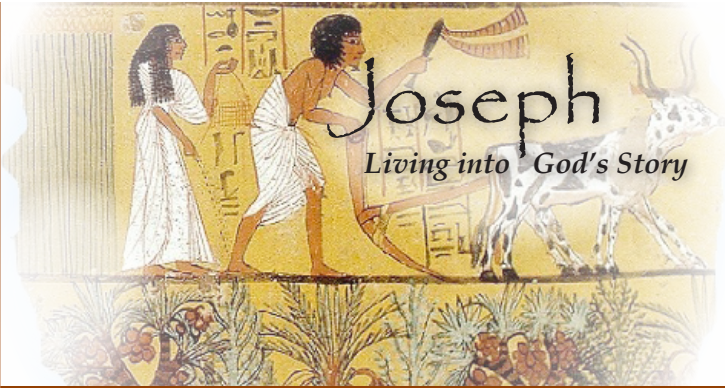


Weekly
Discussion
Guide

March 7,
2010

Genesis 41:
Making Sense
of the Mess



Where we start . . .

Many of us have had the opportunity to travel in foreign lands. Share a story or two about how you initially *misunderstood* something when you were travelling abroad, only to later grasp what was going on.

What we read . . .

Joseph's story continues to unfold before us. How does he make sense of what is going on for him in a foreign land. Let's read Genesis 41, paying particular attention to what Joseph *says*.

What does Joseph reveal about what is going on in his heart through the words recorded in . . . ?

41:16:

41:25, 32:

41:51:

41:52:

Can you come up with a short paragraph that captures the perspective about life that is reflected in Joseph's words noted above?

Why this matters . . .

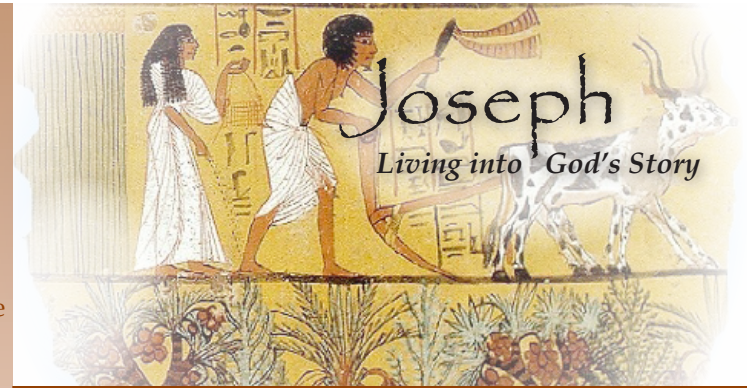
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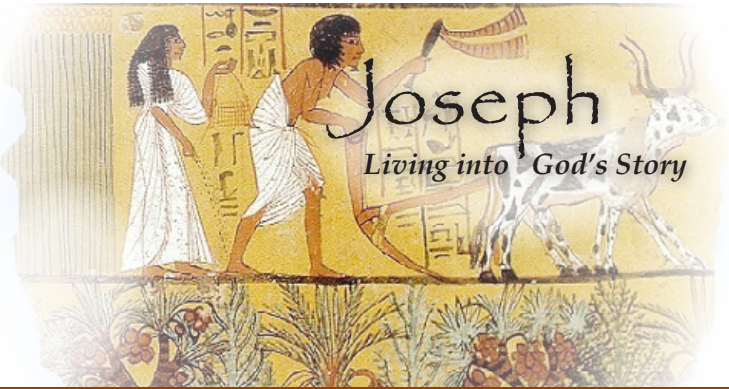
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What are we focusing on?

We are pressing in, seeking to understand not only *how* Joseph lived in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances but also seeking to understand *what enabled* him to live that way. We've seen, in the past few weeks, the remarkable way that he has endured, lived graciously, and bore up under pressure in the worst of circumstances. Seeing his model is helpful; understanding what enabled him to live that way will make his model all the more helpful! And the doorway in to understanding what is going on in Joseph is to listen to what he has to say.

What will we be discussing?

The truth is, we all are *interpreters* of life. No matter what happens to us--good or bad--we do not merely experience life, we interpret it. We attempt to make sense of what is happening in our personal world, trying to make the pieces fit with how we think life should be.

But we don't often recognize that we are interpreters. We all too often simply assume that the way we perceive what is going on is the right and only way to make sense of life. Thus, it is helpful to think about our thinking, and reflect on how and why we draw the conclusions about life--and, subsequently, live out life--the way we do.

The opening discussion point can serve as a light-hearted way into the idea of the way we interpret life. As often happens when visiting a foreign land, the customs and practices leave us a bit confused or disoriented. We try to make sense of what we see and experience in light of how we have come to view the world . . . sometimes with humorous results. Hopefully, your group will have a story or two that will help make it clear that we don't simply experience or watch life happen, we *interpret* what is going on.

As you turn to Genesis 41, we want to be attentive to the clues in the text as to how Joseph is interpreting life. The backdrop for this particular section is, obviously, the dream of Pharaoh. However, as with the previous chapter, the real critical issue is *not* the dream and its interpretation. Of course, the dream and its interpretation move the story along. But what we really need to attend to is how Joseph is living in this story and what indicators we are given to how he is making sense of what is going on in his life.

Out of all the things that are recorded about what Joseph says, there are a few that seem to be particularly helpful in underscoring what is going on in Joseph's mind and heart--the keys to how he is interpreting his life.

In 41:16 he betrays two very significant insights into his own way of thinking. He makes it clear that he himself is not the key to solving Pharaoh's problems and, then, he asserts that God is central to this issue. (To say that God will give Pharaoh a "favorable answer" does not necessarily mean that Joseph believed the dream's interpretation would be to Pharaoh's liking, only that God would graciously provide an answer.)

As we listen to 41:25, 28, and 32, we hear Joseph underscoring that life is not only unfolding as God intends, but God also reserves the right to share (reveal) those dimensions of what He is doing as He so pleases.

When Joseph names his two sons, we get some additional insight into how Joseph interprets his world. In naming his firstborn (41:51), Joseph lets us know that God is freeing him from being defined by the past wrongs done to him; Joseph looks to what God is doing, not what wrongs have been done to him, to set the course for his life. In naming the second (41:52), we see that Joseph does not insist that his circumstances need to be changed in order for God's blessings to be experienced. Even in the land of affliction, Joseph understands that he can experience God's "fruitfulness."

Each of these glimpses into Joseph's heart and mind help us grasp how Joseph interprets his own life. And it is this interpreting of life that enables Joseph to live the way he does, as pictured for us in Genesis.

If we think life is "about me" (perhaps not exclusively but, nevertheless, significantly!), if we think God owes us an explanation of what He is up to, if we think that the wrongs done us must be "undone" for us to move on, and if we think that unless our hard circumstances get changed we will never experience life's blessing, *then we will interpret life in a very specific kind of way and as a result we will find it extremely hard to live in the midst of the difficulties of life with any kind of joy or peace with God.*

We don't only want to learn from Joseph's model of how we lived in the midst of trouble, we also want to grasp the foundation he had for living that way. And what he says, revealing his heart and thoughts about God, and life, and trouble, is the doorway in to understanding.