#1. THE BIG PICTURE OF GOD'S GRACE

"*Christians . . . are able to swallow and devour whatever evils confront them and confidently to expect a thousand advantages for one disadvantage or loss.*" Thus Luther lectured on Genesis where Joseph told his brothers, "*You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good"* (Gen. 50:20). So it goes with the Church in this life. Quipped Luther, *"We see only groanings, tears, troubles, and oppression of the poor; we see the devil's behind; we do not see the face of God."* Is Luther correct? What does this mean in light of Hebrews 11:1?

And yet, just as God Himself worked all for good in the life of Joseph, so He works all for the good of the Church and the Gospel. God is at work in it all, but this remains a matter of faith, not sight. *"Therefore let us learn not to follow our own thoughts or to measure and understand by our own counsels our misfortunes or works and experiences. . . . Before the world Christ is killed, condemned, and descends into hell. But before God this is the salvation of the whole world from the beginning all the way to the end"* (Luther).

✞ Read Genesis 45:1-15. How do you think Joseph's story and Luther's thoughts on facing challenges and hardship in life help us understand our own struggles? When things get tough, how can we find hope knowing there might be good in the situation that we can't see right away? How does all suffering in life ultimately point us to Jesus Christ?

#2. SETTING THINGS UP

Read Genesis 45:16-28 – 46:1-7. It's easy to say we believe that God has everything under control, but when life throws us unexpected challenges, do we actually live that out—trusting His control? Often, we forget that our lives are not just a series of random experiences. True faithfulness means trusting Jesus, regardless of our circumstances because we know that He is the giver of all circumstances.

Consider the story of Joseph in Genesis. Here's a young man who faced extreme hardships—betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, and unjustly imprisoned. It would have been easy for Joseph to lose faith and assume that everything happening to him was just bad luck. Yet, throughout these struggles, Joseph remained faithful to God. Rather than seeing his suffering as meaningless turbulence, he understood that God could use even his painful experiences for a greater purpose.

Sometimes in our own lives, when everything seems to fall apart, we come to the tough realization that we haven't been as faithful as we thought. This means suffering can also be a consequence of our own sinful choices, but what if we viewed it through a different lens? Instead of seeing God merely as someone who removes our pain or fixes our broken circumstances, we can recognize Him as a God who can weave our struggles into a beautiful story.

Joseph's journey exemplifies how God can transform the most broken circumstances for good. He used the very trials Joseph faced to position him as a leader and savior for many during a famine. This perspective challenges us—are we open to allowing God to work through our struggles?

#3. Why might Jacob have been reluctant to go down to Egypt? What did the Lord promise?

#4. The touching scene of Joseph weeping "a good while" when he met his father again reminds us of one of the great joys that heaven will provide. What is that?

#5. Read Genesis 46:26-34. How would the Israelites' occupation help isolate them from the corrupting influence of the Egyptians?

#6. Read Genesis 47:1-12. Jacob blesses Pharaoh. It's the only time in the Bible that one of the Patriarchs blesses a foreigner. Ye, while the Egyptians were surely impressed at his advanced age, Jacob describes his years as *"few and hard."* Why? See Hebrews 11:13-16.

#7. Let's reflect again one the big picture of Joseph's life and his relationship to his brothers. Throughout history, people have had a knack for comparing themselves to each other and complaining, which often leads to all sorts of conflicts—within families, communities, and even nations. But here's something awesome: God's Word offers a way out of that negative cycle. The bible encourages us to be diligent workers and make the most of every opportunity we have to serve the Lord.

Take the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30, for example. It teaches us the importance of using the opportunities God's gives us for His glory and not to let these opportunities pass us by and that God expects us to be good stewards of what He has given us.

Then there's Ephesians 6:6-7, where Paul reminds us to do our work, *"...not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men."* This is pretty powerful! We're called to serve genuinely, not just to impress others. And it's worth noting that Paul was speaking to slaves, people who didn't even get to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

In a world filled with challenges and struggles, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. But we can take heart knowing that God is with us, providing for our needs every single day. The Apostle Paul shared his secret to being content in Philippians 4:10-13, where he says, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* That's a game-changer!

