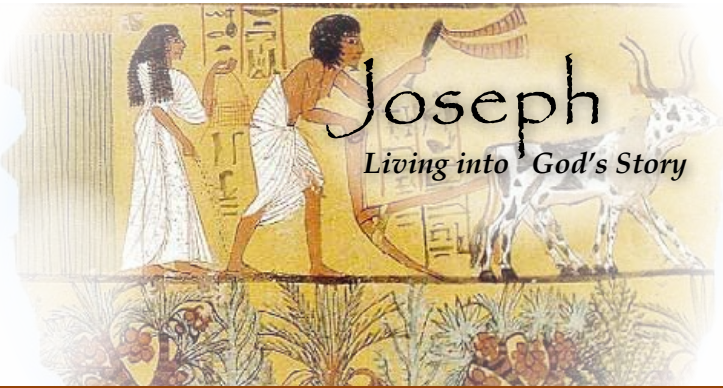


Weekly
Discussion
Guide

March 14,
2010

Genesis 42:
Family
Dynamics



Where we start . . .

In your experience, what kinds of things does God use to draw your attention to Him and His care for you?

What we read . . .

What do you recall about Joseph's brothers? How were things between Joseph and his brothers before Joseph ended up in Egypt?

As we pick up the account in Genesis 42:1-38, pay close attention to what is going on with the brothers.

What do you think God is doing in the lives of the brothers?

How do the brothers speak about what is happening?

Are the brothers interpreting life rightly? Why or why not?

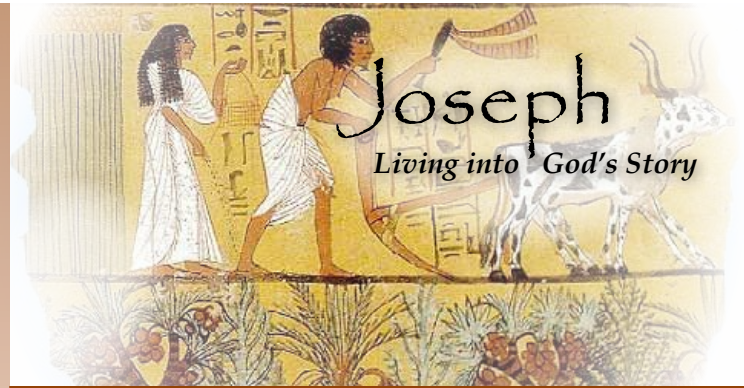
Why this matters . . .

Ultimately, God is ordering things so that the brothers are re-united with Joseph and so that they and their families are provided for. But, at this point in time, the brothers don't see that. What value is there in recognizing that sometimes God is working for good in our lives *that we currently don't see*?

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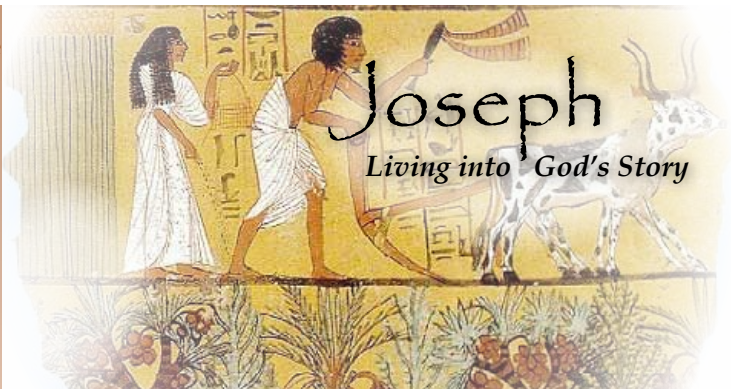
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What are we focusing on?

Over the next few weeks, we will be exploring what God does in reuniting Joseph with his brothers, how He provides for the needs of Joseph's extended family, and how Joseph's dreams end up coming to be fulfilled. As the story unfolds, we are given glimpses of what is going on in the minds and hearts of those involved. This week, we want to take note of both what God is doing with the brothers and how they understand what is happening. In truth, they don't interpret their circumstances entirely correctly . . . but they are becoming aware that God is at work in their lives in unexpected ways. And, that is worth noting.

What will we be discussing?

As we have discussed the past few weeks, we all *interpret* what happens in our lives. We try and make sense of what is happening to us and why it is happening. Sometimes, we interpret well; often we don't.

What does God do to help us re-interpret well? He often uses a variety of things to get our attention. That idea is what is behind the opening question. We want to start thinking about what God uses to call us to rethink what is going on in our lives.

As we turn to the Genesis passage, we want to watch for two things: 1) What happens that God is using to reach Joseph's brothers, and 2) How the brothers are trying to make sense of what is happening to them.

Where is this story going? Ultimately, Joseph's dreams will be fulfilled and Joseph's extended family will be provided for. But in this moment, as the story unfolds in Genesis 42, it is not clear to either Joseph or his brothers exactly what God

is doing. And we get to watch them live in the moment, learning from how they respond.

Pay close attention to what the brothers *say*. Notice, 42:10-11, 42:21 and 42:28. The brothers seem to be aware that what is happening in their lives and their world is not entirely random; they are not the victims of cruel fate. They recognize God's hand in what is occurring. But are they interpreting the events appropriately?

They claim to be entirely honest men. Are they? They admit they had done wrong to their brother (Joseph) and conclude they are reaping the consequences of that past act. Are they? They realize that God is the one who is doing something with them. Is He?

Perhaps the only right conclusion they draw is that God is responsible, in large part, for what is going on! For a very long time, they have not been living as honest men--but God would like them to live that way. For years and years they have been living under the perceived threat of judgment--but God would like to do them good. And so, God is at work to re-work their hearts in a remarkable way.

God has stepped into the world in a massive way--bringing a 14 year cycle of abundance followed by famine--in order to fulfill His plans and bring to fruition the dreams He had given to Joseph. And to do that, He will orchestrate things so that the very natural desperation of the brothers in providing for their families will result in them being in the right place at the right time to be reconciled to Joseph and to have their needs met and so that He can grow up His people into a nation, living in the land of Egypt. So much is going on that they are not aware of!

If we asked Joseph whether he knew what God was doing, he might say, "I am not sure." We are told that "he remembered the dreams that he had dreamed" (42:9). But all the brothers and his father are not (yet) there in Egypt. So, Joseph would likely be still wondering how and when his dreams were to be fulfilled. If we asked the brothers whether they knew what God was doing, they would likely say, "He is doing something, but we don't know what or why!" (42:28)

But God is at work. This we need to see. Often, in our lives, God is orchestrating things for His glory, to advance His plan, to bring to pass what He knows to be good, and we are not sure what He is doing and even when we admit that He is up to something we might not grasp what or why He is doing what He is doing. How important it is that we embrace the amazing truth pictured in this story. Even when we don't see it, even if it entails huge details beyond our grasp, even when we are relatively unaware, God is still working for our good and for His glory in our lives and in our world.