
Interrupted by God

A study for the 21st century woman
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A Study for the 21st Century Woman

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On Interruptions

“We interrupt this program to bring you a special report. . . .”

Words that break into our lives and cause us to sit up and take notice. Words that suggest that something big has happened. Words that inform us that all is not as it seems from our comfortable and safe places. Words that may change our lives.

Invariably when it happens, some of us are livid that our program is messed with. Surely the end of the story is more important than news that doesn't impact us personally. Maybe we rant through emails and tweets or under our breath against those responsible for breaking in on our planned agenda.

But what if the interruption comes from the Lord of the Universe, the Creator, the God of all? Can we afford to avoid his message?

God loves to interrupt those whom he has called to be his followers. His agenda isn't mine or yours. He delights in stretching us, testing us, teaching us, and using us. Our job is to adjust our plans to his. His purposes are not generally about us, however. God has bigger plans for his creation. He is working to reconcile a world to himself, and he wants to use us as his co-workers. As you work through this study, consider how God used his people for his kingdom purposes. Along the way he often changes us as well.

As we study a handful of biblical stories of God's interruptions, I pray that we tune our own ears to listen and our hearts to respond when he interrupts our places of comfort.

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A Beginning

Hope. Excitement. Possibilities. Time with God and friends.

The more you dig into God's Word for yourself, the more clearly he can speak.

The more consistently you attend your group, the stronger your community will grow.

The more honesty you bring to your time in the Scriptures, the more you develop your relationship with him—knowing, following, and worshiping him.

The more vulnerability in your group, the more God can work in its midst.

The more time you spend mulling over the great stories of God, the deeper your insights.

... **So choose God's Word** each day at an appointed time. Don't let anything of lesser importance replace your weekly group meetings. And expect the God of the universe to meet you in amazing ways as you go through these few short weeks together.

Why study stories from the Bible? What do these people from centuries ago who lived in a different culture and religious system have to do with us?

These things happened to them as examples and were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come, (1 Corinthians 10:11).

... **So ask God for insight** from his recorded stories of people from long ago and far away. Most of all ask him to reveal himself to you as you see him act in their lives.

People whose lives were interrupted by God.

What to know about this study guide

Simple doesn't equate to shallow

This study demands your involvement. Although the layout is simple, how deep you go depends on you. As you spend time talking to God and journaling your thoughts, he may lead you to other cross-references, but he will certainly give you insights into the stories. Don't stop with initial surface answers, but use the time you have with God by asking him to clarify the story and speak to you from it. The time you spend in the story with God gives him space to speak. Listen well and then share your thoughts with your small group and glean from their insights.

Each week has 3 parts

If you like doing a little study at a time, the study is set up in three parts, but feel free to do it any way that works best for you. If you prefer daily time in the Word, consider using one part for 2 days by doing the optional starred section on the second day and journaling again, or reread sections several days in a row. You may be amazed at what you see through multiple readings of the story. If you prefer to do the week's study in one sitting, you may want to read all the passages and then journal at the end. Of course, it's great to be in God's Word each day, but you may have other ways of doing that. See what works for your schedule and stick to it.



A star symbolizes optional study for those with extra time and interest.

What you need

- A quiet place, if possible!
- A Bible that you can understand. If you don't have one, ask your group leader for suggestions or email us at info@beyondordinarywomen.org. Modern versions are available as downloads, through Bible apps, or in print at any bookstore. (We are using netbible.org.)
- A notebook to use as a journal—or your laptop or tablet to take to your group meetings. If you prefer paper attached to the lesson, add a blank piece of paper after each lesson (See Journaling 101 p. 37.)
- The commitment to listen to God and write out what you hear after reading and rereading
- Someone, or even better a group of women, to discuss this with you and provide support, encouragement, and spiritual challenge
- This link to the short 5-8 minute videos of today's women whose lives have been interrupted by God: <https://vimeo.com/album/3822806>. Watch the introductory video now, and then view the video with the same number as the week's lesson after you do it.

