

*Living*  
WHOLE

A Seven-Week Study Through the Life of Joseph

JULIE GARISS



*Living Whole*

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*To Randy. Thank you for encouraging me to take risks and then being my best cheerleader when I do. I love you more than my words can say.*

*—Julie*

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# Introduction

**O***ut of Order.* We have seen the sign swinging from a bathroom door, the letters usually scrawled in somebody's poor, untidy penmanship—seldom a trace of compassion noted on the makeshift sign. Of course, even if “Sorry for the inconvenience” were added, it would not make up for the panic those three words can inspire! I have sped through traffic, jumped hedges ten feet tall, and knocked over little children (my own!) just to get to the next in-order restroom. There is nothing as lovely as a gas station bathroom door that lacks the adornment of that hazardous sign!

The words show up in other places as well. Oftentimes they are taped to the office vending machine. No matter how many times one might pummel the overgrown snack box, push the E-9 button, or fiddle with the “Deposit Money Here” slot, if the sign smirks “Out of Order,” you are wasting your time. Oh, the aggravation! Right there behind the smudged glass, staring at you and causing your mouth to daydream of its texture, to taste the creamy chocolate outside shell with the peanuts and caramel in its lush center, is *your* candy bar, hanging so precariously from a tiny hook. Maybe if you just rock the stupid machine back and forth . . .

We have packed up weeks of laundry and carted them to the laundromat, only to find those hideous words attached to the one dryer that has prided itself in putting out some heat. Or maybe we've driven into the car wash and perfectly lined up our tires with the guide rails that maneuver our tired minivan through a good shampoo and massage, only to receive a rinse job that rivals the pressure from the kitchen faucet. Pure frustration!

I have never traveled to the North Pole, but I suspect that somewhere near the top of this sphere is a wind-torn, ice-encrusted sign that bears those same three words, “Out of Order.” Our world wasn't made that way, but Satan was allowed (by his Maker) to take his permanent marker and do his scribbling, the effects of which are obvious. We live on a planet of broken governments, broken philosophies, broken relationships, and broken hearts. Is it possible to live whole in a world that will not be repaired this side of heaven? Is it possible to live with joy and contentment even in the midst of shattering circumstances?

Is it possible that God has his superglue of grace in hand and is ever ready to restore lives that look irreparable?

These are legitimate questions of faith, and they deserve answers that are based on true life experience. That is why I am thrilled you are beginning this journey with me: a study through the life of the Old Testament character Joseph. Studying his life will be a testimony not only to his faithfulness in thorny situations but also to forgiveness that leads to true freedom. You will also appreciate God's intense involvement in Joseph's life and bow in humility to his sovereign abilities. He always works out the intricacies of this world (and our lives) in accordance with his will. I am certain you will not be disappointed in what you learn from Joseph and confident that the lessons studied will be applicable to your own circumstances. My prayer is that by the end of this study, you will be better equipped to live a whole life, one that is spiritually healthy and wise, in a world that is broken and out of order.

This study may be used for group or individual use. If a group study is the chosen format, I suggest that a facilitator direct the discussion of each week's lessons using the questions that have been studied throughout the week. While all questions may not be pertinent for the group, many of them will encourage discussion or at least offer the springboard for others. There is also a guide for discussion leaders included after this introduction to help those who will be facilitators. Remember, whether you do this study with a group or individually, the goal is not just to learn facts but to increase our faith!

With only a few exceptions, each lesson is divided into four main sections. "Get the Facts" is the section of Genesis that you will be studying for the day. Read it carefully before trying to do the lesson. It is important that you get your first glimpse of the lesson straight from the Word . . . on your own. Discovering God's nuggets of truth for yourself is always more thrilling than getting them secondhand. "Get the Picture" is the section that will give you a fact, discussion question, or illustration for the purpose of giving insight to the lesson of the day, or at least to get your curiosity engaged! "Get the Message" is the main body of the study. I encourage you to use your mind and imagination to envision walking beside Joseph through the pages of his life. The lessons are not long or difficult, so do your best to avoid shortcuts! The last section, "Get Personal," is the part that contains application for you. It is in this portion that the text "comes home." My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will do his good work in encouraging, convicting, and correcting. May you always be able to walk away from a lesson with the knowledge that God is working in your circumstances just as he did in Joseph's.

