

A Bible Study by
Melissa Spoelstra

JOSEPH

*The Journey
to Forgiveness*



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A Bible Study by
Melissa Spoelstra

Abingdon Women
Nashville

JOSEPH: THE JOURNEY TO FORGIVENESS

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About the Author

Melissa Spoelstra is a popular women's conference speaker, Bible teacher, and author who is madly in love with Jesus and passionate about studying God's Word and helping women of all ages to

seek Christ and know Him more intimately through serious Bible study. Having a degree in Bible theology, she enjoys teaching God's Word to the body of Christ, traveling to diverse groups and churches across the nation and also to Nairobi, Kenya, for a women's prayer conference. Melissa is the author of *Jeremiah: Daring to Hope in an Unstable World*. She has published articles in *ParentLife*, *Women's Spectrum*, and *Just Between Us*, and she writes a regular blog in which she shares her musings about what God is teaching her on any given day. She lives in Dublin, Ohio, with her pastor husband, Sean, and their four kids: Zach, Abby, Sara, and Rachel.

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Introduction

Do you ever find your mind replaying old tapes of wrongs done to you? Have you walked into a room, spotted someone who has hurt you in some way, and wanted to walk the other direction and hope the person didn't see you? Maybe your pain runs deep from fresh wounds, or perhaps old scars leave a daily reminder of discomfort from the past. All of us know what it's like to feel betrayed by someone we trusted. Often it's a small breach such as being overlooked, hearing a demeaning comment made about you, or being neglected in a time of need. Other times we've experienced lies, gossip, or harsh words that cut us to the core. Some of us have endured unspeakable pain through abuse, adultery, or abandonment.

Someone in your life has hurt you, whether he or she meant to or not. Sometimes we are the victim while other times we are the perpetrator. When someone says words that can't be taken back, behaves badly in moments of anger, or hurts us through action or inaction, we can find ourselves reeling from the blows. God knows the pain we cause each other and longs to help us learn to practice forgiveness.

This Bible study was born out of my own struggle to forgive. God teaches us through His Word the dangers of unforgiveness. In Hebrews 12:15 we read, "Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many." Bitterness becomes a poisonous cup that cripples us when we continue to drink from it, paralyzing our relationships, our thought life, and even our faith. The consequences of holding on to the hurt inflicted by others can ruin the way we view God, ourselves, and other relationships. The stakes of forgiveness are high, and when betrayal gets personal in our lives, it certainly isn't easy.

As I've battled to make sense of pain in my life, I've asked questions such as:

- Where do I start? How do I stop dwelling on things said or done to me?
- How do I tame my emotions and thought patterns in order to see my offender through God's eyes?
- Is it ever okay not to forgive? Does it cheapen justice to forgive, especially when the wrongdoing is abusive, murderous, or truly evil?
- When will I stop having to re-forgive? Will I ever just be "over it"?
- What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation? Is it possible to forgive without reconciling?
- What about trust? Does forgiveness mean I let others repeat offenses without setting boundaries?

Nowhere do we see forgiveness played out more fully in Scripture than in the Genesis account of Joseph. No sugarcoating there. Forgiveness rises to the top in this story, but not without the messy grappling with grace that we all encounter. During the next six weeks we will open the text of Genesis 37–50 to explore what God has to say in our lives through Joseph's story of trial and triumph. As we study his dreams, betrayers, dysfunctional family, struggle to forgive, and journey toward reconciliation, we will find truths that echo into our own situations.

Options for Study

As we begin our journey to forgiveness alongside Joseph, it will be important to decide what level of commitment our time and life circumstances will allow. I have found that what I put into a Bible study directly correlates to what I get out of it. When I take time to do the homework daily instead of cramming it all into one sitting, God's truths sink deeper as I have more time to reflect and meditate on what God is teaching me. When I am intentional about getting together with other women to watch videos and have discussion, I find that this helps keep me from falling off the Bible study wagon midway. Also, making a point to memorize verses and dig deeper by looking at additional materials greatly benefits my soul.

At other times, however, I have bitten off more than I can chew. When our faith is new, our children are small, or there are great demands on our time because of difficult circumstances, ailing parents, or other challenges, we need to be realistic about what we will be able to finish. So this study is designed with options that enable you to tailor it for your particular circumstances and needs.

1. Basic Study. The basic study includes five daily readings or lessons. Each lesson combines study of Scripture with personal reflection and application (**boldface tan type** indicates write-in-the-book questions and activities), ending with a suggestion for talking with God about what you've learned. On average you will need about twenty to thirty minutes to complete each lesson.

When you gather with your group to review each week's material, you will watch a video, discuss what you are learning, and pray together. I encourage you to discuss the insights you are gaining and how God is working in your own life.

2. Deeper Study. If you want an even deeper study, there is an optional "Read Through Joseph's Family Story" challenge that will take you through Genesis 12–50 to help provide both context and continuity for your study of the Joseph narrative in the final fourteen chapters of the book. Watch for the prompts in the margins. Additionally, Digging Deeper articles are available online (see www.AbingdonPress.com/Joseph) for those who would like deeper historical context about Joseph's family, Egyptian practices, and structural nuances in the text that lend fuller insight. Finally, memory verses are also provided for each week of study so that you may meditate on and memorize key truths from God's Word.

3. Lighter Commitment. If you are in a season of life in which you need a lighter commitment, I encourage you to give yourself permission to do what you can do. God will bless your efforts and speak to you through this study at every level of participation.

Take some time right now to pray and decide which study option is right for you. Then fill in the circles below to indicate which aspects of the study God is calling you to complete. Be realistic, but also allow yourself to be stretched and challenged as the Holy Spirit directs.

- ☐ **Make the group sessions a priority. Watch the video and engage in discussion and group learning.**
- ☐ **Complete as much of the homework as you can between sessions.**
- ☐ **Complete all five days of homework between sessions.**
- ☐ **Memorize the memory verse(s) (one to two verses for each week of lessons).**
- ☐ **Take the "Read Through Joseph's Family Story" challenge, which will guide you in reading through Genesis 12–50 over the course of the study.**
- ☐ **Read the additional Digging Deeper articles found online that give additional insights and information on related topics.**

Be sure to let someone in your group know which parts of the study you plan to do so that you have some accountability and encouragement.

A Final Word

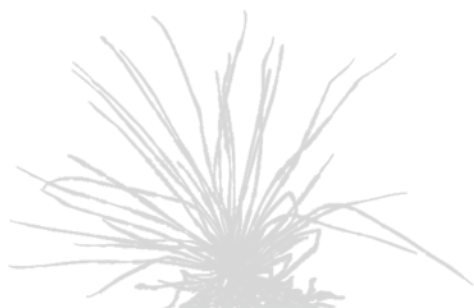
As we delve into Joseph's story and lift the lid on our own forgiveness stories from the past or present, we might find some pain resurfacing. Perhaps you have completely forgiven someone, but simply remembering the situation brings up hurtful memories. A resurfacing of pain doesn't mean we haven't forgiven; it only indicates that our memories include emotions as well as facts. We will learn more

about this in our study. Or perhaps you understand the need to forgive but are looking for God's help and guidance as you struggle to find peace in letting go of offenses. No matter what has been done to harm you, God wants to free you from the chains of unforgiveness and bitterness. He calls you to find freedom as you release your pain to Him so that He may do a supernatural work of forgiveness in your life. In fact, He wants to use the very things intended to hurt you for your benefit. This is the God we serve. He exchanges beauty for ashes (Isaiah 61:3), raises up life out of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:4-6), and uses even our most painful circumstances as a source of blessing in our lives.

