

Welcome to *Genesis Generations II*,
the NC Synod's 2024 Summer Bible Reading Plan.

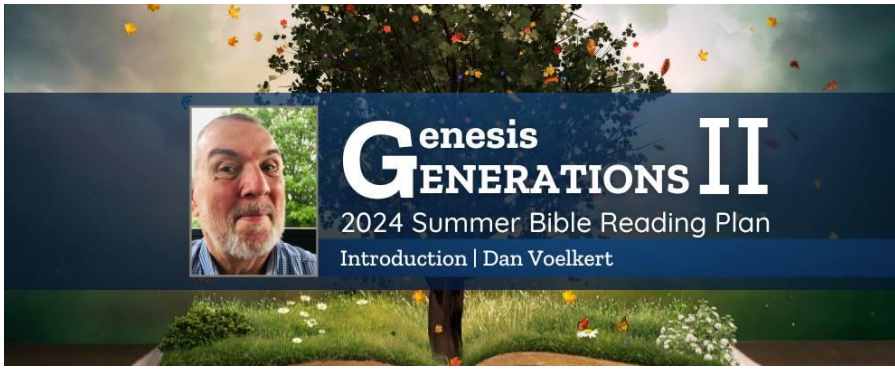
This summer's Bible reading plan will pick up where we left off last summer with *Genesis Generations I* and together we will make our way through the rest of the first book of the Bible. The writers—both clergy and lay—are folks from across the synod and we give thanks for their contributions to this project!

Begin each reading by first exploring the text of Genesis noted in the graphic image at the top of each page. Next read the thought-provoking devotional and sit for a while with the questions. Discuss with your family, friends, or small group. Close your reading with the provided prayer.

HOW MIGHT YOU RESPOND? Consider also participating in an additional option of this effort: a creative response. God has given human beings the ability to create. How does your reading and reflection lead you to respond? Color, paint, sculpt, build, sketch, write, compose, perform, —any medium; every ability! See the final page of this compilation for additional details. And, remember: it's a creation, not a competition!

In the introduction to *Genesis Generations II*, Dan Voelkert writes, *But, through it all it is God's action that binds it all together. His saving action—time and time again—to these people he has called who often seem to just be stumbling along through life.* Might these people of Genesis have things to teach us about our own “stumbling through life” in 2024? We pray that is just what will happen. This Summer Bible Reading Plan is brought to you by the synod's Engage the Bible Task Group—a Book of Faith ministry.

We pray that your engagement with these ancient texts will bring new life and a deepening of your faith this summer.



Previously on *Genesis Generations...*

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. (1:3)

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field. (3:1)

Am I my brother's keeper? (4:9)

(And God said to Noah) "Make yourself an ark of gopher wood." (6:14)

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. (11:1)

The LORD said to Abram, "Go from your father's house to the land that I will show you." (12:1)

And Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. (16:15)

Abraham said, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old?" (17:17)

And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age. (21:2)

(Issac said) "My father, behold the fire and wood but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (22:7)

Then Isaac...took Rebekah and she became his wife and he loved her. (24:67)

Isaac loved Esau....but Rebekah loved Jacob. (25:28)

I hope the above verses evoked the story of God's action in the world from Creation until the birth of Esau and Jacob that we covered last year in *Genesis Generations I*. If your interest is piqued by any of these, [please go back and reread the whole story](https://bit.ly/NCSynod_GG1). https://bit.ly/NCSynod_GG1

And what a story it is. Hollywood script writers could not have constructed a more compelling yarn. But through it all, it is God's action that binds it all together. His saving action—time and time again—to these people he has called who often seem to just be stumbling along through life.

Just one note about our format this year. We are borrowing a practice from television series—the recap (*Previously on Genesis Generations...*). We start out by repeating GGI's last lesson by Julie Russell of Macedonia, Burlington, about the birth of Esau and Jacob to set the stage. It was last year's cliffhanger.

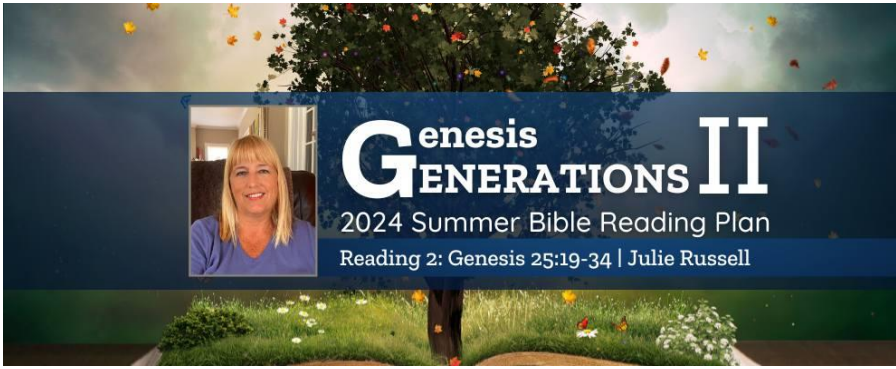
[SPOILER ALERT] A theme for Genesis might be found in Joseph's words to his brothers who had sold him into slavery. He said, "You meant evil against me but God meant it for good," and I think you will see that in all these stories. Things seem to be going sideways, usually by the protagonist's efforts, but God makes things work for his loving purpose.

Reflect:

Do you have a favorite story from Genesis? Why does it speak to you?

Father of us all, as we study the earliest parts of your story among us, open our hearts to the message of Genesis and how you still work in our world today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dan Voelkert of Holy Trinity, Hickory, is the retiring chair of the NC Synod's Engage the Bible Ministry Team. When not coordinating these summer Bible studies, he enjoys his family, especially the grands, volunteering, and playing the ukulele.



The Heir and the Spare

Don't we love it when God does something radical and unexpected? Well, yes and no. We love it when that *something* affirms our feelings, beliefs, or worldview. We get uncomfortable when that *something* seems in opposition to those things.

Since The Beginning, human beings have tried to bring order to a chaotic world by setting up rules, institutions, and other social constructs. These are neither good nor bad, but they are of human design, which makes them imperfect: tribes, borders, governments, church hierarchies, traditions, family obligations... The list is endless! God, who created us, knows that we sometimes need these structures, but God also loves to shake us up and show us that God is way bigger than any plan or tradition we may come up with on our own.

The story of Jacob and Esau upends one of those human-made traditions: birthright inheritance. Jacob convinces his older twin brother, Esau, to surrender his birthright (money, lands, titles, blessings) in exchange for a bowl of stew. This may seem ridiculous to us, but apparently, Esau's stomach overrides his brain, and he agrees to the deal. These two have been wrestling since the womb, jockeying for position, scrambling to be the first one out; Esau wins their first race with baby Jacob clinging to his heel! They MUST be the undisputed champs of sibling rivalry in Genesis!

They are also as un-alike as twins can be. Jacob is clever; Esau is impulsive.

Jacob is forward-thinking; Esau is concerned with immediate needs.

Jacob sees the forest; Esau sees one tree.

Jacob is devious; Esau is easily duped. (Spoiler alert!)

This list gets longer and more uncomfortable in later chapters where we can use words like *trickster*, *liar*, and *thief* to describe God's choice to be the father of a nation! What?

