

The Gospel Project® for Adults

Daily Discipleship Guide CSB, Unit 4, Session 1

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God Redeems Betrayal

Session in a Sentence: Family strife can shatter a family, but God works even through the sinful choices of humanity to bring about good.

Main Passages: Genesis 37:3-8,18-28

What memories from your childhood evoke strong emotions? How do these memories and emotions affect you even today?

Søren Kierkegaard, a nineteenth-century Christian philosopher, said, “Life must be understood backwards ... it must be lived—forwards.” 1 Time offers us a better perspective, a clearer lens, from which to understand what we experience today, whether good or bad. But while tomorrow can give us the gift of understanding, it cannot give us the gift of healing; that only comes from God.

Group Time

Point 1: Favoritism leads to hatred and strife (Gen. 37:3-8).

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons because Joseph was a son born to him in his old age, and he made a robe of many colors for him. **4** When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not bring themselves to speak peaceably to him.

5 Then Joseph had a dream. When he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. **6** He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: **7** There we were, binding sheaves of grain in the field. Suddenly my sheaf stood up, and your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.”

8 “Are you really going to reign over us?” his brothers asked him. “Are you really going to rule us?” So they hated him even more because of his dream and what he had said.

Favoritism, hatred, and strife plagued Abraham’s family for generations. Isaac favored Esau while Rebekah favored Jacob. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. Jacob favored Joseph, the firstborn son God gave his beloved Rachel. Because of favoritism, Jacob struggled to have peace in his family.

How have you seen favoritism harm you or others at home, at work, or in some other setting?

Family Relationships: God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. The marriage relationship _____ the way God relates to His people. Parents are to _____ their children spiritual and moral values and to _____ them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to _____ and _____ their parents.

Point 2: Jealousy leads to an opportunity for sin (Gen. 37:18-22).

18 They saw him in the distance, and before he had reached them, they plotted to kill him. **19** They said to one another, “Oh, look, here comes that dream expert! **20** So now, come on, let’s kill him and throw him into one of the pits. We can say that a vicious animal ate him. Then we’ll see what becomes of his dreams!”

21 When Reuben heard this, he tried to save him from them. He said, “Let’s not take his life.” **22** Reuben also said to them, “Don’t shed blood. Throw him into this pit in the wilderness, but don’t lay a hand on him”—intending to rescue him from them and return him to his father.

Joseph’s brothers were blinded by jealousy and hatred, and Jacob was blind to just how deep their jealousy went. Sending

Joseph to report on them, the doting father had given his vengeful sons the opportunity they needed to dispense with their “beloved” brother, and they devised a plan to murder him. As King Solomon would later warn, “Fury is cruel, and anger a flood, but who can withstand jealousy?” (Prov. 27:4). Joseph and Jacob would soon see the wisdom of that proverb.

Why can jealousy be more harmful than anger or fury, as Solomon warned?

The sin of jealousy led each of the brothers to view Joseph not as a brother or a person but as an obstacle. Even Reuben’s seemingly heroic actions fell short of God’s expectations for His people. As believers, God has called us not to jealousy and fear but to love as we confront sin in our lives and in our culture. We are to know the truth, live according to the truth of God’s Word, and be bold as we stand for truth in this world.

How might spending more time in God’s Word motivate us to stand against sin and for the gospel in our culture?

Point 3: Bitterness leads to betrayal (Gen. 37:23-28).

23 When Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped off Joseph’s robe, the robe of many colors that he had on.
24 Then they took him and threw him into the pit. The pit was empty, without water.
25 They sat down to eat a meal, and when they looked up, there was a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were carrying aromatic gum, balsam, and resin, going down to Egypt.
26 Judah said to his brothers, “What do we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? 27 Come on, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay a hand on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh,” and his brothers agreed.
28 When Midianite traders passed by, his brothers pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took Joseph to Egypt.

In the end, the brothers did not murder Joseph, at least not with their hands. But they did murder him in their hearts (see Matt. 5:21-22) as they sold him into slavery and then deceived their father, Jacob, concerning his fate. Even so, God would turn their plan around. He would accomplish a **redemptive reversal**.

How have you seen God redeem situations for His glory and our good?

We are more like Joseph’s brothers than we care to admit: All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). But God, who is rich in mercy, provided salvation to us through His greatest act of **redemptive reversal**—the rejection and crucifixion of His Son followed by His resurrection from the dead. The blood shed by Jesus on the cross covers our sin—not in an attempt to hide it as Joseph’s brothers had done but as a satisfaction of our sin debt owed to God.

Temptation and Sin: Jesus was tempted like we are, and yet, He never sinned but faithfully _____ temptation and _____ the will of His Father. Knowing our weakness, we are to be on guard against temptation that may lead us to sin, and we pray for God to deliver us from evil.

Voices from Church History

“My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought: My sin—not in part, but the whole Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more, Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!” 2

—Horatio G. Spafford (1828-1888)

My Mission

Because we are fully accepted by the Father in Christ, we fight selfishness and sin to live in a way that brings honor and praise to God’s Son and guides others to become part of God’s family.

- What are some ways you will fight against selfishness and sin in your life this week?
- How can your group reach out to those who have been wronged and rejected by others?
- How can you use past times of redemptive reversal in your life to point others to God’s work in the gospel?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Genesis 37:1-11

You would think Jacob would have known better. He had seen how favoritism could tear apart a family. It was the story of his upbringing in a home where his father favored his brother, Esau, and his mother favored him.

