

## **Life/Small Group Material on Joseph Sermon Series**

### **Joseph: a bit of background**

Joseph is the son of Jacob and Rachel and Genesis 37:3 tell us he is his father's favourite. Favouritism in families never ends well and in the life of Joseph it has dire consequences.

Genesis covers a lot of ground.

It begins with the biblical account of Creation and ends with Joseph's death around 1800BC.

Genesis has a very interesting structure – and percentage wise more text is devoted to Joseph (30%) than any other Abraham comes in at around 21%, Isaac 8% and Jacob 23%.

Of course more text doesn't mean more important but it does make us sit up and take notice – what is it about Joseph's life that God wants us to hear.

Joseph lived during what historians call the Middle Kingdom period in Egyptian history – a time when Egypt flourished culturally and economically.

The key vs for understanding Joseph's life is Genesis 50:20 – 'you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.....'

It reminds us that no matter how things may appear at any given time God's good purposes are being worked out in and through us – that nothing can derail or prevent those good purposes – no circumstance, no event, no person, no institution, no bad decision, no wrong turn – not even Covid 19.

And whilst God does not actively will or purpose bad things, he may allow bad things to happen with the promise of working through them. Transforming them by his grace and power into something unimaginably glorious.

### **Welcome**

Please think of your own welcome question/activity to suit your group and current way of meeting together if needed.

### **Worship**

The key vs for understanding the life of Joseph is Genesis 50:20

*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

Often when we have chance to reflect on our lives we can see ways in which God has continued to work to realise his good purposes and promises despite our outward circumstances.

In the Prayer Course which some Life/Small Groups have been using The Examen prayer is mentioned. It is an ancient Christian way of praying which encourages us to reflect upon our lives and so more clearly see how God is at work. It works equally well as an individual or group prayer.

The Worship section for each week during the Joseph sermons series suggests that the group - whether meeting together on Zoom or alone - uses the Examen prayer.

An example of The Examen is attached.

To use in a group one person reads out each section leaving space in between each for people to think and pray.

The key is not to rush, but allow space for God to speak.

The Examen could finish with a time to share thanksgivings/reflections/requests for prayer before praying the Lord's Prayer together.

## **Word**

### **Notes for Sermon Sunday June 14<sup>th</sup> - Genesis 37: Joseph's Plight**

1. When we think of Joseph many of us think of his 'coat of many colours' (of which the bible only says 'richly ornamented' NIV)  
Begin by sharing what you already know about the life of Joseph and his story.

2. Read Genesis Ch 37

3. Read vs 4 - James 2:1-9 talks about the perils of a different kind of favouritism.

Why is favouritism such a bad thing – in families? churches? communities?

How can we guard against it?

4. Vs 8 - How did Joseph AND his brothers misunderstand the dream?

Do you think Joseph should have shared his dreams with his family – if not why?

5. 37:36 - Joseph is in a very different place to where his dreams suggest he might be.  
Can you relate that to times in your own life? What helped?

## **Witness**

Joseph's life reminds us that God can use even things which appear to work against the good plans he has for us.

**Either** spend some time reflecting upon how you can see that pattern at work in your own life and thank God for the ways he has worked to bring good out of a difficult situation

## **OR**

If life is difficult at the moment and it is hard to see where God is, spend time praying about how you feel. Pray that the Holy Spirit would renew your trust that God is at work despite how it might appear.

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## Word

### Notes for Sermon Sunday June 21<sup>st</sup> Genesis 39-40 – Potiphar and Prison

1. Read Ch 39
2. Vs 2 – ‘The Lord was with Joseph’ – how do we see this?
3. Vs 8 -10 What does this tell us about Joseph’s character?
4. Vs 19-20 – can you think of a time when you have been falsely accused of something or your integrity has been questioned. How has your faith helped?
5. Vs 21 What does this tell us about Joseph’s abilities?
6. Read Ch 40

Can you think of other examples in the bible when God has spoken to someone in a dream (rather than a vision)?

7. Read Acts 2:16-18 – how do we know if a dream is from God (40:8)
8. Whilst grisly, the two dreams reveal rather than determine what is to happen to the cupbearer and baker.  
How does God use this incident later (40:14-15 41:9-13)

## Witness

### For prayer, reflection and action:

In his dealings with Potiphar’s wife Joseph reflects God’s invitation to holiness in living.  
Are there areas in your life in which God is calling you to a deeper level of holiness and faithfulness?

