

# Small Group Questions

*Small groups and individuals can use these questions to engage the content of Sunday sermons.*



**June 5—July 3, 2022**

## **Joseph: Living the Dream**

Have all your dreams come true? Didn't think so. Often our lives take twists and turns that would be impossible to imagine. Sometimes those derailments turn out for the better, but what happens when it doesn't, at least in the short term? Joseph was a dreamer whose life got hijacked by jealousy and injustice. When faced with living out a very different story than he envisioned, how did he allow grace and forgiveness to help him realize the bigger dream God had for him?

*Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good.  
– Genesis 50:20*

**Week 1: June 5, 2022**

**Distorted Dreams**

**Genesis 37:1-11**

### **Connect:**

Every family has its challenges and unhealthy habits and attitudes. But, of those challenges, what stands out as having the most impact on you?

### **Engage:**

Joseph is born into a family, a dysfunctional family with a history of jealousy, lies, and contention. The sins of the father (Jacob) certainly have been inherited by the sons. In ancient culture, the oldest son is the one who gains the most: double the inheritance, patriarchal succession, and family respect. Joseph's dreams suggest he will supplant the standard family pecking order, thereby disrupting and distorting long-held cultural expectations. His older brothers respond with revenge, trickery, and mixed feelings. Read the story of their father, Jacob, in Genesis 25-36 and notice the family pattern!

Read Genesis 37:1-11

1. How does Jacob's favoritism contribute to the attitudes and behaviors of his sons? Joseph? The others?
2. How would you describe Joseph's dynamics within the family?
3. What do you see as the core conflict in the family? Reading just this part of the story. If you were to guess, do you think God can use this crazy and conflicted family for anything good? (Yes, most of us know how the story turns out but isn't the final outcome entirely unexpected?)

### **Apply**

All of us are born into families with dysfunctional histories, with varying degrees, of course.

How has God used your family history and experiences to strengthen your faith? How has your family dysfunction kept you from thriving?

### **Pray**

Share joys and concerns and pray for one another, the church and the world.

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**Week 2: June 12, 2022**

**Hijacked Dreams**

**Genesis 37:12-36**

### **Connect:**

Describe a time when you were jealous of another person? How did that impact your attitude and behavior?

### **Engage:**

In a jealous rage, Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery. Family loyalty, a cornerstone of ancient life, is violated with heinous consequences. The brothers further their sin by deception and cause the family to be ripped apart. Joseph's welfare is in question, their father is grieving, and the brothers are conflicted.

Read Genesis 37:12-36

1. All the characters seem to be motivated by strong emotions:

- Joseph – pride
- the brothers – revenge and deception
- Reuben – helplessness and fear
- Judah – intervention and compromise
- Jacob – inconsolable grief.

Why do you think they each do what they do? How does the action of one person impact all others?

2. What do you imagine Jacob's sons expected when they brought Joseph's bloody coat? How do you think shame and guilt impacted them? Do you think the deception backfired? Why?

3. In light of Joseph's dreams, how do you imagine he feels toward God? His family? His future?

### **Apply**

What do we cling to when others betray us and dash our hopes and dreams? How does faith sustain or help us?

### **Pray**

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**Week 3: June 19, 2022**

**Dreams Derailed**

**Genesis 40:1-23**

### **Connect:**

Do you remember your dreams? Do you have an experience where a dream or waking vision seemed to come true or guide your path?

### **Engage:**

Joseph was sold to the captain of the guard of the Egyptian Pharaoh, Potiphar. Joseph is widely successful in managing Potiphar's home until Potiphar's wife sets her sights on having an affair with him. His refusal led her to falsely accuse him of sexual assault. Joseph is now wallowing in prison.

Read Genesis 40:1-23

1. God gives Joseph opportunities to succeed even while under duress. Still, being a slave and a prisoner is not the same as being free and at home with family. How do you imagine Joseph copes with his situation? How do you think faith plays a role?
2. Joseph's life has been marked by betrayal, each one resulting in more dire circumstances. How does he deal with the resentment he must feel?
3. Joseph's hopes for freedom are dashed again and again. If this were your life, how would you respond?

### **Apply**

Joseph has been sold into slavery, falsely accused of adultery, and now finds himself imprisoned.

What challenges are you facing? How might you hold onto your dreams and faith?

### **Pray**

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**Week 4: June 26, 2022**

**Vengeance Dreams**

**Genesis 42:1-25**

### Connect:

Have you ever exacted revenge on someone? How did it make you feel?

### Engage:

Joseph's story turned around when his ability to interpret dreams comes to the attention of the Pharaoh. Joseph successfully interprets Pharaoh's disturbing dream and he is given the responsibility to alleviate the predicted famine. He rises to be the governor of Egypt with all the power and privilege it entails. Yet, he is still not free or allowed to return to his home.

Read Genesis 42:1-25

1. Joseph seems to have "arrived." He is wealthy and powerful. But he also has unresolved issues with his family. What is the story about his family that he may have told himself during those years in Egypt? Of course, he feels betrayed by his brothers, but do you think he has wondered why his father never tried to find him? Remember, Joseph is unaware of his brother's trickery with the multi-colored coat.
2. Joseph interviews his brothers, keeping his identity a secret. What do you think he is trying to glean from the conversation? Repentance from his brothers? How to plot revenge on his brothers? Information on the welfare of his family back home?
3. What does the brother's response suggest about how they feel about what they did so many years ago to Joseph? What do they fear?
4. If you were in Joseph's shoes, how would you respond? Do you find Joseph's reactions realistic?

### Apply

Joseph is understandably angry with his brothers and hatches a plan. The journey to forgiveness often involves the painful confrontation by the one betrayed. But it seems that vengeance brings little healing or satisfaction.

It begs the question, do we have to forgive and if so, how long do we have to wait?

How do you see your unresolved relational issues in this story?

### Pray

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**Week 5: July 3, 2022**

**Dreams Marked by Grace**

**Genesis 45:1-15 and Genesis 50:15-21**

### **Connect:**

Share an experience of being forgiven or offering forgiveness?

### **Engage:**

The brothers return home and tell their father the demands that the governor of Egypt is requiring. Simeon has been imprisoned, awaiting the arrival of Joseph's younger brother, Benjamin. At first, Jacob refuses to send Benjamin back to Egypt out of fear he will not return. "He is the only one (of my sons) left." Genesis 42:38. Eventually, the famine is so severe that he has no choice and he sends the brothers along with Benjamin back to Egypt for food. Through further trickery of Joseph, the brothers are found to have a "stolen" cup in their possession. Joseph demands that he keep Benjamin with him as punishment. Judah offers to take Benjamin's place and explains that his father will die from grief if Benjamin doesn't return with them.

Read Genesis 45:1-15 and Genesis 50:15-21

1. What motivates Joseph to reveal himself to his brothers?
2. What is the response of his brothers? What do you think they anticipate will happen to them?
3. Even after Joseph's embrace is described in Genesis 45, in Genesis 50, it is still clear that the brothers turn to deceit to protect themselves. (Some family patterns never change!) Why is it so difficult for them to trust Joseph's forgiveness?
4. Joseph's act of forgiveness seems to have freed him to care for his brothers and their families and has helped him see God's long-term plan in his suffering. What role does forgiveness play in giving a new perspective and how does it enable a counter-cultural generosity of grace?

### **Apply**

Joseph's heart is softened toward his brothers and in the big reveal, grace, forgiveness, and restoration bring new understanding to the original dream.

How can we use Joseph as an example of extending and receiving unmerited forgiveness?

### **Pray**

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