

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH



TRUSTING A SOVEREIGN GOD
(8 BIBLE STUDIES)

EXAMINATION

BIBLE STUDIES

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THE SMALL PRINT

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Your Commitment

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

Your Contribution

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

Your Preparation

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading group discussions, but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials provide you with the passage so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Also, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought, and help you reflect on what the passage meant, both at the time it was written, and also what it means for us now.

I would encourage you to make good use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are, however, only “tools” – they are there to help you, and not to restrict you, or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages, and if the questions or notes don't help you, simply don't use them!

I have also included within these materials an introduction to the Life of Joseph. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

Your Leadership

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

*Steve McClure
Spring 2019*

INTRODUCING “THE LIFE OF JOSEPH”

The story of Joseph is a fascinating story of hope amidst disappointment and difficulty. He was tossed into a pit by his brothers, sold into slavery, wrongfully imprisoned and yet what was intended for evil God intended for good. In these studies, we will try to wrestle with the story of Joseph which is recorded for us in Genesis 37-50. Our privilege is to look down over the story but remember that Joseph did not have the luxury of hindsight!

“Joseph’s story is a finely wrought and self-contained novella, describing in vivid detail the development of his character from charismatic and arrogant youth to compassionate middle age...Genesis reaches a melodramatic peak in these climactic chapters: a riches-to-rags-to-riches tale replete with every human passion-love and hate, ambition and glory, jealousy and fury. Tears of joy and grief are shed. Garments are rent in anguish. It’s a gripping saga of trenchers and deception, betrayal and forgiveness.”

Naomi Rosenblatt & Joshua Horwitz, Wrestling with angels, ©1995, pg. 315.

The Principle explained

Initially I am drawn to some verses from the end of Joseph’s life. Just after Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers and said that it was not them who had sent him there but God (45:5-8a). Soon after Jacob’s death, the brothers become fearful of Joseph and so they come to him and throw themselves down before him saying “we are your slaves”. In response Joseph tells them “not to be afraid” and “*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives*” (50:19-21). These verses are quite a commentary on Joseph’s life as he looked back and saw the hand of God at work even amidst the most difficult of circumstances. If Joseph had not been sold off into slavery, he would never have become Pharaoh’s second in command and if that hadn’t happened he would not have been in a position to save many lives during the years of famine.

Joseph’s brothers hated him (37:4) and that was before he shared his dream about them bowing down before him. That made them “hate him all the more” (37:8). They were jealous of him because he was Jacob’s favourite son (37:11). So, they plotted to kill him (37:19) but in the end they decided to sell him off to passing merchants. This they did (much to Reuben’s subsequent horror) but they pretended to Jacob, that Joseph had been killed. Joseph was 17 years old when his brothers abandoned him, but he was at least 37 years old when he saw them again. Despite their worst of intentions Joseph testifies that God intended it for good. Now that doesn’t mean that every problem we face will necessarily have a happy ending but it does mean that ultimately God is working for our good and His glory. We do not have the full picture or the big perspective on all that is going on around us. Paul also affirms this truth; “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*” (Romans 8:28). Notice that while this verse speaks about “all things” that does not necessarily mean “each thing.” The ultimate culmination will be for our good but that will involve a mixed bag of things that are both good and evil. Only with hindsight can we truly see how God’s hand has been at work in these things.

Living with the tension

Like Joseph we do not have the benefit of such hindsight! We have to trust God even when we do not understand what He’s doing. Just imagine the roller-coaster ride that Joseph went through. Even when things started to look up things soon started to go wrong. He honoured God by resisting the

temptations put before him by Potiphar's wife but as a result of his refusal to lie with her (or even just to be with her) she accused him of trying to make sport of her. So Potiphar had him thrown into prison. Even from prison however things are soon looking up and we read that *"God was with Him and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden"* (39:22) and so Joseph was put in charge of all those held in the prison. During that time Pharaoh imprisoned his cupbearer and his baker and they both had dreams which Joseph was able to interpret. The cupbearer was restored but things did not go so well for the Baker. However, the cupbearer didn't remember Joseph to Pharaoh until two years later when Pharaoh himself had some unsettling dreams. Joseph was then promoted to Prime Minister and set about storing up grain during the seven plentiful years so that they would be able to not just survive but thrive during the subsequent seven years of famine.

God is Sovereign over all things and He is working in our lives through the good, the bad and the ugly. As I see it, the key to living and thriving within this tension is 'hope'. When I say 'hope' I mean the confident, trusting and certain hope in a Sovereign God. This is a hope that trusts that God is working for His glory and our good even when it doesn't feel like it. This is a hope focused on the character of God and rooted in His promises. This is a hope that prevails even when we are facing difficulties and finding it hard to trust God. This is a hope that transformed the life of Joseph and eventually led him to fulfill the great plans and purposes that God has for his life. This is a hope that allowed Joseph to trust God to use him to play his part in the working out of God's promises to Israel.

