

OVERCOME

Home Group Series

June - August 2018



*FGA MELBOURNE
LEADER'S GUIDE*

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OVERVIEW

Victory over evil: What do we do when life hurts us?

Series passage:

“But Joseph said to them, ‘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.’ Thus, he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.”

Genesis 50:19-21 (ESV)

A. INTRODUCTION

Each year we focus on one of our five core values as a Household of FAITH (Appendix I). In 2018, we have a Pastoral focus, where we take time to study what it is like to be Intimate Relationally. One of the common pastoral challenges we face is how to help someone who is affected by trauma. Trauma is triggered by a major unexpected event that happens to us personally, or to someone close to us. It is a common life event and, to different degrees, it will impact us all.

This series uses the narrative of Joseph (in Genesis), a man who encountered several major traumas and injustices in his life. But Joseph saw how God was able to sue these terrible events to bring him to a place of great blessing. Joseph overcame.

We begin this Overview by explaining a little about trauma from a psychological viewpoint and pathways to benefiting from it. Our hope is that through this series we will understand:

1. How to apply Biblical narrative to our lives;
2. How Joseph reflects the character and nature of Christ;
3. A robust model for dealing with trauma and growing from it.

For 2018, our theme is “BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING” and we will spend the year focused on the Pastoral and being “Intimate Relationally”

B. UNDERSTANDING & OVERCOMING TRAUMA

Before we look at the Overcome series based on Joseph’s life, it is important to have a basic understanding of trauma and the how it can impact our lives. While we never wish traumatic events on anyone, as we will see, it can have an overall positive outcome and the direction we take in life.

You may recall we covered “Post Traumatic Growth” in our All Leaders Training at the start of the year (see FGA Leadership Podcast <http://fgam.org.au/media/leadership-podcast>), where Craig Campbell from VCC Emergencies Ministry, taught on this topic. This series will also draw heavily from the excellent book by Prof. Stephen Joseph. *What Doesn't Kill Us: A New Psychology to Post Traumatic Growth*. This book has been used in training provided to the Victorian Council of Churches Emergency Ministry, helping counsellors, pastors and volunteers as they assist people who survive tragedies.

Having a basic understanding the stages of overcoming trauma and common roadblocks to recovery should be part of our basic pastoral toolkit. Also, knowing that it is possible for life’s circumstances to be turned around for good helps us to stay strong and positive when we are supporting others going through tough times.

Responses to Trauma

Below is a list of common responses to trauma. It is important to realise that people respond differently to adversity or traumatic events. There is no right or wrong way to respond. Not all will experience every issue, nor will they have the same intensity of response¹.

- **Intrusive memories:** These are unsettling or disturbing thoughts or feelings that come to you randomly. They may be about what happened during the trauma.
- **Flashbacks:** Sometimes people feel they are experiencing the event over and over again, which is called a “flashback”.
- **Hypervigilant or easily startled:** Trauma survivors may find themselves on edge. Over-reacting to sudden noises or danger, or maybe super-sensitive to certain situations where they are hyper-alert to danger.
- **Problems sleeping:** Experiencing disturbing dreams or nightmares is quite common. This can include reoccurring dreams/nightmares. Also, difficulty in sleeping or staying asleep.
- **Avoidance:** Some survivors have difficulty thinking about what happened and push any negative thoughts aside. Situations or people that remind them of what happened are also avoided.
- **Emotionally numb:** It is common to shut down mentally and emotionally. They can have difficulty in feeling emotion or react by being detached and withdrawn.
- **Withdrawn:** Removing themselves from social situations or relationships. Feeling misunderstood, isolated and alone. This strains relationships as they are unable to talk about it.
- **Anxious:** Some are fearful and nervous. Many have difficulty in concentrating.
- **Experience negative emotions:** Common negative emotions are shame, guilt, sadness and grief, irritable and easily angered. This can be expressed in a variety of unhealthy ways.
- **Physical problems:** Some experience negative physical reactions such as nausea, vomiting, trembling, fatigue, changes in breathing or menstrual cycle, loss of libido, dizziness, and gastrointestinal issues such as nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea.

Overcoming Trauma: How to survive and THRIVE

Trauma can be overcome and people, over time, can be healed of the pain and fear often accompanies adverse events. It is vital that people understand these three key messages for overcoming trauma.

1. **You are not on your own.** Everyone encounters adversity is common to all at some point in their lifetime. Often, however, when it happens to us we feel we are on our own and no one can understand what is going on. It easily leads to people becoming isolated or cut off emotionally or relationally. While each situation is unique, it is vitally important for affected people to talk about what has happened and not avoid the issues. Facing their situation by opening up to trusted companions and supports from friends and family is essential for overcoming trauma. The Bible calls us to “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.” (Gal. 6:2). Sharing with others can take much of the sting away and can bring comfort and release.
2. **Trauma is natural and recovery is a process.** People often feel confused and frightened after experiencing trauma or anxiety. They may have trouble controlling thoughts that are upsetting or intrusive and may become withdrawn or suffer anxiety and depression. Although these emotions or intrusive thoughts can be deeply distressing, it can help to know that, for most people this is part of the healing process. Over time, and as healing comes, these will subside.
3. **Growth is a journey.** It may be helpful for people to think of overcoming trauma as a journey. It isn’t something that happens overnight and some days are better than others. Studies show that

¹ Responses to trauma is adapted from the book “What Doesn’t Kill Us: The New Psychology of Post-Traumatic Growth” (2011) by S. Joseph, pp 183-4.

those who have confronted tragedy, horror and adversity have emerged as wiser, more mature and more fulfilled human beings. They are able to reorient personal priorities and appreciate life more. But during the journey people should be careful not to place too many expectations on themselves. There is no time limit on recovery. Focussing on what you can do, not what you can't do is important and do not do anything you are not able to handle at the time. Move at your own speed.

Overcoming adversity has been modelled by the acronym THRIVE, representing six stages or signposts to healing from trauma. Following the exercises presented in the model (the full explanation is available in the book), provides a coherent approach to helping people overcome trauma. They have been summarised here and also, to some extent, are reflected in each of the Overcome sessions. We recommend that you read the full version in Prof Stephen Joseph's book.

	SIGNPOST	DESCRIPTION
T	Taking Stock	<p>Trauma activates a part of the brain dealing with threat so we need time to process what has happened and think things through. Coming to an understanding of what has occurred is the first step to recovery. Family and friends are an essential help, providing a listening ear and encouragement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check you are physically safe • Seek right support (mental, physical, relational, legal etc) • Check you are getting enough sleep • Maintain routine (stay physically active) • Deliberately do things you enjoy and learn to relax • Be kind to yourself • Become self-aware: understand your triggers, your emotions and how they influence you • Observe your reactions (don't judge yourself) • Avoid avoidance where it becomes escapism (e.g. overworking, reliance on alcohol or drugs) • Confront traumatic memories & emotions at the right time • Connect with others family, friends or support groups
H	Harvesting Hope	<p>Trauma can have the impact of leaving people feeling hopeless and struggling with a negative outlook on life. Everyday tasks can become very difficult, if not impossible. A signpost of recovery is, restoration of personal hope. Hope is something that comes from ourselves and reflects our thinking patterns and outlook on life. Studies have shown that a positive mindset leads to much greater satisfaction in life and better performance overall in health, study, work and relationships. If you possess hope that the future will bring new possibilities you are already on the road to change.</p> <p>The Bible is a powerful source of hope as one of the three major markers of the fruit of the Spirit in our life. Also, learning stories from others who have overcome tremendous difficulty can be inspiring and helpful. Setting and working towards achievable goals (small steps) is another important step to release hope.</p>
R	Re-authoring	<p>Personal transformation often takes root in adversity. Re-authoring involves moving from thinking of ourselves as victims to thinking of ourselves as survivors, and even as thrivers. Thrivers are those who are able to rewrite their stories. This not denying what has</p>

