

Forgiveness: Breaking the Power of the Past



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BIBLE STUDIES

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PRECEPT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL



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P R E S S

FORGIVENESS: BREAKING THE POWER OF THE PAST

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This small-group study is for people who are interested in learning for themselves more about what the Bible says on various subjects, but who have only limited time to meet together. It's ideal, for example, for a lunch group at work, an early morning men's group, a young mothers' group meeting in a home, a Sunday-school class, or even family devotions. (It's also ideal for small groups that typically have longer meeting times—such as evening groups or Saturday morning groups—but want to devote only a portion of their time together to actual study, while reserving the rest for prayer, fellowship, or other activities.)

This book is designed so that all the group's participants will complete each lesson's study activities *at the same time*. Discussing your insights drawn from what God says about the subject reveals exciting, life-impacting truths.

Although it's a group study, you'll need a facilitator to lead the study and keep the discussion moving. (This person's function is *not* that of a lecturer or teacher. However, when this book is used in a Sunday-school class or similar setting, the teacher should feel free to lead more directly and to bring in other insights in addition to those provided in each week's lesson.)

If *you* are your group's facilitator, the leader, here are some helpful points for making your job easier:

- Go through the lesson and mark the text before you lead the group. This will give you increased familiarity with the material and will enable you to facilitate the group with greater ease. It may be easier for you to lead the group through the instructions for marking if you, as a leader, choose a specific color for each symbol you mark.

- As you lead the group, start at the beginning of the text and simply read it aloud in the order it appears in the lesson, including the “insight boxes,” which appear throughout. Work through the lesson together, observing and discussing what you learn. As you read the Scripture verses, have the group say aloud the word they are marking in the text.
- The discussion questions are there simply to help you cover the material. As the class moves into the discussion, many times you will find that they will cover the questions on their own. Remember, the discussion questions are there to guide the group through the topic, not to squelch discussion.
- Remember how important it is for people to verbalize their answers and discoveries. This greatly strengthens their personal understanding of each week’s lesson. Try to ensure that everyone has plenty of opportunity to contribute to each week’s discussions.
- Keep the discussion moving. This may mean spending more time on some parts of the study than on others. If necessary, you should feel free to spread out a lesson over more than one session. However, remember that you don’t want to slow the pace too much. It’s much better to leave everyone “wanting more” than to have people dropping out because of declining interest.
- If the validity or accuracy of some of the answers seems questionable, you can gently and cheerfully remind the group to stay focused on the truth of the Scriptures. Your object is to learn what the Bible says, not to engage in human philosophy. Simply stick with the Scriptures and give God the opportunity to speak. His Word *is* truth (John 17:17)!

FORGIVENESS: BREAKING THE POWER OF THE PAST

Outside, winter pierced the day with a frigid, blustery chill; inside, a similar iciness permeated the church. Among the people gathered for the funeral, twenty family members sat scattered in eighteen pews. Snippets of conversations drifted back as I waited for the service to begin.

“Poor old soul lived alone. It was such a shame that John didn’t visit his mother more than a couple of times a year.”

“Did Aunt Marilyn talk to you?” “No, and I’m not talking to her until she talks to me!”

“Why didn’t Rita come to the funeral?” “She got mad at Mother’s funeral and hasn’t talked to any of the family since.”

What happened to create such division within this

family that even at a loved one's funeral they sat apart from one another and talked among themselves about other family members who weren't there?

Sadly, dysfunctional families are nothing new and hardly unusual. Dating back to the days of Cain and Abel, lack of forgiveness has destroyed countless relationships. And although our deepest hurts may come from family, forgiveness isn't simply a *family* issue; forgiveness is a *people* issue. In every relationship it's certain we'll need to extend or seek forgiveness at some point.

So this subject of forgiveness touches us all and brings to mind many questions, including...

How can I forgive when the pain is so great?

What about revenge? Is the other person going to get away with what they did?

What if I choose not to forgive?

Can I be forgiven of my past mistakes?

Does forgiving mean I have to forget the past?

For the next six weeks we'll look to the Bible for the answers to these questions and others. You'll learn how forgiveness not only cleanses your soul and frees your mind but also unlocks the chains that hold you captive to the person who wronged you.

Through this study you'll learn how to unleash the power of forgiveness in your life, letting it propel you out of painful and awkward situations and freeing you from the pain of the past.

WEEK ONE

Have you suffered pain at the hands of another person? Have you wondered if you could ever get past it?

This week we're going to look at the life of Joseph, a young man from a blended family who was horribly mistreated yet somehow broke the power of his painful past in order to walk in freedom. Let's see what we can learn from this story of pain, disappointment, and forgiveness.

OBSERVE

Leader: Read Genesis 37:1–4. Have the group say aloud and...

- underline every reference to **Joseph**, including pronouns.
- circle every reference to **his brothers**, including synonyms and pronouns.

