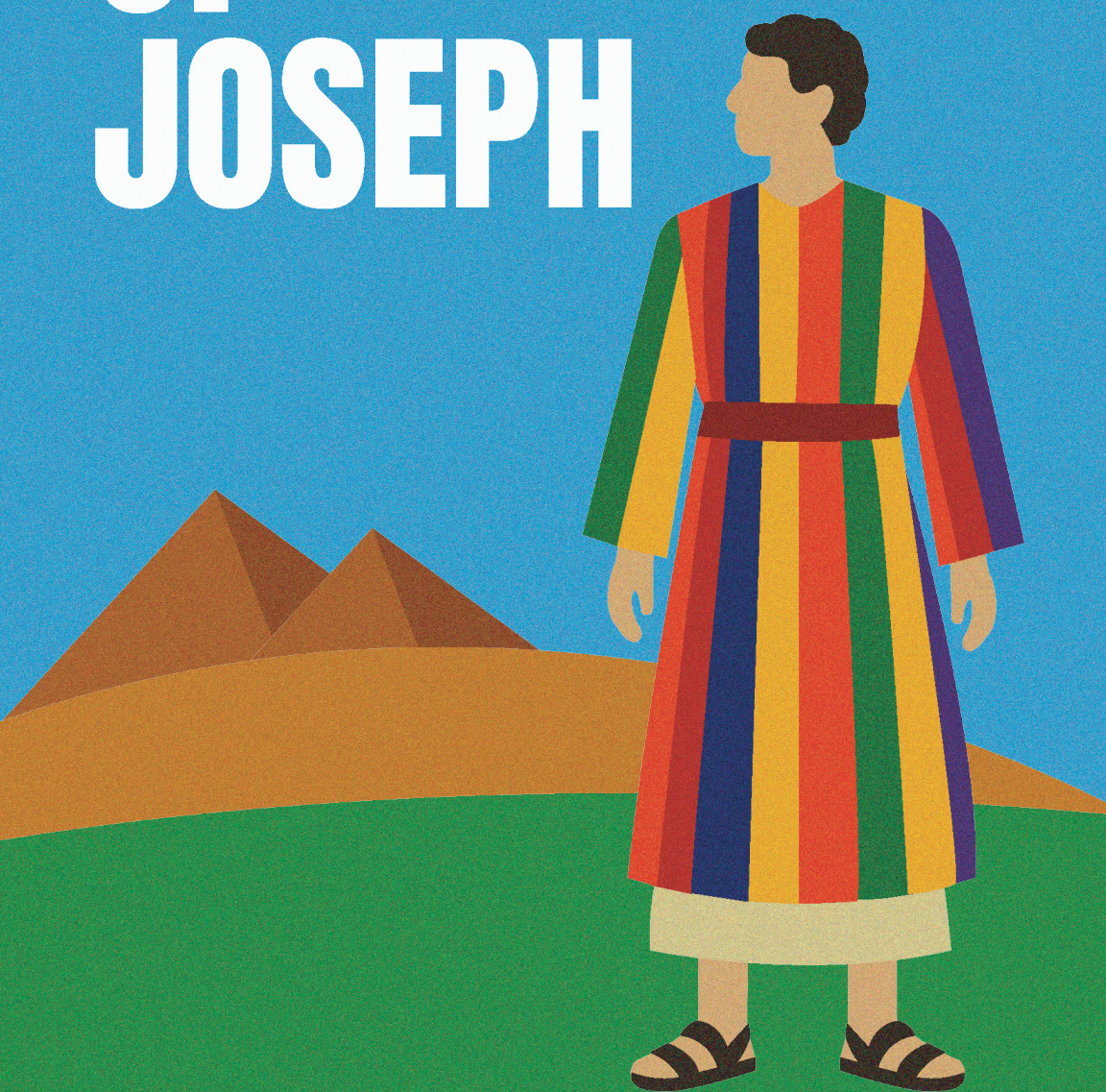


A JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

STORY OF JOSEPH



Lesson 5: The Story of Joseph

Welcome

What's a movie, book, or story with an unexpected plot twist that has stuck with you?

