

 JOSEPH

The

MINI-STUDY



Welcome to BSF's five-week study of Joseph!
We hope God speaks to you through His
Word and your group discussion.

Here's how the Bible study works:

- Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day.
- Discuss your answers with your small group at the end of the week.
- Listen to a podcast teaching on the week's passage.
- Read the notes with the passage's historical background and life application.
- Repeat!

We hope you enjoy using this four-fold approach to exploring God's Word in community with others.

Thanks for choosing to study Joseph with Bible Study Fellowship!

WEEK ONE

JOSEPH IS SOLD, AND JUDAH SINS WITH TAMAR

GENESIS 37-38



Scripture Memory Verse

“Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed.

Genesis 37:27



Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. (How has He provided, answered, comforted, reconciled, guided, etc.?)
2. What from the passage, lecture, notes or discussion challenged or confirmed your thoughts about God?

Day 2 – Genesis 37:1-11

Joseph's dreams increased his brothers' hatred.

3. What fueled the brothers' hatred and resentment of Joseph?
4. a. Joseph's dreams were God's special revelation to him. (See Genesis 41:32, 44; 42:6; 44:14; 49:22-26.)
What did the dreams reveal about God's plan for Joseph?

b. What do Joseph's dreams reveal about God?
5. What stands out to you in Jacob's response in 37:10-11?

Day 3 – Genesis 37:12-36

Joseph's brothers planned to kill him.

6. Why would Jacob want to check on his sons while they were near Shechem?





7. Describe the brothers' response to seeing Joseph.
8.
 - a. How did the brothers plan to justify or cover up their actions?
 - b. In what ways did God protect Joseph from death at the hands of his brothers?
 - c. What does this incident reveal about human nature and sin?
9.
 - a. When have you experienced unexpected mistreatment or cruelty?
 - b. How can you find encouragement when others sin against you? What Bible verse helps you?

Day 4 – Genesis 38:1-12

Judah moved to Adullam, married a Canaanite woman and had three sons.

10. What steps did Judah take that moved him and his family increasingly farther away from his family's identity, community and destiny?
11.
 - a. Why did the Lord put Er and Onan to death?





- b. What does this reveal about God and His response toward wickedness and justice?

12. How does your connection to Christian community impact your walk with God?

Day 5 – Genesis 38:13-30

God gave Tamar twins, and the line of Judah continued.

13. a. What action did Tamar take, and why?
- b. How have you seen people justify wrong methods to achieve something right?
- c. Describe Judah's actions and reactions through these verses.
14. Why is the story of Judah and Tamar significant? (See Matthew 1:1-6.)
15. How does the story of Judah and Tamar encourage or challenge you?

Day 6 – Review Genesis 37-38

16. How has this week's study helped you better understand God's trustworthiness?





Genesis 37–38

Focus Verse

“Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.’ His brothers agreed.” – Genesis 37:27

- Joseph and His Brothers – Genesis 37
- Judah and Tamar – Genesis 38

Engage

Jacob’s story contains a lot of drama and pain. The focus starting in Genesis 37 shifts from Jacob himself to his family, particularly Joseph. **Sadly, crisis and scandal continued to plague Jacob’s family.** The family grew in size and complexity. Favoritism in the family continued to create disaster. Joseph’s brothers cruelly sold him into slavery. Judah committed sexual immorality with his daughter-in-law Tamar. The people were sinful, the dysfunction evident and the pain real. How could anything good emerge from something so bad?

While Jacob’s story might make yours look tame, we see plenty of wrong things in our world as well. Do you ever wonder how God could possibly make something beautiful out of your life and your family? The bad news is bad, but the good news is very good. God is trustworthy; people are not. He delights to take broken things and broken people and redeem them for His glory through His power alone. Isaiah 61:3 reflects God’s delight “to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.” **God can redeem what sin destroys.** What a God!



Joseph and His Brothers – Genesis 37

Jacob's Favoritism – 37:1-4

Jacob and his 12 sons now lived in Canaan. **This chapter introduces Joseph, Jacob's 11th son, as the central character for the remainder of Genesis.** We jump into a picture of daily life in Jacob's household. Seventeen-year-old Joseph was tending flocks with his brothers when he brought a negative report about them to his father. Was Joseph standing for what was right or was he tattling on his brothers in his immaturity? No details are included, but this report stirred their simmering jealousy and anger created by Jacob's undeniable favoritism of Joseph.

The favoritism and rivalry in Jacob's family represented a deeply entrenched family pattern of sin.¹ Jacob's mother, Rebekah, loved him best while his father, Isaac, favored Esau. Jacob favored Rachel over Leah. Joseph was the oldest son of Jacob's favored wife, Rachel, who had died giving birth to Benjamin. We might wonder how Jacob could favor one son over the others, but family patterns and sinful habits are difficult to change.

Jacob gave Joseph an ornate robe that was probably not suited for manual labor and that suggested his preeminence over his brothers. By

the time Joseph was 17, Jacob may have named him heir. Jacob's three eldest sons had been disqualified – Simeon and Levi by their cruelty at Shechem and Reuben by incest with Jacob's concubine.² Jacob's love for Joseph made them hate him, according to verse 4. **The brothers' envy and disdain for Joseph festered until it boiled over into unimaginable cruelty toward Joseph and their father.**

Joseph's Dreams – 37:5-11

Joseph had two prophetic dreams. One involved sheaves of wheat and the other featured stars. He understood both dreams to depict his brothers bowing before him. He shared the dreams and their meaning with his brothers, which only increased their jealousy and hatred toward him. Jacob rebuked Joseph for thinking others would bow before him. However, Jacob "kept the matter in mind." Jacob previously had experienced God's message to him in a dream.³ Was Joseph unwise to repeat the dreams to his family? Did he recognize God had ordained an important destiny for him? **Whatever Joseph thought of his strange dreams, we can know they were God's revelation, as they were fulfilled later in his life.**





The Brothers' Schemes – 37:12-35

Joseph's obedience – 37:12-17

Joseph's brothers grazed their sheep near Shechem. Only a few years before, Simeon and Levi had brutally murdered the rulers and men of Shechem, kidnapped their women and children and plundered their property.⁴ Jacob (here called "Israel") became uneasy and sent Joseph to check on their welfare.

Joseph obeyed immediately and walked 50 miles (80 km) from his home in Hebron to Shechem, but he did not find his brothers. Joseph did not consider his duty fulfilled simply because he checked at Shechem. A man there told him his brothers might be at Dothan, so Joseph trudged on another 13 miles (20 km) to fulfill his father's wishes. In this, Joseph demonstrated initiative as well as loyalty to his father and brothers.

The brothers plot murder – 37:18-24

Joseph's brothers saw him in the distance, perhaps recognizing him by his colorful coat. **Just the sight of Joseph so ignited their jealous anger that they plotted to kill him.** "Here comes that dreamer! Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams." The callousness of their hearts and the ruthlessness of their plan against their own brother are shocking. Only Leah's son Reuben, the eldest, spoke up to defend Joseph. He persuaded them not to kill Joseph but to leave him to die in a pit. Reuben secretly planned to return and rescue Joseph, though he lacked the courage to stop his brothers.

Joseph walked up to his brothers unaware of their murderous plot. **They seized him, stripped off the hated coat and threw him into a cistern to die.** The depth of their cruelty and Joseph's shock and anguish are hard to imagine. Their selfish desire for retribution clouded sound judgment.

God inspired Moses to record this event without mentioning Joseph's response. **We know the**

brothers tried without success to suppress their memories of the mournful cries of their 17-year-old brother. Though ignored, the emotional trauma of this scene was not forgotten. Later, the brothers admitted, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us."⁵ Like Joseph's brothers, people often cope with pain by suppressing traumatic memories. Buried pain can exact a costly toll and is sometimes only faced when forced to the surface by crisis.

The brothers sell Joseph into slavery – 37:25-28

After leaving Joseph deep in a cistern, the brothers hard-heartedly sat down nearby to eat their meal. As they ate, Ishmaelite traders passed on their way. These men traveled from northern Gilead with merchandise to sell in Egypt. **Judah, another of Leah's sons, spoke up: "What will we gain if we kill our brother ... let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him ..."** Like Joseph's brothers, fallen humans often misuse power and influence, not comprehending the responsibility that comes with their position. This would not be the last time Judah sinfully served his own interests at another's expense.

They took Joseph out of the pit and sold him at a bargain price for 20 pieces of silver. At the time, the normal price for a slave was 30 pieces.⁶ The brothers assumed they were rid of their irritating younger brother who foolishly thought he would rule over them!

Reuben's regret – 37:29-30

Evidently, Reuben was not present when his brothers sold Joseph to the traders. **Reuben returned to rescue Joseph from the pit, but he was gone.** As the eldest son, he was responsible for Joseph's life. He came to realize the harm his compromise and weakness caused. Years later, he accused his brothers, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen!"⁷





The brothers' lie and Jacob's sorrow – 37:31-35

Their evil continued to multiply as the brothers resorted to an unfathomable lie to cover their betrayal. **With bitter cruelty, they dipped Joseph's prized robe in the blood of a slaughtered goat and took it to their father.** They claimed to have found it and asked him to identify it. They listened as Jacob surmised that a ferocious animal had torn Joseph to pieces. They watched him tear his clothes and mourn inconsolably. Were they taking revenge on their father who failed to love their mothers and loved Joseph more than them? Long ago, Jacob deceived his own father, Isaac, with a robe and a slaughtered goat. Now his sons deceived him in a similar way.

Reading about the deep suffering imposed by family members on family members is difficult. Jacob's sons, from whom would come the 12 tribes of Israel, acted like hardened criminals. **The truth not yet revealed in this horrific**

account is that God would work through this unimaginable suffering to do unbelievable good. God would eventually deliver and vindicate Joseph. Some deliverance and vindication come after a long time, sometimes after a very long time. Joseph later said, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."⁸ God is never hindered by the worst mankind offers; He will allow the hard thing to accomplish the better thing. The invisible God works through visible circumstances.

God's Sovereignty – 37:36

Scripture is silent about Joseph's journey to Egypt. **We are only told the Midianites sold Joseph to Potiphar, the captain of the guard.** This story sets up God's predetermined plan, yet to unfold. The Israelites ultimately would spend 400 years in slavery in Egypt, as God prophesied. God would deliver them through Moses and a magnificent display of His power.⁹





Judah and Tamar – Genesis 38

The unsavory account in Genesis 38 seems at first an odd interruption to Joseph's story. **However, the story of Judah and Tamar fits here chronologically and also paints the picture of the ongoing life of Jacob's sons.** God would use Joseph to preserve Israel. God also chose Judah, despite his flaws, as the one through whom He would eventually deliver the Messiah and bless the world.¹⁰ God's plan rests on His grace, not the worthiness of the people He chooses and uses. Judah's flagrant sinfulness stands in stark contrast to the upright character later demonstrated by Joseph.¹¹ God also provided grace and justice to Tamar, a desperate widow.¹²

Judah's Wicked Sons – 38:1-10

After Judah led his brothers to sell Joseph and deceive their father, he left home to live among the Canaanites. He became friends with Hirah, an Adullamite, and married a Canaanite woman, identified only as the daughter of Shua. Their three sons, Er, Onan and Shelah, grew up among the Canaanites. **Judah's choices separated himself and his family from identity and community with God's people.**

His choices also corrupted his sons spiritually and morally. Judah chose Tamar, a Canaanite, as a wife for his firstborn son, Er. **Intermarriage with the Canaanites threatened the loss of the unique identity of God's people and compromised their unique relationship with the one, true God.** Judah moved his family away from God's people but could not remove himself from the presence and purposes of Almighty God.

"But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the LORD's sight; so the LORD put him to death." This son was so wicked that God brought immediate judgment on his sin. The inheritance laws of that day decreed that if the eldest son died without children, the next son's duty was to

ensure an heir on behalf of his brother. Therefore, Judah ordered Onan, his second-born son, to marry Tamar, which he did. However, he used her sexually for his own pleasure but refused to impregnate her to preserve his dead brother's line in obedience to the law. Onan left Tamar childless, basically destitute and without hope in a culture that granted women security and social standing through their children.

God judged Onan — "What he did was wicked in the LORD's sight; so the LORD put him to death also." In greed, Onan sought to keep his dead brother's share of the inheritance. God judged his actions as evil. The righteous Judge, the Giver of life and every good thing, also delivered swift judgment on Onan.





Tamar's Widowhood – 38:11-12

Judah overlooked the wickedness of his sons and blamed Tamar, now widowed twice, for their deaths. Rather than provide for her, Judah sent Tamar back to her father. This meant she would remain a widow and be vulnerable to the scorn of her people. **Judah kept her bound by a promise that she would marry his youngest son, Shelah, when he was older.** In actuality, Judah feared his third son would die if he married Tamar.

Initially, Tamar trusted Judah's promise that Shelah would marry her when he came of age. **However, “after a long time,” Tamar realized Judah would not honor her, the law or his pledge.** Judah ignored his responsibility and excused Shelah from his noble duty to marry Tamar (Genesis 38:14). Tamar seemed to hold Judah responsible for her welfare. When she realized Judah was not going to keep his promise, Tamar took matters into her own hands.

Tamar's Strategy – 38:13-23

In a desperate act of self-preservation, Tamar used a sinful strategy to seek justice for herself. **Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute to trick Judah into sleeping with her.** She sought to conceive the child that would honor her dead husband's name and inherit his rightful estate. Judah did not recognize her, sought her services and pledged future payment by giving her his seal, cord and staff. These three items clearly identified Judah, representing his heritage, identity and authority. In exchange for sex, he promised to send her a young goat as payment. After their encounter, Tamar returned to her widow's garments and chaste life as a widow in her father's home. She had, however, conceived a child by Judah.

Judah later sent his friend Hirah with the goat, but the “prostitute” was gone. Judah recognized his risk of public shame, knowing the woman had three items that would clearly identify him. He said, “Let her keep what she has, or we will become a laughingstock. After all, I did send her this young goat, but you didn't find her.”

Judah's Repentance and Tamar's Vindication – 38:24-30

Three months later, Judah was told Tamar was pregnant through prostitution. Judah seemed oblivious to his own hypocrisy and passed his harsh sentence on Tamar, saying, “have her burned to death.” As she was being brought to die, Tamar sent a message to Judah. The words she spoke, “See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are,” sound very much like the words Judah and his brothers spoke to Jacob when they asked him to identify Joseph's blood-stained coat. Judah was clearly identified as the child's father. Like David when confronted by Nathan about his adulterous sin,¹³ Judah was convicted and admitted he was guilty of the sin for which he severely judged Tamar. Judah confessed, “She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah.”

Tamar bore twin boys, Perez and Zerah. We cannot definitively know what God did in Tamar's heart. Were her actions designed to seek justice and hold Judah responsible for her welfare or were they simply for survival purposes? We do know God carried forward the line of the Messiah through Perez, the son of Judah and Tamar. **That God would allow such compromising circumstances and such a deeply flawed family to carry the line of His Son speaks to His grace alone.** Matthew's genealogy of Jesus records the names of five women, one of whom is Tamar.

