

# THE PLAN

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH  
AND THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

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# INTRODUCTION

The story of Joseph, which begins in Genesis 37 and carries through to the end of the book of Genesis, is “by far the longest and most masterful narrative in Genesis, if not the entire Bible.”<sup>1</sup> This incredible story is made even more amazing because of its historicity and detail, with each piece of the story fitting together like a perfectly cut puzzle. The story ends with the fledgling nation of Israel situated on the outskirts of Egypt, enjoying the blessing of God and the favor of the Pharaoh, perfectly setting the stage for the drama of Exodus.

The fact that God is working in history is an understood fact within the church. However, the work of God can take two distinct forms. One form, seen regularly throughout the patriarchal narratives up to this point in Genesis, is the visible hand of miracle. God speaks to Abraham, shows up in bodily form Himself (flanked by angelic companions), miraculously destroys cities, verbally directs His followers, speaks through dreams and visions, and even physically wrestles with men. This visible hand of miracle is notably missing from the Joseph narrative.

The other form of God’s work, however, is quite present throughout the story in remarkable ways: His invisible hand of providence. Through the day to day, the common, and the mundane, God is clearly at work. He is weaving together this detailed rescue plan for His people over the course of more than 20 years, insuring their survival and well-being despite what seems to be a regional or even global famine. Good behavior is seemingly repaid with suffering, sin is transformed into grace and, at times, hope is deferred or even crushed. However, in the midst of each circumstance, God is working His ultimate will through the life of Joseph.

Joseph himself is a magisterial character, towering over the narrative as it moves from the open fields of Canaan to the royal courts of Egypt. In many ways, Joseph is a precursor to Daniel. Both served in pagan empires (Egypt and Babylon), showing unparalleled integrity and wisdom by interpreting the dreams of their respective kings. Both were also jailed for their obedience to God and their unwillingness to be compromised in their behaviors, and both ended up to be vice-regents in their adopted realms.<sup>2</sup> The man Joseph, even removed from the

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, (Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2004.), pg. 435.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

context of the rest of the Bible, is worthy of great respect and admiration and would be a great role model for any of us.

However, the key to the Joseph story is that he's *not* removed from the rest of God's plan of redemption. In fact, unlike Daniel, Joseph's actions and circumstances often point in explicit ways to Jesus Himself. "The Plan" of God in the life of Joseph is to save God's chosen people from certain starvation and, even more, from being eaten alive by their own sinful behavior. However, that same "Plan" also foreshadows God's ultimate plan of redemption that would be worked through a quite distant nephew of Joseph: Jesus Christ. The parallels between the two, Joseph and Jesus, are many and incredible. But that's getting ahead of ourselves...

As we study the Joseph story, we must do so through three important and parallel lenses. First, we must not be so concerned with the providential plan of God that we miss the details and lessons that are given to us in this well-spun narrative. Looking through the "micro" lens, we'll see how the attitudes and decisions of Joseph, his father, and his brothers give us a model for both how and how not to live. Secondly, we must constantly take a step back and look at the larger picture of the master plan that God is weaving together. As we look through this "macro" lens, we'll see how Joseph suffered and must have at times bordered on despair, in similar positions to the ones in which we often find ourselves—only to see God work out His best in spite of Joseph's suffering. It's through this lens that we see an unbelievable illustration of Paul's great words in Romans 8:28: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

Finally, we must look past both the "micro" and "macro" lenses and peer through the *gospel* lens. Joseph's story by itself is an amazing tale. As a foreshadowing of the redemptive plan of God through Jesus, it's more than amazing. It gives us hope! As we study, it's my prayer that we will not only see the character of *Joseph* and the plan of God for Israel, but that we will see *Jesus* and the plan that God has for you and me today.

Soli Deo Gloria,  
Brian Kannel  
York Alliance Church

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is designed to be used as a companion resource to the 2015 Lenten sermon series at York Alliance Church. Each Sunday's message will provide the central teaching of the Scripture passage for that week. You will receive most benefit from this study as you utilize it in conjunction with both the Sunday messages and a weekly LIFE group gathering, a small community with whom you are able to discuss and apply these truths. If you are unable to attend one of the Sunday morning gatherings for any reason, the sermon audio can be found at [www.yorkalliance.org/resources](http://www.yorkalliance.org/resources).

Please be aware that studying the Bible can be a challenging endeavor. Of course, there are very few worthwhile things in life that don't require some effort on our part. But beyond the difficulty of study in general is the fact that we have a very real enemy who is actively opposed to our understanding of the Word of God. Paul tells us that our battle is not "against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12) Therefore, if you find yourself feeling discouraged, frustrated, or unable to understand something, I strongly encourage you to stop and pray. Ask God to guide your heart and thoughts and to give you understanding.

Also, don't do this study in isolation. While most will complete the actual studies individually, I would encourage you to get connected to someone else who is doing this study and to connect with that person each week to talk about what you're learning. Along the way, if you have frustrations or are confused about something you're studying, they can provide encouragement and guidance as you journey through the study together. If you get stuck along the way, you should feel free to skip a section and move to the next one.

This particular study guide has a few unique features to help you grow as a student of the Word as well as a disciple of Jesus. Therefore, a few notes may be helpful as you begin your study using this guide:

- Each week's study will consist of four main sections: personal study, guided study, a personal journaling section, and a "Gospel Glimpse" which is intended to point us forward in a clear way from the story of Joseph to the story of Jesus.

- The personal study component will utilize the “Inductive Bible Study” method, designed to help each person engage and apply the text from their specific perspective. (See the “Inductive Bible Study” section for details)
- The guided study component will consist of two studies, each focusing on a specific aspect of the passage. Each study will then conclude with application questions challenging you to intentionally apply to your life the principles that you’ve learned throughout the study.
- Personal journaling is a discipline that has been used throughout the history of the church in order to see God’s work over a period of time. During this study, you will be asked to journal *at least once a week* some of the key aspects of the week using another notebook, journal, or a computer. As you’re guided through this process, you may already start to see God working in your life, just as He was working so clearly in Joseph’s.
- Finally, at the end of each week’s study, there will be a section that will point out very explicitly some of the parallels between this section of Joseph’s life and the journey of Jesus to the cross and, ultimately, to His victorious resurrection. As you study, you will likely pick up many of these parallels yourself, so the “Gospel Glimpse” will act as more of a summary review. You may even find some that I’ve either missed or not included for the week.
- Included with each study are blank sermon note sheets (for use on Sunday mornings and/or with the sermon audio available online) as well as a “Facilitation/Application” sheet. While the primary intent of this page is that it be used within York Alliance Church LIFE groups, this resource can be used in a variety of other settings as well.

If you have questions about how to best utilize this study guide or have comments on what you’re finding in it or just want to report your experiences with using it, all are welcomed! Email me at [bkannel@yorkalliance.org](mailto:bkannel@yorkalliance.org).

*“Lord Jesus, this amazing story is made even more amazing by the way it points to You and Your work on our behalf. As we study the life of Joseph, encourage us through the difficult situations that we each face at times, reassuring us that You have a good plan that’s in the process of being working out. We know that all things work together for our good and for Your glory. May this study cement that reality in our minds. Just as You had a plan for Joseph’s life, You have a plan for each of our lives as well. May we each embrace that reality, and as we do, see the Kingdom come and Your will be done in our lives, just as it is in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

*In Jesus’ Name, Amen.*



# INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Throughout this study, you'll be asked to engage a method of study known as the "Inductive Bible Study" method (IBS). The goal of IBS is to do as thorough a study as possible (or desired), simply using the text itself. While outside tools such as Bible dictionaries, word studies and lexicons, handbooks and commentaries can be helpful, they aren't necessary using this method. The only thing you need is a Bible or, ideally, two different translations of the Bible.

As you approach the Bible, understand you are approaching the Word of God given to us through the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. However, you are also reading a modern English translation of an ancient document, written by specific people, directed to specific audiences, for a specific purpose. In fact, in the case of Genesis, you are reading a book translated into English from the Hebrew text first written nearly 3500 years ago. Therefore, English translations vary in how they present the specifics of the stories, although the heart is almost always consistent regardless of translation.

Two different translations can be helpful because translators are constantly working on a continuum between accuracy and readability. Because Hebrew language structure is so dramatically different than English, a level of interpretation is necessary in order to develop a readable English text. It's often the case that the most readable translations have taken the most liberties with the original text, and that the most accurate translations are often the most difficult to read. Therefore, reading each passage from a translation at each side of the spectrum can often give the fullest understanding of the text. See the following table for a few recommended translations in each category:

## More Accurate

English Standard Version  
New American Standard Version  
New King James Version  
Holman Christian Standard Version

## More Readable

New Living Translation  
New International Version  
The Message  
New Century Version

With IBS, you will typically read each passage several times, so it's ideal to read it in several different translations in order to get the fullest meaning.