The WELCOME section of each lesson is designed to be fun and bring lightheartedness to your Life Group, so please do not skip past this section of the lesson. It also helps your brand new and returning Life Group members to get to know each other, catch up on the week, share random thoughts, etc. This question relates to Joseph's story by emphasizing the "unexpected twists" in his life.

Worship

Take some time to pray for one another and any difficult seasons that group members might be enduring.

Budget about 10 minutes for this section of your Life Group time.

There are 10 questions/prompts in the WORD section. Your Life Group doesn't have to cover every question below. Life Group Leaders may select the ones that best fit your group. You can also use the remaining questions as personal reflection throughout the week.

Word

Please watch the video lesson and read as much of [Genesis 37-50](#) as you can before your Life Group meets.

Joseph's story is one of the most compelling and detailed biographies in the Bible, spanning Genesis chapters 37-50. He was the favored son of Jacob and the firstborn of Rachel, which made his brothers jealous and resentful. That jealousy eventually turned into betrayal when they sold him into slavery at just 17 years old. Taken to Egypt, Joseph was falsely accused and imprisoned, yet through it all, he remained faithful to God. Eventually, he rose to power as second-in-command to Pharaoh—overseeing Egypt's response to a devastating famine. What others meant for evil, God used for good ([Genesis 50:20](#)).

Joseph's life shows how God works behind the scenes even when things seem unfair or hopeless. He went from the pit to the palace, and from prisoner to provider—not just for Egypt but for his own family. Through Joseph, God preserved the family line that would eventually become the nation of Israel. His story is one of forgiveness, faith, and God's providence, and it powerfully illustrates how God's purposes can unfold even through pain and betrayal.

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1. Imagine you are telling Joseph's story to someone who has never heard it before. Where are the unexpected plot twists in Joseph's story? In other words, list the moments in Joseph's story where someone hearing it for the first time would say, "Whoa! I didn't see that coming!"

Joseph's story in Genesis is full of surprising twists that would catch any first-time listener off guard. Truth be told, it still catches mature Christians off guard. At the beginning of his story, you expect the favored son with dreams of greatness to rise quickly. Instead, Joseph's story is filled with unexpected twists and turns.

Allow your Life Group to think of the twists and turns in Joseph's story on their own. If needed, you can share some of the following examples:

- His brothers betray him and sell him into slavery (Genesis 37:28).
- Just when things seem to improve in Potiphar's house, where Joseph gains trust and responsibility (Genesis 39:4-6), he's suddenly accused of a crime he didn't commit
- Then he's thrown into prison (Genesis 39:20).
- Another major twist comes when Joseph interprets dreams in prison for Pharaoh's officials (Genesis 40).
- You might expect immediate recognition and reward, but instead he's forgotten for two full years (Genesis 40:23-41:1).
- Then suddenly, Pharaoh himself calls Joseph to interpret his troubling dreams, and in a single day Joseph is elevated from prisoner to second-in-command over all Egypt (Genesis 41:39-41). That kind of reversal is so shocking it feels like a "whoa" moment (God's providence breaking through at just the right time).
- Perhaps the most surprising turn, however, comes later when Joseph's brothers unknowingly stand before him in need of food (Genesis 42-45).
- Rather than seeking revenge, Joseph forgives them and provides for them, declaring, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

Each of these turns reverses what the audience might expect, reminding us that God's plan often unfolds through detours. Such twists shift the story from one of survival to one of redemption and reconciliation.

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2. According to **Genesis 37:1-11**, what were the reasons that Joseph's brothers disliked him so much? How have you seen those reasons cause division in relationships?

Genesis 37:1-11 reveals several reasons Joseph's brothers came to resent him. Here are three:

- Jacob openly showed **favoritism** by giving Joseph a special robe (Genesis 37:3). In the Hebrew, the phrase, *kētonet passîm*, likely refers to "a long, ornate garment that signals privilege rather than hard labor." This action bred **jealousy**.
- Joseph brought a "bad report" about his brothers to their father (Genesis 37:2), which may have made him appear full of **pride** and seem to be **untrustworthy** in their eyes.
- Joseph's dreams suggested that his family would one day bow down to him (Genesis 37:5-11). While the dreams were God-given, the way Joseph shared them may have come across as **prideful**, intensifying the brothers' **jealousy**.