SIGNPOST		DESCRIPTION
		<p>occurred, but it is about looking at the events from different angles. Instead of seeing the problem or trauma as something negative and something that is standing in your way, try to look for a way to improve your situation.</p> <p>Being able to re-author comes with time and working on building resilience, then change for the better will naturally occur. This is about understanding the meaning of your life and focusing on the things that matter most.</p>
I	Identifying Change	<p>Changes often come as small steps. They can be easily overlooked, so identifying change is best done in reflective moments. It is important to acknowledge how you are changing as a way of harvesting hope along the journey. Journaling is a powerful way of recognising new achievements in your journey of recovery. This can be along the lines of improvements in your self-confidence, closeness of relationships, self-acceptance, greater meaning in life, thankfulness, and resilience - just to name a few.</p>
V	Valuing Change	<p>This is valuing and celebrating even the small steps of growth in your life. It realises the lessons you are learning and celebrates every positive step. It is focussing on the positive changes taking place. Tracking your gratitude and making it a daily habit as part of your prayer life is a great way to express valuing change.</p>
E	Expressing Change	<p>Expressing change in action is the last hallmark of recovery. One way is to think about examples of things you actually did that show that you accepted yourself, acted autonomously, exhibited purpose in life, improved your relationships, achieved a sense of mastery and found your way to personal growth.</p> <p>Doing something for others, focussing on needs of a friend, family or someone in the community will bring great improvement to your life. Having concrete actions can consolidate your growth and further escalate the healing process.</p>

C. ABOUT THE "OVERCOME" SERIES

This year, through our earlier preaching and home group series “The Human Journey”, we discovered how real-life stories in Genesis also relate to our own lives. Even in our own brokenness God has a plan for personal and relational restoration. He desires for us to be whole and be a blessing to those around us (See Appendix II for the 2018 theme Blessed to be a Blessing).

The “Overcome” series delves deeper into this theme, looking at how to overcome pain and trauma that can happen to us, by studying how Joseph overcame the multiple and deep traumas in his life. Joseph was the great-grandson of Abraham, and Jacob (Israel’s) favoured son. He was smart, very capable in business and was prophetically gifted. However, in his early years he was terribly mistreated and betrayed by those closest to him (his brothers). Time and time again he was wronged even though he was doing the right thing and honouring God. He must have asked “Where is my God?”. Yet, despite years in the “desert”, he never lost his faith. Instead, Joseph held on to the promises God had given to him as a young man. It’s not until the end of the book, that with hindsight, he could see how God used

these circumstances to bring him to a place of greatness. In the end, he proved to be a great blessing by saving his own family and also many surrounding nations.

The series passage, Genesis 50:19-21, is an excerpt from an encounter between Joseph and his brothers. At the time, Joseph was the second most powerful man in Egypt (after Pharaoh). Their father, Jacob, had just died and the brothers feared that Joseph would seek revenge for their earlier mistreatment of him. By dissecting (exegeting) this passage we will see Joseph's response, and how he had come to terms with his past abuse. He had clearly overcome and forgiven his brothers. Joseph had realised how God allowed these things to happen so that he could be brought to a place of trusted leadership at a specific point in the history of the world.

D. MAIN POINTS

This series looks closely at Joseph's response to his brothers when they were fearing retribution for mistreating Joseph when he was young. By exegeting the passage, we will see how his words conveyed exactly how he came to terms with his past trauma. In hindsight he was able to see how God used it to bring about great good.

Each of the sessions reflects one step in the journey of recovery from trauma. Each topic relates the words expressed by to the key point. Each is also mapped to the relevant THRIVE signpost(s), as shown in the following table. This series comprises Five sessions which will run from June to August 2018.

The Five sessions will cover five steps for how to overcome (Sessions 1-5):

SESSION	TITLE	FOCUS	THRIVE SIGNPOST
Session 1	Introduction: An honest difference	"But, Joseph said to them..."	Taking Stock
Session 2	A difference in Lordship	"Am I in the place of God?"	Harvesting Hope
Session 3	A different cycle. Breaking the chain of negative behaviour.	"As for you, you meant evil, but God meant it for good"	Re-authoring
Session 4	A different focus. Identify a purpose that benefits others	"That many people should be kept alive."	Identifying & Valuing Change
Session 5	A tangible difference. Action expresses change.	"I will provide..."	Expressing Change

The suggested format for the series is similar to previous home group series. This is a guide only and the home group should follow a discussion that is most meaningful for their group. The components common to most Home Group sessions are:

- Worship or Opening Prayer
- Testimonies or sharing about things that have happened recently
- Introduction to the Session
- Witness Session Video by Chris Ong
- Read Key Scripture
- Main Point
- Discuss one or more of the Questions
- Read and respond to the Application
- Pray for needs /Closing prayer
- Fellowship

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE

The accompanying the "Overcome" MP4 videos (on a USB stick) are available from the church office. Also, video streaming, and copies of the Leader's Guide and Member's Notes are available for download at <http://fgam.org.au/media/homegroup-materials>. If you are unable to access the files or need assistance with printing notes, please let us know by contacting Megan Griffith (0422 284 404, megan.griffith@fgam.org.au) or Ps. YC Goh (0425 799 576, yc.goh@fgam.org.au).

The Overcome Series will be augmented by:

- The Overcome preaching series at FGA Sunday Services for 5 weeks, 17 June – 8 July 2017. Sermons will be available online in video (<http://fgam.org.au/media/video-sermons>) or audio (<http://fgam.org.au/media/audio-sermons>) format or via the FGAM App (available for free download for Android/Tablet or iPhone/iPad).
- Leaders Podcast available at <http://fgam.org.au/media/leadership-podcast> or through iTunes, on:
 - o "Post Traumatic Growth" by Craig Campbell (3 February 2018)
 - o "2018 Update" Blessed to be a blessing by Ps. Chris Ong

Recommended Reading

1. The summary of FGAM's vision for 2018 to "Blessed to Be a Blessing" is attached in Appendix II
2. Swindoll, Charles R (1998) *Joseph: A Man of Integrity and Forgiveness*. Great Lives Series. Thomas Nelson Books.
Abstract: No family today is more dysfunctional than Joseph's. No one faces greater temptation than Potiphar's wife offered Joseph. No faith is challenged more severely than was Joseph's on death row. Yet Joseph stood firm, exemplifying what is possible when ordinary people maintain their connections with God. Like an epic novel filled with intrigue, tension, and torrential emotions, Joseph's triumphant story touches us all. This third volume in Charles Swindoll's "Great Lives" series presents a fresh look at one of the most intriguing characters in the Old Testament and focuses on the virtue of forgiveness in the face of deceit and betrayal.
3. Joseph, Stephen (2013) *What Doesn't Kill Us: The New Psychology of Post-Traumatic Growth* Little, Brown Book Group.
Abstract: For the past twenty years, pioneering psychologist Stephen Joseph has worked with survivors of trauma. His studies have yielded a startling discovery: that a wide range of traumatic events, from illness, divorce, separation, assault, and bereavement to accidents, natural disasters, and terrorism, can act as catalysts for positive change. Boldly challenging the conventional wisdom about trauma and its aftermath, Joseph demonstrates that rather than ruining one's life, a traumatic event can actually improve it. Drawing on the wisdom of ancient philosophers, the insights of evolutionary biologists, and the optimism of positive psychologists, *What doesn't Kill Us* reveals how all of us can navigate change and adversity, traumatic or otherwise, to find new meaning, purpose, and direction in life.

Keywords: Genesis • Joseph • Overcome • Forgiveness • Purpose

F.A.I.T.H. emphasis: Intimate Relationally

Session 1: An Honest Difference

“But Joseph said to them...”