Before you study, it's vitally important to begin with prayer. Since this is not simply an intellectual activity, but a spiritual one as well, ask God to speak to you through His Word as you study. This doesn't need to be a long, involved prayer time, but it is vital that it happens and that it precedes your study.

After prayer, read through the passage at least once, giving special attention to *observation*: Who are the characters in the passage? When is this happening? What are the details the author is emphasizing? You'll be able to use the space given to write down brief observations that you make as you read through the text.

The next step is *interpretation*: Why is this happening? What are the characters learning about God? About each other? How do the characters change during the passage? Is there a specific message the author is trying to communicate to the original audiences? As you read through the passage again, try to interpret the facts that you've observed and to understand the "why" behind the text, jotting down thoughts and impressions as you do.

Finally, read the passage a final time focusing on *application*: What does this mean for me today? What can I learn about human nature, about the nature and character of God, and so forth, that can inform my daily life? With which character (or characters) do I relate? During the application step, it's vital to translate the theoretical application to a concrete action step: What should I do or do differently because of the reality that I've just read? Take time to write all of the concepts that you feel apply to your life, but be sure to note at least one specific action step that comes out of the passage you're studying.

Simply by reading slowly, paying attention to details, and then asking good questions, we can gain a deep and thorough understanding of the text without using any additional study tools. When we take the time to not just read the text, but to observe, interpret, and apply, it often makes the ancient words of God come alive in our minds and hearts.

# WEEK ONE: BETRAYAL

## GENESIS 37

The story of Joseph begins with many of the threads seen throughout the other patriarchal narratives: favored sons, sibling rivalry, dreams and visions, and sin that compounds into more sin. However, the story takes a startling and tragic turn when the favored son, Joseph, is sold by his brothers into slavery. In a series of clear ways, the plan of God for deliverance is set forth through suffering, just as was true for Jesus. The shadow of the cross can be seen at the very beginning of the Joseph story, just as it can be seen in our lives.

## **Inductive Bible Study**

Read Genesis 37, using at least two different translations if possible.

Observation: Who is involved in the passage? Where does this happen? What details jump out to you as you read?

Interpretation: Why is this happening? What might the characters be feeling? In what way do the characters grow through this passage? What impact does this passage have on the lives of the characters involved? What does this show us about God?

Application: What does this mean for me? What character do I most identify with in this passage, and why? What does this passage show me about God, and what impact does that have on my life?

Action Step: Based on this passage, what's one thing that I should either start doing, stop doing, or change?

## **The Rest of the Story**

When I was a kid, one of my favorite radio personalities was a man named Paul Harvey. With his deep and distinctive voice, he would tell stories of people and circumstances that seemed so random and disconnected until, at the very end, they would come together to explain some famous situation or phenomenon. I loved the everyday and common nature of such significant moments, and I loved to try to guess what it was that would emerge from the random details.

One of the most significant themes in the Joseph narrative is the providence of God. His invisible hand of providence is guiding all of the seemingly unrelated details of this story to bring about His will. In order to see the work of God, therefore, it's best for us to begin with the larger view.

Take 15 to 20 minutes and read through the entire Joseph narrative from Genesis 37-50. You don't need to read for details, but work to see the entire narrative and the larger picture of God's work in the story. Use the space below to outline what is happening in the story:

As you think through the many details that God wove together in order to enact His will, it's quite an incredible plan. In our study over the next seven weeks, we'll dig into the details of the plan and see with even greater clarity the profound plan of God.

**Application:**

- Think back on your life. What are some of the major things that you've seen God do over the course of your life?

## **Using Our Sin**

There are difficulties and tragedies in life that, years down the line, we will look back on and see how God has used them to bring good into our life. Sometimes these difficulties arise from outside of us, through no specific choice or action of our own. However, there are times when these difficulties come from our own sinful choices—choices we both willfully make and blindly engage.

Read Genesis 37:1-11.

As found just within this brief introduction to the Joseph story, list the sinful behavior that is noted as well as who commits this sin.

Many of these sins are not new to Jacob's family. In fact, they seem to mark the family in many ways! Iain Duguid observes: "God did not choose Abraham's family because they were a better representative of traditional family values than their pagan neighbors—unless you count favoritism and murderous envy as the traditional values."<sup>3</sup>

Read the following verses, and note the sin issue that is also present in Genesis 37.

- Genesis 21:8-9
- Genesis 25:28
- Genesis 27:21

As we look at the overall narrative of Joseph's story, we observe that these sinful behaviors set in motion the actions that God would use to ultimately place Jacob

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<sup>3</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Living in the Light of Inextinguishable Hope: The Gospel According to Joseph*, (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2013.), pg. 2.



in Egypt in order to save the nation of Israel. However, despite being used by God, they are still sinful behaviors! How can we hold those two realities together?

Read James 1:13-15. What does this tell us about the nature of sin and God's involvement in it?

So God is not the One leading us into sin. However, read Colossians 1:20. What is the ultimate work of God through Jesus?

If God is reconciling *all things* through Christ, then what will ultimately happen, even with our sinful choices?

The plan of God doesn't circumvent suffering and pain. In fact, there is much biblical evidence as well as church history that would seem to say that God often leads His people right through difficulty in order to display His gospel of grace even more fully. The final word, however, doesn't rest with our sin or our suffering. Philippians 1:6 states it clearly: "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." That is, and always will be, the final word.

**Application:**

- Have you ever experienced brokenness and sin within your family or church community? Are you yet able to see the good that God is bringing from that brokenness? If not, does Joseph's story bring comfort? Why or why not?

## Journaling

One of the great themes of the Joseph story is the way that God weaves the “common” things in life together to providentially achieve His purposes. This is a reality that’s daily at work in each one of our lives as well!

Using a journal of some kind (paper or electronic), use the following guide to record your thoughts and events from the last week. The goal is to capture the larger themes, not necessarily to record every detail of the week. This exercise will be more effective the more often you do it. Therefore, you may start journaling once a week, but if you move to multiple times each week or even daily, you will likely find more evidence of God’s gradual work in the midst of the “common” aspects of life, all for His glory.

Some questions for journaling:

- What are some of the key events of the past day/week?
- What are some key relationships that you’ve been engaging, and how are those relationships going?
- List a few high points from the past day/week during which you experienced great joy and happiness and why you felt that way.
- List a few low points from the past day/week during which things were difficult or painful and why you felt that way.
- What has God been teaching you?
- What’s a question that you’re asking God right now in your life?
- What are you most excited about in the next day/week?
- What are you most anxious about in the next day/week?
- Write a brief prayer that expresses your heart before God.

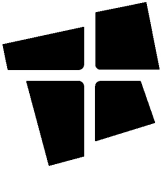
Please note: In subsequent weeks of study and journaling, don’t feel you need to cover each of these questions every time! The intent is to help you think through your life in a way that will highlight the significant aspects of the past day or week. If you’ve used a journal in the past, feel free to use the form with which you are most comfortable. The goal is not to achieve a certain format but, rather, to record the way that God is working in your life in the midst of the sometimes mundane details of living.

## Gospel Glimpse: Genesis 37

As you think about the story of Joseph as well as the story of Jesus, consider the following:

- Jacob “kept the saying in mind” when Joseph explained his dream. (Genesis 37:11) Mary “pondered these things in her heart” when the shepherds told her about the appearance of the angels, as well as when Jesus disappeared into the temple as a boy. (Luke 2:19 and 2: 51)
- Joseph’s brothers did not believe his dreams. (Genesis 37:5-11) Jesus’ brothers didn’t believe His deity. (John 7:5)
- Joseph’s father sent him to the wilderness to check on his brothers, despite the apparent danger to his life. (Genesis 37:13-14) God the Father sent Jesus into the “wilderness” of humanity to die for the sin of mankind. (John 3:16-17)
- Joseph was despised and rejected by his brothers. Jesus was despised and rejected by men. (Isaiah 53:3)
- When Joseph came to his brothers in Gotham, his words are not recorded and he seems strangely silent. (Genesis 37:23-24) Jesus also was silent when confronted with His death. (Matthew 26:62-63, cf. Isaiah 53:7)
- Joseph was sold for silver coins, roughly the price of a slave, to “Gentiles,” those outside of the covenant of God. (Genesis 37:28) Jesus was betrayed for silver coins, roughly the cost of a slave who was gored by an ox and killed, to those outside of the covenant. (Matthew 26:14-15, cf. Exodus 21:32)

These are just a few of the many parallels. Did you find others?



