

**A Lenten Reading Guide:  
The Story of Joseph and His Brothers.  
Genesis 37-50**

This reading guide is meant to be a gift to help you walk through the very familiar story of Joseph and his brothers in the book of Genesis

Another tool which can be used to help us more deeply understand the story is the Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber stage play version of “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.” (Certainly other versions are available. Choose your favorite.) Many of the video clips can be found at Youtube.com and will be referenced throughout this guide. The entire video version can also be purchased inexpensively.

On the Sundays in Lent this guide departs from the story itself and invites you to dwell in the Psalm which is assigned for the day. This guide seeks to make connections between these ancient hymns of Israel and the experience of ‘the family of Jacob.’

May this familiar story become new to you and may you be blessed as you travel once more with Jacob, Joseph and his brothers.

**March 5 Ash Wednesday**

Read Psalm 51

How might the words of this Psalm inform the story of Joseph? What role does confession and forgiveness play in our lives? In our relationship with God? In our relationship with one another?

**Thursday, March 6**

Read Genesis 30:22-24

In these verses we hear that the Lord has ‘added’ a son.<sup>1</sup> Think of what you know of the entire story of Joseph. What does the Lord ‘add’ to the story when Joseph is born?

**Friday, March 7**

Read Genesis 37:1-4

If someone were to begin a story about your family with the words, "This is the story of the family of \_\_\_\_\_ (insert your name in the blank)," what story would they tell first? Who would be named? What joys or struggle would be spoken of right up front?

Have you seen the dynamics described in the Biblical story of Joseph play out in your family or other families you know? How do you think your 'family story' might end? Can the ending still be altered? What would need to happen for the future to change?

### **Saturday, March 8**

Read Genesis 37:1-4

The 'long robe' with sleeves signifies not only Jacob's particular love for Joseph, but also the fact that he is granting him a kind of authority the other 'older' brothers do not have and will not receive. (The practice in that time and place, was that the older brother was the designated heir or leader, so Jacob is acting against accepted practice and tradition. See Deuteronomy 21:15-17) See the film clip of "Joseph's Coat" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z06vEUfmuMQ>

There are other places in scripture where God 'raises up' the younger brother in a special way. Can you think of some of those places? (Jacob, David and The Prodigal Son would be just a couple of examples.)

Scripture reminds us over and over that God is full of such surprises. How has God surprised you?

### **Sunday, March 9**

Read Psalm 32

Consider how this Psalm speaks to the experiences of Joseph and his brothers.

When we do not acknowledge our sin, what effect does the Psalmist say it has on us?

How is 'sin' present in the story of Joseph? Where do you see faithfulness? What is the role of forgiveness in this story?

### **Monday, March 10**

Read Genesis 37:5-11

Compare the reactions of the brothers and their father, Jacob, to Joseph's dreams.

Are you surprised at the brothers' reaction? Why or why not? See the film clip of "Joseph's Dreams" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8S-wns2vBI>

Compare Jacob's reaction in 37:11 to Mary's response to the angels' message in Luke 1:29.

We experience dreams in a number of ways: some we experience when we are sleeping and others are ones we hold when we are wide awake. At first the dreams described here are understood to be of the former variety. Once the dreamer is awake, though, these dreams are accepted as some sort of message from God. (Take a moment to look at other examples of these kinds of dreams in Genesis 28: 10-17, Matthew 1:12-13 and Matthew 27:19)

Do you ever think of your dreams as 'messages from God? Why or why not?

### **Tuesday, March 11**

Read Genesis 37:12-24

What do you think drove the brothers to the point of considering fratricide?

See the film clip of "Poor, Poor Joseph" here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmtcuAxnyHw>

Why do you think Reuben intervenes? (See Genesis 29:32 for a little more about Reuben. Where does he fall in the birth order?) How has your 'birth order' influenced or shaped you?

Consider what we know about the symbolism of Joseph's robe. What is the significance of their removing Joseph's robe?

### **Wednesday, March 12**

Read Genesis 37:25-28

After they throw Joseph into a pit, what do the brothers do? Why do you think this detail is shared?

This time Judah intervenes. What do you think his motivation is?

### **Thursday, March 13**

Read Genesis 37:29-35

The brothers don't outright lie to their father, but they do deceive him nonetheless. Do you find it difficult to imagine that they would allow him to suffer so?

