

Dreamer

SESSION 9

Genesis 37:5-8,18-28

Memory Verse: Proverbs 27:4

Jealousy opens the door for acts of hatred.

Webster's dictionary defines *jealousy* as "hostility toward a rival or toward someone believed to enjoy an advantage we don't have." This emotion often involves a real or perceived threat to something we value. It may be accompanied by resentment, anger, inadequacy, and bitterness. In his play *Othello*, Shakespeare described jealousy as a "green-eyed monster." Centuries earlier, the apostle Paul listed jealousy as one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). And long before that, the Old Testament account of Joseph and his brothers reveals that jealousy opens the door for acts of hatred.

As you prepare this week, search your heart for areas where jealousy may have subtly crept into your relationships and ask God to forgive you. Also, ask Him to use you to help others identify and deal with their own jealousy before it pushes them to say or do something that they can't take back.



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People want to be treated at least fairly. In truth, we would prefer to be treated better than what we deserve. At the same time, we are often troubled when we see people being treated better than us and better than what we think they deserve. That is when jealousy comes knocking at the door of our hearts. Jealousy is dangerous because it corrupts one’s heart and usually leads to more tragic sin. The story of Joseph and his brothers attests to this truth. (PSG, p. 82)

Why is jealousy so dangerous and corrupting?



Understand the Context (Genesis 37:2-36)

Genesis 37:2 begins by introducing readers to Joseph, the older of Jacob’s two sons by his favorite wife, Rachel. Joseph’s name, which means “adding,” constituted part of Rachel’s prayer at his birth (Gen. 30:24). While shepherding his father’s sheep, Joseph delivered a negative report to his father regarding the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. Bilhah served as Rachel’s maid or servant. When Rachel failed to bear children to Jacob, Rachel offered Bilhah to become his concubine. Bilhah gave birth to Dan and Naphtali, whose descendants later formed two of the tribes of Israel. Zilpah, Leah’s maid, also functioned as Jacob’s concubine. Zilpah gave birth to Gad and Asher, whose later descendants formed two more of Israel’s tribes.

Jacob, whose name the Lord changed to Israel (Gen. 32), favored Joseph as a son of his old age. Jacob demonstrated that favoritism by giving him a special robe. As a result, Joseph’s brothers despised him (37:2-4).

Their hatred for Joseph increased when he began to share his dreams with them. In his first dream, Joseph’s sheaf of grain stood upright, while his brothers’ sheaves bowed down to it. In his next dream, Joseph saw the sun, moon, and eleven stars paying homage to him. While his brothers responded with jealousy, Jacob stored the matter away in his mind (37:5-11).

One day when the brothers were pasturing the family’s flocks at Shechem, Jacob sent Joseph to check on them. After discovering that the brothers had moved to another location, Joseph found them at

Dothan. While observing his arrival from a distance, the brothers plotted to murder Joseph. They determined to get rid of the dreamer and thereby destroy his dreams. However, Reuben, the eldest son, convinced the others to throw Joseph into a pit rather than to kill him. Reuben intended to rescue Joseph later. So the brothers stripped Joseph of his special robe and dumped him in an empty cistern (37:12-24).

After temporarily disposing of the dreamer, the brothers callously sat down to eat a meal. When they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites/Midianites passing by, they decided to sell their brother to these traders. Reuben obviously was absent when the others made this decision and conducted the sale. Once he returned and found the empty pit, he tore his garments in anguish.

In an attempt to cover up their evil deed, the brothers dipped Joseph’s robe in goat’s blood. They sent it to their father and allowed him to draw his own conclusion. Jacob assumed that Joseph had been killed by a vicious animal and mourned uncontrollably, refusing to be comforted.

Despite the sad events to this point, verse 36 sheds a ray of light on the rest of the story. Neither the dream nor the dreamer was dead. Joseph was sold in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh (37:25-36).

As you read Genesis 37:5-8,18-28, consider what the passage reveals about the dangers of jealousy. (PSG, p. 83)



PRIOR TO THE SESSION: Display **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: The Patriarchs*) for reference during the session.



DISCUSS: As adults arrive, allow them to share their favorite color. Encourage them to explain why they chose that color.

INTRODUCE: Point out that people often associate certain feelings with certain colors. *For example: red is often connected to anger or love.* Name other colors and their associations. Use green as the final color on your list.

SHARE: *Green might be associated with new growth, but it's also related to envy or jealousy.* Read the introduction on page 82 of the PSG and emphasize the dangers of jealousy. In addition, share the following quotes:

- *“Jealousy eats away at relationships like acid. It’s corrosive and destructive. It destroys trust and intimacy.” (Dr. Gary Chapman)*
- *“A tranquil heart is life to the body, but jealousy is rottenness to the bones.” (Prov. 14:30)*

ASK: **Why is jealousy so dangerous and corrupting?** (PSG, p. 82)

TRANSITION: *In today’s session, we’ll see how jealousy led to an act of intense hatred by Jacob’s sons toward their brother, Joseph.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Music

Secure a copy of the lyrics to “Heal the Wound” by Point of Grace. Direct the group to read the lyrics as you play a recording of the song. Encourage them to reflect on God’s mercy and how God can take away jealousy and hatred. Share that jealousy can be a dangerous thing if it’s not dealt with. Challenge adults to consider the damage jealousy or envy might be doing in their relationships as they dig into today’s verses about Joseph and his brothers.

A Dream (Genesis 37:5-8)

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.

Key Person

Joseph

Joseph was the first son of Jacob by his favorite wife, Rachel. His name means “adding.” While Jacob and Rachel viewed him as a blessing added to their family, his brothers generally perceived him as an unwelcome rival for their father’s attentions. Demonstrating his favoritism, Jacob gave Joseph a special robe. The brothers’ hatred for Joseph intensified when he began sharing his dreams with them.

(v. 5) Dream: Years earlier, Joseph’s father, Jacob, had experienced a **dream** of a stairway reaching from earth to heaven. Scripture records that God sometimes spoke to people through dreams and visions. According to Deuteronomy 13:1-5, dreams should be tested in the same way that prophecy was tested.

Bible scholars have identified three types of dreams. First, a simple message dream did not need to be interpreted. Next, a simple symbolic dream used symbols, but they were clear enough that no interpreter was needed. Finally, a complex symbolic dream required an interpreter. Although dreams sometimes served as a channel of the Lord’s revelation, they were neither foolproof nor infallible.

(v. 5) His brothers: Jacob fathered twelve sons by his two wives (Leah and Rachel) and their maids (Zilpah and Bilhah). The brothers that Jacob sent Joseph to check on at Shechem most likely did not include Benjamin, who was younger than Joseph and the only other son of Rachel.

(v. 5) Hated: This verb expresses an emotional attitude toward people and things that are detested. The one doing the hating desires to have no contact or relationship with the person or thing despised. The hating typically depicted in the Old Testament is the opposition, ill-will, or aversion of human beings toward each another.

As the opposite of love that unites, hate separates and alienates. At least in part, the favoritism that Jacob demonstrated toward Joseph motivated the brothers’ hatred of him. Also Joseph may have antagonized his brothers by bragging about his dream.

(v. 7) Sheaves: The Hebrew term used here derives from a verb meaning “to bind.” A sheaf designates a quantity of stalks and ears of a cereal grass or other plant material that have been bound together. The sheaves in Joseph’s dream call to mind the heads of grain in Pharaoh’s dream that Joseph will later interpret (Gen. 41:22). It also could foreshadow Joseph’s wisdom in preparing for the famine by filling the granaries in Egypt (41:47-49).

(v. 7) Bowed down: The form of the Hebrew verb translated **bowed down** indicates an act of prostration that expresses homage, respect, reverence, and/or worship. The dream imagery of the bowed sheaves was fulfilled decades later when Joseph’s brothers bowed before him when they came to Egypt to buy grain (42:6; 43:26,28).

(v. 8) Reign . . . rule: These two Hebrew words convey a similar message. The word translated **reign** also means “be king.” In the Old Testament, leaders in civil government who might be designated by other titles in today’s world were regularly designated by the term translated “king.” Thus the word might refer to the role of various officials including governors and chieftains. The verb rendered **rule** carries a similar meaning. The principle of authority lies behind both terms.

EXPLORE Genesis 37:5-8



APPLICATION POINT: Believers should be wise in what they share and with whom.

MINI LECTURE: Share that the session begins the last literary section of Genesis. Using **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: The Patriarchs*) and *Understand the Context*, reinforce that the focus has moved from Jacob to his son, Joseph. Distribute **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Background of the Patriarchs*) for the group to briefly scan and use for further reference. Highlight how Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph set the stage for the jealousy and hatred among Joseph's brothers.

READ: **Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 37:5-8** as the group considers Joseph's dream and his brothers' response. Use information from pages 84-85 of the PSG to explain Joseph's dreams and what they meant.

ASK: **What are the advantages and disadvantages of sharing our aspirations with others?** (PSG, p. 85)

DRAW: On a board or sheet of paper draw a stick figure with a thought bubble. In the thought bubble write the word *dreams*.



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Research

Prior to the session, gather several dictionaries, Bible dictionaries, and concordances. Direct attention to the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 89). Group adults into teams and provide each team with a dictionary and Bible dictionary. (*NOTE: An individual can be a team.*) Lead the teams to complete the Bible Skill and develop a definition of “jealousy.” After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share their work. Encourage adults to continue digging into the activity on their own during the week ahead.

A Plot (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.

(v. 18) Plotted: This particular Hebrew verb, occurring only four times in the Old Testament, carries the idea of acting craftily or deceitfully. Joseph’s brothers dealt deceptively with their younger brother. The term appears in Malachi 1:14 to identify “the deceiver” who vows to make an acceptable offering to the Lord but sacrifices a defective animal instead. That Joseph’s brothers talked among themselves (Gen. 37:19) indicates that no leader among them instigated the proposed murder. In reality, a mob mentality prevailed.

Key Word

Dream expert

In the original language this phrase literally translates as “the lord of dreams.” By using this phrase to designate Joseph and by deciding to kill him, the brothers exposed their concern about his dreams. Their words revealed not only their jealousy, but also their determination to act in such a manner as to guarantee that Joseph’s dreams would not be fulfilled. In plotting to kill Joseph, the brothers schemed to get rid of the dream by destroying the dreamer.

(v. 20) One of the pits: The Hebrew term can also be translated “cisterns” or “wells.” Ancient residents of this arid region would dig these reservoirs to catch rainfall, which would supplement existing supplies of water. Verse 24 indicates the pit into which the brothers dumped Joseph was dry. The limestone from which these man-made cisterns were dug was porous, so it was usually plastered to prevent water from escaping. This one was probably dry because of a lack of rain or because the plaster was cracked. Centuries later, the Lord used the analogy of cracked cisterns to depict His people’s idolatry (Jer. 2:13).

(vv. 21-22) Reuben: The eldest of all of Jacob’s sons, Reuben appears in both a positive and a negative light. Negatively, he had sexual relations with one of his

father’s concubines (Gen. 35:22) and received Jacob’s condemnation (49:1-4). Positively, he demonstrated compassion for Joseph when his brothers wanted to kill him (37:21-22).

Years later, Joseph learned of Reuben’s efforts to save his life, which moved him to tears (42:21-24). Reuben also assumed responsibility for Benjamin when Joseph required that his younger brother appear in Egypt (42:36-37). In Canaan, the tribe of Reuben received territory located just east of the Dead Sea (Num. 32).

(v. 21) Save: The basic physical sense of the verb is that of drawing or pulling out. Often the verb appears in contexts of physical deliverance with spiritual overtones. In Psalm 39:8 David prayed that the Lord would “rescue” him from his sins. In Psalm 51:14, he prayed that the Lord would “save” him from the guilt of bloodshed after committing adultery with Bathsheba and having her husband, Uriah, murdered.

(v. 22) Blood: The Israelites recognized blood as the source of life (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:11). Thus, shedding or removing blood meant ending life. Several principles emerge from the relationship between blood and life. First is the sanctity of human life. Second, an animal’s blood had to be drained and disposed of before the sacrifice (Ex. 12:7; Lev. 1:5; 4:6; Deut. 12:24). Third, eating blood was prohibited because the shedding of blood was the most important element in atonement (Lev. 3:17; 17:10-13; 1 Sam. 14:31-35).

Key Doctrine

The Family

God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption. (See Proverbs 11:29; 1 Timothy 5:8)



APPLICATION POINT: Believers must guard against following peers bent on hurting others.

READ: Direct the group to read **Genesis 37:18-22**, noting his brothers' reaction to Joseph's approach. Share that Jacob sent Joseph to find his brothers, who were away from home, caring for Jacob's flocks.

ASK: Why would his brothers want to make sure that Joseph's dreams didn't come true?

DISCUSS: Using information from page 86 of the PSG, encourage adults to talk about different ideas about Reuben's motives for saving Joseph's life. Direct the group to signal with a thumbs up or a thumbs down if they think the brothers would have responded the same way if they had not been together.

ASK: How does jealousy add fuel to a mob mentality? (PSG, p. 86) Draw a second stick figure with a thought bubble. In the thought bubble, write the word *plot*.

REFLECT: Highlight the application point for these verses: *Believers must guard against following peers bent on hurting others*. Encourage adults to suggest some weaker or marginalized groups today and record their responses on the board. Challenge them to consider their own attitudes about these groups and list ways they can stand up for those who need help. Urge them to find ways to stand up for individuals and groups who can't defend themselves.

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Case Study

Encourage adults to brainstorm ways that jealousy might damage relationships within a church. Guide adults to work in groups of two or three to create a case study using one of the ideas shared by the group. After a few minutes, allow the teams to share their case studies and allow others in the group to identify steps that could resolve the situation. Remind the group that jealousy opens the door for broken relationships—even among believers.

A Pit (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.

Key Word

Robe

Traditionally, this **robe** has been imagined as a multi-colored garment, though the Hebrew is unclear. The Hebrew text has been interpreted to mean either a long robe reaching to the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet or a coat with diverse colors. This latter interpretation follows the Septuagint (Greek) or Vulgate (Latin) translations of the Hebrew text.

Whatever the specifics of the robe, this special garment signaled Jacob’s elevation and distinction of Joseph. Ironically this robe that had given Jacob great pleasure became the symbol of his continuing anguish when the brothers presented it to their father after dipping it in goat’s blood (Gen. 37:31-35).

(v. 25) Sat down to eat: Joseph’s brothers displayed a calloused attitude. Apparently, they did not consider sharing any of their food with their brother in the cistern. Ironically, Joseph would later provide food for the whole world, including his brothers (Gen. 41:57; 42:5).

(v. 25) Caravan: This Hebrew term designates a traveling company. Such travelers were usually merchants journeying through the desert with pack animals. Because biblical Palestine lay along the major travel and trade routes between Egypt, Arabia, and Mesopotamia, many caravans passed through the region.

(v. 25) •Ishmaelites: This tribal name was applied to the descendants of Ishmael, Abram’s son by the Egyptian slave Hagar (16:15-16; 25:12-16). The term **Ishmaelites** generally designated the nomadic tribes of northern Arabia. Since they were nomadic, they were regarded as an ethnic group without being connected to any geographical area. The Ishmaelites are men-

tioned along with the Midianites not only in Genesis 37:27-28 but also in the account of Gideon’s triumph over Midian (Judg. 8:22-24).

(v. 25) Gilead: This place name, meaning “rugged” or “raw,” designates the north-central section of the Transjordanian highlands. **Gilead** consists of mountain peaks, as well as grassland plains suitable for raising flocks and herds. In biblical times, part of the region was heavily forested.

An important international trade route known as the King’s Highway passed through Gilead. An aromatic and medicinal preparation known as the balm of Gilead probably was obtained from the resin of a small balsam tree in the region.

(v. 28) Midianite traders: **Midianite** means “strife.” Keturah, Abraham’s wife after Sarah, gave birth to Midian. Abraham sent Midian and his brothers to the east (Gen. 25:1-6). Israel experienced both positive and negative relationships with the Midianites. When Moses fled from Pharaoh, he went to Midian where he married a daughter of the priest of Midian (Ex. 2:15-16,21). In the time of the judges, the Midianites raided Israel until Gideon defeated them (Judg. 6-8).

(v. 28) Twenty pieces of silver: Before 500 BC, **silver** was the most valued metal in the ancient Near East. A slave typically could be sold for twenty pieces of silver in the early second millennium BC.



The Journeys of Joseph

Learn more about the route Joseph traveled to reach Egypt.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers must be aware of callousness in their own lives.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 37:23-28 as the group listens for the result of the brothers' plot. Encourage adults to imagine Joseph in a pit, stripped of his robe, and hearing his brothers eating while they ignored his pleas.

ASK:

How might a person grow calloused in their treatment of others? (PSG, p. 88) Add a third stick figure with a thought bubble. Inside the thought bubble, write the word *pit*.

PRAY:

Encourage the group to bow their heads and close their eyes for a time of directed prayer. First, instruct adults to pray for someone they know who is in a "pit" right now. Suggest they ask God to bring hope and healing to that individual. Second, instruct adults to ask God about any pits they may be living in right now—and about any bitterness that may be coming from that. Urge them to seek His healing and forgiveness.

TRANSITION:

Genesis 37 ends with the brothers dipping Joseph's coat in blood and lying to their father while Joseph is sold in Egypt. They may have thought they were rid of Joseph, but God had other plans. He was at work despite their evil schemes and Joseph's desperate situation.

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Dominoes

Prior to the session, gather five dominoes. During the session, set up the dominoes before gently pushing the first domino and leveling the other dominoes. Explain the progression: Jacob's favoritism, Joseph's dreams, the brother's plot, Joseph in the pit, Joseph sold to the Ishmaelites. Emphasize that uncontrolled jealousy opened the door for the brothers' acts of hatred. Share that jealousy in our lives today can also open the door to acts of hatred.

CHALLENGE

- SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from Apply the Text on page 90 of the *Personal Study Guide*:
- *Believers should be wise in what they share and with whom.*
 - *Believers must guard against following peers bent on hurting others.*
 - *Believers must be aware of callousness in their own lives.*
- REFLECT:** Encourage adults to consider how they can apply these principles to their lives this week.
- ASK:** **How can we guard against becoming jealous of others?** (PSG, p. 90)
- REFLECT:** Guide the group to reflect on this statement: *I am fighting jealousy in my heart.* Direct them to silently rate their agreement on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being “a little” and 5 being “overwhelming.” Challenge them to talk with God this week about how they can overcome the destructive pull of jealousy.
- PRAY:** Conclude the session with prayer, praising God for his mercy and forgiveness. Ask Him to protect adults’ hearts against jealousy and hatred and to heal broken relationships within the family and within the church.

After the Session

Reinforce the session by sending an individual text or email to each adult in the group, asking how you can pray for them, especially in terms of broken relationships with family members and with other believers. Also, spend time this week praying specifically for healthy relationships within the Bible study group. Be sure to contact anyone who missed the session and encourage them to come back this week.

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EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

Sibling Rivalries in Genesis

T.J. Betts



Modena - The Romanesque relief of Cain and Abel from paradise on the facade of Duomo di Modena.