Although Judah made many sinful choices, God had the last word. He is a promise-keeping God. The final chapters of Genesis declare His faithfulness to Jacob, Judah and Joseph. God's plans and purposes rest on His righteousness, not human worthiness, and they cannot be overturned. **God can redeem what sin destroys.**





The Doctrine of Redemption

The revenge, betrayal, murder, sexual sin and family dysfunction captured in the story of Jacob and his sons can be shocking to read. Perhaps the greater shock comes when we realize God ultimately brought something good through this mess of a story about seriously broken people. This is the family through which He chose to bring His truth and His Messiah to the world. God delivered humanity's Redeemer through the descendants of this less-than-stellar family. Their tainted past did not destroy their part in God's glorious future. How can that be? Sinful people can be delivered from slavery to sin because of who God is and what He can do. **God can redeem the damage caused by the curse of sin.**

The Bible uses the term “redemption” to capture an important spiritual truth. The word is borrowed from commerce, meaning to buy something or someone back. This is exactly what God does for those who believe in His Son for salvation. With the precious blood of His own Son, God purchases sinners from the slave market of sin.¹⁴ The overcoming power of God means no one is beyond redemption when they turn to Christ. **The truth about redemption makes salvation possible, but it also gives hope when circumstances in life appear hopeless.** God can accomplish His eternal purposes through the most desperate situations.¹⁵ He can redeem the wreckage of sinful choices to humble and help us and to bring good. He can overturn what the enemy means for evil and use it for our good.

If redemption was not possible, your story and those of people like Jacob, Judah, his brothers and Tamar would end without hope. Joseph's betrayal and slavery would be only pointless and painful. If Jesus could not rescue us, we would be stuck in slavery to sin. Everything broken and battered by sin would stay that way. But that is not the case. **When we believe that no sinner is beyond God's grace and no circumstances are beyond God's redemption, we can have hope.** God redeems, restores, reconciles, rebuilds and reclaims.¹⁶ Have you received God's gracious offer of redemption, Christ's righteousness, in exchange for your sin? What impossible relationship or situation are you asking God to redeem, to His glory alone? God can be trusted, even if we have to wait a long time, perhaps even a very long time, to see the glory in the story. Will you trust God, who alone can redeem what sin destroys?





Take to Heart

Hold Fast

When Joseph's brothers rejected him and sold him into slavery, they had no idea what would become of their despised younger brother. Joseph suffered the unintended consequences of his family's pattern of favoritism. His dreams indicated great things for him, but instead he experienced rejection and tragedy. And his story will include even more pain as we study further. But God's plan for Joseph triumphs over the painful details in this passage. The circumstances that caused him suffering also positioned him to see God's ultimate purpose fulfilled. God's intimate and intentional work in the details of Joseph's life cannot be missed. **God's great power is at work in every circumstance to accomplish His good purposes not only for Joseph, but also for the world.**

The story of Judah and Tamar demonstrates mankind's deep need to be delivered from sin. Those in the family line of the coming Savior needed a Savior just as much as all other people need Him. Judah sought a prostitute, and in doing so, committed sexual immorality with Tamar, his desperate daughter-in-law. In many ways, the ugly details of this account only highlight the beauty of God's love. God honored Judah's tribe, and Tamar was listed in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. Their story vividly illustrates the grace of God, who gives undeserved blessings to those He redeems.

Apply It

Human suffering raises hard questions. It is one thing to know that wicked people suffer the fruit of their evil or that suffering is a natural part of life in a fallen world. Harder questions emerge when we look at someone like Joseph. Though not perfect, Joseph's integrity makes him stand tall among biblical characters. He





was brutally mistreated and abandoned by those who should have protected him. While some of those wrongs were made right later in his life, God's apparent silence can be hard to process. Do you ever wonder at God's seeming silence or inaction while you or others suffer? What feels like God's silence must not be interpreted as a lack of action or concern. God is invisible, but also real and ever-present. Many times, He works silently but powerfully. His plans often do not unfold on our timetable. Real-life circumstances might lead you to believe God, His cause and His people are losing, not winning. Not so. God always accomplishes everything He intends. **God will allow the hard things that are necessary to accomplish greater things.** The question is never God's faithfulness or ultimate victory, but your ability to trust Him. Can you believe God knows things you do not? Can you trust Him, even when He is silent?

All human "power" is delegated by God.¹⁷ Today's news often reveals the abuse of power in governments, churches and families. Are you acting responsibly with the authority God has delegated to you? Joseph's brothers were older, stronger and outnumbered him greatly. But their sinful attempt to deflate his elevated status led to tragic mistreatment of Joseph. When people feel insignificant, they may try to abuse power to elevate themselves and feel in control. Human pride makes people long to dominate others. Have you ever "powered up" when someone made

you feel small? Have you ever put someone down to feel better about yourself? Finding identity in anything but Christ yields only insecurity and the need to constantly refuel your sense of significance. **Only those who understand God's ultimate authority and who they are in Christ can be at peace in a world that battles for superiority.** How is God leading you to trust Him and draw your sense of worth from Him alone?

Imagine the devastation of a natural disaster such as an earthquake, cyclone, flood or fire. The ruins of what was and what could have been lie in the wake of the disaster. In a similar way, sin leaves carnage in our lives and our world. Broken lives, shattered dreams and unmet expectations are a regular part of human life. However, God cannot be defeated by sin. Instead, He sent His Son into this broken world to win back what sin had destroyed. Failure is not final. **Sin does not get the last word.** While the pain inflicted by sin cannot be avoided, its destruction need not be permanent. When you surrender the wreckage in your life to God, He can redeem the pain for His good purposes. The sin-tainted stories of Jacob, Joseph, Judah and Tamar did not end in disaster because God is a gracious and powerful God. Even while you live surrounded by ruins and wreckage, God can build something new, fresh and beautiful. Can you trust God to reclaim what Satan has destroyed in you and your life?

Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

- 1: **Multigenerational impact of sin:** Numbers 14:18
- 2: **Disqualified heirs:** Genesis 34:13-29; 35:22
- 3: **Jacob's dreams:** Genesis 28:12-15; 31:11-13
- 4: **Evil inflicted upon Shechem:** Genesis 34:13-29
- 5: **Brothers remember:** Genesis 42:21
- 6: **Slave price:** Exodus 21:32
- 7: **Reuben's regret:** Genesis 42:22

- 8: **Harm for good:** Genesis 50:20
- 9: **God calls Moses:** Exodus 3:5-10
- 10: **Judah's tribe:** Genesis 49:8-12
- 11: **Joseph's character:** Genesis 39:7-20
- 12: **God defends widows:** Psalm 68:5; James 1:27
- 13: **Nathan confronts David:** 2 Samuel 12:5-9, 13

- 14: **Redemption and blood of Jesus:** Hosea 3:1-2; Romans 6:22-23; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19
- 15: **God's purposes:** Romans 8:28
- 16: **God redeems:** Joel 2:25-27
- 17: **God is the source of all power:** Psalm 62:11; Daniel 2:19-21; John 19:11; Romans 13:1

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WEEK TWO

JOSEPH: SUFFERING IN SLAVERY AND PRISON

GENESIS 39-40



Scripture Memory Verse

When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant.

Genesis 39:3-4a



Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. (How has He provided, answered, comforted, reconciled, guided, etc.?)
2. What truths from the passage, lecture, notes or discussion were new or specifically helpful to you?

Day 2 – Genesis 39:1-18

The Lord was with Joseph as he served faithfully in Potiphar's household.

3. Examine Joseph's rise from being purchased as a slave to working as Potiphar's overseer (39:1-6).
 - a. What challenges did Joseph face, and what do you learn about him?
 - b. How do you see God's work, and what do you learn about Him?
4.
 - a. What tactics did Potiphar's wife use to tempt Joseph (39:7-18)?
 - b. How could Joseph's example help you resist temptation or face pressure?
5. Is there a situation in which you need to take a stand for righteousness that pleases God? What might your courage cost you?





6. What truths about God help you when you are suffering or under pressure?

Day 3 – Genesis 39:19-23

Joseph was unfairly imprisoned.

7. How did God show grace to Joseph through his unjust imprisonment?
8. What truth emerges from Genesis 39:2, 3, 5, 21 and 23? Why is this important?
9. a. What does the Bible teach about hardship and suffering? (See Genesis 50:20; Psalm 119:50; John 16:33; Romans 8:28-29; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Peter 6-7 and Revelation 21:4.)
- b. What truth from these verses particularly encourages you this week?
10. What could Joseph have learned in his trials as a servant and prisoner in Egypt that prepared him for the future? (See Genesis 41:39-40.)

Day 4 – Genesis 40:1-8

The king's cupbearer and baker had confusing dreams in prison.

11. Describe the scene in these verses and what you notice about Joseph.





12. Who needs your intentional care, and what specific step could you take this week to provide it?

Day 5 – Genesis 40:9-23

With God's help, Joseph interpreted the cupbearer's and baker's dreams.

13. What stands out to you about the dreams and Joseph's interpretation of them?

14. What did Joseph ask the cupbearer to do for him?

15. What happened to the cupbearer, baker and Joseph?

16. Recall all the people whose actions caused Joseph pain or extended his time of suffering in Genesis 37-40. What encouragement might Joseph have found while living through so many disappointments?

17. How do you find hope and courage through a long season of disappointment or suffering?

Day 6 – Genesis 39-40

18. What attribute of God resonated most from your study of this week's passage. How have you experienced that attribute in your life?





Genesis 39–40

Focus Verse

“When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant.” – Genesis 39:3-4a

- Joseph in Potiphar’s House – 39:1-18
- Joseph in Prison – 39:19-40:23

Engage

Joseph’s life presents a complex mix of God’s blessing and human disappointment. While we can look back on his story and see God’s overruling plan, Joseph walked a rough path. He was simultaneously favored by God and mistreated and forgotten by people. He rose to positions of influence and responsibility while a slave and in prison. And just when a ray of hope began to shine into the dark, crushing disappointment thundered in. If a graph were drawn of Joseph’s experiences in Genesis 39-40, the valleys outnumber the peaks. Yet despite a series of injustices and trials, Joseph remained faithful to God. He thrived, even in prison, because “the LORD was with him.”

What if, by God’s design, winning feels like losing? How does a child of God reconcile the good, compassionate character and promises of God with long-term suffering in daily life? Have you experienced a mysterious blend of God’s blessings and unanticipated hardship? How do you process suffering and pain? In eternity all things will become clear, even though not everything makes sense today. **God is always with us and at work for good in our suffering.** He is worthy of our trust. By faith, we can experience God’s power to face suffering with purpose, hope and joy.



Joseph in Potiphar's House – Genesis 39:1-18

Genesis 39-40 records a lengthy series of trials Joseph endured in Egypt. Though his brothers' betrayal sent him there, Joseph was in Egypt by God's design. God would eventually place him in a position of power in Pharaoh's palace for the preservation of His people. However, God's long-term plans were not evident to Joseph in the many years of his suffering. Long-term victory can look and feel like short-term defeat. A painful cycle repeated through Joseph's trials: Joseph was favored, then he was rejected, then he rose to favor from a humble position as slave and prisoner, only to be disappointed again. He went from being Jacob's favored son to the pit to Potiphar's house as slave to prison and finally to administrator over all of Egypt. Through no fault of his own, he landed in prison, excelling there only to be forgotten again on his long road to the palace. Joseph's suffering with his brothers began when he was 17, and he did not experience deliverance until he was 30.¹ **Joseph's path was painful, but God's plan was purposeful.**

Positioned by God in Potiphar's House – 39:1-6a

Sent to Potiphar's house – 39:1

Once in Egypt, Joseph was purchased by Potiphar, a high-ranking official in Pharaoh's court. Joseph did not just land in Potiphar's house through the random sale of a foreign slave to a governmental official. **God deliberately placed Joseph at the right place at the right time.** God designed many opportunities for him to grow in character and skill while serving Potiphar.

Favored in Potiphar's house – 39:2-6a

Verse 2 opens with a phrase that echoes throughout Joseph's story, "the LORD was with Joseph." This phrase is stated four times in this

chapter (verses 2, 3, 21, 23). God was present and active with Joseph throughout his lengthy trials. First, Potiphar noticed God's favor on Joseph in that "the LORD gave him success in everything he did." **Joseph gained Potiphar's favor and rose to a position of full responsibility over Potiphar's household.**

Potiphar held an important position. His name meant "the one whom Ra has given." (Ra is the Egyptian sun god) His title, "captain of the guard" (literal) or "chief of the executioners," meant he served as the king's bodyguard. **Joseph's training under Potiphar prepared him for his future role as prime minister.** He learned Egyptian customs and gained experience in successful business administration. He learned important lessons in these humiliating circumstances. These lessons made Joseph a stronger leader later in his life.

God was present with Joseph even in his most desperate moments. Did Joseph ever feel sorry for himself? Did he rise every morning with unwavering faith and unrelenting determination? Surely his path, though challenging and fruitful, was indeed human. Though not recorded, he must have experienced times of deep discouragement and disappointment. Imagine the cultural loneliness he felt as a 17-year-old boy in a foreign land, stripped of privilege and banished from everything he loved and that was familiar. But through it all, Joseph learned to trust God because he needed to trust God. God did not immediately change his difficult circumstances but showed him favor while living in those circumstances. God became real to Joseph. God blessed Joseph's work in ways that caught the notice of his masters. No doubt Joseph applied himself, worked hard and looked for ways to engage his bright mind while in slavery. But Joseph's strength exceeded mere human fortitude. **Joseph's success was God's doing.** The Almighty God who inhabits eternity was "with Joseph."





Tested by Potiphar's Wife – 39:6b-18

Relentless temptation and persistent resistance – 39:6b-12

As Joseph worked diligently and rose in visibility in Potiphar's house, he caught the eye of Potiphar's wife. She noticed "Joseph was well-built and handsome." She aggressively sought a sexual encounter with Joseph with a clear demand – "come to bed with me!" Her constant harassment revealed her attempt to exert power over this young man employed by her husband. She later referred to him as "that Hebrew slave." Perhaps she thought Joseph would feel obligated or opportunistic about complying.

Did her relentless pursuit of a sexual relationship with Joseph tempt him? The passage does not answer this question directly. Trials take many forms. **Already tested by harsh circumstances, Joseph now faced a relentless invitation to sin.** Joseph's clear response revealed his integrity. He bluntly refused her sinful demand. He refused to dishonor Potiphar, who trusted him. Ultimately, Joseph appealed to a higher authority than his earthly master. "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" What wisdom Joseph exhibited in his response! Sin hurts people, but the greatest offense is against God. The most powerful deterrent to sin is love and honor for God.

