



October 27, 2013

## 13 Years a Slave and Prisoner

### A Grow-Pray-Study guide for small groups

This guide uses the Scripture readings from the daily "GPS" study guide. Group members may read the daily readings before the group meeting, or read the verses aloud when the group meets. The group may subdivide into two or three smaller groups, each discussing a set of the daily readings and the matching questions on page 2, or the entire group may discuss those questions together. We pray that, whatever pattern of study you choose, the Holy Spirit will weave God's Word into the life and heart of each group member.



### MONDAY

**Genesis 30:22-24,  
33:1-7, 37:1-11**

From his birth, Joseph occupied a special place in his family. He was the family's eleventh child—but the first one born to Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife. When Jacob felt afraid that his brother Esau might do something violent when they met, he put all his other children out front, and placed the favored Joseph and his mother safely at the rear. Later, he gave him a highly distinctive garment—perhaps the most famous coat in history.

### TUESDAY

**Genesis 37:18-28, 39:1-6**

Joseph's jealous brothers sold him to traders going through the wilderness to Egypt. He became a slave to Potiphar, a powerful royal official, and his reliability and hard work won him Potiphar's complete trust. Joseph's dramatic story is one of betrayal and providence, of God accomplishing his purposes despite the worst that our broken world can do.

### WEDNESDAY

**Genesis 39:7-22**

Potiphar's wife wanted Joseph to have an affair with her. The text tells us nothing else about her, but it must have been clear to Joseph, a Hebrew slave, that this woman could cause him problems. Nevertheless, he refused to betray his master's trust, and rebuffed her advances. Doing the right thing left her holding the garment he abandoned to escape her, and she used it to back up her lying accusations, and convinced her furious husband to put Joseph in jail.

### THURSDAY

**Genesis 41:14-44**

Genesis 40 told of Joseph interpreting dreams in prison for two servants of Pharaoh, and asking for help in winning release. When Pharaoh restored the wine steward, he forgot about Joseph, adding two years to Joseph's time in custody. The unjust detention finally ended when the steward recalled that Joseph could interpret troubling dreams. Joseph clearly hadn't blamed God for all that had gone wrong, and gave God full credit for the explanation. And, astonishingly, Pharaoh abruptly made him second-in-command in all of Egypt!

### FRIDAY

**Genesis 45:1-15,  
50:15-21**

An even greater character test awaited Joseph. With no idea that he was the brother they'd sold, Jacob's sons sought to buy food from Egypt's powerful "famine czar." Joseph first put them through some challenging situations (cf. Genesis 42-44), probably to test whether they had grown morally in the years since they sold him. He let go of any ideas of revenge he might have had, and reunited his family with generosity and grace.

### SATURDAY

**Matthew 5:10-12**

Jesus had personal experience with being falsely accused (see, for example, Luke 11:14-18). All of his "beatitudes" in his Sermon on the Mount, defining what constitutes happiness or "blessedness" in his Kingdom, challenged our assumptions. But Joseph's life stood as a remarkable demonstration of his final declaration: "Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me."

To access the Family Activity suggested in this week's GPS, download the printable GPS from [www.cor.org/guide](http://www.cor.org/guide).



## SUGGESTED PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we pray that we might find solace and trust in your promise. Make us people of reconciliation, patience, integrity and character. Remind us that you are with us, guiding us every step of the way, no matter how grim our lives might seem. Amen.

## CONNECT (5-10 minute discussion, at most)

Who are the best known people today who are also the strongest examples of integrity and character? Do integrity and character usually translate into people becoming well known?

