

Joseph

Fruitful in Affliction

Written by Jennifer Adams

There are a lot of stories in the Bible that I love, but one of my favorites has to be the story of Joseph. I'm not sure I can put my finger on why exactly it draws me in. Perhaps it is the rags-to-riches drama played out in the pages of Genesis, because what little girl doesn't dream of becoming a princess some day and escaping the life she knows? Or maybe it is the larger than life, God inspired dreams that propelled Joseph on a journey that he never would have imagined as a young 17 year old boy tending his fathers flocks. Dreams that sustained him for years and finally came to fruition in a surprising and history altering way. Or maybe it is the ugly, messy, real life emotions and situations he endured that resonate with a deep part of my soul. A reminder that no one is immune to the trials and hard things of life. Yet, his story radiates with a hope that those hard things don't have to define or derail us. It is a poignant reminder that God is present in all aspects of our lives, and He is always working things toward His ultimate purpose. My prayer as you join me on this journey is that God will speak truth to our hearts, and that we will be inspired by Joseph's life that we too can be fruitful in the midst of affliction. Affliction will come, and while it may be completely outside our control, we can control how we respond to it. Will we be content to simply endure and survive, or will we bloom like fruitful vines whose branches are running over the wall and impacting future generations? I know which option my heart longs for. Lord, make us fruitful that we may bring glory to Your name!

"God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." (Genesis 41:52)

"Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine beside a spring; its branches climb over the wall." (Genesis 49:22)

This will be a 6 session Bible study with 5 weeks of homework. The homework is structured so there are two levels of engagement. Option 1 is for those who don't have a lot of time for homework during the week. This option should only take about an hour each week, but will still allow you to participate in the group discussion at the next session. Option 2 is for those that have the time and want to do more in-depth homework. This option consists of 5 days of homework, and should take 30-45 minutes a day to complete.

Option 1: Complete only the Group Discussion questions located throughout the Homework. These questions are highlighted with a leaf symbol next to them. (look for this symbol: 🍃)

Option 2: Complete the five days of Homework.

Whichever option you choose, I encourage you to get into the Bible each week. In Hebrews 4:12, it says *"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* If you want to know God on a deeper level and see transformation in your life, consistent time in His Word is not only crucial, but necessary. Make it a priority and be intentional about setting aside the time!

I can't wait to dive into His Word with you!

Jennifer Adams

Homework - Week 1

Day 1

The story of Joseph kicks off in Genesis 37, but before we start there, I think it is important that we understand some history first. I know history doesn't thrill everyone and some of you might trudge through this part, but stick with me because it is imperative that you have an understanding of where Joseph came from in order to fully appreciate the story as it unfolds.

Every family is unique and has its own drama, and Joseph's family was no different! In fact, this particular story reads more like a Lifetime movie at times. If you thought your family was crazy and dysfunctional, there is a good chance you will feel a little more normal after reading about Joseph's family line!

Let's start with Joseph's father, Jacob, because he is a key player in this story.

Read Genesis 25:19-26. Who were Jacob's parents?

Jacob's life was characterized by scheming, manipulation and deceit. Read the following passages and record the deceit/manipulation either done by Jacob or done to him:

Genesis 25:27-34

Genesis 27:5-29

Genesis 29:16-30

Have you ever tried to manipulate a situation? How did it turn out?

Read the following verses about deceit. Pick one to rewrite in the space below.

Psalm 24:3-4 / Psalm 32:2 / Psalm 101:7 / Proverbs 20:17 / Proverbs 21:6 / Jeremiah 9:8-9 / Ephesians 5:6

Manipulation is one of those insidious things that can become second nature without us even realizing it. But ultimately, the need to manipulate reflects our failure to fully trust God.

What connection do you see between manipulation and not trusting God?

Spend some time asking the Holy Spirit to reveal any areas of your life where you are manipulating or deceiving because you want to control the situation or think you know best.

Look up the following verses about God's faithfulness to fulfill His promises. Circle the one that speaks to you today.

