



SESSION 1 of 4

Joseph and his brothers

MEETING AIM

To think about family relationships and how we live with siblings.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 37

BACKGROUND

Some children have siblings, others don't. Some will get on with their brothers and sisters, others won't. Whatever a child's family situation they will feel conflict and changes of circumstance keenly. Be sensitive as you explore the story and stay aware of different home situations. Reassure the children that although the brothers' relationship fell apart God used it all for the best (Genesis 50:20), and they were eventually reconciled. Make sure you follow your church's policy if the children raise any safeguarding issues.

5 CIRCLE TIME

As the children arrive, welcome them by name and invite them to sit together in a circle. Encourage them to share stories from their week, and celebrate any birthdays or special events. Ask the children if they have any siblings, or any other family members who are close to them in age if they don't have siblings. Talk about how we sometimes get on with these family members and sometimes don't.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: large sheets of paper; felt-tip pens or crayons; pictures of people in rich-coloured robes (for example the Queen, university chancellors or archbishops)

Give out your large sheets of paper and encourage the children to draw patterns on them with dark-coloured pens or crayons. Once everyone is finished, ask them to colour their patterns using bright colours. Do the same yourself so you can use your paper in the 'Prayer' activity later on.

As you work, talk about their favourite colours. Show the pictures of people dressed in rich-looking robes and ask the children what they think of them. Drape

their finished patterned paper around their shoulders to wear as a cloak. Then admire everyone's handiwork!

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: leaders to play Joseph, Reuben and a narrator; paper cloaks from 'Intro activity'; a larger coloured cloak for Joseph (this could be an actual coat or something like a patterned tablecloth)

Gather the children together, still wearing their paper cloaks. Explain that you're going to meet some people from the Bible story. One is called Joseph and the other is his brother Reuben.

Joseph: Hi everyone, my name's Joseph! He looks at the children's cloaks. I love your cloaks! Do you like mine? He swishes around in it. It was made just for me. I have lots of brothers, but my dad loves me best because I'm the most special. I'm very important in my family, and my dad gave me this coat to prove it!

Narrator: How do you think Joseph's brothers felt? *Let the children share their ideas.* Joseph often had unusual dreams, and he liked to talk about them.

Joseph: Listen to this dream I had. We were binding big bundles of wheat out in the field when suddenly my bundle rose and stood upright, while everyone else's bundles gathered around mine and bowed down to it.

Narrator: Let's stand up and pretend to be bundles of wheat, and let's all pretend to bow down to Joseph. What do you think the dream meant? *Let the children share their ideas.* The brothers thought it meant that Joseph would be put in charge of them, and that they would have to bow down to him. They were not happy about it!

Joseph: I had another dream, and this time the sun, moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.

Narrator: Let's stand up and pretend to be shining stars bowing down to Joseph. This time even Joseph's dad got fed up. He said: "Do you really think your mum and I will actually bow down to you?"

One day Joseph's dad sent him out to check on his brothers, who were looking after the sheep quite far away. The brothers saw him coming in the distance. They decided he had made them so angry that they would kill him! But the oldest brother Reuben wasn't sure.

Reuben: Brothers! We can't kill Joseph! Throw him into this empty well but don't hurt him.

Narrator: Reuben thought he would come back later when all the other brothers had gone and rescue Joseph. But while he was away the others sold Joseph to some passing traders so that he would become a

slave. They tore his wonderful coat and put animal blood on it so they could pretend to their father that he was dead.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue exploring the story by discussing these questions:

- Which is your favourite part of the story?
- What didn't you like?
- What does this story tell you about God?
- Are your siblings or family members ever unkind to you?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: yogurt pots; sterile compost; sunflower or cress seeds; cover-up and clean-up equipment

Give each child a yogurt pot to fill with compost and plant a seed. Sunflower seeds are a good choice as you can check in with how tall they are getting over the weeks. Cress is simple and grows more quickly than sunflowers.

Ask the children to tell you how the brothers would have felt in the story. Have they ever felt jealous? Talk about how the brothers' little niggles of jealousy were as small as a tiny seed to begin with but grew and grew until they were ready to kill. What can we do if we feel jealous? (Talk to adults, pray, remember that God made us all and loves us all the same.) Instead of growing seeds of jealousy we can plant seeds of kindness and patience in our hearts, watering them with prayer and love.

