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GENESIS 37:3-8,18-28

THE FAVORITE SON

THIS WEEK'S **focus**

To have a sibling is to know rivalry. Whether it's a biological sibling, step-sibling, or a friend who feels more like a sibling, there are moments when competition and jealousy creep into every relationship. This was the experience among Jacob's sons. To make matters worse, the cause of the ten sons' jealousy towards Joseph was linked to the favoritism their father showed him. Favoritism and jealousy pollute the human heart, and this week's teaching will provide evidence for that truth. While people may play favorites, we can find comfort in a relationship with the God who does not.



CENTRAL **truth**

People may play favorites, but God doesn't.



EXPLORE

scripture

GENESIS 37:3-8,18-28

GENESIS 37:3-8

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons because Joseph was a son born to him in his old age, and he made a long-sleeved robe for him. **4** When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not bring themselves to speak peaceably to him. **5** Then Joseph had a dream. When he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. **6** He said to them, “Listen

to this dream I had: **7** There we were, binding sheaves of grain in the field. Suddenly my sheaf stood up, and your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.” **8** “Are you really going to reign over us?” his brothers asked him. “Are you really going to rule us?” So they hated him even more because of his dream and what he had said.

GENESIS 37:18-22

18 They saw him in the distance, and before he had reached them, they plotted to kill him. **19** They said to one another, “Oh, look, here comes that dream expert! **20** So now, come on, let’s kill him and throw him into one of the pits. We can say that a vicious animal ate him. Then we’ll see what becomes of his dreams!”

21 When Reuben heard this, he tried to save him from them. He said, “Let’s not take his life.” **22** Reuben also said to them, “Don’t shed blood. Throw him into this pit in the wilderness, but don’t lay a hand on him” — intending to rescue him from them and return him to his father.

GENESIS 37:23-28

23 When Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped off Joseph’s robe, the long-sleeved robe that he had on. **24** Then they took him and threw him into the pit. The pit was empty, without water. **25** They sat down to eat a meal, and when they looked up, there was a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were carrying aromatic gum, balsam, and resin, going down to Egypt. **26** Judah said to his

brothers, “What do we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? **27** Come on, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay a hand on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh,” and his brothers agreed. **28** When Midianite traders passed by, his brothers pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took Joseph to Egypt.

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GENESIS 37:3-8,18-28

CONVERSATION

questions

▶ READ GENESIS 37:3-8.

.01 Given Jacob's family history, why do you think that Jacob played favorites with his own kids?

.02 When have you been on the receiving end of favoritism and jealousy? When have you found yourself guilty of these sins?

.03 Do you think it was wise for Joseph to share his dreams with his family? Why or why not?



CONTEXT

Rebellion is contagious. In the book of Exodus, God warns the people of Israel that their sins will bring consequences to their children (see Ex. 20:5; 34:7). This doesn't mean that God bases His relationship with us on how "holy" our parents are. Nor does it mean that we should be punished for sins our parents committed. It means that when children see patterns of sin in their parents' lives, they can pick up those behaviors. We call this *generational sin*.¹ Just as we pick up good habits from our families, we can also inherit negative ones. Jacob is a prime example of this. Having not learned from the parental favoritism he experienced, he made that sin a reality in his own family. However, this pattern can be broken through repentance and trusting God. Jesus offers us the opportunity to become new creations through faith in Him (see 2 Cor. 5:17). With His help, through the Holy Spirit, we can tell a new story—a story where holiness is contagious.

¹ Dorian G. Coover-Cox, E. Ray Clendenen, and Jeremy Royal Howard. *Holman Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), Logos Bible Software edition.

▶ READ GENESIS 37:18-22.

.04 In what way do we see jealousy grow within this passage? What makes jealousy so dangerous?

.05 What do you think the motivation was behind Reuben's alternate suggestion? Explain.

▶ READ GENESIS 37:19-28.

.06 Can you recall where else family division is present in Joseph's family tree?

.07 Remember Joseph's dreams. If you were him at this point in the story, what would you find the most discouraging?

.08 How has God met you during a time of betrayal or hurt?



THEOLOGY

God is described as “jealous” throughout Scripture (see Ex. 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; Nah. 1:2; Zech. 1:14). However, God’s jealousy and human jealousy are vastly different. The jealousy that Joseph’s brothers displayed was not righteous or good; it was rooted in discontentment and a strong resentment for what Joseph had. Scripture also refers to this as envy. God’s jealousy, on the other hand, is rooted in love. In the Bible, God’s relationship with Israel is often described like the relationship of marriage between a husband and wife.² When the people of Israel were found guilty of worshiping other gods, the Bible says that God became jealous, in the same way a husband would be jealous if his wife committed adultery. God’s jealousy is committed to protecting and ensuring what is best for His people.

We have new animated videos!
Check out the video bundle for our study of Genesis at:
goexplorethebible.com/students.

² Mark Rooker, *About the Ten Commandments: Ethics for the Twenty-First Century* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), Logos Bible Software edition, 388-89.

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GENESIS 37:3-8,18-28

NOW

what?



CENTRAL truth

People may play favorites, but God doesn't.

.09 Sin can make us blind to the needs of others. What needs of your friends or family have you been ignoring?

.10 When we experience betrayal, what would it be like for us to bring our pain to God?