Numbers 23:19

I Thessalonians 5:24

II Timothy 2:13

Hebrews 10:23

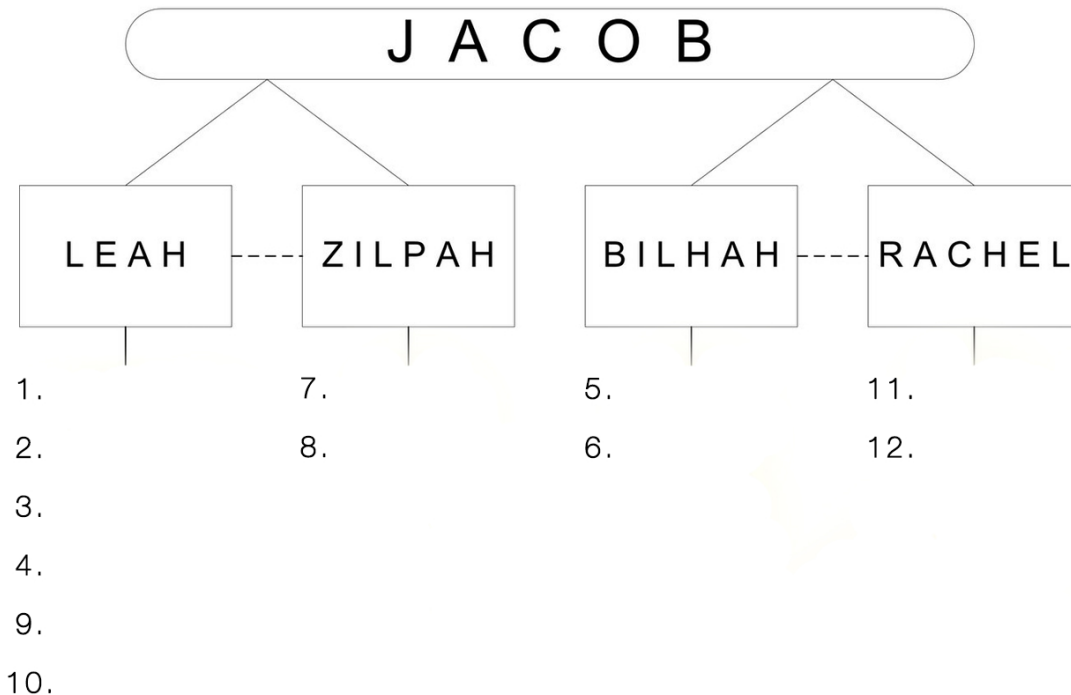
God can be trusted with our lives, and He knows what is best for us! I would imagine that most of you would nod in agreement with this statement, and you could honestly say you believe that to be true. Unfortunately, our actions often belie the truths that we claim to believe. If you find yourself thinking this week that you have a great idea that you need to "help" God with, I encourage you to step back and trust that God is in control! Ask Him to help you give the situation or person over to Him, and allow Him to work in His way and His timing.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Day 2


Today we are going to take a closer look at Joseph's brothers.

Read Genesis 29:31-Genesis 30:24 and Genesis 35:16-18. Fill in the chart below with the names of Joseph's brothers.



Two wives, plus two servants, means there were four women who bore a combined total of 12 sons for Jacob. That's what I call some crazy family dynamics! **Circle Joseph on the family chart.**

As if four moms in one family wasn't enough to create some intense emotions, the favoritism that Jacob demonstrated towards Rachel and then Joseph only exasperated the issues.

 **Read Genesis 37.** Don't let the familiarity of the story cause you to skim over the details. Take it all in and read it slowly.

Look at Genesis 37:3-4. Why did Joseph's brothers hate him?

The coat or tunic that Jacob gave Joseph (Gen. 37:3) was more than just a beautiful piece of clothing. This was not a typical sibling spat over who got the nicest outfit or trendiest pair of shoes. The Hebrew word used in this verse refers to a tunic that extends to the ankles and wrists. Read the following commentary excerpt:

