

## Genesis / God Of The Ordinary / Genesis 37:1-11

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### INTRODUCTION

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**As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.**

**ICE BREAKER QUESTION:** When have you seen the silver lining in a difficult situation? What attitudes or obstacles prevent us from seeing silver linings when available?

Conflict is nearly always present and often a struggle. However, we can find hope and comfort in the truth that God is at work even in the midst of conflict. This is one of the themes of Joseph's story. Favoritism, hatred, and envy defined the family of Jacob. The older sons of Jacob hated Joseph so much that they wanted to kill him. They chose instead to profit from their hatred, and they sold Joseph into slavery. From the brothers' perspective, it seemed they were done with their brother. But years later, they found themselves standing before Joseph as he served as the second-in-command in Egypt. Joseph forgave his brothers because he saw that God was at work through all that transpired.

**Read back through the passage before going through the questions.**

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### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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- 1. What is your biggest takeaway? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?**
- 2. What kind of person does Joseph appear to be at the beginning of this story?**

If you begin reading Joseph's story in Genesis 37, you find a boastful young man who is proud of things like his coat and the mark of his father's favor. He wasn't afraid to let his brothers and father know that he believed someday he would rule over them and they would bow down to him. The brothers' anger and bitterness ran rampant, and they faked Joseph's death to sell him into a life of servitude. Joseph found himself enslaved in a foreign land, having lost everything precious to him. In fact, the rest of Joseph's life seems a bit like a yo-yo, moving up and down between highs and lows.

Thus Joseph misrepresented and so maligned his brothers. Likely, his report was essentially true, but not perfectly so—due to exaggeration or inaccuracies. So young Joseph, in effect, became a tattler.<sup>1</sup>

**3. What caused Joseph’s brothers to become embittered towards him? Were any of these things really Joseph’s fault?**

Joseph’s brothers had to contend with the fact that their father favored and loved him more than the rest of them. Though this wasn’t Joseph’s fault, it still caused a great deal of animosity towards him personally. The other thing that upset his brothers were the dreams that the Lord gave him regarding the future. Once again, this was not Joseph’s fault. Perhaps Joseph wasn’t tactful in his relation of these dreams, but he cannot be blamed for the things the Lord showed him.

We have to be careful that when we are upset at others that we aren’t blaming them for things that aren’t their fault. Jealousy is very dangerous, and if we don’t repent of it, we can get to a place where we can bring ourselves to speak peaceably to others. Many of the problems the Lord Jesus had with the religious leaders were born out of this kind of jealousy towards Him.

*And likely, Jacob felt even less affection for the sons of his slave wives, and these four sons of Bilhah and Zilpah knew it and resented it. Quite naturally, then, the four had little regard for young Joseph, the son of their father’s favorite wife.<sup>2</sup>*

*In the eyes of the disaffected sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, this was a monstrous offense. And when the rest of the older sons heard about what Joseph had done, they began to smolder with resentment. Joseph’s offense grew larger with each retelling. On their relativized scale of morality, Joseph was the lowest.*

*Jacob’s favoritism. Favoritism had become a generational sin in Jacob’s family. Remember, Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob, and remember that Rebekah loved Jacob more than Esau, and recall that Jacob loved Rachel and her children more than Leah and her offspring.<sup>3</sup>*

**a. What can we learn from Joseph’s brothers in this matter?**

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 437.

<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 437.

<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 437.

**4. When have you seen behaviors like this fuel the fire of conflict? How can God still be at work in this situation?**

*God choreographed Joseph's rejection in two ways: first, by his father's favoring of Joseph over his brothers, and second, by God's giving Joseph a vision of his own future exaltation. Human sin and divine revelation combined to produce a hatred and rejection that ultimately created a way of salvation.<sup>4</sup>*

*The human causes of this are so readily apparent: Joseph's sinful distortions and Jacob's sinful favoritism and blatant elevation of Joseph combined to harden his sons' rejection of and bitter hatred for Joseph.*

*Where was God in all of this? we may wonder. He was adding fuel to the fire.<sup>5</sup>*

