



Group Discussion Guide

Who do you trust: Week 2

For groups meeting August 9 evening through August 16 morning.

This week we turned to the Old Testament account of Joseph to learn from his life what it means to trust in God. Joseph was a man who faced many obstacles that were not of his own making, and yet he continued to follow God's leading in his life and realize God was at work even when he couldn't see it clearly. While our reading plan does not take us into previous chapters to give us background on Joseph and his family, it is important to note that his family was filled with manipulation, jealousy and resentment. Jacob married two sisters – Leah and Rachel – though he only truly loved Rachel. Leah bore him sons while Rachel remained unable to conceive. Rachel was jealous and gave her handmaiden to Jacob so she could claim that she indirectly gave him a child. Leah then became jealous when she was unable to bear more children, and gave Jacob her handmaiden. She then was able to bear more children to Jacob. Finally, Rachel bore a son, and this son was Joseph. Eventually Rachel had a second son, Benjamin, but she died just after giving birth to him. All of this can be found in Genesis 29:31-35, Genesis 30:1-24 and Genesis 35:16-21. There are other events recorded in Genesis 30-35 (and earlier chapters) that give us background into Joseph's family and show that Jacob, Rachel, Leah, and some of their children used deceitful tactics to get what they wanted or to take revenge. There was a long history of deceit and conflict in Jacob's family, even before he was born. This is the family into which Joseph was born.

Genesis 37

This chapter begins the detailed account of Joseph's life. At age 17, he goes to Jacob and tells his father that his half-brothers are doing evil (v. 2). We also learn that Joseph was the favorite son of Jacob, and his brothers knew this (vs. 3-4). Their jealousy grows as Joseph shares two dreams he has had, in which his family is bowing down to him. Jacob then sent Joseph out to check on his brothers as they were tending to their father's animals. They plotted to kill him but eventually opted to sell him as a slave instead. They killed a goat, put the blood on Joseph's coat and returned to their father with the lie that they found the coat with blood on it but never found Joseph, and Jacob assumed this meant Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. The slave traders who bought Joseph took him to Egypt and sold him to a man named Potiphar who was an officer of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.

Genesis 39

One key phrase that begins to consistently appear in this account of Joseph's life is, "The Lord was with Joseph ..." (v. 2). God raised him to a high position in Potiphar's household. However, more challenges were thrown at him. Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce him, he rejected her and said, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (v. 9), and one day escaped her grasp leaving his garment behind. She used this to accuse him of making unwanted

advances against her. Her husband believed her, and put Joseph in prison. However, even there, God was with him and made him prosper (vs. 22-23).

Genesis 41

God gave Joseph the ability to interpret dreams for two of Pharaoh's servants while in prison. One servant was executed, while the other was released to serve Pharaoh once again. Although Joseph had asked that servant to remember him, the servant did not ... until one day Pharaoh himself had a dream that no one could interpret. The servant told Pharaoh about Joseph, and God once again gave Joseph the ability to interpret a dream. Even before telling Pharaoh what the dream meant, Joseph gave all credit to God (v. 16). Joseph said the dream meant a famine was coming, and the nation needed to take time to prepare. Pharaoh responded by putting Joseph in charge of these preparations, and in fact made him second only to the king himself in all the land of Egypt. Joseph was now 30; it had been 13 years since his brothers sold him as a slave. Before the years of famine began, Joseph married an Egyptian woman and God blessed them with two sons (vs. 45, 50-52). When the years of famine came and food was scarce, Egypt had food stored and sold this grain and perhaps other dried goods to Egyptian citizens and to foreigners. Pharaoh left all of these details up to Joseph.

Genesis 44

Joseph's brothers had traveled to Egypt to purchase grain to feed their family, because the famine was widespread enough to affect their homeland as well. They did not recognize Joseph, but he recognized them. He asked them if they had any other brothers, and when they told him about their youngest brother Benjamin, he insisted they bring Benjamin with them when they returned or they would not have access to the grain. So, when the grain ran out, Jacob agreed that Benjamin could go with his brothers to Egypt to buy more food, and they swore they would watch over him. Joseph created a way to detain the brothers and accuse Benjamin of being a thief, all in an effort to test his brothers and see if they had changed since selling him into slavery many years before. Judah, who had led the plan to sell Joseph, was the one to step up and ask to speak with him concerning Benjamin. Judah had in fact changed. He pleaded for Benjamin to be released and cited how it would hurt his father if the youngest brother was detained in Egypt (vs. 18-34).

Genesis 45, 50:15-21

Joseph finally revealed his identity to his brothers (Genesis 45:4). He also told them that God was responsible for bringing him to Egypt, so that he could be used to save lives, including their very own lives (Genesis 45:5-8). After spending some time with his brothers, Joseph sent them home and instructed them to bring Jacob closer to Egypt so their family could relocate to the land and survive the famine. The brothers did so, and the family moved from Canaan to Goshen. Joseph and his father were finally reunited (Genesis 45:29-30). Eventually, Jacob blessed his sons and then died. After his death, Joseph's half-brothers began to fear he would take revenge on them; thinking he was simply waiting for his father to pass before punishing them. They sent him a message telling him Jacob had asked him to forgive them before he died (there is no record of whether or not this was actually the case). The brothers then came to Joseph and submitted themselves to him as they asked forgiveness. Joseph said:

“Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” (Genesis 50:19–21)

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe Joseph's family? What does his family dynamic show you about how God chooses to work, and through whom He chooses to work?
2. Common themes in Joseph's family include manipulation, deceit and jealousy. How do these affect human relationships? How do we deal with these when we see them start to take place in our own relationships with other people?
3. Many times in our reading this week, we read, "The Lord was with Joseph." This was usually connected with ways that God worked to elevate Joseph. Is something we should apply universally? Does God being with someone usually mean that person prospers in life?
4. Potiphar's wife pursued Joseph in an attempt to engage in a sexual relationship with him. What did Joseph say to her as he rejected her advances? How can we use this same perspective to combat temptation in our lives?
5. When asked to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph said it was not his ability to do so, but rather an ability given to him by God. What does this show you about Joseph's level of trust in God?
6. Joseph forgave his brothers and told them what they meant for evil, God meant for good. How does this truth apply to your life situation right now? How would keeping this perspective lead you to react when you believe you have been wronged?