

WHO, ME?



JOSEPH

GOD'S MESSY, COMPLICATED,
PERFECT PLAN

JEREMY HAMPER

Faith Alive Christian Resources thanks Jeremy Kamper for writing this Bible study.

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WHO, ME?

Each of us has a story to tell, a journey of faith that began at God's invitation and will continue throughout eternity. In the *Who, Me?* series you'll be drawn into the life of one person in Scripture by hearing their ancient story and exploring it in deeper ways. As you immerse yourselves in Joseph's life, your group will see how God was at work and is still at work in similar ways in our lives today. You'll use essential questions to find points of connection between your life and Joseph's, so that you can experience God's grace more fully and grow as a follower of Christ.

GETTING STARTED

Joseph: God's Messy, Complicated, Perfect Plan and all of the Bible studies in the *Who, Me?* series are designed to be easy to use in large or small group settings for Bible study, youth group, church school, or parachurch ministry. Aside from a few supplies, you'll find everything you need on one disc, including an outline of the essential questions for the study, all of the leader's materials with Bible backgrounds, and printable pages for use within your group. Simply make as many copies of the leader and participant materials as you need.

STRUCTURE

Each Bible study in this series follows the same pattern:

- **The Study Outline:** This outline offers a quick look at the questions you'll be exploring in each session.
- **Scripture, Materials, and Bible Background:** This section helps leaders prepare. We hope leaders will spend time prayerfully reading the Bible passage and Bible background in advance, and gathering or printing the materials listed for the session.
- **Connecting:** This section offers ideas for getting started as your group arrives.
- **Rewind:** After session 1 the short Rewind section will recap where you've been so far in the study. It's also an opportunity for the group to share ways they saw themes from the previous session emerge in their lives throughout the week.
- **Hearing the Story:** In this step a portion of the Bible story or passage is shared by the leader or someone in the group, and a short discussion follows.
- **Entering the Story:** This step helps you engage the story a second time in creative and imaginative ways that draw out your questions and open you up to the Spirit's nudging and new insights about the story.
- **Living the Story and In My Life:** Here the rubber meets the road, usually through a time of discussion and reflection. Each person has the chance to consider how God is speaking to them and seeking to shape them through this story.
- **Closing prayer:** Depending on the timeframe you are working with, you may want to use this time for a brief prayer or expand it to include the requests of the group.
- **Additional Ideas:** Each session will include at least two additional ideas for you to use along with or in place of ideas that were offered in the session. You know your group best, so always read these additional options and build a session that will work best for you.

This study is intended to be a tool for you, so feel free to tweak and change any part of it to fit your unique ministry setting!



JOSEPH OUTLINE

SESSION 1: RIVALRY p. 6

Essential Questions: What issues, things, or situations tend to make you jealous? Have you ever felt as though God has been absent from part of your own story? Has there ever been a time when you didn't feel loved by someone whom you know does love you? What gives you confidence that God loves you?

SESSION 2: TEMPTATION p. 15

Essential Questions: What are some kinds of temptations you find really hard to resist? What role have you allowed God to play in how you handle temptation? Have you ever done what you thought was the "right thing" in a situation, only to end up in trouble or a victim of someone else's sin? How does that make you feel about "fairness" and "justice"?

SESSION 3: ABANDONMENT p. 22

Essential Questions: Which is easier for you to believe: when a close friend says he or she will always be there for you, or when God says it? Have you ever been in a situation in which you weren't patient enough to let things play out and be handled the "right way"? Do you think it's okay to complain to God when things aren't going well?

SESSION 4: OPPORTUNITY p. 29

Essential Questions: When have you experienced a situation that seemed bad at the time but turned out to be a blessing in disguise? Is it easy or difficult for you to see God at work in your everyday life? Do you tend to notice God more when life is good or when life is bad? Why do you think God chooses to work through people instead of just making things happen?

SESSION 5: REVENGE? p. 39

Essential Questions: When have you had the opportunity to show forgiveness to someone who has wronged you? Have you ever been in a situation in which you were troubled by guilt? Name one person for whom you would be willing to give up something significant, like your freedom or even your life. What makes that person so special to you?

SESSION 6: REUNION p. 51

Essential Questions: Consider a time when you questioned why God allowed something to happen to you, only to see later on, at least in part, that God was using that seemingly negative circumstance for good. How did that make you feel about God and his plan for your life? What are some troubling things going on in your life right now that you hope God will eventually use for good and one day allow you to understand? Do you find it difficult to trust God to guide the decisions you make in life?



SCRIPTURE

Genesis 37

MATERIALS

- Bibles or printouts of Genesis 37 (pp. 12-13), one per person
- Writing utensil for each person
- Printouts of the “In My Life” page (p.14), one per participant, optional

BIBLE BACKGROUND

While we tend to think of Joseph as a heroic figure in the Bible, the story doesn't start out that way. As a teenager, Joseph comes across as something of a show-off and a tattletale. Jacob loved Joseph —the first son of his old age by his favorite wife—more than any of his other sons. That happens to parents, but to his discredit he may have showed it a little too much. Jacob gave Joseph an expensive and exclusive gift in the multicolor coat, and his older brothers were understandably jealous.

