

# Forgiveness: Breaking the Power of the Past



Kay Arthur, David & BJ Lawson

**4**minute  
BIBLE STUDIES

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# FORGIVENESS: BREAKING THE POWER OF THE PAST

Outside, winter pierced the day with a frigid, blustery chill; inside, a similar iciness permeated the church. Among the people gathered for the funeral, twenty family members sat scattered in eighteen pews. Snippets of conversations drifted back as I waited for the service to begin.

“Poor old soul lived alone. It was such a shame that John didn’t visit his mother more than a couple of times a year.”

“Did Aunt Marilyn talk to you?” “No, and I’m not talking to her until she talks to me!”

“Why didn’t Rita come to the funeral?” “She got mad at Mother’s funeral and hasn’t talked to any of the family since.”

What happened to create such division within this

family that even at a loved one's funeral they sat apart from one another and talked among themselves about other family members who weren't there?

Sadly, dysfunctional families are nothing new and hardly unusual. Dating back to the days of Cain and Abel, lack of forgiveness has destroyed countless relationships. And although our deepest hurts may come from family, forgiveness isn't simply a *family* issue; forgiveness is a *people* issue. In every relationship it's certain we'll need to extend or seek forgiveness at some point.

So this subject of forgiveness touches us all and brings to mind many questions, including...

*How can I forgive when the pain is so great?*

*What about revenge? Is the other person going to get away with what they did?*

*What if I choose not to forgive?*

*Can I be forgiven of my past mistakes?*

*Does forgiving mean I have to forget the past?*

For the next six weeks we'll look to the Bible for the answers to these questions and others. You'll learn how forgiveness not only cleanses your soul and frees your mind but also unlocks the chains that hold you captive to the person who wronged you.

Through this study you'll learn how to unleash the power of forgiveness in your life, letting it propel you out of painful and awkward situations and freeing you from the pain of the past.

## WEEK ONE

Have you suffered pain at the hands of another person? Have you wondered if you could ever get past it?

This week we're going to look at the life of Joseph, a young man from a blended family who was horribly mistreated yet somehow broke the power of his painful past in order to walk in freedom. Let's see what we can learn from this story of pain, disappointment, and forgiveness.

### OBSERVE

*Leader:* Read Genesis 37:1–4. Have the group say aloud and...

- underline every reference to **Joseph**, including pronouns.
- circle every reference to **his brothers**, including synonyms and pronouns.

*As you read the text, it's helpful to have the group say the key words aloud as they mark them. This way everyone will be sure to mark every occurrence of the word, including any synonymous words or phrases. Do this throughout the study.*

### DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking *Joseph*?

### GENESIS 37:1–4

<sup>1</sup> Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan.

<sup>2</sup> These are the records of the generations of Jacob. Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was still a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father.

3 Now Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic.

4 His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms.

### GENESIS 37:5–11


5 Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more.

6 He said to them, “Please listen to this dream which I have had;

- What did you learn about Joseph’s relationship with his brothers? his father?

### OBSERVE

*Leader:* Read aloud Genesis 37:5–11 and have the group...

- circle every reference to **the brothers**, including pronouns.
- draw a cloud like this  around every occurrence of the word **dream**, including pronouns.

**DISCUSS**

- What did Joseph’s dreams point to? Did they describe the present or the future?
- How did Joseph’s brothers respond to his dreams? Did they understand them? Explain your answer.

7 for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.”

8 Then his brothers said to him, “Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

9 Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, “Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”



10 He related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?”

11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

### GENESIS 37:18–28

18 When they [his brothers] saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death.

19 They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer!

- How did his father respond to Joseph’s second dream?
- Compare the responses of his brothers and father in verse 11.

### OBSERVE

Jacob sent Joseph to check on the welfare of his brothers and the flocks in Shechem. Even though he knew they hated and envied him, Joseph obeyed his father’s commands.

*Leader:* Read Genesis 37:18–28 aloud and have the group...

- *circle every reference to **the brothers**, including pronouns and synonyms such as **one another**.*
- *underline every reference to **Joseph**, including pronouns.*

## DISCUSS

- What does this passage reveal about the relationships between various brothers and Joseph?

<sup>20</sup> “Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, ‘A wild beast devoured him.’ Then let us see what will become of his dreams!”

<sup>21</sup> But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, “Let us not take his life.”

<sup>22</sup> Reuben further said to them, “Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father.

<sup>23</sup> So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they

## WRAP IT UP

As believers we can refuse to allow the past to determine our future. Everything you have endured, suffered, and experienced can have eternal value if you choose to view it from God's perspective.

Joseph's life clearly demonstrates this principle. He suffered a terrible crime at the hand of his brothers, who initially schemed to kill him before selling him into slavery. Yet Joseph did not hold it against them. Instead, years later when famine drove the brothers to Egypt in search of food, Joseph recognized them and felt compassion for them before they knew who he was. He forgave them unconditionally—not dependent on any show of remorse from them. In fact, although they were humble before Joseph, they never specifically asked forgiveness from him. To be sure, they had mistreated him, but he chose to see the past from God's point of view. He recognized that God was working His good in Joseph's life through the very evil that had been done to him.

Joseph's example reminds us that when we don't know why certain things happen, we must remain confident that God is at work in every experience of our lives, even the painful ones. Instead of allowing his situation to paralyze him or render him ineffective, Joseph believed God had a plan for his life. By fulfilling that plan and looking ahead, he broke the power of the past—a past riddled with wounds inflicted by others.

What about you? Do you believe God has a plan and purpose for your life? Are you willing to do what it takes to break the power of the past and walk in freedom toward the future?



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