

I. WE

- A. There have always been unknowns in life... especially true right now. Or maybe just especially obvious/ in our faces. Lots of questions...
 - 1. When will the pandemic end? When will life return to something normal or resembling “normal”? What is life going to be like when this is over? What do I do in the meantime, like right now?
- B. Unknown is scary, stressful, & difficult for each of us in different ways.
 - 1. B/c Separated from our “normal” life.
 - 2. Relationships with one another have been changed, causing pain and loss.
 - 3. Our work/school/home/family lives have been disrupted with no finish line in sight. We have all experienced a serious truth more intensely in these past few months in a brand new way, and it is this:
 - 4. The unknown disrupts everything that we think we know.**
- C. I have great news for you, though! We actually DO have some choices/options as we face this unknown future. If you think about it, there are really 3 basic choices:
 - 1. **“Fight it”** (complain, blame, try and take control, trample others to get what we want)
 - 2. **“Do nothing”** (hide and wait until it’s all over and returns to normal, ignore what’s happening around us), or
 - 3. **“Lovingly act”** (follow the way of love by relying on God/Jesus in all situations). Even if you are uncertain/afraid.
 - 4. In the last few months, we’ve each tried at least one of these options in response to this time of unknown, maybe even all 3! If that’s you, congrats, you have won at the strange game of **“Into the Unknown Tic-Tac-Toe”!**
 - 5. Our common response to the unknown actually reveals an important starting point for today’s message... **We have a choice with what we do in the unknown.**

II. GOD (Gen 37-50)

- A. There’s a story which I think can help us in our current unknown. From Genesis in the Hebrew scriptures and Christian bible- Prob’s written by **Moses** (kind of famous Bible guy; 10 Commandments and leading his people out of Egypt and all) in the early 1400’s BC after having been part of an oral tradition of Israelites for generations. Setting-
 - a. **Where: Canaan & Egypt, in the Middle East**
 - b. **When: About 1600-1700 BC**
 - c. **Who: Joseph.**
 - i. Son of Jacob (“Israel”); great-grandson of Abram/Abraham. Jon talked about Abram’s importance 2 weeks ago in “First Step” episode.
 - ii. Basically, God told Abraham he would become a great nation even though he and his wife were too old to have kids. Abraham took the 1st step in trusting God and left his home & comfortable life to go to a place God would show him later. Became the father of **3 great global faith traditions.**
 - iii. Last week (check it out!) Abraham and his wife Sarai’s trust wavered, and 10 years into their new life, they still had no children, so they took things into their own hands and Sarai suggested Abraham have a child with Hagar. Joseph is Abraham and Sarai’s great-grandson and the focus of today’s message, and a continuation of that story, as you’ll see... I would ask this as you continue to watch/listen to the story, pay close attention to how Joseph and his brothers (the main characters here) choose to interact with their unknown- do they fight it, do nothing, or lovingly act?

B. **Paraphrase Gen 37**- Here's Joseph's pertinent backstory...

a. **Joseph is one of the youngest in his big family (12 boys).**

b. **Is his Dad's "favorite". Though Joseph was born in Jacob's old age and the dad appreciates his son (which I think we can understand), to me, this one is on Jacob- playing favorites with kids breeds jealousy and hatred. Jacob gives Joseph a special coat, attracting more attention to his "specialness".**

c. **Next, Joseph has 2 dreams about his brothers and even his parents "bowing down" to him. Keep in mind that this was counter-cultural in the ancient middle east, strict family hierarchy; Dad was in charge, then sons from the oldest down. So Joseph shares these dreams with his family, further stoking the fires of resentment of his older brothers. What do they do about this, you ask?**

C. Well...

1. Remember those choices I mentioned before that we have in reacting to an unknown future? Fight it? Do nothing? Lovingly act? Joseph's brothers were jealous of him and feared that someday they "knew" that the unknown held something awful for them; something they didn't want to happen. In the face of this specific unknown, what did they choose? Joseph's brothers chose, drumroll please... fight it. Here's what happened- **Joseph's brothers decided to kill him, but then backpedaled from that a bit and sold him into slavery to some passing merchants to be rid of him, instead.** And that decision by Joseph's brothers to "fight it" leads us to a hard truth...