Each week's lessons will be followed by a series of discussion questions for the week. These questions are designed for a group study, but answering them will also be profitable if you are doing this study on your own. Further information for the use of these questions will be found in A Guide for Discussion Leaders beginning on the next page.

Because trials are a by-product of a wrecked world, there will be many of you experiencing hardship that feels it could rival the things Joseph suffered. Perhaps you are finding it difficult to visualize God's purposes. This study will show you that while God may not always intend or purpose the particular trials you encounter, he surely puts purpose in them and will use them to accomplish his will. His ways will not be confounded, remapped, or quenched by the ignorance, disobedience, or even the evil intent of man. How I hope this study will spur you on to a faithful life and remind you that God will *never* waste a single trial in your life. If it is not obvious now, just hang on. He is not finished with you!

# A Guide for Discussion Leaders

**T**hank you to all of you who have expressed your willingness to lead a small group. As a facilitator, you will not have the burden of preparing a lesson each week, but you will be invaluable to your group. A variety of personalities and levels of spiritual maturity will be represented in your small circle of fellow students, so it will be your responsibility to guide the discussions in such a way that everyone feels comfortable without feeling controlled. As you well know, you will have verbal participants and others who are considerably reserved. Developing an ability to *read* your group, honing your skills for guiding an *inclusive* discussion, and cultivating an atmosphere that *promotes real spiritual transformation* will come with experience. Don't fret about it—just observe and learn! And most of all, enjoy the women!

*Your first meeting will follow the completion of the first week of study.* I encourage you to be *prepared* for leading the discussions. Lively, helpful dialogue happens best when you, the facilitator, have done your homework. Don't just show up and expect engaging discussion to simply happen. Look through the questions that you have answered in your daily studies in the portion titled "Get the Message." This is the section where most of your discussion will come from. Mark those questions that lend themselves best to what you feel is most appropriate for reviewing in the group time. The section of your daily study called "Get the Picture" will often offer the impetus to open the day's discussion, and the section called "Get Personal" will provide the opportunities to share with honest transparency. I have also provided a sampling of general questions for each week, but you may have some of your own. Don't be afraid to use them! I dare say many of you will think of questions that are more appealing, and, of course, as you go through the session, questions and comments will just naturally come from the discussion itself. Remember, it is not your responsibility to teach but to direct. Women are usually eager to share their insight, and that is what you want to encourage. The diversity of thought makes for active, animated discussion and will keep everyone coming back for more!



If any one thing should be stressed, it is this: *be hospitable!* A warm welcome to each member of your group, a note or phone call that lets them know you are praying for them individually, and the assurance that they are safe and loved in your care speak volumes. Here are a few more tips you will want to remember, given in the form of an acronym that spells “facilitate.”

**F—Freshness** is vital. Don’t let each week’s discussion fall into a rut of boredom and routine. God gave you a creative mind—this is the time to use it! You want the women to anticipate the weekly time together.

**A—Acknowledge** *all* contributions rather than only those that offer right answers.

**C—Consideration.** There will no doubt be some in your group who are emotionally needy simply because of the circumstances that are happening in their lives. While you cannot solve their problems, you can be a source of encouragement.

**I—Involve** God. That may sound rather obvious, but praying over these sessions may be more beneficial than anything else you do. Also, at the close of each session, take the time to pray for each woman—whether the prayer is led by you or someone else. It is a marvelous thing to hear one’s name being taken before the throne of God!

**L—Listen** more than talk! This is not the time for a lecture. Even though you may have a better handle on the subject, the women will learn better if they discover the truth for themselves.

**I—Invite** participation. Every woman in your group needs to feel valued. Encourage everyone to share their thoughts.

**T—Transformation.** Information is important, but the goal of the discussion sessions will be the transforming of lives.