Ultimately, favoritism, jealousy, pride, and untrustworthiness fueled a toxic mix that tore the family apart. So, help your Life Group reflect on how these same dynamics still cause division today. For instance:

- **Favoritism**: whether in families, workplaces, or churches, breeds insecurity and resentment.
- **Jealousy**: it corrodes relationships when we compare ourselves to others rather than trusting God's plan.
- **Pride**: even unintentionally, pride can make others feel dismissed or threatened.
- **Untrustworthiness**: ruins relationships because untrustworthy people seem to be dishonest and not dependable.

God calls us to respond differently. Scripture reminds us that love does not envy (1 Cor. 13:4) and that humility leads to unity (Philippians 2:3-4).

3. In the video lesson, Cole said, "Don't confuse 'delay' with 'denial.'" How might Joseph's story encourage you to "faithfully wait" and not confuse *delay* with *denial*?

Please keep in mind that you do not have to share any of the following with your Life Group. It's probably best for you to let your fellow members share their own ideas and thoughts about the question.

Cole's statement—"Don't confuse delay with denial"—connects powerfully with Joseph's story. From Genesis 37-41, Joseph experienced long seasons of waiting: sold into slavery, falsely accused, and forgotten in prison. At any point, it could have felt like God had abandoned him or denied the dreams He had given. BUT we repeatedly read the following in Genesis 39: "the LORD was with Joseph" (Genesis 39:2, 21, 23). God had not said "No," to Joseph's calling. He was shaping Joseph's character, deepening his faith, and preparing him for the time when he would rise to leadership.

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Try to guide your Life Group to see that God uses “seasons of waiting” to refine us. In other words, “waiting seasons” are actually “refining seasons.” Joseph’s delay wasn’t wasted. He gained administrative skills in Potiphar’s house, learned leadership in the prison, and grew in dependence on God. When the right time came, he was ready to serve Pharaoh and save countless lives (Genesis 41).

God’s delays are not rejections but invitations to trust His timing. Joseph’s story reassures us that during challenging seasons, God is still at work behind the scenes.

4. More than once, *Genesis 39:2-3* indicates the Lord was with Joseph. How is God’s presence visible in Joseph’s story? When have you experienced God’s presence in an unexpected place or moment?

Give your Life Group time to share their thoughts about both God’s presence in Joseph’s story and when they’ve unexpectedly experienced God’s presence. Those two elements are the most important parts of this prompt. However, if needed, you can share some of the following with your Life Group...

Genesis 39:2-3 makes it clear that “the LORD was with Joseph,” even while he was living as a slave in Egypt. God’s presence is visible in the way Joseph prospered and found favor, first in Potiphar’s house and later in prison (Genesis 39:21-23). The Hebrew word *tsalach* (“prosper” or “succeed”) points to God’s hand enabling Joseph to flourish in circumstances where success should have been impossible. Rather than removing Joseph from hardship, God’s presence empowered him to endure faithfully, gain trust, and influence others. This shows that God’s blessing is not always the absence of suffering but His nearness and provision within it.

This passage also points forward to the truth that God’s presence is not limited to prosperity or comfort. Just as the Lord was with Joseph in both Potiphar’s house and the prison, Jesus promised, “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20). Encourage your group to see that God’s presence is the constant in every season, and His nearness is often most visible when life feels most uncertain.

5. How did Joseph respond when he was sold into slavery, falsely accused, and thrown into prison for a crime he did not commit (*Genesis 39:1-6, 13-23*)? What was Jesus’ response when He was treated unfairly? What are some Christlike ways we can respond when we are mistreated?

Genesis 39 shows Joseph enduring wave after wave of injustice, like being sold by his brothers, enslaved in Egypt, and later imprisoned after being falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife. However, the phrase is that “the LORD was with Joseph” (Genesis 39:2, 21, 23). Instead of becoming bitter or vengeful, Joseph remained faithful, diligent, and trustworthy. The Hebrew word *hesed* (“steadfast love”) is used in Genesis 39:21 to describe God’s favor toward him, showing that Joseph’s ability to endure mistreatment was rooted not in his own strength but in God’s covenant loyalty. His response foreshadows Jesus, who also endured injustice with grace and trust in His Father.