Key passage: “But Joseph said to them, ‘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.’ Thus, he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.” Genesis 50:19-21 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

This introductory session provides an overview of trauma and how we respond to it. While trauma can have a negative and sometimes debilitating impact on our lives in the short term, it is possible to overcome so that the end result is positive and beneficial. For each session in the series we will look at steps to the journey of recovery. For this we refer to the THRIVE model used by a psychiatrist Prof. Stephen Joseph, in his book “*What Doesn’t Kill Us: The New Psychology of Post-Traumatic Growth.*” We recommend you to read this resource if you are going through trauma currently or are helping someone. It covers this fascinating area in great detail and contains much practical information.

The first step in the THRIVE model for overcoming trauma is, Taking Stock. This is looking honestly at our situation and talk about what has happened. While we can have a tendency to avoid it, bury it or worse still deny it, we need to bring it out into the light. Being honest and sharing our hurt with a trusted friend, family or professional sets us on the road to recovery.

This series looks at what happens to us when we encounter Trauma. We will discover how it affects us and what we can do to overcome trauma so that it becomes a springboard for healthy personal growth.

A. VIDEO SUMMARY (Session 1 video, 8:02 minutes)

The video summary for Session 1 on “An Honest Difference” includes:

- Life has suffering
- Chris’s experiences as a Pastor
- Joseph is not a feel-good story
- Trauma as an analogy of a broken vase

B. SCRIPTURE READING (Genesis 50:19-21)

Background to the passage:

This year we have been studying Genesis. The first book of both the Bible and the Jewish Tanakh. It is an introduction to the biblical account of Creation and the beginnings of our faith through the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jacob’s favoured son, Joseph.

The series passage, Genesis 50:19-21, is an excerpt from an encounter between Joseph and his 11 brothers. At the time, Joseph was the most powerful man in Egypt second only to Pharaoh. Their father, Jacob, had just died and the brothers feared that Joseph would seek revenge for their mistreatment of him when he was young. At that time, they nearly killed him, but in the end decided to sell him to slave traders who were heading to Egypt.



We see in Genesis 45:1-8, that Joseph has earlier given his brothers' the same assurance of provision and protection. But now their Father is dead, they feared that it was not genuine. Joseph, after all, was a very powerful man. Instead of taking the opportunity to lord it over his brothers, Joseph reassures them of his genuine forgiveness and God-ordained perspective on the past events. He means no harm to them but rather would continue to provide for them and their families as he had been doing. God had turned their evil into something for great good.

C. MAIN POINT

Let's be honest. There is suffering in Life.

Everyone encounters adversity in life. Whether we go through it personally or we face suffering with a close relative or friend, there's simply no way to go through life without hitting an emotional wall at some point. This is what we call trauma. It happens to us all and we all respond differently to it. While some can bounce back with seemingly minimal impact, others facing similar experiences can be traumatised for extensive periods and struggle to recover. We want this series to provide an understanding of trauma and also practical steps not for recovery. We will see that it is possible for you to grow from it and bring lifelong change for the better.

The first step to recovery is to be honest about what has happened. Talk to someone about it. Sometimes just sharing our story can be a major stumbling block. We feel unable or unwilling to articulate our feelings due to fear, shame, fear of rejection, among other things. We can feel isolated and alone, thinking that no one will understand or care. Avoidance strategies such as denial, burying oneself in work, becoming overly preoccupied with certain things are a very common response. However, if we stay with our head in the sand it's a major roadblock to recovery. It is okay to seek help.

Being honest and talking about what has happened is exactly what Joseph did. Due to his brothers' mistreatment of him, Joseph went from being the privileged and favoured son of Jacob to being a commodity in the slave trade in a foreign land. Here we see Joseph confronted his brothers about their betrayal and he spoke about what had happened.

Talking through experiences with supportive people allows us to convert upsetting traumatic experiences into something we can grow from

D. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Share a formative experience in your life that was bad at the time, but in hindsight was good.

Answer Guide: Sharing personal life stories in an important part of making a Home Group series relatable, and the key to building close relationships within your group. Spend time talking about formative experiences and stories (while ensuring that one person doesn't hog the whole conversation). We are all shaped by key moments/experiences.

Studies conducted over decades have shown that those who have confronted tragedy, horror and adversity have emerged as wiser, more mature and more fulfilled human beings. They have found the adversity prompted them to reorient personal priorities and stick to their new decisions. They appreciate life more. Many have found that the tragedy has turned into something that became a springboard to give life a purpose in helping others.

This question is to give people a chance to share their stories of things that have happened involving significant adversity which they have had to overcome in life. It could be also something that has happened to someone close to them but had a positive impact on their own life.

2. What stops us from being honest and acknowledging deep issues to others or even ourselves? (focus on what each person’s individual tendency is, instead of talking about “other people”)

Answer Guide: Everyone encounters adversity. It is common to all at some point in our lifetime. Often, however, when it happens to us we can feel overwhelmed and not sure what to do. Emotions are very strong and raw, and sometimes the only way we can deal with it at the time is to avoid facing the issues. While this can be a natural coping strategy for the short term, in the longer term it can be detrimental as the issues do not go away by themselves. We need to work through what has happened for the healing process to begin. Making the choice to face the issue is the first step to recovery.

Some of the reasons why we avoid addressing deep hurts are:

- The memories are very painful and still hurt
- Memories bring up strong emotions that can be overwhelming
- We are afraid of losing control of our emotions, especially if we talk to others about it
- We often feel shame or condemnation or blame ourselves for what has happened
- We feel are on our own and no one can understand what is going on.
- We don’t know who we can trust

Feeling alone or not being understood by others, easily leads us to isolation, or cutting ourselves off from others physically, emotionally and/or relationally. This is why the first key message is “you are not on your own”. When people realise they are not alone, it will enable them to open up, and be honest with those around them. To find appropriate supports from trusted friends and family is essential for overcoming trauma. The Bible calls us to “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.” (Gal. 6:2). Sharing with others can take much of the sting away and can bring great comfort.

3. OPTIONAL: Look through the common responses to trauma listed below (which is also in the Overview). If any of these resonate with you (or maybe someone you know), the first step to recovery is to Take Stock (See Application). If there is a strong response may be worth talk to someone about what has happened. This is the first step to recovery and healing.

People respond differently to adversity or traumatic events. There is no right or wrong way to respond, as we are all different. Below is a list of common responses to trauma. Not all will experience every issue, nor will they have the same intensity of response².

- **Intrusive memories:** These are unsettling or disturbing thoughts or feelings that come to you randomly. They may be about what happened during the trauma.
- **Flashbacks:** Sometimes people feel they are experiencing the event over and over again, which is call a “flashback”.
- **Hypervigilant or easily startled:** Trauma survivors may find themselves on edge. Over-reacting to sudden noises or danger, or maybe super-sensitive to certain situations where they are very alert to danger.
- **Problems sleeping:** Experiencing disturbing dreams or nightmares is quite common. This can include reoccurring dreams. Also, difficulty in sleeping or staying asleep.
- **Avoidance:** Some survivors have difficulty thinking about what happened and push any negative thoughts aside. Situations or people that remind them of what happened are also avoided.

² Responses to trauma is adapted from the book “What Doesn’t Kill Us: The New Psychology of Post-Traumatic Growth” (2011) by S. Joseph, pp 183-4.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotionally numb: It is common to shut down mentally and emotionally. They can have difficulty in feeling emotion or react by being detached and withdrawn. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawn: Removing themselves from social situations. Feeling isolated and alone. Not understood by others. This can strain relationships. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxious: Some are fearful and nervous about doing everyday tasks. Many have difficulty in concentrating. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience negative emotions: Common negative emotions are shame, guilt, sadness and grief, irritable and easily angered. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical problems: Some experience negative physical reactions such as nausea, vomiting, trembling, fatigue, changes in breathing or menstrual cycle, loss of libido, dizziness, and gastrointestinal issues such as nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea. |

Answer Guide: People do not need to answer this question or talk about it out loud. The list of common symptoms of trauma is included here to prompt people to reach out and get help in order to overcome the issues they are facing. Just reading through the list may trigger some people who have unhealed trauma to feel uncomfortable. Look out for the people in your group. If someone looks distressed, take time to talk to them privately after the session to see if they are okay. Offer to be a listening ear if they would like help.

