

Lesson Eight: Joseph: The Man with a Divine Purpose

Joseph had a lot of things going his way in life at first. He was handsome. He was the first son born to Jacob through Rachel, and therefore, he was his father's favorite son. He had great dreams that made him feel good about himself. But then one day his entire life changed. Can you imagine how it must have felt to know your brothers hated you so much that they would sell you out of their lives? He was forced to leave the comfortable life he had known, full of love from his parents, and go forth into the unknown. How frightening that must have been for a boy of 17. Yet, God had His hand on Joseph. God had a divine purpose for this young man. Joseph didn't know why God had chosen this path for his life until the very end, yet he never seemed to waver. God was always in control. Joseph kept his eyes on God, and He used Joseph greatly. What an encouragement to us. Let God use you where you are. Let Him use you in the hard times, as well as the good times.

The story of Joseph spans many chapters, Genesis 37-50. We could actually do an entire study just on the life of Joseph, but because of time limitation, we will just focus on the key events in his life.

“Lord, thank you for the lessons you teach me through Joseph's life. Encourage me through his life to seek you more intimately and to trust you for every situation that comes into my life. Keep me mindful that you are always in control.”

DAY 1: Joseph and His Family

LOOKING TO GOD'S WORD

GENESIS 37

1. How would you describe Joseph's relationship with his brothers?

2. Could Joseph have prevented the jealousy of his brothers? Why or why not?

3. How would you describe his relationship with his father Jacob?

4. In verses 21-27 Reuben and Judah came to Joseph's defense. Why would these two, of all the brothers, try to save Joseph?

LOOKING UPWARD

5. How do you see God's sovereign hand at work throughout this chapter?

6. How do you see God's hand at work in your own life?

LOOKING DEEPER

- We are told in Genesis 37:3 that Jacob made Joseph a varicolored tunic. What was the significance of this tunic and what impact might that have had on his brothers?
- How was God already developing Joseph's gifts at the age of 17?

LOOKING REFLECTIVELY

God "broke" Joseph by taking him out of comfortable circumstances and stretching him. God often has to "break" us before He can use us.

- How has God "broken" you? How did it "strengthen" you?

- Are you willing to let God do whatever He needs to in your life to make you usable to Him? If not, why? Be honest with the Lord, and ask Him to make you willing, trusting His loving and sovereign hand in your life.

DAY 2: Joseph's Early Life in Egypt

Chapter 38 seems like an “interruption” to our story of Joseph in Egypt, but it is a narrative of what took place back in Canaan during this time, especially concerning the life of Judah. We pick up our narrative of Joseph in Chapter 39.

LOOKING TO GOD'S WORD

GENESIS 39

1. How did God use Joseph's captivity for good (vv. 1-6)?
2. How was Joseph able to resist the temptation of Potiphar's wife day after day (vv. 7-18)?
3. Joseph was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, and Potiphar believed his wife over Joseph, resulting in his imprisonment. Yet, how did God use this for good?
4. What was one “mistake” that Joseph made that perhaps could have prevented the false accusation against him?

5. What does it mean that the Lord was “with Joseph”?

LOOKING UPWARD

6. Does God’s favor mean prosperity? Why or why not?

7. Have you ever been falsely accused? How did you handle it? What resulted from it?

LOOKING DEEPER

- What does Stephen have to say about Joseph and what God did for him in Acts 7:9-10?
- As you look back over this chapter, note the times God’s favor and blessing on Joseph is mentioned. How does one gain favor?

LOOKING REFLECTIVELY

Joseph lived a life of integrity and was faithful to God in the midst of prosperity and adversity. He is a great example for us to follow.

- Are you living faithfully in the midst of prosperity and adversity?
- Do others around you see Christ in you?

DAY 3: Joseph's Rise To Power

LOOKING TO GOD'S WORD

We will not be able to look at every verse of every chapter, so I will try to summarize as we skim the following chapters.

GENESIS 40:1-8

1. The king's cupbearer and baker offended him, resulting in their being thrown into prison with Joseph. What do you learn about Joseph from the way he responded to them in prison?

2. The rest of the chapter tells of their dreams, Joseph's interpretation of the dreams, and how the interpretations were later fulfilled. In Genesis 40:14-15 and 20-23, how was life once again "unfair" to Joseph?

Genesis 41:1-8 tells us of Pharaoh's dream and his inability to find someone able to interpret it. In verses 9-14, the cupbearer finally remembers Joseph and his interpretation of their dreams in prison, and Pharaoh called for Joseph to come and interpret his dream. Joseph interpreted the king's dreams, which foretold of the coming seven years of great abundance in Egypt (41:29) and the following seven years of famine (41:29). Joseph proceeded to tell Pharaoh what should be done (41:32-37).

