

JOSEPH—LOVE HIM OR LEAVE HIM

by Dave Shirk and Carol Duerksen

KEY VERSE:

But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him. Genesis 37:4

FAITH STORY:

Genesis 37:1-28

FAITH FOCUS:

Joseph was helping his brothers shepherd the family's flock and he took a bad report back to his father. Joseph's father, Israel, loved him more than any of his other children and gave him a beautiful long robe. Joseph had two dreams that he told to his family, in which they bowed down to him. This made them hate him even more and become jealous of him. Joseph was sent to the fields to check on his brothers. They seized him and threw him into a pit. Later they sold him to Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. The Ishmaelites took Joseph to Egypt.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students understand that even though life isn't fair, God's goodness stays with us.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, students should be able to identify times when they have felt that life was not fair, but also recognize God's goodness in their lives.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Snacks—enough for everyone to have one snack and about half of the class to have two
- 2 Paper and pencils if using Focus, Option 2
- 3 Copies of the passages and questions in Explore the Bible
- 4 Chalk or dry board
- 5 Copies of student worksheets
- 6 Bibles for everyone

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–10 minutes)

Begin by handing out snacks to just part of the class—it could be the boys, or the girls, or students from one high school—whatever division you want to make. If students question why they aren't getting a snack, say that you have decided to give it to certain people today.

Ask students to imagine themselves in the following scenario: *You belong to a large upper class family. Your youngest sibling is constantly snitching on you to your parents and getting you in trouble. It's obvious that your parents love this youngest sibling more than all of the rest of you. He gets new brand name clothes all the time—yours come from the discount stores. One day the little brat comes to the family dinner table with a story about a special dream he had. In that dream, he sees himself having power and control over the whole family. What would you want to*

say or do to that kid? How would you feel towards him?

Option 1: Discuss answers as a class.

Option 2: Ask students to write a short letter to their parents or sibling, expressing their feelings about the situation. They should not sign their names. Collect the letters and share them with the class.

CONNECT: (10 minutes)

Ask students to think about a time when life was unfair to them, and begin the time of sharing by telling a story yourself. Pass the snacks around, inviting each student to share their “unfair” story when they take a snack. Allow them to pass either on the story or on the snack. Discuss the fact that the snacks were also unfair today—some got snacks earlier, some got them now, and some got them both times.

Ask students to recall any “unfair stories” they know in the Bible.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15 minutes)

Divide Genesis 37: 1-28 into sections; v. 1-3, v. 4 (all read), v. 5-11, v. 12-17, v. 18-24, v. 25-28. Read responsively, being sure to all read verse 4 together. After the story is read, hand out the papers with the passages and questions to small groups.

Gen. 37:1-4 – How old was Joseph and what did he do? What were three reasons his brothers hated him?

Gen. 37:5-11 – What did each of these two dreams mean? How did the brothers feel about Joseph now?

Gen. 37:12-17 – What was Israel’s mistake? Where were Joseph’s brothers and what were they doing?

Gen. 37:18-24 – What was the brothers’ premeditated plan for Joseph? What was Reuben’s plan for him?

Gen. 37:25-28 – What was plan B for Joseph? What were the brothers’ two motives?

Bring the class back together and have students share their answers. Ask the class to help you make a list on a chalk or dry board of the attitudes and feelings that are displayed by all of the characters in this story. (examples: parents love Joseph, brothers hate Joseph, Joseph is selfish and arrogant, brothers are jealous, Reuben is kind to Joseph, etc.)

Ask: Who is being unfair to whom? Which situations are unfair here? Who loved Joseph? Who left him?

APPLY: (10 minutes)

Hand out the student worksheets and ask students to fill them out. If possible, allow students to spread out in the room so they can have some privacy as they fill these out. Assure them that they will not have to share their answers.

RESPOND: (5 minutes)

Invite students to open their Bibles to Romans 8:31-39. Ask them to follow along as you read it. When you come to verse 39, insert the words “nor when life is unfair” into the verse before “anything else in creation.” Read verse 39 again, this time in unison with the class. Close with a prayer.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

Jacob had taken his family and settled near his childhood home at Mamre close to Hebron. Jacob had twelve sons. The oldest sons were involved in the shepherding of the family flocks. Joseph, the eleventh son, gave his brothers three reasons to dislike him. First, he brought back a bad report, or snitched on them to his father. Second, because he was Rachel’s son, he was the favorite child of his father. Jacob showed this by giving Joseph the beautiful cloak. Third, Joseph had two dreams that his brothers saw as egotistical and arrogant. Dreams were highly regarded in Bible times and thought to be predictions or warnings of the future, or uncoverings of the past (Victor Journey, p. 41). The brothers had nothing short of outright hatred for Joseph (Baker Commentary, p. 31)!

The beautiful cloak was a symbol of his distinction and importance in the family. Some believe that this may have been a sign of Jacob wanting to turn the family birthright over to Joseph (Victor Journey, p. 40). All these things, the bad report, the favored son status, and the two dreams of others bowing to him, did not make Joseph popular with his brothers. Finally their chance came to get rid of him. Joseph was sent by his father to check on his brothers, who were supposed to be some sixty miles away at Shechem. Joseph discovered his brothers had moved twenty miles further north to Dothan, an area known for its rich pastureland (Victor Journey, p. 42). Joseph’s brothers recognized him in the distance and decided to kill him. Joseph’s oldest brother, Reuben, pleaded with his brothers not to kill Joseph, but to put him in a dry cistern instead. Reuben hoped that he could come back later and rescue Joseph. While Reuben was away from the rest of the brothers, they saw some Ishmaelite traders coming their way and decided to sell Joseph to the traders. The traders took Joseph along with them to sell him in Egypt.

WORKS CITED:

Beers, V. Gilbert. **The Victor Journey Through the Bible**. Wheaton: Victor, 1996

Elwell, Walter A., ed. **Baker Commentary on the Bible**. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000

JOSEPH—LOVE HIM OR LEAVE HIM • Student Worksheet

1 When in your life are you the following:

Israel: Plays favorites with people.

When do you play favorites? With friends? Family members?

The brothers who don't like Joseph:

When do you treat others unfairly?

Reuben who secretly is kind to Joseph:

When does your heart go out to someone but you don't want others to know it?

Joseph, who is arrogant and self-centered but also the victim of his brothers' jealousy:

When are you self-centered and selfish?

When are you the victim of others' jealousy?

2 When have you felt God's goodness in your life despite things going wrong?