## OR

40:23 – is there anyone you might have forgotten or overlooked?  
Set aside some time to write them a note or speak by phone and pray for them.

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### Notes for Sunday Sermon 28<sup>th</sup> June Genesis 41 – Pharaoh and Dreams

## Word

1. Read Ch 41
2. How have events in Chs 37, 39 and 40 prepared Joseph for what is to come in Ch 41?
3. Can you see the same pattern at work in your own life? If so how?

4. Ch 41:1 (see also 40:14-15) 'When two full years had passed'. Can you imagine how Joseph must have felt during these years? What does the passage tell us sustained him?
5. Look up Isaiah 48:10, Romans 5:3-4 and 1 Peter 1:6-7

God does not will suffering, but he can use it.

How do we see this at work in the development of Joseph's character?

6. Joseph appears to harbour no bitterness – towards his family, his captors or God. Rather he is portrayed as one who makes the best of the circumstances he finds himself in. How do you think Joseph – and we – can avoid becoming bitter when life doesn't turn out as we hoped?

## **Witness**

Use the following suggestions for facing hardship as a basis for prayer, reflection and action over the coming week.

- Remember God's will is for our good (Jeremiah 29:11). That our hardships will not last and that God's plan is eternal. Remember that Jesus's life led to the cross – but then beyond the cross to resurrection.
- Rejoice in God at all times. Joseph is, by Ch 41, a man who leans into God at all times. There is always something for which to give thanks, even in the hardest day. Thanksgiving lifts our eyes beyond what weighs us down.
- Refuse to give up. Instead of saying 'why me', ask God 'what do you want me to learn?' Grow better, not bitter.

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## **Notes for Sunday Sermon Sunday July 5<sup>th</sup> – Genesis 42, 45-46 Joseph and his brothers**

1. Genesis 42:6-17 – Joseph's actions towards his brother could appear harsh, even vengeful. However what evidence in Chs 42, 44 and 45 tells us this is not the case?
2. What is the special relationship which Joseph has with Benjamin? In what ways does he show this relationship?
3. One commentator writes 'the alternating sun and frost (of Joseph's approach) broke them (the brothers) open to God.'

How do we see these new attitudes at work in the brother's words and actions?

4. According to Gen 45:7 who are the remnant and for what reason did God rescue them?
5. Who was the remnant according to Jeremiah 6:9 and Micah 2:12- and according to Romans 11:1-6 who are the remnant now?

6. Genesis 45:5 Whilst it isn't always easy, we know that we must forgive others. But we often forget that we must also learn how to forgive ourselves.

Read 1 John 3:19-21 - when forgiving ourselves or others is hard what can help?

### **Witness**

Pray for those you find it difficult to forgive – and for anything in yourself which you find hard to forgive too.

Is there anything you need to do as a consequence of forgiving others/yourself – or anything you need to do in order to open yourself up more fully to God's forgiving love?

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### **Notes for Sunday Sermon 12<sup>th</sup> July – Genesis 49:29-50:26 'God intended it for good!'**

1. Read Genesis 47:28-31 and 49:29-33

Hebrews 11:21 praises Jacob's faith – specifically that revealed by what he does and says as he comes to the end of his life (see also Genesis 47:28-31 and the blessings of his sons in Chs 48-49)

What can we learn from both Joseph and his father Jacob, about how to live and die well?

2. Genesis 50:15-21 (see also Gen 45:5-8).

What three things does Joseph say in response to his brother's fears – a response which has strong Christian overtones.

See Romans 12:19, Romans 8:28 and Luke 6:27-28.

3. What interpretation of Genesis 50:24-25 does the writer of Hebrews 11:22 give?
4. Events in Joseph's life find echoes in the life of Jesus, revealing how God works through suffering to rescue others. What two events (there are more!) in Joseph's life have echoes of events in the life of Jesus?
5. Genesis 50:24-25 Both Joseph's life and Genesis end by pointing beyond their own story and encourage us to trust in God's promises for the future based on his action both in the past and present.

How do you see the same pattern at work in your life/the world today?

### **Witness**

Take time this week to reflect back over the life of Joseph and ask God through his Holy Spirit to highlight a particular thought, verse or episode through which he is speaking words of encouragement to you at this time.

Is there anything you need to do or change or continue to ponder and pray over the coming weeks?

Consider how you might live out more fully, and joyfully, the promise of Genesis 50:20.