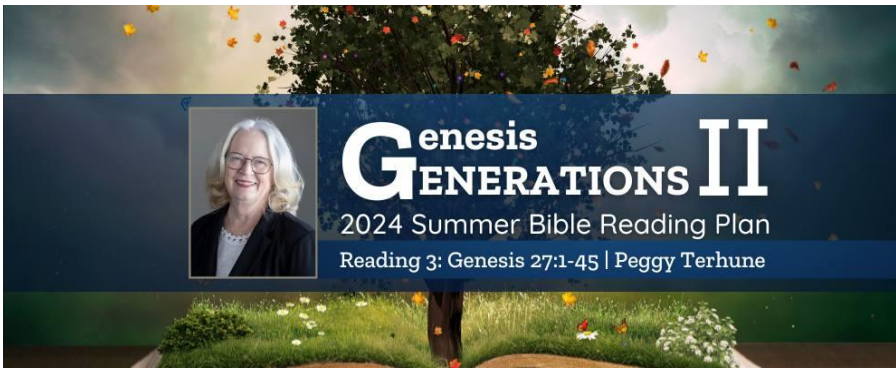
Our modern sense of fairness gets challenged by this story. Why is the younger trickster the one who wins God's favor? Maybe God knows that Jacob's value is not determined by the luck of his birth order. Maybe birthright inheritance causes more problems than it solves (ask Princes William and Harry about "heir and a spare" family tension!). Maybe God makes unexpected choices as God moves with us through human history, running after us, reminding us that God's with us and for us in surprising ways! We are valuable because God says so, not because of what we do, or where, when, and to whom we are born. That's Good News!

Reflect:

1. What about this story surprises you? Does it comfort you or make you uncomfortable? Why?
2. On what social constructs or traditions do you rely? Can you set them aside if God has a different plan for you?

Thank you for loving us and choosing us and surprising us every day! Help us to see our value and that of our neighbors through your eyes and not with our eyes. Teach us to set aside the worldly ways we cling to in order to follow your ways. Amen.

Julie Russell, from Macedonia, Burlington, is a newly-adjusted empty nester whose two children are enjoying their time at NC State. The Tar Heel grad forgives them for joining the Wolfpack and even wears red from time to time! She enjoys reading, gardening, jigsaw puzzles, and long walks with her crazy dog, Charlie and her husband, Chris.



Second Best

When I was a child, my sister and I used to argue all the time about everything. We were so different! Part of the competition between us was because she skipped third grade, but I didn't. So, I always felt second best.

We argued about all sorts of things—even little things. I loved chocolate. If we were both given a chocolate bar, mine was gone in a few minutes. She would take days to eat hers, teasing me that she still had chocolate, and of course, refusing to share. I had eaten mine! I often held a grudge against my sister.

In our passage of Jacob and Esau, Jacob is born second. Growing up, always second best. It was Jacob and Esau's mother Rebecca who suggested that Jacob steal Esau's blessing and birthright. And because that is what happened, Jacob went on to be renamed Israel and to found a great nation.

Grudges are easy things to keep. When we feel put down, treated as less, or feel we are not getting what we deserve, it is easy to hold a grudge. But in the end, who does that hurt? Esau never forgot his grudge and lived his entire life focused on his anger. In Hebrews 12:17, we are told that Esau found no place for repentance. He didn't take the time, opportunity, occasion, or power that he had to make things right.

But what about us? Jesus told the disciples in John 20: 23, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

This story reminds us that retaining sins hurts us. We are to forgive. When you forgive someone's sins, both you and the person you forgive are set free, never looking back, never keeping score, starting each new day as God intends, a fresh start for you both. You are both truly free. But if you hold onto someone's sins, neither of you is free, you both are in bondage. And what good is that to you or to them? None whatsoever.

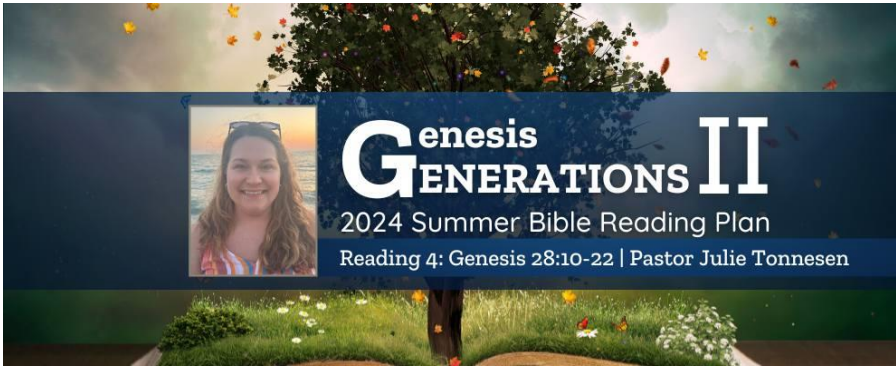
Forgiving sins is the only thing that heals the broken, competitive, scorekeeping, one-upmanship way of humanity that makes everyone miserable.

Reflect:

1. Who in your life are you holding a grudge against?
2. Whose sins have you retained that needs forgiveness?

Forgiving God, we have only to ask, and you grant your forgiveness. Stop our hardened hearts from resentment and anger, Lord, and help us to forgive those who have wronged us. Amen.

Peggy Terhune is a lay preacher and lives in Asheboro with her husband Bob and their four dogs. She works full time as the President/CEO of Monarch, where she focuses on social justice for those with mental illness, substance use disorder, and intellectual/developmental disabilities. She enjoys knitting and reading and spending time with her 7 grown children and her ten grandchildren.



Cracked Shins

“Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it!” If I had a dollar for every time I’ve exclaimed this very sentence...well, you know how the saying goes. When I think about the blessedly numerous moments I’ve experienced God’s presence in my life there are two themes that rise to the

surface. The first is that it’s very rarely in the places I expect God to show up, or conveniently scheduled in my calendar. The second is that it’s often only with hindsight that I am able to name that the Lord was in this place; it just took me a little while to figure it out.

Recently, I’ve experienced God’s presence in a chime of Carolina Wrens who have taken up residence in a cabinet on my back deck. Unlike Jacob, I haven’t heard God’s voice in a dream, or witnessed a stairway to heaven. But their melodious songs and the flittering of the babies learning to fly has caught my attention long enough to force me to take notice of God’s presence in the world around me.

In her gorgeous poem, *The Summer Day*, Mary Oliver says “I don’t know exactly what a prayer is. I do know how to pay attention,” and I think she’s onto something. It seems to me that Mary knew what Jacob knew: that in order to experience the presence of God, we have to wake up to the world around us. That oftentimes (perhaps, always), God is surely in this place, and part of our call as Christians is to practice paying attention, so that we, too, can build altars as a witness to what God has done for us.