Take note of how the clothing tells the story at this juncture. (Note 37:31, 32, 33, and 34)

How does Jacob react? Have you ever experienced such grief? What words would you use to describe it? How have others attempted to comfort you? Were they helpful or not?

See the film clip of "One More Angel in Heaven" for a far too light hearted version of the story here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0IJV4vOkAQ>

### **Friday, March 14**

Read Genesis 39:1-6a

To what does the narrator attribute Joseph's success in Egypt so far? Underline those places where the Lord is mentioned.

What difference would it make if we thought in this way? In other words, how much of our 'success' is because God is *with* us? This way of thinking is clearly counter cultural and may not come naturally to us. Consider keeping track of the things you are grateful for each day and offering thanks to God for them. Try this for a week and see what kind of difference it makes.

### **Saturday, March 15**

Read Genesis 39:6b-18

Joseph finds himself in a terrible position here. Even though he is granted a great deal of trust and authority he is still a "Hebrew slave." (Take note of how Potiphar's wife labels him after he rejects her advances) If he denies his master's wife, Joseph's life will be very uncomfortable in the extreme. If he does not deny her, apparently he can be put to death.<sup>ii</sup> See the film clip of "Potiphar" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKOJfrljowk>

What gives Joseph the strength to deny her? Do you suppose he continues to 'remember the dream?' How can such memories or 'dreams' sustain us during difficult times? What do you draw upon when you are faced with situations like these which urge you to compromise what is most valuable to you?

As a sideline, consider the role of 'clothing' in this part of the story.

### **Sunday, March 16**

#### **Read Psalm 121**

This is also known as a Psalm for Travelers. How might these words have spoken to Joseph? How has God's help come to Joseph so far? How do these words speak to you?

### **Monday, March 17**

Read Genesis 39:19-23

Even though he has landed in prison, God continues to 'favor' Joseph (see especially verses 21 and 23). See the film clip of "Close Every Door" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7N5NccUC-CE>

Look up Jeremiah 1:8, Psalm 23 and Matthew 28:20 for other examples of how the Lord's steadfast love described.

**Tuesday, March 18**

Read Genesis 40:1-8

Again we encounter dreams. Once more, it seems that God is making God's presence known in mysterious ways. Some believe it is helpful to write down one's dreams --- if for no other purpose than to help gain some insight into how your subconscious is processing your life. To be sure, it may also lead to deeper awareness of how God is working. Do you remember your dreams? Is there one in particular that stays with you?

**Wednesday, March 19**

Read Genesis 40:9-15

In verse 15, Joseph articulates to the chief cupbearer his understanding of his journey so far. In spite of the special responsibilities (and perhaps privileges) he has been given while imprisoned, he wants his freedom! Do you think Joseph's offer to interpret their dreams was partly self-serving? Or might it have been that when this opportunity presented itself, it was his way of recognizing God's possible intervention?

See the film clip of "Go, Go Joseph!" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6ZztMthQZw>

Clearly, Joseph was given the gift of interpreting dreams. What gifts has God given you? How are you called upon to use them? How are these gifts God's way of making your life better?

**Thursday, March 20**

Read Genesis 40:20-23

Why do you think the chief cupbearer does not remember Joseph?

What inner resources do you think Joseph relies upon now to deal with this disappointment?

What resources do you draw upon when you are disappointed? Where do you find the courage to persevere when you wonder when/if/how God is at work after all?

**Friday, March 21**

Read Genesis 41:1-13

See the film clip of "Song of the King" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BhAKKz3-CA>

We hear about dreams yet one more time in the story. By now it is apparent that even the most powerful are not protected from them.

The Nile is the 'source of life' in Egypt. It is significant that Pharaoh's dreams are centered there.<sup>iii</sup>

What would hold that same central importance in the world/community you call home? What is the 'source of life' (livelihood, etc.) where you live?

Pharaoh awakened 'troubled' from these dreams. Why do you think he didn't just shake them off as night-time imaginings? Have you ever had a dream like this which wouldn't let go of you? How did you deal with it?

