

Seeing Jesus in Every Story

**“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;
and these are they which testify of Me.”**

John 5:39

Act 4

Joseph: Suffering Servant

Genesis 37, 39-50

Prologue

When God made His covenant with Abraham, He said, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there; and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions” (Genesis 15:13-14 NLT).

God began to fulfill that word through Jacob’s son Joseph, who suffered abuse at the hands of his own family, was enslaved to strangers and unjustly imprisoned. But for all that Joseph endured he emerged as a man of God with a powerful testimony. The great theme of young Joseph’s life would be that God never allows sorrow without using it to accomplish His good purpose.

Joseph’s story takes thirteen chapters to tell, making it the longest narrative in Genesis. It has all the elements of great drama . . . highs and lows, tragedy and treachery, suffering and triumph. Once you start reading, you won’t want to put it down! So let us remind you again that in this study, our focus is on the unfolding drama of Redemption. For that reason, this lesson will only cover a few choice scenes from Joseph’s story.

Cast

Joseph and his brothers

Read Genesis 37 & 41:15-57. Briefly note what stands out to you at first reading. Be prepared to share one of your impressions with your discussion group.

1. What was it about Joseph’s dreams that made his brothers so angry?
2. What was God’s ultimate purpose in bringing Joseph into Egypt?

Scene 1: The Favorite Son – Genesis 37

From this opening scene we know that Joseph didn't have a wholesome, happy family life. He was a young boy when his own mother died during childbirth, so his father's secondary wives tended to Joseph and baby Benjamin. While his father openly doted on him, it doesn't appear that Joseph was tenderly loved by anyone else—certainly not his older half-brothers.

1. Why did Joseph's brothers detest him so much? Briefly note what family dynamics contributed to their resentment and openly hateful attitude toward their younger brother.
2. Sometime later, Joseph's father sent him to check on his brothers in the field. When they saw him coming, what did they conspire to do? What did they actually end up doing?

Additional thoughts and observations

- Can you imagine what Joseph must have suffered in that pit? His cries ignored by his brothers while they sat down to eat. When did it dawn on him, after they finally pulled him out, that this wasn't just a cruel "lesson" before they sent him home to daddy? These aren't questions we can answer from the text but they cause us to think.

What a lonely and frightening experience it must have been, tethered as a slave to strangers, driven away from everything he knew and loved. In what ways did young Joseph's life forever change that day? *Briefly* list one or two that come to mind.

Scene 2: When Life Bottoms Out – Genesis 39-40

Joseph learned to adapt to life in Egypt—in fact, he thrived. His diligence did not go unnoticed by his master Potiphar and Joseph was promoted to manage the entire household. But when Potiphar's wife also took notice of Joseph, the trouble began. This scene relates how Joseph's faithful resistance to temptation landed him in a wrongful and lengthy imprisonment.

1. Several times in the narrative we read that the Lord was with Joseph. What makes that such a vital and encouraging bit of information for us to know, especially through times of trials and suffering?

In what ways can we see that the Lord's presence was a personal reality for Joseph? Note the following verses and keep your answers simple and specific.

- Genesis 39:5
- Genesis 39:8-9
- Genesis 39:21
- Genesis 40:8, 21-22

Additional thoughts and observations

- › It doesn't take much time to read about the challenges and suffering Joseph endured. But keep in mind that he was seventeen when he was taken to Egypt (37:2) and thirty years old when he entered Pharaoh's service (41:46). Through all that time, though, God was working His purpose.

Joseph knew all about trials, but what did he gain through the waiting? What was the Lord doing for Joseph during this time? For insight, read Hebrews 12:7–11 and share your thoughts.

Scene 3: I Dreamed a Dream – Genesis 41:38-57

When the chief butler's dream came to pass, he thanked Joseph for his help and promised to tell Pharaoh about his plight. But he forgot. Two full years go by as Joseph waits . . . hopes . . . and hears nothing but silence. Then one day, as suddenly as he had been thrown into prison, he is pulled out, cleaned up and brought to Pharaoh.

1. At the start of this lesson, we read vs.15-37 where Pharaoh recounts his dream and Joseph interprets and gives counsel. Can you picture it? The most powerful man on earth is shaken and needs answers. His advisors scratch their heads and offer nothing. Only Joseph—who is no one in the eyes of everyone who's a "someone"—can explain Pharaoh's dream.

If you had been in the room that day, what would you have known about Joseph from the moment he opened his mouth? Look again at vs. 16, 25, 28 and 32.

2. What did Pharaoh know about Joseph from the moment he opened his mouth? As a result, what did he entrust Joseph to do for him?

Here's something to consider: Pharaoh promoted Joseph and gave him symbols of his high office (a royal signet ring, gold chain, linen garments). He gave Joseph an Egyptian name and an Egyptian wife. After so much suffering, Joseph now had all the wealth and power of Egypt at his disposal. Would it change him? Egypt was all he'd known for nearly half his life. A lesser man than Joseph would have burned every stained photo of his childhood and left his Hebrew identity behind. But his heart beat with gratitude to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And when Joseph had sons of his own, he gave them *Hebrew* names that would speak into their lives so they, too, would know the God of their fathers.

