

IF GOD IS IN CONTROL, THEN WHY DOES MY LIFE SEEM OUT OF CONTROL?

by Bill Martin

KEY VERSE:

Gen. 45:4b He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life."

FAITH STORY:

Genesis 45:4-8

FAITH FOCUS:

In this passage, Joseph is looking back on his life and seeing God's hand in what happened. Times were tough—he was mistreated by his brothers, sold into slavery, carried off to Egypt, accused of something he didn't do, and thrown into prison an innocent man. But in this scripture, Joseph testifies to his brothers about how God's hand has guided his life. Joseph was able to clearly see the good God had done, and the purpose God had for his life.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students realize that God does good things with less than perfect people.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to state areas in their life where God has done (or is doing) something good.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Small pieces of paper for ballots, pencils.
- 2 Chalk board or dry eraser board
- 3 Shoebox with slit in top
- 4 Treats to be used as "motivational pieces" if you think it's necessary for the Explore section.
- 5 Copies of the letter page for each student.
- 6 A CD player and Christian music CD for background during a quiet time.

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5 minutes)

Welcome the students to class, and ask them if they think they are old enough to vote. Hand out the ballots and pencils. Write the following on the board:

Ordinary: Not perfect but not too strange.

Sub-ordinary: More problems than most families

Extra-ordinary: Really have it together—get along exceptionally well.

Ask students to rate their family as ordinary, sub-ordinary or extra-ordinary and write it down on their ballot. After they have voted, ask students to fold their ballots and place them in the shoe box.

CONNECT: (10–15 minutes)

Break students up into pairs to discuss the following: “*Which one of the three choices is the way you think a family should be?*” Have them choose one, and then in one or two sentences, have them state why they think their choice is the best choice.

While the students are doing this activity, tally the votes and write the results on the board.

Discuss the results of their voting, and asked them for their responses to the question above.

Some questions to ask: *Since we can't choose our families, does that make them responsible for the way we act? If your family has a lot of problems, does that mean that God is absent in your life? Why aren't all families the same?*

Discuss the families that are portrayed in television shows. What is working or not working well in those families? What do they like or not like about the dynamics in those families?

After everyone has had a chance to share say, “*Let's look at a story about a family that did many things wrong, but God did something good, even though they were not good to each other.*”

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15–20 minutes)

Option 1: Tell the overall story of Joseph in your own words, using the outline in Option 2.:

- 1 Even though Joseph may not have always been able to see God working in his life, in the end he could see that God had been there working through it all.
- 2 God loves and cares about imperfect people.
- 3 God was doing something good, even when the people in the story were not.

Option 2: Divide up into small groups of 3-4 and assign the groups the scriptures below. Ask them to summarize what happens in their passage. Give them the option of either telling the group what happened or acting it out for the group.

Here are the passages and the summaries.

- Gen. 29:15-30: Laban tricks Jacob
- Gen. 29: 30 -30:13: Competition between the two wives, two maidservants have children..
- Gen. 37 :Joseph the favorite son: brothers hate Joseph, Joseph shares dream, brothers were jealous, plan to kill him but Reuben stops them, sold to Ishmaelites, deceive Jacob about death.
- Gen. 39:6-20: Joseph was falsely accused and put in prison.
- Gen.. 41:37-44: Joseph rises to power
- Gen. 42: Joseph's brothers travel to Egypt, Joseph exercises power over his brothers.
- Gen. 45:1-8: Joseph is reunited with his brothers.

Ask students to tell you what the lessons are from this story. If your class isn't talkative or needs motivation to talk, break them into smaller groups and offer a "piece of motivation" (ie: treats) for each good answer their group provides. Write the answers on the board. Here are three points that should come out:

- 1 Even though Joseph may not have always been able to see God working in his life, in the end he could see that God had been there working through it all.
- 2 God loves and cares about imperfect people.
- 3 God was doing something good, even when the people in the story were not.

APPLY: (5–10 minutes)

Hand out the letter pages to each student and ask them to write a letter—either from God to them or from them to God. One aspect of the letter is to identify which Joseph they think they are. The second aspect is to write about at least two good things that God has done in their life. Assure the students that no one else will see the letter.