"This sort of robe was worn only by the opulent and noble, by kings' sons, and by those who had no need to toil for their living. All who had to win their bread by labour wore short, colored garments that did not show stain, or cramp the free movement of the limbs. Such was the lot of Jacob's sons, and such the garments they wore. They had to wade through morasses, to clamber up hills, to carry wandering sheep home on their shoulders, to fight with robbers and beasts of prey ; and for such toils the flowing robe would have been quite unfit. But when Jacob gave such a robe to Joseph, he declared in effect that from such hardships and toils his favorite son should be exempt. Now in those times the father's will was law. When, therefore, they saw Joseph

tricked out in his robe of state, the brethren felt that in all likelihood he would have the rich inheritance, whilst they must follow a life of toil.”¹

Joseph’s famous “coat of many colors” was not just a special gift from his father, it was a statement of his rank and position in the family. Jacob was essentially passing over Joseph’s ten older brothers to establish Joseph as his heir, a big deal in a time when inheritance and blessing were so important. If you recall from yesterday’s homework, we saw in Genesis 25 and 27 that Jacob pulled off a massive deception to get the birthright and blessing from his father!

Now that we have a better understanding of the coat and what it symbolized, let’s answer the question again. Why do you think Joseph’s brothers hated him?

I want to propose that it really wasn’t even about the coat. Instead, it was what the coat represented that got Joseph’s brothers riled up. It was a physical reminder that their father loved Joseph more than them. On top of that, the coat signified a favor and position that I’m sure his brothers thought was unmerited and undeserved. After all, this was the same teenage boy that one verse earlier (Gen. 37:2) was running to daddy to tattle on his brothers. As a mom of three boys myself, I can almost tangibly feel the tension as I read this chapter. It makes me want to send everyone to their room for a time out! But in all seriousness, I think there are some lessons in here for us. First of all, no one likes to be overlooked or passed over, especially when it seems unfair.

Have you ever had a time in your life when someone else seemed to have all the favor and blessings? What kind of emotions did that stir up in you?

In this particular story, Jacob was playing favorites. It plainly states it in Genesis 37:3. (On a side-note, showing favoritism in a family situation is never a good idea!) Every time the brothers saw Joseph wearing that coat, they were reminded of a painful truth. However, what they couldn’t see was that God had a greater purpose for Joseph that wouldn’t be fully realized for hundreds of years. Everything that was happening in Joseph’s life was being used to push him closer to that purpose. While they were focused on what was right in front of them (and yes, it was hard and unfair and painful!), there was a beautiful story being woven under the surface. A story that only God could orchestrate.

How do you think the brother’s attitude would have changed if God had given them a glimpse of what He was doing?

 **Do you have a situation or relationship in your life right now that needs a perspective shift?**

¹ *Joseph: Beloved-Hated-Exalted* by F. B. Meyer

Let's get even more personal with this. How many times do we look at others and see what we deem to be favor or blessings, and conclude that God must love them more or is more pleased with them? I think that if we take the time to stop and examine our hearts, we will find that our jealousy and discontent is often a reflection of insecurity. We wonder if something is wrong with us or perhaps God really doesn't like us as much as He likes them. We simply feel forgotten and unseen.

Look up the following verses and see what they have to say about God and favorites:

Acts 10:34-35 // Romans 2:10-11 // Galatians 2:6

The beauty is that we never have to worry about favorites with God. God is not like Jacob! Aren't you thankful for that? God's love for us is steadfast and unwavering (see Lamentations 3:22-23). *The problem comes when we equate blessing or favor with love.* God is working behind the scenes to accomplish a much bigger purpose than we can ever imagine, and each one of us has a different role to accomplish in that greater purpose. So while Joseph's brothers were struggling with some intense emotions because their dad really did love Joseph more, we need to make sure that we aren't projecting similar emotions on others because of what we deem to be favoritism on God's part. It is time we get our eyes off what others have and we don't, and get our eyes back on God and what He is calling US to do.

 **How does our perspective change when we view our circumstances and situations (and that of others around us) as part of God's bigger plan?**

Before we finish up today's homework, I want you to look at one more phrase. **What does the last part of Genesis 37:4 say?**

The brothers hatred for Joseph grew to the point that they could not even offer him the typical greeting of "Shalom" meaning "*peace be with you.*" They essentially could not be civil with their own brother! And as the story progresses, we will see that this hatred they harbor will eventually drive them to do the unthinkable.

