

*Use this format as a family, a couple, or with a small group.

Message Summary

Throughout the story of the Bible, God often selects one person among many to unfold the next step in his unstoppable plan of redemption. To highlight his power, God typically makes his choice without taking into account anything the individual (or community) does to warrant that choice. Examples abound: to create his representative nation, God chooses the childless Abraham and Sarah. Then, of the two sons later fathered by Abraham, he chooses Isaac over Ishmael. Of the twin sons born to Isaac and Rebekah, God chooses Jacob over Esau. Of the twelve sons of Jacob, God chooses Judah over all the others to be the ancestor of the Messiah. In this section of the story we see that God chooses Joseph, one of the sons of Jacob, for a special purpose. Joseph endures brotherly betrayal, slavery, false imprisonment and the capricious acts of a political tyrant to emerge as a ruler in Egypt. But the story doesn't stop with his success. The nation of Israel must survive if the Messiah is to come from them, and a famine is about to threaten that survival. Through twists and turns over many years, Joseph's rise to power helps prepare for that famine—a crisis that brings his family from Canaan literally to his doorstep in Egypt, reuniting the whole family and providing for their needs. God had limitless options at his disposal, but the life of Joseph is another picture of God's power working through unlikely people and circumstances. What's more, even people's evil acts can't stop God from accomplishing his bigger vision: to fulfill his promise to establish a nation that will showcase his grace to the world.

Opening Question

Who in your family has a “legacy” that family members like to talk about, and what exactly is that story?

Discussion Questions

Note: All page numbers below are from *The Story*, 2008 edition. Additional group discussion questions for this chapter can be found on page 391.

1. Joseph had dreams of his own greatness (page 22 summary and page 23 or Genesis 37:1-11). What do you think is the point the author wants to make by including this information in the story?
2. What positive hopes (like Joseph's dreams) for your life do you have that you think have come from God? At what point do positive expectations become presumption or pride?
3. Joseph had to take extreme measures to avoid sinning with Potiphar's wife (page 25 or Genesis 39). What are some of the safeguards you've put in your life to protect you from a moral fall? What price do you think you'd pay if you ever allowed yourself to cross those lines?
4. Potiphar's household, a jail (page 25 or Genesis 39), and ultimately all of Egypt (page 27 or Genesis 41:41) were better off because of Joseph's willingness to be God's servant wherever he found himself. Do you think this is always the case even for us today? What comfort do you suppose Joseph took from sensing God's favor on him in the midst of unjust circumstances? What questions might he still have wanted answered?
5. God provided for the people of Egypt through a common sense solution of restraint in consumption and storing up for the future (pages 26-27 or Genesis 41). That's the “Lower Story” and has some practical application for us today. What might those lessons be?
6. Preparing for the famine was also part of the “Upper Story” of God taking care of his chosen people through the Egyptian surplus. But God never told Joseph what he was doing. Why do you think God doesn't give us all the “Upper Story” information of how our lives are fitting into a bigger plan? What “Upper Story” information did Joseph have? What do you have?
7. Joseph had every reason to be bitter, yet he did not take vengeance (page 33 or Genesis 50:15-21). Joseph had a strong sense of God working through his circumstances despite the betrayal and injustice. Do you think Joseph let his brothers off the hook too easily? Why or why not?
8. Joseph's family lived in a foreign land (Egypt) even though they'd been promised a land of their own elsewhere (page 34 or Genesis 50:22-26). How is that like our life with God now? What do you think is the right balance between focusing on heaven and living in present realities?

As a final question, you can ask group members who did the personal reflection assignment if there is anything from that material they would like to share or ask the group about. Close in prayer.