



SESSION 1 of 4

## Joseph and his brothers

### MEETING AIM

To explore family tensions and how God can transform these.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 37

### BACKGROUND

This chapter is loaded with reasons why this family would implode as it did. A favourite son, jealous brothers, boasting, strange dreams... This story is also a fantastic tool to explore tensions and failures in our own family relationships and what we can do about it. This session does not explore the 'what happened next' for Joseph and his family, but it can be helpful to share how God's hand was at work at every stage and brought restoration to this family in the end.

### 5 GATHERING TIME

As you begin the session, serve refreshments and gather the young people together. Use this time as an opportunity to catch up with any news from the last week and see how your young people are. Ask the group about their own family experiences (being sensitive to particular situations within your group, and reminding them of the need for confidentiality and respect). Encourage the group to think particularly about their relationships with their siblings: what makes them good? When are they more challenging?

### 10 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** large sheets of paper, marker pens

Invite your young people to gather in small groups together with others they are comfortable working with. Give each group a large sheet of paper and a selection of marker pens and ask them to work together to create their own 'ideal sibling', drawing and annotating their ideas on the sheet. Encourage the young people to be creative and imaginative, but also to be sensitive and not share any particularly personal details of their own siblings! What features

would their 'ideal sibling' have or not have? Why did they choose these ideas?

### 15 BIBLE EXPLORATION

**You will need:** Bibles; selection of simple props and costumes

If you have a large group, you may wish to divide into smaller groups for this activity to ensure that everyone is actively involved. Distribute Bibles for everyone to look at the story of Joseph's dreams in Genesis 37. Read the story together and discuss briefly to ensure that everyone has a good understanding of the tensions in the relationships here.

Explain to the young people that this story may be a little difficult to fully understand because of some of the cultural references. Ask the young people to consider what this story would look like in a contemporary setting. What would Joseph's father have given him to show he was the favourite son? What images may Joseph's dreams have involved?

Challenge the young people to work together (in smaller groups if appropriate) to create a short drama to retell this story in a modern setting. Give them permission to change anything from the story, so long as they remain accurate to the central plot. When they have had enough time to plan and rehearse their sketches, gather the group together to watch one another's performances.

As a group, discuss how these retellings help us to better understand this story and add power to the tensions in the relationships. What do we discover from seeing the story told in this way?

As you draw this time to a close, explain to the young people that in many ways this episode is the prequel to a great saga that would follow Joseph's whole life. Through it, we see how God works in big ways to use Joseph to effect entire nations, but also restores the relationships between Joseph and his family.

### 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue the discussion about the story, using these sessions as a prompt:

- How do you feel about this story?
- Who do you feel most sorry for?
- Is there anyone in this story that you can relate to?
- What would you like to change in this family's relationships?
- Where is God in this story?

### 15 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** a selection of examples of 'in this family' rule posters; paper; pens; art materials or laptop and graphics programme  
Before the session, gather together a selection of examples of 'in this family' family rule images, either as posters to display or as images which can be shown via a projector. (Many examples of these can be found on Pinterest.) Show these to the group and talk about which examples they like, which ones they think are important and which ones they would like to include.

Invite your young people to take some time to create their own 'in this family' rules, either thinking about something they would like to uphold in their own family, or if they are more comfortable, to direct them to Joseph and his family. Provide paper and pens for them to begin drafting their lists.

Depending upon the skills and interests of your young people and leaders, you could either provide art materials for them to create a poster displaying their rules artistically, or provide laptops with graphics programmes which the young people can use to design and print out their posters.

Display the finished posters together and provide copies for the young people to take away for their own families.

### 5 PRAYER

**You will need:** paper

Gather the young people together and give each of them a sheet of paper. Ask them to crumple it in their hands and hold it outstretched in front of them. Explain that you are going to be praying for your families and encourage them to think about their own family relationships, bringing them to God, as you pray.

Begin by leading them in a prayer for all those families who find themselves under pressure, where relationships feel crushed or crumpled. Encourage the young people to slowly smooth out their sheets of paper with their fingers and, as they do so, pray that God would bring restoration to those relationships, bringing peace, calm and wholeness to those relationships which have been damaged.