BETRAYAL  
GENESIS 37

Sermon Notes:



## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "How many brothers and sisters do you have? Were there others outside of your immediate family in your house growing up?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Genesis 37

- How have you seen Jesus at work recently?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- What are some of the major things you've seen God do in you over the course of your life?
- Have you ever experienced brokenness or betrayal within the community of faith? Have you experienced God's redemption in this area?
- What kinds of dreams have you had for your life? Have you ever seen them dashed or had to get rid of them?
- Can positive results come from sin? Can you think of a time when that has happened in your life?
- Think about the various lives represented in this group. What are some unique ways that God may be calling us to make an impact on the world around us, simply because of who we are?

**World:** As each of you begin the Lenten season, determine one person who is not currently following after Jesus that God would have you pray for during this season. Make a list of the names (first names only is fine) and create a "Blessing List" that your entire group can pray over. During the period of time leading up to Easter, commit to praying specifically for each person on this list, whether you know them personally or not. Pray that God would give specific opportunities to speak of His love, and that you might have the opportunity to invite them into this group or one of our Celebration gatherings.

# WEEK TWO: BLESSING

## GENESIS 38-39

The contrasting of the lives of two brothers, Judah and Joseph, becomes a clear model of grace for us. The good plan of God rarely calls for our ease and comfort—rather, God is calling us into death to self and new life in Christ. Judah's tragic sin will ultimately be redeemed. Joseph's superior morality seems to be repaid with cursing, at least in the short term. God is constantly working out His best in our lives, but sometimes we only are able to trust that reality by faith.

## **Inductive Bible Study**

Read Genesis 38-39, using at least two different translations if possible.

Observation: Who is involved in the passage? Where does this happen? What details jump out to you as you read?

Interpretation: Why is this happening? What might the characters be feeling? In what way do the characters grow through this passage? What impact does this passage have on the lives of the characters involved? What does this show us about God?



Application: What does this mean for me? What character do I most identify with in this passage, and why? What does this passage show me about God, and what impact does that have on my life?

Action Step: Based on this passage, what's one thing that I should either start doing, stop doing, or change?

## **Goats, Goats, Goats**

Goats don't seem to hold a high position of honor within the animal kingdom. We use a variety of figures of speech that speak of the animals in a derogatory way, often signifying foolish, annoying, or bad behavior. Biblically, the same thing could be said—there simply aren't many positive references to goats.

Interestingly, goats take both a central and ignominious role in Jacob's family. Read the following passages, and then note the use for the goat in each:

Genesis 27:5-25

Genesis 37:25-36

Genesis 38:12-23

The “goat deceit” has now spanned three generations in the family of Jacob, “each involv[ing] an item of identity and a goat.”<sup>4</sup> While the goat is not the central point of the story, the narration gives us this detail to point out the larger significance—the sin of deceit seems to be running in the family.

Years later, Jesus would also use the goat as a symbol for a stern prophesy and warning to the religious leaders of His day. Read Matthew 25:34-46.

- How would you summarize the message of Jesus in this passage?
  
- What kind of people do the goats represent?
  
- How does that tie back to the story of Jacob’s family?

There is one other notable mention of goats in the book of Genesis. Read Genesis 15:7-10. Again, the goats aren’t central in this odd covenant ceremony, but a sacrificial goat is clearly present. The culminating vision of Genesis 15, found in vs. 17-18, was a promise that God made to Abraham and his descendants that He would Himself guarantee the covenant, both His end *and* our end. What was the message of the covenant ceremony? If either side didn’t keep their end of the covenant promise, God Himself would be torn in two. So, in a very clear way, the goat was not only a symbol of deceit, but it was also a symbol of the cross.

**Application:**

- Are there specific sins that have been carried through generations in your family? If so, take time to confess them and pray that they would be broken!

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, (Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2004.), pg. 453.

## **The Lord Be With You**

*Dominus vobiscum.* While it's a phrase that's quite likely foreign to our ears, it's one of the most enduring expressions in church history. In fact, the origins of the expression pre-date even the church as we know it, with the earliest known origins being in the book of Ruth (2:4), and the idea behind the phrase tracing back to the life of Joseph, or even before. The translation? *The Lord be with you.*

The question is: What are we praying when we utter this blessing? Many take it to mean prosperity, comfort, and ease. However, the presence of the Lord doesn't seem to guarantee any such thing.

Read Genesis 39:2-3 and 23.

- What phrase is used at both the beginning and the end of the chapter?
- How many times is it used in both instances?

The repetition of this phrase shows us two key truths: (1) that the presence of God was with Joseph and does not leave him, and (2) that the theological focus of this narrative is not truly Joseph, but God Himself. In fact:

The God who was with Joseph was “the Lord” (Yahweh), the personal covenant name of God, and this name is used eight times in this account, and then never again in the remaining eight chapters of Joseph’s story... Thus we are to understand that at the most uncertain time of Joseph’s life, when he could see nothing of God, the covenant God of Israel was at work to effect his covenant promises through Joseph.<sup>5</sup>

Now, read the rest of Genesis 39. Write a brief outline of the events of the chapter:

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<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, (Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2004.), pg. 460.

Read Psalm 105:1-11. What is the central idea of this first portion of the psalm?

Read Psalm 105:12-15. Summarize these verses. What is God saying?

Read Psalm 105:16-19. What do these verses say about the life of Joseph during his early days in Egypt?

How can this reality describing Genesis 39 be true just as verses 12-15 are true?

The only answer is that Joseph's sufferings were allowed by the Lord for His purposes, not the work of the enemy or of blind fate. *God was with Joseph!* That doesn't mean that God enjoys the suffering of His faithful servants but, rather, "God uses the things He hates to accomplish the goals He loves."<sup>6</sup>

At this point in *your* life, are things not going as you hoped they would? Joseph—and Jesus—understands. Bad circumstances, however, are far from meaning that God's plan for your life is being derailed. In fact, it may just be beginning.

**Application:**

- Have you ever been angry with God for not "rewarding" your faithfulness?

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<sup>6</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Living in the Light of Inextinguishable Hope: The Gospel According to Joseph*, (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2013.), pg. 57.

## Journaling

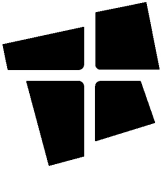
Don't forget to journal regularly during this study, at least one time each week! See page 15 for some questions to prompt your journaling.

### **Gospel Glimpse: Genesis 38-39**

As you think about the story of Joseph as well as the story of Jesus, consider the following:

- Judah's offspring became the chosen line of the covenant, leading to Jesus, which came out of his sin with Tamar. (Genesis 38:27-30) Jesus Himself was born because of our sin and the sin of the world. (Genesis 3:15)
- God was with Joseph, despite the suffering and pain of his circumstances. (Genesis 39:2-3, 23) God was with Jesus through His suffering, all the way until the very end. (Matthew 27:46)
- Joseph resisted temptation (Genesis 39:7-12), just as Jesus did. (Hebrews 4:15)
- Joseph is falsely accused and condemned even though he is innocent of any wrongdoing. (Genesis 39:15-20) Jesus was falsely accused and condemned even though He did nothing wrong. (Matthew 26:57-68)
- Joseph was put in prison with those who had committed crimes of all sorts. (Genesis 39:20) Jesus was crucified alongside two sinners. (Luke 23:33)

These are just a few of the many parallels. Did you find others?



BLESSING  
GENESIS 38-39

Sermon Notes:

## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "Name three blessings in life that you're experiencing right now."

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Genesis 38-39

- How has God been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- What comes to mind when you hear the word "blessing"?
- Have you ever been "blessed" through tragic or difficult circumstances? Describe that.
- Are there specific sins that have been part of your family for generations? Have you ever prayed that God would break those?
- Have you ever been angry with God for not "rewarding" your faithfulness to Him?
- Can you think of examples of times when God used something that He hates to do something that He loves?
- How can a community like this support each other during difficult times? Do we do this well, or not?

**World:** Continue to pray blessing over the person you've chosen to pray for through the Lenten season. Make sure that each person in your group has chosen a specific person to pray for (see last week's "World" section), and that everyone knows at least a first name for whom to be praying. This week, divide into 2's and 3's and share specific ways in which you can be a practical blessing in the lives of the people for whom you're praying. Consider following up with each other later in the week and encouraging one another to take these steps of blessing!