Close out this day asking the Holy Spirit to point out any hatred or jealousy that you may be harboring toward someone. Ask Him to give you the discernment to recognize it and the courage to pull it out by the roots! Left untreated, those feelings and emotions will eventually suck the life right out of you.

"But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." (James 1:14-15)

The good news is that our God wants to deliver us from hatred and jealousy, and the chains they wrap around our heart. So bring all your junk and lay it at His feet. Not only can He handle whatever you bring, He is the only one that can bring true healing.

"Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death and broke their bands apart. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men! For He has shattered gates of bronze and cut bars of iron asunder." (Psalm 107:13-16)

Day 3

When you think about the story of Joseph, what is one of the first things that pops into your head? If it's not the coat of many colors, I would venture to guess it is dreams (and some rather crazy dreams at that!). Today we are going to take a look at the first set of dreams mentioned in this story.

Read Genesis 37:5-11. Summarize below the two dreams that Joseph had:

Who did Joseph tell the first dream to?

How did they react?

Who did Joseph tell the second dream to?

How did they react?

 **Have you ever shared a God-dream with someone and received a response you weren't expecting?**

We don't know exactly why Joseph shared these dreams with his brothers and his father. It definitely doesn't seem like the smartest move considering the hostile relations that were already simmering in the family! But then I remember that he was only 17, and if I'm being honest, I didn't always make the smartest choices at that age. Can anyone relate? Whether it was immaturity, pride, lack of discernment...or a REALLY clueless teenager...Joseph's decision to share his dreams only further strained his relationships with his brothers. Yet even in that decision, we see God working behind the scenes.

When it comes to our own lives, it can be hard sometimes to discern whether a word or dream from God is something for us to keep to ourselves or share with others. I am still growing and learning in this area, but one thing I have learned over the years is to always check my heart motivation before I share something that I believe is from God. What is my reason for sharing it? Is my heart pure and free of pride? Whenever I stop and ask God to reveal any junk that might be in my heart, I have always found that He is willing to do so!

 **How have you learned to discern whether something from God is just for you or something to be shared with others?**

It is important to note that these were God-given dreams. Joseph did not dream these of his own volition. Let's be honest...there is a difference between God dreams and our own dreams. Every time I go to the hair salon (which is not near as often as I would like!), I sit in that chair and dream about what it would be like to be rich and famous and have my own personal stylist. Because how amazing would that be to have someone come to your house several times a week to fix and style your hair!! Please don't tell me I am the only one that has this dream. Unfortunately for me this is not a God dream! Instead it is what I often call a pipe-dream, something I came up with all on my own and a dream that will never see the light of day. Kind of like my dream to be a superstar singer. But that's another story for another day.

However, these were not pipe-dreams that Joseph shared with his family. These were dreams directly from God that would be fulfilled years down the road. When we look throughout the Old Testament, we see numerous stories of God communicating to people through dreams.

Read at least 2 of the following Scriptures and record who had the dream and what God communicated in that dream:

Genesis 20:4-7

Genesis 31:10-13

Genesis 31:24

Judges 7:13-14

I Kings 3:5-14


We were all created with a hunger for purpose. We want to believe that God has a dream, a unique purpose and destiny for our life. I love the story of Esther and if you have time this week, I encourage you to take some time to read it. One of my favorite verses in that book is *Esther 4:14*, "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Read Acts 17:26. What does this verse say about the time and place where you live?

God placed you in this particular place and in this particular time for a particular reason. God doesn't do anything by accident. He has a dream and a destiny for your life.

Look at this verse in the Passion Translation:

"We have become His poetry, a recreated people that will fulfill the destiny He has given each of us, for we are joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. Even before we were born, God planned in advance our destiny and the good works we would do to fulfill it!" (Ephesians 2:10)

 **What does this verse say about you and your destiny?**

🔊 Do you have a dream(s) that God has placed in your heart? If so, what is the dream?

If you can't answer that question, I encourage you to pray and ask God to reveal His dream(s) for your life. Remember, He is the one that created you. When we want to know why something was created, we ask the Creator! We also read the owners' manual. So what does that look like practically for you and me? It means we spend time with God, reading His Word and praying. By the way, prayer is a two-way conversation, so make sure you are giving God the opportunity to speak to you! The beauty is that God is not only the Revealer of dreams, but He is also the One that fulfills those dreams.

