

# Genesis

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# Lesson 1

## Forbidden Fruit: Understanding Our Selfish Nature

### A. Introduction.

Violence. Murder. Abuse. Divorce. Adultery. Rape. Molestation. Theft. Corruption.

Those are all familiar headlines, are they not? We almost expect this kind of news. We have just kind of accepted that that is the kind of world we live in.

But even though we are cynical and not just a little pessimistic about the world we live in, there is something within all of us saying that this is not right. This is not the way the world is supposed to be. And it's not. Not by a long shot.

What God created was good. He says that six times about the things he created on the first five days (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Then, on the sixth day when he created man and woman, he said that what he created was "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

So how did things go wrong?

What happened is sin entered the world, and at the heart of sin is selfishness. Sin is defined in the Bible as lawlessness (1 John 3:4). Sin is when we go beyond the law and do what God has forbidden or fail to do what God has commanded. Sin happens when we elevate self ahead of God. We are going to do what we want to do, regardless of what God has said.

That is the story of Genesis. The story of Genesis is, at least in part, the record of what happened to God's good world when his creation rebelled against him. It is the sad story of what happened to families and peoples and nations (which were in effect just large families at this point) when we decided we were going to do what we wanted to do.

So the Genesis story resembles very much what we read about in the news: murder, violence, war, rape, sexual promiscuity, theft, etc. What we are going to do in this class is look at the connection between all of the wickedness and immorality in Genesis and selfishness. Why did Cain kill his brother Abel? Why did Abram lie about his wife? Why did Jacob steal from his brother? Why did Jacob's sons sell their younger brother Joseph? All of these sins find their roots in selfishness.

We will also look at the consequences of selfishness. As we look at the pain and hurt caused by selfish acts, we will look at ourselves and see how our selfish choices affect our families and our personal lives.

But the story of Genesis is not all sad. There are some notable bright spots in it that shine for us. And what we find is that when people do good and noble things, it is because they have forgotten self. They have given up on pleasing themselves and have instead sought to please God above all else. We're also going to look at these examples.

To begin our study, we must go all the way back to the fountainhead, to the selfish act that got everything started: when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Understanding why they ate this fruit helps us understand a lot about ourselves.

## **B. Story.**

Read Genesis 2:4-17. What two special trees are listed in verse 9? How does the record describe the other trees in the garden in verse 9? What prohibition was given in verse 17?

Read Genesis 3:1-7. What did the serpent ask Eve in verse 1? What seed of doubt did the serpent plant in verse 5? Why did Eve eat the fruit according to verse 6?

Read Genesis 3:8-13. What did Adam and Eve do when they heard God coming (v 8)? Why? Who did Adam blame (v 12)? Who did Eve blame (v 13)?

Read Genesis 3:14-24. What were the curses placed upon the woman and the man?

## **C. Principles and Lessons.**

1. The definition of sin.
  - a. What is the definition of sin in 1 John 3:4? Does that describe Adam and Eve's action?
  - b. What would you say to someone who would argue that what Adam and Eve was not all that bad? How does someone who does not have respect for God define evil? Contrast that with our view of sin.
2. The nature of selfishness.
  - a. Read 1 John 2:15-17. How does John categorize all that is in "the world" in this passage (three categories)? Do we see those categories in our story?
  - b. Read Isaiah 53:6. Isaiah says, "we have turned—every one—to his own way." What does he mean by that? What is the relationship between that attitude and sin?
3. The consequence of sin and selfishness to relationship.
  - a. Why did Adam and Eve hide? Do they seem to be hiding in Genesis 2:24? Explain the difference.
  - b. Read Isaiah 59:1-2. Why can God not help or hear us when we are in sin?
  - c. Read Psalm 51:4, 11. What do you think is David's primary lament in this psalm?

## **D. Applications.**

1. Write down some specific areas of weakness and temptation you are dealing with in your life (not necessarily to be shared in class – this is for your own benefit):
2. How do you excuse these struggles in your life? Why do we make excuses for sin? Why will excuses prevent us from really dealing with the problem?
3. What are some consequences you have felt in your life because of these sins?

# Lesson 2

## Adam & Eve: Selfishness in Marriage

### A. Introduction

Jesus was asked a question about divorce, and he ended up stating a profound fact about marriage.

The question was whether a man could divorce his wife for just any reason (Matthew 19:3), and Jesus' answer was "No." But the way he answered tells us a lot more about marriage than about divorce.

Jesus took them back to Adam and Eve, to the first marriage, and made some stunning deductions about what happened in the first marriage. Jesus said that God created them "male and female" (from Genesis 1:27) and that God then said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they two shall become one flesh" (from Genesis 2:24)

The rather obvious (and yet profound!) deduction Jesus makes from this is "they are no longer two but one flesh." (Matthew 19:5) He naturally concludes from this that if God joins us together as one we don't have the right to bread that union (Matthew 19:6). But for the purposes of this study we need to focus on the first statement, "they are no longer two but one flesh." What does that mean?

I am going to argue that understanding what that statement means will transform your marriage. The reason is that once we think as one we can no longer be selfish in marriage. When we move from an "I" and "me" centered marriage to a "we" and "us" centered marriage, then we've removed most of the conflict we will ever have in marriage.

So in this lesson we're going to go back to the beginning of marriage, back to Adam and Eve, and we're going to think together about how our marriages can be transformed by the understanding that we are "one flesh."

### B. Story

Read Genesis 2:18. Was the man truly alone in the world? Were there not other animals there? In what way was he alone? Why was it not good for the man to be alone?

Read Genesis 2:19-20. Why do you think God wanted Adam to name the animals?

Read Genesis 2:21-23. What do you think is the significance of God taking a bone out of Adam to make Eve? Why not just create her out of the dust of the earth like Adam?

Read Genesis 2:24-25. What does it mean for a man to "leave his father and his mother?" Does a man not have a responsibility to still honor his father and mother? (see Ephesians 6:2; 1 Timothy 5:3-8) Why is this necessary? What does this say about the "one flesh" relationship?

### C. Principles and Lessons

1. The permanence of marriage.
  - a. Read Malachi 2:13-16. Why does God hate divorce?
  - b. Read Ephesians 5:29-32. The one flesh relationship in marriage is a picture of what other relationship? If that is true, what does that tell us about why God made this relationship permanent?
2. The oneness of marriage.
  - a. Read Ephesians 5:22-24. What are the implications of all of this for wives? When a woman becomes one flesh with a man in the marriage relationship, what part of "self" must die? Is this an easy thing for a woman? (read 1 Peter 3:5-6 – note especially the last verse)
  - b. Read Ephesians 5:25-28. What are the implications of all of this for husbands? When a man becomes one flesh with a woman in the marriage relationship, what part of "self" must die? Is this an easy thing for a man?
  - c. Read Ephesians 5:29-32. If marriage is a portrait of our relationship with Christ, what are we demonstrating to the world in our selfless behavior toward each other? How does learning to be "one flesh" in marriage help us to be "one flesh" in our relationship to Christ?