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Read **Genesis 30:22-24, 33:1-7, 37:1-11**. Joseph was a “son of privilege.” How can your “position” as a child within your family affect you as a person? Do you feel that, as a child, you were a “favored child,” or less valued and privileged? How has this belief affected you? What kind of position do you feel you have in your heavenly father’s family? How does this affect you as a person? How can your feelings about yourself and your self-worth cause others to feel about you?
- Read **Genesis 37:18-28, 39:1-6**. Joseph was betrayed by his own brothers. Have you ever felt terrible betrayal by someone you trusted? Did that experience have any effect on your faith? How has that experience affected you as a person? What effect did the betrayal seem to have on Joseph? Was this experience part of God’s plan, or did God simply find a way to use it to further his overall plan? Does making this distinction matter for the completeness of our faith? How do you feel about the statement that “God works in mysterious ways”? Have you personally experienced this?
- Read **Genesis 39:7-22**. Was the fact that Joseph had felt personal betrayal the reason he then refused to betray the trust of Potiphar? Joseph’s loyalty cost him. How have you felt pain caused by your loyalty to another? The wrongdoing of Potiphar’s wife caused Joseph suffering. How have you suffered from the wrongdoing of others? How does what we can “get away with” enter into our decision process? How would you describe “integrity”? Did integrity win out in this story?
- Read **Genesis 41:14-44**. Did Joseph seem to blame God for all that had gone wrong in his life? Joseph was obviously a man of strong character. What gave him this character? Is character and integrity valued in today’s world? How can we go about building our own character and integrity? Will this please God? Peter wrote, “God’s strong hand is on you; he’ll promote you at the right time. Live carefree before God; he is most careful with you” (1 Peter 5:6-7, *The Message*). What helps you to trust that God is “careful” with your life? When things aren’t going as you would wish, how can you be as patient as Joseph was?
- Read **Genesis 45:1-15, 50:15-21**. How might history have been different if Joseph had allowed anger and revenge to drive the way he reacted toward his brothers? Did God influence the way Joseph reacted? Did Joseph invite God’s influence? Do we choose whether we want God to influence our life and our reactions to life’s “bumps in the road”? Can we expect God’s influence to be as dramatic as was his influence in Joseph’s life?
- Read **Matthew 5:10-12**. Did Joseph’s life adequately reflect the truth of these words of Jesus, or are Christ’s words a reflection of his kingdom that was to come? Do we always feel the truth of Christ’s words while we are going through life’s troubling times of suffering, or are these words the good news of God’s ultimate promise? How can we, in good times and bad, remind ourselves of Christ’s promise?

**From last week:** Did you pray daily for God’s guidance and strength as you reordered your priorities in life? Did you look around your house and see what it said about who you are and what tends to direct your life? Did you commit to taking the first steps



toward changes that would put you closer to the mark God has set for you? Please share with the group any insight you might have been provided.

## FOR ADDITIONAL INSIGHT

### From Pastor Adam Hamilton's sermon, October 27, 2013:

Today we begin a five-week focus entitled Sermons from the Wilderness in which we will study five Old Testament characters who spent time in the wilderness. In the Bible the wilderness is both a literal place known by all who lived in the Holy Land, and a metaphor for our life experiences....The wilderness is not just a place. It is also a metaphor for the barren and difficult places in life when we're rejected, overcome with grief, or where we're alone or in despair. Most of the great biblical characters had their times in the wilderness. Most of us will as well....

Joseph's story begins in Genesis chapter 37. Joseph is 17 years old. He is the second youngest in a family of 12 sons and one daughter. The conflict in the story is introduced right at the beginning, in verses 3-4 of Genesis 37: "Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him."

Joseph's tendency to tell on his brothers when they did wrong did not help matters. Then we learn that Joseph dreamt dreams – dreams that one day his brothers would bow down to him. When you have dreams like that, it's best not to share them with your brothers! But Joseph was immature, arrogant and lacked wisdom. After sharing the dreams with his brothers we read: "His brothers said to him, 'Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?' So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words."

One day, Joseph went to meet up with his brothers as they were grazing the flocks. Seeing him coming, his brothers said to one another: "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." Just then a caravan of Midianite slave traders came along, and his brothers decided that instead of killing Joseph, they would sell him as a slave to the Midianites for twenty pieces of silver—about 20 days wages. They return home and tell their father, Jacob, that Joseph was eaten by a wild animal.

Meanwhile, down in Egypt, a man named Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, purchased Joseph from the Midianites. The writer of Genesis tells us that God was with Joseph and Joseph, despite his circumstances, did the next right thing. He was found to be trustworthy, he served Potiphar well and consequently Joseph prospered, even as Potiphar's slave. But then the story takes another interesting plot twist. Listen: "Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, 'Lie with me.' But he refused."

Potiphar's wife continued this for days, weeks, perhaps months. One day she grabbed Joseph by the garments and pulled him towards her bed. He pulled away and ran from the house. She, feeling spurned, cried out to the servants outside saying that Joseph had attempted to rape her. When Potiphar came home, his wife showed him the cloak, and Potiphar was angry. He had Joseph thrown in prison where, presumably, he would live out his days. Joseph's wilderness experience went from bad to worse. Sold by his brothers into slavery, then thrown into prison, a life sentence, for a crime he did not commit. This is the wilderness....