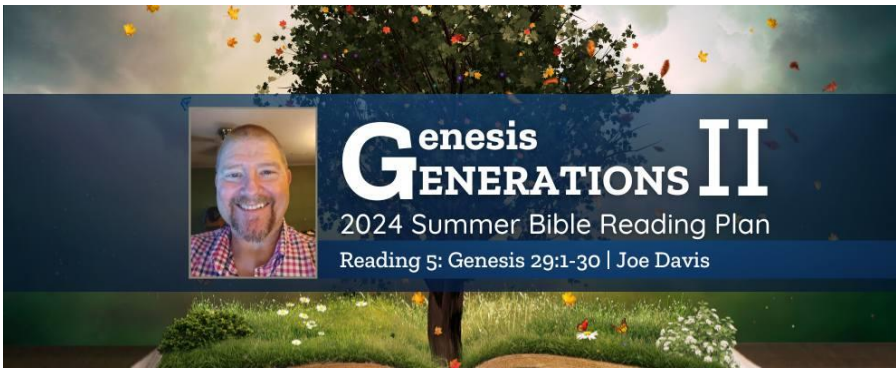
Paying attention long enough to witness how God is at work in the world is a good and faithful thing to do. But it’s not enough. It’s what we do with that witness—how we share it with others and allow it to change our lives—that makes all the difference. I think Barbara Brown Taylor says in best in her book, *An Altar in the World*: “Earth is so thick with divine possibility that it is a wonder we can walk anywhere without cracking our shins on altars.” May we be the kind of people who are so attuned to God’s presence that cracking our shins is a daily occurrence.

Reflect:

1. When was the last time you experienced the presence of God? What did you notice in the world around you? What did you feel when you noticed this presence?
2. When you think back over the times you’ve experienced God’s presence, are there themes that start to emerge? What meaning can you make from this?

God of our dreams: thank you for your presence among us. Help us to open our eyes to see how you are at work in our midst. Give us courage to build our own altars, so that we may bear witness to how you are showing up in our own lives. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Pastor Julie Tonnesen is a third-generation Lutheran pastor and currently serves as a campus minister and chaplain. She loves coffee, reading, and her four-legged companions. This summer you can find her working at the ELCA Youth Gathering and traveling to the NC Synod’s companion synod in Papua New Guinea.



Working Fourteen Years for the Woman He Loved: Jacob and Rachel

I read this scripture passage several times as I tried to sort out and have a mental picture of Jacob's journey to the "land of the people of the east." I often must do this with Scripture and

while doing so, I kept thinking of how many settlers to the Thirteen Colonies came to the New World as indentured servants. An indentured servant coming to the colonies would have signed a contract with someone who would pay their expenses in exchange for working as a servant for a period of time. The time was usually seven years, the same as Jacob's agreement with his Uncle Laban.

Now Jacob very well could have paid a dowery instead of pledging to work seven years to be given the hand of Laban's daughter, Rachel. Instead, he chose to stay with Laban and work. The twist in Jacob's story comes when he finishes his term of service and believes he has been given the hand of Rachel in marriage. Laban gave Leah, his oldest daughter, to Jacob instead. Surprisingly, Jacob does not get mad and leave, but agrees to work again for Laban another seven years and finally receives Rachel as his wife.

Faithful through it all, Leah praised the Lord and God saw and heard her feeling of pain and neglect from Jacob. For her patience and faith in God, He gives her four sons and a measure of joy. Jacob also shows patience in waiting another seven years as he remained patient and did not seek revenge on Laban for the deceit.

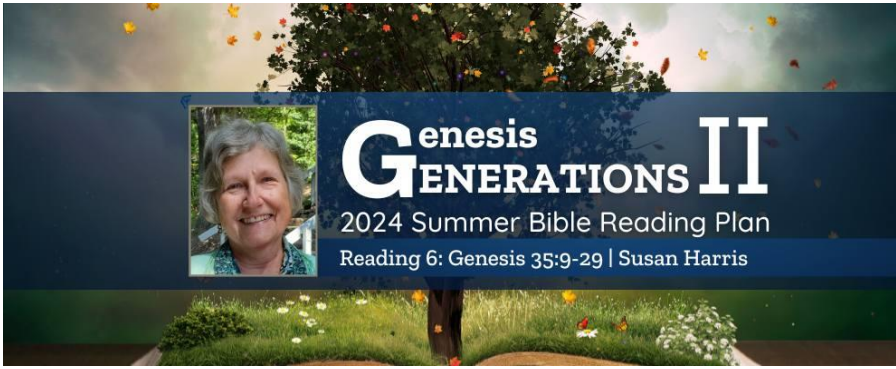
As faithful Christians we can learn a great deal from the story of Jacob and also by making connections throughout the Bible. God works in mysterious ways that we often do not fully understand. Before this story of Jacob, there are similar stories earlier in Genesis that had similar themes of caring for the sheep and a well to provide water for them. If this sounds familiar to you, you are correct in comparing Old Testament stories and those of Jesus. Jesus tended a rather large flock himself as the Great Shepherd and he also drew water for the woman at the well in John 4: 5-30.

Reflect:

1. How do each (Laban, Leah, Rachel and Jacob) treat the other during this Scripture passage? And how do we compare to each of them?
2. In what ways can we identify with any or all of the people in this Scripture passage?

Lord, we know you are working in our lives to benefit Your Kingdom. When we face uncertainty, we pray You continue to guide our wandering through eyes of faith and love for one another. Remove our dislike for the way others have treated us so that we do not sin by seeking revenge. Thank you for Your grace and help us see opportunities to share that grace with others. Amen.

Joe Davis is a retired teacher and administrator with thirty years of experience in the public school system. He is also a certified lay preacher for the NC Synod, ELCA. He is married to Jennifer and has two daughters, Mary and Sarah Grace. They attend Holly Grove Lutheran Church in Lexington, NC.



Many Generations

In 2014, the Women of the ELCA Triennial Convention and Gathering was held in Charlotte, North Carolina. The theme for that Triennial was “Of Many Generations.”

Our families, and even many of our congregations, can reflect back on

the many generations that came before us. My family has been part of the same congregation for at least six generations.

Every year on the third Sunday in August, that congregation has what is referred to as “Homecoming.” People who are no longer members but who may have grown up in that congregation return for worship (and a picnic lunch) that Sunday. It’s a special occasion.

Many of the people who are there for that Homecoming service were carried in their parents’ arms to the font where they were baptized. As young people, many of them stood in front of the congregation to affirm their baptism. Some of them walked down the aisle and were married in that sanctuary. And some may eventually be carried down the aisle one last time, after they have breathed their last. Their children and grandchildren will gather to bury them in the adjoining cemetery.

From baptism, to confirmation, marriage, and even the burial of our deceased family members, God and the church has been an important part of our lives.

This reading from Genesis relates a small part of the family story of Jacob. He returned to Bethel, where God had revealed himself to Jacob. During his life, God was present with Jacob.

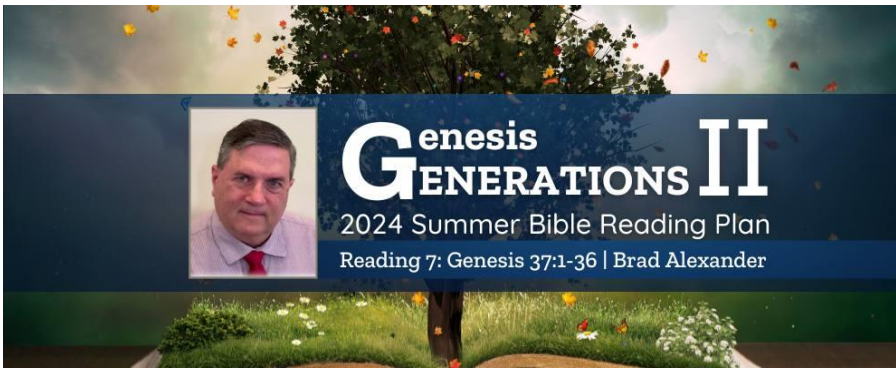
During all the stages in our lives, God is present with us. Throughout all the many generations—past, present, and future—God will surely be with us, protect us, guide us, and lead us. Like Israel, we continue our journey through life, remembering past generations and awaiting future generations.