Enrolled in life's school of development

Whereas we might see trouble, suffering and difficulty as *'problems to be worked through'*, God sees these things as *'opportunities for growth in maturity'*. Joseph did not learn to trust in God by being kept in a comfortable vacuum but by being exposed to the trials that life brings. While we might like to think that entering into the Christian life will bring us an easy life but we are never promised that:

"The good that God works for in our lives is conformity to the likeness of His Son. It is not necessarily comfort or happiness but conformity to Christ in ever-increasing measure in this life and in its fullness in eternity...God in His infinite wisdom knows exactly what adversity we need to grow more and more into the likeness of His Son. He not only knows what we need but when we need it and how best to bring it to pass in our lives." Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God*

God will use anything and everything in our lives to train us, test us and develop us for all that He has for us in the future. The life of Joseph is an excellent illustration for us about how God turns our mess on its head and uses it for our good, how He transforms a prison into a school of learning, how He uses famine to relocate his people and how ultimately all of this brings glory to Himself.

As I look back over some difficult years, I see much that I did not and still do not understand. I might presume to question what God has been doing but the truth is that I do not have even a fraction of the perspective God has. I can see ways in which we are stronger. I can see lessons that God has taught us. I might even go so far to say that I am beginning to see how all these things might be preparing us for the future. I don't however know that I am in a position to fully comprehend (and probably won't ever be this side of glory) how God ultimately intended the difficulties we have faced for our good. What I do know is that God is still on this throne and wants me to hope in Him.

To God be the glory

Steve McClure Autumn 2020

STUDY 1 – GENESIS 29:1-30:24 & 37:1-4 – COMPLICATED BEGINNINGS

INTRODUCTION: We begin with a brief look at Joseph's family backstory. Joseph's father Jacob fled from his brother Esau to his uncle Laban (Gen 27:42-45). There in Paddan Aram, Jacob sought a wife for himself as his parents had instructed him (27:46-28:5), but it was anything but straightforward.

SETTING THE SCENE (ROM 15:4, 1 COR 10:6 & 11): What do these verses teach us about the value of studying the lives of some of the ancient heroes of faith? What is your experience of finding *hope* through the endurance and encouragement that spring from the stories of their lives?

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JOSEPH'S LINEAGE: God promised Abraham that He would make him into a great nation, bless him and make him a blessing (Gen 12:1-3): how was this promise reiterated to both his son Isaac (26:2-5) and grandson Jacob (28:10-15)? Why do these promises remain significant for the story of Joseph?

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LOVESICK JACOB (29:1-21): Jacob fled to his Uncle Laban in fear of his brother Esau, whose birthright (25:31-34) he had bought and whose blessing (27:27-29) he had deceived him of. Why do you think Jacob is so smitten (e.g. v18 & 20) with Laban's youngest daughter Rachel? What do you see here that is both healthy and unhealthy about Jacob's pursuit (contrast v20 with v21b)?

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CRAFTY LABAN (29:22-29): How does Laban exploit Jacob's weakness to marry off his older daughter Leah? What does Jacob's failure to notice that it was Leah (v25) tell us about what was going on in his heart? Why is love like a drug to us and how can we bring that to God?

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UNWANTED LEAH (29:30-35): What do you think it would be like for Leah to be the daughter and wife that no-one wanted (v31)? Contrast Leah in v32 with v35: what evidence do you see here that Leah was able to work through her own issues of idolatry and instead find satisfaction in God?

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DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY (29:31-30:24, 35:17-18): Jacob had twelve children through four different women: what issues do you notice developing here between the four women? What influence do you think the complicated dysfunctions of this family would have had upon the twelve sons?

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DYSFUNCTIONAL PARENTING (37:1-4): Jacob was living in the land of Canaan (as promised to Abraham) and we are introduced here to a young 17-year-old Joseph: what do we learn in v2 about Joseph and his relationship to his brothers? What might have been the nature of this 'bad report'?

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How would Rachel's death (35:17-19) have impacted both Jacob's parenting (e.g. 35:21-22, 49:3-4) and Joseph himself? What are the dangers of showing favouritism (37:3-4)? To what extent can you understand (or even identify with) this intense hatred felt by his brothers? Why was Joseph's ornate robe such a big deal both to Joseph and to the brothers (see also Additional Quotes 1)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What impact would all of this have had on Joseph and without indulging too much in spoilers, how does Joseph's family backstory anticipate all that lies ahead of him? How do your own stories play a part in framing your own journey of faith?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share a little of your own back story and thank God for the ways that He has been at work in it and through it. Pray together about your own impact in others (friends, family, children etc) and ask God to help you model faith in the midst of whatever God brings your way.