Joseph's story is a great example of this faithfulness. He faced betrayal and tough times, yet he remained committed and diligent. His unwavering faith during those trials is a reminder that God can work through our challenges for something bigger than we can see. In the case of Joseph, his father and brothers and all of Jacob's descendants, it will be a story that will take most of the Old Testament to spell out.

✞ Reflecting on Joseph's journey and the teachings of the Parable of the Talents, what practical steps can we take to turn our challenges into opportunities for growth and service, both for ourselves and for those around us?

SESSION 18 Answer Key:

Question 1:
A rational, objective, human point of view of Joseph's life could have only assumed that Luther was correct—all we can see is the brokenness, pain and suffering. We cannot see God! We are spiritually blind, dead, and enemies of God by our nature. We see Satan before we see God. We can only see and know God by faith. Hebrews 11:1

We can only make sense of things through Christ. Every other type of hope turns out to be sinking sand. If we think that good things or bad things in life equal God's favor or displeasure, we will find that hope constantly contradicted by life's circumstances. But in Christ we see that through suffering God brings salvation.

Question 2:
The natural consequences of our own sinful behavior can also be used by God for good purposes in our lives—teaching us what it means to rely on His forgiveness and what it means to live a godly life.

Suffering is not something we should only think about in terms of escape. This doesn't mean that we have to endure all suffering—especially if there is a way around it or out of it—but it does mean that sometimes we might choose it! Think about this in terms of relationships.

Question 3:

Jacob knew that the Abrahamic promise revolved around how the Lord wanted the people of Israel to inherit the Promised Land. If they went down to Egypt, they might be tempted to stay there. Also, they may be tempted to intermarry with the Egyptians and serve their gods. They might quickly be absorbed by the Egyptians or wiped out for some reason. Jacob probably also knew that God had told Abraham that his descendants would be enslave in a foreign land (Genesis 15:13). But the Lord promised to be with Jacob's family in Egypt. In Egypt, God would make them into a great nation. And Jacob would die peaceably there.

Question 4:

Many tears are shed when loved ones have to leave one another or live apart from the ones they love. Death makes separation even harder and more profound. In heaven that won't happen, and we will be forever in the company of our heavenly Father and of his Son, Jesus.

Question 5:

Shepherds were apparently detested by the Egyptians. This probably was a socio-economic issue. Egypt was a land with limited pasturage because it was in the middle of a desert. So any foreigners whose livestock consumed the limited forage were probably disliked. So, the Egyptians would be content to allow them to live by themselves. Joseph arranged for them to live in Goshen, a rich area on the Nile River delta, where their livestock would find plenty to eat. And it gave Pharaoh the excuse to place Joseph's brothers in charge of the royal herds.

Question 6:

Jacob's description of his life is probably a statement that comes from Jacob's eschatological faith and hope—a faith and hope that was not grounded in the blessings, hardships or outcome of this life but rather hoped in the inheritance and blessing to come in the next life, ultimately through Christ.

Question 7:

The parable of the talents is both awesome and convicting. It's about so much more than money. Yes the servants are each given money but the amounts of money are insane! It would take the average day laborer 20 years to earn a talent. Today you easily think of a Talent as being worth at least a million bucks ($50,000 x 20). One of these servants is given the equivalent of $5 million! But imagine the possibilities! If the servants job was to glorify the master with the work they did, imagine how much glory they could bring to their master with resources like that. Even the one who was given only one talent had great opportunity to do this. But sadly he just buried it and did nothing with it.

Through stories like that of Joseph in Genesis, we come to see that there is great opportunity to glorify God even in the very worst of circumstances. Do we just let these opportunities go and do nothing but whine and complain and lament? Or do we have eyes to see the potential?