

Session 6: But God

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

We can trust that God is working, even in our difficult circumstances, to accomplish his larger purposes.

Head Change

To know that God can use our suffering to further his purposes.

Heart Change

To feel confident God has not forgotten us in our struggles and that our pain is never meaningless.

Life Change

To remember during hardships that God is still working and to trust he will not let our suffering be in vain.

OPEN

Name a famous family in politics, history, or the church. What made them famous, and what about them do you find interesting?

As we've seen over the past several sessions, Genesis largely follows the family of Abraham—arguably one of the most famous families in history. We've learned about Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, and now we're ending our study with the life of Joseph. Genesis devotes fourteen chapters to the saga of Joseph, the beleaguered favorite son of Jacob. This extensive narrative covers his life from age seventeen through young adulthood, marriage, fatherhood, and finally his reunion with his family. In this session, Charlie Dates will explore why Joseph suffered and how God used his life for a greater purpose.

Lined writing area for notes and responses.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group's study of the book of Genesis.

1. Tamar's Impact on Judah (Genesis 38)

Shortly after the brothers sold Joseph into slavery, the biblical text shifts from Joseph to Judah, the mastermind behind the brothers' plot. This curious chapter tells a dark tale of betrayal, seduction, trickery, and . . . righteousness? Yes.

Read Genesis 38:6–11.

In the Old Testament, it was customary for a widow to marry her deceased husband's younger brother or his nearest male relative. It is unheard of today, but was so common then that it came to be known as "levirate law." In those days, a widow had no way to provide for herself or her family, so by marrying her husband's brother, she gained stability and security while her husband's inheritance remained in his family.

Judah's eldest son, Er, married a Canaanite woman named Tamar. After Er, a wicked man, died, she married his brother Onan, another wicked man, who soon died.

Now read 38:12–26.

Judah was obligated to provide for Tamar but resisted giving her to his youngest son. Tamar, realizing she'd been treated unrighteously, disguised herself as a local prostitute and slept with Judah himself (as her father-in-law, he was her last option in the levirate custom). Her ploy worked. When Judah heard his daughter-in-law was pregnant, he assumed the worst and condemned her immorality. But when she exposed him with proof that he was the father, he realized the truth and repented,

2. Jacob's Blessings to His Sons (Genesis 48–49)

As Jacob prepared to die, he pronounced specific blessings on each of his sons. But before talking with them, he called Joseph in with his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. The patriarch then did two surprising things. Read Genesis 48:5–7.

Jacob tells Joseph that instead of giving one-twelfth of his land to Joseph—an equal share with his brothers—he was going to claim Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim as his own. In doing so, he gave Joseph a double share of the inheritance.

Joseph placed his father's hands on the heads of his sons: Jacob's right hand on Manasseh the oldest and his left on the younger, Ephraim. But Jacob switched his hands and pronounced a blessing that proclaimed the "younger brother will be greater" than the older.

We've seen this pattern of inverting younger for older before in God elevating Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau despite the cultural norms of the day. While the culture may have set a pattern for power and status, God will choose whom he will choose. **In what ways has God worked contrary to your own expectations?**

When the people of Israel returned to Canaan after the Exodus, Ephraim became a dominant tribe in the north of the country (Joshua 17:17). In the days division after Solomon's reign, the northern kingdom of Israel is often referred to as Ephraim and the southern kingdom as Judah. Yet, despite Jacob's intentions, Ephraim did not become the ultimate leader of Israel. As we saw in Go Deeper Section 1, Judah became the tribe God chose to produce the savior of his people.

How do you react when your plans don't work out? What does the story of Joseph and Judah teach you about God's sovereign power over our futures?

Think of your plans for the next few months or even years. Lay them out in prayer to God, surrendering them to his will and purpose. Pray that God gives you peace as you let him lead you.

3. Weekly Reading Plan

Genesis is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This

reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word. Some weeks will have more reading than others, so feel free to complete the daily readings at a pace that makes the most sense to your group.

Session six focused on Joseph's travails and successes, but it also helped us see how God works behind the scenes to accomplish bigger plans than we could see through our limited perspectives. Joseph's slavery led to Israel's salvation, a necessary event in the big picture of salvation for all people. The patriarchs show themselves to be frail and fallen people yet exactly the ones God chose to work out his redemption plan for all peoples.

Day 1: Joseph: From Slave to the Palace (Genesis 37, 39–41)

Day 2: Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38)

Day 3: Joseph's Brothers Seek Food (Genesis 42–44)

Day 4: Family Reunited (Genesis 45–47)

Day 5: Blessings and Legacy (Genesis 48–50)