

Small Group Materials (Genesis 37-41)

Pray for your time together in God's Word!

(Synopsis of Study): We're taking a macro view of Joseph's life. There is a lot of reading, but the idea is not to get into the nitty gritty of every passage. Instead, examine how Joseph deals with the huge ups and downs in his life. We see him going from being the favored son, being sold into slavery, favored servant of Potiphar, thrown in jail, and then put in power. As we go through these sections, first we look at how Joseph responds to his circumstances, and secondly we look at Joseph's gift of dream interpretation and how he learns to use his gift for God and not for self. Finally, we examine the source of our strength and confidence and who's the star of our lives, God or self?

Ask ONE of the following:

- What are some things that you're good at?
- When are you most confident and assured?

Read: Genesis 37:3-11

³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

⁵ Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. ⁶ He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: ⁷ Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸ His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. ⁹ Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." ¹⁰ But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" ¹¹ And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

Ask the Group: Imagine you're Joseph. *Leader's Note: You may choose to ask a couple of these rather than all of them.*

- What's it like being the favored son?
- What's it like having a sweet gift like dreaming?
- What might your attitude be, especially towards your brothers?
- Where do you think your confidence would come from?

Ask the Group: Now, imagine you're on the other side. What's it like being a sibling of Joseph?
Possible Answers: It sucks. He's arrogant and thinks he's better than you and rubs your face in it. He's a tattletale who thinks the world revolves around him.

Ask the Group: What's your general impression of Joseph's dreams?

- **Ask the Group:** How does he present them to his brothers?
Possible Answers: Flippantly, possibly arrogantly.

- **Ask the Group:** Who is the star of Joseph's dreams?

Possible Answer: They're all about him.

Read: Genesis 37:17b – 28; 39: 1-3

^{17b} So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

¹⁸ They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹ They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams." ²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." ²² And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. ²⁴ And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt.

²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?"

²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. ²⁸ Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

... Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ² The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

Ask the Group: When Joseph's in the pit, do you think he's surprised that his dreams haven't come true?

Ask the Group: When do you trust in the Lord the most?

Ask the Group: The Lord was with Joseph and he became a successful man—a successful slave—but he was still a slave. How does this mesh up with your idea of the Lord being with you?

- **Ask the Group:** Does this challenge what you think it means to experience God's faithfulness?

Read Aloud to the Group: As we read more of Joseph's story, we find that he continues to do well in his master's house. He's given extra responsibility, and everything he oversees thrives. Unfortunately, his good looks earn him some unwanted attention from his master's wife, and when he turns her down, he ends up in prison. While there, he makes a new friend by correctly interpreting a dream—the Pharaoh's cup-bearer. The cup-bearer eventually goes back to Pharaoh, while Joseph is left in prison. But then... Pharaoh also has a disturbing dream that no one can interpret. Guess who remembers Joseph then? That's right, his prison-buddy. Let's pick up the story in Genesis 41.

Read: Genesis 41:14-32, 39-43

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. ¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." ¹⁶ Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." ¹⁷ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Behold, in my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile. ¹⁸ Seven cows, plump and attractive, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. ¹⁹ Seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and thin, such as I had never seen in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰ And the thin, ugly cows ate up the first seven plump cows, ²¹ but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they were still as ugly as at the beginning. Then I awoke. ²² I also saw in my dream seven ears growing on one stalk, full and good. ²³ Seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them, ²⁴ and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. And I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me."

²⁵ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. ²⁷ The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine. ²⁸ It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹ There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, ³⁰ but after them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land, ³¹ and the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of the famine that will follow, for it will be very severe. ³² And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about.

³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. ⁴⁰ You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you." ⁴¹ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." ⁴² Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck. ⁴³ And he made him ride in his second chariot. And they called out before him, "Bow the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt.

Ask the Group: What do you think is the point of Joseph's "crashes"? Let's start with the micro and zoom out.

- What do you think God was doing in Joseph personally in these crashes?
- What do you think God's 15-year plan was in this?
- How does this story fit into the larger narrative of the Bible?

Possible Answers: Humbling his arrogance. Tempering Joseph to be used as a steward later in life. To provide for an entire nation and for Jacob and his family. To bring Israel into Egypt which sets up the Exodus and is a puzzle piece in the Story of God's faithfulness to His people.

Ask the Group: Have you had major crashes in your life?

- **Ask the Group:** How have you seen God use your past to draw you or others closer to Him?

- **Ask the Group:** Are you able to recognize that you fit into His plan and that, although He cares immensely for you, there is a larger Story at work?
- **Ask the Group:** Do you struggle with believing that He works through all circumstances for your good and His glory?

Read Aloud to the Group: Philippians 4:11-13

¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Ask the Group: What do you usually think of when you hear Philippians 4:13?

Possible Answers: 'You can do it!,' It's used for sporting events and test taking, etc.

- **Ask the Group:** Look at these verses again through Joseph's story. What did it mean for Joseph to apply these verses?
Possible Answer: For Joseph, it didn't mean try harder, you'll get out of the pit, jail, slavery—and that it's all going to be good really soon. It meant that wherever God had him, he would be able to endure and find strength in God.
- **Ask the Group:** How do these verses apply to our lives? To your life?

Ask the Group: God uses Joseph's circumstances to teach him that God alone deserves all the glory for the gifts He has given. We all have different strengths that God's given us. What are some of yours?

Leader's Note: If you opted to use the first opening question, you can reference back to that here rather than asking it again.

- **Ask the Group:** In your life, who is that gift about?
Leader's Note: God is jealous for His glory. The gifts that He's given us are not for our exaltation, but for Him. For His glory, to be used that way and for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This isn't to say that we aren't supposed to find pleasure in using His gifts, but they are His.
- **Ask the Group:** How can you develop true humility about your strengths/gifts, giving all the glory to God?

Ask the Group: What is our community application of this passage?

Leader's Note: You may choose to create your own application question as a group based on your discussion, or highlight a question from this study.