E. FIRST STEP TO RECOVERY FROM TRAUMA: TAKING STOCK

Trauma activates a part of the brain dealing with threat so we need time to process what has happened and think things through. Coming to an understanding of what has occurred is the first step in the recovery journey. Family and friends are essential help providing a listening ear and encouragement, but we need to be willing to open up. If you have suffered any of the signs or symptoms from Question 3, take time to go through this checklist. Make a time to talk to someone if one or more of the points below raises a flag for you.

- Check you are physically safe
- Seek right support (mental, physical, relational, legal etc)
- Check you are getting enough sleep and maintain routine (stay physically active)
- Deliberately do things you enjoy and learn to relax. Be kind to yourself
- Become self-aware: understand your triggers, your emotions and how they influence you
- Avoid avoidance where it becomes escapism (e.g. overworking, reliance on alcohol or drugs)
- Confront traumatic memories & emotions at the right time
- Connect with others family, friends or support groups.

New Visitor Take Home

*“What can I not doubt” The reality of suffering (J. Peterson)
 “Why refuse to specify?... because to specify the problem is to admit that it exists”*

F. LOOKING FORWARD

In the next session, we will look at “A difference in Lordship”. In session 2 we discover how Joseph refused to take matters into his own hands because he understood that God was in control.

Session 2: A Difference in Lordship

“Am I in the place of God?”

Key passage: *"And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life." Genesis 45:5 (ESV)*

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

In the Overcome series, we are looking at how Joseph prevailed over adversity to fulfil the purpose God had planned for him. Joseph faced incredible challenges, more than most of us will face in our lifetime. He was sold into slavery and sent to a foreign land, accused of attempted rape and wrongfully imprisoned, and despite helping others he was still forgotten in prison for another two years. Despite all that had happened, he maintained a healthy disposition that God was in control. How did Joseph do that? The Bible doesn't provide clear explanations, but we can gain some insight into how he came to terms with his predicament and maintain a such a positive attitude.

The second key to overcoming is finding ways to hope for your situation to change. This is not something that comes at you from the outside, but something that you develop from within. It reflects what you are focusing on and how you come to terms with your situation. What you are going through is only for a season. Your situation will change and there will be a solution, even if you are unable to see it now. Sometimes challenging seasons are longer than we expect and we can really reach the end of our own strength. But we always have God to go to. He is a major source of hope and encouragement. There are also friends, or family, or even finding the space to pursue things that you are passionate about, even if that is in seed form.

The second key to overcoming is finding hope

A. VIDEO SUMMARY (Session 2 video, 7:46 minutes)

This second session video “A Difference in Lordship”, it encourages us to see how God can use the tragedies of our lives to bring about great good for many others. Even people who don't God him at all. The main points are

- Discovering generosity in the midst of great suffering.
- Recap of Session 1
- Exegesis of the passage
- We are ultimately not in control

B. SCRIPTURE PASSAGE (Genesis 45:1-8)

Background to the passage:

This part of the story flows on from Genesis 44, where Joseph is using his cover as an Egyptian official (even using an interpreter) to communicate with his brothers. Joseph had devised a plan so he could keep his only full-brother, Benjamin, with him in Egypt, while sending the other brothers home with food for his father and the rest of the tribe. However, knowing the devastating effect it would have on their father Jacob if Benjamin didn't return with them from Egypt, their eldest brother Judah was pleading with Joseph for mercy to let their brother go back with them. Finally, Joseph was unable to bear the emotional torment and revealed his true identity to his brothers. Now comes the highly emotive discourse from Joseph we read today.

Some have interpreted Joseph's decisions and orchestration of these events had the intention of actually helping his brothers, not manipulating them. He desired to bring home the point once and for all, so that they could see the devastating effect their actions had on others. To produce true repentance before God so that things could ultimately be made right. After all Joseph himself said several times the ultimate power and orchestrator of his life was God.

Evidenced by 45:5 *"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."* And 45:7 *"And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt."*

C. MAIN POINT

Joseph remained hopeful by refusing to remain a victim instead he reached out to the victims around him

Joseph faced incredible adversity, more than many of us will face in our lifetime. In the prime of his life he was sold into slavery in a foreign land, then wrongfully accused of attempted rape and imprisoned. Although he was good to others he was left in prison and forgotten for years (Gen 39). Despite all that happened, Joseph maintained a healthy attitude and believed it was all part of God's plan for his life. Just how did he manage to do that?

Joseph experienced God in the midst of hardship. Scripture says that *"The Lord was with Joseph and caused everything he did to succeed"*, whether that was in his master's house (Gen 39:2) or in the prison (Gen 39:23) God prospered Joseph. He realised that God was ultimately in control and he didn't hold others responsible for his misfortune. He refused to be crippled as a victim, but he opened his eyes to see the victims around him. He kept accountable to God, using his gifts and talents to help others. By stepping out and serving others the focus shifted from himself and what was done to him, to one of favour and blessings where he saw God move. Joseph had the opportunity, he refused to take matters into his own hands, but encouraged his perpetrators to forgive themselves (v5).

Likewise, we need to shift the focus from ourselves to Jesus, trusting God and not seeking revenge. Seeing ourselves as just a victim opens the trap of self-pity, steals our joy and puts us on the road to nowhere. There is an alternative pathway where we can experience God more deeply. We have the promise of his *"help in our times of need"* (Heb 4:16) and *"Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."* (Heb 12:2). Likewise, as we release control to God, encourage ourselves and keep going, we can bring hope to our ourselves and to those around us.

God encourages us in our hardship as we focus on him

D. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you do to harvest hope in tough times? Maybe if you draw from Scripture that helps you to stay strong, share that too.

Answer Guide: Again, the first question in today's session is aimed at getting your Home Group to share from their lives. It's not about providing cliché answers or the "correct" Christian thing to do. Encourage honest dialogue about the things we do to maintain hope when things are tough. Perhaps even link it to everyday issues like when the kids are being troublesome, or when there are problems at work that don't have a short-term hopeful solution.

If it's possible, anchoring on Bible Verses is a time-tested method for building hope. Most of us will have a scripture that has anchored us in hard times. Scripture is a great source of encouragement and a way to harvest hope for our lives. The Biblical promises given to some in the group may speak to others who need to have hope for their own situation.

2. How do you think Joseph harvests hope? Why does he say “Am I in the place of God??

Answer Guide: This question helps you gauge if your home group has caught the mindset that Joseph exhibits in the passage. It's useful to go through the passage (Gen 45:1-8) and to look closely at the response that Joseph has. The passage gives us a clue to why Joseph would use the words “Am I in the place of God” at the end of Genesis. It's always helpful going into scripture and spending time discussing what it reveals about Joseph.

Joseph demonstrates a good understanding of God, his purposes and his promises. God is first place in Joseph's life. Let's be honest, most Christians say that God has first place in their lives and they can't live without him. But how do our actions mirror our words? What are our actions that demonstrate God has first place in our lives? It's important that we don't pretend and make adjustments where necessary. There is no condemnation, but we need to come back to God.

3. OPTIONAL: Read Romans 12:19-21. What happens when we let God execute justice for us?

Answer Guide: Start by having someone read Romans 12:19-21.

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. ” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (NIV)

This question seeks to open up the discussion of God's justice. The root of being able to let go and allow God get justice comes from us being able to allow God to be Lord in our lives. Forgiveness of the perpetrator and trusting God in faith are keys. This is easy to say and can be very hard to do. Encourage those in your group who may be struggling in this area, to seek God's grace. This is often a decision of the will because it is not something we want to do. We will find release and our recovery will hasten as we move from being a victim to an overcomer.