Joseph also had dreams, each one featuring him at the center, shining with importance. Having a dream is one thing; telling your brothers about it is another, especially when you know it's going to make them even more disgruntled. Joseph was either terribly naïve or somewhat mean-spirited, for he evidently shared these dreams with his brothers with great gusto. Joseph even succeeded in getting his greatest advocate, his father, angry at him over the self-centered dreams: “Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?” (37:10).

Well, the brothers get their chance for revenge when Jacob sends Joseph to check on them as they are away with their flocks. Earlier it was reported that Joseph had “brought their father a bad report” about one of the siblings, and now here comes the tattletale again. They spot him from a long way off (probably the multicolor coat), and someone says, “Here comes that dreamer!” Soon they are plotting to murder him. Based on the quick acceleration of their rage, we can sense how deep their resentment had become.

The plan was to kill their younger brother and make it look like the work of a wild animal. Interestingly, the oldest, Reuben, wanted not only to spare Joseph but to bring him back home. In the end, the boys took Joseph, stripped him of his “richly ornamented” robe, and threw him into a deep cistern.

Reuben was gone while the other brothers sat down to eat; noticing a trading caravan passing by, one of them injected another motive into the plot—greed. “What good will it do just to kill him? We can get rid of him and make some money on the side if we sell him to the Ishmaelites.” And that’s what they did.

By the time Reuben had returned, the transaction was done, and the caravan had taken off. He tore his clothes, but, interestingly, it doesn’t say that the brothers told him what they had actually done. Perhaps they didn’t tell him and Reuben assumed that somehow Joseph was kidnapped. We don’t know. At any rate, the brothers hatched a plan to soak the infamous robe in blood and bring it to Jacob. They didn’t even have to lie to the old man—just show him that all too recognizable robe and let Jacob jump to his own logical conclusion.

There was mourning and wailing in the tents of Jacob, who didn’t see his son again until years later. The chapter ends with an ominous note: “the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials.”

This isn’t a nice story. It’s all about human pride, jealousy, greed, and violence. And there isn’t a word about God in it, until we get to 39:2: “The LORD was with Joseph.” With this we are reminded that God is always present and God’s purposes will come to fruition, even in the mess of this dysfunctional family.

CONNECTING (VARIED)

As members of your group begin to arrive, provide an opportunity for them to talk about their week, sharing anything they think the rest of the group might find interesting. Consider providing snacks or even having the members take turns supplying snacks each week. Try to keep the conversation light, but if it seems fitting you could ask your group members to talk about when and where they have experienced God’s presence throughout the week. When you’re ready to begin the lesson, lead the group in an opening prayer.

REWIND (5 MINUTES)

In subsequent sessions you will take this opportunity to review with your group what you have already discussed about Joseph’s story. For this first session, however, you’ll want to introduce this series about Joseph by briefly explaining why you have selected this study. Then share the format of the session with your group: each week you’ll begin by giving the group members an opportunity to talk about what is happening in their lives. Then you will review previous group discussions about Joseph before moving on to the next part of the story. Each session will involve activities and discussion to help your group understand the significance of each aspect of the story. Encourage your group members to look for similarities between the life of Joseph and their own lives in order to recognize how God was working in Joseph’s life and is still working today.

HEARING THE STORY (15 MINUTES)

READ GENESIS 37

Because it's important to keep the group's interest while reading the story, it's a good idea to practice reading through the passage a few times before you make this presentation. By practicing ahead of time, you'll be able to look up on occasion to make eye contact with your members; this will also keep you from being tripped up by unfamiliar terms or unusual phrases. It's also a good idea, when reading to your group, to pause occasionally or repeat a word or phrase to provide emphasis. After you have finished presenting the story, ask everyone to open their Bibles to Genesis 37, or hand out the Genesis 37 printout.

For future lessons, rather than telling the story yourself, consider assigning various students to present it to the group.

Lead a short discussion, using all or some of the following questions:

- This chapter mentions more than once that Joseph's brothers hated him. What had happened to make Joseph's brothers dislike him so much?
- Describe Joseph's two dreams. How are they similar? How are they different?
- What did the brothers originally plan to do with Joseph when he came to find them? Why did they not follow through with this plan?
- How was Joseph's disappearance explained to Jacob? Why did Jacob believe the brothers' story, and how did he react?
- What happens in the story to give us the idea that this is not the end of Joseph?
(The last verse mentions Joseph being sold in Egypt, implying that there will be more about Joseph in later chapters.)

ENTERING THE STORY (15 MINUTES)

ACTIVITY

Have the group look at the handout of Genesis 37 as you point out that this story is told from a neutral point of view. Then tell them that they are going to retell the story from one of the character's perspectives. Divide everyone into three small groups and assign each the role of either Joseph, Jacob, or the brothers.

Depending on the size of your group, you may wish to form six groups, with every two following the same character(s). Another idea is to separate Reuben from the other brothers. This would result in four different perspectives.

Before you give the groups time to plan their retelling, advise them that it often helps to have some background information to better understand a story. Mention the following:

- Jacob had two wives: Rachel, whom he loved more, and Leah.

WHO, ME? IN MY LIFE



How do you feel when a family member or friend gets something you want or feel you deserve?
How does God want us to respond when someone else gets something we want?

What issues, things, or situations tend to make you jealous? What would happen if you considered the situation from the perspective of those you were envious of?

God isn't mentioned in this part of the story. Have you ever felt as though God has been absent from part of your own story? How did that make you feel?

Has there ever been a time when you didn't feel loved by someone who you know does love you?
What gives you confidence that God loves you?