# WEEK THREE: DREAMS

## GENESIS 40-41

Joseph's steadfast trust in God remained through trials as well as in impossible circumstances. When he was desperate, he refused to give up; when he was victorious, he refused to take credit. When our hopes are crushed, it's easy for us to forget the steadfast love and grace of God. However, it's just as easy to ignore His presence in the times of success! Neither hard work nor crushing circumstance can define us. Instead, we must be solely defined by the grace of Jesus.

## **Inductive Bible Study**

Read Genesis 40-41, using at least two different translations if possible.

Observation: Who is involved in the passage? Where does this happen? What details jump out to you as you read?

Interpretation: Why is this happening? What might the characters be feeling? In what way do the characters grow through this passage? What impact does this passage have on the lives of the characters involved? What does this show us about God?

Application: What does this mean for me? What character do I most identify with in this passage, and why? What does this passage show me about God, and what impact does that have on my life?

Action Step: Based on this passage, what's one thing that I should either start doing, stop doing, or change?

## **Fruitful Delays**

We don't like to wait. We can blame it on the culture, the internet, or the microwave, but there's not much that irritates us more than unnecessary waiting. Having someone in front of us in line at the store that needs to have a price checked is an exercise in restraint. Commercial breaks are simply too much for a DVR-driven society. And forget about the fact that we have just about all of the information in the known world at our fingertips via the internet—and if the webpage won't load in fifteen seconds or less, we begin to feel our blood pressure rise.

Reading the narrative, we can easily miss the slow passage of time in Joseph's life. What has been just a few short chapters for us has been many agonizing *years* for him.

Look at Genesis 37:2. How old was Joseph when the narrative began?

Now, read Genesis 41:46. How old was Joseph when he entered Pharaoh's service?

Thirteen years. From age 17 to 30, Joseph was either in slavery or in prison. We don't know the specific time Joseph was sent to jail, but contextual clues seem to indicate that it was early on in his time in Egypt. Likely, he spent more than 10 years in prison. We know that he spent two years in prison *after* the release of the cupbearer of Pharaoh. (see Genesis 41:1) All that time. Waiting.

In fact, the story has not yet reached its climax. That is still some nine years away (see Genesis 45:6) when his brothers would finally appear in Egypt and God's plan would start to unfold with greater clarity. How long does that mean that Jacob was waiting in Egypt, with no sign of God's purposes?

These periods of waiting, however, are not unusual within the patriarchal narratives, just as they are not unusual within our lives.

- Look at Genesis 12:4 and 21:5. How many years did Abraham wait until the promised son was born?
- Look at Genesis 31:41. How many years did Jacob wait in Laban's household until he returned to the Promised Land?

In each of these instances, the time of waiting bore fruit. Abraham learned to truly trust God and rely on Him by faith. Jacob lived through the kind of deception that he had perpetrated on his brother Esau, preparing him for the transforming work of Jesus in Genesis 32.

What was the fruit of Joseph's waiting? We're given clues through the Hebrew names he gives to his two sons. Read Genesis 41:50-52.

- What are the meanings of the names he gives his sons?
- What does it seem that God has enabled Joseph to do during this long period of waiting?

It's important to note, however, the detail of the name Ephraim. While the land of affliction represents a hopeful pointing to the fruitfulness of God, Joseph still remains there. God has not removed the affliction—He has only allowed the affliction to bear fruit. The same is often true for us as well.

**Application:**

- Have you experienced times of affliction in your life? Are you now? What fruit might those times be bearing?

## **Transformation**

I remember when Transformers became a thing. I was a young kid, maybe 8 or 9, fascinated with toys in general and toy cars in specific, so the idea of a car that could *become* a robot was beyond the scope of my imagination! Both commercials and cartoons displayed an instantaneous transformation: from car to robot, and then back again. My fumbling pre-teen fingers, however, were another story. What happened in just a few seconds on the screen took many more seconds... and minutes... if I could get it to work right at all. Transforming, it seemed, wasn't as easy as it looked.

Genesis 40-41 tells the story of a transformation: not from car to robot, but from prisoner to one of the most powerful men in the most powerful empire on earth. However, this wasn't Joseph's first transformation, and it didn't happen as quickly as it seemed (or as quickly as it looks on TV!).

Read Genesis 37:23. When Joseph was transformed from the favored son to slave, what was removed from him?

Read Genesis 39:12. When Joseph was transformed from the overseer of Potiphar's house to a prisoner, what was removed from him?

The process of transformation in Joseph had begun many years before with an undoing. Twice he had everything he could want and, just like his outer coat, it was removed from him. It was fitting, then, that the first step out of prison and into the service of Pharaoh required changing clothes. (see Genesis 41:14) However, the transformation wasn't yet complete.

Read Genesis 41:42. What were the final outward symbols of Joseph's transformation?

Paul uses similar language when he speaks of the transformation that comes from dying to self and following Jesus. Read Colossians 3:1-17.

- What things are we told to "put to death" or to "put off?"
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What things are we told to "put on?"
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Is this the way that we are transformed, or is it a *result* of our transformation? (see Colossians 3:3)

However, even the earthly transformation in Christ is still incomplete. Paul describes the final transformation in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.

- What are the terms that Paul uses to describe the final transformation?

Unlike just changing our clothes, our final transformation will be complete!

**Application:**

- What are some ways that you have seen God changing you over the past few months or years? How are you asking Him to change you in the future?

## **Journaling**

Don't forget to journal regularly during this study, at least one time each week! See page 15 for some questions to prompt your journaling.

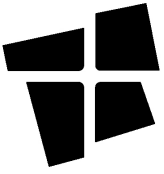
### **Gospel Glimpse: Genesis 40-41**

As you think about the story of Joseph as well as the story of Jesus, consider the following:

- Joseph was surrounded by two sinners: to one he pronounced deliverance, and to one he pronounced judgment. (Genesis 40:9-19) Jesus was crucified between two thieves: one passed into eternity cursing Him and, to the other, He promised eternal deliverance. (Luke 23:39-43)
- Joseph foretold the future accurately, through the power of God, according to Pharaoh's dreams. (Genesis 41:13a, 53-54) Jesus foretold the future as a sign of His deity. (John 13:19)
- Joseph was promoted to a position of honor and glory in Egypt, was given a new name, and all were required to bow before him. (Genesis 41:41-45) Jesus was exalted to position of glory and given a name above every name, at which every knee will bow. (Philippians 2:9-10)
- Joseph provided food for all the hungry that came to him looking for food. (Genesis 41:57) Jesus declared that He was the bread of life and that He was able to provide sustenance for all who come to Him. (John 6:35)

These are just a few of the many parallels. Did you find others?





DREAMS  
GENESIS 40-41

Sermon Notes:

## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "Have you ever had a dream that sticks out to you and you still remember?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Genesis 40-41

- What's Jesus doing in your life?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- How do you respond to delays in the ways that you think God should be working?
- Read Romans 5:3-5. How does the gospel make it possible for us to have hope in the midst of suffering?
- Have times of affliction in your life borne fruit? In what ways?
- What are some ways that you have seen God changing you over the past months/years?
- What are some ways that you are asking God to change you right now and in the future?
- How has God positioned you to be a blessing in the world around you? How about us as a group?

**World:** The promise God made to Abraham, that He would bless him so that he would be blessing for the whole world, comes to fruition in many ways through Joseph. However, the promise is not intended to stop there—in fact, Joseph was simply a precursor to Jesus, the hope of the world! We are called, like Joseph, to be bearers of that blessing. Talk and pray about ways that you as a group might be able to be a blessing in the world through the work of Jesus. It may be that your group can be a blessing as a whole group, or that you will be more effective in smaller groups. However, in some way, *be a blessing in the world around you this week!*

# WEEK FOUR: REUNION

## GENESIS 42-43

God is constantly in the process of redeeming all things. The very worst sin that Joseph's brothers ever committed would become the very way that God would save them and their entire family. However, the temporary joy of recognizing the plan of God doesn't mean that reconciliation can immediately take place. Rather, the process of redemption is a sometimes slow one. The plan of God is not simply to give us a surface peace but, rather, to establish in each of us a deep shalom that endures.

## **Inductive Bible Study**

Read Genesis 42-43, using at least two different translations if possible.

Observation: Who is involved in the passage? Where does this happen? What details jump out to you as you read?

Interpretation: Why is this happening? What might the characters be feeling? In what way do the characters grow through this passage? What impact does this passage have on the lives of the characters involved? What does this show us about God?

Application: What does this mean for me? What character do I most identify with in this passage, and why? What does this passage show me about God, and what impact does that have on my life?

Action Step: Based on this passage, what's one thing that I should either start doing, stop doing, or change?

