



SESSION 1 of 4

Joseph and his brothers

MEETING AIM

To learn that God knows about everything we are going through, and to discover that bullying is never OK.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 37

BACKGROUND

Many children will be familiar with this story, if only through the ever-popular musical. Knowing what happens to Joseph in the end we understand that God has everything in hand, yet in this chapter God is not mentioned. The focus is entirely on the human drama of an unwise father, a favourite son and the brothers' simmering resentment, which boils over into violence. It's a way into thinking about bullying and the complex feelings involved. It is important for children to learn that bullying is never 'deserved', even if the victim is as cocky, annoying and careless of others' feelings as Joseph appears to have been. This session helps children explore the emotions in Joseph's story and gently to consider their own before placing all their feelings within the context of God's love and care.

5 CIRCLE TIME

As the children arrive, chat about some of the highs and lows of the past week. Share about times when you have felt happy, bored, excited, angry, sad or proud, and encourage the children to do the same. Discuss who you tend to share these feelings with. Friends? Family members (including pets)? God?

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (1999), available on Netflix or to rent on other streaming services; the means to show the clip Show the children the song 'Joseph's coat' from *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (starting at 00:08:44). Encourage them to sing along if they know the song. Chat together about Joseph and his story. What do the children already know?

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: scenes from Joseph's story printed on separate cards; a camera or smartphone; a laptop and projector Before the session, print out or write these scenes onto separate cards:

The favourite: Joseph had eleven brothers, but their dad loved him best. Joseph received a special coat from his dad, which made his brothers really jealous. They started to hate him.

The dreamer: Joseph had a dream that he and his brothers were collecting sheaves of corn at harvest time. He dreamt that his brothers' sheaves all bowed down before him. He had another dream that the sun, moon and eleven stars were bowing down to him. These dreams made his eleven brothers hate him even more.

The victim: Joseph's brothers got him while he was on his own, then ganged up on and attacked him. They threw him into a pit and left him there to die.

The slave: Joseph's brothers decided to sell him as a slave instead. They sold him to some passing travellers who took him to Egypt.

The lost son: Joseph's brothers covered his special coat with goat's blood and told their dad that a wild animal had killed his favourite son.

Give out the cards with the scene descriptions and read them together. As a group, work together to create freeze-frames of these key scenes, as if you have paused a film of Joseph's story. Focus on using bodies and faces to express emotions. Encourage the children to take it in turns to be the director, standing outside each scene to compose it. Take a photo of all the scenes and show them to the group at the end. (Remember to follow your church's safeguarding policy when taking pictures of the children.)

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Explore the story further by discussing these questions:

- How did Jacob feel about Joseph?
- How did the brothers feel about Joseph?
- How did Joseph feel when his brothers bullied him?
- How do you think God felt when Joseph was being bullied by his brothers?
- Did Joseph deserve what happened to him? Why? Why not?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: jam jars (with lids) or mason jars; different coloured sand in separate bowls (you can mix play sand with powder paint for this and potentially add biodegradable glitter)

Talk about the many different emotions involved in today's story, asking the children to name some. Introduce the coloured sand and invite them to suggest which colours might represent which feelings. (You don't all need to agree on this.) Give the children a jar each and ask them to fill it with different layers of sand to represent how they are feeling at the moment. There might be a broad band of one colour, a thin sliver of another and a repeating stripe to represent a feeling that keeps coming back.

As you fill your jars of many colours, chat further about the emotions in the story or about the children's own feelings. Let them take the lead and don't force the conversation. They may find it easier to focus quietly on the coloured sand, and they don't have to explain what they have put in their jar.

It might be useful to share this advice from the Childline website (childline.org.uk): "Nobody has the right to bully you. Bullying could be done by friends, family, people at school and strangers – but it's never OK. Where to go for help: tell someone you trust, or phone Childline: 0800 1111."

5 PRAYER

You will need: jars of many colours from 'Creative response'; a long red ribbon or a piece of red wool outlining the shape of a heart

Gather everyone around the heart shape with their jars of many colours. Say this prayer:

Loving Lord, you understand all our feelings. To you they are as clear as the colours in these glass jars. We bring all our feelings to you now and entrust them to your loving care.

Place your jars of many colours inside the heart and say amen together.

Be watchful and available for children who may need to talk to you after the session.

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SESSION 2 of 4

Hannah and Peninnah

MEETING AIM

To think about verbal bullying and to learn that God is always ready to listen to us.