Reflect:

1. How does knowing God give your life meaning?
2. Do your experiences in life influence your family and friends?

God of the past, present, and future, give us wisdom to share with others. Amen.

Susan Harris, wife, mother of two, grandmother of six, is presently serving as a Synod Authorized Minister (SAM) at Sharon, Statesville, a congregation similar to her home congregation, Salem, Lincolnton. She is also an amateur potter, realizing that she is the clay that God is still molding.



Hatred Does Not Thwart God's Plan

Our text this day includes the story of Joseph's "coat of many colors," as a children's Bible story may call it. Although, as often happens when one reads a biblical text out of context, the overall lesson might be overlooked.

As I write this study, we are still in the Eastertide—hearing of the Good News of the Risen Christ. However, when I read this text, I learned about favoritism of one son over the others by the father, and of hatred and jealousy amongst the brothers. All of this led to thoughts of killing someone who may not totally understand the issues his words and actions could cause. It is difficult for us to say if Joseph knew where his tattling or the bragging about his dreams would lead. It is doubtful he would have understood a hatred so harsh that it might have led to his death.

To make matters worse, the brothers lied to their father. Jacob was told his favorite son was dead. As a result, verse 35 tells of his children not being able to comfort him, with Jacob saying, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.

Reuben did stop the death by putting Joseph in a pit, with the intent to rescue him. Except Judah's greed stepped in, selling Joseph to traders, who in turn, sold him to Potiphar, in Egypt, making Joseph a slave. To Joseph, would death have been better than slavery?

Hatred and jealousy led to hurt and pain for this family. Yet, God used it for good as told over the next chapters of Genesis. The hatred by the brothers to Joseph did not thwart God's plan.

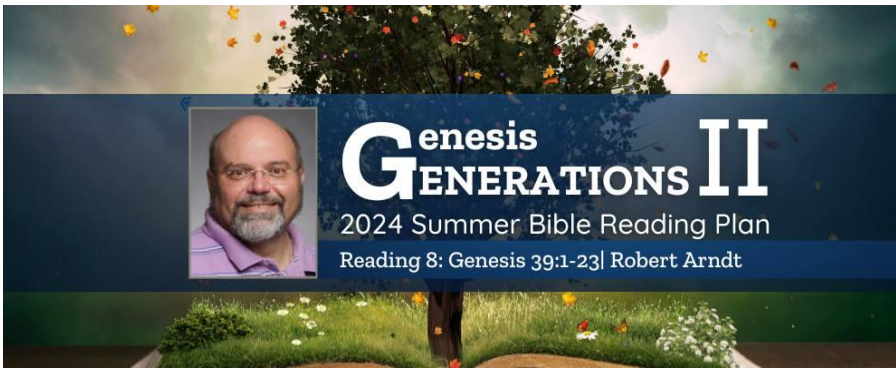
Lessons that I learned: God has no favorites; God loves us all equally. God has a plan: we cannot stop it, no matter what our plans are. And for us today, we can pray in all situations, for God will answer, no matter the circumstances.

Reflect:

1. How might my words, thoughts, or deeds to others lead to hatred? To "slavery" in one form or another for others?
2. When people's words or deeds lead me to hatred, to whom do I turn to be guided away from that hatred?

Gracious God, thank you for the lessons we can gain from Your Holy Word. Help us to choose words, thoughts, and deeds that will show others Your great love. And guide us on the ways to handle the hatred and jealousy that are around us in this world. Amen.

Brad Alexander is a member of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Gastonia, but for the last four years, he is rarely there. Brad was part of the first cohort of the synod's Certified Lay Preachers, serving wherever called to preach and is now an NC Synod Authorized Minister (SAM), serving at St. Mark's, Cherryville. Brad and wife, Debbie, enjoy being with their two daughters and their granddaughter.



Jacob—The Intermission

If you were asked to tell the story of Joseph, this is the section that would probably be omitted. No coat of many colors. No dream interpretations. No getting the family back together in Egypt. None of the good stuff.

This is the in between, the intermission of the movie where everyone dashes to the concession stand.

Except with God there is no intermission. Something is always happening, something that could be miraculous, or quite ordinary, maybe even boring (well, as boring as things can be with God)

This intermission in the story of Joseph illustrates one word—steadfast.

Joseph is steadfast in obeying the laws of God. Joseph uses his talents to manage Potiphar's household. Potiphar entrusted Joseph with everything he owned. Because he was beloved of God and kept his commandments, Joseph and all he was associated with, including what was Potiphar's, prospered.

“How could I do such a wicked thing against God?” Joseph asked Potiphar's wife, as he turned down her advances. He ran away from the wife, but she grabbed his robe and ripped it off him. You know what they say about a woman scorned. With this piece of evidence, this one accused Joseph of trying to rape her. Potiphar had Joseph put in prison.

Joseph was immediately, unjustly, demoted from favored slave to prisoner. But God continued to favor Joseph, and the prison warden soon trusted Joseph so much he was put in charge of the care of other prisoners.

Joseph remained steadfast. Through everything. That's not a quality that generates much fanfare, but Joseph was quietly faithful to the word of God and God's commands.

Being steadfast and faithful is harder than you think. Peer pressure to conform to the crowd is not just a teen thing. Friends, co-workers, family may all pressure a person into being unfaithful to God's words and commands. A little white lie won't hurt. No one will miss just one. They expect people to steal some.

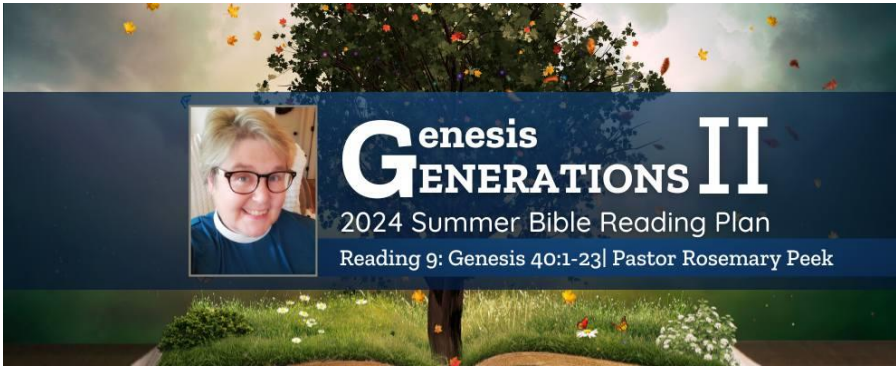
All wicked in the sight of God. All distancing you from God and God's blessings.

Reflect:

1. Have you ever felt pressure to do something you knew was not right and was a sin? How did you respond? Do you wish you would have made a different decision?

O God give us the courage of Joseph to be steadfast and faithful to your word, to see what is wicked in your eyes. Give us the courage to repent when we do that which we should not, lend us the strength that we may walk righteously with you. Amen.

Robert Arndt is a member of St. Mark's in Lumberton. He is a member of the NC Synod Council and a Lay Preacher. He and his wife Julie live in Pembroke.



