UPC Family Devotional

November – Week 1

Memory Verse of the Week:

Then pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one solo discerning and wise as you.”

-Genesis 41:39

Oct 31 Monday Genesis 41:46-57

Just as Joseph predicted, Egypt experiences a season of abundance. Knowing that the famine is coming, Joseph spends these years working hard to store up grain. In our own lives, we may also experience times of plenty when everything in life, including our relationship with God, seems to be flourishing. But there will also be dry seasons when we feel like nothing is going our way and God seems distant. No one ever looks forward to tough times, but it is possible to prepare for them. If we store up spiritual nourishment by feeding ourselves with the Word, setting up habits of prayer, and surrounding ourselves with life-giving community, we will not only survive but thrive in times of hardship.

What are some things that you could put in your spiritual storehouse? How have you drawn from past seasons of plenty to help you through the dry times?

The famine is not confined to Egypt - it is everywhere. So, people from all over the world come to Egypt to buy the life-saving grain that Joseph has stored up over the years. In this way, the Lord provides Joseph with the opportunity to witness to the nations. These days, we do not need to wait for an opportunity for the nations to come to us. We have the ability to reach out to someone in the opposite side of the world in a matter of seconds! There are countless ways we can witness to the nations; the only hindrance is our own willingness. In this time of global spiritual famine, may we go out and feed hungry souls with the life-giving gospel of salvation.

Is there a particular country or people group that God has been bringing to your attention lately? How might you pray for and reach out to them?

Nov 1 Tuesday Genesis 42:1-17

Jacob sends all of his sons, except Benjamin, to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph immediately recognizes them but conceals his identity, speaking harshly to them. We may wonder what motivates the tone he chooses - perhaps he wants to punish them, or simply lashes out in anger. Whatever his reasons might be, Joseph is likely filled with a myriad of complex emotions upon seeing the brothers who sold him into slavery. Many of us go through life nursing emotional wounds and trauma we have not properly resolved. But if we hold on to the hurt that has been inflicted on us, this will likely lead us to hurt others. Let us surrender our broken hearts to God and ask for His love to restore our souls.

How have you acted harshly toward those who have hurt you? For which past hurts do you need God's healing and restoration?

When Joseph remembers his dreams about his brothers bowing before him, he repeatedly accuses them of being spies. Perhaps the memory of his dreams emboldens him to exert his power and test how his brothers react under extreme pressure. One thing that is for certain is that Joseph wants to see his youngest brother, and he uses his authority to ensure that Benjamin is brought to him. As we consider how we can best serve the Lord and advance his Kingdom, we should also leverage the gifts, abilities, and opportunities that God has given us to maximize our effectiveness. Let us seize every chance we have to achieve the Kingdom goals that God has placed on our hearts.

How has God uniquely positioned and equipped you for His work? How can you make the most of these opportunities to advance His Kingdom?

Nov 2 Wednesday Genesis 42:18-25

Joseph's accusations and demands lead his brothers to conclude that they are being punished for their past sins - though they do not realize that the harsh governor they're dealing with is in fact their long- lost brother. Little do they know that what they are experiencing is not punishment but mercy- a mercy that will eventually lead to the salvation of their entire family. While it is true that sin produces consequences that we need to take responsibility for, we must not misattribute our present misfortunes as divine vengeance for past sins. Jesus Christ has perfectly atoned for all of our sin - past, present, and future. When we abide in Him, we can be confident that even our struggles and trials are for our ultimate good.

When have you felt like God was punishing you for past sins? How does the gospel reorient the way you look at your pain and suffering?

Joseph is overwhelmed with emotion upon seeing his brothers again and hearing them speak about the wrongs they committed against him. He turns away to weep secretly and ensures that they have everything they need for their journey back to Canaan to retrieve Benjamin. This reveals that Joseph is keeping up the ruse not out of spite toward his brothers but in order to achieve his greater purpose. There will be occasions in which we, as believers, need to be shrewd and creative to overcome challenges and achieve God’s purposes. Life is seldom straightforward, and when obstacles and complications arise, we should seek God's wisdom to navigate our way through.