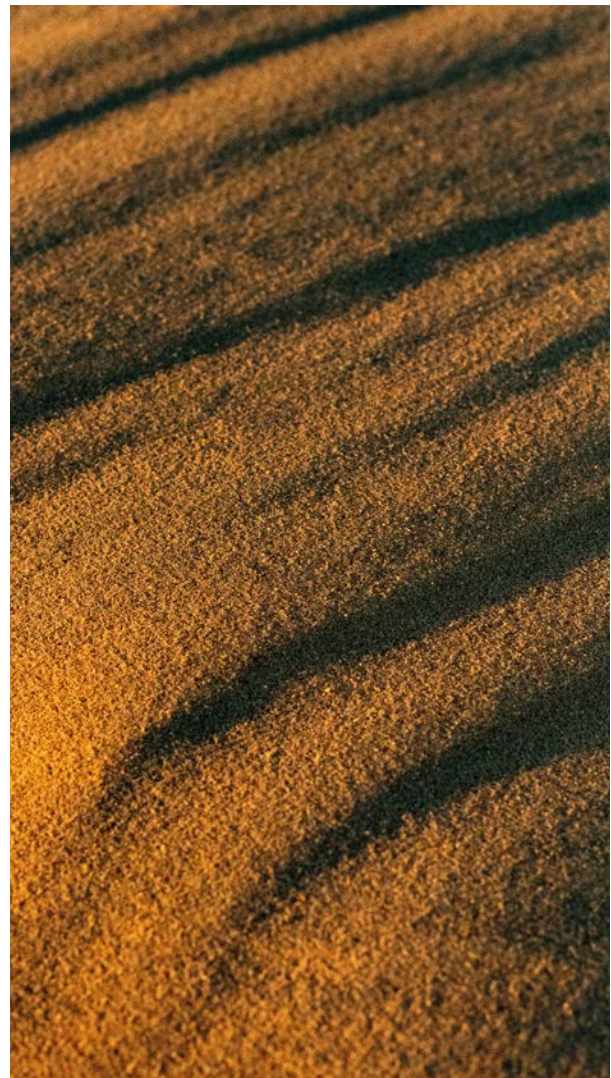
Joseph's persistent resistance did not deter Potiphar's wife. She relentlessly hounded him "day after day." Joseph continued to refuse her and even to avoid her presence. Again, Joseph's integrity shines through. Wisdom, not cowardice, leads discerning people to avoid volatile and tempting situations. In a world that likes to push the boundaries as far as possible, seeking safe distance from evil shows sound judgment. A healthy understanding of human weakness actually reveals strength.

Despite Joseph's evasive strategy, one day Mrs. Potiphar caught him in the house with no one

around. She continued to aggressively tempt him to have sex with her, and when he refused, she grabbed his cloak. **Joseph fled, leaving his cloak in her grasping hand.** Sometimes we can avoid temptation and sin. Other times, we must choose to actively run away.²

Unfair retaliation and unjust imprisonment – 39:13-18

Potiphar's wife's adulterous lust turned to hatred. In revenge, she determined to incriminate Joseph. **She called for the other household slaves and falsely accused Joseph of attacking her.** Would the household servants perhaps be jealous of





Joseph and corroborate her story? Egyptian law considered a slave who approached his master's wife in this way as being worthy of death. Potiphar's wife knew she risked Joseph's life and kept his cloak as evidence of her fake accusations.

She pled her false charges before her husband. She used racial prejudice as she blamed "that Hebrew slave you brought us." This practice of blaming others for personal sin began in Eden at the fall of humankind.³

The Doctrine of Suffering

Suffering and pain are a natural part of life. The human body experiences pain as a signal that something is not right. In a broader sense, human suffering reveals something not right with our world. And what is not right? **Sin shattered God's perfect world and complicated our lives with brokenness and pain** (Genesis 3; Revelation 21). By nature, suffering is difficult. As humans, we like to avoid the difficult. So how do you process a life and world so filled with suffering? Even when you accept the good purposes of God in what feels bad, what if no relief is in sight? What if there are never answers for your hard questions in this life?

Joseph suffered very deep pain for a very long time. He lived in dark places with little hope of the light of deliverance. Perhaps you are waiting for deliverance from suffering. Maybe you have become weary bearing burdens that feel too heavy to bear. God did not leave Joseph in his suffering without His tender daily provisions. While he waited for deliverance, Joseph carried on in God's strength. What helps you keep going when everything in you wants to quit?

Bad things in the world or in your life do not change the goodness of God. God will deliver His people from sin and suffering. Our timetable for deliverance is not synchronized with God's. The challenge is that believers must wait for full deliverance – the final defeat of sin, suffering and death. But while we wait, we gain the opportunity to trust God and find Him faithful. We should expect trouble in this life. We should expect bodies that age, people who fail us and constant hard work among the thorns. The suffering here makes us long for the deliverance there – when God brings his eternal plan to its glorious completion. When our burdens are more than we can bear, our blessed Savior provides what we cannot provide in our own strength. We learn to trust God because we need to trust God. God is worth trusting.

Suffering can make us feel abandoned or alone. However, believers are never alone. Your God will neither leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). To suffer long and not seek God's higher purposes can distort your understanding of God's permeating and proactive goodness. To focus only on the suffering leaves you to only endure pain and miss how God is "with you." To interpret your suffering by only what you understand is to miss the benefit of trusting God for the greater things He seeks to accomplish. **Suffering can be profitable, but we can fail to reap its benefits and waste the pain when we focus only on ourselves.**

God is with you in suffering and uses it to tenderize your heart and draw you to Himself. To understand that God loves you enough to allow suffering in your life, even the long and hard kind, brings perspective on the roughest days. God's ultimate purpose is not in the pain, but in what it produces. Romans 5:3-5 says: "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." **God's purposes for your life are never thwarted by suffering or loss.**





Joseph in Prison – Genesis 39:19-40:23

Sent to Prison – 39:19-20a

Potiphar was furious. However, Scripture does not state he directed his anger entirely against Joseph. Had this been the case, Joseph would have been executed. The punishment for adultery was extreme. A slave could expect no mercy. Why was Joseph spared? Possibly because Potiphar was skeptical about his wife's story.

Potiphar had no way to disprove his wife's statements. Potiphar could not simply take the word of a slave against that of his wife. His wife raised the stakes by making the matter public and involving the other household servants. She blamed Potiphar for bringing Joseph into their home. His high-profile position and her report forced him to act. **Potiphar immediately disgraced Joseph and sent him to jail.** At the same time, he lost perhaps the most efficient business manager he had ever owned.

God allowed another wave of suffering to come over Joseph. **Although Joseph had remained loyal to God and Potiphar, he was presumed guilty, chained and sent to prison without trial.** In that day and for such a crime, Joseph's sentence was relatively light, by God's grace. Potiphar's sentence placed Joseph under his watch. As captain of the guard, this prison was likely part of his responsibility.

Favored in Prison – 39:20b-23

Imagine Joseph's dismay as he walked away in chains from his position of responsibility into unjust imprisonment. However, Joseph did not go alone. The omnipresent God went to prison with Joseph. Again, "the LORD was with him." In keeping with His character, God "showed him kindness and granted him favor ..." **Joseph caught the eye of the prison warden, who also**





put Joseph in charge. God enabled Joseph's resiliency to cause him to rise to the top of dreadful situations. Again, this reversal had to bring hard questions and even discouragement. But Joseph did not remain incarcerated by grief while physically imprisoned. God enabled him to lift his head to see and seize opportunities, and He blessed him as he did. Soon, Joseph became responsible for everything in the prison, so much so that the warden did not have to watch over Joseph's work.

God granted Joseph "favor" and "success" in Potiphar's house and again in prison. We must not equate God's definition of success with physical prosperity and easy living. God promises "success"⁴ to the person who delights himself in God and meditates on His law, day and night. It is possible to thrive spiritually, even while struggling in every other way. **God caused Joseph to succeed in every task he undertook.** Undoubtedly, Joseph learned much from the king's prisoners about the king's household, which he would one day rule. Suffering entrusted to God's higher purpose is not wasted. God can be trusted. The presence of God graciously carries believers through even the longest and most painful suffering in life.

Forgotten in Prison – 40:1-23

Two men – 40:1-7

Chapter 40 opens with the haunting words "some time later." While we do not know the number of years Joseph spent in either Potiphar's house or in prison, we recognize this as an extended time, not a brief interlude. **God certainly did not leave Joseph in this humiliating place of service longer than necessary.** He used his difficulties to masterfully build his character and prepare him for the future. During suffering, the passing of time can feel like slow motion, but God is never late in delivering comfort or relief, though it may feel so. God provided Joseph meaningful work, even in prison.

Two important prisoners, the king's cupbearer and baker, were placed in Joseph's care. Both had offended their master in some way. Joseph's thoughtful kindness and administrative gifts are seen here. After these two men had been in Joseph's custody for "some time," Joseph must have known and related to them personally. He noticed the sad faces of these two expelled palace workers. Sensitivity to others requires freedom from self-absorption and active investment in others. His question communicated interest and respect – "Why do you look so sad today?" God allowed Joseph to "see" them.

Two dreams – 40:8-19

Both men had experienced confusing dreams on the same night. They recognized their dreams were significant but felt sad because no one could interpret them. Joseph, who himself had experienced confusing yet meaningful dreams, sought to help. Joseph humbly acknowledged that "interpretations belong to God." He knew that only the One true God could interpret a dream He sent. He asked them to tell him their dreams.

The cupbearer saw a vine with three branches that budded, blossomed and bore fruit so, when pressed into his wine cup, the fruit became wine the cupbearer gave to Pharaoh. As Joseph listened, he likely prayed for God to give him the interpretation, and He did. Finally, he said, "The three branches are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position." After Joseph gave this good news to the cupbearer, he asked one kindness for himself. **Joseph asked that the cupbearer remember him after he was reinstated.** He explained he had been forcibly carried out of his own country into slavery. And while in Egypt, he had been wrongfully thrown into a dungeon. Joseph's words reveal he desired justice for himself.

The baker listened, encouraged to share his own dream by the favorable interpretation of the cupbearer's dream. In his dream, he carried





three baskets on his head, each holding food for Pharaoh. Birds ate the food out of the baskets. Joseph declared the three baskets indicated three days. **At the end of three days, the baker would suffer a gruesome execution.** He would be decapitated, a common Egyptian form of execution. His body would be hung from a pole where birds of prey would eat the decaying flesh. Possibly, the baker was guilty of a more serious offense than the cupbearer.

One man forgotten – 40:20-23

Joseph's words were literally fulfilled three days later on Pharaoh's birthday. God again proved His faithfulness to Joseph, as what He had revealed came true. The baker was executed and the cupbearer was reinstated. After the cupbearer was taken away, Joseph waited for the prison doors to open and for God's promises to be fulfilled. Yet Genesis 40:23 closes the chapter with a sober drumbeat. **"The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him."** This waiting and disappointment continued for another long two years.

Joseph continued to work in the prison, waiting and forgotten. The Scriptures do not describe his internal struggles, his budding faith or his confidence that God would deliver him as he desired. What was he thinking and feeling? Were there hard days? Did he fully trust God immediately or gradually, with sufficient grace for each day? Joseph's life had to be hard and his mind full of unanswered questions. But through what he could not interpret, God had a plan.

God wove tender experiences of His favor, presence and provision throughout Joseph's story. He learned to trust God without visible evidence that his desires would become reality. His depth of character and faith, evident later, was born in slavery and prison, not the palace. He learned to be a faithful steward and sympathetic to hurting people. God used the small things and hard things to prepare Joseph for greater things. The omnipresent God was "with Joseph" in slavery and prison. And one day, God's silent work and the fruit born by waiting would emerge from the shadows, to His glory alone. **God is always with us and at work for our good in our suffering.**



Take to Heart

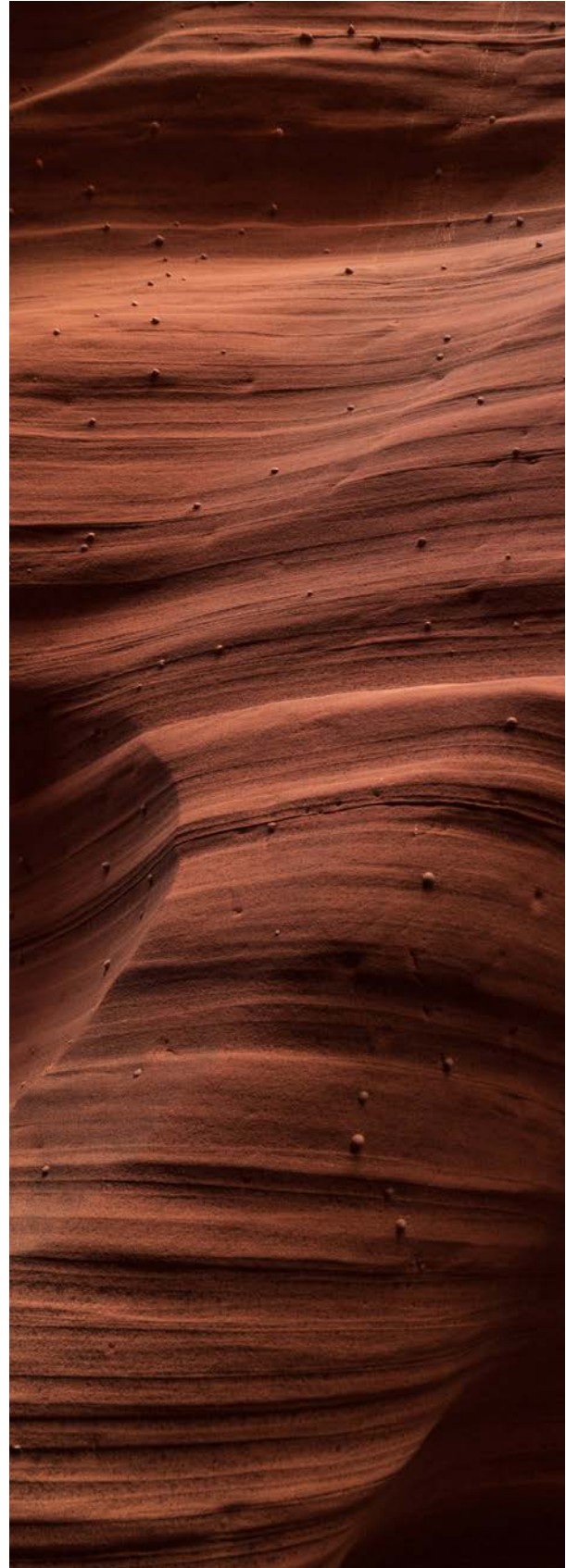
Hold Fast

The early chapters in Joseph's life tell a painful story. Brief moments of hope mingled with compounding disappointment and betrayal. His brothers, who should have protected him, did not. Those who should have honored his gifts, abilities and proven record of service did not. Joseph was punished for his virtue because of one woman's manipulation and lies. And the master who was very aware of Joseph's integrity did not stand by him. Even the cupbearer forgot him after experiencing great personal benefit from Joseph's compassionate care and God-given discernment. **The visible circumstances in Joseph's early life tell a sad story.** Thanks be to God that His work is not limited to visible circumstances.

