

Zi Zhou / General Adult

Family

Large Group Game Question

A. Describe your family

1. Members
2. Special memory
3. Family Hobby

B. How would you describe your family's faith? Do you engage in family worship together?

C. How does your family support you during challenging times?

Small Group Discussion

Gen 37:1-11 "How does envy destroy a family? What can cause envy?"

You may have one or two siblings in your life, which can be both a blessing and, at times, a curse. Take the example of Joseph, who had 10 brothers in what seemed like a great family led by their father, Jacob (also known as Israel), a godly man. However, even in a family led by a godly man, tragedy is inevitable. The greatest humiliation for Israel was that his 10 sons deceived him by selling their youngest brother Joseph to Egypt and claiming him as dead.

The root of the animosity towards Joseph began with his father's favoritism. "Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons," showcasing that, despite Jacob being a godly man, he was not immune to sin. The 10 sons, too, were not exempt from sin.

Every family tragedy is rooted in the sinful nature of humanity, originating from the sins of parents and subsequently carried on by their children. It's crucial to recognize that conflicts and arguments within families are often fueled by sin, whether from others, yourself, or a combination of both. In this case, Israel's sin was loving Joseph more than his other sons, while the 10 sons sinned by succumbing to envy.

Envy is one of the deadly sins; for instance, Cain, the son of Adam, killed his brother

Abel due to envy. It's a similar reason why Jacob's 10 sons sold their younger brother Joseph. Envy, like other sins, may not bear fruit initially. However, if we don't keep an eye on it and eliminate it from our hearts, it can grow bigger and bigger. Eventually, it might lead to arguments, the use of hurtful language, or even escalate to hatred, fighting, or, in extreme cases, murder.

Interlude: Does anyone know what happened to Joseph next?

Joseph was eventually sold to Egypt, but the Lord was with him. Despite becoming a slave, he worked as the steward of Pharaoh's officer. However, Joseph faced false accusations from the officer's wife, leading to his imprisonment. Few years later, Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream. Impressed by his wisdom, Pharaoh appointed him as the ruler of all Egypt. Subsequently, a famine struck Canaan as well.

Gen 42:1-3,45:1-15,50:15-21 Why did Joseph choose not to seek revenge?

Family bonds alone may not be sufficient to prevent revenge. It is indeed more painful when betrayal comes from those close to you. Seeking revenge against people you once trusted is often easier. Joseph experienced significant pain due to his brothers' betrayal, shedding tears when he met them in Egypt. Despite being an ordinary person, he felt deep hurt as he remembered his brothers' actions.

The key factor that led Joseph to choose forgiveness over revenge was his fear of God. As a godly man, Joseph consistently prioritized God in his life, and his transformation was evident. Some may believe that family ties alone can always prevent revenge, but history repeatedly shows that familial relationships cannot always halt human evil. Only God, the source of love, can do so. True forgiveness for crimes like those committed by Joseph's brothers can only come from a person who fears God.

Why did Joseph provide for his brother's family? Is it because of his father?

Not only did Joseph forgive his brothers, but he also supported them during their difficult days. Joseph not only saved his brothers and father but granted them grace

upon grace. Remarkably, he did not take advantage of them, refusing to glory in himself. Instead, he attributed everything to God, stating, "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth," giving all the glory to God.

The reason he felt a responsibility to provide for his family lies in God's will to make us prosper in order to help the needy, starting with our own households and families. Many people neglect their duty to their families, considering their possessions as their own. They fail to adopt Joseph's insight: recognizing that everything is a gift from God, and nothing should be used for personal glory or interests. Godly individuals, therefore, honor God by caring for their families out of love.

After Israel passed away, Joseph's brothers fell into fear, realizing the gravity of their past actions against Joseph. They might have thought Joseph treated them well merely to avoid grieving his father. However, Joseph cried at their misguided thoughts. The only reason he forgave and provided for his brothers' families was his fear of God and love for his family. Consequently, he spoke kindly to his brothers to reassure and pacify them.

Read I Timothy 5:8, why does God attaches importance to family?

As the Scriptures state, even those who do not believe in God naturally care about their families, not to mention Christians. Unbelievers may possess a partial love for family because God created humans in His image. He established the first family and marriage, which we will delve into in later chapters. Here, I want to emphasize that having and caring for a family is part of God's design.

God is a Trinity – one God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. We can say that they love each other in eternity, serving as the original model of family. Family is a gift from God; it is the place where we can trust, share vulnerabilities, and receive care. In God's will, the strong support the weak, and abundance fills lack. The sweetness of fellowship should first manifest in every believer's family.

A family is not meant to be a training ground for seeking personal good; rather, it is a place to deny oneself and seek the good of others.

Open Question: How does your family support you during challenging times? Do you believe that family members should share the same faith in the Lord? If so, why? As a believer, do you think it's important for your next generation to also know the Lord? If yes, why do you hold this belief?