

# Living the Story

## A Study through Scripture

### *Introduction:*

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The story of Joseph is one that is familiar to you if you grew up going to Sunday School. Many of us have made small figurines of Joseph and dressed him with a coat of many colors. While we may have discussed the fact that Joseph went down to Egypt and became a great leader there, I wonder if we fully realize the implications of a moment in someone's life that appears to be headed for disaster showing us the power of God at work. Remember that when we discuss "living the story," this is all ultimately about living within a story that is first and foremost being lived by God. It is God's story. We participate in it, but we do not write it—he does.

There are several key moments in the story of Joseph that I will point out below. We will need to look at portions of all of the text assigned to this week (Genesis 37-50) because in reality, you cannot tell Joseph's story by just pulling out a section. You have to understand the whole.

### *Summary of the Text:*

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The story of Joseph begins in Genesis 37. We discover a couple of things within this chapter. First, he is quick to point out the faults of his brothers (37.2). We also discover that his father plays favorites with his sons (37.3). There are many examples in the Biblical text of families who follow God that are what we would define as dysfunctional. I would put the family of Jacob on that list. Jacob unabashedly places his son Joseph above his other eleven sons.

Genesis 37 also sets up a couple of conflicts we will see played out in the story. First, Joseph has dreams of his brother's bowing down to him and is not afraid to let them know. While we may perhaps never attempt to murder our siblings or sell them off to spice traders headed to another country, we can certainly understand *why* they reacted against Joseph. Second, the "hero" of the story has been sold into slavery and is on his way to Egypt. Obviously, we know he is the hero because of our unique perspective, but even if we were reading Genesis for the very first time, Joseph is now out of the picture, right?

Chapter 39 brings sharp focus on the problem we discover in the Joseph story and, if we stop to think about it, a problem we often face in our own life. Joseph is falsely accused of wrong doing with Potiphar's wife. (Potiphar was one of Pharaoh's officials.) Joseph has done nothing wrong. In fact, Joseph was adamant about living a life of integrity. Instead, he is jailed on false accusations. We may have never been accused of trying to sleep with someone else's husband/wife and certainly have not been jailed for it, but how do we react to accusations that are not reality, yet the punishment is?

Chapter 40 and 41, which work together, tells of Joseph's ability to interpret dreams (40) and then the opportunity he has to subsequently use that ability on behalf of Pharaoh (41). What should be pointed out here is that Joseph recognizes that it is not he who is telling the dreams, but it is God who has given him the ability to do so.

Chapters 42-44 tell the story of Joseph's family making several trips to Egypt to purchase grain. Along the way, they are detained, they are giving back the money by which they paid for the grain, they return to Egypt with Benjamin (Joseph's full-blood brother) in spite of his father's objections, and they are accused of stealing Joseph's special silver cup. What transpires through this is a gradual building up of the story that finds its conclusion in chapter 45, where Joseph reveals to his brother his identity.

### LESSON #3

**Date:** 09/23/2012

**Text:** Genesis 37, 45

**The Big Picture:** We tend to be planners. We will go to such-and-such college and get such-and-such degree, get married, have 2 children, move into a nice house with a white picket fence, then retire at the perfect age... What happens when things do not go as planned? Did God suddenly up and leave us? What do we do now?

**Materials Needed:** 3x5 cards (or some other similar paper) if you chose to complete the prayer exercise listed below.

Genesis 45 is significant to the story of Joseph not simply because Joseph, the son who was thought to be dead is discovered alive, and not because Joseph is able to rescue his family from starvation, but because we are able to see that God was the one at work here. Had we been writing this story, we might have gone straight to the point and not made Joseph face such adversity to gain the power he needed to save his people. The point is not that Joseph faced adversity; it is that God was at work in spite of adversity. Do not miss this point.

Obviously, the application for us is to wrestle with our awareness and faith that God is at work in spite of situations we might determine to be counter to His plan. Let's be honest, we are all pretty good at determining the best way for God to accomplish what God wants to do and very rarely do we include pain and heartache. Can God still be at work in our lives when we face such times?