## **Idols of the Heart**

Idols are funny things. Not “LOL” funny, of course, but strange. In ancient times, idols were little statues, made by men but worshiped as gods. In our time, however, an idol is a bit harder to recognize. Often they start out as good things but, over time, they become more than “good” to us—they become ultimate things. We aren’t reasonable when talking about idols because our love for them and our concern for them far outstrip their actual worth.

Jacob doesn’t worship at the feet of a wooden statue, but he certainly has an idol. Like most of our idols, Jacob’s idol is actually a very good thing—his deep love for his youngest son Benjamin. But the God of the universe won’t share first place honors with anyone or anything, regardless of how good that thing is.

Read the account of the brothers’ homecoming in Genesis 42:29-38.

- What is Jacob’s response to their report?

Jacob’s focus isn’t on the providentially returned money or the abundance of food. Rather, in the original language, the focus is “understandably but instructively self-oriented: ‘*Me* have you bereaved...against *me* is all this.’”<sup>7</sup> (vs. 36)

- What does Simeon offer in reply to Jacob’s despair?
  
- Carefully read Jacob’s response, which he presumably speaks in the presence of his eleven remaining sons. What is strange about it?

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<sup>7</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, (IVP Academic, Downer’s Grove, IL., 1967.), pg. 211.

Idolatry creates strange behavior, including the ignoring of ten sons in order to fully focus on one. However, even more blatant than Jacob's disregard for his other sons is his disregard for the presence of God.

- What does Jacob say would happen if harm came to Benjamin on the journey?

Look at the promise of God to Jacob during the first time He truly appeared to him. Read Genesis 28:13-15.

- What does God promise to Jacob?

Jacob's desperate cry is that, if something happened to Benjamin, his life would basically be a living hell and would no longer be worth living. It may be that God will never leave him, as was promised. But, if Benjamin is gone, to Jacob, so is all hope. Jacob's trust in God has completely disappeared.

Let's shift the focus for a moment... Read Matthew 28:18-20.

- What is God's promise to us?

Read Hebrews 13:5-6. The word "money" could be easily exchanged for any number of idols of the heart, and the truth remains the same: Why should I be concerned when I'm promised the presence of God? Chuck Swindoll shines great light on our hearts: "[You might] say with a shrug: 'I would have trusted God if I had been in that situation.' But would you really? Then why didn't you trust Him last week? Call to mind your most recent major test. Did you rest calmly in Him?"<sup>8</sup>

### **Application:**

- What idols do you cling to so tightly that you can't imagine living life without them?

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<sup>8</sup> Chuck Swindoll, *Joseph: A Man of Absolute Integrity*, (Word, Nashville, TN., 1998.), pg. 107.

## **Real Shalom**

There are times in life when things just seem to be going right. The sky is blue, relationships with those you love are all great, life is full (but not too full!), finances are solid, and there's a nice steak ready to go on the grill. Of course, for most of us, those times are few and far between. At the end of Genesis 2, all of creation experienced a moment like that. In Genesis 3, it all broke to pieces, and we've been longing for it to be restored ever since.

On the surface, Joseph has been placed in Egypt to save the fledgling nation of Israel from a worldwide famine. However, there is something at work that's even greater than that, and it surrounds this idea of *shalom*, the Hebrew word that's often translated "peace."

Read Genesis 35:11. What is the promise that God makes to Jacob?

The word translated "company" is the Hebrew word *qahal*, which is the Hebrew word often used for church. God's promise is that Jacob's diverse sons would become a harmonious community, dwelling together in unity.

Due to the favoritism of a father, the envy of brothers, and the clueless arrogance of a son, the idea of *shalom* seems like a far-fetched dream. Read Genesis 37:4.

- What can't the brothers do to Joseph?

Literally, they can't even say *shalom* to him. That, of course, leads to attempted murder, selling Joseph into slavery, and what seems to be an irreconcilable situation. Things are looking bad.



Read Genesis 43:15-30. While it's difficult to notice in English translations, the word *shalom* is used four times within six verses. (Vs. 23, 27a, 27b, 28) The restoration of *shalom* is clearly the focus. But how?

Read Genesis 43:29-34.

- What did Joseph do after greeting Benjamin?
  
- How was Benjamin treated at the meal?

Joseph designed a scenario that would test the brothers. "If there was still jealousy and enmity at work among the brothers, this would surely stir it up."<sup>9</sup> However, notice also that Joseph was not emotionally disconnected from these events! "He longed to be reunited with his brothers. However, for real reconciliation to take place, it would be necessary to see whether real change had occurred in his brothers."<sup>10</sup>

Joseph's test is not yet over, but his emotional investment in the restoration of *shalom* is striking. Read Luke 19:41-42.

- What causes Jesus to weep for Jerusalem?

In Genesis 3, the *shalom* we experience with God was broken. In Genesis 3:15, God prophesied that there would be One who would come that would restore that *shalom*. However, like Jerusalem, we must be willing to recognize and engage the sacrifice intended for our *shalom*—the sacrifice of Jesus.

### **Application:**

- If Jesus has offered us *shalom* through His sacrificial death, how does that change the way we approach the fractured and broken relationships in our lives?

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<sup>9</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Living in the Light of Inextinguishable Hope: The Gospel According to Joseph*, (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2013.), pg. 107.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Journaling**

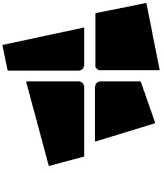
Don't forget to journal regularly during this study, at least one time each week! See page 15 for some questions to prompt your journaling.

### **Gospel Glimpse: Genesis 42-43**

As you think about the story of Joseph as well as the story of Jesus, consider the following:

- Joseph's own brothers didn't recognize him. (Genesis 42:8) Jesus came to the world and His own people, but they didn't recognize or receive Him. (John 1:10-11)
- God used Joseph to save His people from certain destruction through famine. (Genesis 42:1-2) God used Jesus to save His people from certain destruction through sin. (Romans 6:23)
- Joseph's brothers ultimately repented of what they did to Joseph. (Genesis 42:21) All of us who are guilty of crucifying Jesus will ultimately mourn in sorrow for our sin. (Zechariah 12:10)
- Joseph returned the payment for the food he sent with his brothers. (Genesis 42:25) Jesus is unable to be repaid for His free grace that is given to us. (Romans 11:35-36)

These are just a few of the many parallels. Did you find others?



REUNION  
GENESIS 42-43

Sermon Notes:

## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "Would you want to go to your 50<sup>th</sup> high school reunion? Why or why not?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Genesis 42-43

- Where have you seen God at work this week in your life?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- How do you tend to respond to broken or strained relationships?
- What "good things" in your life have the potential to be turned into idols?
- Are there idols in your life that, if they were taken from you, you couldn't imagine living a full life?
- How does the work of Jesus for our reconciliation change the way that you approach the broken relationships in your life?
- How might the *shalom* of our community impact the broken *shalom* of the world around us?

**World:** As you continue to pray blessing into the lives of the specific people you're praying for this season, consider if there are areas where they might be experiencing a lack of the *shalom* of God. For many, being invited into a loving and accepting community is a vital part of restoring *shalom*. Consider whether a small group of you, or even the entire group, might be a place where one or more of those for whom you're praying God's blessing might find peace. Pray *and* plan intentionally about how you might share the peace of Jesus in the community around you!

# WEEK FIVE: RECONCILIATION

GENESIS 44:1 — 45:15

Learning to forgive is one of the most difficult lessons in the life of a Christian. Joseph's model of reconciliation wasn't a quick and mindless forgiveness; but neither was it a partial forgiveness that held on to the past offense. We are best able to forgive when we can see the overarching plan of God at work around us and when we recognize that, like Joseph's brothers, we are guilty and have been forgiven much. The willingness to forgive must be an active part of living in the Kingdom of God.

## **Inductive Bible Study**

Read Genesis 44:1-45:15, using at least two different translations if possible.

Observation: Who is involved in the passage? Where does this happen? What details jump out to you as you read?

Interpretation: Why is this happening? What might the characters be feeling? In what way do the characters grow through this passage? What impact does this passage have on the lives of the characters involved? What does this show us about God?

Application: What does this mean for me? What character do I most identify with in this passage, and why? What does this passage show me about God, and what impact does that have on my life?

Action Step: Based on this passage, what's one thing that I should either start doing, stop doing, or change?

## **Hearts Exposed**

Last week we looked at “phase one” of the testing process that Joseph was using with his brothers. (See “Real Shalom” on pgs. 45-46.) Through the unexpected joy of an extravagant dinner, as well as through the over-abundant grace shown to Benjamin, Joseph was able to discern whether they were still given to jealousy toward their “favored” brother.