### D. Applications

1. Write down at least five ways that selfishness is expressed in marriage:
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
2. Now write down five specific ways that YOU are selfish in your marriage (not necessarily to share with the class – this is for your benefit):
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
3. Take this list and share it with your wife or husband and with God in prayer. Talk about specific things you are going to do to help crucify self in your relationship so that you might draw together into a closer, more intimate unit.

# Lesson 3

## Cain & Abel: Selfishness in Families

### A. Introduction

Who is more likely to kill you? Someone you know or someone you don't?

If you watch the crime shows, you're likely to think a stranger is more likely to kill you. But the statistics tell a different story. A couple of students at the Mayo Clinic compared homicide statistics to the popular crime shows and found that the fictional TV shows distort our perception of reality. Strangers committed over half of the homicides in TV dramas, while the CDC reports that 75% of all murder victims are killed by someone they knew.<sup>1</sup> (These statistics do not include abortion.)

That should not be a surprise to a student of the Bible. After all, the first murder recorded in the Bible is brother against brother (Genesis 4). One of the most notorious of all homicides in the Bible had a love triangle at the center of it. David had Uriah put to death, and he did this in an effort to cover up his sin with Uriah's wife, Bathsheeba (2 Samuel 11). Not only did David have an intimate relationship with Bathsheeba, Uriah had faithfully served David as one of his "mighty men" (2 Chronicles 11:41).

What was the primary source of violent persecution in the first century? We might assume it was from the government, but, with a few notable exceptions, the Roman authorities didn't become much of a threat until late in the first century. In fact, more times than not the government was not the cause of persecution in the book of Acts but rather they are the ones who save early Christians (see Acts 18:12-17; 19:35-41; 21:27-36). It was Jewish brethren that most often created problems for the apostles and early preachers, and this is what Jesus predicted would happen: "And brother will deliver over brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death." (Mark 13:12)

What all of this evidence, both in the Bible and in our own experience, reveals is that violence is usually personal. That is to say that the people who hurt us the most (either in their words or in their actions) are normally the ones to whom we are closest. And, conversely, the ones we hurt the most are the ones who are closest to us.

The same can be said about selfishness in general. Selfishness expresses itself in a lot of different ways: pride, envy, drunkenness, lying, theft, sexual promiscuity, gossip, slander, etc. We all do selfish things like these, do we not? But think about this: who is normally the victim? Is it not those who are closest to us? Who are we the most likely to envy, or lie to, or steal from, or gossip about? Family. Whether our physical family or our spiritual family, it is those closest to us that we tend to suffer the most because of our selfishness.

So, in this lesson we will look at selfishness both in the home and in other family type relationships (like in the church). What causes it? Why is it such a problem? And, most importantly, what can we do to control it?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2009/05/27/mayocrimshows/>

## B. Story

Read Genesis 4:1-7. Why did Cain become angry? God personifies sin in his warning to Cain. Where does he say it is? What does he say about the nature of sin? What does he say Cain must do in response to it?

Read Genesis 4:8-16. What did God ask Cain after he killed his brother? How is that similar to what God did to Adam after they ate the forbidden fruit? What does Cain's response in verse nine say about his attitude in general? What was the blood of Abel doing from the ground (symbolically)? What was the punishment on Cain? What does Cain's response reveal about his attitude (is he really sorry)? What did Cain do after this punishment was given (4:16)? What does that say about him?

Genesis 4:17-26. What do we know about this man named Lamech? What does this say about Cain's legacy (see also 6:11)?

## C. Principles and Lessons

1. The relationship between selfishness and violence.
  - a. Matthew 5:21-26. What did Jesus say about the one who is angry with his brother? How serious is this to Jesus? What are we to do with our gift at the altar if we remember that our brother has something against us?
  - b. Matthew 15:18-20. Where does murder begin?
  - c. Ephesians 4:26-27. What are we to not do when we are angry? (There are two things – look closely) Why are we given these warnings?
  - d. James 4:1-3. What is the source of quarrels and fights? (We think here he is not talking about wars on a national scale, but rather wars within the church. Look at the context in chapter 3.)
2. The larger issue.
  - a. Genesis 9:6. Why does God pronounce this judgment against those who shed blood? (see also James 3:9)
  - b. James 4:4-10. When we fight and quarrel and hurt each other because of selfishness, who are we really hurting the most? What is at the heart of all our problems?
  - c. James 4:11-12. Why do we need to be careful in our judgments? What is the core issue?

## D. Applications

1. Write down the names (not to share in class) of at least three people who irritate you the most. What relationships in your life do you struggle with the most?
2. Now ask yourself and honestly answer in your own heart these questions: How have I sinned against these people? Am I holding a grudge in my heart towards any of them? What are some long-term consequences from my attitude toward them? What is at the heart of my problem with them? What do they reveal about my character?



# Lesson 4

## Noah & His Sons: Drunkenness and Substance Abuse

### A. Introduction

Should a Christian abstain from all alcoholic beverages?

Those who support moderate drinking will argue that since Jesus turned water into wine and drank wine himself that we have the liberty to do the same today (John 2; Luke 7:33-34).

Teetotalers have plenty of Scripture on their side: priests were prohibited from drinking wine while serving God (Leviticus 10:9); the Nazirite vow included abstinence (Numbers 6:3); Timothy would not even drink a little wine unless instructed to do so for medical reasons (1 Timothy 5:23); and the Bible repeatedly denounces and warns against strong drink and drunkenness (Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35; 31:4-5; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:20; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:7; 1 Peter 4:1-3).

Defenders of social drinking offer rebuttals to many of these arguments, but there are two considerations that are usually forgotten in the midst of debate:

First of all, there is the societal context of Jesus day. While we cannot prove that Jesus and his disciples never had any amount of intoxicating wine, the fermented wine of biblical times cannot be compared to distilled wines today. Fermentation is a natural process that cannot come close to what our modern distillation process produces. Not only that, they would typically cut their wine with water so that it would be virtually impossible to get drunk.

But secondly, and perhaps more importantly, there is the societal context of our day. Are we unaware of what alcohol has done? Numerous studies have found links between alcohol and problems such as juvenile delinquency, domestic abuse, divorce, job loss, financial crisis, and sexual dysfunction<sup>2</sup>. Alcohol is involved in almost half of all traffic fatalities<sup>3</sup>. And a recent study found that nearly a third of Americans experience alcohol problems in their lifetime<sup>4</sup>.

We know what alcohol can do. Most of us have seen it firsthand. We've seen the carnage left behind. Most of us know personally the helplessness and hopelessness of people who are prisoners to this drug. We've looked the monster in the face. We've seen his power to control and destroy those we love.