Encourage the children to take their seeds home and ask their parents and carers to help them grow.

5 PRAYER

You will need: your coloured cloak from 'Intro activity'; scissors

Cut up the coat you (not the children) made in 'Intro activity' and give each child a piece to hold while they pray:

Heavenly Father, thank you that you made each one of us special, and that you love each us all equally. Help us not to be jealous of other people and to be good friends to those around us. Amen.

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SESSION 2 of 4

Hannah and Peninnah

MEETING AIM

To explore how to respond when people are mean to us.

BIBLE PASSAGE

1 Samuel 1

BACKGROUND

Younger children will just be starting to explore friendships and considering the need to share and be kind. Anyone watching children play will see positive and negative behaviours within the space of a few minutes. Use this story to explore how it affects others when we are mean. Create space for children to express their feelings if others are being unkind to them. Make sure they are aware of where they can go to get help. Make sure you follow your church's policy if the children raise any safeguarding issues.

5 CIRCLE TIME

As the children arrive, welcome them by name and invite them to sit together in a circle. Share out any refreshments you have brought. Encourage them to share stories from their week, and celebrate any birthdays or special events. Ask the children about their friends. These could be friends at church, nursery or school. Talk about how we sometimes get on with these friends and sometimes don't. If appropriate, share a story from your own life or ask another leader to do so.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: a bowl of sweets

Provide a bowl of sweets to share (remember to be mindful of allergies). Have one leader (X) pretend that their dentist has said they aren't allowed sweets. The other leaders tease X, telling them how nice the sweets are and how much they are enjoying them.

Ask the children how they think X feels. Are the leaders being kind? What might X say back? How could everyone have handled this situation differently? If the children would like to, they can pretend to be X and show how they would change things for the better.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: baby dolls

Gather the children together and tell this story:

In a book of the Bible called 1 Samuel we find the story of a man called Elkanah. He was a friend of God. Now, Elkanah had two wives. Today people only have one husband or wife, but at this time it was OK to have more than one wife. Elkanah's wives were called Peninnah and Hannah. *Practise saying the names together.*

Peninnah had children but Hannah didn't. *Share the dolls out among half the children. Ask those without any dolls how they feel.* Every year they all went to a place called Shiloh to worship God and show him how much they loved him. Every year Peninnah would tease Hannah because Hannah had no children. She was always mean to poor Hannah. She said that God was unhappy with Hannah, and that was why she didn't have any children. *Ask the children what they think of Peninnah and how Hannah must have felt.*

Every time they went to worship God at Shiloh, Hannah cried and couldn't eat because she was so sad. One night while they were there Hannah went off by herself. She cried and prayed over and over again for a son. She promised that if she had a son she would give him back to God to help the priests. *Ask the children what they think happened next. Gather some ideas and then go on with the rest of the story.*

When they went home God remembered Hannah and gave her a baby boy! *Share the dolls around the whole group.* She named him Samuel, which means 'because I asked the Lord for him'. When he was old enough Samuel went to live with the priests so that he could help people worship God.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue exploring the story by discussing these questions:

- Which is your favourite part of the story?
- What didn't you like?
- What do you think of the different people in the story? Elkanah? Peninnah? Hannah?
- What does this story tell you about God?
- What do you do when someone is unkind to you?
- Who can you talk to when someone is unkind to you?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: small wrapped sweets; squares of material, tissue paper and cellophane; ribbon; luggage labels; pens

Ask the children what Peninnah did to Hannah. How did Hannah feel? What did Hannah do? How could Peninnah have behaved differently? Relate these questions to the introductory activity.

Notice that although Peninnah was mean Hannah didn't retaliate, but instead asked God for comfort. Remind the children that if someone is upsetting them they can ask grown-ups for help as well as God.

Show the children the materials you have brought and let them make packages of sweets to give to others. Show them how to put some sweets in the middle of a square of material, paper or cellophane, then gather and tie the corners together with ribbon. However, if they want to do it a different way you can help them to follow their own ideas.

As you work, talk about any situations in the children's lives when others aren't kind to them. What can they do about it? Also think about times when they have been unkind to others. Talk about using kind words, smiles and sharing what we have with others.