2. **Fighting the unknown causes destruction, pain, and loss.**

3. Understand me- I'm not saying that we shouldn't "fight" for truth or justice for others, or that we shouldn't "fight" to protect or help others who need protection or help. This response is different. Joseph's brothers were motivated by fear and jealousy to control Joseph and attempt to control the situation. There is no way that is fighting for what's right...

4. Think about all of the people hurt here because Joseph's brothers chose "fight it"-

a. Dad (Jacob)- went into mourning over the death of his son [As a father, myself, can't imagine losing a child, I would think that would be the greatest loss a parent could experience]

b. Brothers- live constantly with the guilt of this dirty secret. [You may have an annoying little sibling, but even if that's true, you have to admit that selling them into slavery is taking it way too far...]

c. Joseph- can only imagine the pain of the abandonment he might have felt. [How would you feel if your siblings sold you into slavery? What would you do with that pain? How would you face your unknown? Would revenge and hatred seep into your every interaction with people from now on? Would every life opportunity be tainted with a desire to destroy? Would you just give up and end it all? I would understand if Joseph did any or all of these things, wouldn't you?]

5. I would also point out here that Joseph's brothers didn't choose to "do nothing". This seems like a good time to mention the obvious, and it's something they knew that we all know, as well. Joseph's brothers didn't "do nothing" when faced with their unknown because...

6. **Doing nothing does nothing.**

a. They knew what we know- if they did nothing, they would still be stuck in their current situation and nothing would change. That wasn't a viable option for them and I would argue is also not a good choice for us in our current unknown, either. More about that later...

D. So what happens next in the story? Let's find out... And I'm seriously condensing and paraphrasing here... **Paraphrase Gen 39-44- Joseph ends up in Egypt and gets a job working for one of Pharaoh's officials, whose name is Potiphar, and Joseph is put in charge of his whole estate. Joseph is a strong, good-looking guy (it actually says that in Genesis 39:6, you should look it up!) and Potiphar's wife has the hots for and tries to get him to sleep with her. Joseph refuses and out of spite, Potiphar's wife wrongly accuses him of sexual assault and Joseph is thrown in jail. So Joseph once again loses**

everything. However, in jail he rises through the ranks of the prisoners until he's in charge of the whole prison, and next uses his skill of dream interpretation to help Pharaoh who wants interpretation for a dream he has involving cannibalistic cows eating one another. Side note- in my mind- this is where the failed 1st iteration of the "double burger" originated. Thankfully, we have since figured that out, at least. **Back to our story- Pharaoh also dreams of healthy grain stalks getting swallowed up by scorched ones. Basically, Joseph gets the opportunity to interpret Pharaoh's dreams and tells him that there's going to be a devastating famine in the region and to prepare by storing up extra food in the productive years before that happens. Pharaoh decides to go with Joseph's plan. Pharaoh even goes so far as to put Joseph in charge of executing and overseeing the plan, effectively putting Joseph in charge of all of Egypt.**

1. Let me pause here and highlight something for you that you might not have noticed whether you are familiar with this story or not, and here it is... Joseph loses EVERYTHING- not once, but twice. That's 2 separate times that Joseph faces a serious unknown. So what did he choose both times? "Fight it"? Nope. "Do nothing"? No, again. He chose to "lovingly act", making the most of his situation and using what he had (administrative skills and dream interpretation abilities). And here's what that sets up as the story continues...

