

# biblestudy: june 2021

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*Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury's Adult Bible Study Series*

## June 6, 2021 Text: Genesis 37:5-28 “Joseph and His Brothers”

How did you feel after you read today’s focal passage? I felt guilty.

If I had been there, I think I would have agreed with the brothers who wanted to do in Joseph. After all, he was a nuisance, perhaps driven by an ego shaped by being his father’s favorite. You know the type: My car is nicer than yours. My house is bigger than yours. My grades are better than yours. My Christmas presents are more expensive than yours. My team has won more championships than your team. Mom has said I can sit in the front seat if I want to. Dad has said I can sleep late instead of helping mow the lawn. No wonder the brothers had had enough of this Joseph!

Then, there is Reuben. He tries to give Joseph a break, but it does not work because the other brothers get a chance to make a few bucks off this bothersome sibling (Genesis 37:28). I would like to think I would have been Reuben in this story, but probably not. I have too much memory of (Name Omitted) and (Name Omitted) to think I would have tried to rescue Joseph. He is about to get what he deserves!

But Reuben himself was not the picture of moral righteousness. After all, he had illicit sexual relations with Bilhah (Genesis 49:4, 1 Chronicles 5:1). This meant that even though he was first born, he could not inherit that birthright. This “new Reuben” ought to be encouraging to us. Whatever our moral slippage has been, whatever our spiritual

shortcomings might be, it’s not too late to please God with an act of forgiveness, with a touch of kindness, with a mark of grace. Reuben is a good example of “Better late than never.”

Judah saved Joseph’s life by convincing the brothers to sell him instead of killing him (Genesis 37:27). It may have saved his life, but it was hardly done as a step of kindness. They had no way of knowing what these traveling traders would do with Joseph. God is able to use people with mixed motives; Judah is an ancestor of King David. God redeemed the brokenness.

The story is going to continue. In the week’s ahead, we shall be exploring the life of Joseph after he is hauled off into Egypt (Genesis 37:28). He’ll meet his brothers again.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

Chromatus (around 400 AD) wrote (*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament II*, Intervarsity): “Joseph was rejected by his brothers and was received by the Ishmaelites in the same manner our Lord and Savior was rejected by the Jews and received by the pagans.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Can You use me, Lord?...”

## June 13, 2021 Text: Genesis 39:1-21 “Joseph in Potiphar’s House”

This week’s lesson is a sure-fire example of God’s making wonderful lemonade out of life’s lemons. Consider the mess that has been dumped upon Joseph. Sold by his brothers, he has now been sold again, this time to Potiphar, the head of Egypt’s military force (Genesis 39:1). Joseph lived with such integrity and faithfulness that he became greatly favored by his master who put him in charge of everything (Genesis 39:2-6). God turned that lemon into lemonade.

Potiphar’s wife was attracted to the virile and good-looking Joseph. She tried to get him to “lie with her.” (I don’t think she wanted to take a nap.) (Genesis 39:7-12) Joseph refused because it would be a sin against God and against Potiphar. (Genesis 39:9) Isn’t it interesting that Joseph understood that to sin against the “neighbor” is to sin against God!

Potiphar’s wife made up a story about how Joseph had tried to take advantage of her (Genesis 39:13-15). Note: Even when we live our lives with purpose and faithfulness, “life” does not always play fair with us.

The master gets furious and has Joseph dumped into the prison. Another lemon. (Genesis 39:20) God does not desert Joseph and Joseph soon wins the respect and support of the chief jailer. The “boss of the jail” turns everything over to Joseph and Joseph works with trustworthiness and effectiveness (Genesis 39:23). He makes the best of a bad situation.

Do you think God would have so blessed Joseph if Joseph had spent his time plotting revenge against Potiphar? Joseph was faithful, and God has once again made lemonade out of life’s lemons.

These verses almost sound like a soap opera, but there is more than “interesting story” here; there is a lesson to be learned. Life is not always pleasant and does not always unfold in ways that please us. The bottom line is that God is able to bless us even in the midst of hurt and loss. Had Joseph been bitter, it might have blocked what God wanted to do. Joseph continued to offer his best self and God blessed him.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

Jon Meacham (*His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope*, Random House) quotes Lewis at one of the civil rights protest marches: “But we will march with the spirit of love and with the spirit of dignity that we have shown here today...put together in the image of God and Democracy.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, there are things and relationships in my life that hurt and try to make me less than You would have me be. Bless my journey and my truth and make this a good day...”

## June 20, 2021 Text: Genesis 41:1-16, 25-32 “Joseph Interprets Pharaoh’s Dreams”

Here is a short version of this week’s study and related texts. Pharaoh has a dream that no one can explain to him. He hears that Joseph is good at that kind of thing, so he gets him to come and tell him what the dream means. Joseph nails it and gives God the credit. Pharaoh is so impressed that he releases Joseph from jail and puts him in charge of Egypt. Whew!

One thing that catches my attention in this strange story is that Joseph acknowledges that he has the gift of interpreting dreams. Sometimes, in a mood of false humility, we deny that we have been given a talent or skill or insight. Perhaps such denial is a way of staying on the bench rather than getting into the game.

I know a pastor who has an instinct for reaching out to strangers. Yesterday, he called to tell me about being in a hospital waiting room as his wife was having surgery. He heard an elderly woman say, “It surely is chilly in here.” I might have just agreed and let it go. This pastor got up and went to his truck and got a sweater and brought it back and gave it to the woman. It is his spirit always to be on the alert to how he might

help even someone he does not know. One time he came across a woman with dementia who was lost, unable to find the route for driving to her home. He said, “Follow me,” and led her through fourteen miles of back roads and turns to find the home where her anxious family was waiting. That ability to spot a need and that willingness to do something about it sets him apart from most of us, but he acknowledges this awareness is one way that God can use him.

