

Life: Overcome betrayal

October 2, 2014

• *The Bible Studies for Life* lesson for Oct. 19 focuses on Genesis 37:19-27, 39:1-2.

Introduction

One of the first great spiritual truths believers learn is our great Creator, Provider and Redeemer is busy and active in our world. In John 5:17, Jesus said, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”

This truth cannot be verified by the naked eye, but Joseph, a man of faith, was confident in his Lord’s attending presence. The gospel builds on this truth by saying in Romans 5:8: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

From a non-spiritual point of view, this text speaks of the bewildering death of Christ, but to Jesus’ followers it says God took the initiative for positive action in believers’ lives when they were unaware God even cared about them. This week’s lesson builds on these truths with an even greater one: God is at work, even when it’s not obvious—the epic understatement of the ages.

Joseph confidently and boldly served his Lord despite enduring betrayal, injustice, imprisonment and a host of personal indignities. Through it all, Joseph remained faithful in his walk with God. “Overcoming betrayal” aptly describes Joseph’s life.

Joseph successfully overcame betrayal because his greatest characteristic was unwavering loyalty to God. Joseph handled betrayal with stellar distinction because he was committed to living every day under the

leadership and wisdom of his Lord.

Hatred and jealousy can cause others to betray us (Genesis 37:19-24)

The introduction to this lesson's story comes in verse 18, where it states the brothers saw Joseph approaching and decided to kill him. Reuben, the eldest brother, thwarted their murderous objective, but the "better" alternative would spell years of suffering, indignity and anguish for Joseph.

Joseph's errand, described in verse 14, was to discover the location and needs of his brothers. In other families, such a task would have been interpreted as spying by brothers who were rebellious toward their father. Here, however, Joseph, an obedient son with no malice toward his brothers, traveled openly and his approach was observed. His resentful brothers, who hated him because he was their father's favorite, seized the opportunity his open approach afforded them.

The brothers initially conspired to murder their brother, though their grievance concerning favoritism was actually with their father. Being dissuaded by Reuben, they reacted impulsively when another opportunity presented itself. Human trafficking was rampant in ancient Palestine.

The Philistines regularly raided the hill country for food, loot and people to sell in the slave markets. It is quite a shock, however, to see men from the formative family of faith turning on their younger brother and selling him to foreigners and a fate for which they had no concern.

Reuben's effort to save Joseph was lackluster. His responsibility as the eldest son was to lead his brothers and look after the welfare of each one. In such a volatile situation, he should have stayed with his brothers until Joseph's situation safely was resolved.

Nevertheless, Reuben was strangely absent between verses 22 and 29. He

could influence his brothers, yet his absence spelled disaster for Joseph. This story demonstrates the dire importance of following through on leadership wisdom.

God is at work on our behalf even when others abandon us (Genesis 37:25-27)

Judah states his questionable wisdom in verses 26-27. The boy's life will be spared and so his blood will not be on their hands. The selling of a life into slavery hardly is a merciful replacement for murder. By now, the brothers wanted to be rid of Joseph. Their move to avoid spiritual wrong-doing is not remarkable.

Jesus taught in Matthew 5:21-26 the sixth commandment is not satisfied by merely avoiding the shedding of blood. The commandment teaches every human life has such great value even the least word of derision violates the command. For many, religious practice is about narrowly defining requirements and exercising tactics that work around religious expectations.

Joseph's brothers found a convenient religious workaround when the Ishmaelite caravan approached. They were saved from the guilt their previous plan would have brought upon them, but they sought no salvation for Joseph, their brother.

Nevertheless, God provided salvation for Joseph. His sale into slavery became Joseph's salvation. God got Joseph out of a deadly situation and would work through a string of events to bring prominence and reward to his faithful follower.

People betray; God doesn't (Genesis 39:1-2)

Joseph's story resumes in Genesis 39. Verse 1 states Joseph was purchased by Pharaoh's captain of the guard. Such a development was fortuitous

because it placed Joseph in proximity to the Pharaoh, though it would be some years before this point would be realized.

Verse 2, introduces the Lord into Joseph's story. The phrase, "the Lord," refers to God's covenant name, "Yahweh." Each use of God's covenant name is a reminder of two tremendous truths: God is present with his covenant people, and God's people have the right to address him directly regarding any concern.

The verse makes clear the Lord was "with" Joseph. This point is stated four times in Genesis 39, emphasizing God's careful attendance to Joseph's life despite the cruel swings in his circumstances.

The lesson cannot be missed: Those who live in covenant with God and entrust their lives to him will realize God's abiding presence, regardless what life deals them. God's presence is more than a mere substitute for what was robbed from Joseph's life. God is life itself!

No matter our situation, including betrayal, God never abandons his children. Deuteronomy 31:8 states: "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." Joseph's life not only illustrates this promise; it shows God always has faithfully attended to the lives of his people.