Introduction

Tell students that before Jacob took his family back to Canaan, his two wives, Leah and Rachel, and their two female servants—who were also considered Jacob's wives—had given birth to 11 sons. Joseph was the youngest of these sons. Later, after Jacob met Esau and their relationship was restored, Rachel bore another son, Benjamin. Joseph and Benjamin were Rachel's only children. Joseph's life and the relationships he had with his 11 brothers and other people are the focus of this week's lesson.

Directed Instruction

Read Genesis 37 to the class. Ask students what the passage gives as the first reason Joseph's brothers hated him. (Their father loved Joseph the most.) What did Joseph receive that irritated his brothers? (a special robe from their father) What was the second reason given? (Joseph told them about a dream that meant they would be ruled by him.) What was his brothers' reaction when Joseph told them and his father about his second dream? (His brothers felt insulted and envied him more.) It was unheard of that a younger son would rule over his elder brothers. How did the brothers' hatred and envy grow? (They wanted to kill Joseph, but ended up selling him into slavery and lying about what they had done.)

Explain to students that sometimes people treat others in a mean way for no apparent reason, and sometimes people hurt others because they themselves have been hurt. Many times relationships contain strife and envy, and these are the cause for hurtful actions. Convey that strife means a quarrel, a struggle, or a bitter conflict. Envy is defined as a strong desire for another's possessions or advantages.

Tell students that Joseph experienced rejection from his family, who at times yielded to God, yet at other times engaged in deception, hatred, lies, strife, and envy. Ask students to give the names of Joseph's great-grandfather, grandfather, and father. (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) The families of these three generations struggled to maintain relationships. Abraham's two wives, Sarah and Hagar, were in such conflict over their sons, Isaac and Ishmael, that Abraham ended up sending Hagar and Ishmael away (Genesis 16). Isaac loved his son Esau more than he loved Esau's twin brother, Jacob (Genesis 25:28). This conflict pitted husband against wife and brother against brother when it came to the family blessing, and Jacob fled from home because he had deceived his brother out of their father's blessing (Genesis 27). Ironically, Jacob was tricked by his uncle Laban into marrying the older daughter (Genesis 29:16–30).

Teach that God's Word provides guidance on how to live well with others and that Joseph and his family would have been spared much heartache had they known and regularly followed God's wisdom. Have students read Romans 12:17–19 chorally and discuss what it says. Emphasize how marvelous it is, as Joseph's life unfolds, to see his trust in God and his humility increase. This trust and humility eventually led to healed relationships and a blessing to all nations.
Review

- Why did Joseph's brothers hate him? *(He was their father's favorite son; their father gave Joseph a special gift; Joseph shared about his dreams.)*
- Why was Joseph his father's favorite son? *(Possible answers: Joseph was born when Jacob was old; Joseph was the older son of Jacob's much-loved wife, Rachel.)*
- How much money did Joseph's brothers sell him for? *(20 pieces of silver)*
- If you are treated unfairly by others, what would be the godly response? *(to trust God to help me, to not take revenge, to try to live peaceably with those who wronged me)*

Evil thoughts
- They hated him.
- They planned to kill him.
- They threw him into a pit.
- They said a wild animal had eaten him.

Evil words
- They could not speak politely to him.
- They told their father he was dead.

Evil actions
- They took his coat and threw him into a pit.
- They sold him for 20 pieces of silver.

APPLICATION

- As a child, God communicated to Joseph through dreams. Though it may not have been wise to excitedly share such dreams with disgruntled older brothers, Joseph must have felt God had His hand on his life. How can you know that God has chosen you for something special? *(1 Peter 2:9)*
- Is it right for a parent to love one child more than another? *(No.)*
- Why? *(It can cause serious family issues, creating envy, strife, and competition.)*

REINFORCEMENT

According to Old Testament custom, Reuben, the oldest of Jacob's sons, held the special first-born position of honor within his family. Being the oldest, Reuben was assumed to be the next head of the family. This meant his behavior should reflect this coming position of honor. If his father's favorite son, Joseph, was injured or disappeared while on a trip to see if his brothers and their flocks were well, Reuben knew that he would carry the majority of the blame. After all, he should have already sent word back to their father that all was well. This is why, as seen in Genesis 37:21–22 and 29, Reuben seems to be fighting for Joseph's life. He desired to rescue his younger brother and send him safely home to their father, and in doing so fulfill his role as future head of the family.