Best practices for your group get-togethers (See Tips for Leaders p. 43.)

Plan a regular place, time, and leader.

The leader should:

- start on time
- move the group along, being sensitive to God's Spirit
- encourage everyone to share without forcing it
- be a great encourager
- not dominate the conversation
- keep the focus on the women, not herself and her own stories
- provide time for the group to think and share from their journals without reading the starter questions
- contact absent group members to encourage them
- email the group weekly to remind them of their meeting and share her excitement

As a group

- come prepared and on time with your study, journal, and Bible
- share freely and honestly
- encourage one another
- don't interrupt the speaker
- love one another
- don't try to fix the other members of your group or their problems by giving advice
- pray for one another and entrust each other and your problems to God
- be honest and vulnerable, but wise in how much detail you share
- stay in touch with each other between meetings for support and encouragement

If your group meets within a larger group in a church setting

- Look for a woman who is gifted in teaching God's Word to teach after the small group discussion. (For help in preparing as a teacher, contact us at info@beyondordinarywomen.org)
- The discussion isn't about the teacher's comments; rather, it should focus on the members' journaling. That is why the discussion should come first.
- The teacher might spend 15- 20 minutes adding to the background of the lesson, beginning and ending within the allotted time limit. Most of the time should be spent in small groups.
- The teacher's role is to clarify and extend what the group has studied, not to retell the stories they have discussed.
- To use our free 5-8 minute videos highlighting women's stories of God's interruptions, go [here](#). You may choose to show them in your large group or watch them individually online. There is an introductory video. If you don't watch it together, send the group the link in advance.

Lesson 2 Preview

Week two: Joseph, interrupted by God

“As for you, you meant to harm me, but God intended it for a good purpose, so he could preserve the lives of many people, as you can see this day.”

Joseph’s words to his brothers who sold him into slavery

Genesis 50:20

Part One

Do you love a good story? Our study will take us to some great stories, true stories. God has preserved them in his Word so that we benefit. Through them we come to know him more as we watch him work in the lives of people; we become wiser as we learn to avoid their mistakes; and we discover that God is at work through everyday people for his purposes.

Joseph has an extraordinary story. To do it justice we would have to study his life for weeks. Instead, you will read the most pertinent scriptures, and I will summarize the rest of the story.

Who was Joseph? He was Abraham’s great-grandson, born 11th of Jacob’s twelve boys, the eventual founders of the tribes of Israel. God told Abraham that the Promised One would come from his family, and the Old Testament is their story. Joseph was the older of two sons of Rachel, the love of Jacob’s life. Jacob also had children by his other wife Leah, who was Rachel’s older sister, and by his two concubines who were the sisters’ maids.



Read the background as to why Joseph became Jacob’s favorite son in Genesis 29:1-30, 29:19-22; 35:16-21.

Today we might describe Jacob’s family as dysfunctional, as you can imagine—two wives, two concubines, twelve boys, and a daughter. My husband and I had to work hard to make it with a family of one husband, one wife, and only two children. I can’t imagine this.

When Joseph was a teenager, his dreams only added to the jealousy and competition among the brothers.

Read the story in Genesis 37:1-36.

Respond to the story by journaling:

- Write down your insights into the dynamics of Jacob's family.
- Joseph believed that God was sovereign over his life—that is, he ruled over all that happened. With that in mind, specifically how and why did God interrupt Joseph's life here?
- What is God saying to you personally from this story?

Part two

Joseph's story reminds me of Anna and Mr. Bates in Downton Abbey. Those of you who are fans know exactly why I mention them. It's one problem after other for the couple. Their happiness is continuously interrupted by major problems. If I dealt with so many issues, I would be begging God for a break—just a time of peace.

Joseph's life surrounded by his family abruptly ended when his jealous brothers sold him to some traders headed to Egypt. As a slave in Egypt, Joseph served at the home of the captain of Pharaoh's guard and was promoted to overseer. Then his life was again interrupted when his master's wife falsely accused him of attempted rape and he was imprisoned.