MEMORY VERSE: ROMANS 15:4

STUDY 2 – GENESIS 37:5-36 – SOLD INTO SLAVERY

INTRODUCTION: We've seen Joseph's difficult backstory and how he had become Jacob's favourite after Rachel's death. In this study we see how his brothers growing hatred of him boiled over into action. There is still no mention of God, but we know He was Sovereign over all that was happening.

SETTING THE SCENE: If you have grown up amongst siblings, what were the things that created division and/or rivalry? How (if at all) were those issues resolved? How do you think Joseph's brothers came to this place where they didn't have a kind word to say about him (37:4)?

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DREAMS (v5-11): What is your experience of dreams? How can you tell whether a dream is from God? Do you think God ever spoken to you through this means? What is your response to Joseph's dreams? In light of their content, why do you think that he shared them with his brothers? What does or does not surprise you about the responses of his brothers (v5 & 11) and his Father (v10-11)?

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BACK TO SHECHEM (v12-13): Why do you think that Jacob sends Joseph to check on his brothers in Shechem (nb: Genesis 34 records how their sister Dinah was raped in this place)? How aware do you think Jacob was to the jealousy and hatred that was rife amongst his sons?

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WILLING TO OBEY (v14-17): What is the significance of the chance encounter with this 'stranger' in Shechem? How do you see the marks and implications of God's Sovereignty in everyday occurrences such as this (Additional Quotes 2)? What kind of things does God used to direct your life?

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COMING TREACHERY (v18-20): The brothers pent up bitterness boils over as they see Joseph approaching and they plot to kill him: to what extent can you understand or relate to this reaction? What other options were open to them in dealing with their brother?

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RESCUE ATTEMPT (v21-22 & 29-30): How would you evaluate Reuben's attempt to rescue Joseph: half-hearted or whole-hearted? Why do you think his intentions were so at odds with his brothers?

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STRIPPED, MADE CAPTIVE & SOLD (v23-28): Judah's conscience pushes him to make a counter proposal: do you think he was motivated by mercy or guilt and how could we tell the difference? What do you think was on Joseph's mind during this sorry act of aggression towards him?

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REACTIONS TO SIN (v29-35): Reuben is distraught, his brothers enact a cover-up and Jacob is filled with grief: in what ways can you identify with these different reactions to what had happened? To what extent do you think that the brothers achieved what they had hoped to do?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER (v36): How do you respond to the lack of clear references to God in Joseph's life? To what extent do you agree with FB Meyer (Additional Quotes 3), that Joseph must have wondered 'where are you God' or 'what about my dreams'? In what ways do you see God at work in the ordinary happenings of day to day life (i.e. how is God pulling the strings behind the scenes)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God that He is intricately involved in the detail of our lives even when things appear to be going wrong. Ask God to help you to trust Him when things seem to be spiralling out of control and thank Him for His promise that He will always be with us (Isaiah 42:2-3).

MEMORY VERSES: ACTS 7:9-10a

STUDY 3 – GENESIS 38-39 – DEALING WITH TEMPTATION

INTRODUCTION: At the end of chapter 37 Joseph was sold off into slavery to the Midianites and then to Potiphar who was captain of the guard in Egypt. These chapters provide a fascinating contrast in responses to temptation: first from Judah (chapter 38) and then from Joseph (chapter 39).

SETTING THE SCENE: How would you define the nature and extent of temptation? Check out James 1:13-15 and Additional Quotes 4: what similarities and/or differences are there with your definition? Why makes temptation so hard to resist? Are there particular times or seasons when it feels harder?

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JUDAH'S SHAME (38:1-11): Chapter 38 is about Judah (son #4): what kind of picture can we build up about Judah (and his family) from v1-8? If a man died before having an heir, it was expected that his younger brother(s) would help provide such an heir: why do you think Onan was unwilling to fulfil his responsibility and why after his death was Judah unwilling to give her his third son Shelah?

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DOUBLE STANDARDS (38:12-26): Faced with living out her days as a widow, Tamar plots to turn her situation around: what are the rights and wrongs of Judah and Tamar's actions here? How would you respond to Judah's initial (v24) and subsequent responses (v25-30)?

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JUDAH'S HOPE (38:27-30): How do the following verses show us God's grace upon Judah's life: Gen 44:14-34 (sacrificing himself for Benjamin), 49:8-12 (Jacob's blessing), Matthew 1:3 & Revelation 5:5 (The Lion of Judah)? Why does God so love to weave the unlikeliest people into his plan?

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THE LORD WAS WITH JOSEPH (39:2-7): Why is the trust Potiphar places in his new slave such a big deal? How significant was God's presence with Joseph, in explaining his rise to prominence in Potiphar's household? What do you think caught the eye of Potiphar's wife (see also Gen 29:17b)?

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FACING TEMPTATION (39:8-12): What might it have been like for Joseph to face this persistent temptation to sleep with Potiphar's wife? What can we imply from Joseph's words here about what empowered him to repeatedly say 'no'? Would *giving in* to her have been the easy way out?