Remind your young people that you are available for prayer and support as appropriate later.

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SESSION 2 of 4

## Hannah and Peninnah

### MEETING AIM

To explore relationships that cause us pain, and to discuss how we can respond to these.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

1 Samuel 1

### BACKGROUND

All of our young people will have experienced what it means to be provoked at some point. As we look at the relationship between Hannah and Peninnah we can explore the different ways of responding to those who provoke us, focusing on the fact that Hannah responded with prayer.

### 5 GATHERING TIME

As you begin the session, gather the young people together and serve any refreshments. Use this time as an opportunity to catch up with any news from the last week, and to see how your young people are. Ask the group to think about anything that has made them feel really good about themselves this week. What things have been more damaging or hurtful? How did they respond? What did they do with those feelings? Remind the group that this is a safe space where everyone can share how they feel and be honest, while respecting confidentiality (as appropriate).

### 10 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** paper and pens or a selection of images of well-known rival pairs printed off in advance

There are two ways to do this activity, depending upon your circumstances. Option one would be to print off a selection of images of well-known rivalries (with each character on a separate sheet of paper) and hide them around the room. (Examples include: Tom and Jerry, Batman and Joker, Liverpool and Manchester United.) On the signal to begin, the young people should search for the pictures and match them up with the relevant rivals.

Alternatively, you could distribute paper and pens, then challenge the young people to list as many well-known rivalries as they can think of. In either case, you could divide into two teams for this activity and award a small prize to the winning team.

### 15 BIBLE EXPLORATION

**You will need:** Bibles; printouts of 1 Samuel 1; assorted highlighter pens; a sheet of flip-chart paper and marker pens

Give each member of the group a copy of 1 Samuel 1 and access to a selection of highlighter pens. Make Bibles available so the young people can look at the wider story and put this episode into context.

Read the chapter through together and explore any initial questions or observations the young people may have about this story. You may need to pay attention to the fact that there was a man of God who had two wives and explore a little of the cultural context!

On a large sheet of flip-chart paper, create a simple grid with the two headings: Hannah and Peninnah. Ask the young people to look at their copy of the story, select a highlighter pen and begin by highlighting everything they notice in the text about Peninnah. When they have had enough time to go through it, perhaps in pairs, invite them to feed back what they have noticed, making a note of these on the grid.

Ask the young people to look back through the text, this time looking specifically for comments that relate to Hannah and highlighting these in a second colour. When they are ready, ask them to share what they have noticed about Hannah and record these ideas in the second column of your grid.

Gather the young people together and look at the two columns, talking about how these two characters contrast with one another. Spend some time talking about the things they have noticed, and discuss any questions this raises for them.

### 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue the discussion about the story, using these questions as a prompt:

- How do you feel about this story?
- Can you relate to either of these characters? How?
- What would you like to say to Hannah and to Peninnah?
- How do you deal with people who provoke you? What do you think you should do?

### 5 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** a selection of old magazines and newspapers; large sheets of paper; scissors; glue; Bibles

Invite the young people to work together in smaller groups for this, if they prefer, or you can all work together as one large group. Allow plenty of time for the young people to relax into this activity, perhaps playing some background music, as the more time they spend getting into it the more deeply they will connect with the story and the issues it raises.

On a large sheet of paper, draw two simple outlines to represent Hannah and Peninnah. You could ask the young people to decide on their positions and how they relate to each other. Invite them to cut out any images or short pieces of text from the magazines and newspapers that they think represent the two characters or their relationship in any way, perhaps sticking them in the space between the two women.

Try not to direct this activity too much, giving space for the young people to respond creatively as they wish, though you may need to offer some guidance to get them started. For example, you could find some images of expressions that show how you think these two women were feeling, or some key words that represent how Peninnah provoked Hannah.

When they are finished, bring the pictures together to display to the group. How do these images help them better understand this story?

### 5 PRAYER

Remind your young people of Hannah's prayer in verses 10-11 and explain that when we are hurting for any reason, a good response is to take it to God and pour it out to him. Invite your young people to find a space in the venue where they can be quiet and still for themselves, and encourage them to pour out their own prayers to God about whatever it is that is weighing heavily on their minds.

