



Group Session

Small Group Study

Overview

After his falling out with Esau, Jacob left home, married two wives, and fathered twelve sons. His son Joseph was his favorite. Joseph's brothers became jealous of him, so they sold him into slavery. But they told their father, Jacob, that Joseph was killed by wild animals. Slave traders took Joseph to Egypt where he worked in the household of Potiphar. From Potiphar's house, Joseph ended up in an Egyptian prison.

Then through an unlikely turn of events, he ultimately became a ruler in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself. Through Joseph's faithfulness, we see that God still worked everything for good in spite of the difficulties Joseph faced. We can trust God to do that in our lives too.

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Engage

QUESTION

Who is someone you know who has experienced hardship, but handled it in an inspiring way?

In the Bible, Joseph shows us how God works through our hardships. All along the way, Joseph had to choose to remain faithful no matter what he faced.

Watch

As we watch this video, consider this question:

QUESTION

Have you faced a challenging situation where it was difficult to trust God? Can you look back and see God at work?



Consider

In early 1927, after planting a church in Tangar, China, plans were underway for missionaries Victor and Grace Plymire to continue their work in Tibet. However, both Grace and their son John suddenly came down with smallpox. Within the month, they would both succumb to their illness. A single grave on a mountainside was purchased from a local man, and Victor laid his family to rest. Victor's work, however, was not over. Through God's grace and strength, he would go on spreading the gospel for two decades with his second wife, Ruth. In 1949, political upheaval forced the Plymires from China. Their church went into hiding, and its property was confiscated by the Communist government.

Fast-forward to the 1990s; the Chinese political landscape was changing again, and some churches were allowed to reopen and regain their property. The condition, however, was that they must be able to present a deed. Unable to find a one, the leaders of the Plymire's church reached out to David Plymire, son of Victor and Ruth, asking if he would search his father's old papers. No deed for the church property could be found. But the deed for a small gravesite, tucked away on a lonely mountainside, was found. In God's providence, the local man who sold Plymire the gravesite had deeded the property to the church, rather than to Plymire personally. Accepting the deed as proof, the government returned the property to the church. The church in Tangar that Grace and John gave their lives to begin continues to this day.

Our stories differ from the Plymires' situation, but in our own way, we all experience suffering. God doesn't promise we'll never suffer, only that He will work it all for our good if we remain faithful.

QUESTION

Victor Plymire's story is tragic, yet beautiful and powerful. What encouragement do you get from hearing how God worked through Victor's suffering to reach the people of China?

What the Bible Says

In dreams from God, young Joseph saw himself exalted and ruling over his parents and brothers. Unaware that these dreams were part of God's plan to deliver them, Joseph's jealous brothers unknowingly set that plan in motion by selling him to slave traders. These traveling traders

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ultimately sold Joseph to Potiphar, the captain of the guard for Egypt's Pharaoh. Through many twists and turns, God worked behind the scenes to turn Joseph's tragedy into triumph. God ultimately worked everything, not only for Joseph's good, but for the good of his family, including his brothers, and the entire nation of Egypt.

Faith and Faithfulness

Joseph was born a free man, an heir to God's promise to his great-grandfather, Abraham. After his brothers sold him into slavery, Joseph could have given up on God. However, he chose to remain faithful to God rather than becoming bitter and cynical. Joseph's continued faith *in God* would eventually allow him to see the faithfulness *of God* in his life despite his suffering. But things would get worse before they got better. Let's look at one of the unfair hardships Joseph faced.

Read Genesis 39:2, 6–12.

Joseph chose to not give up even though he went from being a favored child to lowly slave with no hope of ever returning to his homeland.

QUESTION

During times of suffering and hardship, why is it vital for us to resist allowing our circumstances to determine what we believe about God and His plan for our life?

Wrongly Accused

Read Genesis 39:13–23.