.11 How can we remind ourselves and each other of God's character during challenging times?

.12 What are some steps we can take to heal generational sin in our families?

DAILY devotions

MEMORIZE PROVERBS 14:30

7 ARROWS FOR BIBLE READING



What does this passage say?



What does this passage tell us about God?



What did this passage mean to its original audience?



How does this passage change the way I relate to people?



What does this passage tell us about humans?



How does this passage prompt me to pray?



What does this passage demand of me?

day 1

GENESIS 37:3-8

DWELL

Joseph experienced both favoritism and jealousy from his family. Though it may seem as though Joseph was living well due to his father's favor, sin never has any winners. God caused Joseph to dream, and these dreams had him at the center of his family in a position of power. Of course, this didn't go over well with Joseph's brothers when he told them. Despite the drama and sin plaguing his family, God would leverage the dreams He gave Joseph to be a way of salvation for His people.



Why would Joseph's dreams have infuriated his brothers?



Joseph's dreams indicated God's favor. How has God dealt favorably with you?

MEMORIZE

Write Proverbs 14:30 on an index card or sticky note and attach it to your bathroom mirror. Say the verse aloud each day, emphasizing a few different words each time.

PRAY

Lord Jesus, no matter what my experience was like in my family, thank You for inviting me to participate in Your beautiful eternal family through Your resurrection life.

day 2

JAMES 2:1-8

DWELL

Humans tend to play favorites. We prefer to be around, and show favor to, those we're like. We've all experienced it. If we're honest, we've all been guilty of it as well. The virus of favoritism ran rampant in the early church as well. In fact, this would prove to be one of the central issues the New Testament writers had to wage war against (see Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25). The early churches were made up of Christians from diverse backgrounds, some of which had historically opposed one another. James's plea for this early Christian community was for them to live out the teachings of Jesus and treat every human being with the value and respect with which God created them.

← What was James's response to favoritism?

↔ How does James's command challenge the way you treat people you do not enjoy being around?

MEMORIZE

Save Proverbs 14:30 as a wallpaper or screensaver on your phone or computer. Read it aloud each time you see it.

PRAY

Holy Spirit, help me to love Jesus with all my heart, mind, and strength, so that I may love my neighbor as myself. Give me the strength to treat all people as those made in the image of God.

day 3

GENESIS 37:18-22

DWELL

Jealousy and resentment are destructive. In the case of Joseph's brothers, it led them to craft an evil plan against him. Some of the brothers, having proved they were already capable of such things (see Gen. 34), were prepared to enact the same violence against Joseph. Our sin, unchecked, will only grow—it never simply affects just us. This is why we need to be honest with the Lord and ask Him to expose us to our own rebellion so that we can surrender and return to Him.

↻ How has the jealousy of Joseph's brothers grown since the beginning of the story?

↻ Where in your own heart is there jealousy or resentment? How can you take this to God?

MEMORIZE

Say the book, chapter, and verse number for Proverbs 14:30 out loud several times. Then read aloud just the first few words of the verse. Do this a few times a day and see if you can memorize more each time.

PRAY

Gracious God, because of who You are and what You have given me, I can reject being envious of what others have. Remind me that I have all that I need in You.

day 4

GENESIS 37:23-28

DWELL

As Joseph begged and pleaded from within a pit, his brothers ate and paid him no mind. This scene reveals how intense their resentment for Joseph truly was. Rather than killing him, they decided to sell him to a group of Ishmaelites on their way to Egypt. The Ishmaelites were distant relatives and descendants of Abraham, whose disobedience also led to family division. Fortunately, no matter what sin has taken place in our lives or the lives of our families, God offers a better way forward in Christ. When we trust Him, He transforms us into new creations (see 2 Cor. 5:17) who can begin living out a better story with His help.

↑ Jealousy is a sin not often taken seriously. Why is it so serious?

→ Have you asked God to make you into a new creation? If so, how can you live out your new identity?

MEMORIZE

Write out Proverbs 14:30 on a piece of paper. Circle three to five key words in the verse and consider their importance. Focus on those words and see how much of the verse you can speak from memory.

PRAY

Lord Jesus, because of Your resurrection life, I am a new creation. May Your grace empower me to live out my identity as a member of Your family.

day 5

PSALM 55:12-16

DWELL

In the book of Psalms, the authors invite God into the complexity of the human experience. Its pages are filled with words of sorrow, confusion, joy, anger, worship, and thanksgiving. The honesty, while startling, is reassuring. In Psalm 55, David expresses the sharp feeling of betrayal—not from an enemy, but from a close companion. Sound familiar? Just as in Joseph's story, even though betrayal was present, so was the hand of God. David's declaration was that the Lord would save him—the same God who was with Joseph in his suffering.

↪ Does your own prayer life reflect the same honesty as this psalm? How does David's honesty make you feel?

↑ What does David's confidence in God, despite experiencing betrayal, say about God's character?

MEMORIZE

Read Proverbs 14:30 several times. Then start by trying to memorize the first two or three words. Once you have those words memorized, add a few more words at a time until you can say the whole verse.

PRAY

Lord, you are the Wonderful Counselor in whom I can place my trust. During difficult times, I can trust that You are with me and working things out for my good and Your glory.