You may be thinking, *I don't really have anyone to forgive right now*. While we aren't always working through a betrayal or hurt, we do rub shoulders with other sinners in our homes, churches, and communities. Even if you can't relate with the need to forgive at this moment, God might want to prepare you and grow you for future opportunities to forgive. As you study Joseph's story, I pray you'll get to know your forgiving God better. Jesus modeled ultimate forgiveness by giving His own life on our behalf.

We can't do it on our own. We desperately need God's Spirit and Word to help us sort through fact and fiction so that we can make the journey to forgiveness. It will mean getting real, raw, and possibly reopening some painful memories. But the freedom and healing on the other side will be well worth it as we search the Scripture alongside others who want to become more like Christ, learning to extend the same grace and forgiveness they have received from Him. As we finish our six weeks of study, I pray that we will be able to take Joseph's posture toward those who hurt us, saying, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good" (Genesis 50:20a).

Melissa





Week 1

**ACKNOWLEDGING
THE PAIN**

Genesis 37, 39

Memory Verse

*I pour out my complaints before him
and tell him all my troubles.
When I am overwhelmed,
you alone know the way I should turn.
(Psalm 142:2-3)*

Fun Fact:

Joseph's name means "May God add" or increase (Genesis 30:24).

Day 1: A Dysfunctional Family

We don't have to look much farther than our own front door to find a place to practice forgiveness. Living in close proximity to others provides many opportunities to hurt one another. With pretenses down, we unveil our true selves at home. Family members see what we hide from others outside our four walls—such as laziness, selfishness, anger, and favoritism.

I've heard it said that the true test of a Christian is how he or she lives at home. Families are the people committed to love us even when our flaws are exposed. Whether through birth, adoption, or the covenant of marriage, family connections often involve our closest relationships: husband and wife, parent and child, sister and brother, grandparent and grandchild.

What family member are you closest to at this stage in your life?

Now imagine the pain if that person was disloyal to you in some way. When that sacred trust is broken, the betrayal cuts deep wounds. Carrie* said this about the fracture in her family:

How do I forgive someone who stood before God and a church full of people and vowed to be faithful until death but then deceived, lied to, and manipulated not only me but also our children and everyone we both knew in order to hide his adulteries? He then manipulated church leaders into believing I was crazy. When finally the truth was revealed and he was confronted by a pastor, he confessed. After hearing what he would have to do to redeem the situation, he packed and left. He vowed to destroy me and turn my children against me. He did everything he could to fulfill that vow even to the spiritual destruction of the children. He threw away everything we had spent years building, along with the future of

*Apart from documented sources, all names of those who have shared their stories have been changed.

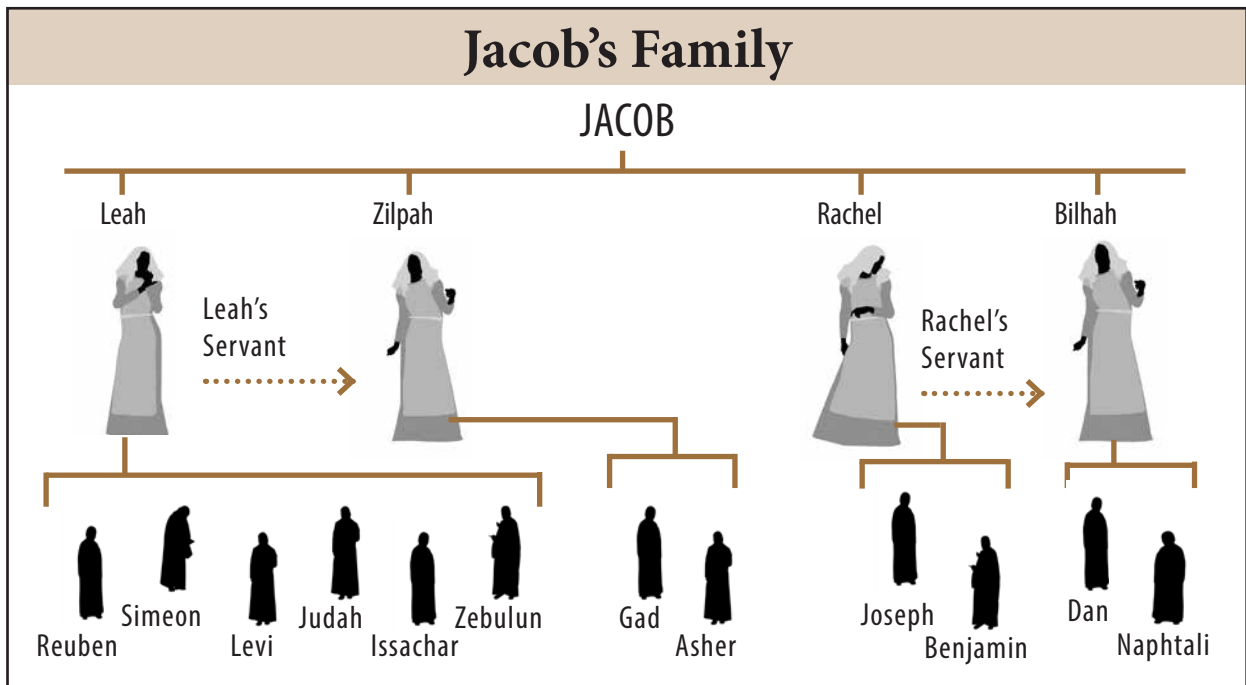


enjoying family gatherings, weddings, grandchildren, and a spouse in old age. How do you ever forgive that person?

I've known many other women like Carrie who've experienced excruciating betrayal by a family member. Joseph's story of betrayal also begins at home. Actually, all of us grew up in a dysfunctional family because no family is perfect.

What are some memories of family experiences or situations that have given you the opportunity to forgive—whether recent or long ago?

Let's learn a little bit about Joseph's family so that we can understand better the nature of dysfunction in his home. I assure you that it will help you feel better about the problems in your own family. Someone asked me recently why the biblical accounts are so full of things such as polygamy, rape, murder, and all sorts of moral failures. While I've asked that same question myself, I have come to believe that one reason is to give us hope that God can work amidst our own messy lives.



How many women bore children to Joseph's father, Jacob?