BIBLE PASSAGE

1 Samuel 1

BACKGROUND

This is the origin story of the prophet Samuel, but the focus is on his long-suffering mother Hannah. Her shared marriage and the pain of childlessness may be alien to children, but many will relate to her experience of verbal bullying. It's an intimate story that shows the power of taking our problems to God in prayer.

5 CIRCLE TIME

As the children arrive, discuss any nicknames they use lovingly for friends, family or pets. How did these nicknames come about?

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: two long scarves; two robes; two baby dolls; long strips of cloth (swaddling clothes)

Invite volunteers to dress up as Hannah and Peninnah, encouraging everyone to arrange the headscarves and swaddle babies. Talk about how 3,000 years ago their lives were different from ours. Both were legally married to the same man, and neither had jobs outside the home, as their job was to have lots of children. In those days, people believed that big families were a sign of God's special blessing. Encourage the children to respond to this, then give one baby to Peninnah and ask the remaining children to gather around her.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: everything from 'Intro activity'; two hangers; a bunch of flowers; newspaper; felt-tip pens; purple cloth draped over a small side table to represent the temple

Moving straight on from 'Intro activity', tell this story:

Our story begins with the two wives of a man called Elkanah: Peninnah, with all her sons and daughters, and Hannah. *Take off the dressing-up clothes and hang them up on hangers. Place a baby doll beside Peninnah's clothes. Then all sit down.*

Hannah had no children, but Elkanah loved her best. *Place the flowers beside Hannah's clothes.*

His other wife Peninnah bullied Hannah all the time. She called her names and teased her about not having any children. *Give everyone a square of newspaper and a pen. Ask them to draw a sad or angry face to show how Peninnah wanted to make Hannah feel.*

Whenever their husband was especially loving to Hannah, Peninnah threw insults at her. *Everyone scrunches up and throws their newspaper like a snowball at Hannah's clothes.* This went on for years. *Draw more sad faces and throw more paper balls. Keep one behind for the priest later in the story.*

Hannah felt like crying all the time. Finally, she went to the temple to talk to God, taking all her sadness to him in prayer. *Invite a volunteer to collect up all the paper insults and take them to the 'temple'.* Hannah cried and told God how much she wanted a baby. She promised that if she had a son he would be special to God.

The priest saw Hannah slumped on the floor and he threw an insult of his own: "You're drunk!" *Invite a volunteer to throw the last paper ball at Hannah's clothes.*

But Hannah explained: "You're wrong. I've been praying to God because I'm so sad and worried." *A volunteer tears up the paper thrown by the priest.*

The priest saw what Hannah was really like. He said: "Peace be with you. May God answer your prayer."

Hannah felt happier, and nine months later she was overjoyed: she had a baby boy! God had listened to her prayer, so she called her son Samuel, which means 'God hears'. *Place a baby beside Hannah's clothes.*

She had a promise to keep, so she took him to the temple and gave him to God. *A volunteer takes the baby to the temple.*

The old priest looked after Samuel, but Hannah went back to see him every year. And God blessed her with five more children!

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- Which part of the story did you like best?
- Why did Peninnah bully Hannah?
- What would you have liked to say to Hannah?
- What questions would you like to ask God about this story?

- Does anyone in the story remind you of someone you know?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: a bowl; ingredients for papier mâché glue (two cups of flour, two cups of water, one tablespoon of salt); newspaper balls from 'Bible story'; plant pots or similar
Talk together about how Hannah rejected the priest's insult. As you mix the glue, invite the children to tear up the paper balls they made earlier. Let them choose something to make or cover with papier mâché, such as a plant pot. As you work together, talk about how it feels when people call us names, and what we can do about it. How can we talk to God about what we're going through?

It might help to share these thoughts, based on advice from BullyingUK (bullying.co.uk): Is it bullying or banter? If the name-calling becomes persistent, this is bullying. It is equally about how you feel. If it makes you uncomfortable and you have told them to stop, but they are still name-calling, this is what we call verbal bullying. How to help: confide in someone you trust. Practise being assertive.

5 PRAYER

You will need: small pieces of flash paper (available online); matches; a metal bowl; a heatproof mat; white chalk

Hand out the paper and explain that you'll write in white on white so that these prayers are private. On one side, ask the children to write an unkind name they have called someone else. On the other, write a name other people have called them or draw a sad face. Then pray together:

Father, we are sorry for the unkind names we have called other people, and we reject the bad names some have tried to stick on us. Please take all of these names away from us.

