



FIRST PREZ HONOLULU
SERMON TEXT

“GOING BACK IN ORDER TO GO FORWARD”

Genesis 50:15–26

by Tim Shaw

Sunday, October 11, 2026

Good morning! I'm Tim Shaw, one of the pastors here on staff at First Prez. We're continuing our sermon series focused on Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. Today is Week #3 of that series, and we're going to be talking about the value of going back in order to go forward.

So, what does that mean? Well, we're going to be talking about the benefits of going backward in time so we can take a closer look at where we've come from.

And what's the point of doing that? Some of you may have already discovered the answer to that question. I've experienced some of the benefits of going back in time. The goal, the hope, the purpose of going back in order to go forward is to see God break us free from some of the negative things in our pasts.

Some of us have been carrying those negative experiences around with us for a long time, and it would be great to be able to let go of some of those things, to set them down at the feet of Jesus and leave them there.

If you've ever wanted to lose some weight, let's say 15 pounds, have you ever gone into Safeway, into the pet food aisle and picked up a 15-pound bag of dry dog food? I've done that. And as you hold that bag of dog food tightly to your chest, have you ever thought to yourself, "I'm carrying around 15 pounds of unnecessary weight that weighs as much as this bag of Dog Chow."

When you're 15-pounds overweight, it's like walking around every day with a 15-pound bag of dog food strapped to your back or to your gut. It's exhausting. What would life be like to be free from that?

But you know what? We seem to just get SO used to carrying that load around with us that on most days we don't even notice the extra weight until we must climb some stairs. I know it is hard work to lose 15 pounds. I don't want to sound flippant about that.

It's also true in our spiritual and emotional lives. We get so used to carrying the impacts of those negative experiences from our past that we no longer notice them until we get in a conflict with someone or we get anxious or discouraged or depressed. Then those wounds from our past start to cause trouble.

We need to deal with our stuff. As Pastor Tim Fearer used to remind us, if we don't deal with our stuff, we're going to force other people to deal with our stuff.

Do we understand how that works? If we don't deal with our stuff, we're going to force other

people to have to deal with it. And one of the ways that we deal with our stuff is to go back and take a look at what happened, address it so that we can move forward in life in healthier ways.

Listen to what Pete Scazzero writes in his book “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality:”

“Emotionally healthy spirituality is about reality, not denial or illusion. It is about embracing God’s choice to birth us into a particular family, in a particular place, at a particular moment in history. That choice granted us certain opportunities and gifts. It also handed to us a certain amount of what I will call “emotional baggage” in our journey through life.

“For some of us this load was minimal; for others, it turned out to be a heavy one to carry. In fact, some of us are so accustomed to walking with such excess weight that we can’t imagine living any other way.

“True spirituality frees us to live joyfully in the present. It requires, however, going back in order to go forward. This takes us to the very heart of spirituality and discipleship in the family of God—breaking free from the destructive sinful patterns of our pasts to live the life of love God intends.”

That’s Pete Scazzero.

Here’s what I think is some really good news about going back in order to go forward. We can overcome our pasts. God can bring healing and change to us even when what we’ve been

through has been really hard. The good news is that in a relationship with Jesus, we can overcome our past. We can experience freedom and healing. The future can be different.

Here’s some more good news: You can overcome the limitations others might have placed on you. You can overcome the limitations you might have placed on yourself because you assumed what others thought you were capable of was the full truth. You can overcome those limitations because God sees you complete in Jesus Christ, gifted by the Spirit of God and called by God Himself to do good in the world.

I love the movie Hidden Figures. It’s the story of a group of African American women in the 1950s and 60s who helped launch the first American astronauts into space. This is a picture of Katherine Johnson. She definitely overcame the limitations others placed on her.



According to the official NASA website, Katherine Johnson made so many significant contributions as a NASA engineer that they named an entire research facility after her.



"The Katherine G. Johnson Computational Research Facility." You can overcome the limitations others try to place on you.