As the brothers wake up, probably still groggy from the incredible party held the night before, they get ready to head back home to Canaan. They are likely talking to one another about the good fortune they had in their interaction with this powerful “Egyptian,” possibly even remembering the prayer that Jacob had prayed over them before they left home (see Genesis 43:14) and marveling at God’s answer. This sets the stage perfectly for Joseph’s final test.

Read Genesis 44:1-17.

- When the cup is found in Benjamin’s sack, what opportunity do the brothers have?
- What is the response of the brothers’ to the steward finding the cup?
- Read Genesis 37:31-34. What is the irony about their reaction this time, when compared to their decision to sell Joseph into slavery?

Derek Kidner makes the observation that this test of Joseph is similar to the famous judgment of King Solomon in that it is a “thrust to the heart.”<sup>11</sup> With what the brothers’ now stand to gain—their freedom, not simply the 20 pieces of silver that they received when Joseph was sold into slavery—their response to this parallel situation clearly reveals their hearts.

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<sup>11</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis: TOTC*, (IVP Academic, Downer’s Grove, IL., 1967.), pg. 211.



Read 1 Kings 3:16-28. How are these two tests similar?

Like the real mother before Solomon, the pressure of the situation and the incredibly high stakes ensure that the true character of the brothers comes out. However, even more telling is the response of one specific brother: Judah. Read Genesis 44:18-34.

- Summarize Judah's plea before Joseph and his reasoning for that plea.
- Read Genesis 37:25-27. Whose idea was it to sell Joseph originally?

This incredible intercession on behalf of Benjamin bears a striking similarity to Moses' intercession for the people in Exodus 32.<sup>12</sup> Read Exodus 32:9-14, 31-32.

- What is the key similarity between these two pleas?

These offers of substitution foreshadow an even greater substitution. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Who does Paul say bore the penalty of sin so that we might be seen as righteous?

**Application:**

- What are the areas of stress or testing in your life that reveal your heart most honestly? What does this tell you about your heart?

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pg. 212.

## **The Importance of Attitude**

When I was in middle school and high school, I played basketball. I loved every single part of the game—playing defense, shooting, ball handling, passing, learning the offensive and defensive schemes—I enjoyed every aspect of it. There was one part of practice, however, that I hated. *Running*. UGH! That dreaded call of “on the line” was my least favorite part of every day.

The irony is that now, many years later, when I have a bit of free time, I *choose* to run. The thing that I used to dread I now willingly engage and, every once in awhile, even enjoy! What’s the difference? I’m not in better shape now than I was then. (I wish!) I’m still not very fast. The only real difference is attitude. I now see the value of staying in shape and staying mobile, and so I do it. My attitude is different.

Both Joseph and his brothers have undergone an incredible change in attitude. There are lots of reasons for those changes that occurred in the two decades or so since Joseph was sold into slavery, several of which are apparent in the text.

Read Genesis 45:1-15.

- Look at vs. 5. What reason does Joseph give for not being angry?

Forgiveness is made far easier because he could “see clearly the overarching purpose of God.”<sup>13</sup>

But how about the attitude of his brothers?

- Read Genesis 37:8. How do the brothers seem to initially feel about the idea of Joseph ruling over them?

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<sup>13</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Living in the Light of Inextinguishable Hope: The Gospel According to Joseph*, (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2013.), pg. 120.

- Read Genesis 45:8b-11. What are the implications of Joseph's direction to his brothers?

Duguid comments:

The test that Joseph's brothers now faced was whether they were willing to live under his rule. They had to choose between continued independence, which meant ongoing destitution in Canaan, and submitting themselves to a life of dependence upon Joseph's provisions in Egypt. The prospect of bowing down to their brother, as depicted in earlier dreams, had now become a reality.<sup>14</sup>

It's so easy for us to change on the outside but not transform on the inside. For Joseph's brothers to willingly depend upon him, to live under his rule, they needed to have had a real change in attitude.

Read 1 John 1:6-7. What does John say about our willingness to live under the Lordship of Jesus?

Swindoll notes three attitudes that allow us to rest under the Lordship of Jesus<sup>15</sup>:

1. When I'm able, by faith, to see God's plan for me in my location.
2. When I'm able, by faith, to sense God's hand in my situation.
3. When I'm able, by faith, to accept both location and situation as good, even when there's been evil in the process.

### **Application:**

- What gets in the way of you living joyfully under the Lordship of Jesus?

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pg. 124.

<sup>15</sup> Chuck Swindoll, *Joseph: A Man of Absolute Integrity*, (Word, Nashville, TN., 1998.), pg. 148-149.

## Journaling

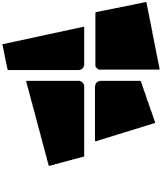
Don't forget to journal regularly during this study, at least one time each week! See page 15 for some questions to prompt your journaling.

### **Gospel Glimpse: Genesis 44:1-45:15**

As you think about the story of Joseph as well as the story of Jesus, consider the following:

- Judah offered to be the sacrifice for the apparent guilt of Benjamin. (Genesis 44:33) Jesus became the sacrifice for the true guilt of all of us. (Romans 3:23-25)
- Joseph executed a complex plan that led to the reconciliation of his family. (Genesis 42-45) God sent Jesus as the pinnacle of a complex plan—begun before the foundations of the world—to reconcile us to God. (Ephesians 1:4-5)
- Joseph's plan resulted both in the forgiveness of sin and the establishment of a true community. (cf. Genesis 35:11, Genesis 45:10-11) The sacrifice of Christ both forgives our sin and establishes a new community of faith. (Ephesians 2:4-22)
- Joseph views his suffering as sent by God in order to achieve a greater purpose, the preservation of life. (Genesis 45:5) Jesus views His suffering as sent by God in order to achieve a greater purpose, the salvation of the world. (John 18:11)

These are just a few of the many parallels. Did you find others?



RECONCILIATION  
GENESIS 44:1-45:15

Sermon Notes:

## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What was/is your favorite and least favorite subject in school?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Genesis 44:1-45:15

- How is Jesus working in your life right now?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- What are the areas of stress or testing in your life that reveal your heart most honestly?
- Is it easier for you to believe that you've been forgiven by God or for you to truly forgive others and be reconciled to them? Why?
- Are there offenses that have been committed against you that are very difficult for you to forgive? What's that process been like?
- Does seeing God's plan in the midst of pain and suffering make that pain and suffering easier to endure? Why or why not?
- What gets in the way of you living joyfully under the Lordship of Jesus?
- Is this group a good example of a reconciling community? Why or why not?

**World:** In these final weeks leading up to Easter, pray intentionally for opportunities to be a blessing to those on your blessing list. Consider ways that you might serve them (individually or as a group) and ways that your story might be an encouragement to them. Also, begin to pray about whether it would be a good time for you to invite them to attend an Easter gathering, either the larger celebration gathering or a smaller gathering within your group. Consider inviting them into the blessing of a reconciling community!

# WEEK SIX: REVERSAL

GENESIS 45:16 — 47:31

The reversal of Jacob's life shows us the power of the gospel at work in us. With the revelation of God, Jacob moves from a lifestyle of death to that of life. He moves from famine and destitution to fortune and plenty. He sees death replaced with new life before his very eyes. Through seeing Joseph again, Jacob is given a window into the reality in which we all are able to live—that we deserve is replaced with the unconditional grace of God. This is truly the blessing that is intended for all nations.

## **Inductive Bible Study**

Read Genesis 45:16-47:31, using at least two different translations if possible.

Observation: Who is involved in the passage? Where does this happen? What details jump out to you as you read?

Interpretation: Why is this happening? What might the characters be feeling? In what way do the characters grow through this passage? What impact does this passage have on the lives of the characters involved? What does this show us about God?



Application: What does this mean for me? What character do I most identify with in this passage, and why? What does this passage show me about God, and what impact does that have on my life?

Action Step: Based on this passage, what's one thing that I should either start doing, stop doing, or change?



Now, read Genesis 46:28-30.

- What is Jacob's response to seeing Joseph?

If Jacob's heart has been "revived" and changed, is he still speaking of death? The difference can be found in understanding how Jacob was viewing life. He longed for the fulfillment of the plan of God and was certain that God's covenant promise was dependent upon his favored son, Joseph. In a way, it was. Not because Joseph would be in the Messianic line, but because Joseph would be instrumental in the survival of Israel through the famine!

Read Luke 2:29-32.

- How is Jacob's response to Joseph similar to Simeon's response to seeing the baby Jesus?
- Why does Simeon have this response? Could this explain Jacob's response as well?