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FACING THE CONSEQUENCES (39:13-20a): What do you think motivated Potiphar's wife to seek to entrap Joseph? Do you think Potiphar's response in imprisoning Joseph was harsh or lenient (Additional Quotes 5)? What would this have felt like for Joseph (see also Psalm 105:18-19)?

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THE LORD WAS STILL WITH HIM (39:20b-23): The first 5 words of v21 are incredibly encouraging: how do we see things beginning to look up again for Joseph from prison? How would these days have helped Joseph answer the inevitable questions he must have had for God at this point?

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STANDING FIRM (1 COR 10:11-13): In what sense are we most in danger of falling when we think we are doing well (v12)? How does it encourage you to know that we are not alone in our temptations (v13a)? To what extent can you relate to God's faithfulness to us in limiting temptation in proportion to our capacity to endure (v13b)? Have you ever experienced God's *way out* (v13c)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: How do the two chapters provide a contrasting picture of how to deal with temptation? What lessons have you learned about how to resist and flee from temptation?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share together some of your areas of weakness. Thank God that He is faithful and won't let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. Ask God to help you to resist temptation and choose to take the *way out* when God offers it to us.

MEMORY VERSES: 1 PETER 5:8-9

STUDY 4 – GENESIS 40-41 – FROM ZERO TO HERO

INTRODUCTION: Joseph had been sold into slavery, falsely accused and now unjustly imprisoned. Yet each time we find the marks of God's presence and blessing upon his life. In this study we see how God gave him great insight and then received the most unlikely promotion to Prime Minister!

SETTING THE SCENE: What for you has hitting rock bottom looked like? What did it feel to be in such a place and what were the steps out? Where do you think this point would have been for Joseph (e.g. sold, accused, imprisoned) and what do you think it would have felt like for him?

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NEW INMATES (40:1-4a): What do we know about the cupbearer and the baker and why Pharaoh locked them up? What impresses you about Joseph's willingness to *attend* to them? What can we imply from the reference to the *captain of the guard* (v4 and 39:1) and his confidence in Joseph?

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UNSETTLING DREAMS (40:4b-8): Rather than listening to "Why does it always rain on me?" (by Travis) on repeat, Joseph instead shows concern for his fellow prisoners: why is this and what does it tell us about Joseph? What is most interesting about Joseph's response to their sadness in v8?

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GOOD NEWS (40:9-15): Joseph interpretation of the Cupbearers dream must have a huge relief: what can we learn about how Joseph is feeling as he asks him to remember (v14-15)? When in your own life have you also longed and cried 'don't forget me' (see also Additional Quotes 6)?

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BAD NEWS (40:16-23): The Baker is encouraged by the first interpretation but his is quite the opposite: what impresses you about Joseph's willingness to speak the truth? Why would the cupbearer's failure to remember have been so frustrating for Joseph (2 more years in prison – 41:1)?

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PHARAOH'S DREAMS (41:1-15): Next it is Pharaoh with the dreams (pair #3 in our story): why couldn't the magicians interpret the dreams and why do you think they trigger memories for the cupbearer? What do you think he means by his 'shortcomings' (note this word is plural)?

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GIVE GOD THE GLORY (41:14-24): Joseph is quickly summoned but he still makes time to shave and change clothes (v14): what was this important? Why is Joseph so eager to ensure that Pharaoh knows that only God can reveal the meaning of his dream (v15-16)?

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GOD WILL DO IT SOON (41:25-36): In v25-32 what does (and doesn't) Joseph say? What impresses you most about how he conducts himself before the world's most powerful man? How comfortable would you have been to follow up the interpretation with advice on how to proceed (v33-36)?

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BECOMING PRIME MINISTER (41:37-57): What makes Pharaoh so sure that Joseph is the right man for the job (v37-40)? What are the implications for Joseph of his new role (v40-45)? What do the names of Joseph children (v51-52) tell us about what was going on in Joseph's heart? How had his managerial experiences (Potiphar's house, prison) helped prepare him for this organisational task?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: Joseph spent 13 years in prison (Gen 37:2, 41:46) but has now emerged stronger: in what ways do you see the truths of Rom 8:28 being worked out in Joseph's life? How has God used difficult periods and/or experiences in your life to develop you (Additional Quotes 7)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: You may not have come as far as Joseph over the past few years but share and pray through some of the ways that God has been moulding you into His image in recent years. Ask God to help you trust in His wisdom and providence for your life even when that is hard to do.

MEMORY VERSE: JOB 23:10

STUDY 5 – GENESIS 42-44 – THE JOURNEY TO HEALING

INTRODUCTION: With Joseph at the helm, Egypt now faced 7 years of plenty followed by 7 years of famine. During the famine Jacob sends his sons to buy grain setting the scene for an incredible family reunion. Before that however, Joseph tests his brothers to see if they had learned from their mistakes.