In this lesson we hope to encourage you to abstain from alcohol. We will not try to convince you that Jesus never drank fermented wine or that the Bible condemns all consumption of alcohol. What we will try to do is convince you that seeking alcohol in our day and in our cultural environment is potentially destructive, and therefore a selfish act that violates numerous biblical principles.

But we're not just going to think about the problem of alcohol. We also want to think about drugs and other unhealthy addictions we as Christians must battle in our lives.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.learn-about-alcoholism.com/alcoholism-and-divorce.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nih.gov/about/researchresultsforthepublic/AlcoholRelatedTrafficDeaths.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/02/AR2007070201237.html>

## B. Story

Read Genesis 9:18-29. Why did Noah lay naked? Which son saw his nakedness? How was the reaction of the other sons more respectful? What were the long-term consequences of this?

Thought Question: We are not told why Noah got drunk, however it can be helpful to humanize Noah and speculate just a little about possible causes (keeping in mind that this is speculation). What do you think are some possible reasons why Noah got drunk?

## C. Principles and Lessons

1. Lack of love.
  - a. 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. Why was Paul so concerned about the question of whether we eat meat or not? Do we not have the right to eat whatever we want? How would these principles apply to our discussion about moderate drinking of alcohol? What are some other “liberties” we have in Christ that we might give up for the sake of someone else’s conscience?
2. Gratification of the flesh.
  - a. Ephesians 5:18-19. How does Paul describe drunkenness? What does that mean?
  - b. 1 Corinthians 6:12-14. Paul is talking in this context about fornication, but he begins by throwing out an argument that they were apparently using. They argued that because of our liberty in Christ (“all things are lawful”) we have the right to indulge the natural desires we have. How does Paul argue against their reasoning? What does this have to say about drinking alcohol and other fleshly desires we might want to indulge?
3. Escapism.
  - a. Proverbs 23:35. What does the drunk man feel when he is struck? Why does he do when he wakes up? Why?
  - b. 1 Peter 5:8. Why are we to be sober?
4. Belonging in this world.
  - a. 1 Peter 4:3-4. What happens when we stop drinking with our friends? Why? How difficult is it to overcome this?

## D. Applications

1. If you drink alcohol presently, this first question is for you. Hopefully, you can see that we have not tried to prove that your behavior is a sin per se (unless, of course, you get drunk). We’ve tried to go below the surface level to the deeper issues. What we want you to do is take an honest evaluation of your life and ask yourself the question, “Why do I drink?” Only you can answer this. Talk with God about this in prayer.
2. For the rest of you who do not drink, we want you to think about your own spiritual life. Alcohol is not the only substance that we selfishly use gratify our flesh, to escape reality, and to belong in the world. Ask yourself this question, “What is my addiction?” Talk with God about this in prayer.

# Lesson 5

## Babel: Pride and Selfish Ambition

### A. Introduction

I was walking my son, Joshua, home last week from school. He talked to me all the way home (which is unusual for him). Josh is in sixth grade this year and has joined the middle school band, and that's what he wanted to talk about all the way home.

His excitement about band is understandable. It was something that was very important to me growing up, and he knows that. Children are usually drawn to the things that are important to their parents (and particularly their fathers). It is not surprising that Joshua has chosen to play the trombone (the instrument I played in school).

Josh is a lot like his father, too, in that he is not gifted athletically. When he scored a goal in soccer it was a big deal in the Maxson household. He knows I love him and that I don't think less of him because he is not a star athlete, but it is an innate desire in every son to want to make his father proud. Music gives him that opportunity.

Like so many of the desires we are studying in this class, what stands behind sinful pride and selfish ambition is something that is not evil in itself. There is nothing inherently wrong with a son wanting to please his father, nor is there anything wrong with a father rejoicing in his son. Those are good and positive feelings that are almost hardwired into us by the One who designed us.

But like other built in desires, there is both a legitimate and an illegitimate expression. The purpose of this lesson is to see how and why this desire becomes sinful and then what we can do to overcome it.

### B. Story

Read Genesis 11:1-4.

- How many languages were there in the world according to verse one? (How do you explain Genesis 10:5, 20, 31?)
- What were the two stated objectives of this project according to verse four? Was it wrong for them to do that? (see Genesis 9:1)

Read Genesis 11:5-9.

- What does Moses say the LORD did in verse five and how was he mocking their project?
- Why do you think God has a problem with them being one people with one language? Isn't that what God wants for us? To be one people? (see Ephesians 2:14-17) Why is God dividing them?

Read Genesis 12:1-3.

- Compare the statement of the builders of Babel in Genesis 11:4, "let us make a name for ourselves," to the statement God makes to Abram in Genesis 12:2, "I will... make your name great." What is similar in those two statements? What is different?

### C. Principles and Lessons

1. God's purpose in creation.
  - a. Isaiah 43:6-7. God promised to make Abraham's name great (Genesis 12:2). Why did he do that? What was the purpose of creating this nation?
  - b. Ephesians 1:3-5. Paul says that God had a purpose for us before creation. What was that? Who should be praised for this?
2. Our response to God's purpose for us.
  - a. Ephesians 2:8-10. We are created for what purpose?
  - b. Matthew 5:14-16. How do we cause people to glorify God?
  - c. 1 Peter 4:9-11. According to Peter, how do we fulfill this primary purpose in life – to glorify God?

### D. Applications

1. Work and career.
  - a. Colossians 3:22-26. Is the Christian to work hard at his job? What is the motive for the child of God? What should it not be according to this passage?
  - b. Titus 2:9-10. What does this passage say our motive ought to be?
2. Material possessions.
  - a. Deuteronomy 8:17-18. What did Moses warn the people as they entered the Promised Land?
  - b. Daniel 4:28-32. Why was Nebuchadnezzar punished?
3. Physical appearance.
  - a. 1 Peter 3:1-4. What moderates the saint's attitude toward his physical appearance? With whose glory are they primarily concerned (see 1 Peter 2:12)?
4. Parenting.
  - a. 1 Samuel 1:21-28. Why did Hannah give her son to the LORD?
  - b. Ephesians 6:4. What is the purpose of our parenting to be?
5. Spiritual life.
  - a. Matthew 6:1-4, 5-6, 16-18. What should motivate us to give to the needy, to pray, and to fast?
  - b. John 12:42-43. Why did some who believed in Jesus not confess it?
6. Evangelism.
  - a. Philippians 1:15-18. What is the wrong reason Paul identifies here for preaching the gospel?
  - b. Romans 15:8-13. What did Paul see as a primary purpose in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles?
7. Your personal Babel.
  - a. Which of these areas listed above do you struggle with the most? Is there another category we have missed that presents a problem for you?
  - b. What are some things you can do to overcome pride and selfish ambition in your life?