E. **Everything goes according to Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams and there are plentiful years of preparation followed by a region-wide famine. This widespread famine even affects Joseph's family in Canaan and they hear there's food in Egypt, so Joseph's brothers travel to Egypt to buy some. Joseph's family thinks he's dead, so they don't recognize Joseph when they show up. You better believe Joseph recognizes them, though! He gives them some food and tells them to bring their youngest brother with them when they come back from Canaan to buy more food. The famine continues, and Joseph's family eats through their first batch of food and needs to go back to Egypt a second time for more, so they show up in front of Joseph again, this time with their young brother, Benjamin.**

a. Indulge me in another pause here. The time is ripe for revenge, don't you think? It's just too obvious. That's what typically happens in this type of classic story after all. I mean, look at the situation- Joseph has ALL of his brothers (rivals for his father's estate, those who sold him into slavery thinking it would get rid of him once and for all) lined up in front of him and he has ALL of the control in this situation.

F. So here's what happens when all of the brothers show up the 2nd time. **45:4-8 "Please, come closer," he {Joseph} said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.**

1. Wait, WHAT!?!? You could argue Joseph has one of the best set-ups for revenge in all of history and yet forgoes that and actually credits God for all he had to go through? Ok, ok, wait a second, maybe Joseph is just biding his time. Remember, Jacob, their Dad, is still alive and this is an ancient patriarchal shame and honor culture. So maybe Joseph doesn't exact revenge on his brothers out of respect for and fear of his Dad. Maybe Joseph is just amassing power and waiting for a more crushing revenge move later. Wait for it! Let's keep going with the story.

G. **Paraphrase of 45-49- Time goes on and Joseph secures food and productive grazing land in Egypt for his entire extended family as the famine rages throughout the region. Jacob, father to Joseph and all his brothers, leader of the entire clan and pretty old at this point, dies.**

a. Alright, here we are, this HAS to be it! Joseph has kept his family close ("keep your friends close but your enemies closer", right?). Here's his best chance for revenge! These brothers are going to get it! Are you ready?

- H. **50:15-20** *But now that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers became fearful.* (Wouldn't you be? Aren't you just a bit scared for them right now in this story? I kind of am and I even know what happens next...) *"Now Joseph will show his anger and pay us back for all the wrong we did to him," they said. So they sent this message to Joseph: "Before your father died, he instructed us to say to you: 'Please forgive your brothers for the great wrong they did to you—for their sin in treating you so cruelly.' So we, the servants of the God of your father, beg you to forgive our sin."* (Joseph's reaction?) *When Joseph received the message, he broke down and wept.* (It doesn't say here, but I have to think Joseph wept because he was confronted with his pain at this point. He wasn't ignoring the hurt he had lived, he was acknowledging it, feeling it, and working through it.) *Then his brothers came and threw themselves down before Joseph. "Look, we are your slaves!" they said. But Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.*
- Whoa. Does that surprise you? It's not what many people expect to happen in this story.
 - Joseph chose to "lovingly act" when he was perfectly set up to exact the most "deserved" of revenges. And that brings us to a main takeaway from Joseph's life and encouragement for us in the here and now-

1. Loving action has amazing results.

- But you might have noticed that I haven't addressed the most important root question here. If you kind of zoned out there for a minute, I get it, it's kind of a long story, but come on back. Are you ready for it? How about now? The key question is WHY? WHY did Joseph act the way he did? WHY was he motivated to "lovingly act" even though he had been so mistreated by those in power AND his own family? WHY did he "lovingly act" in the face of the unknown?
- The answer comes from the end of Joseph's life and today's story...
 - Gen 50:24-25** *"Soon I will die," Joseph told his brothers, "but God will surely come to help you and lead you out of this land of Egypt. He will bring you back to the land he solemnly promised to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath, and he said, "When God comes to help you and lead you back, you must take my bones with you."*
- WHY did Joseph consistently choose to "lovingly act"? It's actually simple cause-and-effect:

5. Trusting God leads to loving action.

- Joseph chose to "lovingly act" because he trusted that God would fulfill His promise to Joseph's ancestors through him and beyond, even though he, himself, would never see the promise fulfilled. That's the cause and effect at work here: cause = trusting God; effect = loving action.