Ask the children to place their pieces of paper in the bowl and stand well back. Light the paper and it will disappear in a flash of flame! Then all say amen together.

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SESSION 3 of 4

David and the good shepherd

MEETING AIM

To learn that God is always with us – in good times and bad – and to provide an opportunity to think about cyberbullying.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Psalm 23

BACKGROUND

David rose from being a humble shepherd to God's anointed king of Israel. He was not perfect, and his reign was never easy. His enemies included the previous king Saul and David's own sons, who tried to take his throne. Yet whether he was praising God or lamenting, repenting for his sins or raging against his enemies, David remained close to God.

Many psalms have been attributed to David, and they express the rollercoaster ride of experiences and emotions that are part of life and faith. Even this famously comforting psalm has its dark valley and lurking enemies. It's a useful way to help children understand that God is always with us, no matter what. 'Always with us' provides a link with omnipresent digital technology and the particular problem of cyberbullying.

This advice from the NSPCC (nspcc.org.uk) might be helpful:

"Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place online. Unlike bullying in the real world, online bullying can follow the child wherever they go, via social networks, gaming and mobile phone." It's recommendations include: letting children know who to ask for help; helping them relax and taking a time out; reporting bullying that takes place on social media and through online gaming; remembering to reassure them that it's not their fault, and that they are loved and valued.

5 CIRCLE TIME

As the children arrive, chat about what they love doing online, such as playing games or using social media and YouTube. Talk about which devices they depend on and share any favourite cat videos or appropriate memes.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: printed symbols for 'No Wi-Fi', 'Low battery', 'No signal', 'Buffering' and '...' (indicating that someone is typing)

Share the feelings these symbols arouse and discuss which is the worst. Invite the children to arrange the symbols in order of awfulness. Debate the different circumstances that might change your answers.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: space to create five zones (indoors or outdoors); the equipment indicated below; the verses from each zone printed or written out

Zone one: green pastures (verses 1-2a): a green, nature-filled space, leafy plants, a sound clip of birdsong played on a loop, picnic rugs to lie on.

Zone two: still waters (verses 2b-3): a font, a beautiful bowl with glass pebbles or a pond filled with water, a meandering path or a simple labyrinth leading towards it (use pebbles, masking tape or chalked footprints to create the path).

Zone three: dark valley (verse 4): a dark corridor, a shaded corner with overhanging trees, a den or tunnel between pews.

Zone four: feast (verse 5): a table with a cloth and party food.

Zone five: the house of the Lord (verse 6): a side chapel or a simple altar with a table, a cross and candles, comfy cushions placed around it.

Tell the children you are going to take some special time out with God together, so you need to switch off and put away all devices. Do this with your own phone and put the devices in a safe place.

Explain that these words from the Bible are a psalm, which is a kind of song. The book of Psalms may have been written by a shepherd boy called David, who became a king. He knew about looking after sheep in the countryside: how to lead them to good grass and how to watch over them when wolves were prowling. He thought about God being a good shepherd.

Lead the children to each zone and read the words there together. Then invite them to explore the zones at their own pace, moving around or settling where they feel particularly close to God. Encourage them to chill in God's presence. Lie on the rugs or cushions, think about the words from the psalm, enjoy the party food, or simply do whatever helps them switch off and spend time with God.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- Which was your favourite zone to explore?
- Where did you feel closest to God?
- Where did you feel furthest from God?
- What does the dark place remind you of?
- At the feast, the psalm mentions enemies. What does that make you think of?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: large sheets of paper; pens

Talk together about how today's psalm describes our lives with God as a journey through different kinds of places. Invite the children to create a map of their own lives with different kinds of places in it. These can be literal (the places they have lived) or figurative (The Lake of Boredom, The Beautiful Beach of Free Time or The Tangled Forest of Homework). Encourage imagination and self-reflection. As you draw, talk together about where you are on your map. Who or what is always with you on your journey? Where do you feel closest to God? When does God feel far away?

Take this opportunity to open up a discussion about cyber safety and bullying online. If you did session two in this series, remind the children about your discussions about bullying and move on from there.

5 PRAYER

You will need: paper; scissors; pens

Invite everyone to draw around their feet and cut out their footprints. Gather in a circle and place footprints on the floor, facing inwards. Then say this prayer:

Wherever we go on life's journey, God will always be there for us. *Turn to your neighbour.*

God loves you. *Mark one footprint with a heart. God is always with you. Mark the other footprint with a cross. Pass the pen around the circle. Each child says these words and marks their neighbour's footprints. Ask everyone to turn their footprints outwards to face the door.*

Lord, you are our good shepherd. Lead us out into the world. Wherever we go, whatever happens, may we know your presence with us. Amen.