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Ask students to spread out in the room so they have some space around them. With the music playing in the background, encourage students to think about areas of their life that seem out of control and that they would like for God to take into control. Ask them to pray that God will give them peace and trust that things will work out the way they are supposed to. Encourage them to talk to you, the pastor or another adult they trust if they so desire. Close this time with a prayer and wish them well for the next week.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

The Joseph story in Genesis is part of the larger story of the Patriarch and Matriarchs (around 2000-1700 BC) which began with Abraham. God told Abraham that from him God was going to make a great nation; his descendants would be as numerous as the sands by the sea. Joseph is part of the fourth generation; Abraham was his great grandfather.

God was beginning to create a people of God, and God was working with some rather imperfect people. You can see deception, starting with Abraham who, when afraid for his life, said that Sarah was his sister instead of his wife. Then there was the case of Rebecca and Jacob deceiving Isaac for the birthright that belonged to Esau. Then Laban deceived Jacob when he gave Leah to be his wife instead of Rachel. Because of that deception, Jacob had two wives—one that he loved and one that he did not. The dysfunction of Joseph's family was deeply rooted in dishonesty that stemmed throughout the generations.

The birthright is a very important element in this story. It belonged to the firstborn son and carried a tremendous amount of weight and authority. In that culture, to be the firstborn son meant that you would receive the birthright, the blessing from the father, and have high standing and authority within the family unit. It's easy to understand why Joseph's brothers couldn't stand him. Because Joseph was the firstborn of Rachel (the wife that Jacob loved), Jacob looked upon him as the firstborn, as proven by the coat that Jacob gave to Joseph. Joseph was in actuality the second youngest son, so for him to be given this kind of honor really upset the family social structure.

But through all this human trouble we see God's providence at work. Through an act of hate, God saves Jacob's family and is true to his promise to Abraham. We see God's providence working through Joseph. As a slave he became the trusted head of Potiphar's (the captain of the guard for Pharaoh) house. When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, he refused to sin against God and ran from her. Potiphar had Joseph thrown in jail because of the false accusations of his wife, but once again we see God's providence at work. Joseph, although a prisoner, became a trusted assistant to the head of the jail.

Pharaoh put his butler and baker in prison; they both had dreams that Joseph was able to interpret. God's providence was at work again. Joseph interpreted the dream of the butler and several years later when Pharaoh was having dreams that needed interpretation, the butler remembered Joseph, and Joseph came before Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. God gave Joseph the ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, and because of this Pharaoh was able to recognize that the Spirit of God was in Joseph.

Joseph not only interpreted the dream (that there was going to be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine), but he also gave Pharaoh a plan to escape the devastation of the famine. Through God's providence, Joseph became the second most powerful man in Egypt. When the famine struck, Jacob sent his sons (Joseph's brothers) to Egypt to buy food, which eventually reunited Joseph and his family. The Jacob clan moved to Egypt where they prospered and multiplied. The providence of God not only saved Jacob's family, continuing the covenant with Abraham, it reunited Joseph to his family, and provided a place where that family could prosper.

WORKS CITED:

- Buttrick, George Author, ed. **The Interpreters Bible.** Vol. 1. Nashville: Abingdon, 1952
Wenham, Gordon. **World Bible Commentary.** Vol. 2. USA: Word, Incorporated, 1994

IF GOD IS IN CONTROL, THEN WHY DOES MY LIFE SEEM OUT OF CONTROL?

Student Worksheet

Write a letter as if God were talking to you, or you are talking to God. Discuss which part of Joseph's life you identify with the most.

Are you the:

- Joseph the favorite son
- Joseph whose brothers hated him
- Joseph who was falsely accused
- Joseph who was a prisoner
- Joseph who was sold into slavery
- Joseph who became a great leader
- Joseph who realized that through all his troubles God was doing something good with his life.
- Joseph who forgave his bothers
- Joseph who _____

Secondly, write down at least two good things that God has done in your life.