Over the next few weeks, we will be going on a journey with Joseph. It will be a roller coaster ride from the time the dream is dropped in his heart to when he sees that dream fulfilled. Please notice that the dream God gave Joseph was not the full purpose (destiny) that God had for his life. God's plan did not end with Joseph's family bowing down to him. The dreams were simply a glimpse into a much larger destiny God had for Joseph to save the entire nation of Israel. This quote from Robert Morris sums it up well: "The dream and our destiny are not the same thing. The dream is what starts us on the path to our destiny."

As we will see in the life of Joseph, there was a path of maturity that he had to embark on before he could see those God given dreams come to pass.

What are some things that God is working in your life right now to prepare you for your destiny?

Close out this day asking God to clarify his dreams for your life. Surrender your life and your dreams to Him, and recognize that He is working things together in your life to prepare you for His ultimate destiny.

Day 4

Read Genesis 37:12-14. Where did Jacob send Joseph and why?

To get a better understanding of the significance, go back and read Genesis 34. What happened in Shechem?

Knowing this history, why do you think Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers?

When Joseph didn't find his brothers in Shechem, what do he do? (Genesis 37:17)

This particular scene gives us a glimpse into the heart and character of Joseph. The first thing I want you to notice is how Joseph responds in verse 13:

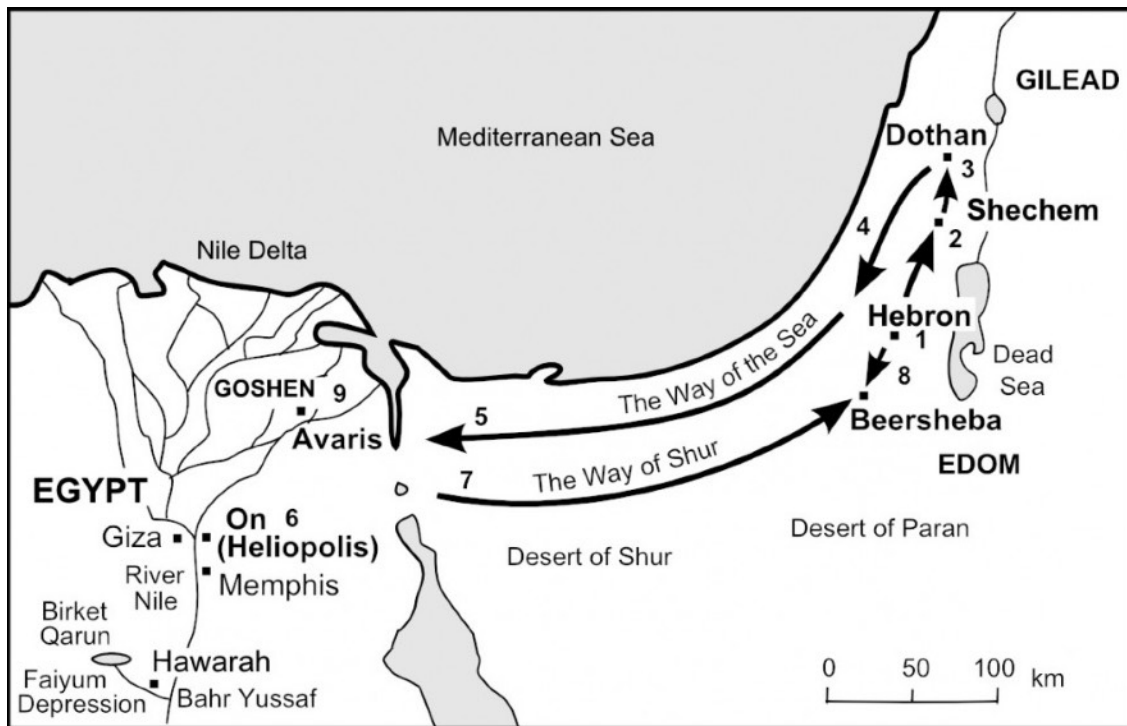
"When they had been gone for some time, Jacob said to Joseph, 'Your brothers are pasturing the sheep at Shechem. Get ready, and I will send you to them.' 'I'm ready to go,' Joseph replied."