The painful realities visible in Joseph's life serve only to highlight God's less visible, but certain plan. Very often, God appears to be losing in this world. Unjust treatment abounds. The ravages of sin continue. People suffer abuse, pain and violence regularly. But God is always at work, beyond what we can see and understand. **God is always doing more than meets the eye.**⁵ In next week's lesson, Joseph's day comes. The God who saw his pain in slavery and prison intervenes to bring deliverance and justice. And while not every story ends with a happy ending in this life, the ultimate victory of God remains certain. God wins. Satan and sin have been defeated. One day, God will right every wrong, judge sin and bring visible unstoppable victory for His people. While we wait in faith for that day, we worship the God who knows all and works in ways beyond human comprehension.

Apply It

Temporary disappointments do not define your ultimate destiny. For God's child, His unseen realities are truer than the pain you may





feel. Flawed people, fleeting pleasure and fading hopes should propel you toward God, the only One who can satisfy your deepest longings. Disappointment, pain and even lingering suffering are profitable when yielded to God, who knows and loves you best. Injustice in this world makes you long for His perfect justice. Pain in this world makes you long for eternity, where pain and tears will be abolished. When disappointments break you of spiritually debilitating self-will and pride, will you trust that God is doing something good? When people fail you, remember God cannot. How is your current suffering stripping you of every option but trusting God? How are you experiencing His daily measure of sustaining grace? How does a bigger and higher view of God give you help and hope?

As humans, we long for resolution. We enjoy movies and entertainment that solve all the suspense and tension in the allotted time. Some of us enjoy googling our questions to receive instant information. We like to see things resolved, and preferably fast. We do not like waiting. Waiting implies dependence on someone or something else to bring an answer or solution you lack and long for. You wait for the doctor because you need the expertise that a professional brings. You wait for needed rain because you are powerless to produce it yourself. You wait in a long queue because doing so is your only hope to board the bus or receive the needed service. Waiting for God to bring resolution to suffering is perhaps hardest of all. Joseph had to wait. What are you

waiting on God to resolve, or at least help you understand? His plans and purposes far exceed your limited vision and understanding. Can you trust God, even when the answers are few, the pain is deep and the solutions invisible? Psalm 27:14 says, “Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.” **God is worth waiting for.**

Even for believers, faith falters. In this life, our trust in God is neither complete nor perfect. Sometimes we face the day with bold, decisive faith. Other days, we struggle to believe what we know is true. Do you ever genuinely want to trust God but find a constant pull to focus on the obstacles? God is not shocked by our faltering faith. Joseph offers a stellar example, but the hard days of his challenging life required active surrender to God. **Faith is not denying the hardship, but trusting God in the midst of it.** How is God calling you to stronger faith? What do you do on that hard day when your faith falters and the visible challenges loom large? God Himself stokes the fire of our faith with His strength and power. He calls out faith when we struggle. God will teach you how to trust Him. That may require unplugging you from earthly sources of security so you can experience God as the unshakeable bedrock of faith. God lets it be hard here so we will discover He offers more than this fallen world can offer. How is God revealing Himself and growing your faith this week, even if that growth is hard?

Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God’s Word in this week’s lesson.

1: **Joseph’s age:** Genesis 37:2; 41:46

2: **Flee immorality:** 1 Corinthians 6:18

3: **Blaming others:** Genesis 3:12-13

4: **Success:** Genesis 39:3, 23; Joshua 1:7-8

5: **God at work:** John 5:17

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WEEK THREE

JOSEPH: WITH PHARAOH AND BROTHERS

GENESIS 41-42



Scripture Memory Verse

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."

Genesis 41:39-40



Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. (How has He provided, answered, comforted, reconciled, guided, etc.?)
2. What truths from the passage, lecture, notes or discussion changed your perspective on suffering?

Day 2 – Genesis 41:1-32

Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams.

3. What caused the cupbearer to remember Joseph?
4.
 - a. Joseph acknowledged God as the source of his interpretation. What does that reveal about Joseph?
 - b. When has God used other people and His Word to guide you to answers only He can provide?
5. What message did God send to Pharaoh through his dreams?
6. What lessons do you learn from Joseph's timely call to appear before Pharaoh as well as his God-given words to Pharaoh?



Day 3 – Genesis 41:33-57

Joseph rose to power as second-in-command to Pharaoh.

7. How did Joseph and Pharaoh respond to God's revelation of a coming crisis in Egypt's future?
8. God prepared Joseph for his rise to this important position. What do you learn from this?
9. How has God led you to take practical steps and make wise decisions when faced with a challenge?
10. How can you see God's goodness and wisdom at work in your current circumstances, whether wonderful or difficult?

Day 4 – Genesis 42:1-20

Joseph's brothers went to Egypt to buy grain.

11. a. How did God bring Joseph and his brothers together?

b. What are some reasons Joseph's brothers might not have recognized him?
12. How did Joseph respond to his brothers, and why might he have treated them so harshly?





13. a. God controls the past, present and future. How is this truth evident in this passage?

b. How does this bring comfort and encouragement to you?

Day 5 – Genesis 42:21-38

Joseph released all his brothers but Simeon to return to Canaan and retrieve Benjamin.

14. What changes do you see in the attitudes of Joseph's brothers?

15. How did Jacob respond to his sons' report?

16. What truths about God help you respond rightly in tense or emotional conditions?

Day 6 – Genesis 41–42

17. What truth about God do you find particularly encouraging or stabilizing this week?





Genesis 41–42

Focus Verse

“Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.’” – Genesis 41:39-40

- Joseph Rises to Prominence – Genesis 41
- Joseph Encounters His Brothers – Genesis 42

Engage

God is good. This simple, repeatable statement carries more infinite weight than we realize. What does it mean that God is good? What defines good, ultimately? **All God is and everything He does is always good.** God’s goodness is not a passive character trait but is actively at work in His people, His plan and His world. He orchestrates everything to most fully reveal His glory and fulfill His eternal plan. This is the truest definition of what is good.

God set up Joseph’s life to bring about His greater good. God was equally good during the hard years as on the day when He summoned His prepared servant from the prison to the palace. God is good in everything He does. This powerful truth can bring stabilizing perspective to a world where the news is often bad. Suffering and hardship do not feel good. **Because God is good, He powerfully works through suffering to reveal His glory.**



Joseph Rises to Prominence – Genesis 41

Pharaoh's Dreams – 41:1-40

One king, one night, two dreams – 41:1-7

After the chief cupbearer walked free, did Joseph look up with hope each time someone entered the dungeon? How long did it take for the reality of being forgotten to set in? For two years, God allowed Joseph's former prison mate to forget him. **God had established the exact time for Joseph to rise to power.** When all was in place for God's good plan, Pharaoh dreamed two almost identical dreams.

The first dream – cows (41:2-4, 17-21):

Pharaoh stood on the bank of the Nile River. The Nile was the source of life to the Egyptians. The Nile provided water for drinking, farming and transportation. In his dream, Pharaoh watched seven fat cows come out of the water to graze at the river's edge. While they were grazing, seven very thin and ugly cows came out of the water and

ate all the fat cows. The ugly cows remained just as thin and ugly after eating the fat cows.

The second dream – grain (41:5-7, 22-24):

Pharaoh saw seven full, good heads of grain, all on one stalk. Then seven withered, thin heads of grain devoured the healthy ones.

Pharaoh's advisors fail – 41:8

Egyptian culture at that time considered its rulers – or pharaohs – to be descended from the gods. Despite high expectations from the people, every pharaoh had his limitations, as all human rulers do. This pharaoh was also prone to superstition. The morning after his two dreams, Pharaoh sent for his court magicians and wise men to interpret the troubling dreams. These advisors were considered experts in the spiritual and supernatural realms as well as esteemed scholars. These men were considered to hold insights given by the gods, but none could explain Pharaoh's dreams or ease his mind.





The cupbearer remembers Joseph – 41:9-13

At the precise moment ordained by God, the chief cupbearer remembered Joseph, who likely thought he had been forgotten. The cupbearer cautiously recalled the time that he had displeased Pharaoh and been thrown in jail by saying, “Today I am reminded of my shortcomings.” He explained that while in jail, he and the baker both had confusing dreams on the same night. A young Hebrew prisoner interpreted their dreams so precisely that “... things turned out exactly as he interpreted them ...” The cupbearer had forgotten Joseph for two long years, but God had not. By God’s design, Joseph was in the right place at the right time. The cupbearer’s timely memory now thrust Joseph directly in front of Pharaoh, as God’s good plan unfolded.

Joseph before Pharaoh – 41:14-32

Pharaoh immediately sent for Joseph. What did Joseph think as he was pulled from the dungeon to shave and change clothes to appear before Pharaoh? He had survived 13 long years since being betrayed by his brothers. He had endured hopeful moments and disappointing setbacks. What was happening now?

Pharaoh explained his desire to have his dream interpreted and that he had heard Joseph could interpret dreams. **Joseph boldly declared, “I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.”** Joseph, obviously bright and gifted, would naturally have desired release from prison. Surely, he longed for a favorable outcome from this opportunity before Pharaoh. Yet he deliberately refused to take credit for what only God could do. Attempting to steal God’s glory is a serious matter.¹

As Pharaoh repeated his dreams with added details, God delivered a clear interpretation to Joseph. Without hesitation, Joseph spoke of God and His determined, unstoppable will. Joseph knew that the one true God was more powerful than the many false gods of Egypt. **In mercy, the**

Creator of the universe had revealed what He was about to do in the land of Egypt. God gave Pharaoh the same message in two dreams.

- The seven fat cows and the seven healthy heads of grain represented seven years of plentiful harvests.
- The seven thin cows and seven worthless heads of grain represented seven years of extreme famine.
- The seven years of famine would follow seven years of great prosperity.
- The years of famine would be so severe that people would forget their previous abundance.
- The repetition of the message emphasized that the events were certain and would happen soon.

Joseph’s story contains several significant pairs of dreams. He had two mysterious dreams as a young man that foretold his future. In prison, his accurate interpretation of two dreams set up his eventual audience before Pharaoh. Joseph now interpreted Pharaoh’s two dreams to deliver a critical message from God about the future. Did Pharaoh recognize the mercy God extended to him and his people? **The passage does not describe Pharaoh’s heart response to God, but we know he recognized Joseph’s message as supernatural and took it seriously.**

God gave a plan – 41:33-36

The Holy Spirit revealed more than the meaning of the dreams to Joseph. **God spontaneously gave Joseph a comprehensive plan to prepare the nation for this unusual emergency.** This moment dramatically reveals God’s good purposes and His preparation of Joseph. First, Joseph, the humble Hebrew slave, offered Pharaoh interpretations that eluded the wisest Egyptian counsel. Then he suggested a strategic plan to serve Pharaoh and the Egyptians, the people responsible for keeping him enslaved and imprisoned.



Joseph's plan addressed the coming crisis with incredible insight. Joseph counseled Pharaoh to appoint a discerning and wise chief administrator to lead through the crisis. Next, Pharaoh needed to appoint commissioners to oversee all the areas and cities of Egypt. The commissioners would collect and store one-fifth of the harvest through the seven good years. When the seven years of famine arrived, Egypt would have sufficient food to prevent starvation and the country's ruin.

God had prepared a man – 41:37-40

Until this moment, those around Joseph saw him as a mere Hebrew slave, though an extremely capable one. **Now, the idolatrous ruler of the most powerful kingdom on earth recognized that Joseph's wisdom came from God Almighty.** Pharaoh said, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you." Pharaoh set Joseph in charge of the palace and all of Egypt. Joseph's power would be second only to Pharaoh himself.

The psalmist would later speak of Joseph's redemption from dungeon to palace in fulfillment of his God-given prophetic dreams.

"He called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food; and he sent a man before them – Joseph, sold as a slave. They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true. The king sent and released him; the ruler of peoples set him free. He made him master of his household, ruler over all he possessed, to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom." – Psalm 105:16-22

Joseph's redemption from the dungeon was more than the amazing result of an unexpected audience before Pharaoh. **God and His plan catapulted Joseph into leadership over all of Egypt.** God used years of suffering to teach Joseph to depend on Him and experience His presence. Joseph's own trials created sensitivity to suffering and a desire



to alleviate the suffering of others. He learned to simply and boldly deliver God's message. Joseph spoke what God revealed – whether positive or negative, whether about the fate of an individual or the fate of a nation. He showed integrity as a slave, a prisoner and a ruler. God had greater plans in mind for Joseph than Joseph had in mind for himself. God developed a great leader in the dungeon, elevated him to the palace and through him, impacted his family, Egypt and eventually the world.

Joseph's Promotion – 41:41-57

Joseph's rule during the years of plenty – 41:41-52

Pharaoh promoted Joseph to the highest position in Egypt. Joseph became:

- governor in charge of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh (41:41)
- honored publicly by the people as Pharaoh himself was honored (41:42-43)
- master of all people of Egypt (41:44)
- “father to Pharaoh” (probably as adviser) (45:8)

Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name and wife to establish him in society. Some suggest Joseph's Egyptian name, Zaphenath-Paneah, may mean “the god speaks and this one lives.” Asenath was the daughter of an important Egyptian priest

from the highest ranks of society. She remained Joseph's only wife.

Joseph's leadership of his family revealed strong faith in God. Despite his Egyptian name, Joseph gave his sons Hebrew names that specifically acknowledged God's goodness to him. The first he named Manasseh, “... because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household.” He named his second son Ephraim, “fruitful,” because of the blessing God poured out on him and enabled him to give to others in “the land of my suffering.”

Joseph traveled throughout Egypt to assess the scope of his task firsthand. **As God foretold, seven years of abundant harvests began.** Joseph collected from the crops and carefully stored the food supplies in centralized granaries in cities. As one abundant harvest followed another, the Egyptians eventually lost count of the food reserves.

Joseph's rule during the years of famine – 41:53-57

Again, exactly as God foretold, a desperate famine began after the seventh year of plenty. The famine extended beyond Egypt into all the surrounding lands. Pharaoh, confident of Joseph's loyalty and ability, simply told all who asked for help, “Go to Joseph and do what he tells you.” When the need was acute, he opened the storehouses and sold grain, not only to Egyptians, but also to those who came from other countries.

Joseph, Moses and the Israelite People

Centuries after Joseph stood before this Pharaoh, Moses was born and raised in the Egyptian culture. Adopted by the daughter of a different Pharaoh, he grew up in Pharaoh's palace. Moses later delivered God's command and confirming signs to let His people go. He confronted the power of Pharaoh and the Egyptian gods. God's people later became known as the Israelites.

The Israelite families, freed from Egypt through the Exodus, were the first to read the written account of Joseph's story. They carried Joseph's bones with them out of Egypt. They had directly experienced the miraculous signs and power associated with their freedom from Egyptian slavery. God's redemptive power faithfully brought them to the border of the promised land. Joseph's story represents an important chapter in the history of God's people.