III. YOU

- What does this all mean for you? No doubt, things are hard right now and there is a lot that is unknown. There has already been much pain and loss, and life IS hard for each of us in different ways right now. The hardest part is that there will be more difficulty before this is over. I would like to remind you that even in the midst of all of that and in the face of your unknown future- you DO have a choice...

B. You can choose to engage the unknown by "lovingly acting" and being FOR others.

- We, like Joseph, can choose to do something different with the unknown than to "fight it" or "do nothing". Joseph's choice to "lovingly act" during his journey into the unknown, to do something positive saved not only his own life AND that of his whole people group, but also THOUSANDS of others from other people groups. Don't miss that- he wasn't just out for himself, but was FOR those around him, even those around him that were nothing like him.
 - Just a reminder- during August, you can participate in our #forSalem opportunity and be FOR Salem by asking others either personally or on social media how you can pray for them.

- D. If you wish you had an example of an entire life lived FOR others, there's great news! There is such a person.
1. He didn't just save thousands of lives like Joseph, but came FOR all lives of all people. He wasn't just a person representing a distant impersonal god, but God, himself, in person; God as a person. He refused to be sucked into the politics of his time. He resisted fighting for himself though he was wrongfully treated. He didn't just exist quietly and do nothing, either. He trusted God and lovingly acted like Him, sharing God's love FOR those around him and, in doing so, changed the course of history forever.
 2. His name? Jesus. Simply put- we can follow Jesus' example and make the same choice he made.
- E. JF- This is a friendly reminder- you HAVE decided to follow Jesus with your life. You HAVE the Holy Spirit working in you. Follow Jesus' example under God's power. Trust God- that he is who he says he is and will do what he says he'll do. Act upon that trust and live out love for God and neighbor. Remember, we love b/c God, through Jesus, loved us first.
- F. Not a JF-
1. Maybe you have questions or doubts. Maybe you're not sure about committing fully to following Jesus with your life yet. Or that God is even really there for you to trust. That's totally ok! I understand because I was once where you are, too! I doubted the existence of God and followed myself, not Jesus for the first 2 ½ decades of my life. You have at least 3 options:
 - a. Read and find out more about who Jesus was and what he said and did. The gospels of the New Testament writings are eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life; start by reading one of 4- Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. You could even read this with a partner or group and work through it together. **We've even got resources here on our webpage to help you!**
 - b. **Communicate with us here at Crosscreek!** We don't have all of the answers, but we have had many of the same doubts and questions you do and are willing to dialogue with you and work through things with you. We're here to help in any way we can!
 - c. **Join a Connect Group at Crosscreek** and live out life in community, figuring it out together! No matter what, you don't have to follow Jesus to act like him and act lovingly! :)
- G. Invitation for all: Read **Phil 2:3-8** once a day for a week or all of Philipians if you are up for it. Think about what it says about Jesus and what you can do with his example as you venture into the unknown.
- H. One last "all-play" = If you're not sure how to lovingly act... Pray... "God, show me how I can be FOR others today."

IV. WE

- A. Imagine navigating the unknown by making a positive difference in the lives of those around you. Let me make that even smaller- how about making a difference FOR just one person. If only a hundred people did that for just one other person, how would that affect our neighborhoods, families, city, state, and country? How would that improve both our current reality and our unknown future? How would that change you and your current sense of purpose and outlook?
- B. We do have a choice. **In the unknown, we can choose to trust God and lovingly act.**
- C. What will you choose in the unknown of this week; today, each moment- "fight it", "do nothing", or "lovingly act"? That choice is yours...

Questions

1. When faced with an unknown situation how do you USUALLY tend to react: fight it, do nothing, lovingly act? Why? How do you know what approach to take to a situation and when?
2. Read Phil 2:3-8. What here do you think most relates to "trusting God and lovingly acting"?
3. What questions/issues/responses do you have to this week's message? How can your group pray for you?