Draw the prayers together as you close the session, making yourself available for further prayer or conversation as appropriate.

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SESSION 3 of 4

## David and the good shepherd

### MEETING AIM

To reflect on what it means to be shepherded by God, whatever we may be facing.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Psalm 23

### BACKGROUND

This psalm is one of the best-known passages in the Bible. These words, written by a man who had himself encountered the presence of his enemies, experienced a need for rest and been given the opportunity to recover, mean just as much to us today. The need is just as real for our young people, but the imagery may be less familiar. This session gives them the opportunity to explore the psalm in ways that may be more familiar and helpful to them.

### 5 GATHERING TIME

As you begin the session, gather the young people together but don't serve your refreshments just yet. Use this time as an opportunity to catch up with any news from the last week, and to see how your young people are. Ask the group to think about the places they consider to be safe spaces. Why do they think this? What can we do to make this place a safe space?

### 10 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** a table; fancy decorations; special refreshments

Ask the young people to help you decorate the table and lay out the refreshments. Invite them to sit around the table and enjoy the refreshments together. As you do so, ask the young people to share what they remember about David from the Bible, exploring what they know of his story from young giant-slayer to mighty-yet-flawed king. For those with less of a church background it may be appropriate to give a brief summary of David's life, explaining that it can be helpful to have a shared understanding of where he was coming from as we look at this psalm together.

Tell the young people that there is a line in the psalm we will be looking at which says that God prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies. Enjoy the feast you have prepared as a group. Explain that you hope this session will be a time of sharing together and will provide a space where you can all be refreshed by God.

### 10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

**You will need:** a Bible; a comfortable space (including comfortable chairs and cushions); background music and the means to play it

Explain to the group that you are going to read Psalm 23 to them while they take some time to listen and reflect in peace and quiet. Invite your young people to find a space where they feel comfortable by themselves, and where they can be still and quiet. Take some time to ensure that they are in a good place before you begin to read the psalm. If they find it helpful you could play some background music or provide paper and pens for those who like to be more active when they are listening.

Ask the young people to listen as you read Psalm 23 over them, calmly and without rushing, taking time to pause after each line as appropriate. Encourage them to think about these words as a prayer to God, and to reflect on what they mean to them personally. Invite group members to take hold of the words that resonate most with them.

As you conclude this time together, invite the young people to share how this has helped them and what they noticed from listening to the psalm in this way, rather than exploring it together. Make time to explore any pressing questions or queries.

### 10 CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue the discussion about the story, using these questions as a prompt:

- How do you feel about this psalm?
- Which words mean the most to you?
- What challenges you about the psalm?
- Where might you need God's shepherding in your own life?
- When do you feel most in need of this love and care?

### 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** Bibles; paper; pens

Invite your group to work individually, in pairs or in small groups as they prefer for this activity. Distribute the paper, pens and Bibles, then explain to the young people that they are to write their own version of Psalm 23 using imagery that may be more familiar to them than sheep and shepherds. Encourage them to look carefully at the text in the Bible and to try to remain as close as they can to the meaning of the original psalm, perhaps using the same sentence openers for each line.

Leave them to write their versions independently, but make yourself available to talk through any images that may be less familiar, or about some of the meaningful alternatives they can create.

When they have finished, invite the young people to read their completed psalms to one another. Talk about the different ideas they have used and how they help us understand what David was writing about. If it helps, find a way to share these rewritings with the wider church.

### 5 PRAYER

As you draw the session to a close, lead the young people in prayer together. Begin by asking them to choose something from the psalm or from their own rewritings that they want to thank God for. Take turns to call out: "Thank you God for..." or "Thank you God that..." to start their prayers. Then invite the young people to call out: "Please God...", also using lines from the psalm. If appropriate, you may want to give them the opportunity to offer sorry prayers for the times when they have not come into the place of safety offered by our shepherd God.

Gather the prayers together, thanking God that we dwell in his house all the days of our lives.