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When comparing Joseph to Jesus, the connection becomes clearer: like Joseph, Jesus was betrayed, falsely accused, and unjustly punished. Yet, Isaiah 53:7 reminds us that Jesus “did not open His mouth” in retaliation. Instead, He entrusted Himself to the Father’s will, ultimately using suffering to bring salvation. As a leader, this parallel can help your group see that Joseph’s story is more than personal resilience—it points forward to Christ’s redemptive endurance.

Encourage the group to identify Christlike responses—such as forgiveness, prayer for enemies, entrusting justice to God, and continuing to serve faithfully—even when it feels undeserved. This helps bridge the biblical text to practical discipleship today.

6. Even while he was in prison, Joseph used his gifts to help others ([Genesis 40:1-23](#)). How have you used your gifts when circumstances weren’t ideal?

You don’t have to, but you can ask your Life Group to look at Genesis 40:1-23 and briefly identify some of the ways that Joseph used his gifts to help others. Here are several ways from Genesis 40:1-23 that Joseph used his God-given gifts to help others...

- **Attentiveness and compassion** – He noticed the sadness of Pharaoh’s officials (Genesis 40:6-7) and cared enough to ask them about their troubled faces.
- **Encouragement and faith** – He reminded them that interpretations belong to God (Genesis 40:8), pointing their hope toward the Lord rather than human wisdom.
- **Interpreting dreams** – He used his God-given ability to interpret dreams for both the cupbearer and the baker (Genesis 40:9-19).
- **Clarity and truthfulness** – He gave truthful and clear interpretations, even when the message was difficult (e.g., to the baker in Genesis 40:18-19).
- **Seeking justice with integrity** – After interpreting the cupbearer’s dream, he humbly asked for help in being remembered before Pharaoh, showing that he valued fairness without resorting to manipulation (Genesis 40:14-15).

Joseph’s actions show us Joseph’s willingness to serve, his faith in God, and his commitment to use his gifts for the benefit of others (even during challenging times).

Give your Life Group time to share about how they’ve used their gifts to help others.

7. After interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams, Joseph is elevated to power ([Genesis 41](#)). How did God leverage Joseph’s previous experiences (both good and bad) to prepare him for leadership in Egypt? How has God utilized both good and bad experiences in your life?

Genesis 41 tells us about a dramatic turning point in Joseph’s life: from prisoner to second-in-command of Egypt. This moment is built on years of preparation in Joseph’s life:

- His father’s favoritism
- His brothers’ betrayal
- Slavery in Potiphar’s house
- False accusation
- Time in prison
- Being forgotten

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All of these experiences seemed painful and unjust, but each shaped his character and abilities. In Potiphar's house, Joseph learned administrative skills, but in prison, he managed people and showed compassion by interpreting dreams.

- The Hebrew word *tsalach* ("prosper, succeed"), which appears in Joseph's story (Genesis 39:2-3, 23) to describe how God caused Joseph to flourish even in hardship.

Even his suffering taught him humility and dependence on God. By the time Pharaoh elevated him, Joseph was prepared to steward abundance during prosperity and to lead wisely in crisis. Here are some things you can point out during your Life Group's discussion:

- You can help your Life Group see that God rarely wastes experiences. He weaves both the "good" and "bad" into preparation for His purposes, echoing the theme of Romans 8:28.
- It may help to draw out the tension: when Joseph was in the pit or the prison, he couldn't see the bigger picture. Only later could he look back and recognize God's hand.
- It might be helpful to ask your fellow Life Group members to reflect on their own stories—times when painful seasons later became sources of wisdom, empathy, or strength. This will open space for them to be honest about their ongoing struggles while still looking for how God might be shaping them.

Keep the focus on how God forms our faith through both blessings and trials.

8. What does **Genesis 50:15-21** teach about forgiveness and reconciliation?

Genesis 50:15-21 comes at the close of Joseph's story, after Jacob's death. Joseph's brothers fear that without their father alive, Joseph will finally take revenge for their betrayal. Instead, Joseph reassures them with one of the most profound statements on God's sovereignty and our sin: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

- The Hebrew word *ra'ah* ("evil") highlights the brothers' real wrongdoing, while *tov* ("good") shows God's ability to redeem it.