### A. Introduction

Like many of the lessons in this series this is a big subject. There are a lot of different categories of lies and lying we can talk about:

- Tall tales. This is when we stretch the truth either to make ourselves look good or to make the story we are telling sound more interesting. These are easy to detect in little children (“I stacked those blocks 200 feet high!”) As adults we’re more adept at telling more believable stories, but the motive is the same (see Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1-11).
- Lying to avoid punishment. The child lies about eating a cookie when he was told he couldn’t have dessert. The adolescent lies when she says she didn’t know her curfew was at 10:00. The employee tells his boss that he finished the job he was supposed to do when it is still incomplete (see Cain, Genesis 4:9).
- Flattery. This is when we tell someone something we think they want to hear. We tell our wives we think they look good in that dress that we really don’t like at all or we tell our mother-in-law that we enjoyed a particular dish she fixed for us that we really hate (see immoral woman, Proverbs 5:3; 6:24; 7:15).
- Slander. This is when we tell a lie about someone to make them look bad or to get them into trouble. It is done out of malice, revenge, and, more often than not, envy (see the trial of Jesus, Mark 14:56).
- Business lies. The ancients would use dishonest weights to make more money off of the products they were selling (Proverbs 20:10, 23; Hosea 12:7; Amos 8:5). Salesmen still do this today, either telling blatant lies about their products or failing to tell the whole truth to give their customers a false sense of security.
- Hypocrisy. This is where we pretend to be something we are not. This is a special temptation for those who are religious (see the Pharisees, Matthew 23:1-36).
- False teaching. This is where a teacher of God’s word deliberately misrepresents what the Bible says or twists the scriptures. This is usually done for money or to attract a following (numerous examples: the serpent, Genesis 3:4; false prophets in the Old Testament, Jeremiah 5:30-31; false teachers in the New Testament, Matthew 7:15-20; Romans 16:16-18; 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-15; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter 2).

Though certainly not an exhaustive list, this gives at least an idea of just how far reaching this sin is and how many different ways we are tempted to do this. And, as you could see in those categories above, lying is not always done with malice. Sometimes we feel justified in our lying, maybe to the point that we feel it is noble and virtuous. Not only that, not all deceptions feel like lying. That is, you don’t have to make a deliberate false statement to deceive. Lying can simply involve stretching the truth or not revealing all the truth about something (and thus giving a false impression).

But at the foundation of all of these different forms of deception is selfishness. The reason we deceive is because we want to benefit ourselves.

### B. Story

Read Genesis 12:10-13. Abram asked Sarai to say that she was his sister. Was this not true? (see Genesis 20:12) How would this be considered a lie? What motivated Abram to deceive? How might he have justified this in his mind?

Read Genesis 12:14-16. Did Abram's deception seem to work?

Read Genesis 12:17-20. Why do you think God afflicted Pharaoh and his house with plagues? Had Pharaoh done anything wrong? Does this not seem unfair? (Remember what God had promised Abram, Genesis 12:1-3, and think about what the consequences would have been if Pharaoh had taken Sarai as his wife based on this false information.) How does Abram's deception reveal a lack of faith in him? What had God promised him?

### C. Principles and Lessons

1. The character of God.
  - a. Numbers 23:19; Hebrews 6:8; Titus 1:2. How truthful is God?
  - b. John 14:6. What did Jesus say about his relationship with truth?
2. Lying and the Devil.
  - a. John 8:44; Revelation 12:9; 20:10. What do these verses show us about the character of Satan?
  - b. Genesis 3:4; 2 Corinthians 11:3. Why did Eve sin? How did Satan convince her that eating the forbidden fruit was acceptable?
  - c. Acts 5:3-4. Who had filled the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira? How is Satan the "father of lies" (John 8:44)? How does he tempt us to tell lies?
3. Truth and the Christian.
  - a. Matthew 5:37. What does Jesus mean when he says to let your "Yes" be "Yes"?
  - b. Ephesians 4:15. What are we to speak? What is this? How is this to be spoken?
  - c. Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9-10. What are we to speak to our neighbor? Why? (List the reason in each passage.)

### D. Applications

1. Lying and children. Lying is something children learn to do very early on. While it may appear to be cute in a toddler it is not cute at all when we see it in adolescents. The battle for our child's character must begin early. How do we encourage our children to learn to be truthful?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
2. Of course, we can't encourage others to be truthful if we do not tell the truth ourselves. If we are in the habit of telling lies, even what we would consider harmless lies, how do we break that habit?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.

# Lesson 7

## Abram & Lot: Covetousness and Materialism

### A. Introduction

In 2 Peter 2:7-8, the Divine record describes Lot as a “righteous” man, not once, not twice, but three times! That’s **three** times!

This is the same man who moved his family to the wicked city of Sodom (Genesis 13:12-13). This is the same man who offered his two virgin daughters to that perverted mob to protect the angel messengers (Genesis 19:8). This is the same man who hesitated when told to leave Sodom, having to be practically drug out of there by hand (Genesis 19:16). This is the same man who allowed his daughters to get drunk with wine, and who, in that drunken state, lay with both daughters on consecutive nights and thus had children through them (Genesis 19:34-38).

And this is a “righteous” man? Really?

The story of Lot is a cautionary tale. It is the sad story of how a tent dwelling sojourner became consumed by materialism; how a “righteous” man became a part of the world around him. It is the story of a man who not only lost his wife and kids, but left a horrible legacy that caused God’s people trouble for many years (the Ammonites and the Moabites).

Lot’s life should serve as a warning to us all. The most dangerous problems facing 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians in America are all illustrated in this man. The tension between living in the world and living as a stranger and pilgrim can be clearly seen in the decisions Lot made. He wanted the best of both worlds, but learned the hard way that you can’t have both.

In this lesson, we’ll examine yet another dangerous expression of selfishness, and that is **covetousness** and **materialism**. We’ll consider the materialistic decisions Lot made (and the covetous attitude that motivated those decisions) and use his example as a mirror through which we can hopefully see ourselves more clearly.

### B. Story

Read Genesis 12:4. What do we learn about Lot from this verse? Did Abraham know where he was going (Hebrews 11:8)? What about Lot? Are there any conclusions we can make about Lot’s faith?

Read Genesis 12:5-6. What do we learn about Lot here? Why was Abram prospering (see Genesis 12:3)? Can we make similar judgments about the source of Lot’s prosperity?

Read Genesis 13:7-13. Why was there conflict? Contrast the decisions of Abram and Lot.

Read Genesis 13:12. Where exactly does it say Lot is living? Is Lot living “in” Sodom at this point? In what kind of home is Lot living?

Read Genesis 13:14-18. What promise does God make to Abram? What is Abram’s response (verse 18)?

Read Genesis 14:8-16. What happens to Lot and all his “possessions”? Where is Lot living when this happens (verse 12)? Who rescues Lot? Does this seem ironic?