To understand the extent of the family drama that we will explore in our weeks of study, we need to look back at the soil where the roots of discord began to grow in this family, beginning with Jacob's family of origin. (We find the details in Genesis 27–30.) Though Jacob was his mother's favorite, his father, Isaac, had a special affinity for his twin brother, Esau, which left Jacob with a father wound. Jacob not only stole the birthright from Esau, the firstborn, but he also tricked his father into giving him the blessing intended for Esau by dressing up as his twin brother. Esau wasn't very happy with his brother's deceit and threatened to murder him. So Jacob fled to his uncle, Laban, who lived far away, and immediately he fell in love with his cousin Rachel (literally on his first day in town—the moment he laid eyes on her). We learn that right after he watered Rachel's flocks, "Jacob kissed Rachel, and he wept aloud" (Genesis 29:11).

Jacob worked for his uncle for seven years in order to marry Rachel, and on the day of their marriage he was tricked at the altar, waking up in the morning to find Rachel's older and less attractive sister, Leah, under the wedding veils. The Scriptures put it delicately when contrasting the two girls: "There was no sparkle in Leah's eyes, but Rachel had a beautiful figure and a lovely face" (Genesis 29:17). Some translations say that Leah had "weak eyes."

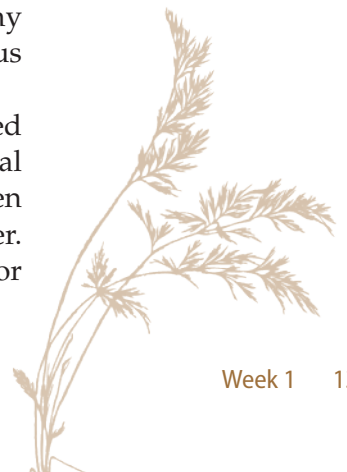
When Jacob expressed his unhappiness over being tricked into marrying the sister with "weak eyes" (NIV), he was given Rachel as well at the end of her sister's bridal week with his promise to work for Laban for seven more years.

According to the family tree, how many children did Leah give to Jacob?

Who was Joseph's mother?

Now, two other women bore Jacob children in this story. When Rachel struggled with infertility at first, she gave her servant Bilhah to Jacob so that she could have children through her. Though Leah bore Jacob many sons, she also later gave her servant Zilpah to Jacob to increase her status through having more children.

The people who followed God during the times of the Patriarchs viewed children as gifts from the Lord. More babies meant more blessings. Social status and greater security came to the woman who bore many children because the children would provide for their mothers when they got older. With the dangers of infant death, illness, and war exponentially higher for



this group of people, the more sons to take care of you the better. Infertility brought grief not only for a woman's unrealized maternal instincts but also through the scorn of others who often equated the inability to have a baby with God's punishment.

When Rachel finally gave birth to Joseph, he entered the world into a family feud between two sisters seeking status in different ways. Rachel, though favored by her husband, felt shame in her barrenness. Leah attempted to compensate for her "weak eyes" and the lack of her husband's love with many sons. Jacob, the head of the household, suffered from the lack of his father's approval and the loss of his mother's presence in his life (after fleeing his homeland), so he looked to soothe his pain in the arms of a woman.

Are you starting to feel that your family's problems aren't so unusual after all?

Read Genesis 37:1-4. According to verse 3, why did Jacob favor Joseph?

What did Jacob give to Joseph as a sign of his special favor?

Knowing a little of the family history, can you think of any other reasons why Jacob might have favored Joseph?

Joseph's birth had ended a long season of infertility for Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel. Jacob didn't hide his favoritism toward Rachel's firstborn. One would think Jacob might have understood the pitfalls of preferring one child over another after the debacle of his own parents' favoritism (Genesis 25:28). Even when bad behaviors and their consequences are modeled for us, we too can struggle to keep history from repeating itself.

Take another look at Genesis 37:1-4. How did the brothers know that Joseph was their dad's favorite?

According to verse 4, how did Jacob's favoritism affect the brothers' relationship with Joseph?

Did you grow up in a family where you felt that one sibling was favored over another? If so, where did you fit into the scenario?

What would you say are two damaging consequences of favoritism that you have experienced firsthand or learned from watching others?

- 1.
- 2.

Jacob wasn't aware of the extent of damage he was inflicting on his family by overtly favoring one child over the others. As parents, we would do well to be on guard against comparing our children or bestowing special favor on one. While things will not always seem completely fair in our children's eyes, we must diligently make a concerted effort to make each one feel special and loved.

My husband and I often take our children on individual outings. These are special getaways from the craziness of everyday life to be intentional about understanding their joys and fears by asking them questions and valuing them with our time and attention. At times we've kept track of these dates on a chart so that they know when their turns are coming. I can't imagine if we were to practice this with only one child. The others certainly would feel left out.

Now, try for a moment to put yourself in Joseph's shoes. Though I'm sure he enjoyed the blessing and affection of his father, he went out to the fields sometimes with his brothers. Meals and holidays likely were spent together as well.

As a seventeen-year-old boy, what mixed feelings do you think Joseph might have had about his position in the family?

As I was growing up, I often was teased as being the favored child. When the four kids wanted to make a plea to our parents, I was sent to negotiate. From my siblings' point of view, my consequences seemed to be less and my benefits appeared to be more. Whether some of this favor was merely perceived, it left me in a strange position at times. While I enjoyed the good relationship I had with my parents, the disdain from my brother and sisters wasn't fun at all.

I wonder if Joseph ever wanted to take off his special coat when he was around his brothers or apologize for his special gift. Perhaps as a seventeen-

The first step on the journey to forgiveness is acknowledging the hurt.

year-old he sometimes paraded around, showing off his favor, while other times he regretted the loss of sibling camaraderie. In any case, that coat came to represent both the love of his father and the growing hatred and envy of his brothers, which we will see compounded in tomorrow's lesson.

When you watch others receive unfair favoritism, what initial feelings come to the surface?

This week we are going to find that the first step on the journey to forgiveness is acknowledging the hurt. We can never forgive without getting honest about our pain. Joseph's brothers endured some unfair neglect because of a birth order they had no control over. Whether they intended to or not, Jacob and Joseph inflicted wounds on the brothers. And the brothers had the choice of working toward forgiveness or vengeance. While you may not be struggling with being on the wrong end of favoritism as Joseph's brothers were, it's likely that you are carrying some pain at the expense of others.

Who has contributed to the hurt you are currently feeling?

What does that pain look like in your world right now? In other words, how are your thoughts, emotions, attitudes, and actions affected by the actions or inactions of this person or persons?

Digging Deeper

Have you ever read Bible stories like Joseph's and wondered if God has favorites? Jacob favored his son Joseph, so perhaps God has some favorite children too. Check out the online Digging Deeper Introductory Article, "Does God Have Favorites?" (see AbingdonPress.com/Joseph).

Today we've looked at the first milestone on the journey to forgiveness. Rather than sweeping our feelings under the rug or pretending we aren't hurt, it is important to acknowledge what we feel. Ultimately, we cannot forgive without acknowledging the offense.

Talk with God

*You keep track of all my sorrows.
You have collected all my tears in your bottle.
You have recorded each one in your book. (Psalm 56:8)*

Tell God how you feel about whatever hurt you have identified. He saw it happen. He longs to listen and talk with you about it. He has collected every tear. Acknowledge the hurt to the One who cares more than anyone else on this planet and who offers His comfort to you.