Finally, give out the luggage labels and help the children think about who they might give their sweets to. Tie the labels to the sweets and encourage them to ask their parents or carers to help them give out their gifts.

5 PRAYER

You will need: the packages of sweets from 'Creative response'

Gather the sweet packages together and pray over them:

Father, please bless the people who receive these gifts. Help us to remember not to tease or laugh at people, but to be kind and friendly. Let us be a blessing to those around us, and send people to help us when others are mean. Amen.

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SESSION 3 of 4

The good shepherd

MEETING AIM

To discover that God is with us and cares about our worries and concerns..

BIBLE PASSAGE

Psalm 23

BACKGROUND

Younger children's lives are full of the unknown. They are constantly coming across situations that they have never experienced before, and it can be difficult as adults to remember what that feels like. What is ordinary to us can seem insurmountable to a 4-year-old. While younger children are unencumbered by the worries of adulthood, they still have real worries and anxieties. Give them space during this session, to voice these worries and to engage with the idea that God is with them. Make sure you follow your church's policy if the children raise any safeguarding issues.

5 CIRCLE TIME

As the children arrive, welcome them by name and invite them to sit together in a circle. Share out any refreshments you have brought. Encourage them to share stories from their week, and celebrate any birthdays or special events. Ask the children about times when they have felt sad or anxious. Why did they feel this way? Younger children can be anxious about things that seem insignificant to us, but are very real to them. Take all the children's suggestions seriously, even if they don't seem important. If appropriate, share a story from your own life or ask another leader to do so.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: white balloons; small brooms or plastic hockey sticks

Blow up lots of balloons and place them in the middle of the room. Create a sheep pen out of chairs or whatever furniture you have in the room (that you can move safely). Give each child a broom, a plastic hockey stick or something similar, and get them to work together to 'herd the sheep' into the pen. Then move the pen and play again, perhaps with different groups of children having a go each time.

If your space doesn't allow for this game, put several ping-pong balls in the centre of a table and build a pen out of books or matchboxes. Give each child a paper straw and encourage them to herd the ping-pong balls into the pen by blowing through the straw. This might be a good option if you have any children in your group who are scared of balloons.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a large sheet of paper; felt-tip pens; a Bible

Gather the children together and read the psalm to the children from your preferred translation. Ask if any of them recognise it. Perhaps they remember singing it. A psalm is a bit like a poem or a song. This one was written by David, a man who used to be a shepherd, so he knew all about how much looking after sheep needed. (You might need to explain that shepherds are people who look after sheep.) Go on to tell this story:

The Lord is my shepherd. *Draw a large shepherd's crook on your piece of paper. I have everything I need.*

He takes me to green fields with water to rest. *Draw some green fields with a blue pond or river.*

He leads me in the right way to go. *Draw paths for the sheep to follow through the fields.*

Even if I must go through the Valley of Death, he will protect me and I will not be scared. *Colour in a dark grey space next to the fields.*

He lays out a table and feeds me in front of my enemies. *Draw some food on the other side of the grey 'valley'.*

He blesses me and gives me more than I can hold. He will be with me always, and I will live in his house for ever. *Draw a house next to the food.*

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue exploring the story by discussing these questions:

- Which is your favourite part of the story?
- What didn't you like?
- What does this story tell you about God?
- What do you do when life gets scary?
- Who can you talk to when you are scared or anxious?

5 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: drawing from 'Bible story'; toy sheep; art materials

Give each child a toy sheep and let them walk their sheep through your landscape, taking the journey for themselves. Talk about how the sheep feel at different points. What might be happening to them? Help them make the connection that God will look after them in hard times, that they do not need to be scared, and that when people are mean he will show his love for them.

Show the children the art materials you have gathered together, encouraging them to create something that reflects what they have taken away from today's story. As you work, chat about what they are creating, but don't ask them leading questions. Let them express what they are doing themselves.

It may be that the children produce work that doesn't seem entirely connected with what you have been doing, or that doesn't make sense. Don't worry about this. The work will have a very personal meaning for the child; a meaning that might not seem evident at first. Congratulate the group on what they have done, and listen to any children who might want to talk about their works of art.

