

# 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.

**Ask:** Why would God ask you to do that? How does He expect you to do it?

Today we’re going to learn about a teenage boy 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)

Let’s talk about how our verse for today applies to our lives:

### Enemies

Do you have any enemies? Has anyone ever been mean to you or made fun of you? Those who mistreat you at school or on the playground are like “enemies” to us, but Jesus wants us to have an attitude of love toward our enemies.

### Curse

Who are those who “curse” you? Has anyone ever called you a bad name? Those who say bad words to you or about you is an example

of someone cursing you. But God tells us to bless those who curse us. That’s right! Ask God to make their lives better.

### Hate

How do others show they hate you? Has anyone ever harmed you on purpose? Is there a bully at school that picks on you? God says we are to do them good, to treat them with kindness and ask God to be good to them.

### Spitefully Use

When someone hurts you on purpose, that is an example of someone who is “spiteful” and God tells us to pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us. The Bible says, “*Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing.*” (1 Peter 3:9a NIV)

When others are unkind, your natural reaction may be to get back at them. But God wants us to be longsuffering.

## Lesson

We’ve been learning about the Fathers of our Faith. [Teacher, review the lesson series up to this point.]

At this point, Jacob’s name has been changed from Jacob to Israel and he is back home in the land of Canaan with his wives and children. We are now we are going to turn our attention to one of Jacob’s sons, Joseph, who was Jacob’s 11th son his 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. <sup>4</sup>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.

One night Joseph had a dream...

## Genesis 37:5-7

*One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever. <sup>6</sup>"Listen to this dream," he said. <sup>7</sup>"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!"*

[A sheaf is a bundle.] His dream seemed to mean that he would have a place of authority over his older brothers. Let's see how the brothers responded...

## 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. Soon Joseph had another dream...

## 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 as well as his mother and father. Let's see how Joseph's father responded...

## 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?" <sup>11</sup>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.

God can give you the strength to be longsuffering, too.

Today's 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. In fact, only God can give you the strength on the inside to be longsuffering. And, 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. <sup>19</sup>"Here comes the dreamer!" they said. <sup>20</sup>"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. <sup>22</sup>"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. <sup>24</sup>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!

**Ask:** How do you think Joseph felt to be thrown into the pit?

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.

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

## Genesis 37:25-28

*Then, just as they were sitting down to eat, they looked up and saw a caravan of camels in the distance coming toward them. It was a group of Ishmaelite traders taking a load of gum, balm, and aromatic resin from Gilead down to Egypt. <sup>26</sup>Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain by killing our brother? His blood would just give us a guilty conscience. <sup>27</sup>Instead of hurting him, let's sell him to those Ishmaelite traders. After all, he is our brother--our own flesh and blood!" And his brothers agreed. <sup>28</sup>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.*

Before you think well of Judah, look at his motive for not wanting to kill Joseph. He was saying, "There's no profit in killing Joe; we should sell him so we can get some money!"

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

*Some time later, Reuben returned to get Joseph out of the cistern. When he discovered that Joseph was missing, he tore his clothes in grief. <sup>30</sup>Then he went back to his brothers and lamented, "The boy is gone! What will I do now?"*

Evidently Reuben wasn't around when the other brothers sold him into slavery. When Reuben found out, he was so distressed he tore his clothes as a sign of grief. Then 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. <sup>32</sup>They sent the beautiful robe to their father with this message: "Look at what we found. Doesn't this robe belong to your son?" <sup>33</sup>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.

**Ask:** Since the 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

*Then Jacob tore his clothes and dressed himself in burlap. He mourned deeply for his son for a long time. <sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>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

#### *Spin for Points*

- Print the questions on individual cards (without the answers.)
- Divide the children into two groups.
- Have Team A select a question card to ask of Team B.
- On a correct answer, Team B gets to use a spinner to determine the number of points their team gets.



- Then Team B selects a question to ask of Team A; repeat process.

Or, use the following questions in another game or discussion:

#### **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 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.)
3. What was Joseph's second dream? (The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before Joseph.)
4. What did Joseph's dreams seem to mean? (That he would someday rule over his brothers.)
5. How did Joseph react to his brother's hatefulness and unkindness? (The Bible doesn't say that he spoke or acted unkindly to them.)
6. Which brother came to Joseph's rescue when all the other brothers wanted to kill him? (Reuben.)
7. Why did Joseph's brothers sell him?
8. What character trait was God building into Joseph through these circumstances in his life? (Longsuffering.)
9. What 4 things does our verse for today tell us to do when someone is unkind to us? (Love our enemies, bless them, pray for them, and do good to them.)
10. Why were Joseph's brothers jealous of him? (Joseph was favored by his father because he was the son of Rachel, his favorite wife.)

11. How can you do today's memory verse? (Only God can give you the strength on the inside to be longsuffering.)
12. What did his brothers do when they saw Joseph coming out to the fields? (They plotted to kill him.)
13. What did his brothers do instead of killing Joseph? (Threw him into a dry well or pit.)
14. Did his brothers leave Joseph in the pit to die? (No, they sold him to the Midianite traders.)
15. 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.)
16. What does God want you to learn from this lesson? (To be longsuffering like Joseph.)

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