Day 2: Fuel to the Fire

Mark hired his friend John to work for him in his business. The two became very close as they worked together, worshiped at the same church, and even took many trips together to places such as Europe and the Caribbean. Mark footed the bill for these vacations and many other activities out of his generosity. Then things began to change in their working environment. John began to show up late, miss meetings, and blow off important deadlines. Though Mark spoke to John regularly about his lapses, nothing changed. Mark tried to overlook as much as he could because of their friendship. However, frustration began to mount among the other employees of the company until they eventually banded together for an intervention with Mark. Their exasperation with John was so great that they all threatened to quit if John was not let go. After much wrestling with God, Mark broke the news to John, hoping that by not working together they might have a shot at repairing their friendship. Yet things went from bad to worse in their relationship after John left the company. Their story is still being written as they daily seek to sort through the facts, the fiction, and their feelings. Not a day goes by that Mark doesn't ponder the pain and wonder what happened for such a great rift to come between two brothers in Christ and what he might have done differently.

I, too, have felt the sting of pain in friendship and have questioned myself about what part I played in contributing to my own friends' problems. If we have played a role in creating the circumstances that have led to our injury or betrayal, are the others involved still to be held accountable for what has happened? If we have been provoked by another person, can we excuse our reaction? These are the kinds of practical questions that often torment us. Clarifying who and what warrants forgiveness is vital in our journey toward healing.

Yesterday we explored some of the bad blood between Joseph and his brothers. What are some of the reasons you recall that Joseph's brothers "couldn't say a kind word to him" (Genesis 37:4)?

Fun Fact:

The original meaning of the Hebrew word for Joseph's coat "is 'a coat of extended length,' literally, a coat that extends to the hands and feet." It wasn't until the ancient Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures (the Septuagint, also known by the Roman numeral acronym LXX) when the coat is referred to as colorful.¹

Today we delve into Joseph's behavior to see if he added any fuel to the fire of his brothers' hatred, and we will consider how forgiveness applies when we've played a part in a conflict.

Read Genesis 37:1-11 and fill in the chart below, noting what each party said or did to the others:

Brothers	Joseph	Jacob
v. 4	v. 2	v. 3
v. 8	vv. 6, 9	vv. 10, 11

I sometimes wonder why details are left out in the biblical text. I want to know exactly what the brothers did that led Joseph to report on them. Was it a major offense, such as harming the sheep or stealing? Or was Joseph overzealous and getting them in trouble for taking too many work breaks or neglecting some minor shepherding procedure? When things aren't clear in a passage, it causes us to search and interact with God to discern truth from His Word. First Corinthians 13:12 assures us that one day we will have all the details: "Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely."

Though I'm glad that one day we'll get the full story, for now I have some questions about this part of the story:

- Should Joseph have tattled?
- Should Joseph have shared his dreams in the manner that he did?
- Was he guilty of fueling the fire of jealousy?

What are some other questions you have regarding this passage?

What questions do you have about how you might be contributing to the friction related to a strained situation in your own life?

Some scholars maintain that Joseph shouldn't have shared his dream. "Even if the dream came from the Lord, it was for his own encouragement,

not for their edification, and he was very unwise to insist on telling it to them.”² Other commentators disagree: “Perhaps Joseph might have been more diplomatic in the way he reported his dreams, but surely he was right in sharing them with the family.”³ While the dreams came from God, perhaps Joseph communicated them insensitively. We don’t apologize for our dreams, job promotions, or exciting news, but we must be careful to show tact when choosing with whom and how we share them.

Can you think of some situations when it might be inappropriate to share exciting news with a particular audience? Explain below.

We need to be mindful even with good news. An infertile couple will want to hear of a dear friend’s pregnancy, but the news must be shared thoughtfully. A recently unemployed sister might find it difficult to celebrate her sibling’s promotion. We must be careful to use discernment and tact in our words so that we do not add fuel to the fire of their pain unintentionally.

Now let’s return to the question of the part Joseph played in the conflict. Let’s assume that Joseph wasn’t completely innocent in his behavior. Does this mean he deserved what he got?

Read Genesis 37:12-37 and summarize below how the brothers took vengeance into their own hands:

Do you think Joseph’s brothers were responsible for their actions even though Joseph could have contributed to their jealousy and hatred with his bad report against them, his favored status with their father, and his dreams that clearly put him in authority over them? Why or why not?

This is an important question that impacts how we forgive. Let’s consider a quick scenario of three friends.

Sally: Sally is really upset when word reaches her that her good friend Mary has broken a confidence by sharing private details of her life with others. In a moment of pain she dials Mary’s number and speaks accusatory words for minutes on the phone without



asking any questions or allowing a response. Then she hangs up on Mary.

Mary: Mary feels hurt and upset by the phone call and believes Sally jumped to conclusions without having all the facts. She hasn't broken Sally's trust and wants to sort things out, but now she is offended by the way Sally handled the situation.

Jane: Jane loves both friends and has only heard Sally's side of the story. So she confronts Mary and learns about the phone call. However, she believes Sally shouldn't be held responsible for her actions because she wouldn't have behaved badly unless she had been really hurt by what she'd heard. She believes the two friends should wipe the slate clean, pretending none of it ever happened. No one needs to admit, apologize, or forgive—just rewind the clock and start over.

What is your response to Jane's conclusion? Explain your answer.

Sally, Mary, and Jane's scuffle may be small scale, but little things can blow up when gasoline is poured on embers. I've seen it happen, and sadly, the clock cannot be rewound. Whether the situation is small scale or far more serious, the question at the heart of the matter is this: Should one person's pain, whether it is real or perceived, justify poor reactions? Can a combustible situation be extinguished rather than inflamed?

Did Joseph get what he deserved? Some might say that if Joseph had been more humble and his father had showed less favoritism, the brothers wouldn't have had a reason for vengeance; therefore, they could not be held responsible for what they did because they were just victims of their circumstances. But the truth according to God's Word is that we cannot claim innocence for our bad decisions because someone did something to provoke us.

Joseph's brothers had a legitimate right to feel pain. Their perception of Joseph's haughtiness, his dreams to rule over them, and their father's favoritism left them angry. They also may have been afraid. In those days, the firstborn son received the birthright. But Leah's firstborn, Reuben, disqualified himself by sleeping with Bilhah (one of his father's concubines). Simeon and Levi, the next in line, led a murderous attack on Shechem without their father's approval, which left them out of their father's good graces. Though there were still seven brothers who were older than Joseph, they might have feared that Joseph was weaseling his way into the position

of power in the family. Because Rachel was supposed to have been Jacob's first wife, it could be argued that her firstborn should have been the next patriarch of the family. Joseph's dreams would only have intensified this fear.