Read Genesis 19:1. At the end of chapter 18 we learn that God is going to destroy Sodom because there are not even ten righteous people in the whole city! God sends angels to warn Lot. Where do they find him? What is the significance of being there? (See Ruth 4:1-2; Proverbs 31:23; Zechariah 8:16; also look at Genesis 19:9)

Read Genesis 19:14. Who does this verse tell us about the changes in Lot's heart? Was this "righteous" man making wise choices concerning his daughters?

### **C. Principles and Lessons**

1. Selfishness in decision-making.
  - a. Genesis 13:11. Who was Lot thinking about when he made his decision?
  - b. Genesis 13:8. Who was Abram thinking about when he made his decision?
  - c. Luke 9:23-25. Our theme for the year is based on this passage. How do this passage serve as a commentary on the choices (and the outcomes of those choices) of these two men?
2. The slow, gradual pull of the world.
  - a. Hebrews 11:13-16. What kind of mentality is described here? Do you think Lot ever had this mentality? What changed? What are some justifications that a "righteous" man would make in moving his family into a wicked environment? If we were to listen in to Lot and his wife as they discussed each gradual move toward Sodom, what might it have sounded like?

### **D. Applications**

1. Career choices. List some critical factors when choosing a job or a career path.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
2. Choosing where to live. What are some considerations when choosing where to live?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
3. Decisions concerning wealth. Abraham proves that you can have wealth and still maintain a pilgrim mentality. What are some practical things you can do to keep that spirit alive and not become like Lot?



# Lesson 8

## Jacob & Esau: Covetousness and Theft

### A. Introduction

The Hebrew writer memorializes Jacob's faith when he writes these words about the end of his life, "By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff" (Hebrews 11:21).

When you consider Jacob's life, it seems remarkable that he should make it onto such an esteemed list of heroes. He doesn't quite seem to belong the other great men and women of faith in Hebrews 11.

His name, "Jacob", can mean either "he takes by the heel" or it can mean "he cheats." That pretty much sums up his life. He was always grasping (from birth even, Genesis 25:26) for what others had, and most often his ambition led him to use deceit and craftiness to get what he wanted.

Yet, he is memorialized as a hero of faith, which says something about the opportunity we have for redemption. For Jacob, his faith didn't really shine until he was old and ready to die. But he is not the only thief who found redemption at the end of his life (see Luke 23:39-43).

If you are guilty of stealing, this lesson should give you hope. God wants to be merciful toward you and forgive you. God is not only willing to wipe away the guilt of your past sins, he wants to share with you his nature, to give you a new heart that will no longer steal, but to give instead.

In this lesson we'll look at some of the ways Jacob stole in his life and how he finally came to himself and found the source of true wealth. We'll look at what an important passage in the New Testament (Ephesians 4) says about stealing and the new nature we have been given. Then we'll consider some specific ways that this new nature will help us to no longer steal.

### B. Story

Read Genesis 25:29-34. Would you call what Jacob did here stealing? Why or why not? Did he do anything wrong? Esau later accused him of "cheating" him twice (Genesis 27:36), referring specifically to this incident here where Jacob takes his birthright. Is that accurate? Did he cheat him?

Read Genesis 27:1-46. This would seem to be a much more obvious form of stealing than the first passage. What were the consequences of Jacob's selfish actions? Was it necessary for Jacob to deceive and steal the blessing from Esau? (see Genesis 25:33)

Read Genesis 32:22-32. Up to this point, how has Jacob taken care of himself and his family? Has he been typically honest with others or has he been a lying and conniving thief? What does that say about his faith? What does the name "Jacob" mean? Why did God change his name to "Israel"? In what ways does this physical struggle with God in this wrestling match represent Jacob's character up to this point in his life?

### C. Principles and Lessons

1. The character of the world: Ephesians 4:17-19
  - a. What knowledge have the Gentiles willfully rejected? (v. 18; see also Romans 1:18-20)
  - b. What was the result of rejecting this knowledge? (v. 19; see also Romans 1:21-32)

2. The character of God: Ephesians 4:20-24
  - a. Where is the truth? (v. 21)
  - b. What is the template for the “new self” or the “new man”? (v. 24)
3. The character of the child of God: Ephesians 4:28.
  - a. What is the thief to no longer do?
  - b. What is he to do instead?
  - c. Why is he to do this?

#### **D. Applications**

1. Material theft.
  - a. Stealing from businesses and/or individuals (Ephesians 4:28). What are some examples of taking things that don't belong to us?
  - b. Stealing from employers (Titus 2:9-10). What are some different ways we steal on the job?
  - c. Stealing from employees (Colossians 4:1; James 5:4). What are some ways employers steal from employees?
  - d. Stealing from the government (Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:7). What are some ways some evade (illegally) taxes?
  - e. What are some other ways we take away money or property that doesn't belong to us?
2. Non-material theft
  - a. Stealing reputations (Proverbs 16:28; James 4:11-12). How do we steal the reputations of others?
  - b. Stealing purity (1 Thessalonians 4:6). How do we steal purity?
  - c. Are there other examples of non-material theft you can think of?

# Lesson 9

## Rachel & Leah / Joseph's brothers: Pride and Envy

### A. Introduction

Two sisters sharing one husband. What else needs to be said? It doesn't take a marriage expert to see that would not work.

Compound this with the fact that Jacob really didn't want Leah (the older sister) to begin with, AND the fact that Leah had children left and right while Rachel (the younger sister) remained childless for several years, AND the fact that one sister, Rachel (the younger), was naturally more beautiful than the other sister, Leah (the older), and it becomes really difficult for us to judge Rachel or Leah too harshly for their actions. (Though our opinion of Jacob is getting worse and worse with each lesson.)

Jacob apparently didn't learn any lessons from his volatile marriage and ended up playing favorites with his children as well. Yet another disaster. The behavior of the older brothers toward Joseph was inexcusable (you can't just sell your brother as a slave, no matter what he has done), and yet it is understandable. Parents need to understand how difficult they make life for their children through preferential treatment (and we ALL do this from time to time). We sin against our children by showing favoritism and they take it out on each other.

But this lesson is not about the evils of polygamy or favoritism. It is about envy and the selfish pride that fuels it. While we need to do everything we can in our families and in our churches and at our jobs to be impartial and fair with everyone, inequities are going to be a part of our lives. It is simply inevitable. There will always be some richer than others, some smarter than others, some prettier than others, and some more talented than others. We need to learn how to deal with these inequities.

Yet envy can survive even in an environment where everything is virtually equal. In fact, greater equality can sometimes lead to greater envy. Think about it, we don't tend to envy someone who is many times wealthier than us (like Bill Gates). We may be jealous of those who are a whole lot richer or smarter or more talented than we are. But we feel most threatened by those who are a *little* richer or those we perceive to be a *little* smarter or a *little* more talented than us. We may covet what the super rich has or what super talented can do or how good the super attractive people look. But the deadly green eyed monster is usually only aroused by those we consider our equals.