5 PRAYER

You will need: the toy sheep from 'Creative response'; music and the means to play it

Gather the children together and encourage them to wave their sheep in the air. Then say this prayer:

Thank you, God, that you love us the way that a shepherd loves his sheep. Thank you that we never need to be scared because you are with us, and you will be with us for ever. Amen.

Then play some music and encourage everyone to dance around with their sheep as a way of saying thank you to God.

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SESSION 4 of 4

Revenge and Love

MEETING AIM

To think about the way Jesus calls us to love each other.

BIBLE PASSAGE
Matthew 5:38-48

BACKGROUND

Children will be familiar with others being mean to them, just as they might be mean to others from time to time. At this age they are just learning to play together, share and be with others, so the idea of retaliating for something someone has done to them will be part of their life. Encourage the children to consider how they can react if someone is mean or unkind to them, either in school, at church or at home. If we are to love those who aren't nice to us, what does that look like in their lives? Make sure you follow your church's policy if the children raise any safeguarding issues.

5 CIRCLE TIME

As the children arrive, welcome them by name and invite them to sit together in a circle. Share out any refreshments you have brought. Encourage them to share stories from their week, and celebrate any birthdays or special events. Ask the children about their friends. These could be friends at church, nursery or school. Do they sometimes do unkind things to each other? How easy is it to say sorry and make up? If appropriate, share a story from your own life or ask another leader to do so.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: pictures of children in different situations (from magazines, the internet or hand-drawn)

Before the session, gather some pictures of children in different situations. Look for pictures of them playing together, but also ones where they do not seem to be getting along or where someone is perhaps being unkind.

Show the pictures to the children and ask them to sort the images into those who are good friends and those who are not friends. Encourage them to talk about what makes a good friend and which types of behaviour are less kind.

5 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a picnic blanket

Spread the picnic blanket out on the floor and sit the children around it. Explain that Jesus often taught his friends. On one occasion they all climbed a big hill and sat down together. Jesus started to teach his friends about how God wanted them to live. Go on to tell this story:

Jesus looked at his friends. He started to speak in a loud voice: "The world says that when someone hurts us we should hurt them back." His friends nodded. This is what they had been taught. But what Jesus said next surprised them.

"I'm telling you not to do that!" Jesus' friends were shocked! "If someone hits you, don't hit back," he said. "If someone takes your things, give them more. Be servant-hearted. Give to those who ask and go further than you must to be kind."

The people who were listening to Jesus started to mutter to each other. "What's this all about?" they wondered.

Jesus went on. "The world says to love your friends and hate your enemies, but I'm telling you to love your enemies, too."

"What? We have to love those people who don't like us?" Jesus' friends had never heard anything like this.

Jesus hadn't finished. "I want you to pray for those who are mean to you. It's easy to love our friends but harder to love those who aren't kind to us. But for you to stand out as a child of God you need to love everyone. Love everyone the way that God loves you."

"Wow," said Jesus' friends. "This is amazing! We have to love everyone just as God loves us!"

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue exploring the story by discussing these questions:

- Which is your favourite part of the story?
- What didn't you like?
- What does this story tell you about God?
- Is it easy to be nice to those who are unkind to you? Why? Why not?
- Have there been times when people were unkind to you?
- Have there been times when you were unkind to other people?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: paper in the shape of a heart; crayons or felt-tip pens; string; garden canes; sticky tape

Ask your group the following questions. Who loves you? How do you know? What does love look like? How can we show love to people we don't like?

Depending on the age of your group members, encourage them to write or draw these ideas on their paper heart shapes. Help any children who are struggling or aren't yet able to write. Encourage the children to decorate the hearts. As you work, keep chatting about the way Jesus calls us to love others. Is it easy to be nice to someone who has been mean to us?

Make the hearts into a simple mobile by attaching them to a garden cane with string (tape the ends to make them less rough).

The children can hang these up at home to remind themselves to love everyone.

5 PRAYER

You will need: heart mobiles from 'Creative response' (optional)

Have the children hold their heart mobiles or form heart shapes with their fingers to give them a focal point while you pray:

Dear Jesus, thank you for coming to earth to teach us how to live. We pray for our enemies, for people who aren't kind to us and for people we don't much like. We know they are God's children, too, so help us to show them love. Amen.

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