Even so, the brothers could not excuse their wicked behavior with these reasons. They certainly knew what God said about murder and revenge. Without television, computers, video games, or shopping malls, the way to pass the hours on evenings and trips was often storytelling. All of the Genesis stories prior to their own story would have been passed down orally. The story of Cain and Abel would have been familiar to them, and they would have known very well how God felt about murder (see Genesis 4). Living in close quarters and taking journeys together in their nomadic way of life, they would have heard about the character of God through the stories of His relationship with their father Jacob, their grandfather Isaac, and their great-grandfather Abraham. Joseph's brothers could have acknowledged their hurt and their hate and then asked God to help them heal. Instead they took vengeance into their own hands.

We, too, have a choice of which posture we will take when legitimate hurt comes into our lives. Which will we take: *a victim mentality*, seeing ourselves at the mercy of our pain, or *a victor mentality*, acknowledging the hurt while seeking God's help in pursuing healing?

How have you struggled with these two internal postures?


What helps you move from victim to victor in your heart and mind when you are struggling with pain?

Even if another person fans the flames of our pain, God calls us to forgive rather than excuse ourselves to disobey His commands.

I've heard my children make excuses like these:

- "I wouldn't have hit her if she hadn't kept annoying me."
- "I wouldn't have thrown a fit if she had given me back my iPod."
- "I would have done my work if she hadn't been singing so loud that I had to leave the room."

They have come up with some good ones. Like other children, they don't want to be accountable for what they've done when they believe someone else pushed them to it. We can be much like children,



Even if another person fans the flames of our pain, God calls us to forgive rather than excuse ourselves to disobey His commands.

**Read Through
Joseph's
Family Story:**
Read Genesis 13-14.

excusing our wrong choices because we had our embers stoked until we allowed ourselves to burst into flames.

Can you think of a situation in which you are choosing to overlook your part in a conflict because of another party's wrong behavior? (Think about relationships in your family, work, church, and community.) Describe it below.

It's always our turn to do the right thing for the right reasons. Forgiveness isn't one option on a list of possible choices for followers of Jesus; it is the only way to peace and freedom.

Talk with God

Spend a few minutes in God's presence, asking Him to help you sort through the muddle of your relational circumstances. Ask for clear vision to see any course correction you need to make so that you don't end up like Joseph's brothers—throwing someone out of your life in retribution. (We may not toss someone into a physical pit, but we are skilled at edging people out emotionally and socially to punish them when we feel wounded.) Make notes in the margin of any action steps God is calling you to make in order to put out a potential relational fire.

Day 3: Taming the Wild Horses

Over thirty years ago, Pam's husband had an affair with her best friend. She felt kicked in the stomach emotionally, which left her physically ill with migraine headaches. She felt spiritually knocked down as well since she didn't anticipate this from her husband, who was a traveling minister at the time. Fresh tears came to her eyes as she recalled the pain even though she had long ago traveled the difficult road to forgiveness. Her honesty touched me as she remembered her best friend stoking the fires of hurt while she battled to forgive and re-forgive with each new offense. At one point she even wanted to kill her former friend when she thought of the harm her friend was causing her daughter by feeding her lies that eventually landed her daughter in therapy.

Though we might not want to admit the thoughts we've had about those who've seriously hurt us, the truth is that most of us have wished some severe pain on our betrayers. After we have acknowledged the depth of our hurt, we also must be real about the emotion of hate.

I don't like the word *hate*. In his book *Forgive and Forget*, Lewis Smedes writes, "The act of forgiving, by itself, is a wonderfully simple act; but it always happens inside a storm of complex emotions. It is the hardest trick in the whole bag of personal relationships."⁴ In the book he outlines what he refers to as the four stages of forgiving:

1. Hurt
2. Hate
3. Healing
4. Coming Together

Smedes says, "If we can travel through all four, we achieve the climax of reconciliation."⁵

As I read his book, I wanted to protest number two. Hate seems like such a strong word. *Can't I just feel dislike toward someone who has harmed me?* I wondered. However, the more I have pondered, prayed, and studied forgiveness, the more I have come to believe that Smedes is right. Pain causes powerful emotions in our lives. Though we may not spew our anger in an outburst, our hate may take more passive forms as we silently wish bad things for those who have hurt us, pray imprecatory prayers for them, or let our anger leak out in passive-aggressive comments. If you are having trouble with the word *hate*, then perhaps you will acknowledge that negative emotions often follow pain in our lives.

If we don't acknowledge our negative emotions, we can't move on to the next step of healing. A friend of mine shared with me how she taught her daughters from a young age about their emotions. She said emotions are like wild horses who want to jump, kick, and make loud noises. In order to tame the wild horses within, we can't stuff our feelings. They will break out one way or another. Instead, we must get honest in front of God and others about the emotions that betrayals or hurtful actions unearth in us and ask God for help.

Lewis Smedes tells the story of a woman who came home early from the gym to find her husband and the teen girl they'd recently taken into their home in a compromising position. She said this of her feelings: "Are you supposed to swallow hard, let him off the hook, and pretend the whole thing never happened? If that is what forgiving is about, ... I would rather buy a gun and shoot them both."⁶ She grew up in the church and knew she was supposed to forgive, but she was surprised at the power of the wild horse within when she came face-to-face with betrayal.

Describe some wild horse emotions you have struggled to tame when you have felt betrayed or wounded:

Fun Fact:

Joseph's father, Jacob, was about ninety years old when Joseph was born.

Read back through Genesis 37:4-11 and note below some of the emotions Joseph's brothers felt toward him:

What circumstances led them to feel these strong emotions toward Joseph?

Even if Joseph egged them on with his coat, his tattling, and his recounting of dreams of ruling over them, the brothers' wound took root in the perceived lack of favor from their father. Yet Joseph wasn't to blame for being born to his father's favored wife or for being the object of his father's special attention. In the haze of our emotion, we too can easily find an inappropriate target for vengeance.

When we hurt, it can lead to hate or other negative emotions such as jealousy, anger, and greed. Unless we acknowledge the hate and ask God to help us heal, we will turn toward fleshly responses and ride the wild horses of emotions until we get bucked off.

What are some natural human reactions to betrayal that you have experienced in your own life or observed in the lives of those around you—before asking God to do His supernatural work of healing?

Bitterness and the need for vengeance can consume us when we reel from the hate and envy we carry inside. When I asked Pam how she was able to let go of bitterness and her desire for vengeance, she said she eventually became so miserable and unhappy that she knew she had to find freedom or she would die. She thought, *I can't live like this; it's just too painful*. So she began her journey to forgiveness, releasing the hatred and anger inside of her. Though it didn't happen overnight, she knew she had no choice except to forgive. She couldn't ride the wild horses of hate much longer if she wanted to survive. Pam found healing in turning to God and getting honest about her hurt and hate.

As we saw yesterday, Joseph's brothers did not tame their wild horses but rode out their desire for vengeance. Review Genesis 37:12-36 and answer the following:

Though the text does not state it explicitly, Joseph's brothers would have had time on their journey to Shechem to brood and commiserate together about the unfairness of their plight.

