

Session 1

January 23, 2022

THE PITFALL OF BETRAYAL

Genesis 37:1-5, 19-24, 26-27

This series of lessons focuses on *pitfalls*, those hidden and unexpected dangers along life's pathway that threaten to slow us down at best, or totally entrap us at worst. Some appear totally coincidental. Others are set intentionally against us. And some may be the consequences of our own making. The good news is that these pitfalls are often avoidable, and those that aren't need not destroy us. The series will draw upon the life of Joseph to illustrate not only the types of pitfalls we all might face, but how God can work through them to accomplish His purpose.

The story of Joseph is an epic journey into human drama. There is lying, deceit, slavery, and accusation. But there is also integrity, redemption, forgiveness, and restoration. In the 20 chapters of Genesis that tell his story, we see him portrayed as an arrogant young man; then, an enslaved and humbled adult; and finally, a compassionate and forgiving elder. Joseph is a true hero, but it took him a long time to achieve that status.

The set-up (vv. 1-8). The events of Joseph's teenaged years present a recipe for disaster in regard to his brothers. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, both Joseph and his father Jacob contributed to the animosity that existed among the siblings. First, Joseph was a *spoiled tattletale*. At the age of 17, he was charged with tending his father's sizeable flocks alongside his older brothers. We have no details about what shenanigans took place, but we do know that Joseph "brought a bad report about them to their father" (v. 2). Second, Joseph was Jacob's *favorite son*...and everyone knew it. We must remember that Jacob's first and deepest love was for Rachel, the barren second daughter of his father-in-law Laban, and sister to the older (and less attractive) Leah (whom Jacob was deceived into marrying). When Rachel finally gave birth to a son, Jacob favored him above the rest (v. 3). To make matters worse, Jacob presented his favorite son with a colorful coat. The word literally means "wrists and ankles." Hence, the coat of many colors was actually a robe; an ornate outer tunic that far outshined the coarse and sleeveless peasant cloth shepherds typically wore for their work. To his brothers, the message was clear. He was their father's favorite and they hated him because of it (v. 4). Third, Joseph had an attitude of *arrogant superiority*. His dreams depicting him as the center of attention and object of their obeisance infuriated his brothers (vv. 5-8) and even offended his parents (vv. 9-10). For reflection: *Without even knowing the rest of the story, can you see how the combination of Jacob's affections and Joseph's own arrogance was setting him up for disaster? How might Proverbs 16:18 apply in this situation?*

The scheme (vv. 19-26). While the actions of the brothers are harsh with hatred (v. 20), one can understand the emotions that fueled them. Reuben, the eldest of them, did his best to calm their anger by offering a compromise. Throwing Joseph into the dry pit would perhaps satisfy the remaining brothers until Reuben could return for him later (v. 22). His motives may not have been entirely pure, though, for "returning him to his father" implies gaining favored treatment with Jacob over his brothers. The remaining narrative is both colorful and fascinating. They must have found some satisfaction in tearing off Joseph's fancy robe and enjoying a meal when the deed was done. Notice the irony of it all: Joseph was being left to die of starvation in an empty

well while his brothers filled their stomachs! (v. 25). But God's providence overruled their own devices, and Joseph was soon sold into slavery. Again, there is irony here. The Ishmaelites (v. 25) were descendants of Abraham from his illegitimate son Ishmael. Hence, Joseph became a slave to his great-grandfather's descendants; literally his third cousins! **For reflection:** *Looking back at the series of events, who do you think was at fault for Joseph's demise? How can we observe God's hand in the story so far?*