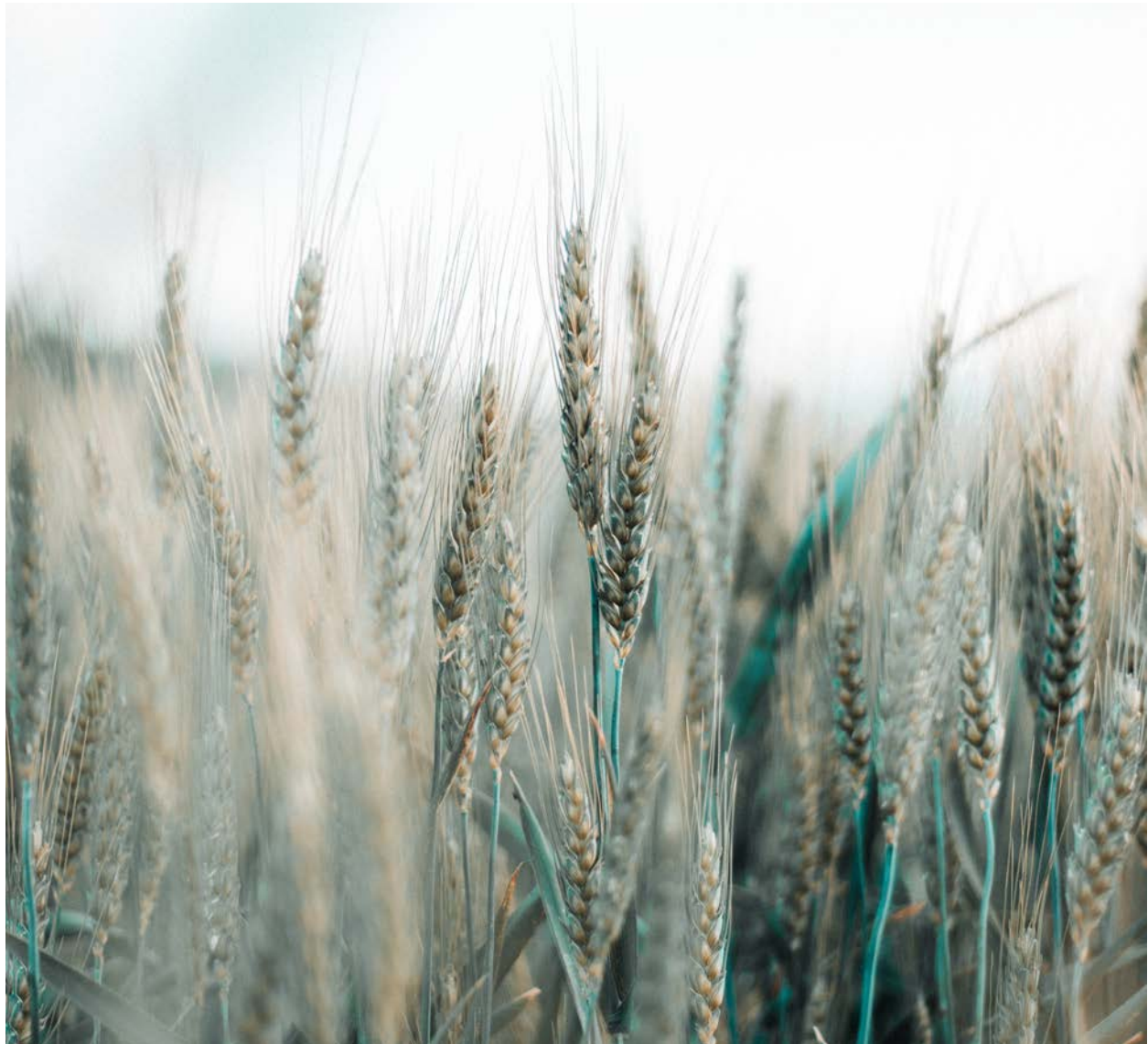
Joseph Encounters His Brothers – Genesis 42

Joseph's Brothers Travel to Egypt – 42:1-5

When the famine reached Canaan and the household of Jacob, he sent his sons to Egypt to purchase grain. However, Jacob kept his youngest son, Benjamin, at home “because he was afraid that harm might come to him.” The painful loss of Joseph impacted Jacob greatly.

Brothers Bow Before Joseph – 42:6-13

The brothers' trip to Egypt began a sequence of three encounters with Joseph. Those meetings and the family's reunion in Egypt are studied in this and the next two lessons. God used these interactions to bring reconciliation and carry forth His plan for His people. The brothers did not expect to meet Joseph, and he did not immediately reveal himself to them.





Upon arrival in Egypt, the brothers appeared before Joseph himself, bowing before him with their faces on the ground. Joseph instantly recognized his brothers, but they saw only a frightening, stern Egyptian nobleman. Joseph spoke harshly to them, always through an Egyptian interpreter (Genesis 42:23). He asked where they were from. Genesis 42:8 tells us that at this moment Joseph remembered his dreams about them. Joseph's dreams had pictured his family bowing before him.² This is the first indication that Joseph remembered his dreams or connected them with his current situation.

Joseph accused his brothers of being spies. We will study Joseph's continued testing of his brothers through several encounters before he reveals his own identity. Did he seek revenge? Was he seeking information about his family? **Joseph's harsh treatment of his brothers is not explained, but he appears purposeful in putting them in situations that expose their hearts.** By seeing God work through his many trials, Joseph had learned to trust God's sovereign control over negative circumstances. He could trust that God was working for the good of His people.

The brothers protested Joseph's claim that they were spying on Egypt's defenses. They assured Joseph they represented the 12 sons of one man and came only to purchase food. They spoke a striking detail – “The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more.” Imagine Joseph's thoughts, hearing them speak of his “death” and his younger brother, Benjamin.

God had given Joseph a wise plan to preserve life during the famine. **Now, God used Joseph as part of His greater plan to restore relationships and strengthen the spiritual purpose of his family.** The brothers needed to acknowledge their sin and seek forgiveness. Just as his brothers had refused to listen to his pleas, now Joseph refused to listen to their story.

The Test of Harsh Treatment – 42:14-23

No one questioned Joseph's authority to send his brothers to prison without a trial. **On the third day, Joseph gave the conditions through which they could be freed.** Joseph expressed his own fear of God and offered a test of his brothers' integrity. “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.” This plan provided food for his family while testing their treatment of Benjamin and their integrity.

God awakened the brothers' consciences through three days in prison and fear for their own lives. Thoughts of Joseph and their own guilt filled their minds. They spoke to one another freely, unaware that Joseph understood their Hebrew language. They acknowledged their sin as they said, “‘Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us.’ Reuben replied, ‘Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.’”

Joseph's Response – 42:24-28

His brothers sensed only God's righteous judgment, but Joseph recognized God's grace. He turned away to hide his tears. However, his brothers needed more than a sense of guilt. Joseph took Simeon and had him bound before their eyes. The firstborn, Reuben, had shown some mercy,³ but Simeon, the second oldest, had a history of excessive cruelty.⁴

Joseph gave orders to fill each brother's sack with both grain and the silver that had been collected as payment. When the brothers



stopped for the night and discovered the silver, they were filled with fear. They exclaimed, “What is this that God has done to us?”

Jacob’s Response – 42:29-38

As Jacob heard his sons’ story, his mistrust spilled out. “You have deprived me of my children!” Even though Simeon was hostage in prison, Jacob refused to let them return with Benjamin.

Reuben made a foolish offer to allow Jacob to kill Reuben’s own sons if he did not keep Benjamin safe. The brothers’ sins had caused them all deep grief, including Joseph. God used Joseph’s suffering, famine and even the brokenness in this family to accomplish His plan. **Because God is good, He powerfully works through suffering to reveal His glory.**

The Doctrine of the Fulfillment of Prophecy

God revealed truth about the future through Joseph’s personal dreams and those he interpreted for others. **Only God has the knowledge to declare the future and the power to make it happen.** God is not bound by time as we are. Humans struggle to interpret the past and present and are powerless to know the future. Even with the advances of modern science and technology, professionals struggle to forecast the weather and predict economic trends. We might plan our day or week or life goals but must remain flexible for events we do not anticipate. God knows perfectly what will happen and when. God can reveal the future because He is omniscient – He knows everything. The sovereign God governs history. This truth provides comfort as we live in a world that seems out of control.

The Bible contains hundreds of prophecies, some fulfilled in history and many awaiting fulfillment. **The reliability of the promises of Scripture rests on the nature and person of God.** God never lies. Everything He desires and declares comes to pass, if not immediately, then ultimately. He is good and keeps His Word. God is omnipotent – no one and nothing can overpower Him.

The reality of fulfilled prophecy in God’s Word is about much more than forecasting future events. Believers are not secured by understanding the exact order of events around the return of Christ or the end of the world. Rather, our hope is secured by knowing that our God and His Word remain utterly trustworthy. **What God has declared in the Bible remains absolutely true, even if that truth is not yet in full bloom.** There is a coming day when God will right all wrongs, judge evil and every knee will bow before His perfect Son. But during a difficult Wednesday or sleepless night, you can know that God has promised to never leave you or forsake you. God is omnipresent – always with you. God’s promises remain unchanged by the wind of circumstances, a flood of emotions or the evil of others. The God who keeps His promises can be trusted today and for eternity.

When you fail to grasp God’s knowledge and control of the future, you live tossed by the waves of cultural thinking and the seeming randomness in this world. Without God and His Word as the anchor for yesterday, today and tomorrow, you are left to interpret life and anticipate the future with only your own limited insight. That does not feel very secure.

Because God is God, the future is secure. And whether you are pondering the path of human history or simply your own week, the person and promises of God provide the bedrock for your faith. God Himself provides hope when all appears hopeless. The goodness of God permeates what appears to be bad. Will you build your life on the God who controls the future?



Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God is good. His perfect plan and timing were revealed through both Joseph's years of suffering and the day of his release. He experienced both contentment and God's presence in less than optimal circumstances in Potiphar's house and in prison. Does it ever seem as if God has forgotten you? Have you desperately prayed but not seen His answer? **God waits until just the right time to accomplish far more than we could ask or imagine.**⁵ Good Friday seemed like a disaster to Jesus Christ's disciples. What good could come if their Savior was dead? What did the past three years mean? But Christ rose from the dead three days later to accomplish redemption for all who would believe. God's timing is always perfect!

Because He is good, God works deliberately to reveal His glory and accomplish His plan. Joseph's life shows how God works, not only through His obedient children, but also through the disobedient and those who do not know Him. **God providentially used the events of Joseph's life to fulfill His purpose for the nation of Israel and the redemption of the world.** Though you believe in God, do you ever wonder how He is involved in the details of life, especially when He seems silent? The last section of the book of Genesis reveals how Joseph's faith grew to recognize God's intentional purpose both in his suffering and in his position of influence.

Apply It

Do you hold grudges? Joseph could have been bitter about how he got to Egypt and all he had been through at the hands of his family. But he was not. He moved on and trusted God. When the opportunity came to help his brothers and family, Joseph did so, but in a wise manner that led them to reflect on what they had done. He





recognized that God must do a work in their hearts, and he helped them, as God directed.

Pain is a reality and bitterness a possibility, but God has a better way. Processing hurt in a healthy manner requires God-given wisdom and the power of the Holy Spirit. Can you recognize the mercy God has extended to you through hard seasons? Can you acknowledge the growth that God has accomplished in the crucible through your suffering? Can you trust God to do the work only He can do in the lives of others? Storybook resolutions do not always happen, but God is always faithful. Will you ask God to free your heart from the grip of anger, bitterness or hopelessness and give you the faith to trust Him?

Joseph's brothers needed to acknowledge their guilt. In our world, guilt is usually considered a bad thing. So why do people feel guilty? We feel guilty because we *are* guilty. God uses our real guilt to help us recognize our offense against Him and others. We are often very eager to be relieved of guilt. There is, however, good news concerning guilt. **God does not intend His children to remain stuck bearing their burden of guilt.** Jesus went to the cross and willingly bore our sin so that you can be forgiven. When you or those you love wrestle with the weight of guilt, how can you sense and encourage God's greater

work? Forgiveness means nothing if we do not own the fact that we need to be forgiven. Justified by Christ, we are released from the burden of our guilt. Through sanctification, God regularly convicts us when we are guilty so that we might quickly repent and grow. Will you welcome the spiritually cleansing process of allowing guilt to turn you to Jesus? Will you pray for your children and those you love to recognize the weight of their sin and their need of a Savior?

God always seeks the greater good. The most excellent expression of good is woven into God's character. God also deliberately propels human history and our lives toward the greatest good. He works everything for the fullest expression of His glory and the greatest benefit for all. God permits hard things to accomplish something better, beyond the struggle. Joseph's suffering prepared him for greater usefulness to God, His people and His purposes. As humans, we most often imagine only a lesser good, far short of the greater good God has planned. By faith, we can interpret our lives through the grid of God's active and unwavering goodness. What hard thing in your life needs the true perspective of God's goodness? Will you believe God is doing something greater than you can understand?

Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

1: **All power and glory belong to God:** Psalm 62:11; Acts 12:21-23; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Revelation 14:7; 19:1

2: **Joseph's dreams:** Genesis 37:5-11
3: **Reuben pleaded for Joseph:** Genesis 37:21-22, 29; 42:22

4: **Simeon's cruelty:** Genesis 34
5: **God's goodness:** Ephesians 3:20

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WEEK FOUR

JOSEPH: BROTHERS' SECOND TRIP TO EGYPT

GENESIS 43-44



Scripture Memory Verse

And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.

Genesis 43:14



Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. (How has He provided, answered, comforted, reconciled, guided, etc.?)
2. What truths from the passage, lecture, notes or discussion specifically applied to your circumstances?

Day 2 – Genesis 43:1-14

Ongoing famine forced Jacob to send his sons back to Egypt.

3. Why did Jacob struggle over sending his sons back to Egypt?
4. How did Judah persuade Jacob to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt with his brothers?
5.
 - a. What instructions did Jacob give his sons before they set out on their journey?
 - b. What truths about God are revealed in Jacob's prayer?
 - c. What do Jacob's words, "As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved," reveal?
6. What difficult situation are you facing that requires surrendering your control or comfort? What are you learning?





Day 3 – Genesis 43:15-34

The brothers attended a banquet in Joseph's home.

7. How did Joseph receive his brothers, and how did they respond?
8. What is revealed in the brothers' interaction with Joseph's steward?
9. What was the possible impact of the seating arrangement and food provisions at the meal?
10. How has God used an unexpected turn of events or a fearful situation to accomplish His purpose in your life?

Day 4 – Genesis 44:1-17

Benjamin was accused of stealing Joseph's silver cup.

11. Why might Joseph have instructed the steward to plant his cup in Benjamin's sack (44:1-2)?
12. a. How does the brothers' response in this situation compare with their earlier treatment of Joseph? (Compare Genesis 44:3-9 with 37:19-32.)

b. How do you explain this change?





- c. How does this give you hope?

Day 5 – Genesis 44:18-34

Judah interceded for Benjamin's freedom and pled to take his place.

13. What points in Judah's speech show God's work in his heart?
14. What could others see in you as evidence of God's work in your life? What has contributed to that growth?
15. a. Read Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 and 2 Peter 3:9. What is the difference between regret and repentance?
- b. When has God's kindness and patience led you to face your sin and repent?

