

**Joseph and Potiphar's Wife**  
**Genesis 39:1-23**  
**Week 3**

Opening

Be sure to hop onto the video call a bit early so group members aren't anxiously, awkwardly waiting. Remember you are the host, so just as if you were welcoming folks into your home, use these first few moments to welcome each participant by name. It means a lot to acknowledge everyone on the call and confirm you can see and hear them.

-if there are new folks joining your group, be sure to introduce them as well

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot. I like the consistency of praying the same pray to center ourselves each week, but once again, feel free to have someone pray differently to open this week.

*Holy God, as we gather again virtually, we ask that you Spirit would be at work among us to connect us and renew us by your Word and our fellowship. Give us wisdom and insight and strengthen our bonds with one another and you. In the name of our risen Lord we pray, Amen.*

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

Check-in question

The problem confronting the preacher, teacher, or reader of this story is how to explain it without piously moralizing on the role of woman as temptress.

**How have you heard this story taught or presented in the past? Or was it one of those Bible stories that never really got brought up in your experience?**

\*since we're doing these meetings on Zoom, some groups may want to add an extra activity to help folks feel at ease. There are some great games out there that you can play via Zoom. Reach out to Sarah if this is something you'd like to try out.

Read: Genesis 39:1-23

In addition to the broader questions below, I am including some other information about this passage and some other ideas to get conversation going; however, don't jump too quickly to these as they shape the discussion. Be sure to first ask what the group thinks, and which parts stand out to them. Trust the Holy Spirit here !

We pick up with the story of Joseph after a strange, brief interlude in chapter 38. Some scholars believe the placement of this story framed by the Joseph narrative sets a deliberate contrast in the way we see sexuality expressed in each chapter.

This story can easily be approached as a basic moral tale about resisting temptation; however, we miss God's part in this if we reduce it to that alone. Moral restraint is good in the face of temptation (sexual or otherwise), but that is only one part of this larger narrative in which God is the primary subject as He continues to be with Joseph and guide his paths (see verse 2 and 23 "the Lord was with Joseph").

This story could be divided into 3 parts:

Verses 1-6 description of Joseph's new situation in Potiphar's house

Verses 7-20 the main action of seduction and escape

Verses 21-23 description of Joseph's new situation in prison

The danger and dismay of the middle section is bookended by these words of confidence that God continues to work out his purposes through Joseph, providing for him, and staying with him – even in prison. To quote Brueggemann again, "at the same time it is true that *life is confidently settled* (v. 106, 21-23) and that *life must be lived at great risk* (v. 7-20). But are true. Either taken by itself is false."

**Can you think of times in your life when this was evident to you? Times when you knew you had to risk, not knowing what was going to happen, but trusting that God was present with you?**

Verse 6 Refer to Genesis 29:17 for a similar description of Rachel.  
Good looks run in the family

Note each time you see the word "hand" the underlying message is of POWER

Verse 9 to "sin against God" is an idiom in Hebrew that might also be translated as a kind of superlative, something like, "sing to high heaven"

Verses 11-12 Joseph's garment is mentioned multiple times in this passage. **Is there any parallel you can trace between this garment and the coat of many colors and their role in this story?** Joseph as a traditional slave, would have only worn one garment, but here we see once again how well he was treated in Potiphar's house to have two.

This is not the first time Joseph has had to function without his royal clothes (37:23 – remember the coat of many colors had long sleeves and was in itself a symbol of royalty and power)

Verse 17 the word “Hebrew” here is used to reflect a low class, socially rejected person, undoubtedly scorned by the people around the throne.

Remind folks of this claim and how it might ring true in the passage for the week:

Walter Brueggemann names the singular theological claim in the Joseph story is “the purposes of God are at work in hidden and unnoticed ways, but the ways of God are nonetheless reliable and will come to fruition.” This can be the place we come back to each week as we explore the story of Joseph.

1. What from this story confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? What questions or curiosities do you have about this passage?
2. What does this story tell us about God?
3. What does this story tell us about humanity?
4. In what ways does this particular passage relate to Brueggemann’s idea of God’s purposes? How might God’s providence already be at work here?
5. What could this story have to say to us today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What about today during this global pandemic?

#### The Swedish Method

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A light bulb should be something that “shines” from the passage — something new or fresh. *What stuck out to you this time through?* Every time we read the Bible, God will be reminding us of things we’ve forgotten and showing us things we haven’t seen before.

And when we read the Bible in a group, he’ll be revealing different things to different people, multiplying the insight and learning. God does not intend for us to see different *meanings*, but to learn the one true multi-dimensional meaning, and then to see some of the limitless implications and applications from that truth.



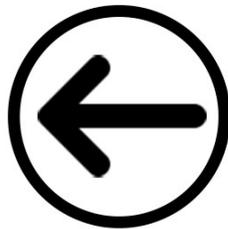
A question mark: Anything that is difficult to understand in the text, or a question the reader would like to ask the writer of the

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passage or the Lord. Did these verses raise any questions as you read? You might stumble over a word or verse, or a connection to another part of the Bible, or a particular theological point.

With every question you ask, try and answer your own question before going to others for help. Some of the deepest, most lasting learning we do comes when we press ourselves to search the Bible for an answer to our own question. The answer might be in the verse we're studying, or in the surrounding chapter or book, or God may bring to mind a verse or verses elsewhere in the Bible. Stop, pray, ask, and do your best. *Then*, turn to others (whether commentaries or other members of your group) for another perspective.

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An arrow indicates a personal application for our lives. Identify and commit to something you sense the Spirit is leading you to do in obedience to this text. Make it specific enough that you can do it this week and make it personal enough that you yourself can do it (and not someone else).

A lot of Bible study, both privately and in a group, falls short of applying the text to our personal lives. One of the great things about studying the Bible in a group is that there's built-in accountability. If you talk out loud with others through steps to take toward greater obedience, you have other people around you to follow up and ask you how those particular things are going.

Arrow (Example): When I do my personal Bible reading, I am going to regularly ask if God might be 1) teaching me something, 2) telling me to stop doing something I am doing, 3) correcting some wrong thinking or behavior, or 4) preparing me to live more effectively for him.

Closing

Remind the group of the Project 15:25 mission partner for the week and ways they can help. Perhaps your COB as a whole wants to join together to support the ministry.

Check in if you haven't already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary. Close with prayer.