**A—Accentuate** the truths of Scripture while calling less attention to opinions.

**T—Time** matters. Women will appreciate your doing your best to begin and end the sessions as scheduled.

**E—Emphasize** group etiquette. At the beginning of Session 1, lay down some ground rules about manners in the group. This will help in controlling those who would monopolize the sessions, respond poorly to someone else’s opinions, etc.

Following each week’s lesson in the book are a few questions to use as needed or to help you think of better ones! (We even have space for you to add your own questions.)

*Week 1*

# Family Ties

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Home life matters. More often than not, we imitate in action and character what we are shown at home. Whether as a compliment or a rebuke, most of us have heard at one time or another, “You are just like your father/mother.” And our parents are usually a reflection of their parents’ influence. The cycle of follow-the-leader is admittedly strong in families—no matter where one is raised. While Joseph was raised by parents who believed in the one, true God, their spiritual maturity was slow in coming. Therefore, Joseph’s ability to rise above the immaturity that was displayed in his home is exemplary. His godliness challenges us to take responsibility for our own attitudes and actions instead of blaming our parents for our moral failures.

This week we will be doing some background checks into Joseph’s family. Little will be shown that will credit them with righteousness, for the family dynamics could best be described as dynamite—an explosive situation! While it may seem disheartening to start our week on such a negative note, sometimes we learn our lessons best from the honest, un-sugarcoated transparency of Scripture. I have no doubt that in this family’s flaws we will see some of our own. Therein lies the hope for our own homes. By the end of Genesis, you will appreciate how far this family comes—not just in miles, but in maturity.

Day 1

# Tricks Are No Treat!

*“One deceit needs many others, and so the whole house is built in the air and must soon come to the ground.”*

—BALTASAR GRACIÁN

## Get the Facts Read **Genesis 27**.

Get the Picture How truthful are Americans? In a *Reader's Digest* survey conducted several years ago, we are presented with the truth that we lie! Out of 2,624 readers, here are the percentages that reflect we have a moral problem:

1. Called in sick at work when not ill: 63%
2. Shifted blame to a coworker for something they did: 13%
3. Been undercharged/received too much change from cashier and not told them: 50%
4. Switched price tags to get a lower price for something they wanted to buy: 12%
5. Knowing they had little chance of getting caught, driven more than twenty miles per hour over the speed limit or gone through a red light: 71%
6. Lied to a spouse about the cost of a recent purchase: 32%
7. Lied to a spouse about their relationship with another person: 28%<sup>1</sup>

Get the Message To deceive, according to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, means to mislead, to cheat, to disappoint. If anyone ever lived up to his name, it would be Joseph's father, Jacob, for that is what his name meant. Deception seems to have come easily to him, but the consequences would be hard. In his old age, his own sons would deceive him in such a horrendous way that he

would suffer years of grief. Sin does have a boomerang effect: it might be aimed at someone else, but its effects will still come back and land at your own feet!

Let's begin our study today in Genesis 27, a study of deception taken to the extreme. Please take the time to read this chapter, for it never fails to shock in its audacity. To set the scene: Before Rebekah had given birth to her twin boys, the Lord had revealed that "two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23, ESV). That was confirmed when Esau foolishly sold his birthright to Jacob (Gen. 25:29–34)—an indication of how irreverently he treated the things of God. But in Genesis 27, when Rebekah overheard that Isaac still intended to give the blessing to his preferred son, Esau, she panicked. Thus began a mother bear's scheming for her favorite cub. While she lacked spiritual depth, she did have an appreciation for the blessing and was willing to go to great lengths to secure it for her son.

Jacob was evidently an agreeable accomplice, and in verses eighteen through twenty-five, he will tell his own father not one, not two, but three bald-faced lies. List these lies on the lines below.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Dragging the good and holy name of the Lord into this wicked scheme seems particularly abhorrent. But the question that begs to be answered is this: Was the deception necessary? What do you think?

\_\_\_\_\_

Was God blessing this scheme of Rebekah's? Was it a plan stamped and approved by God?

\_\_\_\_\_

Why or why not?

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Could Genesis 27 have read differently? Could the blessing have come to Jacob in another manner that did not require trickery?