Day 6 – Genesis 43–44

16. What life lessons have you learned from this week's chapters?





Genesis 43–44

Focus Verse

“And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.” – Genesis 43:14

- Another Trip to Egypt – Genesis 43
- Another Test of Loyalty – Genesis 44

Engage

At Creation, God shattered the darkness with light. **God’s light continues to expose what the darkness tries to hide.** God knows the secrets of human hearts. The things we try to hide are never hidden from Him. In love and compassion, He brings the truth to light. He exposes what we need to face about ourselves. He knows best how to soften the calluses around our hard hearts. How has God worked in your life to expose the truth and draw you to Himself?

God orchestrated Joseph’s brothers’ circumstances to force them to face the dark reality of what they had done. God demonstrated His purifying love by allowing difficulties that exposed the truth. Famine forced them to Egypt, where they unknowingly bowed in front of the brother they had betrayed. God used Joseph to test their loyalty and draw them to repentance. **God’s love leads His people to a place of repentance and reconciliation.**



Another Trip to Egypt – Genesis 43

Jacob's Struggle – 43:1-14

The family's needs – 43:1-2

Through Pharaoh's dreams, God had revealed that severe famine would strike Egypt and the surrounding lands for seven years. God led Joseph to fill Egyptian storehouses with food during the previous seven years of abundance.¹ **People from the surrounding nations, including Joseph's family, came to buy grain in Egypt.**

God often uses true need to sensitize human hearts to His work. **Jacob's family again found themselves in desperate need of food as the famine raged in Canaan.** When the grain from the first trip to Egypt was gone, Jacob told his sons, "Go back and buy us a little more food." Jacob, as patriarch of the family, felt responsible for their welfare.

Judah's concern – 43:3-10

Although Judah was the fourth son, he stepped up as the leader among his brothers. His older brothers had lost their father's trust as a consequence of their sins. Simeon and Levi had mistreated and murdered the Shechemites in vengeful retaliation for Shechem's rape of their sister Dinah.² Reuben had forfeited his rights by sleeping with Bilhah, one of his father's wives.³ Scripture does not record that any of these sons repented of their sins.

Judah's past was also tarnished. Thankfully, God's perfect plan does not depend on perfect people, but on His perfect work. After Judah's role in selling Joseph, he left home and increasingly rejected God's ways. He sinfully refused to care for his widowed daughter-in-law, Tamar.⁴ He did not keep his promise that his





third son, Shelah, would marry Tamar because he feared Shelah would die, as had his first two sons. Judah had sex with Tamar, who had disguised herself as a prostitute in a deceitful plan. When confronted with Tamar's pregnancy and evidence that he was the father, Judah admitted his guilt. God used this experience to break down Judah's pride and rebellion. At some point, Judah had returned to his father's household.

As Jacob faced the need for more grain from Egypt, Judah reminded him of the demands of "the man" in Egypt. This man, Joseph, would not allow the brothers to trade in Egypt or retrieve Simeon from prison if they returned without Benjamin. Jacob was afraid to send Benjamin to Egypt. He questioned why his sons had revealed so much family information to this man. The brothers revealed the surprisingly specific questions Joseph had asked about their family. **Their desperate need for food put Jacob in a difficult position.** Judah challenged his father's fear of losing another son and reasoned that their entire household could die without food. Judah took personal responsibility to guarantee Benjamin's safety.

Jacob's preparations and prayer – 43:11-14

God's overruling purpose was not deterred by Jacob's resistance. **Jacob yielded and gave permission for Benjamin to go, seeing no alternative.** At this point, Jacob sought the best approach for a favorable outcome. He sent a lavish gift of balm, honey, spices, myrrh, pistachios and almonds to demonstrate goodwill to the Egyptians. These gifts reflected the abundance of the land promised to Abraham, a "land flowing with milk and honey," even in a time of famine.⁵ Jacob also ordered his sons to take double the portion of silver, returning the payment that should have been collected on their first trip to buy grain. He then entrusted Benjamin into Judah's care.

Most importantly, Jacob sought the mercy of God Almighty on behalf of Benjamin and his

other sons. He recognized that only God could protect them from "the man" and allow their safe return. Verse 14 records his words, "As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved." This literal translation from Hebrew does not express doubt or fatalism but recognition that the matter was now in God's hands, however it turned out. He acknowledged that God has the right to do whatever He wishes. Yielding to God often requires letting go of control and comfort, even of things held dear. Faith grows as we trust God in ways that feel costly.

Joseph's Banquet – 43:15-34

The brothers' arrival – 43:15-22

The brothers hurried to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. **When Joseph saw Benjamin with the other brothers, he ordered his steward to take the men to his house and prepare a feast for them all.** The invitation raised their suspicions. They were sure Joseph planned to accuse them of theft because of the money in their sacks after their last trip. Verse 18 records their thoughts, "He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys." Interestingly, they described the very treatment they had imposed on Joseph years earlier when they attacked, overpowered, seized and sold him into slavery. Their fear reflected their guilt.

The brothers approached Joseph's steward to confess the silver found in their bags after their last trip. They made plain their intent to return that silver along with paying more for additional food. They honestly described their dilemma.

The steward's assurance – 43:23-25

The steward quickly reassured the brothers that they were not being accused of stealing. The steward spoke of God's goodness saying, "Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver." Then, to increase their confidence, he brought



Simeon out of prison. **He treated them with the hospitality offered to guests, not as suspects or prisoners.**

The brothers prepared their gifts to present to Joseph when he arrived at noon. They expected harsh treatment, as on the first visit, but instead they received kindness. They seemed to be kept guessing, on guard and evaluating what would happen next. **God used both unexpected hardship and surprising kindness to awaken their consciences.**

Joseph's questions – 43:26-31

When Joseph returned at noon to his residence, the 11 brothers immediately presented their gifts. **They bowed before Joseph in a fulfillment of Joseph's first God-given prophetic dream.**⁶ But the entire family was not yet before him. They did not yet recognize Joseph as their brother.

As Joseph asked questions about his father, his emotions grew. When he saw Benjamin, he offered his blessing. "God be gracious to you, my son," God was at work, not only in the brothers, but also in Joseph. The scene so overwhelmed Joseph that he left the room abruptly to find a private place to weep. Did thoughts of his father touch him deeply? Was the sight of his younger brother deeply moving? Did he wonder if Benjamin had been mistreated? Did recognizing God's incredible work to bring this moment about produce a tender response? Joseph was likely flooded with a wide range of thoughts and emotions. He returned only after he washed his face and was sure he could control himself. Then he gave the order for the banquet to begin.

The surprising banquet – 43:32-34

Joseph ate alone while the brothers were served separately, though perhaps in close proximity. Joseph's position as a high-ranking official put him in an elevated position, which came with honor and privileges. Egyptians also viewed the idea of eating with Hebrews as detestable. Though



Hebrew by birth, Joseph lived as an Egyptian and followed their traditions.

The strange encounter at Joseph's house only became more perplexing. **Much to their surprise, the brothers were seated in order of their age, from the firstborn, Reuben, to the youngest, Benjamin.** What were they thinking as they took their seats? The passage states that, "they looked at each other in astonishment." Their minds had to be swirling, wondering what would happen next and how someone in Joseph's house knew their birth order.

When the food was served, Benjamin received five times as much as the others. Why did this happen? Did Joseph plan a test to see how they would react to Benjamin being given favored status? Did he want to honor his own brother? We don't know. We are told they "feasted and drank freely," likely within Joseph's hearing.



Another Test of Loyalty – Genesis 44

Test of the Silver Cup – 44:1-13

Joseph's final test was aimed toward Benjamin, their father's favored son. Would the brothers reveal deep-rooted jealousy that hardened them to his suffering? Did the brothers really love Benjamin, another favored son born of Rachel? What would they sacrifice for him? God set the scene to reveal whether heart transformation had occurred in the brothers over time.



Joseph gave specific instructions to set his plan in motion. The brothers would receive all their silver back in addition to “as much food as they can carry.” His steward was to place his own silver cup into the mouth of Benjamin’s sack. **The test of the silver cup could reveal compassion or willingness to protect themselves at Benjamin’s expense.**

The 11 men must have left Egypt in high spirits. God had answered their father Israel’s prayer.⁷ They had full sacks of grain, Simeon was free and Benjamin was safe. But they had traveled only a short distance when calamity struck. **Joseph sent his steward to chase them and accuse them of theft.**

The brothers boldly proclaimed their innocence. Even with their past experience with the silver returned to their sacks, they had not checked their cargo this time. They were so confident in their innocence that they proposed that if anyone was found guilty, he would die and the others would become slaves in Egypt. The steward modified their offer to remove the threat of death. He said only the guilty brother would become a slave. The rest could return home to their father. **This plan set them up perfectly to abandon their brother Benjamin and preserve themselves.**

Each brother confidently offered his sack for inspection. The first ten sacks passed the examination and then – disaster! **The cup was found in Benjamin’s sack.** The brothers tore their clothes in response, an expression of profound grief and sorrow. Their response stands in stark contrast to their coldhearted betrayal of Joseph years earlier. They reloaded their donkeys and returned to the city.

Judah’s Leadership – 44:14-32

The opening phrase underscores Judah’s rise as leader, “... when Judah and his brothers came in” As soon as they saw Joseph, they fell at his feet. **Joseph’s penetrating question, “What is**



this you have done?” offered an opportunity not just to relate facts but to repent. God asked this same question of Adam and Eve when they sinned and of Cain when he killed Abel.⁸

The silver cup in question held both physical and spiritual value in Egyptian culture. Scripture does not explain how Joseph’s “stolen” silver cup was tied to divination. The steward and Joseph both made the association. No explanation is given of Joseph’s actual use of the cup for divination or telling the future.

Judah did not offer a defense, but he refused to leave Benjamin in Egypt. He explained the dire circumstances that led them to bring Benjamin to Egypt against their father’s strong objections. He pled for mercy for the sake of their father, who would die in grief if Benjamin did not return. Even so, he stated he and his brothers would bear the blame, “Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow.” Judah told

Joseph that he had personally guaranteed Benjamin’s safe return. Judah’s passionate speech demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice his freedom.

Judah’s Offer – 44:33-34

Judah had pledged he would take personal responsibility for Benjamin. **He begged for the opportunity to be Joseph’s slave, if only Benjamin might go free.** The passion of his plea is evident. Only God could create such a change in Judah. He had once been indifferent to his father’s grief and his daughter-in-law’s desperation.⁹ He now willingly offered himself in slavery to avoid bringing misery on his father. Judah had moved from murderous envy of Joseph to willing sacrifice for Benjamin.

Joseph must have thanked God for the transformation he witnessed in Judah. We assume Judah spoke on behalf of his brothers. **Next week’s lesson offers the moving account of**



Joseph's response to the obvious work of God in his brothers.

God designed experiences for Jacob's family to allow His deeper work in their hearts. Joseph would not have risen to leadership in Egypt without his path of suffering. Jacob would not have parted with Benjamin unless it was the only way to save his family from starvation. The brothers would not have faced their sin without Joseph's series of tests. As God melted the

resistance of Jacob's sons, He was demonstrating His love. God's love permeated their difficult experiences. God's love propelled His well-timed plan that led them to face their sin. God's love is at work, even in our deepest trials. God's love is actively good. God's love is a purifying love, reflecting the absolute purity of God Himself. **God's love leads His people to a place of repentance and reconciliation.**

The Doctrine of Repentance

The reality of the ugliness, damage and offense of personal sin can be challenging to face. Sin is easy to spot in others but painful to recognize in ourselves. We can resent Adam for his rebellion that infected humanity, yet fail to personally admit the cost of our own failings. And while our sins are many, the reality that our greatest offense is against God Himself does not always bear the weight it should (Psalm 51:4). God loves sinners enough to allow the cost and consequences of personal sin to accomplish their intended purpose. **God is being kind when He makes us face our sin so that we will seek our Savior** (Romans 2:4).

Jacob's sons found themselves in a series of events designed by God to unravel their false security and expose their sin. The sins of their past and their suppressed guilt surfaced. **God's intent in revealing their sin was not to shackle them in hopelessness, but to set them free** (2 Peter 3:9). In the same way, God lovingly reveals our sin. His Holy Spirit convicts us not just of our sinful nature, but of specific sin. We feel sorrow for the damage our sin has caused (2 Corinthians 7:10). In faith, we can honestly and openly confess our sin to God, who already knows everything about us. We believe that Jesus carried that sin on our behalf. God will forgive and deliver us from being held captive by sin. This process, known as repentance, is a healthy and wonderful ongoing posture in the life of a Christian.

We sometimes delay repentance until the pain of our sin becomes unbearable. **To fail to repent and to ignore the promptings of the Holy Spirit and God's tender call to forsake sin is costly.** Sometimes we think that we can muster up strength to clean up the mess before we bring it to God. To fail to repent from sin means we carry the guilt ourselves, when Jesus died to carry it for us. Daily life, God's Word and the Holy Spirit regularly surface specific sin we need to face. To fail to immediately turn from sin prevents us from experiencing the deliverance Jesus won for us. Jesus rose from the grave, victorious over sin and death, so we do not have to stay stuck in sin's trap.

To regularly experience God's cleansing and power to forsake sin creates a stream of joy and gratitude to God. Though the believer will continue to struggle with sin until we die or Jesus returns, we can see growth over time. **Repentance is essential to spiritual growth.** God lovingly reveals sin and extends grace when we confess and turn from our sin. God hates sin, but He loves repentance, an expression of His kindness. Do you recognize repentance as the wonderful grace of God? Run as fast and often as you can into the healing arms of Jesus.