Prison Dreams

This chapter of Genesis is an episode in the life of Joseph. Within the prison walls, he interprets the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. One will be restored to his former position and favor with Pharaoh, the other will not. We can find adversity throughout Joseph's story, yet in this

story we can find reason for hope both for him and for us.

Joseph's gifts include his ability to listen. Not just nod along and wait to talk, but to genuinely hear what another is saying. This is a kind of everyday compassion we can all practice; listening to others, especially when they are in distress. Even here, in the unlikely setting of prison, Joseph chooses compassion and to use his ability to interpret the two men's dreams. He could have been so disillusioned, so hopeless about the unfairness of his life that he might have rejected the gifts God gave him.

Yet that is not who Joseph is. Despite the injustice he faces, he remains hopeful and uses his divine gifts for the good of others. He listens, hears, interprets, and, trusting in God's plan, asks to be remembered by the cupbearer once he is restored. But the cupbearer doesn't remember. Not only did he fail to act on behalf of Joseph, he forgot him entirely.

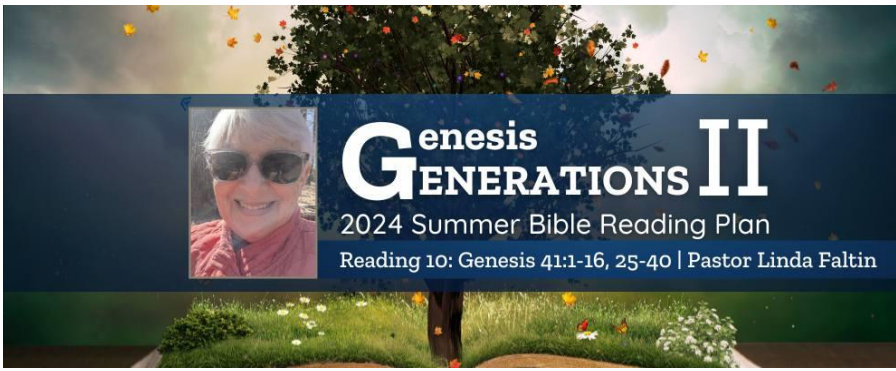
It's a cliffhanger, a season-ending scene. The chapter ends in the darkness of prison, time passes, and another chapter opens two years later. Now Pharaoh's cup bearer remembers! Pharaoh dreams, just as he and the baker did, an indecipherable dream and now, Joseph's name is quick on the cupbearer's lips. Exercising his God-given gifts for the benefit of his fellow prisoner will pay off after all! However, that is in the scenes for next season. In this season, Joseph is STUCK.

When we are in a season of life where we feel stuck, it is tempting to lean into hopelessness and not continue to faithfully be who God has called us to be. Yet, in the glimpse of the next chapter, we see that God remains faithful to Joseph just as God remains faithful to us. Even when we cannot see the benefit of our actions, for ourselves or others, God sees. Even when we do not remember, God remembers.

Reflect:

1. All of us experience seasons of feeling stuck or forgotten. How have you seen—or can now see—God's presence in the moments you may have felt overlooked or forgotten?
2. Where might God be calling you to remain faithful today, even when the outcomes are not yet visible?

God of hope, you are with us when we are stuck and when we are free. Lead us to use the gifts you have given us for the sake of the world and to trust in your faithfulness regardless of our circumstances. Amen.



Joseph, Interpreter of Dreams

Some background: Joseph, after being sold into slavery in Egypt by his jealous brothers, was purchased by Potiphar, the captain of the guard for the Pharaoh. In that household, he became very successful, becoming overseer of all that Potiphar owned.

However, Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph and when she was unsuccessful, accused him of trying to have his way with her and Potiphar, believing her, had Joseph thrown into prison. There he quickly earned the trust of the chief jailer, and he subsequently interpreted dreams for two of the inmates—the Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and baker—giving all credit to God for his interpretations. When these came to fruition, and Pharaoh began having disturbing dreams, the chief cupbearer remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about him.

So, Pharaoh sent for Joseph and told him the dreams which had so disturbed him, and which all of his magicians could not explain—dreams about seven thin, ugly cows eating up the seven fat, sleek cows; about the seven blighted ears of corn swallowing up the seven good ears. Again, giving all credit to God, Joseph interpreted these dreams for Pharaoh, predicting seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of famine, and urging Pharaoh to plan for those lean years during the seven plentiful years. He also suggested that Pharaoh appoint an overseer for this project, and pleased by his proposal, Pharaoh appointed none other than Joseph himself to head the project, conferring on him power second only to Pharaoh himself.

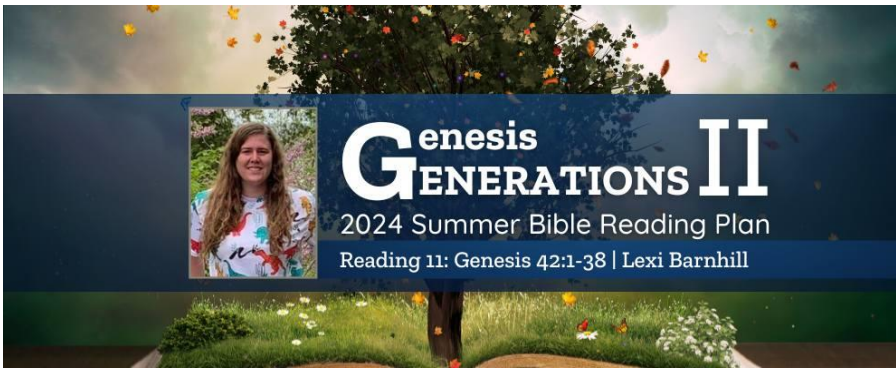
Reading this passage made me aware over and over again how, often in life, “bad” things happen which make no sense at the time but in retrospect, often prove to be vitally important milestones in our lives, growing us into the people we had been created to be. It doesn't mean that God created or caused these things to happen—after all, it was Joseph's very human and jealous brothers who sold him into slavery; a very human and jealous Potiphar who had him thrown into prison; a very human and disturbed Pharaoh who sought his counsel. But using the inner resources of wisdom and wit with which he had been created, Joseph was able to fully become the man he was meant to be, the one created by a wise, loving, caring God. May it be so with us.

Reflect:

1. Have you ever questioned why something “bad” was happening in your life, wondering where in the world God was in it all?
2. When you look back on your life, can you see “growing edges” which occurred at places of seemingly greatest difficulty and frustration, helping you to become the person you are right now?

Gratitude, Holy One, for all the experiences of our lives, even the ones we cannot fully understand. For you have created us with talents and abilities, with intellect and emotions which you intend for our use, even as you rejoice in our becoming fully ourselves, as you intend. Thanks be! Amen.

I am a retired pastor of the ELCA, serving my eleventh interim position since my retirement in 2004. I love to read, write poetry, travel (when I am able), and am finding the adventure of being in my 83rd year of life incredibly mind-opening. Mother of four, grandmother of five – these are my greatest gifts and joys of my life.



Revenge Is a Dish Best Served...with a Bag of Money?

It's been twenty years since Joseph last saw his brothers. Twenty years since they threw him in a pit and sold him into slavery. How do you think he felt seeing them again? They

betrayed him, and now here they are before him, and he's in a position to take revenge for what they did. But instead, Joseph gives them grain, provisions, and money.