### **Saturday, March 22**

Read Genesis 41:14-24

You will notice that Joseph took the time "to shave himself and change his clothes" before approaching Pharaoh. This would not necessarily strike us in this culture, but in that time and place, apparently Hebrew men did not shave. Egyptians did.<sup>iv</sup> Knowing this, how do you understand Joseph's preparations in verse 14?

Before Pharaoh tells his dream to Joseph, Joseph gives the credit to God. Looking back, you will see that Joseph does not speak of God directly before now. Why now?

Pharaoh is "all powerful" --- except clearly, he and his servants do not understand the ways of God. Given this, are you surprised that he is open to Joseph's interpretation? Why or why not?

### **Sunday, March 23**

Read Psalm 95

This Psalm speaks of how everything we know and hold dear belongs to God and comes from God. How is this truth making itself known in the story of Joseph? How do you know it is true in your life? What is the Psalmist's response to this? What is your response?

### **Monday, March 24**

Read Genesis 41:25-36, 37-45

Notice that Joseph not only interprets Pharaoh's dreams, but he also offers a remedy for the devastating future which is predicted.

Given that powerful people are often averse to and even intentionally sheltered from 'bad news,' why do you think Pharaoh is open to Joseph's interpretation? Why does Pharaoh say he is appointing Joseph to this all important role?

What do we read here which symbolizes Joseph's elevation to such authority? See especially 41:41-45.

### **Tuesday, March 25**

Read Genesis 41:46-49

Think of how difficult it would have been for Joseph to accomplish what is described here without the authority granted him by Pharaoh.

What does it mean to have authority? Is it granted or earned or some combination of both?

Think of times when you have been given authority, or conversely when authority was denied you? What difference did it make?

### **Wednesday, March 26**

Read Genesis 41:50-52

Consider what Joseph names his sons. Do you think he has actually been able "to forget all his hardship and all of his father's house?" How easy is it to forget one's origins? What makes you answer in this way?

### **Thursday, March 27**

Read Genesis 41:53-57

Take a look back at 41:49. At that point, it may have made sense for Joseph to stop storing up grain. Because he did not, they were able to "feed the entire hungry world." (See especially 41:57.) What does this tell us about how big God's world-view is? You know what's coming next, but can you see how verse 57 is a kind of foreshadowing of the next chapters?

### **Friday, March 28**

Read Genesis 42:1-5

Meanwhile, back in Canaan... Notice that in this very patriarchal culture, Jacob still is in charge -- even of his grown sons.

See the film clip of "Those Canaan Days" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZOWrk61Zl4>

We hear that as the rest of the brothers travel to Egypt in search of food, Benjamin is kept behind. How is the past influencing the future here? (Look up the story of Benjamin's birth in Genesis 35:16-21.) Do you think that after Joseph was out of the picture Benjamin received the same treatment as Joseph did? Why or why not? If he did, we have every reason to believe the brothers responded differently this time. Why do you think this is so?

### **Saturday, March 29**

Read Genesis 42:6-7

See the film clip of "The Brothers Go to Egypt" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ov2FJhVOT0w>

With all the 'known world' lined up in Egypt to obtain grain, how is it possible that Joseph, who was in charge of it all, was in the right time and place to actually see and recognize his

brothers? Do you suppose maybe he has not 'forgotten' after all? Is it possible that he was actually watching for them?

Have you ever wondered why it is that in all the years that had passed Joseph never managed to get word to his father that he was still alive?

We humans are complicated beings, it is true. Still, how do you think Joseph might have processed all that had happened in relation to his family? What clues are offered to us in the story?

### **Sunday, March 30**

Read Psalm 23

This familiar and much beloved Psalm spoke long ago and continues to speak today. How does God provide? How is God present when we walk through the 'darkest valley? How was this true for Joseph? How is it true for you?

### **Monday, March 31**

Read Genesis 42:6-17

See the film clip of "Grovel, Grovel" at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpJvUrSd\\_2k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpJvUrSd_2k)

Joseph recognizes his brothers. Why do you think he then 'speaks harshly to them?'

When he accuses them of being spies, how do they respond?

Why do you think the brothers offer so much information --- even more than what Joseph asks for?

Why do you think it is important to Joseph that he see Benjamin again? Why do you think he doesn't ask for his father to make the journey?

### **Tuesday, April 1**

Read Genesis 42:18-25

It appears that Joseph's heart is softening. Why do you think he decides to release all but one of his brothers?