Take to Heart

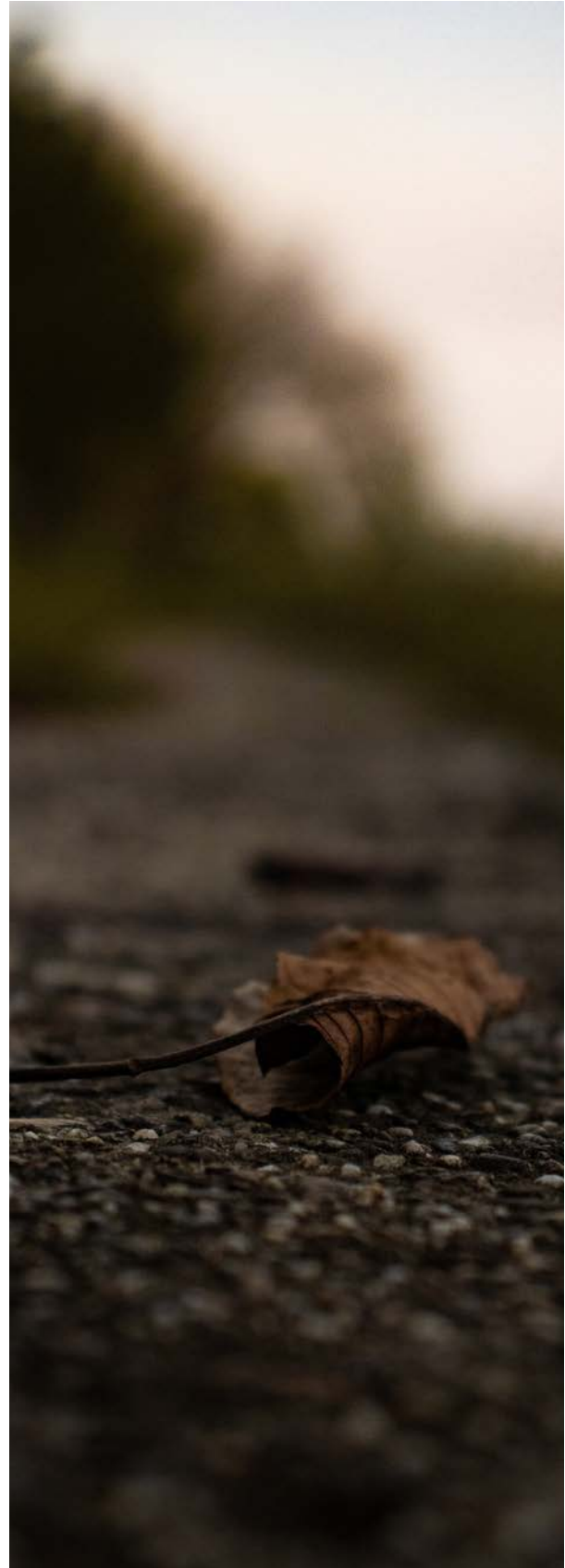
Hold Fast

This story includes multiple people, places and events. Persistent famine brought intense suffering to Jacob's family in Canaan. Egypt became their only hope of survival. They exhausted the supply of grain from their first trip to Egypt, and another trip to buy more grain came with a high price: Benjamin had to accompany his brothers to Egypt. Jacob had to face his fear of losing Benjamin and choose the greater good of his family. The twists and turns of this dramatic story accomplished purposes reaching far beyond the people involved. **God rescued the family that would become the nation that would bring the Savior to the world.** God deals with many lives at once, and we cannot know all He is doing. We are better able to rest in God's sovereignty when we appreciate that God is working in multiple people, in multiple situations and in multiple ways, all at once. God's work is never one-dimensional. We can trust God is doing more than we imagine in ways far beyond what we understand.

Judah's past failures did not prevent him from rising to usefulness to God and others.

He stepped up. He dealt gently and honorably with his father. He took full responsibility for Benjamin's life when he was required to go to Egypt. He pled passionately with Joseph for mercy when the silver cup was found in Benjamin's sack. He offered himself as a substitute, so Benjamin could return to Canaan and spare Jacob deep grief and pain. God can use flawed people with a record of failure because He provides what they lack. People fail, but they can grow. God loves flawed people and lovingly works to reveal sin, prompt obedience and bring growth. God never fails.

God used Joseph as His instrument in the restoration of his brothers. He put them in situations that forced them to face their sin and revealed the condition of their hearts. Scripture doesn't tell us how Joseph decided what to do and when. We cannot know for certain that his





motives were entirely pure. Regardless, God used these tests to accomplish good. Under pressure, the brothers connected their pain to their guilt. God used these tests to soften their hearts and bring them to repentance. The brothers' path to restoration involved the very person they had afflicted with grievous pain. Only God can restore what sin has destroyed. God uses people to bring healing to hard and hurtful places and broken relationships. God orchestrates His healing, restorative work with precision and grace.

Apply It

Jacob faced a crisis of faith as he released Benjamin to go to Egypt. It took a situation as dire as the probable starvation of his family for him to release his remaining favored son out of his sight and control. He stated, as he yielded to God's ways, "If I am bereaved, I am bereaved." **Jacob acknowledged that he needed to trust God, even if trusting God meant personal loss.** The God who gives has the right to take away. And if God takes away what we treasure, we can trust that His loving care and faithfulness will go with us into life with the loss. If following God brings pain, we must trust that God will not leave us alone. We have a natural propensity to forget the good times when bad times come. Are you open to learn what God may be teaching instead of becoming frustrated, doubtful, angry or bitter? How is God calling you to trust Him with what He has asked you to give up? If something you once held dear is gone, how has God met your deepest needs?

This week's lesson ends without resolution. Judah's passionate plea for mercy from Joseph awaits an outcome not yet delivered. We stop this week with the tension high – a real cliffhanger.

Life often leaves us in situations like the gap between Genesis 44:34 and Genesis 45:1. We pray for a conclusion; we await an outcome; we long for an answer to the question left hanging in midair. We often find ourselves in the middle of what God is showing us. How do you cope when the tension is high and the conclusion is in "the next episode"? These times allow you to acknowledge the emptiness of your hands and your absolute need for God's help. These electric moments teach you to listen for God's moment-by-moment instruction and ask God for faith to take the next breath. What cliffhanger are you facing in life? Will you trust God with what He has not resolved? What lesson does God have for you while you wait for His plan to unfold?

Romans 2:4 tells us, "... God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance." For most, repentance does not come easy. Hard times and bitter disappointments are often needed to tenderize our hearts toward God. We desperately need to face God's holiness and recognize sin's deceit and destruction in our lives. God took Joseph's brothers through painful times to provide opportunities for them to deal with their past. They needed to face their own weight of sin and guilt. Will you embrace the painful path to repentance as evidence of God's kindness? If someone you love is caught in sin, will you pray for God's kindness to lead them to repentance, even if that kindness involves watching them suffer? Will you welcome the wounds of God that are intended to bring you healing? God's kindness prevents Him from allowing His children to remain paralyzed by sin. Will you thank God for the healing grace of repentance? If God is calling you to repent of specific sin today, do not delay!

Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

- 1: **Famine and plan:** Genesis 41:31, 54-55
- 2: **Shechem:** Genesis 34
- 3: **Reuben's sin:** Genesis 35:22

- 4: **Tamar:** Genesis 38
- 5: **Canaan's bounty:** Deuteronomy 31:20
- 6: **Joseph's dreams:** Genesis 37:5-9

- 7: **Jacob's prayer:** Genesis 43:11-14
- 8: **Invitation to repentance:** Genesis 3:13; 4:10
- 9: **Judah's former indifference:** Genesis 37:26-27; 38

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WEEK FIVE

JOSEPH: REVEALS IDENTITY AND REUNITES FAMILY

GENESIS 45:1-47:12



Scripture Memory Verse

“But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on
earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.”

Genesis 45:7



Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. (How has He provided, answered, comforted, restored, guided, etc.?)
2. What truths from the passage, lecture, notes or discussion helped you this week?

Day 2 – Genesis 45:1-15

Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers.

3.
 - a. As Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, what did his words and response communicate to them?
 - b. What do Joseph's words about God sending him to Egypt teach you?
 - c. How did Joseph's brothers respond to his announcement? What might this reveal?
4. What is hard about forgiving someone? What makes forgiveness easier?
5. What truths did you discover about God and His ways from this passage that could affect your relationships?



Day 3 – Genesis 45:16-28

Pharaoh instructed Joseph's brothers to bring Jacob's entire family back to Egypt.

6. How did Pharaoh display grace toward Joseph and his family?
7. How did Jacob respond to his sons' news about Joseph?
8.
 - a. When has someone brought you news that gave you hope?
 - b. How could you specifically trust God to find hope in a difficult situation today?

Day 4 – Genesis 46:1-30

Jacob and his household went to Egypt.

9.
 - a. What might Jacob have been concerned about as he prepared to leave for Egypt?
 - b. How did God speak to his concerns?
 - c. What does this reveal about the character of God?



10. How many people went to Egypt with Jacob? What are some possible reasons for their names to be carefully recorded?

11. a. What has God called you to leave behind to follow Him in a new direction?

b. What promises from God's Word help you depend on Him and move forward in faith?

Day 5 – Genesis 46:31–47:12

Jacob and his family were allowed to settle in Goshen.

12. How did Joseph prepare his brothers for their meeting with Pharaoh?

13. What events in Jacob's life might he have been referring to in Genesis 47:9?

14. What stands out about Jacob's character in his words and actions before Pharaoh?

Day 6 – Genesis 45:1–47:12

15. What truths about God's character are made plain in this week's verses?



Genesis 45:1–47:12

Focus Verse

“‘But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.’” – Genesis 45:7

- Joseph Revealed His Identity – Genesis 45
- Joseph Reunited With Jacob – Genesis 46:1-30
- Joseph Settled His Family in Egypt – Genesis 46:31-47:12

Engage

Why are relationships so challenging? Why do friendships and family connections break down? Why is it so easy to offend and be offended and often harder to forgive? Every human relationship involves sinful people, and that means conflict is a normal part of life. An unkind thought, harsh word or reckless deed can do untold damage. When hope for peace seems lost, it is wise to remember God's ultimate example and the power of His grace. Jesus went to the cross to make forgiveness possible. He extends forgiveness and undeserved blessings to His enemies. In human relationships, the power of grace unlocks the power to forgive and breaks the cycle of payback. **Those who understand the power of God's grace can experience God's power to forgive.** Grace can disarm hostility and overpower personal bitterness, unforgiveness and resentment.

The harm that his brothers inflicted on Joseph deeply damaged his family relationships. In this passage, the narrative reached a high point when Joseph finally revealed his identity to them. God used famine to bring them together physically and achieve His deeper work of reconciliation in their hearts and relationships. God saved them from death in the famine and reunited this fractured family to accomplish His greater purposes for mankind. **God's purposes prevail through life's circumstances and human history.** God's ultimate purposes always achieve the greater good He intends.



Joseph Revealed His Identity – Genesis 45

Genesis 44 ended with Judah's passionate plea before Joseph to be held prisoner in the place of Benjamin, who had been accused of stealing Joseph's silver cup. **God used the tests Joseph imposed on his brothers to reveal their willingness to protect their brother Benjamin and honor their father, Jacob.** Chapter 45 opens at this dramatic moment.

Joseph's Revelation – 45:1-3

Joseph could not wait any longer. He sent his servants out of the room and wept loudly enough to be heard from a distance as he revealed his true identity to his brothers. This was the third time Joseph wept during his encounters with his brothers, but it was the first time publicly. What were his brothers thinking? Joseph's brothers were speechless. They could not answer him but were "terrified at his presence." **Joseph probably thought he would never see his family again, so the reality of this moment brought intense emotion.**

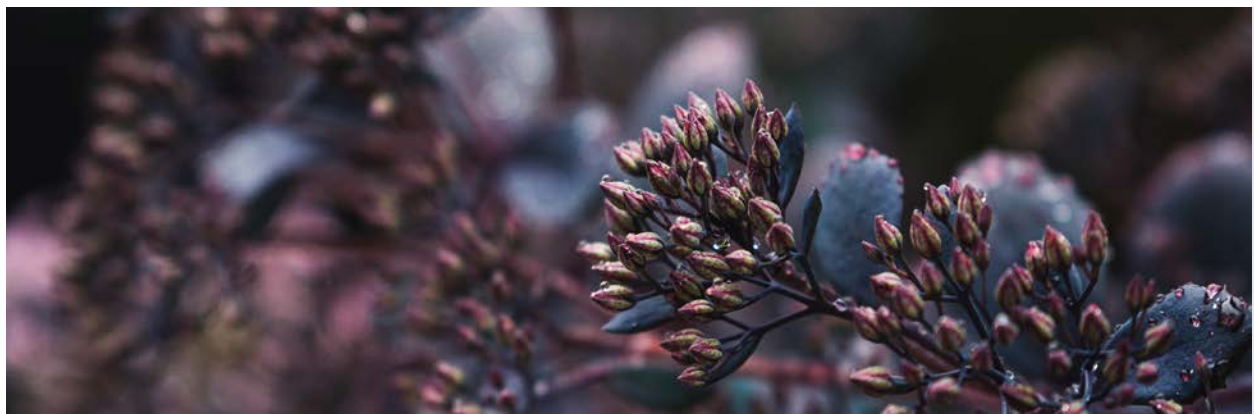
Joseph's Explanation – 45:4-8

Joseph was quick to sense his brothers' fear and disbelief. For them it was as if Joseph were back from the dead. He, the one they had wronged, now stood with complete power over

their destinies. He called them closer, probably close enough to look into his face, and said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!"

Joseph did not ignore or redefine their sin. He addressed their past offense against him without bitterness or resentment. "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." How was he able to acknowledge their sin against him without casting blame, seeking retaliation or recounting the pain they had caused him? **God had revealed His overruling redemptive purposes to Joseph.** When Joseph was young, he had dreamed of his future power to rule.¹ Now, Joseph exercised that power as God had ordained. Joseph's trials had deepened his desire to love and serve others – the Egyptians and hungry visitors, including his family. That love now exceeded his quest for power, position or revenge.

Joseph understood God's prevailing purpose for his life. He had arrived in Egypt as a slave, but God had positioned him as an instrument of salvation for many. Joseph told his brothers of the future impact of five more years of devastation awaiting them, as the famine would prevent planting and harvesting of crops. "But God sent me ahead of





you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” The way God chose to position Joseph in Egypt may have been painful, but His plan was purposeful. God goes ahead of His people and orchestrates their path for their ultimate good and His greater glory.

The NIV footnote offers the alternate translation for verse 7, “to save you as a great band of survivors.” **God saved Jacob’s family as part of His covenant promise to Abraham.** Jacob’s 12 sons would be multiplied into the great nation of Israel while nestled inside Egypt. More than 400 years later, God called Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt by an even greater deliverance – the Exodus. Jacob’s family came to Egypt as a small clan of weak and needy survivors. They left as a nation of millions. God delivered them from calamity through His grace, in His time and for His purposes.

Joseph’s Plan – 45:9-24

Joseph’s brothers continued to marvel while Joseph laid out his plan to deliver his family from the severe famine. Their father, the entire family and all their livestock needed to come to Egypt without delay. They would live close to him in the land of Goshen, where Joseph could provide for and protect them. Joseph continued to acknowledge God’s providence in giving him a

position of power and influence under Pharaoh. Joseph instructed his brothers how to deliver the message to their father. His emotional expression of love for them erased any doubt that he was, indeed, their long-lost brother.

The news of Joseph’s tearful family reunion quickly spread throughout the palace. **Pharaoh was pleased and offered carts to help with their move; he also promised them “the best of the land” and “the best of all Egypt.”** His respect for Joseph brought goodwill to Joseph’s family.

The brothers, “the sons of Israel,” returned to Canaan with the gracious provisions and promises. Joseph’s wise parting comment upon their departure, “Don’t quarrel on the way!” likely reflects his past experience growing up in this family.

Jacob’s Agreement – 45:25-28

Jacob was stunned by the news his sons brought him about Joseph. Not only was his beloved son alive, he was also a ruler in Egypt. The proof of his sons’ testimony and the gifts from Pharaoh were convincing. Jacob’s years of grief were replaced with great joy: “... the spirit of their father Jacob revived.” **Hope filled Jacob’s heart as he declared, “My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”**

Jesus Is Greater

Many have pointed to beautiful parallels between Joseph and Jesus, even though these are not confirmed in the New Testament. **While God used Joseph greatly to accomplish His purposes, the person and work of Christ far exceed that of Joseph.**

Joseph suffered in slavery and prison and was exalted by God to save His people from extinction through famine. Jesus suffered on the cross and rose from the dead to save His people from sin and death. Joseph was used by God to preserve the people of the Promised One who would come from the line of Judah. Jesus is the Lion of Judah. Joseph was exalted to second-in-command in ancient Egypt. Jesus is the King of Kings, exalted to the highest place. **Joseph is to be respected; Jesus is to be worshipped for eternity.**

We learn valuable lessons from Joseph’s life, but **God is the hero of his story.** The greatness Joseph modeled reflects the work of a great God in his life. Joseph was great, but Jesus is greater.





