

Summer 2020



Genesis 50:20

20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Reflection

A couple of years ago I had the privilege of regularly writing to prisoners who'd become Christians in gaol, in prisons throughout Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.

In partnership with their prison chaplains, through the Crossroad Bible Institute,¹ I'd mark bible studies that the inmates would do and then write them a letter of encouragement. While no doubt some of the inmates were simply aiming at reductions in their sentences through good behaviour you could always very quickly tell those who had come to a genuine faith in Jesus Christ. They had a hunger for God's word and had all the time in the world to meditate over it, as well as over their own sinfulness. And what was even more exciting for me was that many of them had immediately woken up to the huge mission field that God had placed around them inside of the prison system. In my letters of encouragement and in my prayers for them the verse I found myself returning to time

¹ www.crossroadbibleinstitute.org.au

and time again was this one, from Genesis 50:20,

20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

This verse comes right at the end of the story of Joseph, a swashbuckling tale of rags to riches (or more precisely a very fine coat to rags to riches!) that extends from Genesis 37 right the way through to Genesis 50. Joseph, his father Jacob's favourite son, is spoilt and proud, to the point that his brothers hate him so much that they plot to kill him. At the last minute, they relent, only to sell him into slavery. Jacob is heartbroken thinking that his son is dead; as Joseph is taken off to work as

a slave in Egypt. Through all this Joseph remains faithful to God, but just as his star begins to rise, his integrity paradoxically causes him to be thrown into prison. And from rock-bottom, ever faithful to God despite all the evil that has been done against him, Joseph then begins a meteoric rise that ends in him being made second-in-charge of all of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself.

A terrible drought descends on the land and in a dramatic scene towards the end of the story, his brothers, who'd sold him into slavery, are standing before him, having come to Egypt to purchase the only grain available in the whole region. His brothers don't initially recognise Joseph, and when he finally reveals himself to them they are terrified, yet in these pre-

cious words Joseph exemplifies not only God's forgiveness, but also teaches us about his providence,

20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

What you intended for evil, God intended for good. Words well worth memorizing. Words that offer a gracious second chance. Words that help us understand God's providence and power over the evil that grieves him so much and yet happens in a world over which he has complete control. Words that help reformed prisoners living within the consequences of their own sin see that even through the evil in their past God can bring about great

good in the present and future; reformed prisoners living within the consequences of their own sin, that is, just like you and I.

20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Think & Pray

Take some time now to try and memorise this verse and the principle behind it. What you intended for evil, God intended for good – in Joseph’s case, and so often in ours, the saving of many lives. The evil that was done to Joseph resulted in him saving his family, and countless Egyptians from starvation. God so often uses adversity in our lives to great ends, he so of-

ten repurposes what others meant for evil against us and turns it into good.

Reflect back over your life, is this not so? How might current struggles that you are going through – whether you are reaping the consequences of past sin or are a victim of circumstances completely outside of your control – be used by God for good? Perhaps through the depths of depression God is preparing you to lead many, many others safely through the terrible path that you are walking right now? Maybe you've been horribly wronged by a family member so that this coming year you might lead them to Christ, by having such an effect on them as you exemplify his love and forgiveness in the way you relate to them, despite what they've done to you.

20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Could it be that God will save many lives through some evil that has been done to you?

Close in prayer today remembering that while we might not be in gaol, we too are reformed prisoners, no longer slaves to our sinful nature but graciously set free to do good in this world in contrast to how we once lived. Pray then for our brothers and sisters in gaol who've come to faith in Jesus and pray that what they intended for evil might be used by God to save many lives, as they lead their fellow inmates to

faith in Jesus Christ. In his name we pray.
Amen.