ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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JUSTICE ISSUE: ISOLATION, EXCLUSION, GRIEF AND THE FAILURE OF JUSTICE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	¶162 Other Social Issues, B; ¶161 Economic Challenges, C; ¶162 Other Social Issues, L; ¶163 Basic Rights and Freedoms; Book of Resolutions #3100
OBJECTIVE:	To help youth explore the experience of isolation and injustice in Joseph's story, understand that God bears witness even when justice fails, and reflect on grief, community and action as expressions of faith.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	Paper, pens/markers, Bible – print or digital, Optional: tape or string for marking movement zones, Optional: printouts of Romans 8:22 and Social Principles passages

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say: Think of a time when you felt left out, misunderstood, or on the outside. Or, if that hasn't been your experience, think of someone you've seen in that place. How did it feel?

(Pause for reflection)

Read: Romans 8:22

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

Say: There are times when justice doesn't happen right away. When people are left behind or silenced. In those moments, scripture tells us that all creation groans—not just people. And God groans with us. When others forget, heaven remembers.

Pray: God who sees the whole story, help us sit with what hurts. Help us notice those who are pushed to the edges.

NOTES

This story begins in a family, but not all families feel safe or supportive. Whether youth come from strong support systems or carry wounds of betrayal, this lesson invites them to explore how God shows up when others turn away.

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Let us be people who remember, who witness, who restore. Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28

Themes: betrayal, isolation, injustice, divine witness, longing for restoration

Say: Let's read today's story: Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28. Listen for how Joseph is treated and what happens to him.

(Read passage.)

Discussion Questions:

- What do you notice about how Joseph is treated by his brothers?
- Have you ever experienced feeling rejected, excluded, or misunderstood?
- What does it mean for people to "throw others in a pit" today?
- How might people experience this through social media, family dynamics, or school life?
- What does it mean that God still saw Joseph? That creation groans with us?

Optional: Read Romans 8:22 together. **Ask:**

- What are some things in the world right now that make you "groan" for justice?
- What do you want God to remember, even if others forget?

NOTES

Joseph is a dreamer, the youngest brother, the favorite child of Jacob. His brothers resent his special status and dream-filled visions. Their jealousy becomes so intense that they strip him of his robe—his identity—and throw him into a pit. Eventually, they sell him, and Joseph begins a journey of pain, displacement, and ultimately transformation.

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Group Activity #1 (10-12 minutes)

Title: *"Stand Where You Are" – A Movement-Based Reflection*

Say: After I read each statement, you'll choose where to stand based on how much it relates to your experience. Move silently. This is about self-reflection, not judgment.

NOTES

Goal: To explore feelings of isolation, inclusion, and community—both in person or online—using reflection and embodied movement or visible cues.

SET UP

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Statements:

1. I've been misunderstood by people I care about
2. I've witnessed bullying or exclusion at school or online
3. I've been the one who hurt someone else—even unintentionally
4. I've posted or shared something online and worried afterward how people would react
5. I've felt invisible in a group chat or social circle
6. I feel safe being myself with my family or friends whether in person or online
7. I believe God is with people who feel invisible
8. I've chosen to include or stand up for someone who felt bullied or left out
9. I want to be a person who helps others feel seen

Debrief Questions:

- How did it feel to move or respond during this activity?
- What surprised you about where you or others stood?
- Do online spaces make it easier or harder to belong? Why?
- How might God respond to those standing at the edges?
- What role do we play in helping others feel like they belong?

Group Activity #2 (10-12 minutes)

Title: *"Josephs of Today" – Exploring Real-World Isolation and Response*

Say: Now we will look at real-life situations where people experience exclusion.

Profile 1: "Jada in the Group Chat"

Jada used to be part of her school's friend group chat. Lately, people have been replying to everyone else but ignoring her messages. She found out someone made

NOTES CONT'D

In Person:

- Mark three zones: CENTER = "This feels very true for me," MIDDLE = "Somewhat true," OUTER = "Not true for me"

Online:

- Use thumbs up, hand raise, or no reaction to express agreement

Instructions: In pairs or small groups, choose one of the profiles below. Use the questions to reflect on how exclusion plays out today—and how we are called to respond. (You can read these aloud, print them, or screenshare them for online groups.)

Leader Notes:

- Normalize the full range of responses—no pressure to reveal private experiences.
- Acknowledge: digital harm and exclusion often go unseen by adults and leaders.
- Offer optional journaling or a 1-on-1 follow-up if the topic brings up deeper issues.
- Provide clear expectations for **safe and respectful digital conduct** in youth group settings.

Notes for Facilitator:

Navigating Grief and Loss

Sometimes, the pit Joseph was thrown into looks like grief, loss, or depression. It's important to help youth name and navigate these feelings in safe, faithful ways.

- **Name the grief:** Encourage journaling, prayer, or talking with a trusted

a new group chat without her. No one says anything to her face.

Profile 2: "Luis the Transfer Student"

Luis just moved to town. He dresses differently, speaks Spanish at home, and doesn't know anyone yet. In his first week, he was mocked in gym class. No one invited him to sit at lunch.

Profile 3: "Jordan's Family Divide"

Jordan's family always expected them to become a doctor. But Jordan wants to be a filmmaker and express their identity in ways their parents don't understand. They feel silenced at home.

Profile 4: "Amira and the Post"

Amira posted about a racial justice protest. A few classmates began screenshotting her posts and mocking her in the hallway and online. She considered deleting her account but doesn't want to disappear.

Reflection Questions:

- What kind of "pit" is this person in?
- How would you want someone to respond if this were you?
- What do they need: from God, from others, from themselves?
- What might restoration or healing look like in this story?
- What do the Social Principles call us to do?
- How can you, or your group, bear witness when justice is missing?

Say: Joseph's brothers didn't just ignore him, they plotted to remove him completely from their circle. We don't always throw people into a pit, but sometimes we do it with our silence, comments, or exclusions—especially online. The pain is just as real, even if the pit is digital. God sees those in the pit—and God calls us to notice them too.

NOTES CONT'D

adult.

- **Feel it without shame:** Jesus wept. So can we.
- **Remember others who are hurting:** Even small actions (a note, an invite, a smile) can disrupt someone's loneliness.
- **Choose healing:** That might mean boundaries, therapy, or changing habits.
- **Trust that justice doesn't die when it's delayed:** Heaven bears witness even when earth does not.

Consider exploring age-appropriate congregational or outside resources for pastoral counseling/Stephens Ministers for youth in the congregation.

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CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Say: What do you want God to remember from today—about your story, someone else's, or the world?

Circle Blessing (spoken one by one or together):

"I am not forgotten. I am not alone."

Closing Prayer:

"God of the pit and the promise,

May we carry the stories that others bury.

May we be people who remember, who include, who stand beside.

And may we never forget that your justice is alive—even when the world tries to silence it.

Amen."