Katherine died in 2020. The NASA Administrator at the time said, "Our NASA family is sad to learn the news that Katherine Johnson passed away this morning at 101 years old. She was an American hero, and her pioneering legacy will never be forgotten."

The passage we're going to hear read in just a moment is from the Book of Genesis. It comes at the end of what I think is one of the greatest stories in the Old Testament. The story of Joseph and his brothers would be worth a weeks-long sermon series on its own. Today, what we're going to read comes from the end of Joseph's story. That is a very interesting place for us to jump into this story of a man who overcame the limitations others put on him. And what we're going to see today as we think about Joseph's life is how he learned to look back on his painful family story, give it and see how God was at work through it all. That, and his trust in a very big God, enabled him to go forward in his life.

The story of Joseph is such a great story. Unfortunately, we're not going to be able to examine it as it deserves, but what I am going to do after we hear today's text read is to quickly review how we got to this point in Joseph's story.

I'd like to invite Lei Arakaki to come up to read today's Scripture. Let's welcome Lei.

Genesis 50:15-21 (NIV)

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"

So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father."

When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

So, that passage comes at the end of Joseph's story. What do we know about his life leading up to this moment? Some of you might be thinking to yourself, "Hey I'm new here. I don't know anything about Joe." No worries. I hope that after today's message you'll want to learn more about him. He's awesome.

For those of you who have heard the story of Joseph before, maybe many times, I'm going to give you a little group quiz before we do our quick review of Joseph's remarkable life.

The first question is kind of a trick question so watch out. Just shout out your answers.

- How many brothers did Joseph have? (Joseph had 1 full brother)
- What was that guy's name? (Benjamin)
- How many half-brothers did Joseph have? (He had 10)
- What were some of their names? No Googling. (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun)
- Who were Joseph's dad and mom? (Jacob and Rachel)
- God changed Jacob's name to what during a wrestling match with the Angel of the Lord? (Israel)
- Who was Jacob's dad, in other words who was Joseph's grandfather? (Isaac)
- Final question: Who was Isaac's dad? (Abraham)

That's some of the cast of characters that are part of the foundational story of the people of Israel. Joseph and his 11 brothers became the founding fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel.

In the passage Lei just read for us, his brothers are worried that Joseph might turn on them because of what they did to him a long time ago. Their dad was now dead, so the brothers cooked up a plan to lie to Joseph about some instructions they say their father gave them before he died. So, what did the brothers do to their little brother Joseph, a long time ago, that they're worried about now that dad is gone?

I'm going to show you an AI-generated video of part of the story of Joseph and his brothers. As you watch this story, let your mind explore the questions that are raised for you. What catches your attention? What did his brothers do to him and how do they try to justify themselves? I think there are going to be a lot of questions that are going to come to mind as you watch this story. Check this out.

VIDEO: [The Story of Joseph and His Coat of Many Colors](#)

All of us come from imperfect families. As one of my mentors once said, "Parenting is an amateur institution." That means that families are made up of people who are learning how to be a family. Just when parents think they understand one stage of childhood, they are presented with fresh challenges as their children grow. So, none of us come from perfect families because none of us had perfect

parents. But let's be honest here. Joseph's family had some serious problems.

What his brothers did to him was outrageous. It doesn't matter that Joseph may have unwisely shared with his brothers some dreams he was having about his future. It's probably true that the special coat and his dad's favoritism didn't help the dynamics among the boys. But you don't deserve to be sold as a slave because you had some dreams and wore a colorful coat.

And your father doesn't deserve to have his life engulfed in grief based on a lie. Joseph's brothers watched their father weep when they knew that their brother was most likely still alive in Egypt. This is a family with significant issues.

But never forget. It is through this broken family that Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, came into the world. This was the extended family of Jesus and Jesus' family was even wilder than this. Check out the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew chapter 1. Don't underestimate what God can do to restore and transform our world even through a broken family story like this one.