Joseph Reunited With Jacob – Genesis 46:1-30

Jacob's Confirmation at Beersheba – 46:1-6

Before moving to Egypt, Jacob stopped at Beersheba to offer sacrifices to God. Jacob had family history in Beersheba. He had fled from Beersheba when escaping Esau's murderous threat. His grandfather Abraham and father, Isaac, had encountered God at Beersheba.² Jacob sought to worship God in this memorable place and at this critical moment for himself and his family.

God spoke to Jacob in a vision at night. God called Jacob by name, and Jacob responded, "Here I am." **God spoke directly to Jacob's fear and called him to faith.** God seemed to say, "Jacob, do not hesitate to go to Egypt; this is my purpose for you and your family. This is for good." God repeated His promises because He is faithful to keep His word and because Jacob needed to remember what was true. God reminded Jacob:

- **I am God, the God of your father.** – Elohim, the eternal and unchanging God, was present and trustworthy.
- **I will make you into a great nation.** – God's covenant promised this nation to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- **I will go with you.** – God Himself would go with Jacob to Egypt.
- **I will surely bring you back.** – Jacob's body was returned to Canaan for burial.³ This promise to the nation was also fulfilled after the Exodus, as God's people left Egypt to return to the promised land.
- **Joseph would close Jacob's eyes in death.** – God's prophetic promise was fulfilled.⁴

Jacob's Family Registry – 46:7-27

Scripture lists Jacob's family members who left Canaan to live in Egypt. Genesis 46:27 gives the number of Israelite men in Egypt as 70 in

total. It was 430 years later that a nation of more than 600,000 men *plus* women and children were delivered from slavery in Egypt to return to Canaan, the promised land.⁵

The people on this list became the nation of Israel, the people of God. Carefully maintained legal registries were the basis for the distribution of land in Canaan among the various tribes of Israel. Accurate genealogical records were preserved up through the birth of Jesus. Jesus' genealogy was traced through these ancient records that had been preserved in the temple.⁶ All legal records after the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ appear to have been lost in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Jacob's Reunion With Joseph – 46:28-30

As they crossed into Egypt, Jacob sent his son Judah ahead to get directions to Goshen. **When Joseph later arrived in Goshen, he presented himself to his father in a tearful, yet joyful reunion.** Joseph, so long mourned as dead, now appeared in all his glory. No words were recorded as father and son wept for a long time. Finally, Jacob said, "Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive!" Even through their darkest hours, God had steadily moved His promises forward to their glorious fulfillment.





Joseph Settled His Family in Egypt – Genesis 46:31–47:12

Joseph Presented His Brothers – 46:31–47:6

Joseph understood Egyptian society and customs, and he implemented a wise plan for approaching Pharaoh. He carefully coached five of his brothers on how they should speak and behave. Pharaoh's attitude about their coming had been most generous so far. Joseph acted wisely in his ruling position. He was careful to follow appropriate protocol to confirm the decision was Pharaoh's. This would protect him from being accused of preferential treatment for his family. Pharaoh offered Joseph's family employment among his own herds.

God had foreordained Goshen to become Israel's temporary dwelling place. Goshen was probably situated at the eastern part of the Nile delta. It was "the best part of the land" and provided excellent pasture for grazing. Goshen's fertile soil would enable them to grow crops after the famine ended. Their location in Goshen also separated them from the Egyptians, who found shepherds detestable. In addition, the land gave room for the amazing God-ordained explosion of their population. Their interaction with Egyptian culture further developed their minds and abilities through education and training (especially seen in the life of Moses). God was preparing them to help execute His purpose for the world.

Joseph Presented His Father – 47:7-12

Jacob's appearance before Pharaoh was full of solemn beauty. The aged patriarch (then 130 years old) was ushered into Pharaoh's presence. **Pharaoh received Jacob graciously, with all the respect due his old age and the honor of his position as Joseph's father.** Pharaoh asked Jacob, "How old are you?" Jacob spoke humbly of his years as few in contrast to those of his forefathers. He described his 130 years as a difficult pilgrimage.

Joseph, his father and brothers left their audience with Pharaoh at peace with one another and in good standing within Egypt. God brought reconciliation to their formerly severed relationships. God brought hope for survival despite ongoing famine. Joseph achieved Pharaoh's blessing to settle his family in Goshen, which was also called the district of Rameses. God's grace was evident through Joseph's story, which involved suffering for him and many others. God also demonstrates His grace to us in the midst of difficult, even unbearable circumstances. Whatever comes, hope is possible because God is unchangeably just and good. **God's purposes prevail through life's circumstances and human history.**





The Doctrine of Reconciliation

Joseph's reunion with his brothers demonstrates a beautiful scene of reconciliation. The sins of the brothers against Joseph created a relational chasm so severe it seemed impossible to mend. The brothers thought Joseph was dead, or at least they never expected to see him again. The guilt of their sin created a rift too deep to imagine healing. God accomplished what no human plan could. He exposed truth, mended relationships and planted forgiveness in human hearts. If the reconciliation of Jacob's sons amazes you, the mending of your broken relationship with God should amaze you more.

Since the first sin in the Garden of Eden, sin is a part of our spiritual DNA. This sin that we are born with means we are all born as enemies of God. On our own, we would never seek God. Instead, we want our own way and seek our own pleasure (Romans 3:10-20). Our sins have left us estranged from God, our Creator. The wrath of God rests on us. The rightful and deserved consequence of our enmity with God was earned (Romans 1:18; 2:5-8). But there is good news. **God took the initiative to bring reconciliation to a relational gap beyond human repair.** The wall that separated us from God has been broken because Jesus took our sins upon Himself. People who place their faith in Jesus' work on their behalf gain access to God. They will walk with Him in this life and will be with Him for all eternity. Jesus did what it took to reconcile sinners to God.

Most people do not even realize they are enemies of God. They live life unaware that their biggest problem is with God. People attempt to approach God on their own terms, which actually is not an option. There is only one way to come to God – through the shed blood of His own Son. **If you do not recognize the peril you face because of your sin, you cannot value the costly reconciliation God has provided.** To fail to be reconciled to God through His Son leaves you condemned, bearing the weight of your own sin and guilt. You are left an enemy of God, your Creator, your Judge.

Do you realize how wonderful it is to be declared forever right with God? **Because of what Jesus has done, those deserving eternal judgment can know, enjoy and worship God** (Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Ephesians 2:12-13). Instead of being cast away from God's presence, He lovingly and tenderly draws you to Himself. When you understand the peril you faced, you cannot help but be humbled and overwhelmed by the indescribable and costly privilege of walking with God. 1 John 3:1 says, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" Christ broke down the wall that separated us from God. Have you been reconciled to God? If so, you can become an agent of reconciliation, leading people who are alienated from God to know and love Him. Former enemies of God can become His own children. What a wonder! What good news!





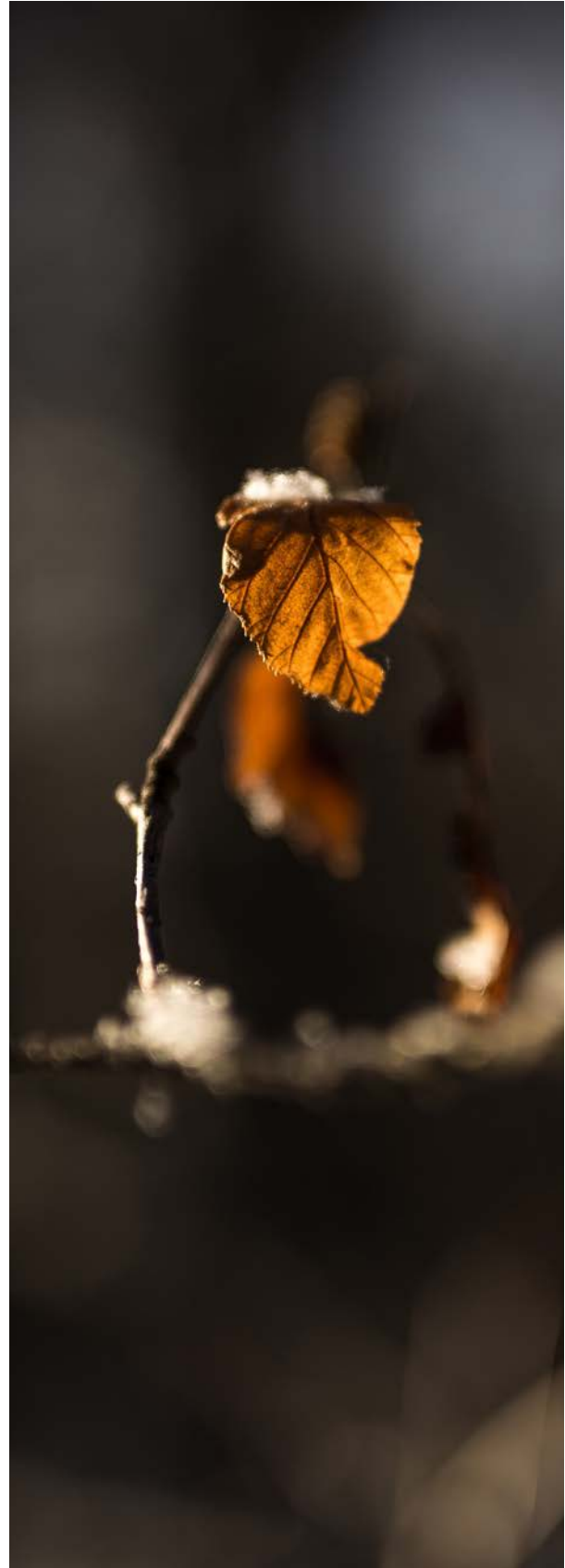
Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God worked mightily to bring reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers. He literally moved people to distant lands and engineered circumstances to reunite Joseph with his father, Jacob. **By His grace, God can restore what sin has destroyed.** Sin has left humanity broken. Fractured relationships are part of that dreadful result. Through Christ, not only will God repair the breach between you and God, He will also rebuild and restore what sin has stolen. Not every relationship or situation ends happily on this earth, but God has purposes beyond what we see and understand.

God brings special comfort in times of need. At Beersheba, God spoke directly to Jacob's doubts by repeating His promises and assuring Jacob that His plan included moving to Egypt and a certain return to Canaan. God met Jacob's fear by saying, "Do not be afraid ... I will go down to Egypt with you." God's presence and His promises sustain us. We can rest in His promises, even in those yet to be fulfilled.

When speaking to Pharaoh, Jacob described his years as "few and difficult." Jacob lived a hard life. He endured some trouble of his own making and some inflicted by others. His difficulty with Esau, his harsh treatment under Laban, family strife and his sons' sins added up to a lot of pain. Jacob referred to his life as a "pilgrimage." A pilgrim is in transit – a traveler or wayfarer headed somewhere else. Like Jacob, we are pilgrims on this earth, our temporary dwelling place. The believer's true citizenship is not on this earth where pain reigns and suffering lingers.⁷ **Even if what God has done or will do is not yet visible or understood, God can be trusted.** Faith stands on what God can and will do, in His perfect way and at His perfect time. Whether or not things resolve on this earth, eternity is bright for God's children. This world's trouble allows us to experience God's sustaining grace and to eagerly long for the day when our lives are uncomplicated by sin.





Apply It

Family dynamics are challenging, even in the best of circumstances. God sets us in families, a place meant to be secure and nurturing, a refuge from the outside world. However, real life is much more complicated than that. The place God designed to shelter us can also bring profound hurt and harm. We can sometimes look within our own families and feel deep disappointment, bitterness and resentment at the dysfunction we see. **For the believer, God often uses our closest family relationships to draw us to Himself.**

Joseph's emotion at his reunion with his family reveals the deep vulnerability that even this high-profile leader experienced within the circle of his own family. Whatever your family background or current situation, there is hope. What is God teaching you through your family dynamics? Sometimes, disappointment with people awakens us to find our security in God alone, who never fails us and always keeps His Word. How might God use you to bring hope and healing to your family? Will you trust God to use whatever you face in your family for your good, even if it means He must triumph over pain to do so? How will you pray for your own family?

Forgiveness can be difficult to offer to someone who has wronged you. Sometimes, even becoming willing to forgive requires time and a work of God in your heart. Holding onto a grudge, replaying the wrong in your mind or rehearsing your payback can feel temporarily satisfying, but it robs you of the joy Jesus died to give you. How can you forgive someone who has not acknowledged the wrong they have done or the pain they have inflicted? Can you forgive someone who has not apologized or

taken responsibility for their sin? Joseph was able to forgive his brothers because he believed that God's greater plan overruled their sin. Even with an awareness of God's deeper work, forgiving others remains challenging. To forgive, you must abandon any sense of revenge. Sometimes you must choose a heart of forgiveness, even when full restoration of a broken relationship is not possible. **Healthy relationships require forgiveness.** You can forgive others because God has forgiven you, through Jesus. Healthy relationships require forgiveness. How willing are you to forgive those who do not deserve it? Do you withhold forgiveness or offer it generously? Who do you need to forgive?

Do you believe God has you right where He wants you? Will you trust that God has positioned you in the right city, the right job and the right family to accomplish His plans for you and others? If God calls you to uproot from where you are comfortable, will you put aside fear and go where He is leading? If God has you in a place of ongoing hardship, a season of "famine," will you trust that He will make a way and provide for you in that barren place? Things that are new or unknown to you are utterly known to God. How is God speaking truth to you and reminding you of His presence and promises? Our security never rests in our comfort with our present circumstances. **Our security rests on the goodness of God, His unfailing presence, His preserving power and His unconditional love.** Where does God have you today? In a new place? In a barren place? In a place of unexpected responsibility? Wherever you are, God is there. And wherever you are going, God is already there. Trust God in your Canaan and in your Egypt. He is faithful. He is ever-present. He will never leave you or forsake you.

Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1: Joseph's dreams: Genesis 37:5-11 | 4: Jacob's death: Genesis 50:1 | 6: Jesus' genealogy: Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38 |
| 2: Beersheba: Genesis 21:33; 22:19; 26:23; 28:10 | 5: Jacob's family: Genesis 46:26-27; Exodus 1:5; 12:37; Deuteronomy 10:22 | 7: Suffering and future glory: 2 Corinthians 4:17-18; Philippians 3:20 |
| 3: Jacob's burial: Genesis 50:13 | | |

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Congratulations!

We hope you have found this study soothing to your soul. Feel free to continue exploring God's Word with your current group for as long as they are meeting.

Thank you for spending your precious time with Bible Study Fellowship. We pray your time in the Bible has enriched your life and we hope to study alongside you again soon!