Joseph's response exemplifies *forgiveness* by refusing to retaliate, and reconciliation by promising to provide for his brothers and their families. Emphasize that forgiveness does not ignore or deny sin but releases your right to get revenge, trusting God's justice and providence.

In your Life Group discussion, invite your fellow members to consider the difference between *forgiveness* and *reconciliation*.

- **Forgiveness** *must* be given (even if the other person doesn't ask for it or change)
- **Reconciliation** requires repentance and restored trust

Encourage your Life Group to share personal experiences of forgiveness and reflect on how Joseph's perspective on God's larger plan enabled him to let go of bitterness. This can lead to a deeper conversation about how God can bring healing even from betrayal and suffering, and how believers are called to reflect His mercy in their own relationships.

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9. How can the hope found in **Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 4:17; and James 1:2-4** comfort others without downplaying or dismissing their pain?

When facilitating this discussion, it's important to remind the group that Scripture never dismisses suffering but reframes it in light of God's purposes.

- **Genesis 50:20** reflects Joseph's words to his brothers after years of betrayal and hardship: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." The Hebrew word for "meant" (*chashav*) can also mean "to weave" or "to devise," showing that while human intentions may be destructive, God sovereignly weaves them into His redemptive plan. This provides a model for how we can both acknowledge real pain and affirm God's power to bring good out of tragedy.
- **Romans 8:28** is often quoted but can easily sound cliché if not handled carefully. The Greek phrase *panta synergei* ("all things work together") emphasizes that it's not each individual event that is "good," but the whole tapestry of God's purposes that brings about ultimate good for those who love Him. You might ask your Life Group to share how they've seen God use difficulties in ways that only made sense later. This helps keep the tone empathetic and avoids glossing over people's wounds with "quick-fix" hope.
- Paul's words in **2 Corinthians 4:17** describe present troubles as "light and momentary" compared to the "eternal weight of glory." The contrast here is not meant to minimize suffering but to magnify future glory. The Greek word *baros* ("weight") carries the sense of "heaviness," as if Paul is saying, "What's coming is far heavier and more substantial than anything we suffer now." Invite your Life Group to imagine the difference between something that feels crushing now VS. the eternal solid joy of God's promises.
- **James 1:2-4** calls believers to consider trials as an opportunity for growth, not because suffering itself is joyful, but because *hypomonē* ("steadfastness" or "perseverance") is forged through it. The goal is maturity in Christ (Colossians 1:28). When applying James 1:2-4 in your Life Group discussion, stress that comfort doesn't mean denying grief. It means walking alongside others with assurance that God is present, at work, and shaping something good in the midst of hardship.

Encourage your fellow Life Group members to listen well, acknowledge the real pain others experience, and then gently point to the hope that Scripture anchors in God's character and eternal purposes.

10. Joseph chose character over comfort. When are you most tempted to compromise your integrity? How can you remain strong when no one's watching?

As with the last prompt/question in lesson 4, this question is subjective and calls on your fellow Life Group members to be transparent. If it's helpful and if you need to spur on discussion, consider being the first to respond authentically to this question.

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Witness

As a Life Group, go to shepherdchurch.com/go and choose an outreach project for your Life Group to participate in sometime during the next few weeks. Make sure everyone in your Life Group has the details.

This prompt is designed to move your Life Group from study to action by participating in a practical outreach project. The website link connects your group to opportunities that Shepherd Church has already organized (local service projects, community partnerships, and ways to meet tangible needs). By choosing one together, your Life Group can live out what you're studying in Scripture about serving others and showing God's love.

As a Life Group, you'll want to set aside time to:

- Look through the options on the website together
- Narrow down a project that fits your Life Group's availability and strengths
- Clarify details, such as the date, time, location, and responsibilities
- Make sure everyone gets the information, either by sharing it verbally, texting/emailing the Life Group, or creating a group chat reminder

Taking these steps moves the project from being a "good idea" to a committed plan.