



HOME GROUPS

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Series: **Joseph Part Four**

Kensington Commons

Text: Genesis 39

SUMMARY:

Over the last couple of weeks, we looked at the beginning of the Joseph story and how refusing to see the humanity of others prevents us from being the people of welcome. Today we follow Joseph to Egypt and see how the presence of God manifests itself in small and big ways in Joseph's life and creates an alternative reading of reality that exposes the imbalances of power.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In Genesis 37, when the storyteller describes the approaching caravan of Ishmaelites to whom the brothers sell Joseph, we're given a detailed account of the fragrances which the brothers could not smell from the distance. A Jewish Midrash from the 5th century believes that the mention of spices, balm and myrrh indicates a providential amelioration of Joseph's suffering on the road to Egypt.¹

¹ N. Sarna, Genesis, 260.

² "the food he ate" - a euphemism for physical intimacy with his wife

Those small details indirectly communicate the presence of God's grace at the point in the story where God seems to be absent and provide a measure of healing.

What small moments of beauty have you noticed this week? Has there been anything lately that lifted your spirit and subtly indicated God's presence in your life?

2. Read Genesis 39:1-6, paying attention to what words and phrases are repeated in the text. What do we learn about Joseph from this introduction to his life in Egypt? What does the author communicate about the distribution of power or authority in this section? What elements are used to foreshadow the conflict?²

3. This is the first time God's presence is named in the story. God was not mentioned when things were going well for Joseph or when Joseph was thrown in a cistern.

Why do we think we tend to lose sight of God when things are going well for us and/or when we experience difficult times?

How do you tend to miss or not notice God's presence? And what helps you in those moments to get "unstuck"? Is there anything (sound, smell, ritual, memory, activity) you regularly go back to that reminds you of God's presence with you?

4. Consider Genesis 39:6-10, noticing how the author portrays the dialogue between Potiphar's wife and Joseph.³ What are the woman's tactics? What are Joseph's reasons for saying no?

Discuss your own experience with either negative or positive repetitive messages. How do you cope with things that creature pressure in your life by speaking to you persistently and repeatedly, demanding your attention or distracting you? Or, talk about what has helped you to handle a situation with a clear imbalance of power.

5. Look at Genesis 39:11-23, noticing how Joseph's garment again becomes part of his story. How does the wife tell the story to different audiences? What adjustments does she make?⁴ How does the imbalance of power play out here?

6. How does Joseph's experience in prison echo the one in Potiphar's house?⁵ And what do you think the narrator wants to communicate to us by starting and ending this episode in Joseph's life like that?⁶

³ "took notice of Joseph": literally "lifted up her eyes to Joseph"

"Come to bed with me" - *sikba immi* - "mere two words in Hebrew, an expression never used of marriage." Waltke, *Genesis*, 520

⁴ "The framing of Joseph on false charges is capped by the pejorative name, "Hebrew" (v. 17). This use (cf. 40:15; 41:12; 43:32) reflects a low class, socially rejected person, undoubtedly scorned by the people around the throne." W.Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation*, 316.

⁵ In vv.19-23 the same verb is used with three different subjects: 1) master "placed" Joseph in prison, 2) Yhweh "placed" (disposed) the chief jailer in his favour, 3) the jailer "placed" the prisoners in Joseph's charge. V. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 18-50*, 472.

⁶ The episodes of Joseph's slavery and being in prison cover about 11 years of his life.

7. What does this story tell us about God, power and the powerless?

Whose voices and stories do you think our culture has not been listening to? Who would you like to pay more attention to this week?

BENEDICTION/PRAYER:

*God,
as we are reminded today of systems of injustice
and imbalance that dehumanize our neighbours,
as we remember moments when our stories have not been
heard, when we acknowledge those moments
when we did not listen well,
as we mourn today those whose lives were taken this past
week,
may we come to recognize all of the ways
that we participate in, and we benefit from,
and we are crushed by systems
that strip us from our humanity.*

*Grant, o God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit
may so move in every human heart
that the barriers that divide us might crumble,
suspicion disappear, hatred cease,
that our divisions might be healed,
also that we might live in justice and peace.
In the strong name of the reason Christ we pray.
Amen.*