

Life Lesson 17
Joseph and His Brothers
Text: Genesis 31-33

Introduction

Did you ever get into trouble because your brother or sister or friend thought up a really bad idea – and you went along with it? In our story today we will meet some brothers with hateful attitudes and bad plan. We'll also see how another brother got into big trouble right along with them because he didn't have the courage to tell them "no."

The Story

We've been learning about the Patriarchs. Can you name the ones we have studied so far? (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) Jacob had twelve sons. Each of those twelve sons became the head of a big family. They became known as the twelve *tribes* of Israel. (You'll remember that "Israel" was Jacob's new name.)

Jacob had a lot of trouble in his life because his mother loved him best, while his father loved his brother Esau best. You would think he would learn from his bad experience and treat all his children the same, wouldn't you? I'm sorry to say that didn't happen.

His favorite son was the child of his favorite wife, Rachel. His name was Joseph. His next-to-the-favorite was Joseph's brother, Benjamin.

How do you think Joseph's brothers felt about him? They were jealous of him because their father loved him best. When Jacob gave Joseph a special coat of many colors, they began to hate him. Then he saw some of his brothers doing wrong and told his father about it. They got

in big trouble over it--and who do you think they blamed? Yes, they were mad at Joseph for telling on them.

To top it all off, Joseph had some dreams.

"Do you know what I dreamed last night?" he asked his family. "I dreamed we were gathering the wheat into sheaves out in the field. All of a sudden, all of your sheaves got up from the ground, and bowed down to my sheaf."

"Hah!" his brothers said. "Do you think that means you're going to rule over us some day? Don't hold your breath!"

They hated him for his pride and his dream. Then he had another dream.

"I dreamed last night that the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to me." he told them.

This time even his father was angry.

"Do you believe your mother and I and your brothers will bow down to you? You're getting too big for your britches young man!"

Trouble was bound to come with his brothers feeling so jealous and angry toward Joseph, and before long it did!

"Your brothers are out tending the sheep," Jacob told him. "I want you to go and see how they are doing."

Joseph said, "Yes, sir," and started off to find his brothers.

Before he came close, they saw him walking toward them.

"Look who's coming," they said. "It's the big dreamer. He's probably come to tattle on us again. Why don't we get rid of him while we have the chance? We can kill him and throw him in one of the pits around here and tell Father a wild animal killed him. No one would ever

know."

"Let's not kill him," said Reuben. "Let's just throw him in the pit and let him die of starvation."

Reuben was the oldest of the family, and he felt responsible for Joseph. He planned to go back when no one was looking and get Joseph out of the pit. He didn't have the courage, though, to tell them they were wrong and stop them from doing such a wicked thing.

While Reuben was off somewhere else the other brothers discussed what to do with Joseph. About that time they saw a caravan of Midianite traders coming through.

In those days they didn't have Target and Walmart stores where you could buy things you needed. Traveling merchants would go from place to place buying things from some people and selling them to others.

Those merchants gave Judah an idea.

"Maybe we ought not kill Joseph," he said. "After all, he is our own brother. Why not sell him to those Midianite traders. That way we'll be rid of him, and make a little money, too."

The others agreed. They pulled him out of the pit and sold him to the traders for twenty pieces of silver.

When Reuben got back, was he ever upset! I'm sorry to say he was more concerned about himself than he was about Joseph.

"What am I going to do now?" he moaned. "The child is gone, and how can I go home without him?"

The brothers took Joseph's coat and dipped it into the blood of a sheep they had killed. Then they showed it to their father.

"Is this Joseph's coat?" they asked.

"It is!" he cried. "Some beast has probably torn Joseph to pieces."

If the brothers thought that Joseph's death would make their father forget him and love them more, they were mistaken. He cried and mourned and wouldn't be comforted, although all his children tried their best to make him feel better. Before it was over, all the brothers were sorry and wished they hadn't done such a wicked thing.

The brothers didn't say, "A wild beast killed Joseph." They didn't actually tell a lie. When you trick someone into believing something that isn't true, it's a lie, just the same. You can lie by your actions as well as your words.

Meanwhile, Joseph was having a pretty tough time. First, his own brothers ripped off his good clothes and dumped him down in a deep hole. Can you imagine how scary that must have been for him? He knew his brothers hated him. He must have wondered if anyone would come back and get him. Would he have to stay in that deep dark hole until he died of starvation?

How relieved he must have been when they came and pulled him out--and how horrified he must have been to find out their plans. He was the favorite son of a wealthy, influential man. He had everything he wanted, and everyone had to do just what he said. Someday he would be rich and powerful. Didn't his dreams prove that?

Now all of that was gone. He had nothing. He was a lowly slave--headed for a strange land. No one cared if he was hungry and uncomfortable. No one paid any attention to what he said.

Then he was taken to a strange land where he couldn't even understand the language. Everything was different in Egypt--and he was to be a slave there. He would have to work hard and wouldn't even be paid for what he did.

This is a sad story, isn't it? Yet, there is an important lesson in it for us. Joseph's brothers

meant all these things to hurt Joseph, but God used those very things for good. God was with Joseph in Egypt and blessed him in some very special ways. We'll learn more about his adventures in Egypt next week.

The Life Lesson

The way Reuben acted reminds me of the way people act today. He knew that his brothers' plan was wrong. He didn't want to be a part of it, but he didn't have the courage to stand up to them and tell them they were wrong. He went along with it, planning to straighten things out when no one was looking.

Sometimes boys and girls think they can go along with the crowd when their friends are doing wrong things.

"I'll just go along with them, but not really be a part of the wrong things they do," they think. It doesn't work that way, though.

A boy named Mike learned that the hard way. His friends weren't Christians, but he liked playing with them, so he hung around them all the time. They decided one day to shoplift some candy at the convenience store. He pretended to go along with them, but planned to put his candy back so he wouldn't really be stealing. Can you guess what happened? The store manager caught him, and he was in big trouble. Mike's parents were ashamed that he had been stealing, and no one believed him when he said he wasn't really planning to shoplift. To make it worse, the other kids all got away without being caught.

If you hang around with people that are doing wrong and don't stand up for what is right, you'll wind up in trouble too. Reuben – and Mike – would tell you that it isn't worth it!

Review Questions

How many sons did Jacob have?

Twelve

Which one was his favorite?

Joseph

How did his brothers feel about Joseph?

They hated him.

What did Jacob give Joseph that made his brothers hate him even more?

A coat of many colors.

What did Joseph do that made his brothers angry?

He told on them when he saw them do wrong.

Why did Joseph's dreams make them angry?

The dreams meant they would bow down to him one day.

What did the brothers decide to do to Joseph when they saw him coming to the fields to find them?

They decided to kill him.

Which brother suggested they throw him in a pit instead?

Reuben

What did they do to Joseph instead of leaving him in the pit?

They sold him to Midianite traders.

How did the brothers lie to their father about Joseph's disappearance?

They put a sheep's blood on Joseph's coat and implied that an animal killed him.

If you fool someone into thinking something that isn't true, is it lying?

Yes!