What has God given me to do? How am I equipped to do God’s work? Suppose Joseph had said, “Me? I’m just a little Hebrew man who is in jail. How do you think I could be of any help to the Pharaoh?” Instead, he cleans up as best he can (Genesis 41:14) and goes to Pharaoh. And then he admits that he has the ability to interpret dreams and gives God the credit for what he is about to do (Genesis 41:16).

This week’s study challenges me to accept the way God has put me together. My gifts are not the same as yours. Your gifts are not the same

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as mine. I dare not make like God has not equipped me to be of services In the text, the wine steward does not know how to interpret dreams, but knows someone who does. His gift is not the gift of interpreting dreams; it is the gift of awareness and willingness to share what he knows (Genesis 41:9). And me? And you?



June 27, 2021 Text: Genesis 45:1-15 “Joseph Forgives His Brothers”

When food began to run out at home, Joseph’s brothers came to Egypt for help. Joseph was in charge of things in Egypt, but when his brothers arrived, they did not recognize him. Joseph could have used that setting to exact revenge for all that those brothers had done to him, everything from plotting to kill him to selling him to some passer-by traders. But he did not do that; instead, he provided them with food.

Next comes today’s key passage, Genesis 45:1-15. He identified himself: “I’m Joseph.” And his brothers were terrified because Joseph now held all the power. He could do to them anything he wanted to do. (Genesis 45:3-4) So, he forgave them and said that God has used their evil for good (Genesis 45:5).

It is a beautiful story, in part because it is so different from our usual way of relating to people. I may not hurt someone who has offended me, but I might have a slight smile when some bad fortune comes their way.

Forgiveness is a tricky business. One of the Hebrew words that is translated as “forgive” is *nâcâh*. Its roots are in a word meaning “to lift.” If someone forgives me, they have lifted from me the burden of the wrong I have done. They may even end up carrying the weight themselves, but they have taken it off my back.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In the Charles P. Frank novel *Digging Through Time* (iUniverse): “A biblical text from Luke 10 was used to illustrate how each person uses the talents God has given him or her in service to others.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Thank You, Lord, for using me...”

How do you handle “life after forgiveness?” In the study text, there is much hugging and kissing, but what caught my eye was the very last part of verse 15: “After that, his brothers were finally able to talk to him.” Forgiveness can clear the air for both parties. Up until the brothers received forgiveness, they had not been open to dialogue, to conversation. They mostly listened. Now, they can talk with Joseph!

Is there someone you need to forgive? Is there someone you need to ask for forgiveness? Keep at it. In Matthew 18:22, Jesus advises the disciples that seven acts of forgiveness may not be enough. How many times do I forgive? Seventy-seven, but who’s counting?

This text has many of the ingredients of our lives: bad stuff, recovery, God’s protection, integrity, new start, opportunity, forgiveness. How does the story of Joseph become our story?

What Someone Else Has Said:

In Jan Karon’s novel *To Be Where You Are* (Putnam), one of the characters says, “...unforgiveness makes us the victim.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Forgive me Lord...”

Bruised Apples

A few years ago a group of salesmen went to a regional sales convention in Chicago. They had assured their wives that they would be home in plenty of time for Friday night’s dinner. Well, as such things go, one thing led to another. The sales meeting lasted longer than anticipated.

Their flights were scheduled to leave out of Chicago’s O’Hare Airport, and they had to race to the airport. With tickets in hand, they barged through the terminal to catch their flight back home. In their rush, with tickets and briefcases, one of these salesmen inadvertently kicked over a table, which held a display of baskets of apples. Apples flew everywhere.

Without stopping or looking back, they all managed to reach the plane in time for their nearly missed boarding, all but one. He paused, took a deep breath and experienced a twinge of compassion for the girl whose apple stand had been overturned. He told his buddies to go on without him and told one of them to call his wife when they arrived at their home destination and explain his taking a later flight.

Then he returned to the terminal where the apples were all over the floor. He was glad he did. The 16-year-old girl at the apple stand was totally blind! She was softly crying, tears running down her cheeks in frustration, and at the same time helplessly groping for her spilled produce as the crowd swirled about her, no one stopping or to care for her plight.

The salesman knelt on the floor with her, gathered up the apples, put them into the baskets, and helped set the display up once more. As he did this, he noticed that many of them had become battered and bruised; these he set aside in another basket. When he had finished, he pulled out his wallet and said to the girl, “Here, please take this \$20 for the damage we did. Are you okay?” She nodded through her tears.

He continued on with, “I hope we didn’t spoil your day too badly.”

As the salesman started to walk away, the bewildered blind girl called out to him, “Mister....” He paused and turned to look back into those blind eyes. She continued, “Are you Jesus?”

He stopped in mid-stride, and he wondered. Then slowly he made his way to catch the later flight with that question burning and bouncing about in his soul: “Are you Jesus?”

Do people mistake you for Jesus? That’s our destiny, is it not? To be so much like Jesus that people cannot tell the difference as we live and interact with a world that is blind to His love, life and grace. If we claim to know Him, we should live, walk and act as He would. Knowing Him is more than simply quoting Scripture and going to church. It’s actually living the Word as life unfolds day to day.

You are the apple of His eye even though we, too, have been bruised by the fall. He stopped what He was doing and picked you and me up on a hill called Calvary and paid in full for our damaged fruit.

Author Unknown