Joseph he had a sense of himself being at the center of worship and honor, people all over the world bowing to him, his brothers and sisters submitting to his lordship

And just like Joseph, sometimes he'd share those visions of himself with the people around him

and just like Joseph, sometimes they didn't always understand or appreciate it!

And just like Joseph, this man was sold out by one of his closest brothers for a few shekels of silver to men who intended to do him harm

And just like Joseph, that experience of being sold out would lead him to a place where in his own flesh he would rather not have gone

But unlike Joseph, he knew ahead of time that it was his Father's will that he would end up there

and he willingly submitted to the plan for the sake of his dishonest, scheming, brothers and sisters

And just like Joseph, there would be innocent blood shed to cover that sin, but it wasn't the blood of a goat to facilitate a cover up

Instead, it was the blood of a perfect man to do a real cleansing

It was blood that was shed to bring all sin into the light and to forgive it, not to push our sin and misdeeds deeper into the darkness

And this perfect Joseph goes not to the bottom of a well but to the bottom of the grave.

And his brothers don't fish him out and sell him into slavery—instead, his Father reaches all the way down and pulls him up out to FREE his brothers and sisters from THEIR slavery

And ultimately this journey leads this perfect Joseph to the place of royalty, and worship, the fulfillment of all his visions and all his dreams

And not just his, but of all the prophecies and promises of God for thousands and thousands of years

Jesus Christ is the perfect Joseph who fulfills the life and work and promises of Joseph and he's the one that gives us confidence that even though all our best efforts and good intentions sometimes just aren't enough

God's good is always, always, always good enough.

If you're new with us, each week I close with a **Take-WITH: A Wildly Important Take-Home** question or statement or action to do

This week, two of them as we just get started in this great story and just get started with our fall:

1. Where's the mess in or around your life past or present that's too big for your good intentions to fix?

Family relationships, something that happened 10 years ago that you're still living with, an issue at work or with your grown kids.

Where is there a mess in or around your life, past or present too big for your good intentions to fix In fact, maybe you've accidentally contributed to them in spite of your best intentions and best efforts

2. What's your trust level like and relationship like with the God whose good actually is good enough?

Are you willing as we enter into this fall, as we enter into this story, to LEAN IN a bit to allow God to take your mess and show you how he's willing to go to work to mean it for good?

Not that it'll all be magically fixed or magically erased, but that you might be willing to be surprised by God's power and grace to bring good out of bad, to bring grace and mercy to us in the midst of just about anything?

This morning, we're gathered here at the start of a new fall, a new beginning, and there's a new opportunity for me and for you

To take a deep breath, and step in, day by day, into a life of faith, hope, and love.

Trusting that the God whose good was good enough to raise Jesus from the dead is good enough to bring good out of our mess, too.