E. SECOND STEP TO RECOVERY FROM TRAUMA: HARVESTING HOPE

Trauma can have the impact of leaving people feeling hopeless and struggling with a negative outlook on life. Everyday tasks can become very difficult, if not impossible. A signpost of recovery is restoration of personal hope. Hope is something that comes from ourselves and reflects our thinking patterns and outlook on life. Studies have shown that a positive mindset leads to much greater satisfaction in life and better performance overall in health, study, work and relationships. If you possess hope that the future will bring new possibilities you are already on the road to change.

If you are struggling to have hope you may want to try some of these options.

- Find a verse or passage in Scripture that encourages you
- Regain a closeness to God. He is a good God and one who is able to save.
- Read or listen to stories from others who have overcome tremendous difficulty
- Working towards achievable goals (small steps) is another important step to release hope.

New Visitor Take Home

“Suffering brings about a greater sense of authenticity. It strips away pretence and causes a childlike dependence on God.” Warren W. Wiersbe

F. LOOKING FORWARD

Next session we will look at what it means to break the cycle of hurt and rewriting the story of your life.

Session 3: A Different Chain

“As for you, you meant evil, but God meant it for good”

Key passage: “While we were still sinners Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8b (ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

In the first two sessions we have learnt how it is possible to grow from trauma if we approach it honestly and differently. We also realise that God is the one who is ultimately in control of our lives. Although our circumstances can be uncertain. God is certain and knows the end from the beginning. He is committed to bringing us through.

Trauma, by its very nature, affects our behaviour and significantly impacts the way we live our lives. So, how we respond when trauma will determine whether it gets passed on. If we are unable to overcome our own situation, it will certainly impact those around us. However, as we grapple the issues confronting us and begin to make sense of them, their negative impacts can be diminished.

It is like a beautiful vase that has shattered to pieces. It will never be the same again. Rather than stick it back together with all the cracks obvious for all to see, we can change its shape and purpose and make it into something different, and more beautiful. We need to invite God in to bring about the change for good.

Breaking the chain in your family line can start with you

A. VIDEO SUMMARY (Session 3 video, 8:15 minutes)

This third video session helps us to understand what it means to re-author our lives. Here are the key points:

- Recap
- Joseph’s turnaround moment
- Hurt people often hurt people
- Joseph’s act of grace turned the tables
- Throughout it all, Joseph was able to see to the end of his story.

B. SCRIPTURE READING (Genesis 43:29-34)

Background to the passage:

This passage records the second encounter that Joseph had with his brothers. Due to the severity of the ongoing famine, they had run out of food again. While supplying food to his family Joseph had devised a plan of manipulation so that one of his brothers (Simeon) had to stay in Egypt. This time the brothers had come back with Joseph’s only brother of the same mother (Rachel), Benjamin. Benjamin was dearly loved by Joseph. It is in this passage that we see the big turnaround moment when Joseph’s heart is broken over-seeing his brother, resulting in grace and provision being extended to all his brothers.

C. MAIN POINT

We need to re-author the cycle of evil and change the story of our lives

There is no denying this world suffers injustice, pain and suffering. Often, what is overwhelming and often indescribable is passed on to those we are closest to. As the saying goes “Hurt people, hurt people” as we see hurtful behaviours perpetuated down the generations. From a study on generational transmission of trauma, M. Gerard Fromm says “*what human beings cannot contain of their experience—what has been traumatically overwhelming, unbearable, unthinkable—falls out of social discourse, but very often on to and into the next generation as an effective sensitivity or a chaotic urgency.*” What he means is, *if we don’t face our issues and pursue a healthy recovery processes, the impact of our trauma inevitably impacts others.* We are unable to contain it.

As we grapple with the issues that have damaged us and begin to make sense of them, their negative impact can be diminished. It is true we will never be the same again and we will be forever changed. But it can be like a beautiful vase that has been shattered to pieces. There is no point in trying to rebuild the original design as it can never look the same. However, we can repurpose the pieces and create something different and even more beautiful. Our lives can be such a mosaic in God’s hands.

Personal transformation often takes root in adversity. Re-authoring involves moving from thinking of ourselves as victims to thinking of ourselves as survivors, and even as thrivers. Thrivers are those who are able to rewrite their stories. This not denying what has occurred, but it is about looking at the events from different angles. Instead of seeing the problem or trauma as something negative and something that is standing in your way, try to look for a way to improve your situation.

Being able to re-author comes with time and working on building resilience, then change for the better will naturally occur. This is about understanding the meaning of your life and focusing on the things that matter most.

Today’s passage from Genesis 43:29-34, shows the turning point that broke the cycle in Joseph’s family and he extended grace to all his brothers. It was in his power to do anything he wished to his family, and they expected the worse, but he showed grace and mercy. His actions broke the cycle of sibling hatred and revenge. This is an Old Testament reflection of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus (Rom 5:8).

There is suffering in life, but it is possible to respond to it differently

D. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Hurt people, hurt people. Do you think that this statement is true?

*Answer Guide: Go around the home group and share either examples of how hurt people continue the hurt, **OR** examples of how it’s possible for hurt people to re-author the story of their lives and turn evil into good.*

*The statement is actually **NOT FULLY** true. Sure, there’s a tendency for people to pass on the hurt, quite often onto their loved ones or those closest to them. But we all know of the most famous example of someone who didn’t. Jesus Christ was hurt by us, and yet He did not in turn hurt others. Instead, he gave up his life for many.*

This question helps us to understand the root causes of injustice are in the world. Who do we blame for wrong and abuse that goes on. Most of the hurt is perpetrated by people one to another. One of the reasons abuse continues is because of the cycle of harm that runs in families and communities.

Our hope is that you’ll land about 50/50 on either side of this question (some will think the statement is true, and others won’t). You might want to foster a good debate. One alternative is to divide your group in two and they can argue on either side.

2. Read Genesis 43:29-34 again. How did Joseph break the cycle of hurt? What does that look like in our lives?

Answer Guide: It's good to take time in your home group to explore scripture. We're doing a narrative (Genesis is mostly Biblical Narrative). That means that the main points and key areas for learning are "hidden" in the story and not explicitly spelled out (like in the Epistles). Take time to review the full context of the story of Joseph up to this point. How well does your HG know the narrative of Joseph?

- *Talk about the contrast of the generosity (and grace) that Joseph shows his brothers, relative to the hurt that they have inflicted on him.*
- *Explore how Joseph has experienced a life of injustice and hurt in the lead up to this moment*
- *Talk about how Joseph has also experienced God's amazing grace and generosity. 1 John 4:19 says "We love because he first loved us"*

What are some of the "natural responses" Joseph could have shown his brothers? (perhaps imprison them, kill them etc.) The natural responses provide a good backdrop to the actual response that Joseph exhibited.

Remind the group that every one of us is called to be witnesses. It is important to realise it is not in our own strength that we can fulfil the command of Christ but only by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. As we partner with Christ we find that His yoke is easy, and burden is light. We get to know Christ in ways we would never have known him if we had not put ourselves out there to be involved and caring for others. We want to be sheep and not a goat.

Take time to talk about how we can show the same kind of generosity and grace that Joseph shows.

3. OPTIONAL: What does it mean to re-author the stories of your life?

Answer Guide: The stories we tell ourselves are the pathways through which we make sense of our lives, construct our identity, and establish why we choose to live our lives one way and not another. Spend time in your group analysing how stories are told in their home. Meaning is not something out there that is given to us; it is something we give to ourselves. We do that through stories.

It's a great opportunity to discuss some of the biases that creep into how we re-tell the stories of our lives (even if the re-telling takes place in our heads and hearts). Anchor on how in Joseph's story, the brothers intended and did evil, yet Joseph ... chose to tell the story with God as the author and the template.

"The stories that we tell which adopt the view that we are victims, that we are mentally defeated, and that the world is unsafe, unpredictable and other people untrustworthy, are associated with higher levels of distress. But stories that construct meaning, in which we view ourselves as survivors and even thrivers and that establish hopefulness in us, will lead towards growth" (taken from What Doesn't Kill Us).