We don't see any hesitation on Joseph's part when Jacob sends him on a dangerous mission. Instead he announces that he is ready to go! It is a picture of a young boy who is submitted to authority and is willing to serve and obey, even when it is difficult.

What are some of the valid excuses Joseph could have used to avoid this assignment?

Have you ever found yourself giving excuses (valid or not), when God asked you to do something that was hard, uncomfortable, or even dangerous? If so, how did that turn out?

The second thing I want to point out is Joseph's response when he gets to Shechem. To put it in perspective, Shechem was not just right around the corner from home, but 50 miles north of Hebron and would have taken Joseph at least two days to travel.



Once he arrives in Shechem, he doesn't find any sign of his brothers. He finally runs into a man who informs him that his brothers have left the area and gone to Dothan which was an additional 15 miles north. At this point, Joseph had a choice to make. He could have easily returned home to tell his father that his brothers had safely left Shechem. After all, it is generally assumed that it was the potential hostility in Shechem that Jacob was concerned about. However, instead of taking the easier route, we see that Joseph "went after his brothers and found them." (Gen. 37:17) Joseph was committed to following through with his father's orders until the very end. He didn't just do the minimum requested of him.

Is there an area of your life where you are just doing the bare minimum, yet you know God is calling you to go deeper and further? What keeps you from following through to the very end?

Joseph's determination to keep searching for his brothers until he found them demonstrated a genuine love and concern for them, despite the hatred they so blatantly spewed in his direction.

What does Matthew 5:44 say about how we are to treat those who hate and mistreat us?

Is this a command or a suggestion?

Reading further in that chapter, what is the reason given for why we should love our enemies?

Loving our enemies does not come naturally and isn't easy, which is probably why the Bible addresses this subject multiple times! Just do a quick search on verses that talk about loving your enemies and you will find plenty to choose from.

Wrap up your time today by asking the Lord to make you ready and willing to obey when He calls you to do the hard things. Pray for the strength to resist doing just the bare minimum, but believe that God will give you the spirit of a warrior who is willing to follow through and persevere until the end. Finally, spend some time repenting if there is anyone in your life that you have not loved the way God has called you to love.

"We love because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

Day 5

We are on the homestretch of Week 1! Today we will wrap up this first chapter on Joseph.

Read Genesis 37:17-36. It can be tempting with such a familiar story to quickly skim through the verses, but I want to encourage you to take your time and read it slowly.

This part of the story is something that I have a hard time wrapping my mind around. It's almost like watching a horrible accident in slow motion. We see Joseph's brothers consumed with a burning jealousy that becomes a simmering hatred. As if that wasn't bad enough, they then plot the heartless murder of their little brother with the intent to cover it up so their dad thinks it was a tragic accident! This is a painful reminder of what happens when sin is allowed to grow and fester in hearts.


Read Genesis 37:25. What does the very first line say that his brothers did right after throwing him in the pit?

Those are some hardened and cold hearts! **Now read Genesis 42:21 where we get a little more insight into Joseph's behavior at this time. What does it say he was doing after being thrown in the pit?**

Can you imagine the scene? This young, scared, teenage boy stripped of his tunic is thrown in a deep pit that he can not get out of. Will his brothers leave him there to die? Will he ever see his beloved father again? What about those dreams God had given him? While all these thoughts and emotions are coursing through his mind, his brothers are casually eating a meal as if nothing has happened.

What do the brothers see as they are eating and what do they decide to do with Joseph?

When Joseph is sold as a slave and heads towards Egypt, all he can see is that he is leaving everything he has ever known. He has no idea where he will end up and what will happen to him. **What emotions do you think he was experiencing? Do you think he was wondering about those dreams that God had given him?**

 **Have you ever been in a place (or maybe you are there now) where it doesn't seem like your God dreams will ever happen? During those times, what lies from the enemy do you have to fight?**

It comes down to a trust issue. Do we trust that God is who He says He is? Do we trust that He can do anything? Do we trust that He has a plan even when nothing around us makes sense?

