



THE BIG IDEA

Not-so-typical families
forgive each other.

THE BIBLE

Genesis 37:1-36, 50:15-21;
Matthew 18:21-22; Colossians 3:12-13

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

DISCUSSION

- **Have you ever gotten into a big fight with a family member, but now you can laugh about it? What were you fighting about?**
- **What's something that would be easy for you to forgive a family member for?**
- **What's something that would *not* be easy for you to forgive a family member for?**

YOUR ATYPICAL FAMILY COULD BE EVEN MORE ATYPICAL

- **We've all needed to forgive (or be forgiven by) a family member. No family is perfect because families are just people – and people are never perfect.**
 - In every family, people hurt each other. But when "typical" families hurt each other, they respond with bitterness, anger, or revenge.
 - "Atypical" families hurt each other too, but instead of pursuing revenge, they pursue forgiveness.
- **We've been saying there is no family God can't use. Your family can be used by God to do "atypical" things in the world – but how?**

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

STORY | Tell a story about a time you struggled to forgive a family member.

- **INSTRUCTIONS: Tell a story from your life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time when you struggled to forgive a family member for something they did to you. Try to think of a story where both you and your family member were in the wrong. Be sure to share . . .**
 - *How you felt about what your family member did.*
 - *Why it was difficult for you to forgive them.*
 - *What you did to offend or hurt them.*
 - *How you eventually forgave each other.*



- At some point, we all need to forgive or be forgiven by our families. Sometimes forgiving our family members is easy, but when a person has deeply hurt us, forgiveness can be much more difficult.
- Typical families let their hurts and offenses go unresolved until they result in bitterness, broken relationships, or even revenge. **But atypical families know their relationships with their families are too valuable to lose.**

VIDEO | A Clip from "The Book of Genesis (Part 2)" from The Bible Project

- So far in this series, we've met the family of Adam and Eve, the family of their descendant Abraham, and the family of Abraham's grandsons, Jacob and Esau. Today, I want to introduce you to another generation of this same family: Jacob's son Joseph and his brothers.
- We've talked about Joseph before, so you may be familiar with some of his story, but today we're going to focus specifically on Joseph's relationship with his family. Let's get a quick overview of Joseph's story, and then we'll look more closely at the details.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Play [a clip from this video](#) from *The Bible Project*, playing only 2:35–4:10.

SCRIPTURE | The Story of Joseph

- Now that we have the big picture, let's pay closer attention to Joseph's relationship with his family.
- **Read or summarize Genesis 37:1-10.**
- Let's think about these family dynamics.
 - Joseph is his father's favorite – clearly. And he isn't quiet about it.
 - Joseph decides it's a good idea to tell his brothers that, someday, they will all serve him.
 - For obvious reasons, his brothers didn't like this.
- I'm not defending what Joseph's brothers did to him, but let's be clear – Joseph wasn't totally innocent. He was arrogant and a little obnoxious.
- One day, Joseph's brothers are working hard in the fields. Joseph heads out to meet them – wearing his fancy coat, of course.
- **Read or summarize Genesis 37:18-36.**
- Imagine you and your siblings are outside, sweating in the sun. While you're hard at work, your brother (your dad's favorite) comes strutting over to you, wearing his fanciest and most expensive clothes while you're covered in sweat and dirt. Clearly, he has not come to lend you a hand.
- Joseph's brothers are so tired of Joseph – his attitude, his "favorite" status, and his dreams about how he would someday be their ruler. In anger and jealousy, they throw Joseph into a well, stage his death, and sell him into slavery.



- I've needed to forgive family members before, but I've never had to forgive anyone for something like this. Joseph may have had an attitude problem, but this kind of retaliation from his brothers was cruel.
- **If you were Joseph, how would you have felt about your brothers? How do you think you would have responded when they needed help?**
- You already know how this story ends. Joseph saves the lives of his brothers and forgives them for what they did to him.
- Joseph forgives his brothers, but when their father Jacob dies, the brothers get scared Joseph will change his mind and try to get revenge. They know they haven't deserved the forgiveness and kindness Joseph has given them.
- **Read Genesis 50:15-21 together.**
- Joseph had every reason to be angry at his brothers, but Joseph chose forgiveness instead of bitterness.

DISCUSSION

- What's one thing we can learn about forgiveness from Joseph's story?
- Do you think forgiveness is a one-time decision, a process, or both? Explain why!

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

ATYPICAL FAMILIES FORGIVE EACH OTHER

- So how do you forgive a family member when they've hurt you? Forgiveness doesn't have to be complicated. It could be as simple as . . .
 - Admitting you've been hurt.
 - Telling God you need help to forgive them.
 - Asking God to heal the parts of your heart that have been hurt.
 - Choosing to focus on moving forward instead of what happened in the past.
 - Forgiving yourself and asking for forgiveness, if you need to, for the part you played in what happened.
- Think right now about a family member you need to forgive. Now imagine how you, and your family, could be transformed if you were willing to choose forgiveness over bitterness or revenge.
 - How do you think forgiveness could change your attitude or perspective?
 - How do you think forgiveness could change the person you're fighting with?
 - How do you think forgiveness could begin to change your family's pattern of behavior in the long-term?



REFLECTION |

- Forgiveness is tough, but isn't it amazing that we get to forgive others in the same way God has forgiven us?
- In the next few minutes, here's what I'd like you to do:
 - **Identify someone in your family you need to forgive.** Write their name down and pray for them as you do.
 - **Think about why you want to forgive them.** Is it because you're tired of feeling angry? Because you don't want to become bitter? Because you miss having a close relationship with them? Write that down too.
 - **Hang onto this card.** Let it be a reminder of your commitment to forgive instead of take revenge. Forgiveness is often a process, so while you learn to forgive, you may need to be reminded of why it's worth it.
- Forgiveness is something we can offer to those who have hurt us, but it's also a gift we give ourselves. Unforgiveness leaves us feeling bitter, angry, and closed off to others. But when we let God help us forgive, we find healing, hope, and freedom.

DISCUSSION

- **How do you think forgiving that person could have a positive impact on you and your family?**
- **Read Colossians 3:12-13. According to this passage, how can we practice forgiveness on a daily basis?**
- **What is one thing you're going to do this week to choose forgiveness instead of revenge?**

DON'T BE TYPICAL

- We've talked about a lot of difficult things in the last few weeks. That's because our families can be pretty difficult sometimes! But our imperfect families aren't hopeless.
 - **Like Adam and Eve, not-so-typical families can be used by God.**
 - **Like Abraham and Lot, not-so-typical families pray for each other.**
 - **Like Jacob and Esau, not-so-typical families have tough conversations.**
 - **Like Joseph and his brothers, not-so-typical families forgive each other.**
- It's not your job to fix your family. But if you want to see your family be used by God to do "atypical" things in the world, you have a role to play.
- Pray for your family, have tough conversations with your family, and forgive your family. When it comes to your family, **don't be typical.**