**5. What would the passage have meant to the original readers of Genesis? What was the main point for them?**

*Allen Ross explains:*

*... just as Joseph lived in bondage in Egypt before his deliverance and supremacy over Egypt, so would the nation. Just as suffering and bondage formed tests for Joseph to see if he kept his faith and was worthy of the promise, so too the bondage of the nation was a means of discipline and preparation for the nation's future responsibilities. Moreover, the climax of the story showed that the Hebrew slave served a God who was infinitely superior to Egypt, who controlled the economy of Egypt, and whose wisdom outstripped the wisdom of Egypt.<sup>6</sup>*

*Ultimately, and above all, the story of Joseph is about God working his will through the everyday events of life. There are no miracles here. God does not suspend his natural laws to make things happen. The story is about the hidden but sure way of God. God's hidden hand arranges everything without show or explanation or violating the nature of things. God is involved in all events and directs all things to their appointed end. Toward<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 436.

<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 438.

<sup>6</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 436.

<sup>7</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 436.

*What a God he is—because he is not just a God of the extraordinary but a God of the ordinary. His power and infinitude take both the good and evil actions of Joseph’s family, of Pharaoh and his servants, and of passersby and uses their actions for good (cf. 50:20).<sup>8</sup>*

*As Walter Brueggemann has said:*

*The main character in the drama is Yahweh. Though hidden in the form of a dream, silent and not at all visible, the listener will understand that the dream is the unsettling work of Yahweh upon which everything else depends. Without the dream there would be no Joseph and no narrative. From the perspective of the brothers, without the dream there would be no trouble or conflict. For the father, without the dream there would be no grief or loss. The dream sets its own course, the father-brother-dreamer notwithstanding. And in the end, the dream prevails over the tensions of the family.*

*The effect of the dream and its narration set in motion a chain of events that were not disasters but the work of grace.<sup>9</sup>*

**a. In what ways are we similar to the original audience? How are we different?**

**6. Do you struggle with trusting God when bad things happen in your life? What can you do to trust Him more, with your feelings and with your life?**

Encourage group members to spend some time thinking back on conflict situations when they were unable to recognize God working in the midst of the struggle but can now see He was there. Suggest that they record these experiences in a journal so they can look back at it the next time they find themselves unable to trace God’s hand.

*Do you see what that tells us? It reveals that any of us who follow God will live a life that will sometimes become very tangled. At times complications will rise from our own sin (as with Joseph), from the sin of those around us, and from the sin of those in the wider spheres of our existence. We live in a world caught in a web of sin, and it is constantly casting new webs. But we know that amidst life’s complexities the creative*

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<sup>8</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 436.

<sup>9</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 440.

*power of God is at work to do us good. This is true when we are ill, when we have trouble with our children or grandchildren, when professional problems engulf us.<sup>10</sup>*

**7. How can understanding God’s sovereignty help us when we experience struggles in life?**

*Truly we have a God of providence, a God who sustains our souls in all of life, perpetually working good. This is a truth to learn now, because life is not going to get easier. In fact, the more you follow God, the more complicated life will become because your life’s course will buck the currents of this world.*

*But take it to heart that God is at work to do you good, and rest your soul in that. Submit yourself to him in the great processes of life. Follow him. Listen to the life of Joseph, a hero for the ages, who became so much like Christ himself.<sup>11</sup>*

**8. What does it look like for ordinary people in ordinary places and ordinary times to live out the creation mandate and the Great Commission?**

## **Conclusion**

The seemingly ordinary decision to take our child to Sunday school or help him memorize Bible verses might be used by God to equip that child to be a mighty warrior in the Lord’s army. Our choice to give money to a local missionary apart from any visible revelation from God may be what purchases the Bible that leads to a great revival in a foreign land. The Lord is with us in the silent, “unremarkable” moments of our lives to do extraordinary things.

## **PRAYER**

Take a moment to thank God for the ways grace has been expressed in your life. Thank Him for drawing you into His story.

Close this final session of your “When Relationships Collide” video series in prayer. Ask the Lord to help each of you as you move forward to use the principles you have learned in this study to deal with conflict in a way that is healthy and God-honoring.

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<sup>10</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 440–441.

<sup>11</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 441.



## **FURTHER STUDY**



**Article –**

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/ordinary-christian-work>

**Video –**

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/joseph-s-call/>