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If your answer showed that there might have been a better way to obtain the blessing, how might the scenario have played out?

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Interestingly enough, Jacob will soon find himself receiving the deceiving. When he runs away to his mama's family for a bride—and to be honest, for fear of Esau's wrath—he will spend twenty years discovering Uncle Laban had a few tricks up his sleeve too.

In Genesis 29, how is Jacob misled?

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What should have been a monogamous relationship between Jacob and Rachel was now destroyed by Laban's deceit, and that alone led to a lifetime of trouble.

Unfortunately, Jacob was shown this kind of behavior from both sides of the family tree. Check out Genesis 26:6–11. What was the devious plan that Isaac concocted?

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Guess where Isaac got the idea? Turn to Genesis 12:10–20 and Genesis 20 to find the answer.

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Amazing, isn't it? Grandpa began the cycle of deceit that would last through his own great-grandchildren!

It is not until you see these examples of conniving grouped together in one bundle of deceit (and this isn't all of them) that you begin to question, "How could a family get so . . . crooked?" And that, my friend, is the deceiving thing about deceit. Practice it enough, and like any sin, it begins to feel normal, even comfortable. A young wife gives in to temptation on her latest shopping trip, and rather than face a possible rebuke from her budget-minded husband, she finds herself hiding the adorable little skirt in the back of her closet to pull out at a more agreeable time. Or let's make her cover-up more honorable: Let's say she is a Christian married to a man who is not following the Lord. She gives money to the church (their money) but disguises her tithe in her record keeping. The danger of deceit is its willingness to cover up truth, even when it is done for what would appear to be a worthy reason. It is misleading someone in an attempt to mask the actual reality of a situation. From today's reading, I have come to this convicting conclusion: no amount of reasoning, when tainted by the ways of Satan, will ever bring about God's blessings. God will continue to work his purposes even through our deceit (for his plans cannot be thwarted by our own evil motives), but he will never bless it.

If you don't look under the surface, you may think just the opposite—that God does bless deceit. When Jacob tricked Isaac for his blessing, it would appear that God turned a blind eye to the situation and Jacob never suffered the consequences of his actions. Through the next set of years he will accumulate great wealth and grow a large family. But remember, for twenty years he lived in fear of meeting his brother again. And as said before, his own family would



cause him grief. And it seems he never again saw his dearly loved mother, as there is no reunion recorded in Scripture.

In Genesis 12, when Abraham deceived Pharaoh, it looked as if the ruler of Egypt was the only one to suffer from Abraham's deception, yet remember those gifts that Pharaoh gave to him? Listen to what the commentator R. Kent Hughes has to say about them:

Significantly, those new riches were no blessing to Abram. The ill-gotten gain caused huge trouble in the following years, first in the strife with Lot's herdsmen, and then through a young Egyptian woman named Hagar, who was likely one of the maidservants given to Abram by Pharaoh.<sup>2</sup>

It takes an enormous amount of unholy energy to live a lie. Just the effort needed to make sure we don't get tripped up by our own deceit is exhausting. So . . . why do we do it? I suspect you will agree that the female gender has a tremendous instinct to fix things: broken relationships, difficult situations, unfair circumstances. Few of us set out on our white chargers to right the wrongs of the world with the intention to lie, but the desperation to "fix" may convince us that manipulating the truth is an honorable solution. But we will only create a problem that is worse than what we had in the beginning. In all honesty, with every lie that comes from our mouths, we are in effect announcing a distrust in God to do his good work in his good way in his good time. We could save ourselves future hurt down the road if we would learn from the mistakes of these Bible characters. Lying didn't work for them—it won't for us either. As the old West African proverb wisely states, "A man who tries to walk two roads will split his pants."

**Get Personal** Here is your assignment, friends. Listen to how you talk today. Carry a little notebook tucked in your purse, or put it in plain sight on your work desk. If you ever find yourself *stretching* the truth, *avoiding* the truth, *masking* the truth, *changing* the truth, or *hiding* the truth, then be honest with yourself and call it what it is. Write down your dishonest words in your notebook. Putting them in print brings the reality home and forces you to see it for what it is. You just caught yourself in a lie!

