

***GOD'S BOUNDLESS FORGIVENESS:
BIBLICAL CHARACTERS***

GENESIS 50:15-21 (CEV)

Teaching

- Leader 1: Today we will deeply root ourselves in God's Word by exploring the characters we encounter in the scripture text. This method of Bible study invites you to listen to what the characters in the Bible story say, do, and feel. Then consider which characters you most relate to, why you relate to them, and what God might be teaching and saying to you through the biblical characters and story.
- Leader 2: We invite you to quiet your hearts and minds as we enter a space to be deeply rooted in God's Word.

Introductions

- Leader 1: You are invited into this space and this time with a daring vision to experience God's boundless forgiveness.
- Leader 2: Let us pray. Merciful Lord, thank you for your gift of forgiveness. Your only Son loved us enough to come to earth and experience the worst pain imaginable so we could be forgiven. Your mercy flows to us in spite of our faults and failure. Teach us to let that blessing of boundless forgiveness continue to flow through us and out into the world. Help us explore your boundless forgiveness today. Amen.
- Leader 1: We're going to begin with some introductions at your tables or Zoom breakout groups. Introduce yourselves with your name, church, city, and if you could pick an emoji to describe how you're feeling right now, what would be? For example, I might be a hug emoji because it's so good to see people I haven't seen for so long. Others might be a sleepy emoji, because this morning started way too early. We encourage you to use mutual invitation...when you finish, invite the next person to go. You will have 5 minutes for this, so make sure everyone has a chance to introduce themselves.

(Leader 1 gives 2-minute warning to groups.)

Encounter Scripture

Leader 1: Welcome back! Hopefully you were able to meet some new people or learn something new about those sitting with you at your table. An important part of studying scripture is connecting with others and we will be doing that throughout these sessions. Today I invite you to move beyond your comfort zone to connect with others and encounter God's story in new ways.

Leader 2: We will be encountering God's story today through the story of Joseph and his brothers. This is a complicated story, with many twists and turns spanning the last 13 chapters of the book of Genesis. From being the enviably favored son – to being sold into slavery by his brothers. From becoming a trusted confidant in the house of the Pharaoh in Egypt - to being his brothers only chance for survival amidst a famine. Our story picks up after Joseph's father Jacob has died and Joseph and his brothers are together once again. The brothers fear Joseph's resentment and hatred, yet Joseph surprises them with forgiveness.

Leader 1: As we have different voices read the story from Genesis 50: 15-21 (CEV), I invite you to pay attention to what each of the characters say and do, and consider what they are feeling and what their motives might be. *(Name)* will be the voice of the narrator, *(name)* will be the voice of Joseph, *(name)* will be the voice of Joseph's brothers, and *(name)* will be the voice of their father, Jacob.

Narrator: After Jacob died, Joseph's brothers said to each other,

The Brothers: "What if Joseph still hates us and wants to get even with us for all the cruel things we did to him?"

Narrator: So they sent this message to Joseph:

The Brothers: Before our father died, he told us,

Jacob: "You did some cruel and terrible things to Joseph, but you must ask him to forgive you."

The Brothers: Now we ask you to please forgive the terrible things we did. After all, we serve the same God that your father worshiped.

Narrator: When Joseph heard this, he started crying. Right then, Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to the ground in front of him and said,

The Brothers: "We are your slaves."

Narrator: But Joseph told them,

Joseph: "Don't be afraid! I have no right to change what God has decided. You tried to harm me, but God made it turn out for the best, so that he could save all these people, as he is now doing. Don't be afraid! I will take care of you and your children."

Narrator: After Joseph said this, his brothers felt much better.

Leader 1: I invite you to pull out the handout at your table or that you downloaded online. If you do not have one, you can do this on a plain sheet of paper. Above each character is a thought bubble. List in that bubble the things each character said and did. What can you infer this character might have been feeling? What was the character's motive? We will take 2 minutes for you to write your responses on your own.

(Pause 2 minutes for participants to reflect on and write their responses.)

Leader 1: There are a variety of responses you might have written down. These are some of the ones we came up with for the different characters:

Leader 2: For the Brothers:

Said:

- What if Joseph still hates us and wants to get even with us for all the cruel things we did to him? Now we ask you to please forgive the terrible things we did. After all, we serve the same God that your father worshiped. We are your slaves.

Did:

- Talked amongst themselves. Sent a message to Joseph. Reported what their father said. Listened to their father. Bowed down to Joseph. Felt much better.

Feelings/Motives:

- Afraid, relief

Leader 1: For Joseph:

Said:

- Don't be afraid. You tried to harm but God made it turn out. I will take care of you and your children.

Did:

- Heard the message, started crying, spoke to the brothers, recognized God's work, offered to care for them and their children.