When an opportunity for vengeance presented itself to the brothers, they did not hesitate to act. What was their original plan when they saw Joseph in the distance? (v. 18)

What stopped them from carrying out this plan? (vv. 21-22)

Even though Joseph's brothers ultimately chose not to murder him, you could say that they reacted strongly to his dreams! It should not surprise us that the brothers reacted so strongly. After all, they had a history of struggling to control their passions. As we learned yesterday, Reuben, the oldest, demonstrated his lack of restraint and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah (Genesis 35). Likewise, Simeon and Levi demonstrated wild horse emotions when they slaughtered the men of Shechem to the embarrassment of their father (Genesis 34). Judah, as well, would soon prove himself to be a man struggling with self-control when he picked up a temple prostitute who turned out to be his own daughter-in-law (Genesis 38).

These were not men who had a great track record of restraining their emotions and passions. So when the brother who reminded them of a deep father wound appeared on the scene, they defaulted to their natural, fleshly tendency and took vengeance into their own hands.

Are there hurts from your past that still sting when you recall them? If so, name them below.

Have you ever taken even small steps of vengeance? If so, how did it feel in the moment? How did it feel later?

What do the following verses tell us about a few of the negative emotions that Joseph's brothers acted on?

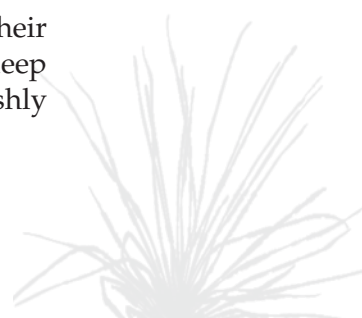
Proverbs 10:12

Matthew 5:21-22

1 John 2:9

Fun Fact:

"The Hebrew word for 'dreamer' implies one who is a master at dreaming, perhaps suggesting that he is good for nothing else."



Digging Deeper

This week we are covering Genesis 37 and 39. Are you curious about what happens in Genesis 38? Check out the online Digging Deeper article for Week 1, "A Story within the Story," to find out how this chapter diverges from the Joseph narrative to give us some additional insight into the life of his older brother Judah (see AbingdonPress.com/Joseph).

**Read Through
Joseph's
Family Story:**
Read Genesis 15.

At times we all feel negative emotions toward persons who hurt us, so what are we to do with those emotions? We have options just as Joseph's brothers had. We can

- Dwell on the emotions and let them fester inside.
- Take steps of vengeance against those we perceive to be the source of our pain.
- Ask God to help us heal.

Sometimes we do all of these. The tough question is, *Where do we start when we want to heal but the wild horses won't stop thrashing about in our hearts and minds?* Joseph's brothers chose vengeance, which led to other negative decisions such as covering up the crime with lies. But we can make a different choice. As we will see in the weeks to come, Joseph learned to tame his wild horses. I pray you'll remain open to how God wants to work in your life as we learn how he was able to take his hurt and hate to God and find healing.

Talk with God

Let's end our time in God's Word today by talking with God about our pain, so that we don't follow in the footsteps of Joseph's brothers. Tell God about anything that is causing you pain, whether it is a fresh wound or an old scar that itches from time to time. Acknowledge the pain and ask Jesus to help you forgive, re-forgive, or simply tame the wild horses of emotion that you feel toward the individual(s). Now watch God begin His healing work as you continue this practice of acknowledging your feelings and relying on God for help.

Day 4: The Before and the After

An old friend called to tell me she realized her life can be summed up in two categories: before and after. A few years ago Cindy and her family underwent a very painful time when her pastor husband was fired from a large church. The devastation could fill a book. They lost not only her husband's job but also their church family and community; what had been close friendships now were complicated. I've heard it said, "There is no pain like church pain." That has certainly been true for my friend. Although much time has passed and they now serve a new church, have many new friends, and can see God at work in their hearts, some things can trigger Cindy to revisit the pain of the past. When her daughter reconnected with a friend at Vacation Bible School and asked to invite her over, Cindy felt her

heart race as she realized that this was the daughter of a man who served on staff at the church that had fired her husband. In fact, Cindy's husband had recommended him for the job, and he had played a significant role in the church conflict. Although the man's wife probably had nothing to do with the situation, the thought of speaking to her about a playdate reopened the old wound.

Joseph could have divided his life into the same two categories: before and after his brothers betrayed him. I can only imagine seventeen-year-old Joseph in the bottom of that pit. We find out later in Genesis 42:21 from the brothers' own words that Joseph was distressed. "We saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen." Did he apologize for telling on them or for flaunting his father's favor? Did he quietly cry, wondering how in the world to reconcile the dreams God had given him with what appeared to be impending death at the hands of his own brothers?

Joseph went from hero to zero in a very short time. He was not dead, but neither was he free. He was now living in the uncertainty of what his future would hold.

Can you relate to such a great loss? You may not be dead, but you certainly don't feel free. You have no idea if relief and justice will come in the next day, month, or year—or not at all. It's a scary place to be.

The roller coaster of circumstances turned Joseph's perfect world as the preferred son with a beautiful robe and dreams of greatness to a scared boy at the bottom of a pit with a very uncertain future.

Although Judah persuaded his brothers to sell rather than kill Joseph, what thoughts and emotions do you think Joseph might have had as he was taken by foreigners along the road to Egypt?

Imagine the confusion of not understanding the foreign language spoken by his captors. For a boy who lived a sheltered life under his father's protection, fear of the unknown would have been bad enough, but it's likely that betrayal at the hands of his own flesh and blood was even worse, topping the list of crimes committed against him. The reality of the turn of events changed everything in Joseph's life.

In Charles Dickens's famous novel *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham encounters this kind of day when her fiancé leaves her jilted at the altar. She lives out the rest of her days wearing her bridal gown, with every clock in her house stopped on the moment she got word of the betrayal. The cake begins to rot on the table while Miss Havisham's dress becomes tattered and faded. She lives only to inflict her pain on those around her. She never recovers from the day the clocks stopped in her life.

Fun Fact:

Both Midianite and Ishmaelite traders were descendants of Abraham and often traveled together.

Fun Fact:

Much has been written about the symbolism of Joseph's robe.

One scholar notes, "The robe began with deep love. Then it was torn in deep hate. Now it is the main tool for a deep deception."⁸

Have you ever experienced a moment when your world seemed to change in an instant? Perhaps you learned of the betrayal of a friend or spouse or the death of a loved one. Maybe you expected a promotion only to leave your boss's office bewildered by the news of termination. Or perhaps you've experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. Like my friend Cindy, you may have wounds that divide your life into before and after.

Have you ever had an experience that left you feeling much like Joseph along the road—alone, terrified, hopeless? Does any particular day or event come to mind? If so, briefly describe it below.

My friend Cindy and I talked about how we would not have had an answer for that question five years ago. If you are in that boat, just tuck these truths into your heart and mind. Though I hope a day never comes when the clocks stop in your life, the truth is that at one time or another most of us will have some kind of hurtful experience, perhaps of betrayal, that divides our lives into before and after. One of my before and after moments revolves around how planting a church has impacted our family and friendships. For my daughter with alopecia, she divides her life into before and after she lost her hair. Your pain might seem to pale in comparison to some of the things that others go through, but remember that even the smallest offense can begin to consume us if left unchecked—unforgiven.