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SESSION 4 of 4

Love your enemies

MEETING AIM

To think about how we respond to bullies and explore God's challenge to love one another.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 5:38-48

BACKGROUND

This lesson from Jesus is part of the Sermon on the Mount. He tackles the question of whether he is challenging Jewish law head-on, and he raises the bar even higher. For example, the law says: "Do not kill", but Jesus says: "Don't even be cross with someone, don't call them names". Such teaching would have made his followers gasp. How could anyone achieve such perfection?

The last lesson is perhaps the most demanding of all: "Love your enemies." Children who have experienced bullying will have a sharp understanding of who their 'enemies' are, so this instruction will be just as challenging for them. This session encourages them to wrestle with it together, and to think about how to get into the habit of loving others, whoever they are.

5 CIRCLE TIME

As the children arrive, chat about the goodies and baddies in popular superhero or fantasy movies. Who do we want to win, and what do we want to happen to their enemies?

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig* by Eugene Trivizas and Helen Oxenbury

Read this traditional-story-with-a-twist together and take in the pictures. Wonder together about the ending. What happened to the Big Bad Pig? How did the little wolves treat their enemy?

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: character cards for everyone in the group, repeating or doubling up as necessary; an 'Old rule' card and a 'New rule' card (see below)

Before the session, create cards with all these descriptions:

The fighter: your brother was killed by the Romans.

The disciple: you were a fisherman and Jesus asked you to follow him, so you did.

The thief: you are picking people's pockets in the crowd around you.

The beggar: you are really hungry, and are hoping that Jesus will give out free food.

The Pharisee: you pride yourself on being a very good person and keeping all of God's laws.

The neighbour: you had to walk all this way because someone stole your donkey.

Old rule: an eye for an eye. People must be paid back for the harm they do you: "You shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Exodus 21:23-24).

New rule: love your enemies. "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you...Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:39-44).

Explain that you're going to imagine yourselves in today's story. Everyone will be part of a big, noisy rabble that has followed Jesus to hear what he has to say. It's hot and your feet are dusty. Everyone has crowded onto a hillside to listen. Give out the character cards and read them together. Then tell this story:

Jesus is talking about the religious laws, which you are all familiar with. These are like the rules of the game. *Lay down the 'Old rule' card. Invite the children to talk about how their character feels about the old rule.*

What happens if we all play by this rule? *Invite responses, either in or out of character.*

Then Jesus surprises everyone with some new rules! Lay down the 'New rule' card. Invite the children to talk about how their character feels about the new rule.

What happens if we all play by this rule? *Invite responses, either in or out of character.*

Jesus told the crowd: "Be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect."

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- What do you imagine it felt like to be in the crowd around Jesus that day?
- What questions would you like to ask Jesus about this story?
- Why did Jesus make the new rule?

- Who is easy to love? Who is hard to love?
- Who are our enemies?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: packets of Rowntree's Randoms; paper plates

Chat about how loving our enemies can be hard. Jesus knew this because he had lots of enemies, but he told his friends to love the people who hurt them. Ask the group how they could begin to do such a difficult thing. One answer is to practise loving people by doing random acts of kindness. If you get into the habit of being kind and loving, maybe loving those who are hardest to love will become a bit easier.

Tip out a plateful of Randoms. Can the children suggest random acts of kindness inspired by these different shapes? Chat about acts of practical love as everyone selects different sweets and eats them. Talk about how we could do some of these things for people we don't like.

Childline (childline.org.uk) recommends the following as an anti-bullying strategy designed to build victims' confidence: "You could give someone a compliment. Or you could help at home with some chores. Doing something nice for someone can really help you feel better about yourself."

5 PRAYER

Jesus told us to pray for our enemies. Explain that you're going to pray for everyone who has hurt you. Invite the children to think of someone who has hurt them. Say this prayer:

We silently tell God their names, and we clench our fists to show how angry and upset they have made us. *Clench fists.*

Loving God, we pray for our enemies.

And we pray for ourselves, that our hearts may be filled with love instead of hate.

Let's open our hands and join them with our neighbours' hands. *Cross arms (as if singing 'Auld lang syne') and hold hands around the circle.*

Loving God, hate drives us apart but love brings us closer together. Please help us to love each other. Amen.

Be available to children who may need to talk to you after the session.

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