Consider the role of unresolved guilt in this story. It is evident that Joseph has not forgotten his family --- nor what was done to him. Even though his brothers do not recognize him yet, clearly they have not forgotten either.



What role does unresolved guilt play in our lives? Is there something for which you have not asked or have not accepted forgiveness? What difference would forgiveness make to you? What difference might it make to someone from whom you are withholding forgiveness?

In verse 24 we hear that Joseph “turned away from them and wept.” Put yourself in Joseph's shoes. What do you think prompts this reaction?

### **Wednesday, April 2**

Read Genesis 42:26-28

A surprise is waiting for the brothers when they open their sacks. Why do you think Joseph has seen to it that their money has been returned to them? How do the brothers respond? (See also verse 35.) Why do they respond in this way? How would you have reacted?

### **Thursday, April 3**

Read Genesis 42:29-38

How would you characterize Jacob's response to the brothers' report? From this vantage point, how has Joseph's death shaped his life?

Note Reuben's response in verse 37. Why do you think he puts himself on the line in this way?

### **Friday, April 4**

Read Genesis 43:1-10

Jacob has a real dilemma on his hands. He can hold on to Benjamin and he and his family will starve (and God's ancient promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:1-9 will be negated these several generations later) or he can let Benjamin travel with his brothers and be given the means for life and continue to hold on to God's promise to his family.

Note how the brothers' account of their conversation with ‘the man’ is different from what is relayed in Genesis 42:9-13. What do you make of that?

Take note of Judah's offer in verses 8-9. Why do you think he makes this promise now?

### **Saturday, April 5**

**Read Genesis 43:11-15**

Here we read that Jacob finally gives in and allows Benjamin to accompany his brothers on their return trip to Egypt. Where is Jacob now in his journey with grief and loss?

Take note of the special gifts he sends along with them. If you look back at 37:25, the Ishmaelite traders were bearing similar things on their camels. Evidently these were rare in Egypt. What might be the purpose of these gifts? Why do you think they carry “double the money” with them as well?

**Sunday, April 6****Read Psalm 130**

How do these words speak to or reflect the conclusion of the story of Joseph and his brothers?  
Where does redemption come from?

How might these words have spoken to Jacob/Israel in his long journey with grief?

How do these words speak to you?

**Monday, April 7**

Read Genesis 43:15-34

Note that this time Joseph specifically asks about their father's welfare. How does he then react when he sees Benjamin?

Notice the eating arrangements described here. Evidently, Joseph, with all of his power and authority is not now and never will be 'truly' an Egyptian. Given his status in Egypt, Joseph is also not allowed to eat with his brothers. It is as though he does not fully belong in either world. Where and how in your life have you experienced this?

Do you think the brothers noticed Benjamin's preferential treatment? If so, how do you think they understood it?

**Tuesday, April 8**

Read Genesis 44:1-17

See the film clip of "Who's the Thief" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFprn5BVI1E>

Why do you think Joseph 'frames' Benjamin in this way?

**Wednesday, April 9**

Read Genesis 44:18-34

Just a moment before, the brothers were bowing down to Joseph. In verse 18, we hear that Judah has stood up and has closed the physical gap between them.<sup>v</sup> Compare his words here to what he says in 37:26.

See the response of the brothers in "Benjamin Calypso" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFprn5BVI1E>

**Thursday, April 10**

Read Genesis 45:1-14

See the film clip at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urFNII9FtYA>

What is it about Judah's words which prompt Joseph's reaction now?

Most believe that Joseph's speech in verses 4-8 sums up the whole intent of the story of Joseph and his brothers.<sup>vi</sup> What do his words say about how God works? Paraphrase it in a sentence or two.

Some believe that Joseph had not even put all the pieces together until now --- and it is so that at least prior to this he gives no hint of having done so. What do you think?

Forgiveness is not so much explicitly spoken as it is lived here. Can you think of times when forgiveness has been offered to you even without words? How did you experience that?

### **Friday, April 11**

Read Genesis 45:16-28

Forgiveness continues to be demonstrated in Joseph's abundant generosity to his brothers for their journey home.

Why do you think Joseph tells his brothers not to 'quarrel' along the way home? (See verse 24.) What might have caused them to quarrel?

