



Parkway Fellowship

Family Feuds • Joseph vs His Brothers: Playing Favorites Ain't Favorable • Genesis 37-50 • 11/04/2018

Main Point

Persevering through trials is a testimony to God's sovereignty and faithfulness and breaks the cycle of generational sin.

Introduction

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

Have you ever felt cheated out of something? How did you deal with that situation?

If you were to see or learn about someone in this group getting cheated or another type of injustice, would you most likely: feel bad but helpless to intervene, pray, not give it much thought because "that's just life", wonder what the person did to deserve it, do whatever you could to make it right, or something else?

Feeling cheated can easily lead to us feeling miserable and embittered. If we hold onto this feeling, it will soon begin tainting all of our thoughts and make us very cynical. Being bitter is not a good place to be!

In today's study, we'll see another family feud that took place in Abraham's family line. Joseph was Jacob's son, and treated as the favorite as had been common practice for generations. It also led to conflict with his brothers, who hated him and plotted to kill him. The experiences that followed gave Joseph plenty of reasons to be embittered and opportunity to get revenge. Instead, he chose to forgive.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 37:2-11.

Was it wrong for Jacob to show favoritism toward Joseph the way he did? How could Jacob's disproportionate love for his son have tempted Joseph toward boasting and pride?

How should Joseph have responded to this favoring from his father? How should it have impacted the way he interacted with his other brothers?

If Joseph did share the dreams God gave him out of a boastful, arrogant spirit, does that justify the brothers' resentment? Do you think the brothers assumed that their initial jealousy, left unchecked, would lead to more trouble later on?

At the start of the biblical account of Joseph, we find him pasturing his father's flock with his brothers. The twelve sons were serving together in the same place with a common task for a single purpose. Yet, we begin to see discord and resentment in their relationships. The brothers harbored jealousy and hatred toward Joseph after they saw the way their father loved him most, to the point that they "could not speak peacefully to him" (v. 4). As for Joseph, we do not know whether he gave his father a bad report on his brothers out of genuine concern for the household or a desire to promote himself and boast in Jacob's love for him. Either way, it is clear that neither Jacob nor Joseph had a finger on the family pulse.

| Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 37:18-30.

What reasons could there be that none of the 10 brothers spoke up and told the others what they were doing was wrong and to leave Joseph alone completely?

What do you think prompted Reuben to speak up? Judah?

What good lessons can you learn from Reuben and Judah here? Where did they still fall short?

Harboring feelings of anger and feelings of resentment is toxic in family relationships. Had the brothers had open dialogue with Joseph or their father, perhaps relationships could have been reconciled and restored prior

to the events that took place in verses 18-30. A mob mentality is a powerful thing. Apparently, 8 of the 10 brothers agreed to murder Joseph on the spot, likely just because they thought that's what everyone else wanted to do. Reuben and Judah were able to speak some reason into the situation and get Joseph's life spared. Though falling short of ensuring Joseph's safety altogether, the two weren't afraid to shrewdly speak truth and try to influence their brothers. In doing so, they saved Joseph's life.

| Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 50:15-21.

Much had transpired since Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. The brothers lied to Jacob about what had happened, saying that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Joseph became successful in Egypt, but was then falsely accused of attempted rape and imprisoned. He became known and respected in prison, too, but was forgotten by those he had helped. After being in prison for some time, Pharaoh recognized God's hand on Joseph (Gen. 41:38) and put him in a position of authority over all of Egypt. Many more years passed, and a famine came to the land, causing Joseph's now much older brothers to come to Egypt for help. Joseph's brothers did not recognize him, so Joseph tested them (Gen. 42-44). Then he revealed himself to them in love, forgave them, provided for them, and was restored to his father and younger brother Benjamin before Jacob died (Gen. 45-49).

What power could Joseph have wielded over the brothers to seek revenge for all they had done to him? According to the world, would it have been justified? According to the Word, would it have been right?

In verse 17, why do you think Joseph wept?

How was Joseph able to forgive his brothers for all that they had done to him?

Joseph had the right, the opportunity, and the moral high ground to exact revenge. He could have saved Reuben and Judah and killed the others. Instead, he forgave all of them and blessed all of them and their families.

Though much of his life was painful, Joseph saw the hand of God guiding every aspect of his life. God's sovereignty in all of these events does not negate the sins committed against him. Potiphar's wife and Joseph's brothers would answer for their sins to God if they did not have grace and forgiveness from God. But because Joseph saw that God was with him whatever happened, and because Joseph saw throughout his life that all of these things happened to him to prepare him for the responsibilities he had, Joseph was able to forgive his brothers and even care for them despite their sins against him.

Joseph shows us the same kind of forgiveness that Jesus Christ demonstrated at His betrayal. All of the disciples forsook Jesus on the night He was betrayed, and even as He was being nailed to the cross, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The Father sent the Son to die

for us, and though this came as a great cost, the evil that happened to Jesus was planned by the Father for our good” (cf. John 3:16).

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are some practical steps you can take to keep your finger on the family pulse in order to avoid resentment and feuds?

Do you feel the freedom and have the courage to speak truth in your family when there are wrong attitudes and actions? Explain.

Read Deuteronomy 5:8-9. Is there a situation where you need to initiate forgiveness so that restoration can take place and/or the cycle of generational sin can be broken? How can this group pray for you about that?

Pray

Thank Jesus for His forgiveness. Ask Him to help those who are suffering in family relationships, to draw them closer to Him through it give them the courage and grace to forgive those who have harmed them.

Commentary

| Genesis 37-50

Israel’s role as the people of promise was being jeopardized by their acceptance of the loose moral standards of the native Canaanites. The incest between Reuben and his father’s servant-wife (35:22) hints at that moral compromise. Judah’s marriage to the Canaanite Shua and his later affair with his own daughter-in-law, Tamar, makes the danger clear. To preserve His people, Yahweh removed them from that sinful environment to Egypt, where they could mature into the covenant nation that He was preparing them to be.

This explains the Joseph story. His brothers sold him to Egypt to be rid of their brother the dreamer. God, however, used their act of hate as an opportunity to save Israel from both physical famine and spiritual extinction. The rise of Joseph to a position of authority in Egypt in fulfillment of his God-given dreams illustrates the Lord’s blessing upon His people. Joseph’s wisdom in administering the agricultural affairs of Egypt again fulfilled God’s promise that “I will bless him who blesses you.” What appeared to be a series of blunders and injustices in Joseph’s early experiences proved to be God at work in unseen ways to demonstrate His sovereign, kingdom work among the nations.

No one was more aware of this than Joseph, at least in later years. After he had revealed himself to his brothers, he said, “God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” Years later after Jacob’s death, when Joseph’s brothers feared his revenge, he reminded them that they had intended to harm him, “but God intended it for good to accomplish ... the saving of many lives.” Human tragedy had become the occasion of divine triumph. Joseph’s dying wish—to be buried in the land of promise—looks past the future tragedy of Israel’s experience of slavery and anticipates God’s triumph in the exodus.