When have you had to find a creative solution to a problem you were facing? How has God guided you through a challenging situation?

Nov 3 Thursday Genesis 42:26-38

Jacob’s sons give their father a report of what happened in Egypt, and Jacob sees that they have brought back the silver that they look took to pay for the grain. In response, Jacob laments that everything is against him and blames his sons for all that he has lost. We can certainly understand the old man's sorrow, and it is not unreasonable for him to find the fault with his sons. In the face of tremendous loss, it is human nature to take out our grief on whoever we believe is the cause of our distress. But such a reaction will only cause more hurt in an already painful situation. Let us instead pour out our grief to God who heals the brokenhearted.

When have you reacted to painful circumstances in an irrational or unhelpful way? What might help you remember God's premises to the brokenhearted?

Desperate for his father to agree to the Egyptian governor's demands, Reuben swears on his own son's lives that he will bring Benjamin back safe. But Jacob still refuses to allow Benjamin to go back to Egypt. In his mind, he has already lost Joseph, so he cannot endure losing Benjamin as well. That Reuben stakes the lives of his two sons on Benjamin’s return give Jacob no sense of security. Reubens's words might seem noble, but they reveal how little he understands about his father's heart. When a loved one is grieving, we might be tempted to offer a quick solution, but often the best thing we can do is to simply listen, be present in their pain, and pray for them.

How do you usually respond when a friend is distressed about something? What response do you desire from your friends when you are upset?

Nov 4 Friday Genesis 43:1-14

After some time passes, the unrelenting famine in the land prompts Jacob to ask his sons to go back to Egypt to buy more grain. This reignites the conversation about taking Benjamin along with them. The reality of the famine forces Jacob to set his emotions aside and consider the situation with greater objectivity. He is now able to have a calm conversation with his sons to gain clarity on what transpired. When we have conflicts with other people, especially fellow believers, let us be careful not to make assumptions or be stubborn in our own ideas of what is right. We must be willing to have open and honest conversations that seek truth and aim to reach a peaceful resolution.

How do you approach confrontations with people you disagree with? How can you ensure that you speak with truth and love in difficult conversations?

Jacob finally agrees to send Benjamin to Egypt with his brothers. He is persuaded by Judah, which is somewhat surprising given his questionable character. At this critical moment, however, Judah personally vouches for Benjamin’s safety: he offers to forever bear the blame if he does not return Benjamin to Jacob. We cannot be sure of what caused Judah to step up like this, but it seems that he is starting to acknowledge the sins of his past and wants to turn his life around. In the story of God's people, we see that he works not only in the heroes but also in the villains, transforming their hearts and using them to bring about his good purposes. This is the grace and mercy of our loving Father.

Is there anyone in your life whom you have dismissed as beyond the God's salvation? Start praying for them today to repent and be saved.

Nov 5 Saturday Genesis 43:15-24

Joseph's brothers become fearful when they are invited to his house, thinking that they will be punished for stealing the silver. Rather than trying to invent a cover-up story as they have done in the past, they seek out Joseph's steward to explain honestly that they found the silver in their sacks and do not know who put it there. It is very stressful to find yourself in a situation that makes you look guilty of wrongdoing. We might be tempted to lie our way out of the mess, but the wiser choice would be to assert our innocence with respect. If we humbly tell the truth, we can defuse tense situations and break any false assumptions that people might hold against us.

How do you respond to suspicion and the accusation? How did Christ model humility and integrity for such situations?

Joseph’s steward responds kindly to the brothers’ apologetic explanation regarding the silver. He even reassures them by declaring that the God of their father has given them the treasure through a miracle. We can only assume that Joseph had spoken to this Egyptian about the God of his fathers and His miracle - working power. This ought to encourage us to speak boldly about God to those He has placed in our lives- even if their cultural or religious background seems antithetical to the Christian faith. Let us not be afraid to tell others what God has done for us through His son, Jesus Christ. We can trust that in His timing, God will open the hearts of those He has called to Himself.

How often do you talk about God with your unbelieving friends and coworkers? What creative methods can you use to introduce your faith in your conversations?