Why is that? What is the nature of envy? What is the relationship between envy and pride? How do we feed this sinful attitude? And, more importantly, how can we starve it out?

### B. Story

Jealous Sisters. Read Genesis 29:21-30. Why is this just wrong?

Read Genesis 29:31-35. What do the names of these sons say about Leah's heart?

Read Genesis 30:1-8. How does Rachel look at having children?

Read Genesis 30:14-18. What do you think about this?

Read Genesis 30:19-24. How do these two sisters see themselves? What is their sense of self-worth wrapped up in?

Jealous Brothers. Read Genesis 37:1-4. What had provoked these brothers to envy?

Read Genesis 37:5-11. What did the brothers think about this dream? Was the fulfillment of this dream a good thing or a bad thing for the brothers?

Read Genesis 37:18-24. What was their original plot?

Read Genesis 37:25-28. For how much did they sell their brother?

**C. Principles and Lessons**

1. Wisdom from above.
  - a. James 3:13-16. What is the fruit of earthly wisdom?
  - b. James 3:17-18. What is the wisdom from above?
2. A jealous husband.
  - a. James 4:1-3. What causes conflicts in our relationships? (These are probably church relationships under consideration here.)
  - b. James 4:4-5. What does he call us when we are acting like this? Why? Why does he call God a jealous husband? How has our behavior provoked God to jealousy? Isn't jealousy a bad thing? Is it even appropriate for a husband to be jealous for his wife? What is James saying?
  - c. James 4:6-10. To whom does God give more grace? When will God draw near to us? When will God exalt us? How does 4:10 contrast with 4:1-3?

**D. Applications**

1. Problem areas.
  - a. Relationships. All the stories in our lesson illustrated envy in relationships. Relationships are powerful. They bring out the best and the worst in us. What are some different relationships which provoke us to envy?
  - b. Children. This is still a relationship and yet it is such a problem we needed to give more attention to it. What is it about our children that bring out the green eyed monster in us? Why does it bother us so much when we see other people's children outperforming our own?
  - c. Possessions. Why do we envy what a family member has or what someone at church has more than what Bill Gates has?
  - d. Position. Same as the previous question, why do we not envy the CEO of our company? Why do we feel more bitterness toward the guy in the cubicle next to us who may be on the same pay scale we are on?
2. Overcoming envy.
  - a. 1 Peter 3:3-4. Physical appearance can produce strong feelings of envy. How can we use this passage to help us to overcome this feeling? How would this principle help us overcome envy in other areas as well?
  - b. 1 Peter 4:9-11. Talents and gifts can produce envy. How could the perspective of this passage eliminate all feelings of envy?

# Lesson 10

## Noah & the Ark: Selflessness & Submission to Authority

### A. Introduction

What does it mean to submit?

The story is told about a farmer who gave his son plans for a farm. A house, a barn, a fence, and a well were included in these plans. Where all these things were to go on the property was clearly marked in the plans.

The son took those plans and put the house, fence, and barn right where his father asked him, but when he looked at the location of the well, it seemed to be too far from the house, so he dug the well right next to the house.

The question is when did the son submit to his father?

The answer is, NEVER! When he put the house, the barn, and the fence where his father asked he was not submitting to his father's will, he simply agreed with what him in those cases.

Are we submitting to God or do we just happen to agree with him sometimes? Have we submitted to God's design for worship, organization, and work in the church or does God's way just happen to suit our preferences?

Have we submitted to God's will concerning patience and forbearance? Turning the other cheek? Meekness? Forgiveness? Do we follow God only when he agrees with what we want to do anyway? Do we obey only when it is convenient?

The bottom line is this: What do we do when God's instructions just don't make sense?

Noah demonstrated true selflessness and submission. He built something that didn't make sense. In this lesson we'll examine Noah's example, look at how submission is the foundation of our relationship with God (from Deuteronomy), and then consider some practical applications for us as parents in raising submissive children, as well as some personal applications we should make as individuals.

### B. Story

Read Genesis 6:1-8. Why did God destroy the earth? Why was Noah spared?

Read Genesis 6:9-22. What was Noah told to make? Out of what wood? What were the dimensions to be? How many decks were there to be? How many doors? What was to be brought into the ark? How many of these commandments did Noah keep?

Read Hebrews 11:7. What motivated Noah to build the ark? Did Noah do what God commanded because it made sense to him? Explain your answer.

### C. Principles and Lessons

1. God loves us and is on our side: Deuteronomy 10:12-22.
  - a. What does the LORD want from (v 12)? What is the purpose of his commandments (v 13)?
  - b. Who did he set his heart on and why is that so surprising (v 14-15)?

- c. Is God for or against Israel and how do they know (v 16-22)? What has God done for us today?
- 2. God has rules and requirements: Deuteronomy 11:1-12.
  - a. What should be their response to God's love for them (v 1)?
  - b. Does God expect obedience? How do we know (v 2-7)?
- 3. God explains to us in clear language what the consequences for disobedience are: Deuteronomy 11:13-25.
  - a. What are the blessings God promised for obedience (v 13-15)?
  - b. What are the curses promised for disobedience (v 16-17)?
  - c. Why did God spell out these consequences (v 18-25)?
- 4. God gives us the freedom to choose to respect or reject his authority: Deuteronomy 11:26-32.
  - a. What did they have the power and the ability to do (v 26-28)?

#### **D. Applications**

- 1. Teaching submission to children: Deuteronomy 5:16; Ephesians 6:1-4.
  - a. What are we to do for our father and mother? How does that principle relate to this idea of submission to authority? Some suggest that this commandment was strategically placed in the middle of the 10 commandments. What is the relationship between this commandment and the first four? What about its relationship with the last five?
  - b. How can we use God's example of parenting us (following the four principles above under *Principles and Lessons*) in raising our children?
- 2. The church: 1 Corinthians 14:33-38.
  - a. In this context Paul is giving instructions about those who would lead the public assembly (see v 26-32). What are women prohibited from doing in the assembly?
  - b. To many this makes no sense. Women are often better Bible students, more talented, and generally more spiritual than their male counterparts. What would Paul have to say to those who would make this argument? (v 36-37) How does this relate to our discussion about authority? Are there other areas where the church has been given specific instructions to follow?
- 3. Our personal lives: Colossians 3:17.
  - a. What does it mean to do all things in the name of the Lord? How does that relate to what he has just talked about? (v 12-14, 15-16) Do some of those commands make no sense? Which ones?
  - b. How does Colossians 3:17 relate to what Paul writes about after it? (3:18-4:1) Do some of those commands make no sense to us? Which ones?