SETTING THE SCENE: What is your experience of broken relationships? What was it that led to the brokenness and how (if applicable) were they restored? What things might be obstacles to reconciliation? What would be the challenges of restoring Joseph’s relationships with his family?

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JOURNEY #1 (42:1-24): What are the circumstances that lead the ten brothers to Egypt? In what ways is it surprising that Joseph sees and recognises his brothers? Why do you think that Joseph initially treats them harshly (spies, testing, prison)? What does their discussion about what they did to Joseph (v21-24) tell us (and Joseph) about what God had been doing in their hearts over these years?

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BACK HOME (42:25-38): Simeon remains and Joseph sends the others back to get Benjamin: why does Joseph return their silver and why do their hearts sink when they find it in their sacks (v28)? What do you make of Jacob’s refusal to allow Benjamin to return with them (v36-38)? How would the brothers have reacted to Jacob’s assertion that he only had one son left (also Additional Quotes 8)?

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JOURNEY #2 (43:1-15): What are the circumstances and process which eventually leads the brothers back to Egypt, this time with Benjamin? How important are Judah’s assurances in winning over Jacob and how do they demonstrate his growing maturity (contrast with 37:26-27, 38:24-26)?

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FACING JOSEPH (43:16-34): Why were the brothers so frightened when Joseph ordered that they be taken back to his house for dinner? In what ways does the steward's answer (v23) to their desperate pleas (v20-22) reassure them? Why was seeing Benjamin so significant for Joseph and why do you think that he didn't reveal himself at this point?

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THE FINAL TEST (44:1-17): Joseph again sends them away having placed his silver cup in one of their sacks: why are the brothers so upset when it's found in Benjamin's sack? Consequently, Joseph says that Benjamin must remain: in what ways was this the ultimate test of whether they had changed?

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JUDAH'S INTERCESSION (44:18-34): Why is Judah's petition on behalf of his family and his offer to remain there in Benjamin's place (v33) clear evidence that they had changed? How is Judah's leadership both a clear indication of how God will grow His people and a shadow of the one who one day would be punished in our place?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What impresses you most about this journey of healing for Jacob's twelve sons? How would these events have set the scene for their subsequent reconciliation? In what ways does the transformation of Judah encourage you that God wants to use even the weakest and unlikeliest of people in His service (Additional Quotes 9)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share more deeply about any relational struggles in your own life and pray for healing and reconciliation. Ask God to work in your hearts to bring humility and a willingness to work hard on relationships that you find difficult and/or ask for forgiveness.

MEMORY VERSES: 1 COR 15:9-10

STUDY 6 – GENESIS 45:1-47:27 – RECONCILED AND REUNITED

INTRODUCTION: Last time we left the story on a cliff-hanger and here in chapter 45 Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers. This study is about a family finding reconciliation and then being reunited together in Egypt under Joseph’s leadership, care and provision.

SETTING THE SCENE: When has there been *distance* between you and someone you were close to for an extended period? What made this difficult and what was it like when you were finally reconciled and/or reunited? What would it have been like for Joseph to be away from his family for so long?

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‘I AM JOSEPH’ (45:1-4): What does Joseph’s outburst of emotion tell us about how he is feeling and how difficult this has been for him (v1-2)? Why do you think his brothers were so terrified of him (v3) and how would bringing them close to him have helped reduce their anxiety (v4)?

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‘BUT GOD’ (v5-8): These are simply stunning verses: how does Joseph’s belief in the Sovereignty of God help him to find perspective about all that he had been through? How might the brothers have responded to Joseph’s words here and how would it have put their minds at ease?

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BRING MY FATHER (45:9-28): Joseph’s first question to the brothers here was about his Father (v3) and now he tells them to hurry back to him: why do you think that Joseph is so eager to send them back for him (Additional Quotes 10)? Why does Joseph tell them not to quarrel (v24b)? Jacob does not initially believe them: why was this and what was it that convinced him that Joseph was alive (v25-28)?

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MOVING TO EYGMT (46:1-27): It had been some time since God had spoken clearly to Jacob (32:22-32): why do you think God chooses to do so now (v1-2)? Why are the promises reiterated in v3 so significant as the whole family (70 people including Joseph’s family) move to Egypt?

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TEMPORARY SETTLEMENT (46:28-47:12): At the sight of his Father, Joseph is again emotional: how do you respond to Jacob's declaration that he is now ready to die (46:29-30) and how is this different to what he has said in the past (see 37:35 & 42:38)? Why is Jacob eager to stress to Pharaoh that they just needed somewhere to stay temporarily (27:4)?

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What are the similarities between how Pharaoh welcomes the family and how he had welcomed Joseph? Why do you think Jacob describes his years to Pharaoh as *few and difficult* (47:9-10)?