While we may never be able to make sense of the devastation that often invades our lives when we least expect it, we can find glimpses of hope in the midst of our despair just as Joseph did. His clocks didn't stop forever like Miss Havisham's. Instead, he found a road to healing even while living in captivity.

Read Genesis 39:1-6 to learn what became of Joseph after his world turned topsy-turvy. How many times does the word LORD appear in these verses?

How did the LORD show up in Joseph's life even during his time of captivity?

During a difficult time, how have you experienced God's nearness and favor even in the midst of your pain?

Whether or not God has given us a specific dream about our future as He gave to Joseph, most of us have had dreams or ideas about our future that did not turn out the way we expected. Would you say your life has played out the way you imagined it would when you were a high school student? Explain your response.

None of us starts out in life hoping for these things:

- I hope to endure a messy divorce.
- I hope to have strained relationships with family members.
- I hope to have an unfair boss who doesn't appreciate my work.
- I hope my friends will betray me and gossip behind my back.
- I hope my church leaders will offend and confuse me.

When we hover at a low point and nothing seems to be working out the way we thought it would, God remains faithful.

Yet often our dreams and reality do not connect very well.

Joseph probably didn't think his dreams were connecting with reality either. However, we see from the text that the Lord was with Joseph even when nothing made sense in his life. And Joseph had eyes to see God's favor. As one source notes, "This is not a story of the success of Joseph; rather it is a story of God's faithfulness to his promises."⁹ The good news for us is that when we hover at a low point and nothing seems to be working out the way we thought it would, God remains faithful.

As we sort through the Joseph narrative, one danger is to try to make a connection between Joseph's behavior and God's favor. Though the Bible tells us in general terms that God rewards obedience and disciplines us when we get off course (Psalm 19:9-11; Proverbs 3:11-12), we cannot determine how that works out in our lives or the lives of others. It can be dangerous to play god and draw sharp cause-and-effect lines in our circumstances. Yet often when things go wrong, our tendency is to search for the source of the problem. When we get cancer, have wayward children, or are betrayed by someone we trusted with our heart, a warped mind-set can cause us to look for a reason why calamity has knocked at our door. And it breaks my heart when some Christians respond to a tragedy by calling the victim to search for the source of sin and repent. It's not cause and effect.





Hebrews 11 gives us a clear picture of saints who encountered great success and others who endured horrifying situations.

Read Hebrews 11:32-38 and answer the following questions:

What were some of the amazing things people accomplished through faith? (vv. 32-35)

What were some of the terrible things that happened to others who had faith? (vv. 35-38)

What does verse 38 say about those who suffered?

*God never leaves
us and even draws
nearer to us in our
times of desperation.*

Fun Fact:

*At the time of
Joseph, Egypt
was a land of
superstition, with
more than two
thousand gods
and goddesses
and an emphasis
on preparing for
the afterlife.¹⁰*

Some people of faith saw incredible miracles, and others faced devastating circumstances. God doesn't say that we will never face betrayal or tragedy, but He does promise to be with us through it. Deuteronomy 31:6 tells us, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (NIV).

No, God wasn't punishing Joseph for bad behavior by allowing his betrayal. And God wasn't rewarding Joseph with favor in Potiphar's house because of good behavior. God doesn't withhold trials when we are "good" and bring them when we are "bad." Regardless of our circumstances, God remains faithful. When the clocks stop in our lives, His compassion is great. God never leaves us and even draws nearer to us in our times of desperation.

As head of Potiphar's household, Joseph was still a captive—bought and paid for by Potiphar. He must have missed his family and friends and the familiarity of his food, language, and culture. Yet he recognized God's favor even in the "after" of his life. We can too.

My friend Cindy saw God's favor when the other mom came to pick up her child from the playdate. Anxiety rose inside her as the clock revealed an encounter approaching with a woman whose husband had caused much grief for her whole family. What would she say? Could she really be nice?

"God, please help me," she prayed. God answered with a puppy. You see, Cindy is the biggest puppy lover you will ever find. She can't help but smile and laugh and speak baby-doggy talk in their presence. And as the mom walked toward Cindy, she was carrying in her arms their brand new

puppy. Instead of an uncomfortable moment, Cindy was able to show genuine puppy love and see walls coming down in the process.

God wants to walk with you through every step of the “after” moments in your life, too. He longs to bless each of us and show us His favor in unique and incredible ways. He can even use a puppy to make things easier for us! Watch for His blessings today!

*Read Through
Joseph's
Family Story:
Read Genesis 16.*

Talk with God

Whether you are living in the “before” or “after” of some difficult event or time in your life, take a moment to count the blessings from God that you’ve seen just this week. Has He provided for a financial need? Has He given you grace to deal with difficult people? Has He prospered your work? Did He bring some relief from physical pain? Like the psalmist, take this posture: “My eyes strain to see . . . / the truth of your promise fulfilled” (Psalm 119:123). God is faithful. Ask Him to give you eyes to see His favor through the haze of hardship.

List at least five things you can attribute to God’s faithfulness in your life right now. (I think that puppy would be on the top of Cindy’s list!)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Day 5: Run for Your Life

When my son was in seventh grade, he transferred from the private Christian school he’d been attending since kindergarten to our local public school. He was a shy kid who wanted to fly under the radar without drawing much attention while he navigated new waters. Imagine his surprise the first month in his new school when he was called to the principal’s office and told someone had reported him for inappropriate texting on his phone. My son didn’t even own a phone, and so he defended himself as best he could.

Fun Fact:

Joseph lost a garment each time he was betrayed. His brothers took his robe or coat (Genesis 37:23), and Potiphar's wife took his cloak or shirt (Genesis 39:12).

I called the principal the next day to be sure he wasn't still suspect, wanting to satisfy my sense of justice for a wrongful accusation. She assured me that she had quickly learned it was a case of mistaken identity with another student in his homeroom who had the same first name. Thankfully, the situation was resolved easily, but that's not always the case with false allegations, is it?

Have you ever felt wrongfully accused? Whether someone assumed your guilt, maliciously lied about you, or subtly implied your wrongdoing, what was it like to be accused of something you didn't do? Write two adjectives to describe your situation (or how you think you would feel if this ever happened to you):

Unfair and *calculated* are two words that came to my mind. Our sense of justice really emerges when people are wrongfully accused—especially when it's us. The few times I've felt unjustly accused, I've experienced these desires:

- To defend myself and provide evidence to prove my innocence.
- To bring up the faults of my accuser.
- To write passive-aggressive comments about the situation on social media.
- To tell others my side of the story.

I try to refrain from following through with these urges, but I must admit that they are my first thoughts when I am blamed for something that I do not believe is my fault.

Joseph endured temptation that culminated in a wrongful accusation that would serve as a second major betrayal in his life. It was another moment when the clocks could have stopped in his life. Let's read about the incident.

