

Joseph Sold By His Brothers

(Genesis 37)

Introduction

When others hurt us, it is easy to want to hurt them back. But God says that those who have believed on Him are to be longsuffering. [Teacher, write “longsuffering” on the board.] That means we are to patiently accept hurt or trouble for a long time. Why would God ask you to do that? How does He expect you to do it? The Bible tells us about a teenager who needed to learn to be longsuffering.

Opening Prayer

Lord, we want to do what You want us to do. Teach us what it means to love people who hurt us and are unfair to us. It's so unnatural to be kind to people who are mean to us. That's why we need your Holy Spirit to fill us with the strength to be longsuffering. Amen.

Memory Verse

... **love** your enemies, **bless** those who curse you, **do good** to those who hate you, and **pray** for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. (Matthew 5:44)

Lesson

We've been learning about the children of Israel. Who remembers who the first Jew was? (Abraham!) His son was Isaac and Isaac's son was Jacob, whose name was changed by God to Israel. Next we turn our attention to one of Jacob's sons, Joseph. He was Jacob's 11th son and he was Jacob's favorite son.

Let's pick up the story in Genesis 37.

Genesis 37:3-4

Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children because Joseph had been born to him in his old age. So one day Jacob had a special gift made for Joseph—a beautiful robe. But his brothers hated Joseph because their father loved him more than the rest of them. They couldn't say a kind word to him.

Joseph was favored by his father because he was the son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife. But his brothers were jealous of him, especially when their father made Joseph the coat of many colors.

Genesis 37:5-7

One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever. "Listen to this dream," he said. "We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!"

[Teacher, explain what a sheaf is.] His dream seemed to mean that he would have a place of authority over his older brothers. The younger would rule over the older ones. Who does this remind you of? (Jacob and Esau)

Genesis 37:8

His brothers responded, "So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them.

Joseph's older brothers thought that he was being boastful and arrogant to think that he would rule over them.

Genesis 37:9

Soon Joseph had another dream, and again he told his brothers about it. "Listen, I have had another dream," he said. "The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!"

Joseph had a second dream that seemed to indicate that he would someday rule over his brothers.

Genesis 37:10-11

This time he told the dream to his father as well as to his brothers, but his father scolded him. "What kind of dream is that?" he asked. "Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow to the ground before you?" But while his brothers were jealous of Joseph, his father wondered what the dreams meant.

Envy and jealousy are wicked things to allow in any relationship. Even though Joseph's brothers hated him and were unkind to him, the Bible doesn't say that Joseph spoke or acted unkindly to them. God was building into Joseph's life the ability to be longsuffering. He wanted Joseph to learn to patiently accept the hurt.

God can give you the strength to be longsuffering, too. [Teacher, explain today's memory verse] The Bible tells us to: *...love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.* (Matthew 5:44)

Who are your "enemies"? (Those who mistreat you at school or on the playground) Who are those who "curse" you? (Those who say bad words to or about you) How do others show they hate you? How do they "spitefully use" you (hurt you on purpose)? When others are unkind, your natural reaction may be to get back at them. Only God can give you the strength on the inside to be longsuffering. He wanted to give Joseph that kind of strength.

One day Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers who were tending the sheep a long way from home. Joseph's father wanted to know how his other sons and their flocks were doing. Even though Joseph knew his brothers hated him, he obediently walked 65 miles to find them. But when the brothers saw Joseph approaching, they plotted to kill him.

Genesis 37:18-20

When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him. "Here comes the dreamer!" they said. "Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, 'A wild animal has eaten him.' Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!"

The brother's sinful jealousy was now leading them to do a terrible thing. That is how sin develops. It often begins with just a thought and becomes an action. Sin can lead to terrible actions as it did with Joseph's brothers, who now plotted to kill him.

Genesis 37:21-22

But when Reuben heard of their scheme, he came to Joseph's rescue. "Let's not kill him," he said. "Why should we shed any blood? Let's just throw him into this empty cistern here in the wilderness. Then he'll die without our laying a hand on him." Reuben was secretly planning to rescue Joseph and return him to his father.

Thank goodness Reuben had a good conscience and didn't want to murder his little brother! But, look what they did do to him...