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JOSEPH: A MAN OF INTEGRITY (47:13-26): What do we see in these verses of Joseph's integrity in both his work and his leadership (see also 46:31-47:2)? As the famine ran its course the people of Egypt gave their money, livestock, land and even their servitude to pay for food: to what extent do you think that the way Joseph dealt with the famine was merciful or harsh?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER (47:27): The Israelites settled in Egypt and are soon growing in numbers: why was this such a clear indication that they were in the right place and experiencing His blessing? In what ways have you been impressed and challenged by the way that Joseph forgave his brothers and worked hard to bring his family back together?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God for the way that He has been working in the lives of this Old Testament family: pray for such unity, purpose and sense of being in God's will among one another's families and friends. Pray together for any necessary reconciliation or reconnection.

MEMORY VERSE: EPHESIANS 4:32

STUDY 7 – GENESIS 47:28-49:32 – THE NEXT GENERATION

INTRODUCTION: The Israelites in Egypt were increasing greatly in numbers and Jacob enjoyed seventeen years there with his family. Before Jacob's death (aged 147), he gives instructions about his desired burial back in Canaan and then blesses each of his sons and grandsons one by one.

SETTING THE SCENE: What kind of legacies (both positive & negative) do people leave behind after them? What kind of legacy would *you* like to leave behind? How would you summarise Jacob's life and the legacy he left to the next generation? What words would you have written on his gravestone?

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FINISHING WELL (47:28-31 & 49:29-32): Why is Jacob/Israel so eager to ensure he is buried in Canaan, (alongside his forefathers) rather than in the land of Egypt (see also Gen 23:17-20 25:9-11)? What does Jacob's assertion that he would soon *rest* and be *gathered* with his people imply about his belief in an afterlife? Why is it so significant that we are told that *Israel worshipped* in 47:31?

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'RECKONED AS MINE' (48:1-8): Joseph's visit enables Jacob to rally his strength (v1-2): why is Jacob so eager to remind him of the promises God made to him at Luz (v3-4)? Why does Jacob claim Joseph's sons (Manasseh & Ephraim) as his own (v5)? Why are they like Reuben & Simeon (who had both messed up 34:25, 35:22)? What do you think reminds Jacob of his grief for Rachel (v7-8)?

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BLESSING FOR JOSEPH'S SONS (48:9-22): Was it just his failing eyes (v10) or do you think that Jacob had just seen little of his grandsons during these years (v11)? Why do you think Jacob blesses Ephraim first (v13-14) and why does this displease Joseph (v17-18)? How do you understand the substance of Jacob's blessings here in v15-16 & 20a? Why was this an act of faith (Hebrews 11:21)?

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BLESSINGS FOR THE TWELVE SONS (GEN 49): Jacob begins this section saying that he will tell them what will happen in the days to come (v1): for each of the following sons what does Jacob commend? What does Jacob rebuke? What does the future hold for three sons?

REUBEN (v2-4):

SIMEON & LEVI (v5-7):

ZEBULUN & ISSACHAR (v13-15):

DAN (v16-18):

GAD, ASHER & NATHTALI (v19-21):

BENJAMIN (v28):

JUDAH (49:8-12): Bearing in mind what we have seen of Judah throughout (37:26 38:18 & 26, 44:18-34) this story, why do you think Jacob has so much to commend here about Judah? Why do you think that it was Judah through whom came the line of David (Luke 3:33-34) as prophesied here?

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JOSEPH (49:22-27): Jacob also has much to say to Joseph who he describes as a *fruitful vine near a spring* and one whose bow remained steady while under attack from archers: what do you understand him to mean by these metaphors? What does Jacob say has enabled Joseph to stand firm?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What most impresses and challenges you about what Jacob has to say to his twelve sons and two grandsons? What kind of things is God teaching you here that one day you might also want to pass on to the next generation (either physically or spiritually)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God for His love for His people and the generational impact of one generation to the next. Pray into the life of Jacob and the rich legacy that he passed on to his children and grandchildren. Ask to God to bless your own impact upon subsequent generations.

MEMORY VERSE: GENESIS 49:10

STUDY 8 – GENESIS 49:33-50:26 – GOD’S SOVEREIGN PLAN

INTRODUCTION: Finally, we come to the end of the life of Joseph. In this study we will consider Joseph’s reassuring words to his brothers following the death of their Father, Jacob. This passage makes clear that God was Sovereignly working out His plan in and through Joseph’s life.

SETTING THE SCENE: What is your understanding of the mystery involving the Sovereign plan of God and our own free will (both taught throughout scripture)? What is your own experience of how in practice to move forward amidst the tension of these parallel or even at times contradictory truths?

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JACOB’S DEATH & BURIAL (49:33-50:14): What do you find most moving about the death of Jacob in the response of Joseph (50:1) and the Egyptians (50:3b)? Joseph respected his Father’s wishes and requested permission to bury him in Canaan: what do you think that the inhabitants of Canaan (50:10-11), and the Egyptians who went with them, would have made of this solemn mourning?