Read Genesis 39:6-9 and make some notes in the chart on the next page about each person—his or her appearance, attitude, character, or anything else you notice.

Potiphar	Potiphar's wife	Joseph

These aren't characters in a musical about a Technicolor dreamcoat. They were flesh-and-blood people with desires such as those we have today.

According to some commentators, Potiphar might have been castrated. The text refers to him as a word that is often translated "eunuch." In Egyptian culture, many Pharaohs feared a takeover of their dynasty, so they had their most prominent leaders become eunuchs so that they could focus more on their jobs and refrain from the temptation for a coup.¹¹ In any case, we know from the text that Potiphar's wife began to see Joseph as an object of her desire.

When Potiphar's wife propositioned Joseph, what three reasons did Joseph give as to why he couldn't comply with her request? (vv. 8-9)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Joseph was a man. He had physical desires. I'm sure he struggled with temptations to give in to what feels good in the moment instead of what ultimately pleases God. He might have rehearsed these three reasons to himself many times and meditated on them so that he wouldn't give in to his flesh. Potiphar's wife treated Joseph like property; he became an object to her. But even though she propositioned him day after day, he continued to maintain his integrity.

What do you think are some things Joseph might have done in order to repeatedly make the wise choice when faced with the same temptation?



Have you ever been bombarded with the same temptation again and again? Check all those that apply, and add another if you want:

- ___ To cut corners at work
- ___ To have an inappropriate relationship
- ___ To feed a food, alcohol, or sexual addiction
- ___ To keep “ingesting” inappropriate television, books, or magazines
- ___ To be disrespectful to someone
- ___ To _____

When we are bombarded by temptation, what can we do to stay true to what we believe—even at the risk of our job, our friends, or our very lives?

Read Genesis 39:10. What does this verse say that Joseph did *specifically*?

Yes, he stayed as far away from Potiphar’s wife as possible!

There was a time when I was struggling with how social media was affecting my thought life. It was reopening old wounds and causing me to view things that triggered old resentments. God called me to stay off of social media for a few weeks and keep my focus on Him. So I deleted a few apps from my phone and decided I would reinstall them only when I was in a better frame of mind.

What is it for you? It may be that you need to steer clear of friends who tempt you to engage in gossip, or avoid that coworker who tends to flirt, or minimize contact with a neighbor who doesn’t understand some new dietary choices you feel God calling you to make. Whatever it is, God may be calling you to avoid temptation in order to maintain your integrity and keep growing in faith.

Take a moment to get quiet and listen to God. Where do you sense someone feeding your temptation to sin in an area that you are trying to overcome?

Joseph loved and forgave those who hurt him, but he had healthy boundaries when needed, as we will see throughout his story.

Running can be a mark of a coward, but sometimes God calls us to flee. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22 NIV). God also might call us to flee a toxic relationship, a compromising job, or a spiritually abusive relationship or group. While we can’t run away from every problem, there is a time when God says the best thing to do is get out of Dodge.

Sandy found this to be true for her when some friendships that once had been healthy and encouraging began to turn in a different direction. The exclusivity and gossip she fell into when she was with those friends wasn’t honoring God and was stifling her spiritual growth. God called her to set some boundaries in the relationships, but she fought it. It seemed disloyal, and she thought it would be perceived as judgmental to communicate that she could no longer attend certain exclusive gatherings. So Sandy put it off, sought godly counsel, prayed and fasted, and asked God to help her see another way out. Still, He said she needed to flee. It wasn’t easy, and things did seem to go from bad to worse after she put some distance in the relationships. But in the “after,” Sandy learned a lot about forgiveness and putting God first in everything.

Staying focused on God’s truth rather than human desire cost Joseph greatly. It led to a second betrayal, which took him from his initial captivity as a slave in Potiphar’s house to a much worse imprisonment. Things went from bad to worse for Joseph, which raises a question: If God’s hand of favor was on him, as we read yesterday, why did all of these bad things happen?

Just as we can’t sort out all the reasons for the difficult circumstances in our own lives, we don’t know for sure why these bad things happened to Joseph. However, from the perspective of hindsight, we can see some benefits to Joseph’s trials.

Warren Wiersbe writes, “Had he stayed home with his pampering father, Joseph might not have developed the kind of character that comes from hard work and obeying orders. God’s method for building us is to give us a job to do and people to obey. He tests us as servants before He promotes us as rulers.”¹² Sometimes you have to learn to follow so that you can lead.

Joseph’s great grandfather Abraham received a promise from God that we refer to as the Abrahamic Covenant, found in Genesis 12:3: “All the families on earth will be blessed through you.” Joseph brought this blessing with him even as a slave. While we don’t get too many glimpses into Joseph’s thoughts and feelings, we do see a boy becoming a man as God blesses his administration of Potiphar’s house. Joseph lives out Proverbs 22:29: “Do you see a man who excels in his work? / He will stand before kings; / He will not stand before unknown men” (NKJV).



***Read Through
Joseph's
Family Story:
Read Genesis 17.***

*Sometimes you
have to learn to
follow so that
you can lead.*

God wants us, like Joseph, to recognize His favor so that we can focus our eyes on blessing others rather than sitting in our self-pity for all the wrongs done against us. The opportunity to serve others and work hard can become God's gifts to help us on the journey to forgiveness.

Now let's finish Genesis 39 and end our week acknowledging God's faithfulness in the midst of the pain of life's betrayals.

Read Genesis 39:19-23 and write one sentence describing how God remained faithful to Joseph even when things went from bad to worse in his life:

God continues to bless us even when we feel like we can't sink any lower. He is crazy about us! While we can't always make sense of the whys and hows of what we're enduring when others hurt us, we can rest assured that God will never leave us or forsake us.

Think back over all you've learned from Joseph's life this week about acknowledging pain in difficult circumstances. Write one or two key statements or concepts that stuck out to you in your time of study:

Talk with God

Spend some time in prayer, praising God for the favor He has shown you even in some very low times of life. Pray for those who have wrongfully accused you in the past and for anyone who has truly betrayed you. Acknowledge the pain they have caused you. Remember that Joseph didn't cover up the hurt or pretend it didn't happen. Likewise, we can't move on to the healing until we acknowledge the hurt and other emotions we feel.

Ask God to give you eyes to see what your response should be to the things you can't control in your life. Write a short prayer in the margin.

VIDEO VIEWER GUIDE: WEEK 1

Acknowledging the Pain

The first thing we have to do is _____ our feelings.

Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything. (1 John 3:20)

We need Jesus to help us _____ the fire of pain.

*A gentle answer deflects anger,
but harsh words make tempers flare. (Proverbs 15:1)*

We have to leave _____ in God's hands.

Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God, for the Scriptures say,

*"I will take revenge;
I will pay them back,"
says the LORD. (Romans 12:19)*

If we don't forgive the _____ stuff, it turns into _____ stuff.

*When you walk through the fire of oppression,
you will not be burned up;
the flames will not consume you...
Others were given in exchange for you...
because you are precious to me. (Isaiah 43:2b, 4)*