 **Read the following verses about trust and circle the one that speaks to you today:**

Psalm 22:4-5 / Psalm 28:6-7 / Isaiah 26:4 / Jeremiah 17:7-8 / I Timothy 4:9-10 / II Timothy 1:12

Before we end our homework for this first week, there is one last thing that I want us to look at because it is too good to skip over! Throughout the story of Joseph, you can't help but notice the similarities between Joseph and Jesus. While the Bible is divided into Old Testament and New Testament, it is still one book that flows and fits together and all points to the same thing. This is illustrated time and time again through the use of types, which were essentially shadows in the Old Testament that pointed to an ultimate fulfillment in the New Testament. In this sense, Joseph is often seen as a "type" of Christ. Scholars have come up with more than 100 parallels between the two, but don't worry we aren't going to look at all of them! Instead, I want you to look up the following Scriptures and record some of the most obvious parallels. The first one is filled in for you.

Joseph	Jesus Christ
1. Genesis 37:3a - Joseph was "beloved" by his father	1. Matthew 3:17b - Jesus was God's "beloved" Son
2. Genesis 37:4 -	2. John 15:25 -
3. Genesis 37:18b -	3. Matthew 27:1 / Luke 19:14 -
4. Genesis 37:23b -	4. Matthew 27:28a -
5. Genesis 37:28 -	5. Matthew 26:15 -
6. Genesis 41:43b -	6. Philippians 2:10a -
7. Genesis 41:57a -	7. John 6:35a -
8. Genesis 42:8 -	8. John 14:9a -

As I look over these parallels, I can't help but wonder how well my life reflects Jesus. As a "shadow", Joseph wasn't a perfect picture of Jesus. No one could ever claim to be. That's what a shadow is, an imperfect reflection...yet there is enough of the original evident in the shadow to identify it. It makes me pause and consider what my life is reflecting. When people see me, do they see a reflection of Jesus? Do I respond to situations the way He would? Do I talk in the same manner that He would? Do I keep my eyes on the calling of my Heavenly Father the way He did, despite the trials and tribulations I may face?

Are there any particular ways that Joseph reflected Jesus that challenge you today? Think back through this week's homework and the various situations he faced.

Spend some time praying that the Lord would reveal areas of your life that need some further transformation so you would better reflect Him.

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." (II Corinthians 3:18)

Group Discussion - Week 1

These are all the Group Discussion questions from this week's homework compiled onto one page. This page is designed to help facilitate table discussion at the next session. You can record your answers again on this page, or simply look back at your homework...whatever you prefer!

Every time the brothers saw Joseph wearing his special coat, they were reminded of the painful truth that their father loved Joseph more than them. However, what they couldn't see was that God had a greater purpose for Joseph that wouldn't be fully realized for hundreds of years. Everything that was happening in Joseph's life was being used to push him closer to that purpose. While the brothers were focused on what was right in front of them (and yes, it was hard and unfair and painful!), there was a beautiful story being woven under the surface. A story that only God could orchestrate. **How does our perspective change when we view our circumstances and situations (and that of others around us) as part of God's bigger plan?** (pg 7)

Do you have a situation or relationship in your life right now that needs a perspective shift? (pg 6)

When Joseph shared his dream, he didn't get a favorable reception from his family. **Have you ever shared a God-dream with someone and received a response you weren't expecting?** (pg 8)

Reading the story, it doesn't seem like Joseph used wisdom in his decision to share his dreams with his brothers. **How have you learned to discern whether something from God is just for you or something to be shared with others?** (pg 8)

Read Ephesians 2:10. (Look it up in the Passion Translation if you can.) **What does this verse say about you and your destiny? Do you have a dream(s) that God has placed in your heart? If so, what is the dream?** (pg 9-10)

When Joseph is sold as a slave and heads towards Egypt, all he can see is that he is leaving everything he has ever known. He has no idea where he will end up and what will happen to him. **Have you ever been in a place (or maybe you are there now) where it doesn't seem like your God dreams will ever happen? During those times, what lies from the enemy do you have to fight?** (pg 14)

Read the following verses about trust and circle the one that speaks to you today:

Psalms 22:4-5 / Psalm 28:6-7 / Isaiah 26:4 / Jeremiah 17:7-8 / I Timothy 4:9-10 / II Timothy 1:12 (pg 14)