# Lesson 11

## Abraham & Isaac: Selflessness and Sacrifice to God

### A. Introduction

“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” (Genesis 22:2)

God hated human sacrifice. The biblical historians present it as the ultimate expression of rebellion and apostasy. It is called an abominable act (2 Chronicles 28:3), and is given as the chief cause of captivity (2 Kings 17:17).

Why is God telling Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice?

It was a three day to the land of Moriah. That was plenty of time for Abraham to contemplate this question. “Why is God asking me to do this?”

Of course God stopped Abraham from doing this, but he let him go a long way toward sacrificing him at the same time. He walked for three days. He cut the wood. He lit the fire. He got a knife. He walked up the mountain. He answered his bewildered son’s question. He built the altar. He bound his son up. He laid him on the altar. He pulled out a knife. He took it in his hand...

It’s painful for us to relive all of that in our mind, even though we know how the story ends.

Nowhere in the book of Genesis will we find a story that illustrates selflessness more than this one right here. Nothing in this world is more important to us than our children. We would live and die for them. We would stand between them and someone coming at them with a knife. We would never raise the knife ourselves.

Yet that’s exactly what this great man of faith did. Abraham was completely selfless when he offered his son Isaac.

So why did God call on Abraham to do this? We’re going to look at that in this lesson as we think about sacrifice: God’s sacrifice for us and our sacrifice for him.

### B. Story

Genesis 22:1-8. What explanation is given for God’s actions (v 1)? How is Isaac described (v 2)? When did Abraham arise to go (v 3)? When did he get there (v 4)? What did he tell the young men that demonstrated faith (v 5)? What did Isaac ask? What did Abraham say?

Genesis 22:9-14. What did he do with his son (v 9)? What did he do with his hand (v 10)? What did the angel of the LORD say to him (v 12)? What did Abraham find caught in a thicket (v 13)? What did he call the name of that place (v 14)?

### C. Principles and Lessons

1. God’s sacrifice.

- a. God said to Abraham, “Take your son, your only son... and offer him” (Genesis 22:2). What did God offer for us? (John 3:16)

- b. After the angel of the LORD called Abraham to stop him from slaying his son as an offering, the angel told him, “for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me” (Genesis 22:12). Who did God not spare? (Romans 8:32)
- 2. Christ’s sacrifice.
  - a. Who carried the wood for the sacrifice? (Genesis 22:6) What did Jesus carry? (John 19:17)
  - b. The text says that Abraham bound his son (Genesis 22:9). Is there a contrast here with Christ? (Luke 9:21-22, 30-31, 51; 22:39-46; John 12:27-28)
  - c. When they arrived at the place Isaac asked where the lamb was, to which Abraham replied, “God will provide for himself the lamb” (Genesis 22:8). What did John the Baptist introduce Jesus as? (John 1:29)
- 3. Our sacrifice.
  - a. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. Who do we live for and why?
  - b. Philippians 2:17. What does Paul call his life here? In what way was this true in Paul’s life?
  - c. 1 Peter 2:5. What role do we play in God’s house? What do we offer to him?

#### **D. Applications**

- 1. Giving
  - a. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. Why did the Macedonians give so liberally (v 5)?
  - b. Philippians 4:18. What does Paul call the financial support they gave him?
  - c. Hebrews 13:16. What pleases God?
- 2. Separation from the world.
  - a. Hebrews 13:10-14. What altar do we have (v 10)? Where did Jesus go to be sacrificed (v 12)? Where are we to go (v 13)?
  - b. Hebrews 13:15-16. What is the conclusion in verse 15?
- 3. Love
  - a. Romans 12:1-2. What are we to offer our bodies as? Who gave life to our “mortal bodies” (Romans 8:11)?
  - b. Romans 12:3-8. What are we to do with our “gifts” (v 6)?
  - c. Romans 12:9-21. What are some “gifts” or sacrifices to God we can make according to these verses?



# Lesson 12

## Joseph in Egypt (pt 1): Selflessness and Sexual Purity

### A. Introduction

It began as a friendship. They did everything together. Went to church together. Went together on hikes, vacations, and sporting events together. They never missed a birthday.

The two couples were inseparable. Jack and Jill. Ted and Sally. They had what seemed to be a lifelong friendship.

But Jack and Jill started having problems in their marriage. Jill would come over to talk with Ted and Sally about her frustrations with Jack. Jack was working long hours and was always grouchy when he came home. He had started to ignore her. Even when he was at home he wouldn't pay much attention to her.

Jill and Ted worked in the same building and would often have lunch together to talk about problems at home. Ted was trying to help Jill with her marriage. He would even come to Jack's defense, helping her understand the stress Jack was under at work.

But over time, the lunch dates became less and less about helping a troubled marriage. Jill and Ted started to have feelings for each other, feelings both knew were wrong. But Jill was vulnerable and Ted ignored the stop signs. They had crossed over boundaries and ended up having an affair together.

If you think this couldn't happen to you, think again. "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12) "Let not your heart turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths, for many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng." (Proverbs 7:25-26) This could happen to anyone.

We know what the problems are: children out of wedlock, fatherless children, teenage mothers, abortion, sexual diseases, workplace affairs, divorce, broken hearts, shattered lives...

What is at the root of all of this? It is selfishness. Like everything else in this study, sin always begins with selfish choices. We put our selfish desires ahead of others. We put what we feel we need ahead of God.

Joseph is an outstanding example of sexual purity. It would have been easy for him to allow his circumstances to justify sin, but he selflessly put his master and his God ahead of his own desires.

### B. Story

Read Genesis 39:1-6. Where was Joseph brought? How would this present temptation to him? How old was Joseph (37:2)? Why was Joseph successful? What does that say about him? What was Joseph responsible for? How would that present temptation to him? Was Joseph handsome?

Read Genesis 39:7-10. Why do you think Potiphar's wife might have been attracted to Joseph? Why did Joseph refuse to lie with her? How often did she come to Joseph? What was Joseph's response?

Read Genesis 39:11-18. What is the problem in verse 11? How did Joseph respond when she grabbed his garment? Why do you think she lied about Joseph?

Read Genesis 39:19-23. How was Joseph's selfless decision rewarded? How is the end of this chapter similar to the beginning of the chapter?

### **C. Principles and Lessons**

1. The goal of purity: 1 Thessalonians 3:11-4:2
  - a. What is the ultimate goal (3:12)? How does this shape our decisions regarding purity?
  - b. Who should we try to please (4:1)?
2. The standard of purity: 1 Thessalonians 4:2-8
  - a. Who sets the standard of purity (4:2, 8)? How does that contrast with our former life (4:5)?
  - b. What is God's will concerning purity (4:3, 4, 6)? (there are three phrases that begin with "that")

### **D. Applications**

1. Boundaries for the eyes.
  - a. Proverbs 7:10. Why do prostitutes dress as they do?
  - b. Proverbs 7:14. Where was this woman earlier that day? How was she dressed there?
2. Boundaries for the flesh.
  - a. Proverbs 7:11-12. Is this saying it is wrong for a woman to leave her home?
  - b. Proverbs 7:13. What is the problem with kissing, hugging, and other physical contact?
3. Boundaries for the heart.
  - a. Proverbs 7:15. What is she doing to this young man? Is it only immoral women who use this tactic? Are there innocent ways we do this?
  - b. Proverbs 7:22. Which is a more powerful weapon for the immoral woman: the way she dresses or the way she speaks? Why do you think?

