



Osborne Baptist Church

PURSUING GOD IN ISOLATION • SESSION TWO: ISOLATED FROM FAMILY •
GENESIS 37:2-28; 39:1-20; 41:1-13; 50:15-21 • NO DATE

MAIN POINT

When we feel wronged by those we love, we are tempted to become isolated in bitterness and cynicism. Yet, God's continual presence reminds us of His grace and enables us to show that grace to others.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever felt cheated out of something? If you have come to peace with it, what were some things that helped you overcome this feeling?

How might feeling cheated out of something lead a person to feel isolated? When have you experienced this result?

Feeling cheated can easily lead to us feeling miserable and embittered. If we hold onto this feeling, it will soon begin tainting all of our thoughts and make us very cynical. Being bitter is not a good place to be and can lead us to a place of isolation.

Joseph had plenty of opportunities to be embittered. His brothers hated him, he was sold into slavery, he wound up losing a great job because someone lied, and he languished in prison because of a lie. In this lesson, we will look at Joseph's remarkable perseverance and see how even though he was literally isolated from his family and homeland he kept from becoming bitter.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 37:2-11,17-20,28.

What stands out to you about the Bible's description of Joseph?

After Joseph revealed his dreams, his brothers took their father's sheep to seek pasture land near Shechem. We aren't told why Joseph did not go too, but it could have had something to do with his "most favored son" status. Perhaps Jacob sought to protect Joseph from his brothers' hatred until they cooled down. Even so, Jacob eventually sent Joseph to check on his brothers and to bring back a report.

What might Joseph have been thinking or praying as he was betrayed by his brothers and carried off as a slave, separated from his father?

How would Joseph have been tempted to move toward bitterness and further isolation from his brothers? How would you be?

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 39:1-4,10-15,19-20.

Genesis 39 relates an important instance of Joseph's faithfulness to the Lord while living in Egypt. Joseph practiced his faith when others might have been resentful. His loyalty to his master, Potiphar, resulted in an attempted seduction by his master's wife. The short-term result was Joseph's undeserved imprisonment. Yet, in spite of the constant setbacks, Joseph knew God was with him. The Lord's faithfulness in blessing Joseph proved that the evil schemes of others cannot prevent God's plans from succeeding through those who He desires to use.

To what must we credit Joseph's favor and success in these verses?

How did being aware of God's presence have made a difference in Joseph's life? How would always being aware of God's presence make a difference in your life?

How would Joseph have been further tempted toward bitterness and cynicism following these events? How does a continual remembrance of God's presence enable us to fight bitterness and cynicism in literal times of isolation?

Joseph knew rejecting Potiphar's wife would cost him dearly, but he was determined not to sin. The same faithfulness that had resulted in his becoming Potiphar's chief servant also brought about his fall into disfavor and prison.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 41:1A,9-13.

What might Joseph have been thinking after two years without a change in his difficult circumstances?

What did the cupbearer's restored memory mean for Joseph? What about for Pharaoh? What does it mean for us?

When was a time you were waiting on someone to come through on a promise for you? How did you respond as you waited? How are we tempted to move further into isolation and possibly further away from God in these moments?

Through the cupbearer's restored memory, God provided Pharaoh an opportunity to have his dream interpreted, and He provided Joseph an opportunity to get out of prison. God had a role in the cupbearer's remembering Joseph. What a great reminder that God can be trusted to take the right action at the right time. God works on our behalf, but He does so on His schedule. We can trust Him to protect, provide, and work all things for our good and His glory.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 50:15-21.

What did Joseph reveal to his brothers about God's plans? How had Joseph's life shown evidence that he believed this?

Do you think God is working out the events in your life not only for your own good, but also for the good of others around you? How can you show this in the way you live?

Joseph recognized that his brothers were not the ones who had caused all of the events of his life. Despite their evil intentions, God was ultimately in control over all the events of his life—his slavery, his time in prison, his being placed in a high position of power. In these events God had worked to save not only Joseph, but also his family and many people in Egypt. In light of this, Joseph showed comfort and favor to his brothers as he had been shown by God.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Think about a time you have felt isolated from people you loved because of a broken relationship. How is God speaking to you about that in light of today's study?

How might you fight against moving toward bitterness and cynicism in these seasons of isolation but instead seek faith in God, that you might exhibit His grace to others?

PRAYER

Thank God that He is ultimately in control of our lives no matters what we face. Ask Him to lead you to fight against bitterness in your life and instead seek to exhibit His grace to others, even when they have hurt you.

COMMENTARY

| GENESIS 37

37:2-4 The account begins with a description of 17-year-old Joseph, the central human figure in this section. Jacob's unequal treatment of his sons aroused great jealousy, so that Joseph's brothers hated him. The robe of many colors probably marked Joseph as Jacob's chosen successor for clan leadership, especially since he was the firstborn of Rachel, the only woman Jacob had ever intended to marry.

37:5-11 Like his father Jacob (28:12-15; 31:10-13), Joseph received two dreams from God during his lifetime. Both portrayed Joseph as gaining a position of supremacy in his family, though the symbols differed greatly. The first dream used an agricultural image (v. 7). The second, more important and wider in scope than the first, was astronomical (vv. 9-10). The pairing of dreams with a shared meaning meant that God would certainly make the events happen (41:32).

37:18-24 Joseph's older brothers, all of whom hated him and were violent men (34:27-29) or even murderers (34:25-26), plotted to kill him, calling him "the lord of the dreams" (that dreamer). Being skilled at deception as well (34:13), the brothers also concocted the lie that a vicious animal ate him. They threw him into a dry cistern designed to store water for the flocks.