Do you think the brothers ever told their father the whole story of how Joseph wound up in Egypt? If so, how do you think that conversation went?

For one version of Joseph's reunion with Jacob see the film clip here:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S\\_G3uKGavCg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_G3uKGavCg)

### **April 12**

**Read Genesis 46:1-4 and 50:15-21**

Clearly the brothers have been fearing that Joseph had only spared them revenge until after their father died. How does Joseph respond to their fear?

Return again to Joseph's original dream which had the sheaves of wheat (his brothers) bowing down to his sheaf of wheat and the sun, moon and stars bowing down to him. (See 37:5-11.) At the end of the story in 50:19-20, how does Joseph now understand those dreams?

Forgiveness and reconciliation are, indeed, central to the Biblical Story. As we complete our journey through this epic story, we are led to understand that both find their roots in the heart and the intent of God.

### **April 13: Palm/Passion Sunday**

Read Psalm 31:9-16

Reflect on the words of Psalm 31. How do they speak to the meaning of the story of Joseph and his brothers? How is Joseph's speech to his brothers in Genesis 45:4-8 reflected in these words? How do these words speak to you on your journey?

### **Final Thoughts**

As you conclude your journey through the story of the Joseph and his brothers, what lasting impressions do you carry?

A number of years ago, I taught a course on the Power of Forgiveness. A number of examples shared in the class had to do with acts of violence perpetrated by strangers and how those who were victimized forgave them. A woman approached me after one of our sessions and said, "Oh, but that kind of forgiveness is easy. How much harder it is to forgive those we had loved and trusted and who then betrayed us."

While I might argue that no forgiveness is necessarily 'easy,' she did have a point. Perhaps it is so that we have much more to forgive when we were previously in a trusting relationship with those who hurt us. This was certainly the case in the story of Joseph and his Brothers.

As we enter into Holy Week, we journey again into the heart of God's forgiveness for us all which is merely foreshadowed in the story of Joseph and his brothers. How has your understanding of God's Sacrifice and Forgiveness for you been deepened by your journey through this ancient story? Although it differs in many ways, it is certain that God was also working through the events of the first Holy Week 'for good.' (See Joseph's words to his brothers in Genesis 50:20). Indeed, while others meant the suffering and death of Jesus to 'do harm,' God used it to do great good! Amen! Alleluia!

For further study:

"Actor's Playhouse at the Miracle Theater Presents: Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat: A Student Enrichment Guide." [www.actorsplayhouse.org/joseph\\_study%20.pdf](http://www.actorsplayhouse.org/joseph_study%20.pdf)

If you are looking for a quick overview of the story's plot, music, Biblical texts, etc., through the lens of the stage play, this is a great place to start.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Genesis*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982.

Brueggemann's classic treatment of the story of Joseph would offer ample background for understanding the story. He offers helpful outlines and connections to other parts of Scripture.

Dempsey, Carol J. and Elayne J. Shapiro. *Reading the Bible: Transforming Conflict*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011.

Chapters 2-4 of Dempsey and Shapiro's exploration of this story seeks to understand it in terms of what it teaches about reconciliation. Since many have concluded that is one of the main points of the story, these chapters serve as a very helpful resource.

King, Philip J. and Lawrence E. Stager. *Life in Biblical Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

This volume is especially helpful as one seeks a deeper understanding of social and family structures in ancient Israel.

Millgram, Hillel I. *The Joseph Paradox: A Radical Reading of Genesis 37-50*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2012.

I found this somewhat unorthodox treatment of the story helpful. Hillel Millgram asks questions that many mainline scholars don't necessarily explore. The questions he posed enabled me to go deeper in my understanding.

---

<sup>i</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching: Genesis*(Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 299.

<sup>ii</sup> Brueggemann, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching: Genesis*, 315-316.

<sup>iii</sup>Brueggemann, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching: Genesis*, 327.

<sup>iv</sup> Hillel I. Millgram, *The Joseph Paradox: A Radical Reading of Genesis 37-50*(Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2012), 82-83.

<sup>v</sup>Millgram, *The Joseph Paradox: A Radical Reading of Genesis 37-50*, 125.

<sup>vi</sup>Brueggemann,*Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching: Genesis*, 343-351