

June 13, 2021

2. When You Find Yourself in Trouble — Genesis 39:1-17, 19-21

I like the title of this session. When I read it, I am reminded of John Lewis, who served in the US House of Representatives until his death on July 17, 2020. Lewis, a civil rights organizer in the 1960s alongside Martin Luther King Jr., was known as “the conscience of the US Congress.”

As a Christian and a civil rights leader, Lewis knew a thing or two about getting into trouble. In a 2018 tweet, he wrote:

Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.¹

In Genesis 39, Joseph is in trouble. Joseph was successful in his assigned work. Potiphar noticed and put him in charge: good trouble. Potiphar’s wife noticed too and extended romantic overtures to Joseph: bad trouble. When Joseph rebuffed her desire, she pitched a fit, falsely accusing Joseph. Joseph ended up in jail: bad trouble. In jail, God was with Joseph. The head jailer put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners: good trouble. Whatever Joseph did, God made sure it worked out well.

John Lewis started his life in trouble. Born to sharecroppers in Alabama, he attended segregated public schools. He aspired to be a preacher. He counted the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Martin Luther King Jr.’s radio broadcasts as inspirations for his work as an activist, which led to Lewis getting into a lot of trouble. Choosing protest, Lewis walked across the Edmund Pettis Bridge and was severely beaten. Lewis’s life is marked by getting into good trouble. He and Joseph had that in common.

“Lord, I can resist anything but temptations” (source unknown). Temptation is part of the human condition and often leads to trouble. I have several questions about trouble:

- What did John Lewis mean by good, necessary trouble?
- What determines whether trouble is good or bad?
- Anabaptists have a long history of getting into trouble. When has our tribe gotten into good and bad trouble?
- I’m part of an anti-racism team. Good or bad trouble? Black Lives Matter. Good or bad trouble?
- Jesus got into a lot of trouble. How does his life inform response to the above questions?

—Ruben Chupp
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¹. Joshua Bote, “Get in Good Trouble, Necessary Trouble’: Rep. John Lewis in His Own Words,” USA Today, updated July 19, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/07/18/rep-john-lewis-most-memorable-quotes-get-good-trouble/5464148002/>

Ruben Chupp of Nappanee, Indiana, is a spiritual director, chaplain, and retired pastor. His personal goals: “love God and the person in front of me at any given time; read some, write some, think some, pray some, and take a nap every day; love my wife, Idella, my children, and their children with all the grace I possess; and finally, get home before dark.”

Resources for this session

- ***Salt & Light Videos***

Matthew Yoder is the presenter for unit 1, Grace. These teaching videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each session. They are available on [MennoMedia's YouTube channel](#). Matthew is the pastor of Grace Mennonite Church, Pandora, Ohio.

Additional commentary for this session is available at:

<https://www.mennomedia.org/salt-light-supplements/>