Joseph remained faithful to God not only through the loss of his freedom, but also in the face of great temptation to sin. Instead of being rewarded for his faithfulness, however, he was falsely accused of rape by Potiphar's wife. Joseph was thrown into prison and lost his freedom to an even greater degree.

QUESTION

Describe a time in your life when you did the right thing but received what felt like the wrong outcome.

When it seemed that he had every reason to give up on God, Joseph remained faithful and won the favor of his jailers. While in prison, God used Joseph to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. All these events of Joseph's life culminated when Pharaoh, himself, had prophetic dreams and called for an interpreter.

Rise to Power

Read Genesis 41:8–16, 39–45.

Joseph was summoned from the prison and revealed that Pharaoh's dreams predicted a severe famine was coming to Egypt. Joseph suggested to Pharaoh that a wise man be chosen to oversee the collection of food in preparation for the famine. God's plan for Joseph's good was revealed

as Joseph was chosen to be the man who would rule over Egypt. He was second-in-command only to Pharaoh himself. Joseph had remained faithful. Through all of Joseph's suffering, God had guided Joseph's steps to put him into this position of power.

The final question that remained for Joseph, who has honored God through many difficulties, is if he would also honor God with his power. You see, the famine that was coming to Egypt would extend to Joseph's homeland. Soon his brothers would find that their survival depended upon the mercy of Joseph.

QUESTION

How does the revealing of God's ultimate plan for Joseph change your perspective on his time in slavery and prison?

Acknowledging God's Sovereignty

Read Genesis 50:15–21.

It could be argued that the key verses in Joseph's long story are Genesis 50:19–20. Joseph asked, "Am I God?" Then he pointed out that his brothers had sold him into slavery to harm him, but God had intended it for good—not only Joseph's good, but it benefited his brothers and all of Egypt as well. Joseph acknowledged God's sovereignty at the end of his story. But the most powerful truth is that verses 19–20 show what Joseph had believed *the whole time*. It was the knowledge of the sovereignty of God during his suffering that enabled Joseph to remain faithful and to forgive.

QUESTION

Can you think of a time, when at the end of a difficult season, you could look back and see God at work in ways that you could not when you were in the middle of that season? Share with the group.

Reflect

Joseph likely begged God again and again to get him out of slavery and prison. Even Jesus Himself, faced with immense suffering on the cross, asked His Father—whom He trusted absolutely—if there were a different way (Matthew 26:39) for God's plan to be accomplished.

We, too, can pray the same way. We don't have to hide it when we wish we weren't in times of suffering. We can be totally honest with God in prayer. But we must also trust in our Heavenly Father and be ready to say just as Jesus did, "Yet I want your will to be done, not mine" (Matthew 26:39). God may not change our circumstances when we ask, but what we've learned from Joseph's story is that God is good. He will work *everything* for good if we trust Him—just as He did for both Joseph and Jesus.

Listen to God

The goal of *Listen* is not only to gain an understanding of God's Word, but also to pause and listen to what God our Creator might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Choose the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

What are the things in life that tempt you most to turn from God? (No one will see the answers but you.) How can you seek God's help now in these areas?

QUESTION

Can you think of a time in your life when you were faithful to God, but rather than things getting better they got worse? What was your response? How did this affect your faith in God?

QUESTION

What are some times in your life that you attempted to take revenge? Did this help or hurt your circumstances? Did it help you to trust in God?

QUESTION

Joseph chose to forgive his brothers. Is there anyone whom you need to forgive for hurting you?

QUESTION

What fears do you have about trusting God fully with your life and future? What can you do in the days ahead to allow God to build your faith?

QUESTION

Write out a prayer to God regarding a current difficulty in your life. Begin by being honest with all the things that you do not like or would like to change about the circumstances. Follow with a declaration of trust in God's goodness and His trustworthiness. Finally, end with surrender to His will in spite of your desires.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and remember to pray for them during the week.