Jacob was right about "his desire to see God's promise fulfilled."<sup>16</sup> As with Jacob, it is only in the promise of God that we truly have life. However, Jacob was wrong about *how* God's promise would be fulfilled and, like him, we don't know who God will use or how He will work. However, we can embrace *His* life, even as we embrace our own death! (Galatians 2:20-21)

**Application:**

- In what ways is your life defined by the promise and plan of God? In what ways are you too concerned about your own plans?

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<sup>16</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Living in the Light of Inextinguishable Hope: The Gospel According to Joseph*, (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2013.), pg. 152.

## **Sojourners**

*Sojourn: (n) a temporary stay. (v) to stay somewhere temporarily.*

One of the great challenges of our faith is to recognize that this world, though good and pleasant in many ways, is not our home. The late Rich Mullins crafted these words that point us toward this reality:

Nobody tells you when you get born here  
How much you'll come to love it and how you'll never belong here  
So I call you my country, and I'll be lonely for my home  
And I wish that I could take you there with me.<sup>17</sup>

Both Joseph and Jacob maintained the understanding that Egypt, no matter how good it might be, was only temporary.

Read Genesis 46:1-4.

- What did God assure Jacob about going to Egypt?
  
- What was the promise from God about Canaan?
  
- Read Genesis 47:29-31. When Jacob was finally preparing to die, what promise did he ask Joseph to make to him?

Read Genesis 47:1-4.

- How did the brothers characterize their stay in Egypt to Pharaoh?

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<sup>17</sup> Rich Mullins and Beaker, "The Land of My Sojourn." Copyright 1993, Edward Grant, Inc., Kid Brothers of St. Frank Publishing.

Interestingly, the land of Goshen was on the east side of Egypt, “fertile, yet away from Egypt’s centers of activity”, and conveniently located near the Promised Land for “an eventual escape.”<sup>18</sup> Joseph seemed to realize that this was simply a sojourn, and that they need to be ready to leave when God called.

The idea of this world being a sojourn from our true home is one that would be developed throughout the history of God’s people.

Read 1 Chronicles 29:14-16.

- How does David describe himself and the people before God?
- Look at the context of David’s words. Why does he pray this way?

Read 1 Peter 2:11-12

- To what kind of behavior does Peter call God’s people, precisely because they are sojourners? Why does he do that?
- Read 1 Peter 2:9-10. What is the assurance that we have in the midst of our sojourn here on earth?

Egypt was not the final destination of Israel. This life is not the final destination for the believer in Jesus. However, like Joseph, we must take care to live like that.

**Application:**

- In what ways might you be more tied to this world than you’d like to be?

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<sup>18</sup> Joyce Baldwin, *The Message of Genesis 12-50: The Bible Speaks Today*, (IVP, Downer’s Grove, IL., 1986.), pg. 194.

## **Journaling**

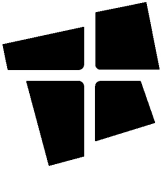
Don't forget to journal regularly during this study, at least one time each week! See page 15 for some questions to prompt your journaling.

### **Gospel Glimpse: Genesis 45:16-47:31**

As you think about the story of Joseph as well as the story of Jesus, consider the following:

- Jacob had a difficult time believing that Joseph was still alive, and needed to see the chariots from Egypt to believe it. (Genesis 45:26-27) The disciples had a difficult time believing that Jesus was alive again, and one even needed to feel the scars from the crucifixion to believe it. (John 20:24-29)
- Through Joseph, a surprisingly large and diverse family was saved and brought to a place of safety and blessing. (Genesis 46:8-27) Through Jesus, a surprisingly large and diverse family is saved and will dwell eternally in a place of safety and blessing. (Revelation 5:9-14)
- Through Joseph's suffering, he and his family were able to enter into rest in Egypt. (Genesis 47:12) Through Jesus' suffering, the people of God are able to enter into an eternal rest. (Hebrews 4:9, 12:2)

These are just a few of the many parallels. Did you find others?



REVERSAL  
GENESIS 45:16-47:31

Sermon Notes:

## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "Would you rather live in the city, on a farm, or in a suburban home?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Genesis 45:16-47:31

- How have you seen God working in the past week?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Do you tend to be more pessimistic or optimistic? Why do you think that is?
- In what ways is your life defined by the promise and plan of God? In what ways is your life more defined by your own plans? How can you discern the difference?
- In what ways might you be more tied to this world than you'd like?
- How would you describe your attitude toward God right now?
- What are some ways God has treated you better than you deserve?
- How might we help one another live in the reality that this world is not our own?

**World:** When we live in the reality that we are sojourners in this world, we are able to be blessings to others with our time, resources, energy, and relationships. Consider practical ways that *you* might be a blessing this week—to those on your blessing list and to others in the world around you. Pray for divine opportunities to engage people and love them in Jesus' Name.



# WEEK SEVEN: REDEMPTION

## GENESIS 48 - 50

Perhaps no other Old Testament truth summarizes the victorious proclamation of Easter more succinctly: That which was intended by others for evil, God has meant for good. In the face of the treacherous defeat of Good Friday, Jesus emerges victoriously. Joseph's brothers struggled to receive the forgiveness of their brother and embrace the grace that was offered and, in the same way, we must learn to rest in the free grace of Jesus if we are to truly embrace the victory of Easter.

## **Inductive Bible Study**

Read Genesis 48-50, using at least two different translations if possible.

Observation: Who is involved in the passage? Where does this happen? What details jump out to you as you read?

Interpretation: Why is this happening? What might the characters be feeling? In what way do the characters grow through this passage? What impact does this passage have on the lives of the characters involved? What does this show us about God?

Application: What does this mean for me? What character do I most identify with in this passage, and why? What does this passage show me about God, and what impact does that have on my life?

Action Step: Based on this passage, what's one thing that I should either start doing, stop doing, or change?

## **Blessings**

One of the great themes of the book of Genesis is the idea of covenant blessing. God blessed Abraham. Abraham passes that blessing onto Isaac, although for some time he longed to pass it on to Ishmael. Isaac's passing of the blessing to Jacob was surrounded by deceit, and the patriarch could only "bless" Esau with what amounted to cursing. (Genesis 27:39-40) And now, as we arrive at the end of this great book, it's time for Jacob as well to pass on the blessing.

Read Genesis 48:1-19

- What does Jacob say about Ephraim and Manasseh in vs. 5?
  
- How does Joseph order the blessing of his sons in vs. 13?
  
- What is Jacob's response in vs. 19?
  
- Read Genesis 17:19-21 and 25:23. How is Jacob's response to Joseph parallel to the other passing of the blessings in Genesis?
  
- Read 1 Chronicles 5:1-2. How is this action by Jacob explained?

Hebrews 11 is often referred to as the “Hall of Faith.” It’s a compendium of great acts of faith by many of the patriarchs and Israelite heroes. The author, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, selects the blessing of Joseph’s sons as the “singular event that characterized him as a man of faith.”<sup>19</sup> Considering the breadth of experience in the life of Jacob, this is an incredible choice! Read Hebrews 11:21.

- How is the act of blessing described by the writer?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- In what way is the act of blessing also an act of worship?

Worship leader Dennis Jernigan states the following as a simple definition of worship: “He’s God, we’re not.”<sup>20</sup> If we embrace that simple definition, Jacob’s act of blessing is truly an act of faith that embraces God’s future plans and actions according to His sovereign will.

- Look back at 1 Chronicles 5:1-2. To whom is the birthright given? But through whom is *covenant blessing* passed?

Read Genesis 49:8-12, which states the blessing of Judah. In words that surpass even the blessing given to Joseph’s sons, Jacob acts in faith. The covenant promise of God would not be passed through the favored son but through the transformed sinner. This isn’t only an act of worship—it’s one worthy of worship!

**Application:**

- How is your life communicating blessing to those around you?

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<sup>19</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, (Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2004.), pg. 541.

<sup>20</sup> Verbal interlude on “Celebrate Living.” Copyright 1995 – Shepherd’s Heart Music.

## **Mourning, Revenge, and Forgiveness**

One of the most difficult parts of grace is the ability to truly receive it. Extravagant gifts that are so far beyond what we deserve can often leave us in a position of disbelief: Why would someone be so generous? We operate in a “tit for tat” mindset that struggles to fathom a gracious gift that truly has no strings attached.

Genesis 50 has the feel of an epilogue that unravels some of the neatly tied up loose ends that seemed to have been taken care of years before. Read Genesis 50:15-21.

- What message did Joseph’s brothers send to him following their father’s death? Do you think he truly commanded them to say that as they stated? Why or why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Vs. 17 records the response of Joseph. Why might he have responded this way?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What is Joseph’s response to them in vs. 19? Read Romans 12:17-19. How is Joseph’s response parallel to Paul’s command to Roman Christians?

