



## YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

### Module 2—Genesis Part 2

#### Lesson 5: The Story of Joseph—Genesis 41; 45

### BIBLICAL REFLECTION

*(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)*

Joseph had a tough life in all reality. Sold to slaves, eventually given power and prominence, then falsely accused and thrown into prison. After time, he was made powerful in prison, asked to interpret dreams, called on by Pharaoh, and ultimately given charge of Egypt's great and powerful nation. Not only was Joseph's life a roller coaster, but the very thing he deserved most—a relationship with his father—was kept from him. I'm sure that Jacob felt great loss. This is how God feels toward humanity—a sense of great loss.

Joseph became the administrative head of Pharaoh's kingdom. He was Pharaoh's primary representative, second only to Pharaoh. Joseph always put God first. He knew the value of his relationship with God.

God's methods and God's timetable are extremely difficult for us to understand or even recognize. The story of Joseph is proof that God's blessing isn't about stuff or merely the good things that happen to you. God's blessing is simply this: God sharing God's life with us. Even in the most ridiculous moments of crime, hatred and disaster, God has the ability to bring good from evil. God's blessing comes from God, not from our actions. Genesis 37, the story of Joseph, is proof that God is determined to fulfill God's promise despite the obstacles that occur along the way, such as character flaws with humanity.

### GOD'S STORY

God determines blessing by being God-with-us, not our circumstances. Joseph's life has not been easy. He has been betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, bought by a high-ranking Egyptian official, Potiphar. While there, he was elevated to a place of good-standing and honor in Potiphar's house, framed and so imprisoned by Potiphar's vindictive wife. He is isolated, alone, and cast down so that he must serve even the other prisoners. He interprets their dreams. He gains some standing. Then, Pharaoh dreams. Joseph is taken to him. Up and down, this way and that. Any way we look at Joseph's story he is constantly at the whim of other people's actions. Sometimes that has meant times of birth. More often it has meant barrenness. His life seems as if it's not his own. Joseph would agree. It isn't. Joseph's life belongs to God.

Joseph is nothing if not God-aware. He has cultivated this kind of life. Whether through hardship or prosperity, Joseph has developed an abiding sense of God's presence. That is the constant that allows Joseph to survive regardless of his circumstance. His life is opened towards God in any and all circumstances. Joseph has carved out space for God.

Joseph's God-awareness does not make him a fatalist, though. Fatalism entails resignation, a kind of passive and unengaged acceptance of anything that happens. Instead, Joseph is actively attuned to precisely how God is at work in and amidst his circumstances. Whether he is in prison or in the the courts of Potiphar's house, Joseph makes space for God. Blessing is defined by God. Joseph knows this. So Joseph carves out space to acknowledge God's presence with him in whatever situation he finds himself. It is Joseph's God-awareness that allows him to be blessed, to exist in the tension of knowing life is not as it should be, and yet trusting God is at work even still.

## OUR STORY

Joseph could easily take credit for the ability to interpret dreams. He has done it for people in prison, and now he has done it for the most powerful person in Egypt. As someone who has been at the mercy of other people's actions and motives for virtually his entire life, Joseph can now finally take control of his own life. "Yes, Pharaoh," he could say, "I can interpret your dream for you. I have that ability. I can make that happen for you." But he doesn't. God will show you what they mean. Joseph deflects. Joseph points away from himself. This isn't about him or about his circumstances. This is about God, who has been at work in Joseph's life all along the way. His life has always been about God, why would it be any different now?

Joseph's life has been shaped over every period of time by God-awareness. Joseph has cultivated receptivity to God's presence in his life. This has sustained him, not his own ability to control his life and make things happen. If his hope were in his ability, he'd have none because he hasn't been able to do much for himself. Instead, he receives God's blessing by letting go of a desire for control. This is what allows Joseph to live in the tension of barrenness and blessing, and so to say that God has made him fruitful even in the land of his suffering (41:51). Joseph offers his life to God in every circumstance, and knows God's blessing because of that. He has carved out space for God to act in his life so that he can be a vehicle now for God to act in the lives of others.

Blessed to be a blessing. And that is precisely what he does here for Pharaoh, and ultimately for all of Egypt. Notice what happens to Pharaoh because of Joseph's God-awareness. Pharaoh becomes God-aware. In Joseph he sees God's very Spirit at work. Because Joseph carved out space for God in his life, Pharaoh now makes space for God in the entire empire. And when famine hits, when barrenness comes to their land, they are ready. They have cultivated God-awareness in a tangible way. Joseph, blessed to be a blessing.

## OTHERS' STORY

Today's narrative invites us to consider a theme—forgiveness. Joseph is now brought face to face with his brothers who years earlier abandoned him and sold him as a slave for a few bucks. Will Joseph forgive them? Can he? Should he? Forgiving others, especially those who have hurt us deeply, is a very hard and tricky thing. We get a sense of the struggle in the story of Joseph. On one hand he is moved to uncontrollable tears at the sight of his brothers and on the other hand he speaks to them harshly and requires that they bow down to him again and again. We see in Joseph's actions the struggle it is to forgive. The deeper the wounds, the harder and longer it takes to heal.

What is the relationship between forgiveness and blessing, barrenness and birth? Our ability to be a blessing as well as experiences seasons of new birth is tied up in our ability to forgive others. I don't think Joseph is able to be a blessing to the full extent if he chooses not to forgive. I don't think he experiences "new birth" with his family if he is unable to forgive.

Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers foreshadows Jesus' own forgiveness. What Joseph was able to do in part, Jesus does completely. In Christ we all have forgiveness. If we have been forgiven we are to forgive one another, indeed it is one of the clearest marks of Christ on a person.

## THE WORLD'S STORY

Blessing. God-with-us, in every moment of our lives. Blessed because God is with us. Blessed because we can be responsive to God in any and every circumstance. Blessed because even in a cistern, we are not dead yet. Blessed because we can call out to God, "Lord, be with me now." Blessed because God does not abandon us, even in our prisons. Blessed. God-with-us.

Blessed to be a blessing. God is not at our whim. God is with us in order to make us a blessing to others. The blessing of God-with-us transforms us, or ought to. God's faithfulness to be with us draws forth our own. That is the crux of our story.

Specifically, for example, how can we be a blessing to those who are oppressed? In what ways can we get involved? Let's start here:

- 1. Get informed.** What do you know about social injustice? Although it can be very hard to see the injustices either live or in video, pictures, etc., it is important that we come face to face with humans who are living in injustice.
- 2. Speak up.** After becoming informed, tell people about it. Present a class at your church. Tell people about it at work, etc. Don't be silent. Speak up for those who can't speak up for themselves.
- 3. Prevent slavery.** Join a group like [www.ijm.org](http://www.ijm.org) and get involved with prayer, giving money, and so on.
- 4. Control demand.** Shop with knowledge. How many things do you purchase that were made by slaves? If you shop thoughtfully and with others in mind, it helps control the demand of the things made by slaves around the world.
- 5. Raise Money.** Plan, organize and execute a fundraising initiative and give the money to an organization trying to attack the very roots of injustices around the world.

Bottom line, learn-join-act! The birth, life, crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ were about liberation. How can your group get involved?