

Praise for the Real People, Real Faith Bible Study Series

“Jodie’s Bible studies are some of my favorite resources! Her insightful and practical application of Scripture keeps her studies at the top of my list. Anyone who uses this Bible study will feel closer to God and better understand his truth.”

KAT ARMSTRONG, preacher, author of *The In-Between Place*,
and cofounder of The Polished Network

“Each weekly lesson includes a practice session to help us apply gleaned wisdom for navigating our own crossroads. Jodie’s studies move us toward transformative biblical literacy and an action-packed faith that lives what’s learned.”

SUE EDWARDS, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary
and author of the Discover Together Bible Study series

“This study will stretch and challenge you as Jodie guides with wisdom and practical application each step of the way. I deeply value how Jodie refuses to simply fill our minds with information about the Bible—she consistently pursues the ‘So what?’ question so we are stirred to action.”

NANCY BEACH, leadership coach with the Slingshot Group
and author of *Gifted to Lead*

“Niznik’s highly practical invitations toward spiritual disciplines further root me in the powerful message that I am loved, God has a plan for my life, and obedience brings joy. This will be a perfect Bible study addition to any ministry longing to deepen women’s connection to God.”

MARY DEMUTH, author of over forty books, including
Into the Light

“Each week is filled with outstanding biblical teaching as well as opportunities to consider how these truths apply to our lives. I especially appreciate that Niznik incorporates spiritual practices that enable us to delve deeper into our relationship with the Lord.”

SISSY MATHEW, spiritual formation and teaching pastor
at Irving Bible Church

REAL PEOPLE, REAL FAITH BIBLE STUDIES

Choose: A Study of Moses for a Life That Matters

*Crossroads: A Study of Esther and Jonah
for Boldly Responding to Your Call*

*Trust: A Study of Joseph for Persevering
Through Life's Challenges*

*Journey: A Study of Peter for Stumbling
Toward Jesus's Extravagant Grace*

A

REAL PEOPLE

REAL FAITH

BIBLE STUDY

TRUST

*A Study of Joseph for Persevering
Through Life's Challenges*

JODIE NIZNIK



Trust: A Study of Joseph for Persevering Through Life's Challenges
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WHY JOSEPH AND WHY NOW?



It's been a season of uncertainty around my house, and I'm guessing it might have been the same for you. But even if you aren't in a season of uncertainty, I can sadly promise that one is coming. It's just the way life is. As I've prayed about how to handle my tumultuous time, God kept bringing me back to Joseph. Talk about a man who had to move through uncertainty! His entire life got upended. He woke up one morning wrapped in the best style of the day, thinking life would turn out one way, and went to sleep that night as a slave, knowing nothing would be the same.

How did he handle this unexpected and unwelcome turn of events? By faithfully trusting in God. Every step of the way, Joseph chose trust again and again. And even if he did have a pity party that we aren't privy to, it seems he got over it quickly. Because what we do see is that Joseph kept doing the next right thing. Day after day. Even when the right things weren't done in return, Joseph chose trust.

Trust can be difficult when things feel uncertain and out of control. But journeying with Joseph has shown me that trust is not impossible, and I believe his story will show you the same. How can you choose trust in uncertainty? By remembering who God is. By knowing that God is still working, and he works all things for good.

I pray that as you journey through this study your trust in God will grow. No matter where you are or what you're going through, God is good, and he is with you. You can trust him.

—Jodie

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS STUDY



Practice Sections

Each week our lesson will start with a short practice section. These practices are an opportunity for you to take some of the concepts we are learning and live them out, perhaps in a way you've never tried before. These practices won't take a lot of time, but they may require some planning. Therefore, we will start each week's lesson with the practice section. Prayerfully read it through and then make a plan to try the suggested activities.

You may discover something you really love in these little sections—something that brings new life into your relationship with the Lord. You may also discover that some of these exercises will take effort. Some may be hard for you to do and others may be easy, even fun! They will all help you stretch and grow. Growth almost always brings the spiritual fruit of a changed life. For me, that makes any effort totally worth it.

Pacing Your Study

Each week of this study includes a practice for the week and four study sessions. You are welcome to tackle as much of the week's material as you like on any given day. However, I suggest giving yourself five days to complete the week's work, and I have marked the sections accordingly. If you break it into these chunks, the study shouldn't take you more than thirty minutes to do each day. However, if you are a researcher or extensive reflective thinker, you may want to set aside more time for each day's study.

In general, you will find the days broken down as follows:

Day one will be reading about and planning for the practice activity.

Days two through five will be reading Scripture and answering the questions in this study guide.

