

LIFE GROUPS

Genesis 48

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

ICE BREAKER QUESTION: What kind of predictions and hopes for the future do you have for your children, your siblings, or yourself?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **What is your biggest takeaway? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?**

2. **Read Genesis 48:1-12. What is so incredible about what Jacob does with Joseph's sons in these verses?**

The literal Hebrew reads, "Like Reuben and Simeon they will be to me"—that is, these boys would become the firstborn sons of Jacob. Ephraim and Manasseh would become *not* Jacob's grandsons, but sons number one and two. They displaced Reuben and Simeon!¹

In the future, his other children would be incorporated into the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.²

Rachel had been the love of his life. He had worked fourteen years for her. And her untimely death cut her childbearing short and prevented his burying her in the family

¹ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 542.

² R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 543.

tomb. But now Rachel's firstborn son Joseph could extend her line by Joseph's giving his sons to Jacob as direct heirs.³

Following this, Jacob's kiss and embrace of the boys were significant gestures in the adoption process (v. 10). Lastly, Jacob's removal of his sons from his knees and bowing with his face to the earth was a consummating gesture of the adoption (v. 12).⁴

3. READ GENESIS 48:13-21. What comparisons can we make from Jacob's blessings of Ephraim and Manasseh with Jacob's own blessing as a child? What is the importance of their names in this passage?

Because Jacob formally adopted Ephraim and Manasseh, they were honored as tribes of Israel over Jacob's sons Reuben and Simeon, who were remembered primarily for their sins. The name Manasseh means "God has made me forget all my hardship at my father's house." The name Ephraim means "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." Although Manasseh recognizes the hardships of the past, Ephraim recognizes the goodness God works in suffering, and it is Ephraim who receives the blessing. The legacy of Joseph's life was formed in the way God worked His deliverance and purposes through hardships, just as He did through the life of Jesus, and just as He will do through each of us.

Here Joseph is rewarded through a blessing for his sons. But Jacob's past of deceitfully obtaining the blessing and birthright intended for his older brother Esau makes Ephraim and Manasseh's blessing particularly interesting. In both cases, the younger sibling receives the blessing, contrary to custom and expectation. Again we see the way God works in timing and ways we cannot predict, often defying expectations of the world around us. He chooses to use "the foolish things of the world to shame the wise," and "the weak things of the world to shame the strong," just as we see in the supernatural reign of Jesus.

And both sons were astonishingly blessed. Manasseh would become "a people," but Ephraim would become "a multitude of nations." In Egypt and at the exodus, Ephraim

³ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 543.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 543.

and Manasseh were great tribes indeed. At one time the name Ephraim was used as a synonym for the kingdom of Israel.⁵

“Such confidence in God’s word was worth having. The tribe of Ephraim attained great prominence during the old covenant period. Joshua, one of the greatest leaders in Israelite history, hailed from Ephraim (Num. 13:8, 16), and that clan was the preeminent tribe in the northern kingdom of Israel after it separated from the southern kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 11:9–12:33). Moreover, Ephraim is often used in the prophetic books as a designation for the entire northern kingdom (Hos. 5:12).” – Ligonier Article

Such a lovely blessing in the name of the God who walks with, shepherds, and redeems his people.

Jacob’s new sons had been mightily blessed!⁶

He was only the messenger. His crossed hands of blessing were an act of profound faith. That is the divine assessment. “By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff” (Hebrews 11:21).⁷

4. What can we learn from Jacob and Joseph’s response to the unexpected blessing of Ephraim over Manasseh?

But here, in Jacob’s handling of Ephraim and Manasseh, we see the crossed hands of blessing—and thus we clearly understand at the end of Jacob’s life and the book of Genesis that God’s grace must never become captive to position or privilege or heredity or expectation or tradition or convention or disposition. God’s grace is sovereign. It cannot be tamed. The economy of grace operates on its own principles—humbling human wisdom and exalting the unlikely, so that the last are often the first, and the first last.⁸

As Manasseh’s father, Joseph had worked to instill firstborn character and a requisite sense of responsibility in his oldest boy. This humiliation was an undeserved wound. Why

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 545.

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 544.

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 545.

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 545.

had the old man crossed his hands? Was it because of his near-blindness? Or was it his inveterate, heel-grabbing perversity?⁹

Now he dared to trust God and believe his plans were best. He dared to do God's will despite the wishes of his illustrious, godly son. Jacob had his anchor into the will of God forever" (Barnhouse).¹⁰

It had taken Jacob a lifetime of divine discipline to learn that he must only speak and do the word of God. Now he dared to trust God and believe his plans were best. He dared to do God's will despite the wishes of his illustrious, godly son. Jacob had his anchor into the will of God forever" (Barnhouse).¹¹

"Both Ephraim and Manasseh share in Jacob's blessing, but the younger Ephraim gets a larger portion of favor. Joseph objects when this happens because his father defies the normal custom, which typically grants more to the older son (Gen. 48:17–18). Lest Jacob's act be mistaken, he declares his intent to place Ephraim over his brother, thereby giving us a powerful illustration of grace (vv. 19–20). Tradition says the elder, Manasseh, is "owed" a better blessing. However, the Lord gives every good gift, and, as John Calvin writes, since God "owes no one anything, he is free to confer gifts at his own pleasure." Jacob's blessing, Matthew Henry says, reminds us that "grace does not observe the order of nature, nor does God prefer those whom we think fittest to be preferred, but as it pleases him." – Ligonier Article

5. What can we learn about God's kingdom given that both brothers receive a blessing and Ephraim receives the greatest blessing?