Genesis 37:23-24

So when Joseph arrived, his brothers ripped off the beautiful robe he was wearing. Then they grabbed him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

They threw him into a dry well. What a terrible thing Joseph's brothers did to him! Joseph must have been angry and afraid! But God gave him the strength to be longsuffering. And He can help you to be longsuffering, too.

Our memory verse tells us four things God says you should do when someone is unkind to you:

1. Love – Decide to care for that person, even though you may not feel like it.
2. Bless – Ask God to bring good things into the life of that person.
3. Do good – Be nice to that person.
4. Pray – Talk with the Lord about that person.

As you follow these steps this verse teaches, you will be showing longsuffering. It isn't easy to be longsuffering, but God can help you.

Joseph certainly needed God's strength in a special way to be long suffering through his brothers' cruel treatment.

Genesis 37:25-28 [Teacher, read...]

And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt. So Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt.

At least they didn't leave him in the pit to die! But, who knows what the Midianite traders would do to him!

Genesis 37:29-30

Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph was not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. And he returned to his brothers and said, "The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go?"

Reuben was so distressed they decided to come up with a plan.

Genesis 37:31-33

Then the brothers killed a young goat and dipped Joseph's robe in its blood. They sent the beautiful robe to their father with this message: "Look at what we found. Doesn't this robe belong to your son?" Their father recognized it immediately. "Yes," he said, "it is my son's robe. A wild animal must have eaten him. Joseph has clearly been torn to pieces!"

They dipped Joseph's beautiful coat into blood and asked their father to identify it. They didn't actually say that Joseph was dead; they led their father to believe he was dead. And, they didn't try to correct his thinking.

So, his brothers didn't actually kill Joseph and technically they didn't lie to their father about what happened to him. Did they sin? (Yes! They let their father believe a lie and that's just the same as being dishonest!)

Genesis 37:34-36 [Teacher, read...]

Then Jacob tore his clothes and dressed himself in burlap. He mourned deeply for his son for a long time. His family all tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "I will go to my grave mourning for my son," he would say, and then he would weep. Meanwhile, the Midianite traders arrived in Egypt, where they sold Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Potiphar was captain of the palace guard.

Think of the sorrow those sons brought to their father! But as we will learn in the next few lessons in the weeks to come, God is at work behind the scenes.

God allows us to go through difficulties in life to help us to become more longsuffering and to teach us to rely on Him for our strength.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we want to learn to be longsuffering like Joseph was. We want to love people that do us wrong. Please fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we might have the power to overcome our natural reaction to return hurt for hurt. Teach us to love our enemies, to bless them and pray for them and do good to them. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES**CRAFT CORNER**

With plain white T-shirts and fabric paints, let the children make "coats of many colors."

GAME CENTER

Use the following questions in a game of your choice:

Review Questions:

1. Which son did Jacob love the most and why? (Joseph because he was the son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife.)
2. What did Jacob do for Joseph that made his brothers especially jealous of him? (Made him a coat of many colors.)
3. What was Joseph's first dream? (He and his brothers were out in the field binding sheaves, and his sheaf stood up, and their sheaves all gathered around it and bowed low before it.)
4. What was Joseph's second dream? (The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before Joseph.)
5. What did Joseph's dreams seem to mean? (That he would someday rule over his brothers.)
6. How did Joseph react to his brother's hatefulness and unkindness? (The Bible doesn't say that he spoke or acted unkindly to them.)

7. What character trait was God building into Joseph through these circumstances in his life? (Longsuffering.)
8. When someone is unkind, what is your natural reaction? (To get back at them.)
9. How can you do today's memory verse? (Only God can give you the strength on the inside to be longsuffering.)
10. What did his brothers do when they saw Joseph coming out to the fields? (They plotted to kill him.)
11. What did his brothers do instead of killing Joseph? (Threw him into a dry well or pit.)
12. Did his brothers leave Joseph in the pit to die? (No, they sold him to the Midianite traders.)
13. How did Joseph's brothers lead their father to believe Joseph was killed by wild animals? (They dipped Joseph's beautiful coat into blood and asked their father to identify it. They didn't actually say that Joseph was dead; they led their father to believe he was dead. And, they didn't try to correct his thinking.)
14. What does God want you to learn from this lesson? (To be longsuffering like Joseph.)

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