

Week 4: Joseph

Connect: choose 1 *Connect* question and discuss for 5-7 minutes.

- One word to describe how you are feeling/doing right now.
- Have/are you experienced a major shift in your life situation that at first seems only detrimental? What was/is that like for you?

Read these passages aloud:

Genesis 37:1-8 - Joseph dreams of greatness

Genesis 37:17b¹-20; 25-28; 31-36 - Joseph is sold by his brothers

Genesis 41:14-15; 25-30; 34-45; 53-57 – Joseph’s rise to power in Egypt

Genesis 42:1-5; 43:1-5; 8-9; 13-15 - Joseph’s brothers go to Egypt

Genesis 45:1-15– Joseph reveals himself to his brothers

Genesis 50:15-21 – Joseph forgives his brothers

Engage the text as a group:

1. What do you **observe**?
 - Describe Joseph’s character as the story progresses. What are his brothers like? What’s Jacob like?
 - What is similar about Jacob’s interactions with his sons that you remember from Jacob (his father’s) interactions with his sons (Esau and Jacob)?
2. What **questions** do you have of the text?
 - Where is God at work in the story? In what ways is God named? Not named?
 - What do you think of dreams (when you sleep)? Have they ever been meaningful?
 - Why do you think God allowed for Joseph to be separated so long from his family, sold into slavery?
 - What do you think it was like for Joseph’s brothers all those years knowing what they did to their own little brother?

Why does Joseph matter?

Joseph’s story is one of deep redemption and restoration in a family and an individual’s life after intense betrayal, decades-long separation, and all its accompanying pain. Joseph’s story is one of hope: hope in the God who is able to bring restoration and goodness and healing out of a situation that just seems impossible.

As Joseph says at the end of Genesis to his brothers, “Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.” Since the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve’s fall into sin,² humankind has had a propensity for self-and-other destruction. Everything is out of kilter—we harm ourselves, we harm each other, we harm our relationship to God, and we harm God’s creation over which we were given to be stewards. But human sin and folly does not ultimately thwart God’s plan of redemption for creation and for humankind.

¹ Start at the second sentence of v.17.

² Genesis 3

God uses an arrogant little brother to save his family and entire nations from starvation, while humbling him in the process. The story of Joseph matters because it tells of how God can bring forgiveness and reconciliation to a family divided by favoritism, murderous intent, and separation.

HOW DOES JOSEPH POINT US TO JESUS?

Just like Joseph, Jesus is the son who would bring salvation to the nations—though now not only from death due to famine, but death due to separation from God. Joseph left his home, was sold for twenty pieces of silver by his brothers' murderous intent, he was taken to a new place, took on the customs of the land, and ruled for the sake of saving the people.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God became incarnate, leaving heaven to come to earth, becoming human and living with and as one of us to proclaim and bring the kingdom of God powerfully to earth. Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver by people with murderous intent, and was tried and killed. But death didn't conquer him, he rose again. What those who put Jesus to death intended for his harm, God intended for good, to preserve many people.

Jesus Christ brings redemption for us all through his implementation of God the Father's will, just as Joseph did for pharaoh. Jesus is the ultimate Joseph, but better—he was never arrogant or pompous, instead he humbled himself to death on a cross.³

3. What **applications** does the story of Joseph's life have to your/our lives today?
 - Where has great pain been used for deep good that you have observed?
 - Where do you find yourself? With Joseph or with the older brothers?
 - Do you think God has a plan and purpose for your life?

Video:

Watch a video summary of Genesis, now having gone through Hagar, Tamar and Judah, Jacob, and Joseph. (Total 5:05 min.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpbWbyx1008>

6 tools for interpretation: read through the 6 Tools (if time allows) or take-home and read.

Literary: The story of Joseph in Genesis is a narrative.⁴

Historical: Joseph is the son of Jacob and Leah, grandson of Isaac and Rebekah, great-grandson of Abraham and Sarah—the family God chose to bless for them to be a blessing to the whole world. Descendants of Israel come to be in Egypt by Joseph's bringing them there.

Theological: Not even evil can thwart God's plan to protect and preserve the people God is working redemption through. God works in and through both good and bad situations. God uses a last-born to bring about redemption for Israel.

Cultural: Joseph is the youngest of the 12 brothers (before Benjamin); culturally, he is the most insignificant child. Joseph is taken as a prisoner to another country, he has to learn the language, the customs of the people; he marries an Egyptian.

³ Philippians 2:6-8

⁴ Refer to "Week 1: Hagar" for more on the **6 Tools for Interpretation** for Genesis.

The bigger story: Joseph's story establishes how the descendants of Israel come to be in Egypt (they are later enslaved), leading to God's liberation of them from Egypt, their wilderness wanderings, to the promised land,⁵ and on through the rest of the Old Testament account.

Holy Spirit: Joseph is humbled from arrogant and favored teenager, to prisoner and slave, to a leader appointed to serve a country and save the nations. God uses discord, betrayal and imprisonment to save nations from famine and death, and brings reconciliation to a divided family.

Close in prayer:

Father God, thank you for your mercies and the way you draw beauty and goodness and reconciliation even out of the most painful and seemingly nonsensical events. Thank you that we can trust you who works all things together for the good of those who believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who lived, suffered, died, and rose again to make all things new. We worship and adore you. In his name we pray, through the Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁵ For Israel's enslavement, liberation, wilderness wanderings, read Exodus.