37:25-28 The fact that Joseph's brothers sat down to eat a meal soon after they disposed of him reveals how brazenly sinful they were. Judah convinced seven of his brothers that it was more profitable to sell Joseph as a slave than to kill him. According to 42:21, Joseph pleaded with his brothers, but to no avail. They sold him for 20 pieces of silver, the standard price for a teenage male slave.

37:36 Even as Jacob mourned his son's death, Joseph—very much alive—was taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, a prestigious military officer in the court of Pharaoh.

| GENESIS 39

39:2-6 Because the Lord is God over the whole earth, He was with Joseph even in Egypt. God's active presence in Joseph's life made him successful. Potiphar noticed the teenage Hebrew

slave's remarkable effectiveness, and as a result Joseph not only found favor with him, but was put in charge of Potiphar's entire household as well. With Joseph in charge, the Lord's blessing extended to all that Potiphar owned.

39:7-10 In contrast to his brother Judah, who sacrificed his honor for the pleasure of a prostitute (38:15-16), Joseph refused the advances of his master's wife. To commit adultery would have been a great evil and a sin against God. Potiphar's wife persisted, telling Joseph day after day to "lie beside her" (go to bed with her).

39:11-15 When the subtle approach failed to seduce Joseph, Potiphar's wife resorted to a more direct method. Finding—or perhaps creating—a situation where none of the household servants except Joseph was in the house, she grabbed Joseph by his garment and ordered him to sleep with her. In a courageous display of godly self-control, Joseph resisted, escaped and ran outside, leaving his garment in her hand. Potiphar's wife then lied to the household servants, playing upon the other slaves' jealousy that had been inflamed when Potiphar placed the Hebrew young man over them as their boss. The presence of Joseph's garment seemed like circumstantial evidence for her false claim.

39:16-20 When Potiphar's wife repeated the story to her husband, she framed the lie in a way that placed the blame squarely on him. Her story made Potiphar furious. Without investigating the truth of her claims, Potiphar declared Joseph guilty. But instead of killing him, he had him thrown into prison.

39:21-23 The Lord, who is present in Sheol (Ps 139:8), was also with Joseph in prison. God, who is rich in "faithful love", demonstrated His love by granting Joseph favor in the eyes of the prison warden. For the third time in his life, Joseph was given authority over his peers—in this case, all the prisoners who were in the prison. Mirroring Potiphar's level of confidence in Joseph, the warden did not "see anything in his hand" (bother with anything under Joseph's authority) because the Lord caused everything Joseph did to be successful.

| GENESIS 41

41:1-7 Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the world of his day, was also the Egyptian who received dreams from God that were far-reaching in their implications. His two dreams, both on the same night, had essentially identical plots, though the images were different. Both had 14 items, seven healthy and seven thin and sickly. In both dreams the seven healthy things appeared first, only to be consumed by the afflicted ones. Both were symbolic since they contained features not found in the real world.

41:8-14 These dreams clearly indicated trouble, but exactly what trouble was the question. To unravel the mystery, Pharaoh summoned all the court magicians, who would have received instruction from ancient Egyptian scrolls of dream interpretation. Pharaoh also summoned all of Egypt's wise men to assist in the critical task of discerning the dreams' meanings. However, no one could interpret the dreams satisfactorily. The crisis caused the chief cupbearer to remember how Joseph had accurately interpreted two mysterious dreams two years earlier. Desperate for insight into his own dreams, Pharaoh immediately sent for Joseph. Prior to entering the royal court he had to be shaved—probably both his beard and scalp—and he put on clothes made of linen, as was appropriate for the Egyptian court. Joseph's change in appearance mirrored the change that was about to occur in his career.

41:15-16 Fluent in the Egyptian language after 13 years in the land, Joseph listened intently as Pharaoh described his problem. With humility Joseph confessed to Pharaoh that he was unable to interpret the dreams, but confidently added that his God would give Pharaoh the information he desired.

41:17-24 As Pharaoh repeated his account of the dreams, he added that the ugly cows still appeared wasted after they had eaten the healthy ones.

41:25-32 Joseph prefaced his interpretation with three important insights: first, Pharaoh actually had only one dream (lit "Pharaoh's dream is one"), though it was given twice using different symbols. Second, the dream's source was the one true God (lit "the God"). Third, it revealed what God was about to do.

41:33-36 Joseph advised Pharaoh to take four steps in preparation for the upcoming 14-year cycle of events in order to create a food reserve for the seven years of famine.

41:37-46 Joseph's insight into the dream, along with his ability to devise such an intelligent plan, convinced Pharaoh that Joseph had God's spirit in him. Pharaoh gave Joseph the Egyptian name Zaphenath-paneah ("Then God Said, 'Let Him Live'") and a wife of high social status. Asenath ("She Who Belongs to the Goddess Neith") was the daughter of Potiphara, a priest at On (Heliopolis), the prestigious religious center of solar worship in ancient Egypt. Joseph, who was now 30 years old, had been transformed by God in 13 years from an imprisoned foreign slave to the world's second most powerful man. He who had spent years in prison now went throughout the land of Egypt overseeing a project that would save the lives of untold thousands.

| GENESIS 50:15-21

51:15-16 The death of Jacob had a bearing on the outlook of the brothers, fearing that Joseph held a deep-seated grudge despite his earlier assurance of pardon (45:5–7). Their fear of retaliation was not irrational. However, Joseph would rise above personal revenge, viewing the lives of his brothers in view of God's better purposes.

51:19-21 Joseph acknowledges that he is not in control of history's measures. Divine purpose prohibits Joseph from exacting personal vengeance, yet personal experience with the providence of God through difficult circumstances confirmed for him that he could never usurp God's sovereign design by taking the lives of his brothers into his own hands. It was God, after all, who had transformed the brothers' evil intentions into good, achieving the deliverance of many peoples.