E. THIRD STEP TO RECOVERY FROM TRAUMA: RE-AUTHORING

Think about the things that you know need to stop in your life. Spend some time reflecting on them. Invite God into your journey into the recovery process. It may be useful to spend some time journaling or writing them down, as the Holy Spirit the root and what drives them. Are these behaviours shown by your parents, or did they happen after a formative life event? What can you do to stop passing them onto others? How can you bring restoration to this problem?

Personal transformation often takes root in adversity. Re-authoring involves moving from thinking of ourselves as victims to thinking of ourselves as survivors, and even as thrivers. Thrivers are those who are able to rewrite their stories. This not denying what has occurred, but it is about looking at the events from different angles.

Being able to re-author comes with time and working on building resilience, then change for the better will naturally occur. This is about understanding the meaning of your life and focusing on the things that matter most.

New Visitor Take Home

Being angry never makes anything better. If we have unresolved anger, we either explode or we implode; we either blow up at somebody, or we fall apart on the inside. It's a miserable way to live. It is possible to break the cycle.

F. LOOKING FORWARD

Next, in the next session, we look at the role of moving the focus from ourselves to others as we Identify and Value change.

Session 4: A Different Focus

“That many people should be kept alive.”

Key passage: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

This series studies the process of overcoming trauma. In the last session we looked at what it means to break the cycle of trauma and begin to re-author our story. Often major traumatic events instigate dramatic changes in our worldview and perspective on life. This occurs as we break the negative cycle(s) from the past and choose to allow God to help us. It is metaphorically similar to a beautiful vase that is shattered and broken. The pieces can't be stuck together again as they were, but they can be rebuilt into a stunning mosaic. This happens as we reach out to God and choose to respond to the Holy Spirit.

God is very patient. There is no timeline for our journey. Re-authoring occurs as we receive healing and discover new things that take on greater importance. One of the ways to accelerate recovery and reinforcing change for good is to celebrate them. Celebrations were commanded by God from the earliest days that Israel became a holy nation called out by God (Exodus 23:14). This stops us from focussing on how far away we are from where we want to be and helps us to see how God is working in our lives and stay positive. Let us stop and celebrate the things God is doing for us along the way.

In the THRIVE recovery model (refer to the Overview, we call this identifying and valuing change (This constitutes I and V of the THRIVE model).

A. SESSION VIDEOS (Session 4 video, 6:57 minutes)

This Session 4 video by Ps Chris Ong highlights the following points

- Steps Joseph took to overcome the evil done to him
 1. He refused to accept the standard response
 2. Looked to God for leadership in his life
 3. Made a conscious choice to break the cycle
- Joseph didn't see himself as a victim but saw the victims around him.
- God comforts us in our suffering so we can also be of help to others
- God's comfort is so different to the comfort that the world offers.
- The fourth step Joseph took in overcoming evil was:
 4. He knew there was a greater purpose in his suffering than just benefiting himself.

B. SCRIPTURE READING (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

Background to the passage

The Corinthian passage is an excerpt of a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth and also to all the people leaving in Greece (v.1), instructing them to live holy and righteous lives. Interestingly, Paul starts this letter saying how God is the source of all comfort and just as we are called to bring comfort to others. He then goes on to provide an example from his own experience, mentioning some of the things he suffered and endured for the sake of Christ. Paul took great risk and was highly rewarded. The focus of this passage helps us to realise that the suffering we go through is designed to

bring comfort to others. Just as God had used the hardship the Apostle endured to bring comfort and encouragement to other believers suffering persecution, it equally applies to us and what God wants to do with our suffering.

C. MAIN POINT

*There's value in the suffering we go through.
It can be a source of hope to others*

On first reading of Joseph's story, we are struck by the unfair and awful treatment that Joseph receives time and time again. He was betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery, falsely accused of rape and thrown into prison, and despite doing good he was forgotten. We can't help but ask "Where is God in all of this and how could God let this happen?" However, it is not until we see the end we see a totally different picture. Joseph himself realised this when said "You intended it for evil, but God intended it for good." (Gen 50:20). God was not absent at all, but rather he used Joseph's predicament to bring about a great deliverance for Joseph's family and peoples from many nations.

As Joseph's focus shifted from seeing himself as a victim, to seeing the victims around him, he unwittingly moved into his life's calling. If he had remained self-concerned and in a pity pit he would never have achieved the greatness God had in mind. It was the times Joseph reached out to do good to those around him that God trained him in leadership and honed his abilities.

Like Joseph, Jesus Christ also suffered greatly at the hands of evil men. But God intended something incredible that no one could fathom, not even the disciples who were closest to him... the salvation of the world (Acts 2:23).

Even though we cannot see the end of our own story, we need to trust that God wants to use the difficulties and the pain in our lives to accomplish his purposes through us. A step of faith is demonstrated as we shift our focus onto others. God will direct us and restores your own life in the process. Even small steps are cause for celebration.

D. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is something in your life God has done recently that you can share (and celebrate) with the group?

Answer Guide: Part of valuing the change is to share with others the things that God does for us, however small. This reinforces our value and appreciation of the Spirit's work and also encourages us to continue the journey of recovery. Something powerful happens when we share with others. Even if it is seemingly insignificant. We are called to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Rom 12:15), as it brings us closer together and strengthens our relationships and trust with one another. It expresses Christ's love to others.

In terms of our personal journey to victory, we are less likely to become overwhelmed and stuck in a rut if we learn to share and celebrate with others along the way.

2. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 again. What does vs 4 mean when it says "... so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God"?

Answer Guide: Sometimes we feel like we are "disqualified" from leading or helping people because of the hurts and pain in our lives. So many people come up and say that because they don't have perfect lives, they are unable to be used by God to comfort others. I've heard this from people who have been divorced, who have suffered loss, who have supposedly failed in life, lost jobs etc.

Yet, God comforts us all. He provides us with the hope, love and faith to continue on and to thrive. However, this comfort that he provides us is not just for our benefit.

Comfort foods, comfort shopping and even some of the vices that people turn to for relief of stress, pressure and pain (drugs, porn, illicit affairs etc.), may ease the pain for a moment, but they're drastically different from the comfort that God provides.

The biggest difference between the comfort that God provides versus the comfort that the "things of the world" provides is that God's comfort prepares us to express that same comfort to others ... to help them and bless them. We are blessed to be a blessing.

Take time to explore how God can use our trauma and suffering as a blessing to others.

3. OPTIONAL: Identify the things in your life that God can use, and that are of value in providing comfort to others.

Answer Guide: Hopefully, by the time you've hit this stage of the Home Group material, there will have been quite a lot of open sharing by your group. Either that, or maybe you've been together as a home group for a long time and know each other well. Take time to go around your group to see how (specifically) the traumas or experiences in our lives can be of value to others.

Who can we help? Ask the group to take a moment to ask God to bring to your mind or show you the kinds of people you have been gifted to help. Perhaps there are specific people to reach out to? If there is no one, then encourage each person to allow God to lead them to people that need help and can benefit from their experience. Share the names with the group and pray together. Not only commit to pray for them, but make it a point within the next few weeks to reach out to them and apply the principles taught in this series. When you come back to your home group, share and celebrate with them.

E. FOURTH/FIFTH STEP TO RECOVERY FROM TRAUMA: IDENTIFYING AND VALUING CHANGE

Changes often come as small steps. They can be easily overlooked, so identifying change is best done in reflective moments. It is important to acknowledge how you are changing as a way of harvesting hope along the journey. Journaling is a powerful way of recognising new achievements in your journey of recovery. This can be along the lines of improvements in your self-confidence, closeness of relationships, self-acceptance, greater meaning in life, thankfulness, and resilience - just to name a few.

This is valuing and celebrating even the small steps of growth in your life. It realises the lessons you are learning and celebrates every positive step. It is focussing on the positive changes taking place. Tracking your gratitude and making it a daily habit as part of your prayer life is a great way to express valuing change.

Write down things that God can and has done in your life that can be of value to others.

