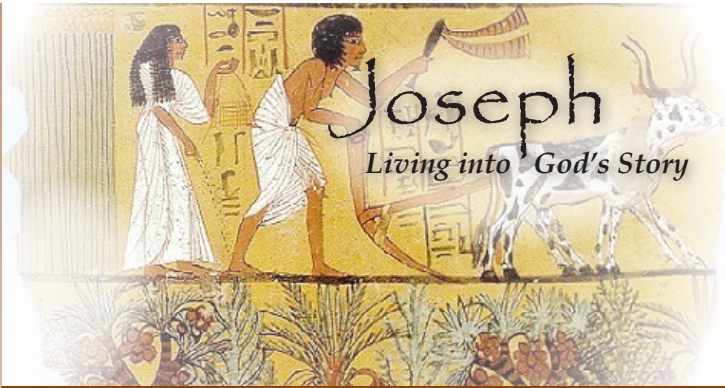


Weekly
Discussion
Guide

March 21,
2010

Genesis 41:
Things Are
Looking Up!



Where we start . . .

In the rhythm of life, we do enjoy times when things are looking up. What impact does an “upswing” have on your relationship with the Lord?

How do you respond to the Lord differently when things are hard in contrast to when things are going well?

What we read . . .

Joseph’s life is not *all* trouble. Read Genesis 41:37-52.

How are things going for Joseph at this point?

What might it have been like for him to experience all of this in light of his past long years of slavery, imprisonment, and mistreatment?

What do you think keeps Joseph from drifting from God now that things are going so very well for him?

What do you hear from Joseph that helps you understand what is keeping him on track?

Why this matters

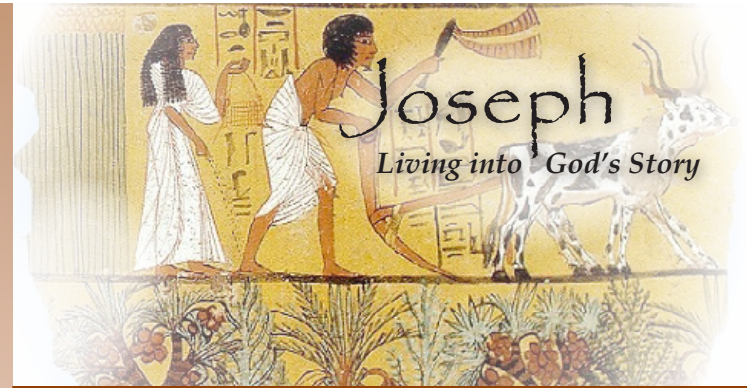
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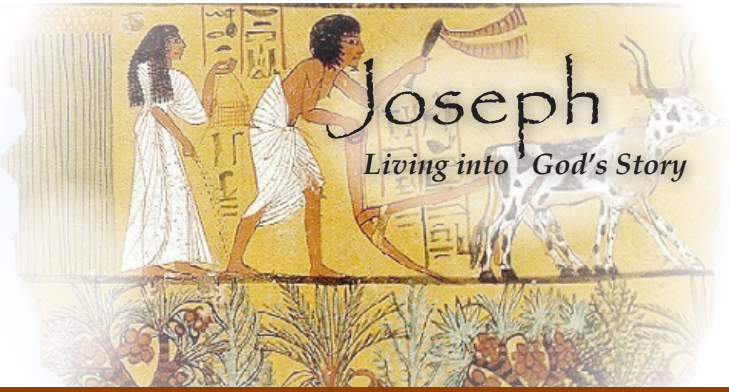
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What are we focusing on?

We've have spent a good deal of time over the past few weeks exploring how Joseph lives well in the midst of difficulty. We have both watched him and listened to what he says in order to learn how to live in the "withness" of God, even in the midst of hard times. But life is not always hard; we do have times and seasons when things seem to be going well. And so does Joseph. We dip back into Genesis 41 to reflect on how Joseph lives when things are looking up! And, for some, this might even be harder than living close to God when we are facing trouble. We tend to call out to God when times are hard . . . and there is a risk of losing sight of God when times are going better.

What will we be discussing?

We don't need to press the opening questions too far; the goal is not to drive home the point that it may be harder to walk in intimacy with God when things are going well, but only to raise awareness that we might relate to God differently when times are "good" than when times are (perceived as) "bad." That awareness is enough.

As you turn to the story of Joseph, it might help to remind the group of where Joseph's story has taken him over the past many years. His brothers sold him, after initially planning his death. Potiphar wrongly imprisoned him, after Joseph only did good to and for him. The cup bearer forgot him, even after Joseph had helped make sense of his dream. Life has been incredibly hard for Joseph. And, as we have seen, Joseph has lived well in the midst of it all because of how he had been *interpreting his own life*.

But the story takes a turn at the end of Genesis 41; things take an "upswing." Things, seemingly, begin to "go well" for

Joseph. An honest reflection on what Genesis 41 tells us makes it clear that Joseph is now in an enviable position that includes rank and riches and power.

How might you feel if your story had been unfolding in this way? How might you act if you went "from rags to riches" in such a fashion? Years of slavery and imprisonment replaced by power and prestige.

Would you think you "deserved" these blessings for all you have suffered? Would you live as if it were "your turn" for things to work out well for you? Would you leverage your power and position to make things go as well as they could for you? Would dependence on God slip from your thoughts? Thinking honestly about how we all live when we step into the "expected blessing" might help us think well about how remarkably Joseph lives.

What Joseph does tell us about what he is thinking in the midst of this "up turn" is helpful. Reflecting on the names of his sons as recorded in Genesis 41:50-52 provides some great insight.

From the naming of Manasseh, we can see that Joseph is not thinking that he "deserves" these blessings, seeing as God has made him forget his past hardships. These blessings are not "pay backs" for wrong suffered; the past wrongs are not in view.

From the naming of Ephraim, we can see that Joseph is not thinking that he somehow merits or deserves these blessings, seeing as he realizes that God is making him fruitful even in these times of affliction. These blessings are not "deserved" or "earned;" they are grace gifts in the midst of his life.

Here we catch a glimpse into how Joseph lives well even in the good times. He is a consistent man; whether in the bad times or the good times, Joseph is still "God's man." Joseph is still interpreting life as if it is all about God and not about him and that what is going on is all about what God wants and not about what Joseph deserves or merits or earns. And it is just that kind of thinking that, apparently, enables Joseph to keep both his heart and his actions right in the midst of blessing.

In the New Testament, this idea of maintaining the right perspective in the midst of blessing undergirds James' counsel to those who expect (and, apparently, experience) the blessings of God in their endeavors. James writes about the necessity of understanding good days as gifts from God (see James 4:15-17); he tells us that whatever good we experience, it is a gift from God (1:17).

Ultimately, what we see is that Joseph is the man he is--whether in the good times or the hard times--because he doesn't allow his circumstances to define him (but he lets his relationship with God define him), and because he rightly interprets life (that all that is happening in life is in the hand of the living God who is doing what he pleases in our lives).