Feelings/Motives:

- Pity, reconciliation

- Leader 2: For Jacob, the Father:
Said:
- You did some cruel and terrible things...you must ask for forgiveness.
- Did:**
- Encouraged repentance, died
- Feelings/Motives:**
- Sorrow, reunite family
- Leader 1: For God:
Said:
- Didn't say anything, but,
- Did:**
- We learn from Joseph that "God decided", God made it turn out for the best so that he could save all these people.
- Feelings/Motives:**
- Forgiveness, reconciliation
- Leader 2: When we pay attention to what Biblical characters are saying and doing, and what their feelings and motives are, it is easy to see how their stories are not so different from our stories. Like these characters we have fear, sorrow, pity. And are in need of forgiveness, reconciliation. God's story for Joseph and his brothers is our story. How do you relate to these characters and this story?
- Leader 1: For example, **I relate to...because...**
(Leader: Provide an example of which character you relate to and why. Perhaps you relate to the brothers because of a time in your life you were afraid of the consequences of reaching out to someone you hurt. Perhaps you relate to Joseph because you saw God at work in a hurtful situation. Perhaps you relate to Jacob, seeing family divided and wanting healing to occur. Your personal reflection will give permission for the group to share more deeply.)
- Leader 2: I invite you to take two minutes and write on your paper which character in this story you most relate to and why.
- Leader 1: God's Word and story always sends out in the world. What do these characters not only teach us about ourselves, but about the world around us and where God is calling us? We will spend the last 10-15 minutes in our table groups or Zoom breakout rooms for discussion. You might begin by sharing which characters you most relate to and why, then use the questions provided in the handout to guide your conversation. Choose one person in your group to serve as a facilitator to share the questions in the handout.

DISCUSSION at tables/Zoom Breakout Rooms:

Have a handout at each table with the discussion questions. For leading on Zoom, identify participants to serve as facilitators prior to the meeting.

GOD'S STORY LIVED OUT IN THE WORLD

Consider the roles of each of the characters in the story.

Where do you see these characters in the world right now?

- **Who do you see playing the role of Jacob, holding people accountable and urging reconciliation?**
 - What situations do you see this happening?
 - Where do you see this in the world...in your community...in your church...in your family?
 - How does God call you to hold others accountable and urge reconciliation in the world...in your community...in your church...in your family?
- **Who are the brothers, seeking forgiveness?**
 - What people and events in our world...your community...your church...have done cruel things, but are now honest about their sin with those they have hurt and are seeking forgiveness and reconciliation?
 - How is God calling you to be open and vulnerable with the hurt you have caused others, and to seek forgiveness and reconciliation – in the world, your community, your church, your family?
- **Who is Joseph, being asked to grant forgiveness to those that have hurt them?**
 - Who or in what situations do you see people offering grace and caring in unexpected ways to those who have offended them – in our world, your community, your church, your family?
- **Where is God at work, moving to forgive and offer grace?**
 - Where do you see this in the world, your community, your church, your family?
 - How can we join that work?
- **Who is released to live new lives once they are granted forgiveness?**
 - How do you see new life being lived - in the world, your community, your church, your family – because of forgiveness?

Leader 2: *(With two minutes remaining.)* This is your two-minute warning. Please begin to wrap up your conversations.

Wrap Up

Leader 1: I hope you were able to find yourself in God's story in a new way today. God's boundless forgiveness is for us here, and now. God's boundless forgiveness frees us to forgive others, and find reconciliation and new life.

Leader 2: For our closing prayer, I invite you to hold your hand out in front of you and make a tight fist.

Leader 2: God of forgiveness, we hold on tightly to our hurt, pain, fears, anger, and so much more. We pray for your forgiveness. Help us to forgive others. Free us from the pain, grudges, and negative feelings that bind us so we may live again, free from resentment, pain and bitterness. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

People of God, God's power and work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Open your hand, release what binds you and receive God's gift of boundless forgiveness.

Leader 1: We invite you to join us in the Boundless closing ritual. Respond to the leader's prompt by saying together, "Boundless" and doing the action shown on the screen.

Leader 1: GOD's love is...

Response: *(place hand over heart)* BOUNDLESS

Leader 1: God's Creation is...

Response: *(open arms wide)* BOUNDLESS

Leader 1: God's Forgiveness is...

Response: *(cross wrists)* BOUNDLESS

Leader 1: God's invitation is...

Response: *(uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched)* BOUNDLESS

Leader 1: God's Promise is...

Response: *(sign of the cross on another's forehead or hand)* BOUNDLESS

These resources were developed for the 2022 Northeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly by Pastor Shivon Miller (Trinity Lutheran Church, Duluth, MN), Leader 1 Anderson (Synod Minister, NE MN Synod, ELCA) and Pastor Leader 2 Nilsen (Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Baxter, MN). They are based on the [2022 NE MN Synod Journey Resources](#) and [2022 ELCA Youth Gathering Getting Ready Materials](#). You are welcome to adapt this text to meet the needs of your context. For more resources, visit www.nemnsynod.org/Curriculum.