Parents: Because the Bible covers so much of Joseph's story, your kids' sessions have emphasized different parts. Youth looked at Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers, and their daily devotions review more of Joseph's story. Kids reviewed Joseph's story and talked about how God works things out AND helps us to forgive. Preschoolers focused on Joseph forgiving his brothers after they had hurt him.

Before next time, continue to listen with the personal devotions.

Did You Know?

There are twenty-one dreams recorded in the Bible. Fifteen are found in the Old Testament, ten of them in Genesis. The remaining six are in the New Testament and all of those are connected to Jesus.

Some of these biblical dreams were clearly spoken messages, like when God told King Abimelech that the woman he had chosen for himself was already married to Abraham. Other dreams used symbols, like a loaf of bread knocking over a tent. Some were understood by the dreamer—an angel came to Joseph, Jesus' earthly adopted father, and told him to take the family to Egypt. Other dreams needed an interpreter, as we saw in today's session when Joseph helped Egypt's Pharaoh understand his dreams.

Personal Devotion

Listening to God is something we need to do every day. Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1

Read Genesis 39:2–23; 41:8–45; 50:15–21.

Look back over the Group Session section and complete the Personal Reflection Questions. If time permits, read the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What do you sense that God is saying to you?

Personal Devotion

Day 2

Read Genesis 50:18–19.

Joseph suffered because of the decisions of others. When our suffering comes at the hands of someone else, what do we do? What is our role? In the end, Joseph had the power to punish his brothers for what they had done to him. Why didn't he? Because Joseph understood it is God's role to judge and punish, not ours.

The apostle Paul would teach the Early Church this same truth in Romans 12:19, reminding believers that God, not the believer, should take revenge.

QUESTION

When we experience suffering at the hands of others, why is revenge often our knee-jerk response?

QUESTION

Can you think of a time in your life when someone tried to do something that was not their role? What problems or dysfunction did it cause?

QUESTION

What steps can we take to change our response from revenge or anger, to trust in God's sovereignty and faithfulness to Him? Take a few moments to think about practical steps and write them down. Finish by praying for God's help in taking these steps.

Personal Devotion

Day 3

Read Matthew 18:23–35.

In this parable, Jesus clarified what it's like when we ask for forgiveness from God, but withhold forgiveness from others. It looks totally unjust and even a bit ridiculous.

QUESTION

What stands out to you most in this Parable of the Unforgiving Servant? Take a few moments and highlight the things that speak to you most.

QUESTION

What might you need to change in your own life in light of Jesus' powerful teaching on forgiveness?

QUESTION

How can you show forgiveness today to someone, even in a very simple way?

Personal Devotion

Day 4

Read Genesis 37:1–11.

God gave a young Joseph dreams about his future. They were true, but Joseph shared them with his family who didn't respond to them very well. They responded with jealousy and questioning.

The dreams revealed a future where God would use Joseph to aid his family, but neither they nor Joseph recognized that at the time.

QUESTION

How might Joseph have better handled the dreams God gave him with more wisdom?

QUESTION

Think about the dreams you feel God has for your life. How are you handling them? If they are more for the benefit of others than for yourself, does that make you want them less?

QUESTION

Pray and ask God to give you the proper perspective about the dreams and plans He has for your life. Ask God for wisdom in how you are to handle these dreams and take steps of faith to see them become a reality.

Personal Devotion

Day 5

Read Genesis 41:1–40.

Joseph had been a slave and prisoner for years now. Many lessons he had learned came with a high price. But in this passage, we begin to see how God had been working to put Joseph in the place of authority where God planned for him to be.

QUESTION

Joseph learned to trust in God’s plan rather than his own plans or abilities. What are some of your abilities you often trust in?

QUESTION

Reread verse 16 from this passage. How might this verse be a key to understanding how Joseph saw God’s plans for his life come to pass?

QUESTION

What step do you need to take to trust in God’s abilities more than yours? Spend some time in prayer asking God for guidance and wisdom.