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REASSURING HIS BROTHERS (50:15-18): Following Joseph’s death why do you think that the brothers are so fearful and what do they do about it? What would you commend about their interactions here? Why did it cause Joseph to weep?

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REASSURING HIS BROTHERS (50:19-21): What do you find most extraordinary about what Joseph says about the Sovereignty of God (v19-20 and Additional Quotes 11)? What would it take to foster such a perspective on life? Some of the hardest things in Joseph’s life were necessary to bring about God’s plan: how in hindsight have you seen such tough times bringing forth good and God’s glory?

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How would Joseph's words (v21) have encouraged the brothers not merely to *not be afraid* but also to begin to feel quite positive about their future?

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JOSEPH'S DEATH (50:22-24, HEB 11:22): Why do you think Joseph is commended by the writer to the Hebrews for how he speaks of their departure from Egypt some 400 years later? How does this tie in with Joseph's instruction that on that day his bones be taken from that place (v24, Exodus 13:19)

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STEPHEN'S SUMMARY (ACTS 7:8c-16): What would you say are the key learning points from Stephen's account of the life of Joseph? How does this contrast with what you would identify as the key things that you would want to say to others about the life of Joseph?

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POINTING TO JESUS: One writer identifies almost 50 ways that Joseph is a *type of Christ*. Indeed Charles Spurgeon wrote: "*There is scarcely any personal type in the Old Testament which is more clearly and fully a portrait of our Lord Jesus Christ than is the type of Joseph.*" In what ways do you think the life of Joseph pointed forward to the life of Jesus Christ (see also Additional Quotes 12)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: From all that we have talked about in the life of Joseph, what do you think produced such resilience, perseverance and faith in Joseph? In what ways does the story encourage you to take steps forward with God in the months and years to come?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God for all that He has been teaching us through the life of Joseph. Pray that God would help you to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor 5:7) even when it feels like the things around you are falling apart and/or not going your way. Praise God for His Sovereignty.

MEMORY VERSE: GENESIS 50:20

APPENDIX – ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

QUOTE 1: “Jacob did nothing to hide this favouritism. In fact, he put it on display by giving Joseph “a varicoloured tunic” (The NIV calls it “a richly ornamented robe”)...In Joseph’s day, the working garb was a short, sleeveless tunic. This left the arms and legs free so that workers could easily manoeuvre and move about. As you can imagine, by giving Joseph this elaborate full-length coat, which was also a sign of nobility in that day, his father was boldly implying, “You can wear this beautiful garment because you don’t have to work like those brothers of yours.” *Charles R. Swindoll, Joseph: A man of Integrity and Forgiveness, Thomas Nelson © 1998, pg. 11*

QUOTE 2: “Our lives are made up of such ordinary things. Most of you reading this will never have anything ‘supernatural’ happen to you. Does that make you a failure? Does that mean you have a sub-standard Christian experience? Not at all, unless you are prepared to say that Joseph’s experience too was sub-standard. It takes more faith and greater grace to live for God in days when His presence is invisible, and His purposes are hidden from our eyes. We are meant to walk by faith and not by sight.” *Liam Goligher, Joseph: The Hidden Hand of God, Christian Focus, pg. 24*

QUOTE 3: “How eager his desire to send just one last message to his father! And with all these thoughts, there would mingle a wondering thought of the great God whom he had learned to worship. What would He say to this? Little did he think then that hereafter he should look back on the day as one of the most gracious links in a chain of loving providences; or that he should ever say, “Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves: God did send me here before you.” It is very sweet, as life passes by, to be able to look back on dark and mysterious events, and to trace the hand of God where we once saw only the malice and cruelty of man.” *F.B. Meyer, Joseph: Beloved-Hated-Exalted, pg. 24*

QUOTE 4: “In our members there is a slumbering inclination towards desire which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power desire seizes mastery over the flesh. All at once a secret, smouldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames. It makes no difference whether it is sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity or desire for revenge, or love of fame and power, or greed for money, or finally, that strange desire for the beauty of the world, of nature. Joy in God is in course of being extinguished in us and we seek all our joy in the creature. At this moment God is quite unreal to us, he loses all reality and only desire for the creature is real; the only reality is the devil. Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God...The lust thus aroused envelops the mind and will of man in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us...It is here that everything within me rises up against the Word of God.” *D. Bonhoeffer, Temptation, pg. 116-117*

QUOTE 5: “Understandably, Potiphar is absolutely seething when he hears the news. He’s angry about the circumstances, he’s angry at Joseph, he’s angry because he has lost a good and trustworthy worker. Unsurprisingly, Joseph had no opportunity to defend himself. But I wonder too, could Potiphar perhaps be suspicious of his wife’s motives in telling him? The fact that Joseph was imprisoned might suggest this interpretation, because in Egypt attempted rape was a capital offence, so Potiphar could have had him executed.” *Liam Goligher, Joseph: The Hidden Hand of God, Christian Focus, pg. 69.*

