

Pa232 Counseling

Lesson Pa232-24 Family Issues: Unjust Treatment by Family Members

Do you ever argue with your brother or your sister? Often children find it hard to get along. The Bible tells about one young man who had 11 brothers to try to get along with. His name was Joseph, the favorite son of Jacob. His father had given him a richly embroidered robe to wear.

When Joseph was 17, he had a dream that he shared with his brothers. "Listen to the dream I had," he said. "We were tying up bundles of grain out in the field. Suddenly my bundle rose and stood up straight. Your bundles gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

Jacob, Joseph's father, loved him more than any of his other sons, because he was born to him when he was old. He was the son of his wife Rachel, the wife he loved. Now Joseph's brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them. So they hated Joseph and they could not speak a kind word to him.

Later he told his father and brothers about another dream he had. This time the sun and moon and 11 stars had bowed down to him. His father rebuked him saying, "Will your mother and I and your brothers really come and bow down to the ground before you?" Joseph, as a result, was known by his family as 'the dreamer.' This could indicate the feelings the family had about Joseph. "His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind" (Gen 37:2-11).

Later, his father sent Joseph to his brothers, who were caring for his sheep. When his brothers saw him coming, they planned to kill him. Then they would see what would come of his dreams. Reuben, his oldest brother said, "Let's not take his life. Throw him into this empty well here in the desert." Reuben was hoping to later take his brother back to his father.

After they had taken off his special robe and had thrown him in the well, they sat down to eat. As they were eating, they saw some traders coming on their way to Egypt. Judah, another brother, suggested that they not kill him, but sell him to the traders. So, they sold him for 20 shekels of silver, and the traders took him to Egypt. When the brothers returned to their father they lied to him and said, "We have found Joseph's robe and it is covered with blood. A wild animal must have eaten him"(Gen 37:18-32).

It is not uncommon for a person to go through trouble. A counselor's purpose is to help that person to realize that God has not forsaken them. We want to help them understand that God will make a way for them. Jacob's family went through a lot before they saw the reason for the path God had taken them down.

Imagine talking with Joseph as he traveled with the traders toward Egypt. He might start by telling you what has happened. He might say, "What did I do? How will my father know where I am? Why would my brothers sell me to these strangers? I'm afraid!" We would call this a "crisis counseling" episode. Joseph's view would be what you want to hear first. And in such a situation, it will probably be the only one you will hear. In this process of listening, you are allowing Joseph a chance to better understand what has happened to him.

A counselor will be able to put things in some kind of order that helps him talk about his situation. As you encourage this free expression of feeling you can help Joseph relate the beginning and the middle of his circumstance. You will even help him see where the situation may be going. He may blame others and also begin to understand why others acted as they did. Perhaps Joseph would reflect on the fact that his brothers were far more resentful of him than he had realized. He may realize that telling his family his dreams had made him look boastful. It presented a possible threat to the family. In retrospect, he might think he should have kept the dreams to himself.

The counselor encourages the telling of the story to help the person walk through the process of this crisis. Hearing the whole story will help you see things more clearly too. The counselor avoids the impulse to give words that defend, blame, justify, or explain the actions of others. If the person asks a direct question like, “Why do you think they did this to me?” The counselor could answer with another question such as, “Tell me, why do you believe they acted the way they did?” For the person to realize for himself would more helpful, than for you to give your opinion.

This is a delicate time for the one speaking, as he or she reveals their thoughts, secrets, and feelings. The behavior of the counselor will influence them greatly, since they likely feel vulnerable and unprotected. Remember, the hurting person knows more about this situation than you. Your task is to help them find some comfort or a course of action to deal with the situation.

The counselor should focus on:

- Displaying an open behavior, such as arms uncrossed, sitting on a chair of equal size and height to the troubled person.
- Showing a calm and attentive expression on your face.
- Nodding or making small remarks that fit with the story.
- Not playing with papers, pencils, phones, or other objects nearby.
- Asking few and only essential questions to help the person tell his story.
- Being in a silent, prayerful attitude during interaction with them.
- Asking the Spirit of God to give the person courage to share difficult things and to give you the wisdom, patience, and strength to be a supportive helper.

Before, during, and after you speak with someone, remember to thank God that he is allowing you to care for this ‘Joseph.’ Welcome the guidance you will sense from the Spirit of God to respond to them. In silence, encouragement, instruction, or even a combination of these responses, God will direct you. The Spirit of God can lead you into all truth. We may not, but God knows, why things have gone the way they have. He also knows what will occur in the future.

It is important to understand that you are there to help that person come to some resolution of their situation. You want to provide that person rest from the stress, anger, fear, and doubts they are facing. It is surprising that simply the process of talking with you can bring the rest needed. You can trust the Holy Spirit to put a plan of action into that person’s heart as you pray.

This lesson is **important** because it reminds us that through good times and bad, God is still in control. If we have surrendered to him, he will direct our steps. God has no favorites, for he “causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt 5:45).

The **main truth** of this story is that a good counselor is one who listens. They listen in times of crises, when people don’t need advice or instruction. They just need a caring person to listen to their questions.

To **review** this lesson, answer these questions:

1. How can we help someone in a crisis like Joseph was in? [Pause]
A. If you said, “We can help such a person by encouraging them to speak freely,” you are right.
2. What are we trying to do by listening to that person? [Pause]
A. If you answered that we are listening to help them walk through this difficult situation, you answered correctly.
3. What should we avoid when listening to the story the person tells? [Pause]
A. If you said, “We should avoid the impulse to jump in with comments or judgments while they speak,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story of Joseph and what his brothers did to him. Find another believer you know has gone through a difficult time recently and volunteer to listen to their story. Follow the guidelines of this lesson as you listen. Then pray together and listen for the guidance of the Spirit may give to each of you. Then encourage your ‘Joseph’ to trust God and see what he has planned for the future.