

**SALT & LIGHT: ADDITIONAL COMMENTARY**

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**GENESIS 39:1-21**

**The hunger to profit.** Reflect together how challenging it was in the first year of the COVID-19 virus outbreak. In March 2020, the governor of Pennsylvania (PA) issued an order to stay at home, leading to the shutdown of nonessential businesses, including schools and restaurants, that lasted until May 29, 2020, in most parts of the state. A campaign was organized by two businessmen to compel the governor to “reopen PA” with professionally made signs, banners, and highway billboards. One business owner’s handwritten sign at a Reopen PA rally in Pennsylvania read, “I am not a coward, I am not selfish, I am trying to survive.”

- How was your family impacted by the COVID-19 virus?
- How were you or your family impacted by the shutdown and stay-at-home orders in your state or county during the first six months of COVID-19?

Most of us reading through the life of Joseph cannot connect our ancestries to Abraham and Sarah. Even so, every family’s history is filled with unwanted events, bad characters, and shocking surprises—just like the families of Israel’s patriarchs and matriarchs. Recall a piece of your family’s history! Remember a time when you, another family member, or an ancestor(s) ended up in an unwanted, bad circumstance, either because of something you did or through no fault of your own. Prepare to share this story later with your group.

Followers of Christ together can demonstrate living by faith during the worst circumstances, against the backdrop of our violent, unjust, and unrighteous role and experiences in the history of our world.

Questions for prayer and discussion:

- What shifts would the Church have to make to prioritize *living as witnesses together through loving one another*?
- How can we who are victims of sexual assault, and we who have sexually assaulted others pursue peace, justice, righteousness, healing, and even reconciliation together, in the midst of our ongoing story of sexism, racism, classism, and white supremacy?

None of Joseph’s brothers were otherwise motivated but by the desire to profit. They were not motivated by the love of their father for their brother and for them. Joseph’s cousins were not motivated to rescue him from his wicked brothers and return Joseph to his father. Hagar and Abram’s offspring and Abram and Sarai’s offspring were equally, firmly

in the grip of the desire to make the best or highest profit possible in every trade-related transaction.

They not only trafficked in humans. The Ishmaelites bought and sold desirable perfumes, aspirins, and pain killers such as opium (37:25, *Complete Jewish Bible*). His cousins transported Joseph from the well near Dothan and remained on the trade route from Damascus into Egypt. They passed not far from Joseph’s family as they wound their way southeast into the Egyptian territory.

In Egypt, the traders sold Joseph directly to Potiphar for an unstated price. Joseph was caught up in routine human trafficking. Slave trading must have been very profitable for family members to make the trek with their blood relative captives, to sell them and perhaps to buy others.

Potiphar selected Joseph for reasons that are not explained; the passage indicates Potiphar judged Joseph could be beneficial for Potiphar’s advantage and profit.

**Treating one another like objects.** Of all that her objectification of Joseph says about Potiphar’s wife, the single most important fact is that she did not seem to recognize that God’s abiding with Joseph provided good things to her through him. She attributed the success of Joseph’s labor, discernment, and wisdom to Potiphar’s having selected the best slave available. She did not recognize that God had granted favor to her, her husband, and their family.

She wanted more from Joseph and reasoned she had a right to take more from him because after all, he had been purchased by her husband. His mind, his devotion, his acumen, wisdom, skill, and his sexual organs all belonged to them—in her reasoning. Potiphar’s wife treated Joseph the way men routinely treated women and girls. To the wife of Potiphar, Joseph existed to please her husband’s expectations and her sexual desires. She wanted to profit from him through sexual pleasure because in her estimation, he existed to do as she commanded.

The family of Jacob and their neighbors were driven by a desire to profit, by pleasure, lust, greed, and desire. At every level of society, people sought profit and pleasure at others’ expense.

Society became disabled and could not recognize God’s presence among them. No matter how much they witnessed God’s goodness, they could not recognize God was present among them. People and societies could not see God was a far superior source of blessing and enrichment, and that God wanted to abide with people.