New Visitor Take Home

"The point at which things happen is a decision. Instead of focusing on yourself, focus on how you can help someone else." Germany Kent

F. LOOKING FORWARD

Next, in the next session, we look at the things we can do to Express Change that has taken place in our recovery process.

Session 5: A Tangible Difference

“I will provide...”

Key passage: "For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills;"
Deuteronomy 8:7 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

Through studying the past four sessions we have seen the keys to recovery from trauma. These begin with an inward focus as we come to terms with what has happened and try to find a new balance in life. In the last session we looked at changing our focus from ourselves as victims and seeing how our own life experiences can be of benefit to others. We were encouraged to celebrate our steps of recovery, even the small ones, and let them be an inspiration to others who need encouragement for their own situation.

The last step in sealing our victory is to be active in helping others. Expressing Change is so much more powerful than saying “I forgive them” or “I am healed”. We were made for a purpose and God uses the bumps and lumps along the road to shape us into something beautiful. This is God’s refiner’s fire, that purifies our hearts to be more like Christ’s and proves that we have truly overcome.

A. SESSION VIDEOS (Session 5 video, 7:03 minutes)

This video is the final session in the series. The main points are:

- Recap of the series
- Joseph knew that it was not enough to overcome mentally.
- There is a big difference to say to someone “I forgive you” and “Let me help you”
- Joseph’s words reveal genuine transformation “He spoke kindly to them”
- What we do in tangible action demonstrates that we have overcome

B. SCRIPTURE READING (Deuteronomy 8:7)

Background to the passage

This passage is written in the context of God’s promise to his people as they had spent 40 years in the wilderness (Deut 1:1). Moses was recounting to the next generation all the works that God had done in bringing them out of Egypt, as well as the result of their disobedience by refusing to go into the promised land at that time. Despite Israel’s stubbornness God was committed to bringing his people to the Promised Land.

We can use the scripture to encourage us to also come out of the wilderness. It is a decision we make to stop going around the same mountain, irrespective of many years it has been. We must trust that God’s intention is to bring us to a good place, one where his blessings will flow abundantly.

C. MAIN POINT

There is a big difference in saying “I forgive you” and “Let me help you”

We come to the end of our exegeted passage, Genesis 50:19-21. Now their father was dead, Joseph had ample power to lord it over his brothers and do anything he wished. Instead of choosing vengeance, he spoke reassuring words to them and took action to care their families. As aptly put by Charles Swindoll “Joseph’s words provide the finest expression of forgiveness we find anywhere, outside of the words of Jesus Christ himself” (“Joseph”, Great Lives Series).

It is easy to think that things are all in the past and we have moved on, but sometimes it’s not until we show action that we seal our victory and prove that we have overcome. Somehow the impact of our changed priorities and re-evaluation on life is not realised unless it is expressed by tangible change.

Let’s never forget that God sovereignly works all things for His glory and for our good (Rom 8:28). Nothing in our life is insignificant or wasted when we operate our lives under the Father’s providential care. This is something Joseph came to terms with, explaining how he could have taken the blows that came his way in such abundance. God’s grace is sufficient for you as well.

D. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. You may have heard the expression “talk is cheap”. Why are actions more powerful than words?

Answer Guide: This is a general question aimed to see that we take risks in many areas of our lives. We take risks with the choices we make such as who we marry, where we live, how we invest, what course or career we pursue. We take these risks because we believe that we will be rewarded by doing so, through better quality of life, whether that be a financial reward or related to personal satisfaction or quality of life. We take risks all the time. Taking risks for the sake of the Gospel should be a strong motivator, the Bible speaks of many of the rewards we will get by doing so.

We can often wish that we do things and have great plans to do things of significance, but if we don’t take the small steps that are in front of us we will not be able to reach it.

2. Do you think that we need to wait until we are fully recovered before we start expressing God’s goodness to others? When is it too soon? Or too late?

Answer Guide: This is a trickier question than it would initially seem. The quick answer would be “Of course! We can always do good to others”. However, that so often just leads to a very superficial “Christian” response and can sometimes reveal a hypocritical heart.

Spend time discussing what needs to be recovered before we can help others.

It’s true that we don’t need to be fully recovered (in some sense, we won’t fully be recovered until all is restored by God at Judgement Day). However, there needs to be an internal healing that has taken place before we can truly speak kindly to another and do good to those who have meant us evil.

Joseph is a good example of the kind of internal recovery that is a pre-requisite for us expressing authentic change:

- *He truly understood the evil done to him and still forgave his brothers (Taking Stock)*
- *He truly trusted in God and his promises (Harvesting Hope)*
- *He re-authored the story of his life (Re-authoring)*
- *He was able to pinpoint God’s work in his life (Identifying and Valuing Change)*

Please don’t just jump to Expressing Change before it’s actually taken place in your life.

3. OPTIONAL: Review the THRIVE model. How can we use this in our lives?

SIGNPOST		DESCRIPTION
T	Taking Stock	<p>Trauma activates a part of the brain dealing with threat so we need time to process what has happened and think things through. Coming to an understanding of what has occurred is the first step to recovery. Family and friends are essential help providing a listening ear and encouragement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check you are physically safe • Seek right support (mental, physical, relational, legal etc) • Check you are getting enough sleep • Maintain routine (stay physically active) • Deliberately do things you enjoy and learn to relax • Be kind to yourself • Become self-aware: understand your triggers, your emotions and how they influence you • Observe your reactions (don't judge yourself) • Avoid avoidance where it becomes escapism (e.g. overworking, reliance on alcohol or drugs) • Confront traumatic memories & emotions at the right time • Connect with others family, friends or support groups
H	Harvesting Hope	<p>Trauma can have the impact of leaving people feeling hopeless and struggling with a negative outlook on life. Everyday tasks can become very difficult, if not impossible. A signpost of recovery is restoration of personal hope. Hope is something that comes from ourselves and reflects our thinking patterns and outlook on life. Studies have shown that a positive mindset leads to much greater satisfaction in life and better performance overall in health, study, work and relationships. If you possess hope that the future will bring new possibilities you are already on the road to change.</p> <p>The Bible is a powerful source of hope as one of the three major markers of the fruit of the Spirit in our life. Also, learning stories from others who have overcome tremendous difficulty can be inspiring and helpful. Setting and working towards achievable goals (small steps) is another important step to release hope.</p>
R	Re-authoring	<p>Personal transformation often takes root in adversity. Re-authoring involves moving from thinking of ourselves as victims to thinking of ourselves as survivors, and even as thrivers. Thrivers are those who are able to rewrite their stories. This not denying what has occurred, but it is about looking at the events from different angles. Instead of seeing the problem or trauma as something negative and something that is standing in your way, try to look for a way to improve your situation.</p> <p>Being able to re-author comes with time and working on building resilience, then change for the better will naturally occur. This is about understanding the meaning of your life and focusing on the things that matter most.</p>

	SIGNPOST	DESCRIPTION
I	Identifying Change	Changes often come as small steps. They can be easily overlooked, so identifying change is best done in reflective moments. It is important to acknowledge how you are changing as a way of harvesting hope along the journey. Journaling is a powerful way of recognising new achievements in your journey of recovery. This can be along the lines of improvements in your self-confidence, closeness of relationships, self-acceptance, greater meaning in life, thankfulness, and resilience - just to name a few.
V	Valuing Change	This is valuing and celebrating even the small steps of growth in your life. It realises the lessons you are learning and celebrates every positive step. It is focussing on the positive changes taking place. Tracking your gratitude and making it a daily habit as part of your prayer life is a great way to express valuing change.
E	Expressing Change	<p>Expressing change in action is the last hallmark of recovery. One way is to think about examples of things you actually did that show that you accepted yourself, acted autonomously, exhibited purpose in life, improved your relationships, achieved a sense of mastery and found your way to personal growth.</p> <p>Doing something for others, focussing on needs of a friend, family or someone in the community will bring great improvement to your life. Having concrete actions can consolidate your growth and further escalate the healing process.</p>

E. SIXTH STEP TO RECOVERY FROM TRAUMA: EXPRESSING CHANGE

Expressing change in action is the last hallmark of recovery. One way is to think about examples of things you actually did that show that you accepted yourself, acted autonomously, exhibited purpose in life, improved your relationships, achieved a sense of mastery and found your way to personal growth. Doing something for others, focussing on needs of a friend, family or someone in the community will bring great improvement to your life. Having concrete actions can consolidate your growth and further escalate the healing process.