In this story, Joseph is an example of how to begin reconciliation. He doesn't just forgive them immediately, but he also doesn't turn his back on them. Joseph does not let his anger and hurt drive his decision, but instead gives them a chance to show they have changed. Yes, he is distrustful—he has a right to be. But by keeping Simeon in his custody and giving them grain, provisions, and returning their money, he is truly giving them a chance to prove they have changed. They could easily go home, leave Simeon to rot in Egypt, and keep their prizes.

But when they find the money, they're worried. They ask, "What is it that God has done to us?" This deep regret has left them in a state of paranoia, unable to see this as a gift because they know they don't deserve it. They truly regret what their anger and jealousy did to Joseph and refuse to do that to another brother. Verses 42:21-22 shows Joseph their sincerity and gives Joseph a glimmer of hope for reconciliation with the family he lost long ago.

Joseph had every right to be angry with his brothers, yet he chose to give them a chance. He shows us the importance of letting go of past hurts and embracing a spirit of forgiveness. Holding onto grudges only serves to perpetuate cycles of bitterness and resentment, ultimately hindering our own growth and healing. By choosing forgiveness over revenge, we open the door to healing and restoration, both for ourselves and for those who have wronged us—especially those who feel true remorse.

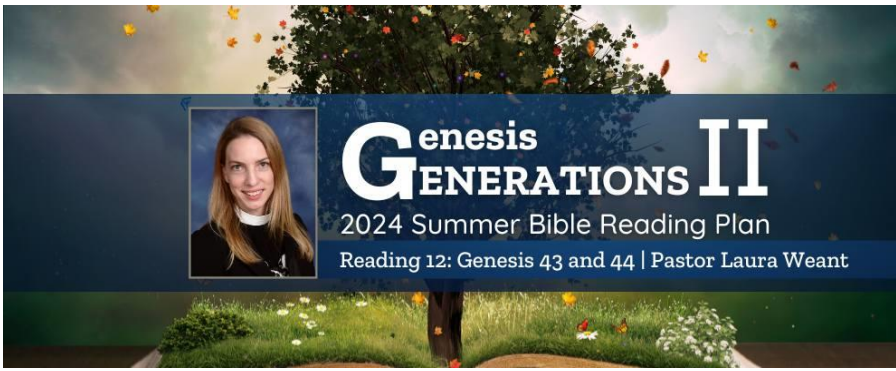
As followers of Christ, we are called to embody this spirit of forgiveness, and as impossible as it may seem, we remember that through God, nothing is impossible. We are called to extend grace to those who have wronged us and desire forgiveness, just as we have received grace and forgiveness from God. And in doing so, we participate in the redemptive work of God, bringing healing and reconciliation to a broken world.

Reflect:

1. What do you think true forgiveness looks like in relationships with other people?

Loving God, thank you for your forgiveness, for your love, and for your mercy. We know that forgiveness isn't easy, but we are blessed every day by your example. Help us to follow your guidance and free us from the anger in our hearts, so that we may spread your love and grace throughout the world. Amen.

Lexi received her MDiv. from Duke University in 2019, and currently works in the NC Synod office as the Event Coordinator and Logistics Manager. She is the proud mother of two very handsome cats, Remus and Eugene.



Judah's Redemption Arc

While Joseph is “giving main character energy” (as the kids would say), another son of Israel quietly slides into focus in these two chapters: Judah. Judah is the fourth son of Leah, Jacob/Israel’s first wife—not a very prominent position—not someone whose name we would

expect to remember. But we do remember Judah. He gets a kingdom named after him, and he’s a very prominent member of Jesus’ genealogy.

But up until this point in Genesis, he’s not been looking too good. It was Judah who suggested the brothers sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites in Chapter 37. And in Chapter 38, Judah behaved shamefully towards Tamar, time and time again. But he gets humbled before that episode is over.

We don’t hear from Judah for a while, as we follow Joseph’s story in Egypt. Even when the brothers go down to Egypt the first time, Judah is in the background, but we can imagine those experiences humbled him even more.

The strain of the situation was enough to make Judah step out from the shadows and face the situation with integrity. He is the one who has to face his father with the hard truth: they either starve or take Benjamin to Egypt. But, knowing how grieved his father would be if something happened to Benjamin, Judah offered himself as surety for Benjamin’s safe return, and he has a chance to prove it.

Joseph set up a false crime as a pretense to keep Benjamin with him. Joseph’s motives for this are hidden from the audience, but given what happens next, it’s not unreasonable to think Joseph was using the situation as a test to see whether his brothers had changed since they sold him. If they fail the test, at least he’ll have Benjamin; but if they pass...

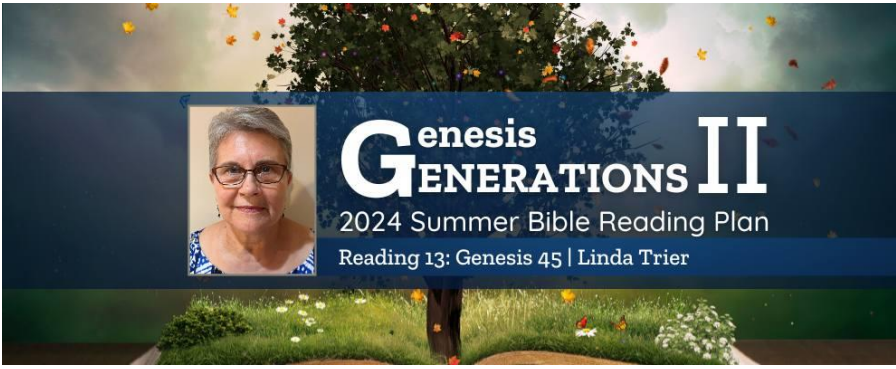
Judah steps up and gives a heartfelt speech, offering himself in Benjamin’s place, and, as we’ll see, that’s what turns the tide for Joseph. Though a middle son, Judah has incredible powers of persuasion: persuading the others to sell Joseph, persuading his father to let Benjamin go to Egypt, and now persuading Joseph to not enslave Benjamin. Judah, the one who was the cause of Joseph’s enslavement, now offers himself as a slave in his brother’s place. The story has come full-circle. Judah is truly repentant, and his redemption is at hand.

Reflect:

1. If Judah was your brother, would he be redeemed in your eyes, considering what he had done?
2. Have you ever had to right a former wrong, like Judah? How did God work through you?

Heavenly Father, you humble the proud and bring us to true repentance. Pierce our hearts with the knowledge of our sin and help us return to you. Shower us with your boundless forgiveness, and give us your grace, for the sake of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Laura Weant is privileged to be the pastor of the good folks at Bethany Lutheran in Boone, where she enjoys daily sunrises over the mountains, the sound of the babbling brook in her backyard, chasing chickens, avoiding her children when they’re arguing, and talking theology with her pastor-lumberjack-husband. Also, music. And faking-it at gardening.



Where Forgiveness Meets Jealousy

Such a simple title but such a profound resolution. Forgiveness is God's gift to us to bring love and peace to a human condition like jealousy. While jealousy can be destructive to the participants, forgiveness heals and restores them.

In this chapter of Genesis, we see Joseph break the bonds of past rejection and the life circumstances that brought him to this place. He weeps in verses 2 and 14. Between these two verses, we find Joseph forgiving his brothers by explaining that God has been present with him and sent him on this long path to preserve them. This preservation would not only save their lives but also keep God's promise to Abraham alive for generations to come. God took jealousy, an evil, and used it to bring about everlasting good. Joseph's family was not only fed but restored to an abundant life together.