If you start running behind (we all have those weeks), you may have to pick and choose which questions you want to answer. My advice is to make the Scripture reading your first priority. Then if you have time, scan through the questions to see which ones you want to answer.

As is usually the case, the higher the investment, the greater the return. When we collaborate with Jesus by inviting him into our lives and spending time with him, we experience life transformation. As your life is transformed, you will find it looking more and more like the life God designed you to live. So make every effort to arrange your days so that you can regularly spend time with Jesus.



WEEK 1

FAVORED TO FORSAKEN



Day 1

Practice—Serving in Secret

Joseph was the favorite. His father, Jacob, cherished and loved him more than his eleven brothers. This made him the favorite son of the favorite wife. (Yes, Jacob had more than one wife. We will get to that soon.) You can already see there are going to be issues, can't you? Playing favorites only feels good to one person—the favored one. Competition, jealousy, and hatred become ripe for the picking for everyone else.

We know this feeling, don't we? We've all been overlooked, passed over, and picked last—or not at all. All while the people around us seem to get what we wanted and hoped for. Favor. Favor never seems to fall on us, just everyone else.

But I wonder if getting overlooked is sometimes just a function of how we interpret a particular situation. Perhaps those feelings of rejection sting us so deeply that they blind us to noticing how often we actually are being given preference. Whether that has been true in our lives or not, here's what we do know: favoritism is dangerous. It's a false system built with an arbitrary measuring stick. And it's tempting to grab at the chance to be the favored one whenever the opportunity presents itself.

I do it more than I'd like to admit. From skipping the long line when the cashier ushers me into the newly opened one to making sure my boss publicly attributes the good work to me. I have a confession: I like being preferred over others. I like hearing things such as, "We don't do this for just anyone," "This is special—just for you," "You're better at this than he is," or "I'd rather spend time with you than her." These statements of favor and preferential treatment are like dopamine hits for my brain. They make me feel good, and I suspect they do the same for you.

It's not that it's wrong to be recognized or celebrated; it's when longing for favor becomes our driving motivation that we get ourselves into trouble. When this happens, no amount of recognition is actually good enough. It all falls short. That's the problem with being favored for a moment—it only lasts for a moment. And then it's gone and we're just like everyone else again.

Here's the good news: God doesn't play the favorites game. He looks upon each of us with the same loving gaze. We know this for many reasons, but namely because he sent Jesus to die for our sins when none of us deserved it (Romans 5:8). And we are saved by our faith in Jesus, not by anything we do or don't do (Ephesians 2:8–9). There's no earning God's love—and this is solid evidence to us that he doesn't have favorites. Playing favorites is something humans made up—and like all things we make up that are outside of God's best for us, it never turns out well. Joseph, as you will see in this lesson, is a prime example of just how damaging favoritism can be to not only one person but entire families.

This week, to try to diminish our natural desire to be recognized and favored, we're going to seek to serve others in secret. This is actually a practice Jesus encouraged when he said, "When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret" (Matthew 6:3–4). God knows that when we get noticed for our good deeds, that recognition can start to become our motivation instead of him being our motivation. Serving in secret is one way we can keep our hearts in check and serve God simply because he's God.

To do this practice, start each day with the simple prayer, “Lord, show me who you want me to bless today.” Then keep your eyes open for opportunities and be ready to serve others as you feel the Lord leads. It could be that you hear of a need and make a strategic plan for how you can quietly help without being noticed. Or perhaps it’s more spur of the moment, like helping a stranger or joyfully allowing that car to cut in front of you after you’ve waited in the long traffic line. I’m not sure what the Lord will place in your path, but I feel confident you will have multiple opportunities to serve and bless others. The goal is to do these acts of service without being noticed, so if for some reason you get caught or someone tries to recognize you, just give credit to God and quietly move on.

In the end, we are seeking to let God, not us, get the glory for the good. I’ll never forget when my family had a need, and someone left the right gift card for the right amount in our mailbox. I’ve never discovered who that person was, and while I’m still incredibly curious, I’m glad I don’t know. That person serving my family in secret helped me see God more clearly. If I knew who it was, I would have been tempted to marvel at how nice they were. Instead, I marveled at God and was reminded that he saw my family and would care for us. And I’m sure it also did my secret server good to not be known. Having us swoon over them might have gone straight to their head; it would have mine. Really, everyone wins when we allow God to use us in this way. Have fun on your adventure of secret service this week.

- Spend a few minutes in prayer asking God to help you see places and people he may want you to serve. Write down anything that comes to mind.

- If a situation or person comes to mind, write a plan of action for how you will serve them in secret this week. Be as specific as possible, including the dates you will do things.