New Visitor Take Home

If you can say this Psalm as a prayer you will open the door to experiencing God's goodness "Teach me to do Your will, For You are my God; Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground" Psalm 143:10

APPENDIX I

FIVE CORE VALUES OF FGAM

Evangelistic • Apostolic • Pastoral • Teaching • Prophetic

The five core values of FGAM have been broken down into the 5-letter acronym for F.A.I.T.H.

FAITHFUL TO THE MISSION (F):

Faithful has been chosen as opposed to Excellence (which we used to have in our values statement). Excellence is not up there as part of our vision for how to serve because in order for things to be excellent, you have to devote all your resources to it and everything drops on the side to make that one thing excellent. A lot of people nowadays are pursuing excellence (six sigma, zero tolerance through a whole bunch of excellence processes) but the thing is ... a lot of guys die on the way to excellence. Excellence is a bit of commodity everyone is pushing for it in spurts and with very tightly defined boundaries.

Faithful is the new spectacular. As for me I just want to be a faithful pastor and if I can really be honest with you now, when I was younger, I wanted to be an excellent pastor but now I have seen so many guys fall and I just want to be the real thing I want to finish my days serving the Lord and be a faithful pastor to the mission that God has for me and I want to be a faithful husband, a faithful father and I tell you with today lack of loyalty, faithful is the new spectacular. It is spectacular to find the guy who will serve the Lord with joy, it is spectacular to find the person with one wife the whole time and his family survived the whole thing. I was just thinking faithful to the mission for me and excellent also has this problem of our own achievement and if I have done excellent it is my own doing, faithfulness removes that away so I sow the seeds, I water it and God brings the excellence so we are not saying let's be terrible and I think faithfulness reaps excellence whereas I think you can short cut a lot of things and get excellence, in today world there are a lot of shortcuts to get excellence and I am not keen on these so that is off for us and you are going to hear us talk about that a lot from us but I am giving you the short version.

ACTIVE AND PERSONALLY INVOLVED (A):

Active sits against conceptual. How are we going to serve the Lord, what does serving look like? What is the vision when you close your eyes – serving is being faithful is it serving every day or serving the lord but not being active because today we live in a generation that is big on intentions and ideas – let's solve world poverty and go for a rock concert and that's about it, we buy all these brands, promote love, climb the highest mountain for you on my T-shirt, they big on their ideas but they are not doing it. I have just finished a book called, "Love Does". For us it has to be active or the word that we discussed is incarnate it has to be involved us in the flesh and so if we are serving then not just pay money for someone to serve the Lord, we don't want that e.g. P&W team can't pay people to come and play for us or pay a missionary so we are doing the stuff but not active in it.

INTIMATE RELATIONALLY (I):

I is intimate. We are going to do our relationship intimately. We tossed between using the word intimate and the word love. Love is a more technically appropriate word to use, however, the problem with the word Love in this day and age is that I can say "I can love my coffee, I love my car, I love all kinds of things". It is really hard and for it to be the distinctive of FGA. For it means that Ps. Quentin is going to get involved with your children's life, finding out their grades/home life. It's like being an interfering

parent all over the place almost like an Asian way to be a lot more intimate with the relationship. So how are we going to serve? We are going to serve intimately which involves getting to know people, understanding the differences between each of us and the kind of conflict that comes with a close-knit relationship. Intimate sits against clean and neat. That is why there will be a lot not dead set written down yet will be some but not a lot to allow the intimacy to occur which is quite a Hebrew way.

TEACHABLE IN DISCIPLESHIP (T):

How are we going to serve? With a teachable spirit. That is the entire discipleship model we are also going to have the orientation of teaching – I catch myself how often how I get irritated with my kids for not learning things fast enough or I get irritated with some people that I teach the computers but I have to understand that people are learning – I have practiced a thousand times but my kids are learning to control their emotions, growing up and learning how to build their characters to tell the truth so a few times they will lie, throw tantrums but if we remember how we serve is in this whole model of teaching and being teachable as discipleship then we account for all those things – part of it was inspired by people that had inspired me. As for intimate, Roger has inspired me during the holiday we go together and for teachable Quentin and his team has really inspired me for that as Quentin takes these really young guys in their raw format and Quentin has the patience to teach them, disciple and groom them and then they graduated into our main ministry. A lot of our ministries are powered by people that come out of the pipeline of other ministries. That is a good model for us to have a teachable discipling type model. Teachable sits against Expert. We are always a learner, there usually an expert service model so when you talk about serving- you always go and get the expert but what I want is to get the learners.

HOLY AND SET APART FOR GOD (H):

Holy (H) used to be something that was judged based on appearance or outside so e.g. he is a holy person, he does not smoke and drink, does not do this or that etc... holiness for us from the biblical meaning means set apart (on purpose). A good analogy for holy is water. Water can be used for all kind of things. You can wash your car, your dog can drink it, you can wash your dirty boots, you can bathe with your water, you can swim in it or boat ride on the water but then water in the temple of God becomes holy water. It looks exactly the same and I reckon the molecular composition is exactly the same as water used for watering your garden. God can use things solely for his purposes. Holy is there for us so that when we go off and do normal things we remember that its purposes are for God - so that God's name get glorified. If anyone looks at our activities, it looks like a dance competition and looks like water. Holy water. We make sure that people know its purposes and our lives are like that too. That means as Christians, Raymond, you should look like an accountant except that you are a holy accountant because everything in your life exists for the purpose of God. That is the concept of Holy. So the holy for purpose sits opposed to looking holy. I think in our past we have a whole bunch of things that just look holy so people serve to look holy which is what we don't want.

APPENDIX II

2018 VISION: PASTORAL

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

Key passage: *“And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”* Genesis 22:18

2018 are focussing on the book of Genesis. It is a highly honest, relational book that traces a household of FAITH as they live out God’s plans for them. God’s people (all of us) were created and blessed to be a blessing to the world around them. We were made to reflect the very image of God.

However, it’s so easy to lose sight of our calling because of the everyday issues that crop up in our lives. Sin complicates and infects everything it touches, and we (if we’re honest) struggle to walk fully in obedience with God. Yet despite our multiple failings, Genesis shows us that God is ever faithful, that even though Satan bruises our heel, Victory is the Lords!

*Our one line for the year is “Blessed to be a Blessing” and our key verse is taken from Genesis 22:8, which says:
“And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice”*

Bless is the most used word in Genesis. Adam was blessed, so was every human being that was given breath and life. Yet time and time again, in the book of Genesis, we see how humanity grabs for blessing (taking matters into their own hands, building towers, living for their own pleasure, lying, cheating and even killing). The book ends with Joseph (the capstone example of our one-liner for the year), who despite the many afflictions in his life, obeyed God’s voice, and in doing so, ultimately was able to be a blessing to his own family and the many nations around him. Joseph knew who he was, and what his life was ultimately going to do. Things that others intended for evil, God had intended for good, and for the saving of many lives.

Let’s take a close look at our lives. It’s a Pastoral focussed year, and we will pour through Genesis with its raw honesty, and ask questions like, “How did we get here”, “Why are we here” and “What are we to do”? We need to see ourselves the way God (our creator) sees us, and we need to align ourselves with his vision and purposes. In Biblical terms, that’s called “obedience”, and that’s how we shall be a blessing to all the nations of the Earth.

For 2018, our theme will be “BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING” as we spend the year focused on the Pastoral and being “Intimate Relationally”

NOTES: