

# SESSION 6

# THE BIG PICTURE



*When have you seen the silver lining  
in a difficult situation?*



## THE POINT

*God is at work even in the midst of conflict.*



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

My father left my mother, brother, and me when I was six. He came in and out of our lives over the years, but was absent most of my life. He was an alcoholic. When times were good, we had a decent relationship. Those times were rare. It was the largest source of conflict in my life. When I was 12, my father tried to parent me again. I resisted. He persisted. It was a battle of the wills for 25 years or so.

For years, my mother and others tried to encourage the relationship between my father and me. My father, in later years, sobered up, got right with Christ, and completely rebuilt a strong relationship with my mother. Even after I entered the ministry, it was the one relationship bridled with the most conflict, mostly on my part.

What good could ever come from our relationship?

The story of Joseph is one of the strongest examples of family conflict within the Bible. The story holds nothing back. It is messy. Favoritism, hatred, and envy defined Jacob's family. Yet, even in the midst of that kind of family dysfunction, God had a plan.



# WHAT DOES **THE BIBLE** SAY?

## **Genesis 37:5-8,26-28; 50:15-21** (HCSB)

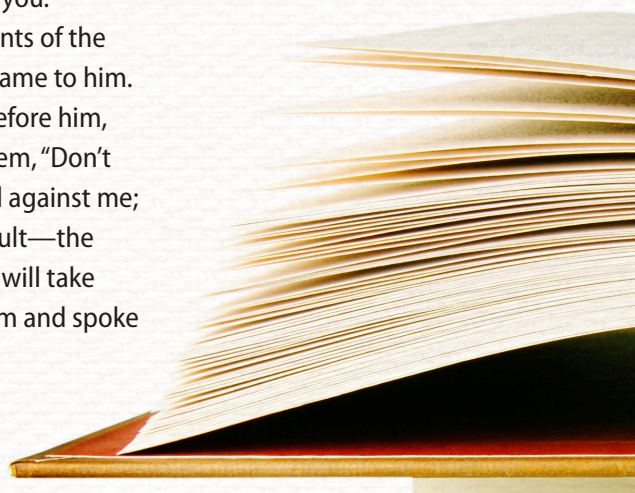
**37:5** Then Joseph had a dream. When he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. **6** He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: **7** There we were, binding sheaves of grain in the field. Suddenly my sheaf stood up, and your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." **8** "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.

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**26** Then Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? **27** Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay a hand on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh," and they agreed. **28** When Midianite traders passed by, his brothers pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him for 20 pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took Joseph to Egypt.

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**50:15** When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said to one another, "If Joseph is holding a grudge against us, he will certainly repay us for all the suffering we caused him." **16** So they sent this message to Joseph, "Before he died your father gave a command: **17** 'Say this to Joseph: Please forgive your brothers' transgression and their sin—the suffering they caused you.' Therefore, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when their message came to him. **18** Then his brothers also came to him, bowed down before him, and said, "We are your slaves!" **19** But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? **20** You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people. **21** Therefore don't be afraid. I will take care of you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.





## **Genesis 37:5-8**

Favoritism, hatred, and envy defined Jacob's family. Apparently it was common knowledge that Joseph was his dad's favorite son (Gen. 37:3).

It is never right to play favorites with children. If a parent has more than one child, each child will be different. We are all "remarkably and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14).

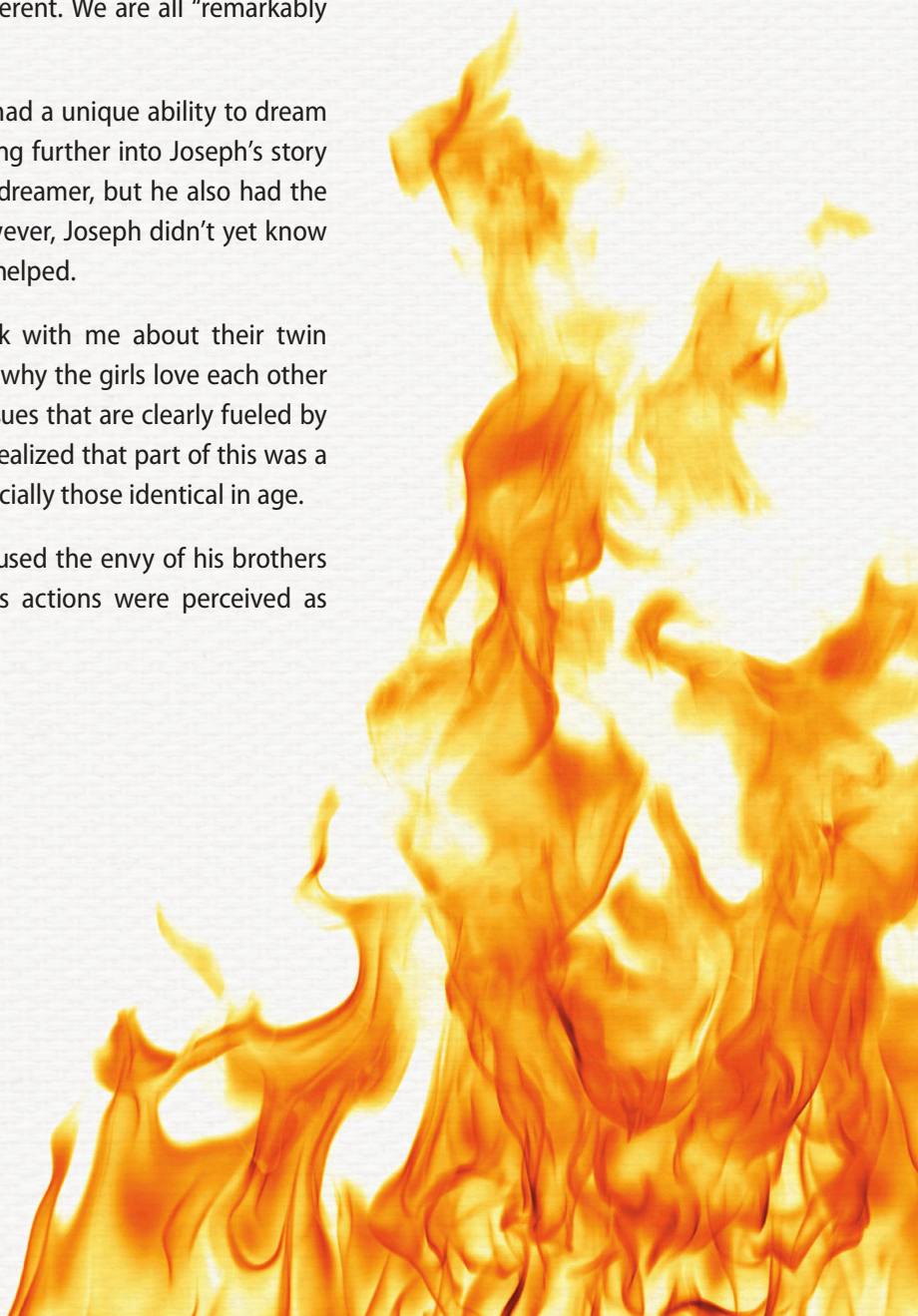
Joseph was special in one sense. He had a unique ability to dream prophetically. As we learn from reading further into Joseph's story (Gen. 40–41), not only was Joseph a dreamer, but he also had the ability to interpret dreams. At 17, however, Joseph didn't yet know how to share his dreams in ways that helped.

Recently, some parents came to talk with me about their twin daughters. They couldn't understand why the girls love each other so much but continually fight over issues that are clearly fueled by jealousy. I wanted to be helpful, but realized that part of this was a normal dynamic among siblings, especially those identical in age.

Regardless of the motive, Joseph aroused the envy of his brothers through his words and behavior. His actions were perceived as coming from a self-righteous attitude.

***When have you  
seen behaviors like  
this fuel the fire  
of conflict?***

### **QUESTION #1**







"When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer."

—CORRIE TEN BOOM

## **Genesis 37:26-28**

Joseph's brothers, the older sons of Jacob, let their hatred of Joseph grow to the point that they wanted to kill him. They chose instead to profit from their hatred, and sold Joseph into slavery. (I have always wondered what they did with the money.)

In the eyes of society, the brothers were not guilty of murder. Instead of killing Joseph, they opted to sell him. They allowed his father to believe he had been killed.

In the eyes of Jesus, though, the brothers were guilty of murder (see Matt. 5:22). They may have taken a more merciful route, but Joseph's life was severely disrupted by the conflict with his brothers. He would serve as a slave. He would live far from home. He would go to prison. His life would never be the same.

***How has a conflict shaped your life?***

**QUESTION #2**



## **Genesis 50:15-21**

From the brothers' perspective, it seemed they were done with their brother. Years later, though, they found themselves standing before Joseph as he served as the second-in-command in Egypt. Joseph had learned much over the years. He chose to do the right thing even in the face of incredible injustice.

As Joseph matured, he also learned how to use the special gift God had given him to dream prophetically. He saw the hand of God at work. Joseph forgave his brothers.

This story reminds me that the greatest injustice ever committed was the cruel death of Jesus Christ on a cross. He was perfect, having never sinned. He willingly submitted Himself to being brutally murdered. Those who witnessed the crucifixion, even His closest disciples, could not understand that seemingly senseless death. In spite of that tragedy, God used the death of the sinless One to bring about salvation for all who place their faith in His Son. God was at work in the death of Christ.

We may not always see how God is at work in a situation. It often takes time for the big picture of God's work to be revealed. Just as in the story of Joseph, God's grace leads us to forgive others. When we trust that God is at work in our conflict, we can more easily extend forgiveness to the other person.

The day I chose to forgive my father was one of the most freeing days of my life. It allowed me to build a relationship with my father the last few years of his life. I still have pain in the memories of those years, but God used them for an ultimate good in my life. I can clearly trace my commitment as a husband and father back to my frustration with my own family life as a child. God used those days to confirm the future life he wanted me to have. God does redeem the times, even in the midst of conflict.

***What will help you extend forgiveness when you're wronged?***

**QUESTION #3**



*The author, Ron Edmondson, with his family.*



## THE BIG PICTURE

1. A family member who hurt you years ago is now asking to be a part of your life again. However, the very thought of the reunion brings back painful, unresolved memories.

How might God be at work in the midst of this?

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2. Identify a current conflict in your life. Reflect on your answer over the next few days.

How might God be at work in the midst of this?

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*How can we encourage each other when we struggle to see evidence that God is at work in difficult situations?*

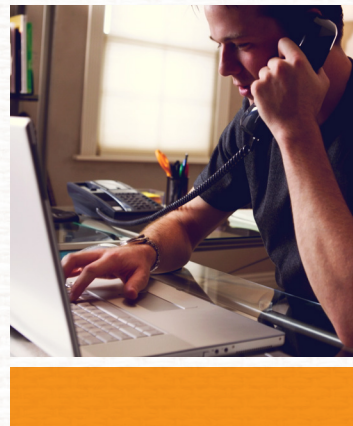
**QUESTION #4**



# LIVE IT OUT

Conflict can be draining, but God can use whatever conflict we are facing to bring meaningful results in our lives. Conflict can lead to resolution which ultimately can lead to a far stronger relationship. And in the process, God can strengthen our faith and endurance.

- ▶ **Trust.** Even if you can't see God's hand yet, trust that He is at work.
- ▶ **Forgive.** Regardless of who's at fault in the conflict, forgive the other person.
- ▶ **Call.** Contact someone and let him or her know how God changed you because of your experience with the conflict.



Could God be at work in your conflict, preparing a better story for you? **That's far better than any silver lining.**

## Love Greater Than Our Sins



*Obviously, because I'm a Christian author and speaker who's married to a pastor, our children are perfect, always behaving as if singing angels dropped them straight into our arms from the bosom of heaven. Their first words were, "I want to ask Jesus into my heart." (I know, right? Brandon and I were surprised, too. They skipped right over Mama and Dada to the Gospel of Atonement.) But I've heard of other kids who can be rotten. Ahem.*



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