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SESSION 4 of 4

## Revenge and love

### MEETING AIM

To explore Jesus' radical teaching about how we should treat those who wrong us.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 5:38-48

### BACKGROUND

This reading is perhaps one of the best-known pieces of Jesus' teaching, and also one of the most challenging! In a world that expects 'getting even' to be the norm, this session helps young people explore how to do things Jesus' way.

### 5 GATHERING TIME

As you begin the session, gather the young people together and serve any refreshments you may have. Use this time as an opportunity to catch up on news from the last week and to see how your young people are. Ask the group what they find challenging about following Jesus. What do they think is the most challenging thing Jesus ever said? (There are no right or wrong answers here, this is just the start of a conversation to explore further during the session.)

### 5 INTRO ACTIVITY

The way you begin this session will depend on your group. You could begin with a game, asking for two volunteers. Explain that they are to have an 'insult-off!' They should trade insults with one another, but they must keep the insults good-humoured and light, not personal or offensive. If you are worried about how well this would go, you could ask two leaders to act it out, or ask the two volunteers to do the activity in character as two well-known fictitious enemies.

If you'd rather steer clear of this altogether, you could begin the session by looking at a few well-known stories of revenge, perhaps choosing some suitable examples by searching for 'petty revenge stories' on the internet (there are various appropriate ones on the Bored Panda website). Explain that while some of these are funny, revenge generally ends in tears and is rarely a comedic story in reality. Say that we will be exploring what Jesus had to say about revenge today.

### 10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

**You will need:** a Bible, appropriate costumes

Before the session, prepare a volunteer (a leader or young person) to deliver this reading, acting as Jesus, wearing an appropriate costume and delivering it as though teaching the crowd. You could ask a volunteer on the day to deliver the reading, but it would have a greater impact if your volunteer has a chance to learn the reading and really act out this part, speaking with appropriate emphasis and directing their teaching to the crowd.

Gather the young people together and ask them to imagine they are sitting together listening to Jesus teaching a huge crowd of many people about a wide variety of subjects. Ask them to imagine they are hearing this teaching for the first time, then invite your actor forward to give their speech.

At the end, ask your actor to slip away, then choose a few members of the crowd and ask them for their immediate response to Jesus' teaching. Do they agree with him? Is he right? What do they think?

Divide your group into two groups: those who agree with what Jesus had to say and those who think there is more truth in the old teaching (an eye for an eye, and loving your neighbour and hating your enemy). Encourage some debate between the two groups as to why their way of thinking is right. Draw the discussion together by helping your young people see how radical Jesus' teaching was – not just back in the day when he said it, but still today, when many of us still find it hard to swallow!

### 10 CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue the discussion about the story, using these questions as a prompt:

- How do you feel about this teaching?
- What challenges you most about it?
- What would you like to ask Jesus about it?
- How does this teaching challenge you to live differently? What might you do differently this week?

### 15 CREATIVE RESPONSE

Gather the group together and talk about some different scenarios they face in which they might be tempted to seek revenge. Spend some time talking about real-life situations but remind the group to respect confidentiality. You could discuss a situation they have found themselves in at school recently, or you could ask them to think about a situation that has come up in a TV drama or film they have seen.

Arrange the young people in smaller groups and ask them to work together to create two role-play responses to one of the situations you have talked about: one where they take the 'eye for an eye' response and another where they turn the other cheek instead. Ask them to pursue the role play to its logical conclusion, exploring where their reaction might lead.

When they have had enough time to complete their role plays, gather the young people together. If appropriate, you could ask each small group to perform their drama, or you could spend time talking about how these role plays helped them to explore the concepts raised in the Bible reading, and how they feel about it now.

### 5 PRAYER

**You will need:** paper

Give each member of the group a sheet of paper and invite them to screw it up or crush it in their hands. As they do so, invite them to think about a friendship that has become 'crushed' or to think about someone they have a particularly difficult relationship with, which makes it hard to turn the other cheek.

Explain that you are going to pray for them, and for the relationships represented on the sheets of paper, that there would be healing, peace, love and restoration. As you pray, encourage the young people to present these challenging relationships to God, and to smooth the paper out between their fingers as they do so, symbolising their relationships being smoothed out.

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