Read the story in Genesis 39:1-20.

From slavery to overseer, brought low again by unjust imprisonment, then raised to what?

But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him kindness. He granted him favor in the sight of the prison warden. The warden put all the prisoners under Joseph's care. He was in charge of whatever they were doing. The warden did not concern himself with anything that was in Joseph's care because the Lord was with him and whatever he was doing the Lord was making successful. (Genesis 39:21-23)

Eventually two of Pharaoh's servants were imprisoned, and one night they both had troubling dreams. Making it clear that only God is able to interpret dreams, Joseph told them the dreams' meanings. Just as he predicted, one of the men was killed and the other servant was released. Although Joseph asked the freed man to tell Pharaoh about his wrongful slavery and imprisonment, the man forgot Joseph for two years.

At that point Pharaoh wanted someone to interpret his own distressing dreams. His servant admitted that he had met a young man in prison who correctly interpreted dreams for both of Pharaoh's servants and suggested that Pharaoh talk to Joseph.

Read the story of Joseph's rise to power in Genesis 41:14-52.

Respond to the story by journaling:

- Consider the various ways that God interrupted Joseph's life. God doesn't tell us how Joseph responded to the ups and downs. Write down your responses to your own hard times.
- How does this story give you hope when God interrupts your life with hard things?
- What is God saying to you personally from this story?

Part three

Sometimes we know how God has been at work behind the scenes of our lives, but more often he does not reveal it to us. If I had my way, I would know the whole story, the big picture. It seems like it would be easier to deal with difficulties if I could see how God would use them.

But rarely is life that way. If the hardships last, we may wonder where God is or if he cares. (David's psalms often reflect those emotions.) Since God sovereignly rules over all, we can trust in him and his character even when the answers to our questions are hidden from us.

Joseph finally understood the whole story, the whys of God's plans, but it took about 20 years to see it. His response to his brothers' evil can help us walk by faith when we don't know God's purposes. The same God who worked in Joseph's life is at work in ours. The same God who interrupted Joseph's life over and over, using those situations to raise him up to almost unlimited power in a foreign land, can interrupt our lives and use what happens for good.

After the famine became severe, Joseph's brothers travelled to Egypt to buy food because they were in the midst of the same famine that Egypt was experiencing. Although they didn't recognize Joseph (after all he was by now second in power only to Pharaoh, dressed as an Egyptian, and no longer a teenager), he knew them. And he tested them.

Read highlights of the story in Genesis 42:6-38; 43:15-25; 44:1-13; 45:1-15, 50:20.



Read the entire story from Genesis 42:6-45:15.

Respond to the story by journaling:

- What was the end of the story, the way that Joseph's life intersected with God's bigger story?
- What is revealed about God as you consider the whole story of Joseph?
- What scares you about God's sovereignty and what peace does it give you?
- What is God saying to you personally from Joseph's story?

God used Joseph to keep the lineage of Jesus alive in the middle of famine. He was moving toward fulfilling his promise of the one who would come in God's timing.

The verses that have been most meaningful to me when I have faced a hard time without any answers from God are found in Rom. 8:28-29: "And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose, because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters."

When we are left in the dark, we can trust that the God who loves us will bring good from his interruptions. That doesn't suggest that all that happens is good. It wasn't good that Joseph became a slave, was unjustly imprisoned, or forgotten by Pharaoh's servant. These verses do mean that God takes both the good and bad, the difficult and joyful, the expected and the surprising to make us like Jesus. They mean that we are called to his purposes, sometimes without ever seeing what he does with them. What is good to God is our growth in faith and character, and the extension of his glory and his kingdom. He is not capricious. He has meaning and purpose in all that he does.

We can trust him and know that even when his purposes are unclear, he is at work. Thus we have hope, even when others sin against us, even when we lose family and position. God is there.