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⁹ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 544.

¹⁰ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 545.

¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 545.

¹² R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 545.

Indeed, the last are often first, even for Christ. “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:11–13).

The crossed hands of blessing tell us that grace typically surprises. “But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (1 Corinthians 1:27–29). This is what makes the gospel so wild and wonderful. Because no one is beyond God’s grace, the proudest, baddest, meanest man in town can, and often does, find grace. There is a wildness to God’s mercy!¹³

Again and again, for years together, we put forward some cherished desire to God’s right hand, and are displeased, like Joseph, that still the hand of greater blessing should pass to some other thing. Does God not know what is oldest with us, what has been longest at our hearts, and is dearest to us? Certainly he does: “I know it, My son, I know it,” He answers to all our expostulations. It is not because He does not understand or regard your predilections, your natural and excusable preferences that He sometimes refuses to gratify your whole desire, and pours upon you blessings of a kind somewhat different from those you most earnestly covet. He will give you the whole that Christ hath merited; but for the application and distribution of that grace and blessing you must be content to trust Him.¹⁴

6. Have you ever been disappointed in God because the circumstances you faced were not what you expected? How did it affect your faith in Him?

John Calvin comments: “Until our faith rises to lay hold on those things which are removed afar off, we know not what it is to set our seal to the word of God.” The Christian life is future-oriented. We by no means deny the importance of the present, but we recognize that our life now is guided by what will happen in the future. Our secure hope in what God is going to do one day must show itself in our conduct, priorities, relationships, and vocations.

7. Read Hebrews 11:21. Of all Jacob did in his lifetime, why do you think he is recognized for this specific act? Why was faith required by Jacob to bless Joseph and his sons?

¹³ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 546.

¹⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 546.

By identifying his sons with the despised shepherding people, Joseph sealed them off from ascendancy. It was madness from the perspective of the Nile. But like his father Jacob, Joseph believed the word of promise—that God was building a great people who would one day return to the land of promise.¹⁵

“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward” (Hebrews 11:24–26). Joseph had made a similar choice, and he did it with like faith.¹⁶

All this calls for faith, both for salvation and living. Just as Jacob pulled back from trusting his own wisdom and predilections and trusted God’s word, so must we. God calls us to trust in him alone. This is what old Jacob did in the last hours of his life—and this is where he experienced the pleasure and praise of God as recorded in the “Hall of Faith” found in the book of Hebrews.¹⁷

“As we have said, [Hebrews 11:21](#) singles out Jacob’s blessing in [Genesis 48](#) as paradigmatic of faith. After all, in looking to things yet to come, the patriarch shows “assurance of things hoped for” and “conviction of things not seen,” both of which make up true faith in the Lord ([Heb. 11:1](#)). Believing God for that which he has seen only in part, Jacob shows what it means to be a person of faith.” – Ligonier Article

- a. **How do a person’s current character and former behavior shape the circumstances around them? How do they shape our expectations and predictions for their future?**

8. How can reflecting on Jacob’s faith on his deathbed help you remain faithful to God in the present?

Genesis 48 gives a remarkable portrait of an old man who took full charge of his own death. His faith on his deathbed was the singular triumph of his life. And there, while he did nothing that today is commonly referred to as worship, as there was no prayer or song, he intensely worshiped. This is because we worship when we, *by faith*, trust God

¹⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 546–547.

¹⁶ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 547.

¹⁷ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 546.

for all of life and give ourselves to him (cf. Romans 12:1, 2). By faith Jacob crossed his hands in worship and blessed his adopted sons as he surrendered his life and the future of his people to God's word. And his sunset faith unleashed the wild grace of God to do its wondrous work in the generations to come.¹⁸

PRAYER

Thank God for the promises He's given us, and for the confidence we can have that He will be faithful to fulfill them. Pray that, in our obedience and trust, He blesses our lives through His grace in order that we can be a blessing to those around us—overflowing to others the same love, hope, and truth He's given us through the Holy Spirit, and the legacy of Christ. Finally, pray that we, and all who follow after us, will leave a legacy that brings God glory and points to the ultimate blessing of salvation through Jesus Christ.



FURTHER STUDY

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/josephs-protest>

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/mountain-joseph>

¹⁸ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 547.