It's a dishonest existence to live with lies, and besides—it's miserable. Peter quotes the Psalmist in 1 Peter 3:10: "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech." He also quotes from Isaiah 53—the prophecy concerning our Savior. Here's your example: may your speech be as pure as Christ's:

"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" (1 Pet. 2:22).

## Day 2

# Sisters, Sisters!

*“Lord, help the mister that comes between me and my sister.  
And, Lord, help the sister that comes between me and my man!”*

—IRVING BERLIN

**Get the Facts** Read **Genesis 29; 30:1–24**.

**Get the Picture** Continuation of the family line was of particular concern for the patriarchal families. If a wife was barren, it was acceptable for her to give one of her servants to her husband for the purpose of procreation. Even though it was an acceptable practice, it was not God-honored. In the case of Abraham, the child of promise was given to Abraham and Sarah, not Abraham and Hagar. And in reference to the text today, God chose to bring the line of Christ through Judah, who was the son of Jacob and Leah, not Leah’s slave girl.<sup>3</sup>

**Get the Message** Rivalry can get ugly. I have sat—no, scratch that. I have yelled, I have jumped up and down like a kid on a pogo stick, and I have lost all sense of decorum while watching my kids’ basketball games, simply because of my competitive spirit. I have thought unkind things about the other team and their spectators. I have prayed completely prejudiced entreaties that the team that was most deserving (that would be *my* team) would win. And I have either strutted away from ball games high-fivin’ because “the best team won” victory or left in the shocked silence that comes with defeat, questioning all the way home how the refs, the coach—the cheerleaders, for Pete’s sake—could have let the game go sour! Fortunately, my emotions are easily placated with a good night’s sleep, but in our text today, such is not the case.



We will be looking at a rivalry between sisters that takes an unhealthy turn when fed by jealous hearts. These chapters in Genesis find Jacob in the land of Upper Mesopotamia at the home of his Uncle Laban (about four hundred miles from home). Jacob falls fast for Laban's daughter Rachel (described as "lovely in form, and beautiful" in Genesis 29:17). Due to the scheming of Laban, what should have been a sweet love story turns into an ancient soap opera when Jacob finds himself married to "weak-eyed" Leah ("weak" literally means soft, suggesting that her eyes lacked a sparkle or glow that was valued in women of that time).<sup>4</sup> Jacob is permitted to marry Rachel after first finishing out the bridal week with her sister, but there was never any doubt which wife held his greater affections. And yet, even though Jacob's love for Rachel was painfully obvious, Leah seemed to hold the ace card as she began producing more children for him than barren Rachel. Before moving on, let's take the time to read a little between the lines.

Would you record the names of Leah's first three boys and the reasons she gives for these particular choices?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Do you hear the hurt—the desperate need to be loved? If there was ever a convincing reason for a man leaving and cleaving to *one* wife, here it is: Genesis 29. And yet, for all Leah's losses in love, at the end of this chapter she is ahead four to zero when it comes to adding to the family tree. At the beginning of Genesis 30, we're told that Rachel becomes jealous of Leah (some versions use the word "envious"), and though the Scripture does not say, I would venture a guess that it was an emotion that cursed both sisters: Rachel because she wanted what Leah had—children—and Leah because she wanted what Rachel had—Jacob's love.

Consider for a moment the havoc that envy can bring to a heart. It has been said that in every language of the world there is a word for envy simply because no one escapes its sting. Who of us, ladies, has not given in to less than honorable thoughts when someone has something we desperately want? *Even if I had a figure like hers, I sure wouldn't be putting it on parade the way she does!* Who of us has not grieved a little over a friend's (mind you, a *friend's!*) successes? *I think*

# About the Author

**JULIE GARISS** is a frequent speaker for Christian seminars, retreats, and conferences. Julie recently retired from serving nine years with her husband, Randy, codirecting the Life and Ministry Preparation Center on the Ozark Christian College campus (Joplin, Missouri). Forty years of their married life has been serving in located ministry—thirty-three years with College Heights Christian Church, also in Joplin. They have three children and eleven grandchildren.