But here's something we need to understand. We need to make a commitment to becoming what I like to call transitional people, if we hope to interrupt the negative impact of an unhealthy family system. Otherwise, it just keeps rolling down the generations. You and I are going to have to deal with our stuff. And that means we're going to have to go back into our stories in order to go forward in a new and healthier way.

So, what happens next in Joseph's story? I only have time to give you the highlights of this incredible story. This week, I want to encourage you to read Genesis chapters 37-50. It's a page-turner.

So, our boy Joe gets taken to Egypt where he is sold as a slave to a man by the name of Potiphar who works for Pharaoh, the head guy in Egypt. The Bible tells us that the Lord was with Joseph and he succeeds in his work beyond his wildest dreams. Potiphar gives Joseph complete control over his entire household.

This is the PG-13 part of the story. The Bible tells us that Joseph is a good-looking guy and Potiphar's wife repeatedly tries to seduce him. And every time she tries, Joseph refuses. He says, "It would be a sin against his God to do such a thing." That's what he says to Potiphar's wife every time she makes her demands. Ultimately, she falsely accuses Joseph of assault and Potiphar throws Joseph in prison. He goes to jail when he has done nothing wrong.

And the Bible tells us that God remained faithful to Joseph. While in jail, Joseph correctly interprets the dreams of two of his fellow prisoners. Both of those men had connections to Pharaoh. One of the men is restored to his position in the palace, just as Joseph predicted when he interpreted the man's dream. And the other one is executed, just as Joseph predicted when he interpreted his dream. The one who was set free made a promise to Joseph that he would remember him. But that doesn't happen,

at least not for a long time. The man forgets all about Joseph, and Joseph remains in prison for two more years.

Then Pharaoh starts to have his own disturbing dreams. He has one dream where seven healthy cows are consumed by seven skinny cows. And then Pharaoh has a dream about seven healthy ears of grain that are swallowed up by seven thin ears of grain. And no one in the palace can interpret the dreams.

It is only then that the man who was released from prison remembers Joseph and tells Pharaoh that there is a guy who can interpret dreams. So, Joseph is brought from the prison to the palace where he tells Pharaoh that only God can interpret dreams correctly. Joseph points to God when he could have pointed to himself. That's an important insight into the character of this man. After he gives the interpretation to Pharaoh of seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine, Joseph is put in charge of all of Egypt and ends up saving the country and the surrounding nations, including his 11 brothers, their families and their father.

As a quick review, here's a short video of the story I just shared with you.

VIDEO: [Joseph Prison to Palace](#)

From a pit to the head of Potiphar's household, to prison and then to the palace. What an amazing story.

In the passage Lei read for us, Joseph looks back on his life, and he can see God's hand all along the way. God was present with him. Was it easy to go through all that he went through? I don't think so. Were there days when he felt abandoned by God? I think I would have. And yet Joseph knew that God was with him even though he didn't always understand why these things were happening to him. Even from the perspective of the end of Joseph's story, there are a lot of mysteries and unanswered questions.

There's a theme that God repeats again and again in the Bible. We see it here in Joseph's life and in the lives of so many other people in the Bible. I heard one pastor put it this way.

- When God wanted to make David a king, He didn't give him a crown. He gave him a Goliath. We saw that last week in Jeff Page's marvelous sermon.
- When God wanted to raise Joseph to the palace, He didn't give him a shortcut; He gave him prison.
- When God wanted to make Esther a Queen, He didn't give her comfort; He gave her a crisis.
- When God wanted to make Moses a leader, He didn't give him a stage; He gave him a wilderness.
- A lot of times when we feel like God is breaking us, He's actually building us.
- And what we need to understand is that when God does not give us what we expect in life, He gives us what we need to become all that He needs us to be to fulfill His calling on our lives.

Joseph saves the people of Egypt from starvation, and he ends up saving his family as well because they came to Egypt in search of food during those seven years of famine. It is a complicated moving story of how that happens. His brothers come to Egypt and Joseph feeds them and forgives them. He is reunited with his dad and his brother, Benjamin, who is now a young man himself.