*Preparing for the Group Time:*

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Some of our groups this week may decide to attend the area-wide worship that is a part of President Perrin's inauguration festivities. I would encourage you to do this, but do not overlook making contact with group members this week to do two things.

One is to keep in touch with them. Because the first weeks of group are so important and because new members may still feel unsure of their place within a group, checking in with a group member allows them to feel reassured that things are still on track, even if you are not meeting this week.

The second thing is continuing to get to know group members. It is important that group members know your relationship goes beyond that hour or so you meet on a Sunday night. A short visit with a group member builds on a relationship you are working on during your times together.

## Living the Story

Lesson #3  
Text: Genesis 37, 45

### Lesson Outline:

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Last time to include this, but if you have added someone new to the group since last week or if the make up of your group has changed since last year, be sure that you have taken the time to get to know one another. Here are the questions again that I suggested might be good “getting to know you” questions:

- If you could be doing anything else besides being here at group, what would you want to be doing?
- What was the best small group experience you have ever had?
- How did you end up at South Plains?

If you asked your group to take with them the Genesis 15.1 passage, be sure to allow some time for people to share how it went.

To start off the group discussion, ask your group members if they make goals or think about long-range plans for their life. Have they ever answered the question: *Where do you want to be in five, ten, twenty years?* Now ask them: *What would be the worst thing that could happen to mess up your plan? Why would that be a problem?*

If you have children and are going to do the *For the Children* exercise, begin with it.

Because we have such a large amount of text to go through, you might have people tell the story of Joseph. Pay close attention to what they include in the story and be sure to fill in those things listed above.

Go through the discussion questions.

Ask your group to do the “Living the Story” activity this week.

If you have not finished your group covenant, you may want to finish that this week so you can move on to actually working together as a group, rather than just planning on how you are going to do that.

Close in prayer, using the prayer activity listed below, if you are comfortable.

### Discussion Questions:

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*(NOTE: Because I want our time in group to be focused more on living the story we see in texts we study during the week, in Bible Classes, and through our preaching, I am shifting toward having fewer discussion questions that focus on specific aspects of the text and more on the application or “So what?” of that particular text. They will be geared to have more discussion even though we have fewer questions.)*

We read in Genesis 37 that Joseph’s brothers hated him. Why did Joseph have it coming to him?

In what ways do we resent people who demonstrate an air of superiority to us? Why is that so bothersome to us?

In chapter 39, Joseph is falsely accused of something he did not do. How do we handle false accusations? What are the options we have to handle this situation? What is the best way for us to address such situations?

How does knowing God has been at work in the life of Joseph—and is at work in our own lives—change our reactions to things that go wrong in our lives?

Do we really believe that God is at work in our lives, in the good times and in the bad times? What are some ways you have helped strengthen your belief that God really is at work?

*For the Children:*

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This week, giving that our children are probably familiar with some aspects of the Joseph story (although maybe not the full purpose of the story), I would take a few moments and have a time of discussion with just our children. Perhaps you want to begin with them and let them tell you the story of Joseph. Fill in the blanks for them so they have a fuller understanding of the story. (Notice that we did leave out Genesis 38, by the way!)

Then ask the children: What do you do when things do not go the way you planned on them going? What do you do when people say bad things about you, but you didn't do anything to those people? How did Joseph handle these things? How can you be more like Joseph?

*Living the Story:*

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This week, ask your group to get a pad of paper or perhaps a journal and make note of every time life didn't go the way you planned it this week. For whatever reason it did not, write down when it happens. Ask them to think about how they responded to that event. Compare their response to Joseph's throughout his life. My guess is that just the act of being aware of those moments will help each of us act in a more Joseph-like manner this week.

*Prayer Time:*

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If your group is comfortable doing so, you might have each individual write down on a card a situation in their life that they tend to doubt God is at work. After writing this down, randomly switch the cards and ask your group to spend time this week praying for that situation in someone else's life and asking God to show himself at work in that situation. (You may do this anonymously or have people sign their cards before switching.)

*What's Next:*

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The congregational reading for this upcoming week (September 30) is Exodus 1-17. This is covered in *The Story* chapter 4.