- › Manasseh means *forget*. "For God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house." Joseph could truly say God had set him free from the pain and hurt he experienced at the hands of his brothers.
- › Ephraim means *fruitful*. "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." This second son arrived during the years of abundance. Joseph's heart was overflowing (not to mention Egypt's grain silos) with praise.

Scene 4: God Meant It for Good – Genesis 45:1-16

Joseph could have emerged from prison a bitter man but instead, he was a better man. This scene picks up Joseph's story nine years later. The seven years of plenty have come and gone. After two years of severe famine, all the earth comes to stand in Egypt's bread lines. Joseph regulates it all, setting the price and determining the portions to be sold. He is the provider of bread and the people could not have been in more capable or compassionate hands.

Nothing in the story indicates that Joseph ever expected to see his brothers again—he wasn't watching for them and they certainly hadn't come looking for him. But there they were, waiting their turn in line, looking older and thinner than he remembered. Outwardly Joseph barely acknowledged them but his heart nearly thumped out of his chest. He turned his gaze away, refusing the eyes he had desperately searched for help twenty years ago. Joseph's brothers bowed down and he remembered the dreams he had dreamed.

1. Scan Genesis 42:9-17. What was Joseph's initial response toward his brothers and what do you make of it?

- Twenty years later, Joseph's brothers could still knock the wind out of him without even trying. Maybe you know the feeling. But he needed to know if they were still the cold blooded men who tossed him in the pit and sold his life away for pocket change. Scan Genesis 42:18-28 and briefly describe what Joseph learned about his brothers. Note whatever stands out to you.

2. When the brothers returned a second time, bringing Benjamin, Joseph has them come for a meal. Scan Genesis 43:26-34 and describe the scene. Note whatever stands out to you.

- Joseph sends them off but has his servant put Joseph's own silver cup in Benjamin's grain sack. Then he sent his servant after them to accuse them of stealing. The brothers declare innocence but vow that whoever is found with the cup will be Joseph's slave in payment of his crime. Why did Joseph pick Benjamin's sack and why did he test his brothers in this way?
- Judah pleads to take Benjamin's place (44:18-34) and Joseph can no longer keep his identity a secret from them. What was it about Judah's plea that convinced Joseph?

Joseph finally reveals who he is (45:1-15) and repeats three times that God had sent him to Egypt ahead of them.

Intermission: Pause – Ponder – Pray

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.

Romans 8:28 (NLT)

As you memorize this passage, let it work into your heart and mind. Scripture meditation is like a good cup of tea . . . satisfying as it is savored. So give yourself time to savor God's Word. Write the scripture in the space provided and meditate on what it says.

Ask the Lord to open your eyes and increase your understanding. Jot down what He points out to you; keep returning here and adding your thoughts throughout the week.

Ponder what this says about God. Consider His character, attributes, work, promises . . .

Just as God accomplished His purpose for Joseph, will you trust Him to do the same for you? What circumstances, although painful or confining, can you see God using for good in your life?

Write your response to Him in worship and praise . . .

Epilogue: Seeing Jesus in the Story

Search to See . . .

Joseph provides us with a nearly flawless model of faithful living—we can glean lesson after lesson for our own life from his godly example. But in God's great unfolding drama of Redemption, our Creator had a uniquely choice role for Joseph. Joseph's story bears a striking resemblance to the path that Jesus Himself would walk. As we trace the pattern of Joseph's life, we can see the silhouette of our Savior come into view.

What parallels do you find in Joseph's life that point to Jesus? These are just a few of many. Compare the verses in the corresponding column and note the similarities. The first two are examples.

Joseph	Parallel	Jesus
Genesis 37:3-4	Loved by his father, rejected by his brothers.	Matthew 3:17 / John 1:11
Genesis 37:11, 18	His brothers were jealous; plotted to kill him.	Matthew 27:18 / John 11:53
Genesis 37:28		Matthew 26-15
Genesis 39:14-18		Matthew 26:59-60
Genesis 45:5		Luke 23:34
Genesis 41:41		Philippians 2:9 / 1 Peter 3:22

It's been said that we never look more like Christ than when we forgive. In Genesis 50 after Jacob's death, Joseph's brothers express fear that Joseph will pay them back for all the evil they did to him. After sending messengers to plead on their behalf, Joseph most likely summoned his brothers, who fell prostrate at his feet. It would be their final bow in fulfillment of Joseph's dreams.

Knowing his brothers would need assurance of his forgiveness, Joseph speaks kindly to them: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good . . . to save many people" (vv.19–21). Joseph didn't minimize their sin against him; but he knew that God had overruled their evil to accomplish His own good purpose.

In the last scene of our story, Joseph not only forgives his brothers—he also assures them of his provision and care. Once again, we see the picture of our loving Savior who promises to forgive us, keep us and provide for our every need.

Make it personal . . .

- Are you perhaps in need of assurance today? Like Joseph, God wants to comfort you by speaking to you from His Word. Listen . . . note what He quietly whispers to your heart.
- For you personally, what is the most significant insight you've gained from the story of Joseph? How will you apply this insight in your life?

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