The just response to the treachery and sin of Joseph’s brothers is to avenge their sin with punishment and violence. However, through a series of tests, Joseph saw that their repentance was real and their hearts were changed. His response, then, was not to punish or to repay with evil but, rather, to forgive. However, he

responds to their fears, not by assuring them of their innocence, but by reminding them that God is the One who will ultimately repay.

- Read Romans 3:23-25. How does the idea of propitiation assure us that God will not ultimately repay us for our sin? (If you don't know the definition of "propitiation," look it up!)

Re-read Genesis 50:20. This verse is cited by many as the central thesis for the entire Joseph story. Read the following verses:

- Genesis 3:1-13
- Matthew 26:36-42
- Ephesians 2:1-9

With these verses in mind, how might Genesis 50:20 actually be a central thesis for the entire Bible?

With this reality in mind, the weeping of Joseph (Genesis 50:17b) is given even greater context. The high price of forgiveness has already been paid, but we are often unwilling to believe it and to rest in the gift. Rather, we work to earn that which has already been given, failing to live in the abundant freedom God promises us. That would indeed be a cause for mourning. However, when we embrace the sacrifice of Christ and the victory He offers, we can rejoice!

**Application:**

- Do you ever find yourself living and acting in uncertainty regarding the forgiveness of God? In what ways?

## **Journaling**

Don't forget to journal regularly during this study, at least one time each week! See page 15 for some questions to prompt your journaling.

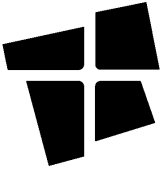
### **Gospel Glimpse: Genesis 48-50**

As you think about the story of Joseph as well as the story of Jesus, consider the following:

- Jacob blessed each of his sons according to the grace and plan of God. (Genesis 48-50) God blesses each of us as His sons and daughters of His according to His plan and grace. (1 John 3:1-3)
- Joseph was able to forgive his brothers because of their honest repentance and change of heart. (Genesis 50:20-21) Jesus forgives our sin when we repent and turn our hearts to Him. (1 John 1:9)
- Joseph told his brothers not to fear and, instead, to rest in his love. (Genesis 50:21) We are called out of fear due to the love of Jesus. (1 John 4:18-19)
- Joseph's final words called his brothers to wait for God to take them from Egypt to the Promised Land. (Genesis 50:24) After Jesus' ascension, His followers were told by angels that He would return from heaven, and they understood that they would all ultimately be in heaven with Jesus. (Acts 1:11, Revelation 21:3)

These are just a few of the many parallels. Did you find others?





REDEMPTION  
GENESIS 48-50

Sermon Notes:

## **LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet**

**Welcome** one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "How did you celebrate Easter at your house?"

**Worship** Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

**Word:** Genesis 48-50

- How have you seen God working in the past week?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Have you ever had a "blessing" communicated to you by someone? What was that experience like?
- How does your life communicate blessing to the world around you?
- What does true forgiveness look like, both extended and received?
- Do you ever find yourself living and acting in uncertainty regarding the forgiveness of God? In what ways?
- Are you able to rest in the ultimate forgiveness and victory of God? Why or why not? If so, how does that affect the way that you live?
- How might our group pass the blessing of God to the world around us in tangible, practical ways?

**World:** The Easter story is one of incredible blessing and abundant grace! The victory of Jesus over death and the grave has so many meanings. Among them: (1) We are completely forgiven and need have no fear that God will repay our evil with evil; and (2) all who truly repent and turn to Jesus can experience this same joy. Pray about intentional ways that your life, as well as your group, can communicate that message to the world around you. Think intentionally about the next several months leading up to the summer. What is *one way* that your group could make an impact on the community around you in the next few months? Plan, pray, and follow-through!



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study guide must have been the oddest writing experience that I've ever had, beginning to end. After several years of writing and well over a dozen larger projects, there's a routine that typically happens. I won't bore you with all the gruesome details, but writing for me follows a sort of process: extensive research, prayerful reading of many different sections of Scripture, outlining and highlighting various ideas within a passage, determining themes and a structure the study will follow, developing key ideas both for weeks as well as for specific days, and then painfully getting all of those ideas from brain to page. When I finally reach the writing stage, if all goes really well and there are few interruptions, I might get through three weeks of studies in a single day. More likely is one week at a time, each often spread over a few days of writing.

This study didn't go anything like that. It came quickly. The writing took place over a few really intense days, often starting early and lasting late into the night. The structure seemed to emerge out of the writing process, and almost seemed unplanned until it just came together. I found myself researching on the fly, connecting Scriptures together in my spirit before they seemed to even reach my brain, and several times laughing out loud at the way the gospel connected so clearly with the story of Joseph. I began to write early one Saturday morning, basically without a plan, and somehow finished the last facilitation page on Wednesday before noon, just a few days later. I don't say that to say that this study is any better or worse than previous studies—I'm simply saying that the process was profoundly *different*.

That said, there is still quite a cast of characters that have had a role in this project, even though the process is a mainly solitary one for me. I first want to continue to thank our Governing Board and Elders for giving me the freedom, space, and blessing to develop and write these projects. I believe that they are teaching us to study the Word of God, and I'm thankful that you're willing to support me in that process. None of these could happen without the amazing staff that we have that manages things so well when I'm not around! Special thanks to Tim and Mike for covering the details that could easily be missed when I'm buried in my writing "cave." Also, huge thanks to Chris for his great graphics and general technical assistance. For the first time ever, I had a vision of the cover before I had any ideas about what would be *inside* the cover, and you've done an incredible job of

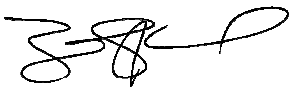
making it look far better than the best vision I had in my head. Finally, another thank you to Tim and to Kimberly Cole for once again donning the “editor” hat and fixing my grammatically incoherent ramblings. You guys are great!

My family is a great support to me throughout every project, and this one was no exception. Trying to write in the midst of the basketball season and over snow days requires special grace and understanding, and you all freely gave it to me. Amanda, while this project was shorter than most, I know that they never arrive at convenient times—thank you for not only flexing, but cheering me on!

Finally, as is tradition at this point, a final thank you to the musicians and bands that provided the soundtrack for the writing process. Because the process was shorter, the band list is a bit shorter as well. Thanks to Kelley McRae, Brandi Carlile, The Decemberists, the late and great Rich Mullins, U2, Vampire Weekend, and The Gray Havens.

The Joseph story, like the gospel story, is one that shows us that God is working in the midst of the details, even when all hope seems lost. I want to dedicate this book to several friends who often find themselves feeling lost and hopeless. God is weaving together a beautiful story, and we each have the incredible privilege of being a small part of it. I pray that Joseph’s story, and the testimony of God’s providential hand even in the midst of suffering, would bring great hope to us all.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BK', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Brian Kannel  
January 28, 2015

## GOD IS WORKING.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THAT REALITY IS EASY TO SEE. GOD PROVIDES. GOD HEALS. GOD SPEAKS. GOD SHOWS UP IN BODILY FORM AND LITERALLY DIRECTS HISTORY. GOD WRESTLES WITH US. EACH OF THESE IS SEEN DURING THE FIRST PORTION OF THE ANCIENT BOOK OF GENESIS, AND MIGHT BE REFERRED TO AS GOD'S "VISIBLE HAND" OF MIRACLE. THIS VISIBLE HAND, HOWEVER, IS NOTABLY MISSING FROM THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE.

THERE ARE TIMES, HOWEVER, WHEN GOD'S WORK IS MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO SEE. HE IS WORKING NONETHELESS. IN PAIN. IN COMMON CIRCUMSTANCES. IN CONFRONTATION, IN ANGER, AND IN REVENGE. IN POVERTY. IN WEATHER. IN PLENTY AND IN FAMINE. THIS WORKING OF GOD CAN BE REFERRED TO AS HIS "INVISIBLE HAND" OF PROVIDENCE, AND IT IS SEEN AGAIN AND AGAIN THROUGHOUT THE JOSEPH STORY.

JOSEPH'S STORY READS MUCH LIKE OUR LIVES: GOOD BEHAVIOR IS SEEMINGLY REPAID WITH SUFFERING, SIN IS TRANSFORMED INTO GRACE AND, AT TIMES, HOPE IS DEFERRED OR EVEN CRUSHED. HOWEVER, IN THE MIDST OF EACH CIRCUMSTANCE, GOD IS WORKING HIS ULTIMATE WILL THROUGH THE LIFE OF JOSEPH. HIS PROMISE IS THAT HE WILL DO THE SAME FOR US.

## GOD HAS A PLAN.