As you read the text, it's helpful to have the group say the key words aloud as they mark them. This way everyone will be sure to mark every occurrence of the word, including any synonymous words or phrases. Do this throughout the study.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking *Joseph*?

GENESIS 37:1–4

¹ Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan.

² These are the records of the generations of Jacob. Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was still a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father.

³ Now Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic.

⁴ His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms.

GENESIS 37:5–11


⁵ Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more.

⁶ He said to them, “Please listen to this dream which I have had;

- What did you learn about Joseph’s relationship with his brothers? his father?

OBSERVE

Leader: Read aloud Genesis 37:5–11 and have the group...

- circle every reference to **the brothers**, including pronouns.
- draw a cloud like this  around every occurrence of the word **dream**, including pronouns.

DISCUSS

- What did Joseph's dreams point to? Did they describe the present or the future?

- How did Joseph's brothers respond to his dreams? Did they understand them? Explain your answer.

7 for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.”

8 Then his brothers said to him, “Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

9 Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, “Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”

¹⁰ He related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?”

¹¹ His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

GENESIS 37:18–28

¹⁸ When they [his brothers] saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death.

¹⁹ They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer!

- How did his father respond to Joseph’s second dream?
- Compare the responses of his brothers and father in verse 11.

OBSERVE

Jacob sent Joseph to check on the welfare of his brothers and the flocks in Shechem. Even though he knew they hated and envied him, Joseph obeyed his father’s commands.

***Leader:** Read Genesis 37:18–28 aloud and have the group...*

- *circle every reference to **the brothers**, including pronouns and synonyms such as **one another**.*
- *underline every reference to **Joseph**, including pronouns.*

DISCUSS

- What does this passage reveal about the relationships between various brothers and Joseph?

²⁰ “Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, ‘A wild beast devoured him.’ Then let us see what will become of his dreams!”

²¹ But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, “Let us not take his life.”

²² Reuben further said to them, “Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father.

²³ So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they

stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him;

24 and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it.

25 Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring them down to Egypt.

26 Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood?

- How great had the brothers’ jealousy and hatred become, according to verse 18?

- As you read about the rejection and abuse Joseph suffered at the hands of his brothers, does this remind you of any similar situations of abuse, hatred, or jealousy? Do you know individuals who have been abused by their families? Discuss how it made them feel.

OBSERVE

Leader: Read Genesis 37:29–36. Have the group say aloud and...

- underline every reference to **Joseph**, including pronouns.
- circle every reference to **his brothers**, including pronouns.

27 “Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him.

28 Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled him up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.

GENESIS 37:29–36

29 Now Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he tore his garments.

30 He returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is not there; as for me, where am I to go?”

31 So they took Joseph’s tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood;

32 and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, “We found this; please examine it to see whether it is your son’s tunic or not.”

33 Then he examined it and said, “It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!”

34 So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sack-cloth on his loins and

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about Reuben and the other brothers from this passage? What were they like? What were they doing?

- How was their father affected by their choices?

- What happened to Joseph?

- Parents often are hurt by their children's actions. Do you know parents who have been wounded by something their child did? Discuss the scenario.

mourned for his son many days.

35 Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I will go down to Sheol [the grave] in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him.

36 Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the body-guard.

GENESIS 42:1–17

¹ Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, “Why are you staring at one another?”

² He said, “Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die.”

³ Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt.

⁴ But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, “I am afraid that harm may befall him.”

⁵ So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those

OBSERVE

Some years after the brothers sold Joseph into slavery, he accurately interpreted Pharaoh’s dream to predict that Egypt would have seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh promoted the one-time slave to be his second in command of all Egypt. During the plentiful years Joseph stored grain in great abundance. When the seven years of famine came, he opened the storehouse and sold grain to people from all over the face of the earth. This chain of events led to Joseph’s next encounter with his brothers, twenty-two years after they betrayed him.

***Leader:** Read Genesis 42:1–17 aloud and have the group...*

- *underline every reference to **Joseph**, including pronouns.*
- *circle every reference to **his brothers**, including pronouns and synonyms such as **sons of Israel**.*

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking the references to Joseph's brothers?

- What did they claim to be in verse 11? Are they?

who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also.

6 Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.

7 When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, "Where have you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food."

8 But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him.

⁹ Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them, and said to them, “You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land.”

¹⁰ Then they said to him, “No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food.

¹¹ “We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies.”

¹² Yet he said to them, “No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!”

¹³ But they said, “Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in

- What is so significant about this passage? What did the brothers do when they appeared before Joseph?

- What does this tell you about God? about Joseph’s dreams? Is this all coincidence, or is God at work? Discuss.

- How did Joseph treat his brothers? Why did he deal with them in this manner, and what was the result?

the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive.”

14 Joseph said to them, “It is as I said to you, you are spies;

15 by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here!

16 “Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.”

17 So he put them all together in prison for three days.