UPC Family Devotional

October – Week 3

Memory Verse of the Week:

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.

-Genesis 37:3

Oct 17 Monday Genesis 36:1-43

Following the death of Isaac, we are given a detailed account of Esau’s family line. His decision to marry Canaanite women is a noteworthy part of this chapter and was a source of grief to his parents, Isaac and Rebekah. When Jacob and Esau’s possessions become too great for the land to support them both, Esau moves to the hill country of Seir, and his family becomes the nation of Edom. This sets the scene for the two very different stories of the nations of Israel and Edom. Jacob and Esau choose different paths, and the impact of their choices will be felt through future generations. Let us choose the path that God has set out for us so that it may be well with us and with our descendants.

Which of your past decisions continue to have an impact on your life today? What are some life choices you are currently facing that will determine the course of your future?

Esau lost his birthright and the blessing of the firstborn but nevertheless experiences abundant blessings. His descendants have become great rulers and kings. God's continued blessing upon humanity- regardless of their spiritual state- is called common grace. Those of us who belong to the family of God are not the only ones that are guided and blessed by His hand. When we see God's common grace at work in the lives of unbelievers, we should rejoice rather than harbor feelings of envy or judgment. Scripture tells us that the goodness of God leads people to repentance. Let us, therefore, help people to see that there is no greater good in all of life than belonging to God through His son, Jesus Christ.

How do your non-Christian family members or friends experience the blessings of God's common grace? How can you witness to them about God's saving grace?

Oct 18 Tuesday Genesis 37:1-11

This is the beginning of Joseph's story, which is introduced as an account of Jacob’s family line. Thus, Joseph's journey is not the isolated story of one man but marks the beginning of Israel’s journey as a people. Joseph will be the first of his family to go to Egypt, setting the stage for the great story of Exodus and the Israelites’ journey to the promised land. We may sometimes question how our life fits into God's greater plans for the world, but may we be encouraged today that God is using each of our individual stories to spread the news of His salvation throughout the world and across generations. Let us live faithfully for Him in every moment, knowing that He is working even in the most mundane aspects of our lives.

How is God's faithfulness revealed in your family history? Take a step back and consider all the people and circumstances God has used to bring you to Himself.

As the obvious favorite son of Jacob, Joseph attracts the jealousy and hatred of his brothers. Despite this opposition, Joseph shares his dreams with them, which only results in greater animosity. We know from later chapters that Joseph’s dreams are a divine revelation of what is to come, but his brothers are blinded by their envy. Jacob rebukes Joseph but also keeps the matter in mind. Though Joseph's family rejects the future that his dreams project, God's sovereign plan will unfold regardless. It is not easy to acknowledge God's mysterious purposes when our immediate circumstances and emotions blind us. But let us be wise in discerning God's will and following it, no matter how the world around us responds.

When have negative feelings made it hard for you to pay attention to God? How do you respond to confusing or challenging passages from God's word?

Oct 19 Wednesday Genesis 37:12-24

Neither Jacob or Joseph seem aware that Joseph's brothers hate him enough to do him harm. Jacob sends his son to his brothers alone, and Joseph, not finding his brothers where they should be, goes on to search for them. As soon as Joseph's brother see him in the distance, they plot to kill him. They are especially contemptuous of Joseph's God-given dreams. Joseph's brothers let their anger fester in their hearts until it leads them to attempt murder. When we harbor sin in our hearts, it may cause us to commit evil we never thought to ourselves capable of. Let us remain vigilant against sin and not give a foothold to the devil.

What sins have you been harboring in your heart? Confess them to God and ask Him to protect you from the enemy’s deceit.

Even though Reuben convinces his brothers to spare Joseph’s life, he does not prevent them from roughing him up, stripping him of his robe, and throwing him into a cistern. He intends to rescue Joseph later and restore him to his father, perhaps as a means of improving his standing with Jacob. To him, Joseph is merely a covenant tool to earn his father's favor. Let us carefully test our motives when we do good deeds, for we may be feeding our own selfish desires rather than genuinely loving God and our neighbors. Let us ask the spirit to search and purify our desires as we serve those He has placed around us.