QUOTE 6: “I know your world is not filled with Egyptian dungeons or dreams that need to be interpreted...Your mistreatment comes in a completely different package. But whatever form it takes, it hurts. You feel the horrible rejection. You’ve done what is right, but you’ve been treated wrongly. In the midst of all this, remember, God has not abandoned you. He has not forgotten you. He never left. He

understands the heartache brought on by the evil which He mysteriously permits so that he might bring you to a tender, sensitive walk with Him." *Charles R. Swindoll, Joseph: A Man of Integrity & Forgiveness, pg. 54*

QUOTE 7: "Your pain won't last forever, but you will. 'Whatever we may have to go through now is less than nothing compared with the magnificent future God has in store for us' (Romans 8:18 PHILLIPS). What is coming will make sense of what is happening now. Let the composer complete his symphony. The forecast is simple. Good days. Bad days. But God is in *all* days. He is the Lord of the famine and the feast, and he uses both to accomplish his will." *Max Lucado, You'll Get Through This: Hope and Help for Your Turbulent Times, pg 86-87.*

QUOTE 8: "He [Jacob] was a *patriarch* who should have been saying to his sons, "Boys, things may seem bleak, but this is the time to trust in God's promises. We need to call some of them to mind. He will provide! Benjamin, let's get on our knees, and let's pray for your safety, and let's watch God work. There's a reason He put that money in those sacks. There's a reason He wants you to go down to Egypt. We don't know what it is yet, but we'll trust Him for the answer. Instead, Jacob reacted with fear, suspicion, paranoia, negativism, and pride. "Nope", he said. "No way. Benjamin is not going." *Charles R. Swindoll, Joseph: A Man of Integrity & Forgiveness, pg. 108*

QUOTE 9: "Judah is putting himself in harm's way for Benjamin's sake. Judah is willing to be a slave himself rather than let his brother be enslaved. There is great grace in his words and in his offer. This man has changed beyond recognition...Some of us may be despairing over some bad choices we have made. We may be torn by grief or remorse. We may think we have screwed up big time and pulled others down with us into our mess. But we must not think for one moment that God has stopped working or that He cannot work out His own will even in and through our bad choices. God's hand directs through all the confusion of human guilt and human weakness and human wickedness." *Liam Goligher, Joseph: The Hidden Hand of God, Christian Focus, pg. 156-163.*

QUOTE 10: "The desire of Joseph's heart was to see his father and to get all of his family to move to Egypt and to live near him so he could provide for them without reservation and without limitation." *Charles R. Swindoll, Joseph: A Man of Integrity and Forgiveness*

QUOTE 11: "But God will use your mess for good. We see a perfect mess; God sees a perfect chance to train, test, and teach the future prime minister. We see a prison; God sees a kiln. We see famine; God sees the relocation of his chosen lineage. We call it Egypt; God calls it protective custody, where the sons of Jacob can escape barbaric Canaan and multiply abundantly in peace. We see Satan's tricks and ploys. God sees Satan tripped and foiled." *Max Lucado, You'll Get Through This: Hope and Help for Your Turbulent Times*

QUOTE 12: "Joseph had been left for dead, but had gone on to claim the highest rank possible as Pharaoh's right hand man. In this respect, Joseph points us to the Lord Jesus, who was rejected by His own people, then 'crucified, dead and buried' (Apostles Creed). But then God raised him from the dead and highly exalted him. He is now seated at the 'right hand of the majesty on high' (Hebrews 1:3). Joseph is just one of many types of Christ found in the Old Testament, that is, people who resemble and model the character of Jesus to some degree. We have also seen glimpses of Jesus in Judah, reminding us that no one individual in Scripture can ever fully capture the multifaceted glories of our Saviour or represent all the offices (that is, the roles and activities) of our Lord." *Liam Goligher, Joseph: The Hidden Hand of God, Christian Focus, pg. 201*

MEMORY VERSES

STUDY 1 – GENESIS 29:1-30:24 & 37:1-4 – COMPLICATED BEGINNINGS

⁴ For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

Romans 15:4

STUDY 2 – GENESIS 37:5-36 – SOLD INTO SLAVERY

⁹ Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰ and rescued him from all his troubles.

Acts 7:9-10a

STUDY 3 – GENESIS 38-39 – DEALING WITH TEMPTATION

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

1 Peter 5:8-9

STUDY 4 – GENESIS 40-41 – FROM ZERO TO HERO

¹⁰ But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

Job 23:10

STUDY 5 – GENESIS 42-44 – THE JOURNEY OF HEALING

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10

STUDY 6 – GENESIS 45:1-47:27 – RECONCILED AND REUNITED

³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 4:32

STUDY 7 – GENESIS 47:28-49:32 – THE NEXT GENERATION

¹⁰ The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.

Genesis 49:10

STUDY 8 – GENESIS 49:33-50:26 – GOD'S SOVEREIGN PLAN

²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Genesis 50:20