3. Why did Pharaoh place Joseph in charge of Egypt (41:38-45)?

4. How old was Joseph at this point (41:46)?

LOOKING UPWARD

5. How had God worked in Joseph's life during his captivity (see 40:8 and 41:16)?
6. How can you keep a proper perspective when you know you have been "wronged" by others and you are paying the unjustified consequences?

LOOKING DEEPER

- Who are some other people in the Bible who had "delays" in their lives?

LOOKING REFLECTIVELY

There is no mistake in where God has you. Allow Him to use you where you are.

- How are you allowing God to use you right where you are?

There is often a delay before seeing God work through us. Delays are a necessary time of spiritual preparation.

- How do you see God's hand in the "delays" in your life?

Josephs' life teaches us that disappointments are vital to spiritual growth because they demand faith and resting all hope upon God. V. Raymond Edman wrote, "Delay never thwarts God's purposes; it only polishes His instrument."¹

- How is God "polishing" you?

DAY 4: Joseph's Reconciliation With His Family

LOOKING TO GOD'S WORD

GENESIS 42

1. Jacob sent his sons, with the exception of Benjamin, to Egypt to buy grain during the famine. When his brothers came before Joseph, why didn't he just tell them who he was and why do you think he recognized them but they did not recognize him?

2. Why do you think Joseph responded to his brothers in the way he did?

3. Describe what his brothers were feeling in verses 21-23?

In Genesis 42:29-38, the brothers returned to Canaan to retrieve their younger brother Benjamin, having left Simeon back in Egypt. Jacob first refused to let them take Benjamin, but after all the grain was eaten, he sent his sons back to Egypt with Benjamin (43:1-15). When Joseph saw Benjamin, he responded with emotion (43:16-34). In Genesis 44, Joseph sent his brothers back to Canaan and played a little trickery on them. He "threatened" to keep Benjamin as his slave, and Judah pleaded with him to keep him instead of Benjamin. This brings us to Chapter 45, when Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers.

GENESIS 45:1-8

4. What was Joseph's perspective on what his brothers had done to him when he was seventeen?

5. What emotions were his brothers most likely experiencing when they realized this was indeed Joseph?

LOOKING UPWARD

6. How do you view painful or hurtful events in your life? How have hurtful events molded your life?

7. How is one able to gain the type of perspective that Joseph had about his life?

LOOKING DEEPER

Read the entirety of Genesis 42-45. Trace Joseph's actions throughout these chapters toward his brothers. Why did he do what he did?

LOOKING REFLECTIVELY

We must trust God with our emotions when we are face to face with those who have hurt us deeply.

- Is there someone who has wounded you deeply? How have you handled it? Can you trust God's sovereign hand in the midst of it?

- Is there someone you need to forgive?

DAY 5: Joseph's Last Days

In Genesis 46-47 Jacob moved his family to Egypt. God once again spoke to him, encouraging him to not be afraid to go to Egypt and reminding him of His promise to make him a great nation (Gen. 46:1-4). Genesis 48-49 records Jacob's final days. Today we look at Joseph's last days after his father Jacob died.

LOOKING TO GOD'S WORD

HEBREWS 11:22

1. How did Joseph show his faith in God's promise to Abraham?

GENESIS 50:15-26

2. How has Joseph changed in his relationship with God and his family since he was a young boy?

3. What stands out to you about Joseph's life and the way he dealt with life?

4. How old was Joseph when he died (v. 22)?

LOOKING UPWARD

5. How does harboring an unforgiving spirit affect us?

6. What makes it difficult to trust God's sovereignty?

LOOKING DEEPER

REREAD GENESIS 50.

- What was Joseph trying to convey to his family in verse 24?
- Why would he want his bones carried back to Canaan?

LOOKING REFLECTIVELY

God is in control even when it seems that your world is spinning madly out of control.

- Is there something going on in your life today that is hard for you to understand? Take it to the Lord and trust His hand.

God uses even the negative motives of others to bring about His perfect purpose.

- Meditate on Genesis 50:20. “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”

Joseph had a divine purpose. His life was not always easy and was filled with ups and downs. Yet Joseph found favor with God and he allowed God to use him wherever he went. Where does God want to use you? What is His divine purpose for your life? Are you focused on Him, or are you focused on your circumstances and the situation in which you find yourself? Let God use you to accomplish His divine purpose through you.

1 R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 473.

Closing Thoughts

Faith is how we begin the Christian life, and it sustains us throughout. As believers in Christ, we are not given the option as to how we should walk. It is clearly stated in 2 Corinthians 5:7, "for we walk by faith, not by sight." And in Colossians 2:6, "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord (by faith), so walk in Him (by faith)." So what effect does living by faith have on your life? For me, it deepens my walk with God because I have to depend on Him, not myself. I have to depend on His provision and His sovereignty, not my own methods and plans. It causes me to love Him more deeply as I see Him working in my life and the circumstances around me.

I pray that as a result of this study your relationship with the Lord has grown deeper and your faith has grown stronger. Let us be women who please God by living by faith.

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