

Overcoming Hatred

*This lesson will help you
to rise above adverse
circumstances.*

Many years ago a popular comedy duo called The Smothers Brothers entertained audiences with zany stories and folk songs. The two brothers, Dick and Tom, created humorous routines that centered on their contrasting personalities. Dick presented himself as the intelligent, logical, and articulate straight man. Tom, the fall guy, often became confused and made dumb-sounding statements. Dick condescendingly pointed out his brother's foibles, adding to Tom's consternation and confusion. Tom became an open target for more ridicule. In frustration, Tom finally blurted out his signature line, "Mom always liked you best."

The accusation of favoritism was just a joke for the Smothers Brothers' routine. However in some families or in other relationships, favoritism is a cruel reality leading to rivalry, resentment, and even revenge.

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1. Give an illustration of favoritism that you have observed in each of the following situations.

Family

School

Work

Neighborhood

2. Imagine a scenario in which someone consistently overlooks you in favor of another person. Describe the thoughts and feelings you might experience.

As you think over past experiences, do you sense anger, resentment, or bitterness growing within you because of unfair treatment? Do you contemplate ways that you might get back at someone for what they have done to you? If so, note the experiences of Joseph in Genesis 37—50. Notice how he responded to the intense jealousy and revenge of his brothers. Through his belief in the eternal purposes of God, Joseph was able to rise above his retaliatory instincts and respond in a godly manner.

3. What statement did Joseph make in Genesis 50:20 that unlocks the perspective he had on his difficult circumstances?

Let's backtrack to learn about the life events that Joseph encountered.

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Fatherly Favoritism

4. Read Genesis 37:1–4. What did Joseph do that angered his brothers?

5. Why did Israel (Jacob) demonstrate a greater love for Joseph?

6. How did the brothers respond to the preferential treatment their father gave to Joseph? See Genesis 37:4.

If Tom Smothers's signature line was "Mom always liked you best," then Joseph's brothers' signature line could have been, "Dad always liked you best!" What prompted Jacob to show favoritism to Joseph over his brothers? Several reasons may have led to Jacob's preferential behavior.

7. What reason for Jacob's affection toward Joseph does verse 3 mention?

Rachel had been the favorite of Jacob's wives. For many years she remained childless while Jacob's other wives gave him several children. Finally Rachel gave birth to Joseph. This son had a special place in his father's heart.

8. How did Joseph's behavior contrast with his brothers' behavior? See Genesis 37:2. (An additional study of Genesis 34:1—35:1 will reveal the rough conduct of Joseph's brothers.)

9. How would a child's compliant behavior versus his siblings' defiant behavior encourage a parent's favoritism?

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10. Read 1 Chronicles 5:1 and 2. What occurrence involving the family birthright might have contributed to the appearance of favoritism? (See also Genesis 35:22.)

The giving of the birthright was the ancient custom of passing on the family name and title. The father typically gave the birthright to the eldest (firstborn) son. Joseph received the forfeited birthright because he was the firstborn of Rachel. This honor placed Joseph in the prominent position within the family. The multicolored coat that Joseph received from his father (Genesis 37:3) may have been a symbol of the influential position that Jacob envisioned Joseph assuming.

11. What contributing factor to the brothers' feelings of resentment toward Joseph do you find in Genesis 37:5–11?

Joseph's dream was not just the hopeful expression of youthful imagination. Have you ever heard a child responding to the question, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" The child may say, "I'm going to be an NBA basketball player," or, "I want to be president of the United States." In contrast to mere wishful thinking, Joseph's dream was an actual snapshot of the leadership role he would one day assume.

12. Joseph's sharing of his dream with his brothers served to aggravate an already sensitive relationship. How did the brothers react to Joseph's dream according to Genesis 37:8?

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Brotherly Hate

The favoritism of Jacob for Joseph created an intense reaction by his brothers. Their hatred for Joseph grew stronger; intense feelings of resentment pushed them to the point of seeking revenge. Hatred so dominated the brothers' lives that they entertained ideas of killing Joseph.

Has hatred ever consumed you? Consider the following facts about hatred and the effect that hatred can have in your life.

Hatred often begins because of observed inequity.

In Jacob's family, the bad report, the special coat, the father's affection expressed solely toward one son, and the news about the dream worked together to create a potentially flammable condition. Add to those factors the incendiary temperaments of the brothers, and a highly volatile situation existed.

Have you ever been on the negative side of favoritism? Inequities are everywhere—bullies rule on school buses, coaches overlook certain children in favor of others, people cut in line to gain advantage, employers give preferential treatment to attractive people, government officials rule according to financial kickbacks, and powerful contractors get the bids rather than the “small guys.”

13. What accounts of inequity could you add to the list?

14. Have you ever seen inequity trigger hatred? Describe the situation.

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Joseph's brothers chose to behave poorly when they felt the sting of inequity.

How will you choose to react when you are treated unfairly?

Hatred destroys communication.

What happened to the communication lines in Jacob's family? See Genesis 37:4, 8, and 31–35. Hatred negatively affects communication, causing people to speak harshly. They may use bad language or hurl insults. People at odds may refuse to talk to one another. They may lie, deceive, spread rumors, or gossip.

15. Describe a situation where hatred negatively affected the communication in one of the following settings: a home, a church, an office, or a community.

Do you believe that someone has wronged you?

Are the lines of communication between you and the offender broken?

Are you feeling bitterness and resentment toward the offender?

16. What principles of communication do you find in Leviticus 19:16–18 and Matthew 5:43 and 44?

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17. What steps do you need to take to restore communication with the person with whom you are at odds?

Hatred left unattended will only increase.

Genesis 37:8 describes the brothers' increasingly negative attitude toward Joseph: "And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words." When someone has it in for you, often your relationship with that person deteriorates. Only by deliberate action can you and the other person restore the relationship.

18. What current news stories provide illustrations of the escalation of hatred?

19. If you were a mediator between two hostile colleagues at work, what steps could you take to lower the tension?

Hatred grows in the fertile soil of envy.

Read Genesis 37:11. Why is envy often a factor in hatred? Sometimes people experience difficulty in rejoicing over other people's good fortune. Sibling rivalry is alive and well in many families.

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20. How does envy foster hatred?

21. What other accounts of envy fostering hatred do you find in Genesis 4:1–8 and 1 Kings 21:1–16?

22. What illustrations of hatred caused by envy have you observed?

Hatred launches plots for revenge.

23. What plot did the brothers devise against Joseph? See Genesis 37:19, 20, 24–28, and 31–33.

Rather than humbly acknowledging Joseph as the family leader, his brothers coveted that position. The brothers allowed hatred to consume their lives. The brothers' hatred led them to commit a cruel act of treachery against Joseph and against their father. The consequences of the brothers' choices deeply hurt their family.

In contrast, Joseph rose above the adverse circumstances caused by his brothers. If anyone would have had an excuse for allowing bitterness to fill his heart or thoughts of revenge to

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consume his mind, that person would be Joseph. He could have stomped his feet, clenched his teeth, shaken his fist, and cried, "It's not fair! I will get you back for what you have done to me!" However, Joseph did not seek revenge. Rather than allowing himself to be overcome with evil, Joseph responded with good. He behaved in a godly manner. The question remains, How will you respond the next time you are on the negative side of favoritism?