An interesting thing happened to Joseph during his time in slavery and in prison. The 17 year-old who was a bit arrogant and insensitive was changed by the wilderness. He could have become bitter and resentful and he might have turned away from God altogether. Instead he becomes humble, trustworthy and faithful. He continually does the next right thing that earns him the respect of his fellow slaves and prisoners. And though he's not yet been delivered he trusts that God is with him, and that somehow God will see him through. This is what the writer of Hebrews describes as faith: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Joseph lives by faith.

Joseph becomes known in prison as someone who can interpret dreams. One day Pharaoh begins having disturbing dreams, and no one can interpret them. But a former prisoner tells Pharaoh about Joseph. Pharaoh asks that Joseph be brought to him from prison. He tells Joseph his dreams, and Joseph interprets them: the dreams foretell that, after, seven great years of crops, there will come a seven-year period of famine which will threaten the entire region. Crops must be stored and saved during the years of plenty, and everything will be okay. Pharaoh asks Joseph to take charge of preparing Egypt for the famine. At the age of 30 this former slave and prisoner becomes Pharaoh's second in command!



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We're meant to notice here the strange and hidden ways of God. Joseph, the young shepherd, becomes a slave, then falsely accused, a prisoner, and now Egypt's second in command. Notice that God didn't stop his brothers, nor Potiphar's wife, from doing evil. But God was with Joseph, Joseph trusted in God, and 13 years later, Joseph finds himself saving Egypt from disaster and appointed prince over the land. The writer of Genesis says, "This is how God works. Not instantly delivering us from hardship, but walking with us through it, then working discreetly through it, and finally redeeming it and accomplishing his purposes through it!"

This is still how God works in our lives. To us he seems slow to deliver. He doesn't instantly fix all our problems. He walks with us through them. But somehow, in ways we cannot see sometimes until years later, he uses even the evil we experience for his purposes. Evil will not have the final word. Paul notes this in a famous passage in Romans 8:28: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." That means that whatever it is you are going through, God can redeem it, will walk with you through it, and can bring something beautiful from it.

## What others have said about reconciliation

Reconciliation—the restoration of friendly relations.

- "The number one problem in our world is alienation, rich versus poor, black versus white, labor versus management, conservative versus liberal, East versus West...But Christ came to bring about reconciliation and peace." - Billy Graham
- "In a quarrel, leave room for reconciliation" - Russian Proverb
- "The practice of peace and reconciliation is one of the most vital and artistic of human actions." - Thich Nhat Hanh
- "Reconciliation should be accompanied by justice, otherwise it will not last. While we all hope for peace it shouldn't be peace at any cost but peace based on principle, on justice." - Corazon Aquino
- "The pattern of the prodigal is: rebellion, ruin, repentance, reconciliation, restoration." - Edwin Louis Cole
- "We are all one - or at least we should be - and it is our job, our duty, and our great challenge to fight the voices of division and seek the salve of reconciliation." - Roy Barnes
- "Before Nelson Mandela was arrested in 1962, he was an angry, relatively young man. He founded the ANC's military wing. When he was released, he surprised everyone because he was talking about reconciliation and forgiveness and not about revenge." - Desmond Tutu
- "Israel is no longer a people that dwells alone, and has to join the global journey toward peace, reconciliation and international cooperation." - Yitzhak Rabin
- "Christian faith is... basically about love and being loved and reconciliation. These things are so important, they're foundational and they can transform individuals, families." - Philip Yancey
- "The work of community, love, reconciliation, restoration is the work we cannot leave up to politicians. This is the work we are all called to do." - Shane Claiborne
- "The overall purpose of human communication is - or should be - reconciliation. It should ultimately serve to lower or remove the walls of misunderstanding which unduly separate us human beings, one from another." - M. Scott Peck
- "The church is not a theological classroom. It is a conversion, confession, repentance, reconciliation, forgiveness and sanctification center, where flawed people place their faith in Christ, gather to know and love him better, and learn to love others as he designed." - Paul David Tripp
- "If there is to be reconciliation, first there must be truth." - Timothy B. Tyson
- "We do believe that the church has a visionary role for reconciliation, beyond that of any government." - Richard Harris

## Final application:

This week, make your own, personal and private list of hurtful things others have done to you that you still harbor hard feelings about. Pray for these people and ask for God's help as you let go and forgive them. If possible and appropriate, seek these people out and make every effort to reach reconciliation. Next week, if you can, share with the group whatever you learned about yourself in the process.