After his father's death, when his brothers come to him and lied to Joseph about the instructions his dad supposedly left him, Joseph wept

His brothers don't really know him, and so he weeps. But even in his pain and disappointment, Joseph continues to do what is right.

The great news about the gospel is that negative experiences in our families of origin do not have to determine our future, unless we let them. God is the one who can shape our future, if we let Him. And we let Him work in our lives by taking the next faithful step with Jesus as a part of this community of Christ-followers.

If there was anyone who would be justified to be filled with bitterness and rage it would be Joseph. But he did not let the pain of his past control him. Throughout his story we read that Joseph walked with God. He remained faithful, he continued to seek God even when terribly unjust things were happening to him.

Pete Scazzero writes, "He continued to walk with the Lord until his dying day, partnering with the God of Israel to be a blessing to his

family of origin, Egypt, and the world. He honored and blessed the family that betrayed him. Joseph went back to go forward."

How did he do that? Joseph was convinced that the size of a problem is always measured by the abilities of the one called upon to solve that problem. And Joseph entrusted his life to a very big God. When he reveals himself to his brothers they are terrified. Listen to what happened. With his brothers standing before him Joseph reveals himself for the first time to them.

Genesis 45:1-8 (NIV)

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But

God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God."

Joseph understood that in all things God is at work for the good of those who love Him. We see traces of the good that came out of all the pain in Joseph's life in Genesis 37–50, but much remains a mystery. Most importantly, Joseph rested in God's goodness and love, even when circumstances went from bad to worse.

Joseph was willing to go back to go forward. He was honest with his emotions. Most of us are reluctant when we think about going back and feeling the hurt and pain of our past. That's understandable. I know what that's like.

I remember the time I was enrolled in my first doctoral class at Fuller Seminary. It was called, "Building Strong Families in the Local Church." I had a sense that this class was going to require that I go back in time in order to go forward in life in healthier ways. So, I called up my therapist sister Debbie and asked if we could get together to talk about our family. Her first response was, "We can do that but when I asked you to do the same thing five years ago, you totally blew me off." She was right about that. When you're not ready to do this work, you're not ready. But I wish I had taken her up on her offer because my initial response to her request just delayed the healing that needed to begin in my life for five years.

At the beginning of my class at Fuller, Debbie and I got together in a restaurant in Southern

California. And as we sat together in this booth, she unfurled the emotional and psychological map of our family going back generations. It included the marriages that ended, the addiction issues, the fractured relationships, the children who were born three months after their parent's marriages as well as a lot of very healthy people and relationships. But unfurling that huge genogram of our family in this family restaurant was an act of liberation for me. There it was. The story of our family of origin in all its glory and brokenness.

I suppose it is the brokenness of life that draws me to the Japanese art of kintsugi.



Here's an image of a broken bowl that was restored, not by trying to hide the cracks but by highlighting them with gold. And in the end the bowl is even more valuable, and I'd say beautiful than it was before it was broken.

If I break a ceramic bowl, my tendency is to try and glue it back together so you can't see the places where it was broken. And that often doesn't work, so I just throw it out and buy a new one. But in kintsugi, the fractures are still visible, even highlighted. And that gives it a beauty that was not there before.

In that conversation with my sister, I shared some of my anger and frustration with things that had happened in our family. I will never forget what she said after allowing me to get it all out on the table. She said, “Tim, our family needs more grace and not less.” She was encouraging me to do what Joseph did.

The thought of going back so I can move forward in healthier ways can feel like I’m playing with a black hole that might swallow me up. We fear that going back will be too painful. Joseph wept repeatedly when he reunited with his family. In fact, Scripture tells us that Joseph wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him. Joseph did not minimize the painful years. He honestly grieved the pain. And by letting himself experience grief was part of the reason he was able to forgive his brothers and was able to even bless the brothers who had betrayed him.

My family needs more grace and not less. I am grateful to God and to others who helped me give that grace. And it was by growing in grace that I was able to forgive. Maybe that is what your family needs today as well.