Siblings fight. This seems to be a universal and timeless truth. When siblings are young, the rivalry may seem quite harmless. If brothers and sisters fail to mature past such pettiness, however, the contention can become irreparably destructive.

Four of the five notable narratives in the Bible depicting sibling rivalry are in Genesis. The lone exception is Jesus's story about the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). In contrast to a narrative shared to illustrate a point, each of the stories in Genesis involve real siblings with real issues. They highlight the calamitous consequences of sibling rivalry gone awry.

CAIN AND ABEL

The first sibling rivalry occurred between the first siblings. Genesis 4 records the birth of Cain and Abel. Cain became a farmer, while Abel was a shepherd. From the beginning, Eve recognized God's hand in Cain's birth. She may have seen him as the fulfillment of God's promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

Such maternal expectations may have contributed to the staggering shock Cain received when God rejected his offering while accepting Abel's offering. Cain's anger and despondency, coupled with

murdering his brother because God rejected his sacrifice, indicate Cain's sinfulness and arrogance. Grain offerings as well as animal offerings were permitted by the law. The offering of the arrogant and faithless, however, is always unacceptable to God (cf. Prov. 15:8; 21:27; Heb. 11:4).

JACOB AND ESAU

The second sibling rivalry was between fraternal twins Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25:19-34; 27:1-28:9; 32:1-33:17). Their rivalry began before they were even born. When Rebekah prayed about the turmoil inside her womb, the Lord told her that two nations were fighting one another—but the older would serve the younger (25:23). When the twins were born, the younger one, Jacob, was grasping the heel of Esau, the firstborn.

From there, Jacob and Esau grew up differently. Esau liked to hunt, while Jacob preferred to stay at home. Even though Esau failed to realize it at the time, their rivalry intensified when he allowed his desire for immediate gratification to cloud his better judgment. He sold his birthright, the right to a double portion of their father's inheritance, to Jacob for a bowl of stew. The rivalry came to a boil, however, when Jacob and his mother conspired to steal the blessing Esau was going to receive from his father, Isaac, by disguise and deceit (27:1-38).

LEAH AND RACHEL

The next example of sibling rivalry was between Leah and Rachel (see Gen. 29-31), proving that sons were not the only ones who can fall victim to this family dysfunction. Both sisters were married to Jacob, but his affection for them differed greatly. Jacob wanted Rachel; but Laban, the sisters' father, tricked him into marrying Leah first. So, she often felt unwanted and struggled to "measure up." Meanwhile, Rachel seemed to have everything going for her—except she was barren. Leah hoped having children would increase Jacob's love for her (29:32-35; 30:14-20).

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

Of the sibling rivalries in the Bible, the Scriptures give most attention to the one between Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 35-50). Out of Jacob's many sons, Joseph was markedly his favorite because Joseph was the son of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel. Despite seeing the damage rivalry had done in his own life—and in the lives of his wives—Jacob made his preference for Joseph obvious.

For example, Jacob gave Joseph a special cloak that may have denoted authority over his brothers. At the very least, the coat distinguished him from them as the special object of their father's love. Consequently, "they hated him and could not bring themselves to speak peaceably to him" (Gen. 37:4). Joseph's dreams of his brothers bowing down to him intensified their hatred (v. 8).

Like Cain, their anger and jealousy took a murderous turn (Gen. 37:18). Only an intervention from the oldest brother, Reuben, and the appearance of a caravan of merchants spared Joseph's life (Gen. 37:21-28). Even then, his brothers sold him into Egyptian slavery, convinced that they had gotten rid of Joseph for good.

CONCLUSION

A few common elements rise out of these sibling stories from Genesis. First, all portray selfishness and jealousy in at least one of the siblings. Second, the stories depict destroyed relationships—and, at worst—emotional and physical harm. Finally, they show how strongly parenting does influence the relationships between siblings.

We should not be surprised that God's Word exclaims "How delightfully good when brothers live together in harmony!" (Ps. 133:1).

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