

Family Forgiveness

by Nate Stauffer, Carol Duerksen, Michele Hershberger

FAITH STORY:

Genesis 42

The Joseph story starts out with his brothers being jealous of him and selling him to Ishmaelite slave traders. He ends up getting thrown in jail for false accusations by his slave owner's wife. However, through God's providence Joseph received the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream. Pharaoh placed Joseph second in command of Egypt for interpreting his dream. This is where we begin the Bible study in chapter 42 of Genesis. Joseph's brothers come to buy grain from Egypt due to the famine across the land. They are then sent to Joseph as he is the one who controls the sale of grain. Joseph's brothers do not recognize him and end up being put to the test by Joseph. This is the beginning of the forgiveness process for Joseph.

SESSION GOAL:

Help the student to understand that forgiveness within their family is a process and not a simple, one time phrase.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

The students will be able to:

- Discuss the process of forgiveness in the Joseph story.
- Identify situations within their own family that need forgiveness.

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- Bibles
- Pencils
- Copies of the skit
- Two cell phones
- Small sheets of paper
- Wooden cross—large enough for small papers to be nailed to it
- Hammer and Nails

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS:

Greet the students and ask for four volunteers to act out the skit. Do the skit.

CONNECT:

Discuss:

Who are the losers in the family presented in this skit?

How is everyone a “loser”?

EXPLORE THE BIBLE:

Recall with the students how Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery and how he became second in command to Pharaoh of Egypt. Ask students to turn to Genesis 42. Lead the group through the scripture verses by asking the questions below.

Verses 1-7:

- What happened?
- What do you think of the way Joseph responded to his brothers?

Verses 8-17:

- Look back at Joseph’s dream in chapter 37.
- Why was Joseph testing his brothers?

Verses 18-28:

- Did Joseph’s belief in God affect the way he chose to treat his brothers after their 3 days in prison? What hint do we have that he may have softened his heart a bit already?
- Do you think the brothers were truly remorseful for what they did to Joseph? Why or why not?
- Why did Joseph put the money back in their grain bags?

Verses 29-38:

- If you were Jacob, would you allow Benjamin, the youngest brother, to be taken to Egypt? Why or why not?

DISCUSS:

What does this Bible story teach us about forgiveness?

- That it's more than just saying you're sorry; there's a process of restitution—we have to make it right for the ones we hurt.
- That we don't have to forgive those who hurt us automatically. Joseph checked out his brothers to see if they truly had repented, which their private conversation revealed that they had. The Bible teaches that there is not true forgiveness without true repentance.

APPLY:

Discuss: What does a person do to start the process of forgiveness?

Points to make:

- Someone must first ask the Lord for help with the change of heart. It is hard to forgive someone close to you for causing you emotional or physical harm—someone that you consider to be a “loser.”
- It takes a willingness to be able to confront the situation and let them know how you feel.
- It takes time to reconcile the offense. It is especially hard to forgive if someone does not show remorse for their actions. Joseph, whose brothers showed remorse, took quite some time to forgive them and establish trust. This whole process of forgiveness and reconciliation could take awhile, just as it did with Joseph. Everyone wins when that happens, but everyone loses when it doesn't.

RESPOND:

Invite students to write on a piece of paper the name of a person in their family that they might need to either forgive or ask for forgiveness, and to nail that paper to the cross. Explain that this is symbolic of asking Jesus to begin to work in the situation—that it may not happen quickly or without some tears and hard work, but that Jesus is with them in that process. Say that it is also okay if they are not ready to nail this problem to the cross and need time to process the situation more in their hearts and minds.

Finally, encourage the students to talk with one of the youth leaders, pastor, or another adult that they trust if they feel the need to further discuss or pray for their situation.

Close with prayer, asking God to work and move in the hearts of the youth and adults towards the process of forgiveness.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

Joseph's brothers came to the land of Egypt to purchase grain during the famine. They came to Joseph to buy the grain, but they didn't recognize him. Joseph had the opportunity to get revenge on his brothers for selling him into slavery. At first, he responded harshly to the brothers and accused them of being spies. But, according to the Layman's Bible Commentary, page 110, ". . . behind this show of seeming unconcern for the hapless victims, the writer is constantly letting the true character of the hero shine through. Joseph's interest in Benjamin and Jacob and his emotional struggles as he meets his Brethren from time to time prepare the reader for the high moment of reconciliation which will come in due course."

Joseph took advantage of the information and demanded that one of the brothers stay in jail while they brought the younger brother back to prove that their motives to buy grain were pure. As the brothers proceeded to do this they began to speak of what they did to Joseph. They figured that they were being punished by God for this. The brothers didn't think that Joseph could understand what they were saying because he had an interpreter. "The offenders must first come to the place where they acknowledge that they have done wrong and where they are sorry for their sins. This is the first step in the theology of reconciliation." (Laymen's Bible Commentary pg. 111) Joseph then showed his true character by finding a place to weep.

Joseph had his attendants put grain and the brother's money in the grain bag as well. When the brothers looked in their bags on the way back home, they found their money to pay for the grain. They figured they were now in big trouble. At the end of the chapter, the brothers relayed the message to Jacob, their father, and he grieved the loss of two sons. "In spite of Reuben's offer of his two sons as a pledge for Benjamin's return the sorrowing patriarch refuses to let them take Benjamin back to Egypt, since he is the only surviving son of his beloved Rachel." (Laymen's Bible Commentary pg. 112).

Session Reproducibles

SKIT

Characters: Parent, Teenager, Brother of Teen, Friend of Teen. Teen and Brother have cell phones. Parent and Teen are in one half of room, Brother and Friend are in another part of the room.

Parent: Hey, can I talk to you for a minute?

Teen: Sure.

Parent: I saw that you got a “B” on your report card. How do you expect to get into a decent college with that kind of grade?

Teen: It’s just one B!

Parent: You’d better get that GPA up or you’ll be grounded until you do!

Teen: Why do you have to be so hard on me?

Parent: You’re just a good-for-nothing like your brother. Speaking of—he’s next door at his friend’s house. Go tell him to come home.

Parent leaves.

Teen mutters to him/herself: I’m not going over there. I’ll text him and he’d better come home.

Teen texts brother.

Brother reads text he just received: I’m supposed to go home. I’m not going.

Friend: Cool!

Brother: I hate it there. We just fight. My dad fights with us kids, and we fight with each other. They’re all such losers.

Friend: Text that back!

Brother: Good idea.

Brother texts to Teen.

Teen reads text: Loser! I’ll show you who’s the loser!

Teen storms across room to his Brother and grabs him by the shoulders. STOP at that point.