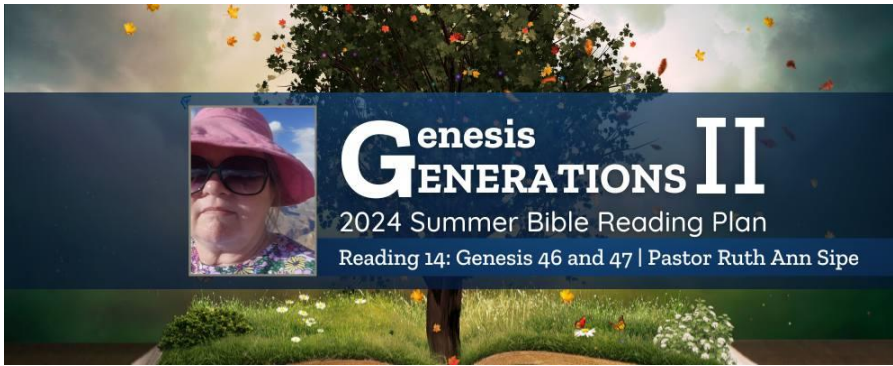
Do we hear the words spoken to us from Scripture and prayer? Do we realize that Jesus came to show us God's purpose and will for our lives? Joseph knew this because he spent his life in contact with God through dreams, the Word, and prayer. We are so blessed to have direct contact with God through the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who helps us hear His word to us from the Scriptures and through prayer. If we listen to our constant companion, we, too, can break the bonds of human conditions like jealousy. Our faith can take us to a place of trust, grace and love, a healing like no other.

Reflect:

1. How does being jealous, or being the recipient of jealousy, separate us from God??
2. What insights have you obtained from the 45th chapter of Genesis and how will they help you live a life that reflects our God?

Dear holy, triune God, thank you for seeking us through the Holy Spirit, Your word and prayer. When we listen, you bring forgiveness, love and hope to us and end bonds of our human condition that would lead us on a path away from you. Help us to listen and use your Word as a foundation for our lives every day. In Your holy and precious name, we pray. Amen and Amen.

Linda Trier, your sister in Christ, lives in Granite Quarry, North Carolina. She is married to Jerry Trier. She is a retired high school Biology teacher who volunteers at an elementary school three mornings a week. She is very active in the life of her church—Wittenberg, Granite Quarry—and enjoys visiting those members who are not able to get to worship, sometimes bringing them Communion.



Faithful Farewell

Many of us have learned that someone in our family or congregation is very ill and taken the time to visit them. We may have faced the difficult reality of saying a final farewell to one or more of our parents or other loved ones. This passage contains a reminder of

moments like those.

When Joseph learned that his father Jacob was dying, he took his own sons and went to say farewell to his father. Jacob used this opportunity to remind them of the promises that God had made to him in the land of Canaan long before Joseph or the other members of his family travelled to Egypt (Gen. 28:13).

Jacob chooses this moment to formally adopt his two grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, as his own sons, giving them an equal inheritance with his other sons.

Jacob also reminds Joseph that he had already promised his father that he would not bury him in Egypt but would instead return his body to be buried with his ancestors in the land that was to be their permanent home. We learn here that Joseph did indeed fulfill that promise when the time came, accompanied by a large procession of family and of Egyptians!

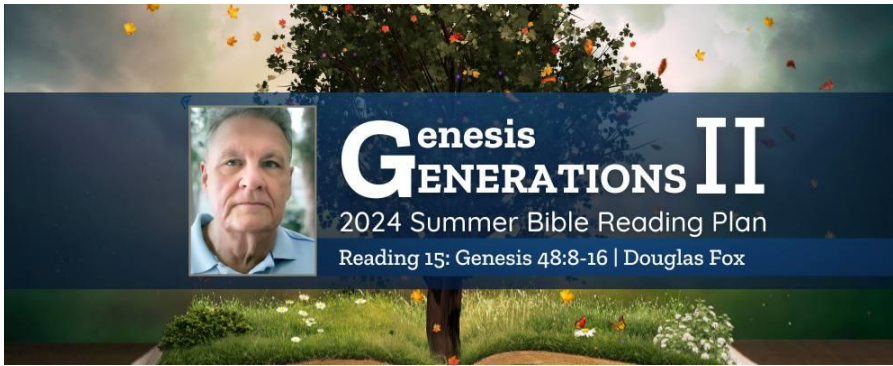
This passage reminds us that while the people of God multiplied and flourished in Egypt under Joseph's leadership, that was not the fulfilment of God's covenant with Abraham or God's promise to Jacob himself. God's people would not remain in Egypt forever. They would still inherit the land that God had promised to Abraham and would certainly continue to multiply in numbers, so that the covenant God made with Abraham would be fulfilled (Gen. 15).

Reflect:

1. How have you been blessed by your visits with sick or dying loved ones?
2. What promises have you made to others that you may find difficult to keep?

Almighty God, give us the faith modeled by Jacob, so that we may always trust in your promises. Help us to keep the promises we have made to others. Most of all, help us to see you at work in the surprising and even grief-filled moments in our lives. Amen.

After almost 15 years of parish ministry in Cabarrus, Davidson, and Stanly Counties, Ruth Ann Sipe now serves together with her husband Ray as coordinators for Lutheran Disaster Response of the Carolinas.



Last Place

Israel, a.k.a Jacob, earlier usurped his brother Esau's birthright and blessing, putting himself, the second born, over Esau, the first born. And here we go again, as, after having adopted both of Joseph's sons as his own sons, Israel blesses and promotes the second-born Ephraim over his first-

born brother, Manasseh. Ephraim's line would go on to provide the ruling class of what would be the Northern Kingdom, before mostly disappearing in the exile, becoming one of the 10 Lost Tribes of Israel. Remnants of both boys' lines would become the Samaritans or be assimilated into the people of the Southern kingdom.

But why does the younger supersede the older, or is it better to say, the last take primacy over the first?

"And the last shall be first..." is mentioned multiple times by Christ and the apostles. We see it in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Again, in the parable of the Good Samaritan where an outcast is elevated to the paragon of selfless compassion. In the parable of the sheep and the goats, it is the sheep who ministered to the "least of these" who gain favor and blessing. The Beatitudes list multiple "lasts" who will be elevated to "firsts."

And the primary example of first/last versus last/first is Christ himself. First, as touching his Godhood. Last, as touching his manhood. Lord of heaven, humble servant on earth. He humbled himself to live an itinerant life as he hobnobbed with the riffraff of his time. On Maundy Thursday, the master teacher became the humble servant washing his students' feet. And on Good Friday, he fully humbled himself, became equal to the criminals—the very bottom of the societal barrel—in the ultimate expression of love as he gave his life up for us that we might have eternal life through his death and resurrection.

In both Luke 9:23 and Matthew 16:24-26, Christ says: "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Deny all in you that would seek to be first, and instead humble yourself to follow him and carry out his commandment: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34)

We are daily called to be lovingly "last," humbling ourselves to love and serve those around us even as Christ humbled himself for us.

Reflect:

1. What makes it so hard to avoid the desire to be "first" and instead see "last" as a blessing and opportunity to witness of Christ?
2. What concrete actions can you do to embody the servanthood of Christ as you live in your community?