And yet, the only thing Jacob seemed to learn from that was how to play favorites. He did it with his wife Rachel. He did it with his son Joseph. It is no surprise to see the results were the same: a family divided.

It is natural that we learn from Jacob's mistakes and seek to put the sin of favoritism to death in our families. We should do this. We need to do this. The unity and harmony of our homes depends on it. But as important as that is, there is much more at stake here. As we consider a father's unequal love for his children, we should be drawn to delight in the Father's equal and steadfast love for His children. God does not play favorites within His family. All of us who have trusted in Christ are invited to approach God as our loving Father. And as we do, we are to be drawn toward one another as well. We are to seek to love all of our brothers and sisters in Christ as God does, with the love that He gives us. There is no place for partiality within the church, from God or from one another.

How might you be prone to exhibit the sin of favoritism at times toward some of God's family, either in your heart or through your actions?

Voices from the Church

"The *ground is level at the foot of the cross*. This being so, it is absurd to be partial toward anyone. All should be treated equally—as beings created in the image of God. Rich and poor should be accorded equal honor and cordiality. Discrimination or favoritism is spiritually irrational." 3

—R. Kent Hughes

Day 2: Read Genesis 37:12-22

Jacob appears to have been clueless about the sinfulness of his favoritism toward Joseph, but that was not all he couldn't see. He also seems to have had no idea how deeply his favoritism wounded his other sons. So Jacob most likely was clueless to the peril he placed Joseph in when he sent him to check on the brothers once more. He had no idea of the destruction his poor decision would cause. How Joseph would be rejected by his brothers, betrayed, and nearly killed. Had he only known.

But there was a Father who did know the perils His Son would face because of His decision to send Him to His own. He knew His Son would be rejected and betrayed and that He would not escape death but would be executed while His people mocked Him. Of course, we are talking about God sending Christ Jesus. This all-knowing Father not only knew what would happen but was at work providentially to bring the cross to pass so that we might experience salvation from our sin.

How does God knowing what Jesus would experience and working to bring it to pass deepen your understanding of the gospel and your love for Him?

Day 3: Read Genesis 37:23-28

Joseph's brothers were so wounded by their father's favoritism that they wanted to kill their younger brother. It was only because of Reuben, the oldest brother who probably felt some semblance of responsibility, that the brothers abstained from their plan and threw Joseph into a pit instead. But his life was still in peril as they callously sat down and ate a meal as their brother pleaded with them (see 42:21).

But then a new opportunity arrived. When Judah saw a caravan of traders approaching, he asked his brothers what they would gain by killing Joseph. Instead, they chose to make a few bucks off of their brother and sold him to the Midianites. But as we see how sin was wreaking havoc in yet another generation of Abraham's family, we will also see that there was a way to break the chain. God would be at work in Joseph and the brothers to change them. Sin is inherited and many sins are learned behaviors. But God's grace and mercy made known to us in the gospel are greater. Christ has crushed sin under His heel, and in doing so, He has freed us from its power in our lives.

What sins do you feel enslaved to that you need to repent of and trust in Christ for deliverance?

Day 4: Read Genesis 37:29-36

One of the wonderful things about the Book of Genesis, and the Bible as a whole, is how raw it is. We see this rawness in how Jacob responded when his sons told him that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned for days. That is to be expected. But when all of his sons and daughters tried to comfort him, he refused. Instead, he was determined to carry his grief with him all the way to the grave. This is how death affects people. This is real. And apart from the gospel, this is how death would impact us. Death would be a crushing blow, leaving us without hope and without joy. Because Christ has gone before us in death and has put death to death, we can respond differently, especially when it comes to grieving the death of a fellow believer. Death does not have the final word (see 1 Thess. 4:13).

How do you tend to see death: through the world's lens or through the gospel's? Why?

Day 5: Read Genesis 38:1-30

Genesis 37 ends with a cliffhanger. We read that Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, the captain of the guards for Pharaoh. But when we turn the page and begin reading Genesis 38, it might feel as if a few pages of our Bible stuck together. We don't read of Joseph in Potiphar's house; instead, we read of a sordid account of Judah. And then Joseph's story continues in Genesis 39. Why this interlude?

Remember, it was Judah who suggested the brothers sell Joseph into slavery. And yet, look at how Judah responded when Tamar provided evidence showing he was the father of the child(ren) growing inside of her. Here he doesn't seek to maximize his gain from a situation; instead, he owns up to what he had done (v. 26). In this we find a hint that God was at work in Judah, growing him and changing him, as we will see Him do with his younger brother Joseph in Egypt. Joseph will carry our attention for the bulk of the remainder of Genesis, but we have to be careful to remember that God was not focused solely on the slave in Egypt. He was also at work in *others*, preparing them for their reunion a couple of decades later. Yes, God is at work in us, but not only us. He is changing us and others for His glory and our good.

For whom can you pray today that God would be working in him or her? How can you encourage this person?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- Favoritism leads to hatred and strife (Gen. 37:3-8).
- Jealousy leads to an opportunity for sin (Gen. 37:18-22).
- Bitterness leads to betrayal (Gen. 37:23-28).

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

How has your mindfulness of the gospel led you to repent or avoid sins such as favoritism, jealousy, and bitterness this past week?

What actions can we take to help those who are hurting from the experience of conflict or betrayal?

References

1. Søren Kierkegaard, in *The Diary of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Peter Rohde (New York: Citadel Press, 1988), 111.
2. Horatio G. Spafford, "It Is Well with My Soul," in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: LifeWay Worship, 2008), 447.
3. R. Kent Hughes, James: *Faith That Works*, in *Preaching the Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 94.

