

The unknown footsteps of God

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As we worked our way through the middle chapters of Genesis in December, we saw the Lord establish a covenant relationship with Abraham and his descendants and give them prosperity in the land of Canaan. But in these final chapters of Genesis, God providentially uses the dramatic events of Joseph's life to guide the family of Jacob out of Canaan and into Egypt. Then, in the beginning chapters of Exodus, we see God directly intervening to deliver his people out of slavery in Egypt to wander in the wilderness. If God was going to give his chosen people the land of Canaan as he had promised, why was he leading them out of it? The section of Israel's history that you will read this month is filled with the twists and turns of family squabbles and famine, slavery and salvation. It was a time of waiting and wondering for God's people.

Our natural response to being forced to wait for something is often anger or doubt. We may feel resentment because God is leading us down a path that was not part of our own plan. We may question why he is giving us an affliction that is so difficult to deal with. We may

even begin to lose faith in God's promises and wonder whether he is really working all things for our good as Romans 8:28 says. Joseph probably wondered how God was going to fulfill his dreams of being a ruler over his brothers when he was working as a slave and languishing in prison. God's people probably wondered how God was going to fulfill his promise to give them the land of Canaan while they were in slavery in Egypt. Moses probably wondered how he was going to be the deliverer of Israel after the people rejected him and he spent forty years in the desert of Midian as a shepherd. It is natural to experience confusion and discouragement when we are going through times of waiting or intense suffering. But if we allow difficult days and sleepless nights to lead us away from God, we will have the wrong perspective of our struggles.

One reason that we often question God's way for us is because it is so far beyond the understanding of our limited human minds. As Paul reminds us in Romans 11:33, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" We do not know exactly what God is going to do in our lives, but we may take comfort in what we do know about God's character from his word and creation. We know that God is powerful. *Nothing* is out of his control! He controls the big things like nations and rulers, weather, and the events of history. But he also controls even the smaller things that we think we have control over, like our bodies, possessions, relationships, and circumstances. We also know that God is perfectly good and works all things for the good of his people. We are reminded of this in Genesis 50:20 when Joseph tells his brothers, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."

Providentially, Psalter 211 was chosen as the chapel theme song at my children's school in the 2020–2021 school year, which was an especially difficult time for many of us. I distinctly remember sitting outside on the soccer field for the all-school program surrounded by families who were dealing with all sorts of different trials, including struggling to navigate daily life with COVID restrictions and schism due to doctrinal controversy. Uncertainty regarding the future of our families, churches, and schools was rampant, yet we all joined

together in singing the beautiful words of stanza 3:

Thy way was in the sea, O God,
Thro' mighty waters, deep and
broad;
None understood but God alone,
To man Thy footsteps were
unknown;
But safe Thy people Thou didst
keep,
Almighty Shepherd of Thy sheep.¹

We do not know the ways of God any more than the nation of Israel did when they stood at the edge of the Red Sea with deep water in front of them and enemies closing in behind. We do not know where he is going to lead us in the coming months as individuals, families, and churches. But what we do know is that our good Shepherd will always protect and preserve his people. We may not be able to see around the bend of the path we are on, but we know where it is ultimately leading. So by God's grace we live in faith, like Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and so many saints who have gone before, trusting that the unchanging God who has acted so powerfully in the past on behalf of his people will continue to do so in the future. In your devotions this month, pray for the humility to recognize that you are not God and the faith to place your trust in his understanding instead of your own (Prov. 3:5–6).

¹ No. 211, in *The Psalter* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1927), 178.

Date	Read	Reflect
Feb 8	Genesis 37	How do the events of Joseph's life recorded in this chapter foreshadow what Jesus would experience during his ministry?
Feb 9	Genesis 38	How is God's sovereignty over sin shown in the events of this chapter (see also Matt. 1)? Why is this important to remember?
Feb 10	Genesis 39	How did Joseph exemplify the teaching of Ephesians 6:5-8 in his life? Who are you called to faithfully obey?
Feb 11	Genesis 40	How does Joseph's experience here remind you that God does not always answer our prayers right away? What do you do to endure times when you must wait on the Lord?
Feb 12	Genesis 41	How do the names that Joseph chose for his sons show that he remained humble even when he was exalted to such a high position? Do you remember to give God the glory for your accomplishments?
Feb 13	Genesis 42	How did God use the events of this chapter to prick the consciences of Joseph's brothers? Have you ever experienced this?
Feb 14	Genesis 43	How does Joseph exemplify the mercy of God in his behavior toward his brothers, who had sold him into slavery? What can you learn from this?
Feb 15	Genesis 44	Did you notice the change in Judah from what we read about him in chapters 37-38 to now? How does this testify to the transforming power of God?
Feb 16	Genesis 45	How does Joseph point out the truth of God's providence when he reveals his identity to his brothers? Why is this truth so important for you to remember?
Feb 17	Genesis 46	How is Joseph's advocacy for his family in Egypt a picture of how Jesus intercedes for you with the Father?
Feb 18	Genesis 47	What can you learn about your responsibilities toward your own employer from Joseph's faithful labors in the service of Pharaoh?
Feb 19	Genesis 48	How does Jacob remind his sons of God's faithfulness as he nears the end of his life? How are you reminded of God's faithfulness in your life?
Feb 20	Genesis 49	How did Jacob's burial request show his trust in God's promises? How can you live out your trust in God?

Feb 21	Genesis 50	How was the pilgrimage to Canaan to bury Jacob a witness to the nations? How can you be a witness to others when you experience the loss of a loved one?
Feb 22	Exodus 1	How was God strengthening the nation of Israel through their afflictions in the land of Egypt? How has he strengthened you through your afflictions?
Feb 23	Exodus 2	How did Moses choose a life of suffering over a life of ease? (See Heb. 11:24-26.) How are you called to make the same choice in your own life?
Feb 24	Exodus 3-4	How does Moses make excuses for not obeying God's call? What can you learn from the Lord's answers?
Feb 25	Exodus 5:1-7:7	How does the Lord encourage Moses and Aaron after the disappointment they had recently faced (see Ex. 5)? What does this teach you about God's character?
Feb 26	Exodus 7:8-8:19	How do plagues 1-3 make clear that no other gods are like the Lord? What does this teach you about the futility of serving anything other than the one, true God?
Feb 27	Exodus 8:20-9:12	How do plagues 4-6 show that God's mercy is only for his people and not all people? What comfort do you find in the truth of election?
Feb 28	Exodus 9:13-10:29	How do plagues 7-9 show the power of God's wrath upon the wicked? What is your response as a child of God to the power of God's wrath?
Mar 1	Exodus 11:1-12:42	What truths about Jesus and his work on your behalf do you see pictured in the Passover lamb?
Mar 2	Exodus 12:43-13:22	What purpose did the feasts serve for the children of Israel? What institutions do we have today that serve the same purpose?
Mar 3	Exodus 14	Of what was Israel's passage through the Red Sea a picture? How does your own baptism picture the same spiritual reality?
Mar 4	Exodus 15:1-21	What can you learn about worshiping God from the song of Moses?
Mar 5	Exodus 15:22-16:36	How was the manna in the wilderness a picture of Christ? How can you partake of the Bread of Life daily?
Mar 6	Exodus 17	What does it mean to "tempt the LORD" (v. 2)? Why is this so serious? (See also Ps. 95.)
Mar 7	Exodus 18	How does Jethro's wise advice here show the need for elders and deacons to serve in the church? How can you serve in your church as a young person?