# Lesson 13

## Joseph in Egypt (pt 2): Selflessness and Forgiveness

### A. Introduction

He is hurt when his best friend takes his position at work, but then he discovers that his friend has been scheming to get that position for months.

She is wounded because he forgot their anniversary, but then she finds out that he forgot because he was with another woman.

When it comes to forgiveness there are four factors that determine the relative difficulty:

1. Intensity. How much are we inconvenienced by the action? If this is going to cause us only minor adjustments to our life, then forgiveness comes much more freely. The weight of forgiveness becomes proportionately heavier the greater the negative consequences to our lives are.
2. Identity. How close is the person to us who caused the pain? The closer the person is to us, the deeper the scar will be. We can quickly forgive strangers. It is our friends that we have a difficult time forgiving. It's more personal.
3. Intent. Was this an accident or was it planned and deliberate? Can we blame neglect or personal weakness on the part of our neighbor who has injured us or did he or she do this with conscious premeditation? The more we can justify our neighbor's hurtful actions the easier it is to forgive them. The more evidence we can find for their actions being intentional the harder it is to forgive.
4. Incidence. How often has the hurtful behavior occurred? The more often the negative action is repeated the harder it is to forgive. This is why Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" (Matthew 18:21)

Now think about these factors in Joseph's life:

1. Intensity. Joseph is forced to leave his home and his family to live as a slave in a foreign land.
2. Identity. He is sold by his own brothers.
3. Intent. The brothers schemed and plotted this action. Joseph even tried to dissuade them from what they were doing while he was in the pit (Genesis 42:21).
4. Incidence. We do not know how often they attacked Joseph, but it would not be surprising to find that they had unjustly criticized or punished him in some way before this. We do know that this was not the last time Joseph endured cruel injustice. He was later thrown in jail for a crime he didn't commit (Genesis 39).

Now look back at those same categories and think about the profound depths of the grace of God and what we have in Jesus' sacrifice for us (and read Romans 5:6-8). Joseph is a type of Christ. His example should provoke us and motivate us to greater selflessness in forgiving those who have sinned against us.

In this lesson we'll explore the subject of forgiveness and see how it is the greatest expression of selflessness. We'll look at the example of Joseph and Christ and what that means to us in our lives in a practical way.

### B. Story

Genesis 37. We've already covered this story in lesson #9 so we won't ask questions here, but if you need to refresh your memory of how Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers you might want to read this again.

Genesis 45:1-15. How did the brothers react when Joseph revealed himself to them? What did he ask of them (v 4)? What did he tell them not to do and why (v 5)? What was the purpose of all of this (v 7)? What did Joseph promise to them (v 11)? What surprising thing does Joseph do for them (v 15)?

Genesis 50:15-21. What were the brothers worried about (v 15)? What did the brothers do before Joseph (v 18)? What question did Joseph ask (v 19)? How did the evil purposes of the brothers cross paths with the good purposes of God (v 20)? What did Joseph promise once again (v 21)?

### C. Principles and Lessons

1. Forgiveness is necessary only when one suffers injustice.
  - a. Joseph: Genesis 40:15. What did Joseph clearly recognize about his situation in Egypt first as a slave and then as a prisoner?
  - b. Christ: 1 Peter 1:19; 2:21-23; 3:18. Was Jesus' suffering on the cross deserved?
  - c. Us: 1 Peter 2:19-20. What kind of suffering is "a gracious thing in the sight of God"?
2. Forgiveness demands that we bear the burden of someone else's sin.
  - a. Joseph: Genesis 45:10-11. Did the brothers of Joseph pay for what they did? In this story, who helped whom?
  - b. Christ: 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18. What did Jesus bear for us and why did he bear it?
  - c. Us:
    - i. 1 Peter 2:18. Who gets the better end of the deal in the unjust master/obedient slave relationship?
    - ii. 1 Peter 3:1-2. Who gets the better end in the unbelieving husband/submissive wife relationship?
3. The security of God's love loosens the chains of selfishness and fear giving us the freedom to forgive.
  - a. Joseph:
    - i. Genesis 39:2, 3, 5, 21, 23. Why did Joseph prosper in Egypt?
    - ii. Genesis 41:51-52. Did Joseph understand the reason why he prospered?
  - b. Christ: 1 Peter 2:23. To whom did Jesus commit his soul while on the cross? (See also Luke 23:46)
  - c. Us:
    - i. 1 Peter 4:14. Who rests upon us when we suffer injustice in a Christ-like way? (See also Acts 7:59-60)
    - ii. 1 Peter 4:19. To whom are we to entrust our souls while suffering? (See also Psalm 37:5-7; 2 Timothy 1:12)
4. Forgiveness involves sacrifice of self to save another.
  - a. Joseph: Genesis 45:5, 7, 8, 9; 50:19, 20. What was the Divine purpose of Joseph's suffering?
  - b. Christ: 1 Peter 2:24, 25; 3:18. What was the Divine purpose of Christ's suffering?
  - c. Us: 1 Peter 2:12; 3:1-2. What is the Divine purpose of our suffering?

### D. Applications

1. Receiving the sinner.
  - a. Philemon 10-14. What is Paul pleading with Philemon to do? Is Paul using his apostolic authority to compel Philemon to do this or is this a brotherly appeal? Why do you think he did it this way?

- b. Romans 15:7. What are we to do for each other? Why?
- 2. Restoring the relationship.
  - a. Philemon 15-17. How does Paul want Philemon to receive him back?
  - b. Matthew 18:35. What does it mean to forgive someone from the heart? How do we not forgive from the heart? Is there another pseudo kind of forgiveness that we pass off as the real thing? What does that kind of forgiveness look like? How does it behave differently than real forgiveness? Why do we often fail to forgive from the heart?
- 3. Releasing the debt.
  - a. Philemon 18-19. What do you think Onesimus might have owed his master? What does Paul encourage Philemon to do with that debt? Why?
  - b. Luke 15:30. What was the foundation of the older brother's argument against his younger brother? Does that make sense (if thinking with worldly wisdom)? What has the older brother forgotten? (Luke 15:29, 31)
- 4. Remembering nothing.
  - a. Philemon 21. What do you think Paul is asking Philemon to do here? Once you've thought about what that might be, consider what will be necessary (at the heart level) to make that possible.
  - b. 1 Corinthians 13:5. What are we to not keep a record of? Why?