Lord who humbled himself that I might be saved, help me to be less focused on being "first" but to gladly "take up my cross" and follow you in loving service to others that puts their needs first so that in loving them, I may witness and draw them to you.

After 43 years of teaching that included grades 4 and 9-12, and college, as well as directing many theatre productions, the author is now retired and filling his days with assisting in multiple ways in his congregation, St. Mark's, Lumberton.



Relationships, Forgiveness, and the Mess of Loving Your Siblings

As the oldest of three children, I can tell you something about having difficulty in sibling relationships. As someone navigating raising a sister

who is 11 years younger than I, I could tell you some stories. However, Joseph's brothers really take that whole sibling rivalry to the next level. The story of Joseph and his brothers, and many other family stories in the book of Genesis remind us that relationships, even the ones that matter most, are hard. Siblings not getting along seems to be a recurring theme in this first book of the Bible; you have Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and now Joseph and all his brothers acting in maniacal, hurtful ways, and they didn't even have a remote control to argue over. Joseph's brothers in this text worry that Joseph will hate them after their father dies and sending him a message so he will forgive them is surely relatable to those of us with siblings. The complexities and nuances here might help us understand why the authors of Genesis emphasized the sibling relationship so much. Because deep down, even though we fight over remotes, for attention, for achievements, or for the last piece of cake, our siblings are the people we're stuck with. We don't choose them, yet we need this relationship, and we need each other.

When my siblings have hurt me and asked for forgiveness, I sure as heck haven't always responded the way Joseph does: *Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.* (v. 19-21) It's tempting to wield the wrongs done to us by our siblings and our siblings in Christ as weapons against them and hold grudges forever. But how might our lives be different if we live out the kind of forgiveness and reconciliation Joseph models here? How free might we be if we found ways to comfort the siblings who wronged us and spoke kindly to them?

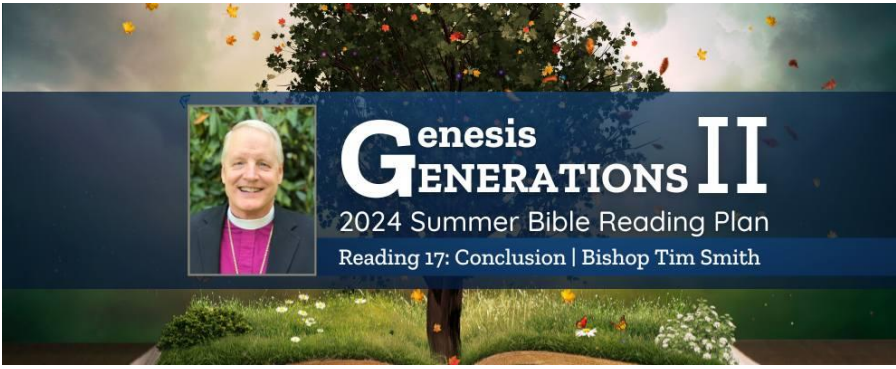
The book of Genesis is full of stories of siblings causing deep harm to one another and I don't think that's accidental because in Christ we have been given a whole, motley crew of diverse siblings and we can't seem to figure out how to live together, love each other, and show up in this family the way Christ Jesus calls us to. The story of Joseph forgiving his brothers despite the horrible things they did to him, is a story for all of us in this wild messy family. We are all Joseph and we are all the brothers—in need of forgiveness, reconciliation, and grace

Reflect:

1. What is your favorite family story about a sibling disagreement or conflict?
2. When do you think you really did a good job of forgiving someone?

Creating God, You knit us together as a chosen family through the love of your Son, Jesus. Help us to love our biological and God-given siblings well. Help us to heal, to practice forgiveness, reconciliation, and grace the way you have shown us. Be with us in our journey to love our siblings, continue to abide with us, and remind us of your love each day. Amen.

Pastor Cassie Overcash is an Assistant to the Bishop of the NC Synod. She is very uncoordinated, a proud Swifty, and loves her friends and family—especially her siblings (even though we don't always get along) Eddie and Katie.



Genesis Conclusion

How to wrap up in a neat little bow the first book of Scripture that begins, well, “In the beginning?” So much of my childhood Sunday School memories come from this book: Adam and Eve, Cain killing Abel, Noah’s Arky, Arky, Abraham and Sarah, almost sacrificing Isaac yet

God provides otherwise, poor Esau tricked by the supplanter, Jacob, who later wrestles the angel and is renamed Israel, then Jacob’s twelve sons and the jealous brothers of Joseph who sell him with his coat of many colors into slavery in Egypt, only to have dream-interpreter Joseph rise to power second only to Pharaoh and thus save all Israel from famine, and, and, and...

In fact, I remember a seminary Old Testament professor sharing with us 40 years ago in class that nearly all biblical scholars, whether Jewish or Christian, believe that the most ancient and foundational Old Testament biblical narrative is actually the story of Moses, the burning bush, telling Pharaoh to “Let my people go!”, the plagues, the parting of the sea, the wandering in the wilderness, the giving of the law. But I digress, because that’s all in the book of Exodus, not Genesis!

No, Genesis ends in chapter 50 with Papa Jacob having just died, Joseph instructing doctors in the care of his body in preparation for burial, and the reminder that God will lead them again to the land promised to Abraham, our ancestor in the faith. All that is to say that it’s commonly held among biblical scholars that, in modern terms, Exodus was the first novel or movie, and then it was such a smash hit that Genesis came out as the prequel!

The essence and purpose of Genesis? To reflect back—all the way to the beginning—on the God who is most fully revealed in the deliverance (exodus) from bondage in Egypt, the God who fulfills promises, the God stronger than Pharaoh, who chooses Israel as God’s own people. One might even say that Genesis is essentially the detailed Joseph narrative with a long introduction. And the purpose of that Joseph narrative is to set the stage for Israel’s being in bondage in Egypt in the first place, to set the stage for the bad Pharaohs coming along, the rise of Moses, and, indeed the Exodus! The same God whom we know primarily in deliverance, in setting us free, is surely the same God who called (“Let there be...”).

Reflect:

1. What’s your favorite Genesis story? Why?
2. Did you learn or notice or understand something new or different this time around in reading through Genesis?

Gracious God, you call into being all that is and you create us as humans in your very own image. Continue to create in us and through us new hearts intent on being your voices, hands, and feet of deliverance and freedom for all your precious ones. Thank you for your Word that enlightens, enlivens, and instructs us anew each day. Amen.

Bishop Tim fancies himself a biblical nerd who delights in sometimes and with great animation if not exaggeration taking an hour to tell the Genesis story to his grandchildren, who often then cry, “Tell it again!” He knows that really what they want is to delay bedtime. And he’s okay with that when it comes to Bible stories.



How will you respond?

Create!

Come along on an artistic journey of response by creating your own *visio divina* or *audio divina* of one or more of the daily devotions.

The God of creation has made us beings with the capacity for creation. How does your reading and reflection lead you to respond? Color, paint, sculpt, build, sketch, compose (prose, poetry, music)—any medium; every ability!

Share!

Share in your congregation. Gather and showcase artistic responses from all ages: perhaps as a narthex display or bulletin board!

Share with the world. Post your creative response on Facebook or Instagram. Please tag your post #2024GenesisCreations @ncsynod Complete your creation and share by Wednesday, September 4. Remember: it's a creation, not a competition!