PRACTICE REMINDER

Pray, "Lord, show me who you want me to bless today." Then keep your eyes open for opportunities to bless others without being noticed.



Day 2

The Dreamer

The story of Joseph is found in the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Genesis tells the story of God's perfect creation, humankind's consistent choice of their own ways over God's ways, and the coming of Jesus to reconcile our waywardness. Genesis also makes it clear that Jesus would enter the world through God's people, the Jews. Joseph's story occupies thirteen of the fifty chapters in Genesis, which is more space than any other person receives in this book. His story has much to teach us about trusting in God even when things go terribly wrong, because there is much that goes terribly wrong for Joseph.

To start with, Joseph was born into a family that could dominate the tabloids. His father, Jacob, who is also called Israel, had two wives and they were sisters, which is a whole other fascinating story of double-crossing and deception.

These two sisters, Leah and Rachel, were fiercely competitive and jealous of each other. Leah, the older sister and first wife, was jealous because Jacob loved Rachel more than her. And Rachel was jealous because Leah had child after child while Rachel was left behind in her barrenness. Their answer to this competition was to throw their female servants at Jacob to have more children.



⋮ If you want to know more
about the story of how
Jacob wound up married
to sisters, read Genesis 29.



While this was a common cultural practice, it doesn't make much sense to us today. However, in their culture, children were everything and brought great honor to the family. Thus, they would do anything to have children—the more the better. Women who had no children felt deep shame and were often stigmatized by the community.

So now we have four women having, or trying to have, children with the same man. Baby after baby came on the scene and this dysfunctional family soon amassed ten sons and one daughter. Finally, Rachel's long-held dream came true and she had a baby boy, declaring, "God has taken away my disgrace" (Genesis 30:23). She named him Joseph, which means "May the LORD add to me another son" (verse 24). Joseph, born to the favorite wife, quickly became the favorite son. And as we explored in the practice section, playing favorites never goes well. Joseph's older brothers took serious issue with the preferential treatment given to their baby brother. And Joseph, in his immaturity, seemed to relish being daddy's boy.

Rachel's prayer for another son was finally answered, and she gave birth to Joseph's younger brother, Benjamin. But sadly, while she was giving birth, she died (Genesis 35:16–18). This leaves Jacob without his beloved wife and Joseph without his mother.

Read Genesis 37:1–11.

1. Write down all the things you learn about Joseph and his family from verses 1–4. Especially note the dysfunctional dynamics of playing favorites starting to emerge. Consider the actions of Joseph, Israel, and the brothers.

The New International Version Bible translation says Jacob made Joseph an “ornate robe” (verse 3). This probably conjures up images of a multicolored coat-like garment. And while this robe potentially fits that imagery, the original Hebrew word isn’t quite clear about the colorfulness of the robe. A more specific translation would be to describe the robe as reaching from his palms to his soles. It was long sleeved and long hemmed, which meant it was not suited for working in the fields as a shepherd. You could call the robe ornate because it was impractical for working. To work as a shepherd, one would wear a much shorter garment that would allow ease of movement. Regardless of what the robe actually looked like, what the “ornate” description reveals is that Joseph was likely given the preferential status of an overseer instead of being expected to do the work of a shepherd in the fields with his brothers.

2. Briefly describe the first dream Joseph told his brothers about (verses 5–7). While we can’t know for certain what Joseph was really thinking or feeling, imagine for a moment what it might have been like to be him, favored by your father and despised by your siblings. Why do you think he told them about the dream, especially considering how they treated him (verse 4)? Why do you think the brothers reacted as they did?

3. Joseph had a second dream and again told his brothers and father about it (verses 9–11). Why do you think Joseph told them about this dream, especially considering how it went when he told them about the first dream? How did his father react to this dream?

I'm not sure if Joseph was oblivious or just immature, but he seemed to keep going back for more. In these verses we learn that the brothers hated Joseph and spoke unkindly to him. Three times the text tells us they hated him (verses 4, 5, and 8) and then verse 11 caps it off by telling us they were "jealous of him."

Jealousy happens when we become dissatisfied with what we have in comparison to what someone else has. The brothers seemed to be jealous of Joseph for exactly this reason.

4. Have you ever been in a situation where you were consistently treated unkindly by someone (perhaps because they were jealous of you)? What happened and how did you respond? Did you play any part in further instigating this situation? (Keep in mind, if you were or are in an abusive situation, you did not and do not ever deserve this kind of treatment. This question is meant to ask if you played any role in furthering jealousy—like Joseph did in flaunting his dreams to his brothers, who already mistreated and hated him.) Is there something you could have done differently that might have helped mitigate what was happening?