What should be our motivation as we do good to those around us? What helps us to know whether our motives are right?

Oct 20 Thursday Genesis 37:25-36

Joseph’s brothers sit down to have a meal, seemingly untroubled by the wickedness they are committing on account of their jealousy. A caravan of traders passes by, and Judah proposes to sell Joseph, reasoning that they might as well make some profit while getting rid of their brother. It might seem like pure luck that the Ishmaelites pass by at just that moment, but we know that God is working out His plan to save Joseph's life. Even when the decisions of human beings are bent on evil and driven by personal gain, let us remember that no event falls outside of God's control. In God's eyes, there are no lucky coincidences. All things are ordained by His invisible hand.

What situations in your life have you credited to “good luck” or “bad luck”? On further reflection, can you see God's hand in those situations?

Though Reuben had intended to save Joseph, he discovers that his brothers have already sold him. In order to protect themselves and cover up their sin, the brothers dive deeper into deception. Dipping Joseph's cloak in goat’s blood brings devastation not only to Jacob but also upon the whole family as they cannot comfort their grieving father. They clearly did not think this far ahead when they decided to sell off their brother for 20 shekels of silver. Sin might promise immediate gratification but later produces consequences that can easily spiral out of control. Let us be careful not to underestimate the damage that sin can inflict- especially upon the people closest to us.

When has your sin produced damaging consequences that you did not expect? How did you deal with those consequences?

Oct 21 Friday Genesis 38:1-11

While Joseph is carried off to Egypt, the narrative shifts its focus to Judah, who devised the plan to sell Joseph into slavery. Departing from the ways of his father and Grandfather, Judah chooses to leave his family and dwell among people with whom he shares no spiritual kinship, eventually marrying a Canaanite woman. Perhaps it was his guilty conscience that drove him from his people to bond with bad company. In a similar way, our own sinful behavior can cause us to break away from the church and seek fellowship with those who indulge in those same sins. But this will only give sin a tighter hold over our lives. May we, instead, take all our transgressions to Christ, in whom there is no guilt or shame.

Where do you turn first when you feel shame about your sin? Does the company you keep reflect the kind of godliness God is calling you to?

The narrator of Genesis wastes no time revealing the consequences of Judah’s bad choices. His first two sons are put to death by the Lord for their wickedness, which shows that Judah did not raise his children to fear God. Tamar, the widow of Juda’s firstborn, is left without any sons and is sent home because Judah is afraid of what will happen to his third son if he marries her. When we distance ourselves from God's covenant community, we remove an important source of counsel and support, which will ultimately lead us to grow distant from God. Let us stay committed to our community of faith - especially when we make mistakes and fail - for they will lift us up and help us find restoration in the Lord.

How has God worked through your church community to help you overcome sin? How might you help those in your community who are struggling with the same sin?

Oct 22 Saturday Genesis 38:12-23

Many years pass, but Judah’s third son Shelah is not given to Tamar in marriage as she expected. So, Tamar takes matters into her own hands by devising a deceptive plan to produce an heir through Judah himself. Judah further sullies his already questionable character, and Tamar achieves her ends through the worst possible means. It is such an ugly situation we might even question why it is included in the Bible. But even within this horrible mess, God has a plan. God does not rely on human goodness to fulfill His promises and work out His will. It is His goodness alone that can bring hope into the darkest of circumstances. No matter how deep we have fallen into sin, God can redeem us for His glory.

When have you felt like you hit rock bottom? How has the Lord given you hope even in the worst of circumstances?

Judah looks for the woman he slept with so that he can retrieve the belongings he gave her as a pledge. He does not persevere in his search, however, fearing that he will be put to shame if people find out about what he has done. Once again, we are given an insight into Judah’s deep spiritual deficiencies. Though he has committed grave sins against God, Judah’s only concern is to avoid being embarrassed before strangers. It seems that he has completely forgotten the God of his fathers. May we never drift so far from God that we become shameless about our sins. Let us cling to God, depending on His word to be a light for our path so that we would not stray.

How might you check your heart for any sins that you have become numb to? Who in your community could help keep you accountable in your walk with God?