Preschool–Grade 6

Joseph Forgives His Brothers

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: Forgiveness names the wrong and lets go of payback, trusting that God can bring good out of it. We forgive because God has forgiven us.
Bible passage: Genesis 45:1–15. Students read it out loud themselves.
Memory verse: "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life." *Genesis 45:5 (KJV)* and "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." *Colossians 3:13 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
Before class: read Genesis 37, 42:1–8 and 45:1–15. Write both memory verses on the board. Draw two columns on the board: "Pay back" and "Forgive."

1. Opening game: Pay Back or Forgive? (5–10 minutes)

Read each situation. Students call out what most people would do, and you write it in a column: a friend shares your secret; a teammate costs you the game; a sibling breaks something of yours; someone spreads a rumor about you; someone who hurt you years ago asks for help. Ask: *Why does paying back feel fair? What does it cost to forgive?* Say: "Today we meet a man who had all the power in Egypt, standing in front of the brothers who sold him."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Tell the background: Joseph's brothers hated him (Genesis 37:4), cast him into a pit and sold him for twenty pieces of silver (37:24, 37:28). The LORD was with Joseph (39:2), and Pharaoh set him over all the land of Egypt (41:41). In the famine, his ten brothers came to buy corn and bowed before him, but they did not know him (42:3, 42:6, 42:8). The second time they brought Benjamin (43:15).
Read out loud: Genesis 45:1–15. Students take turns, a few verses each. Old words in this passage:

- **refrain himself** (45:1): hold back his feelings; **made himself known**: told them who he was
- **troubled at his presence** (45:3): afraid to be standing before him
- **grieved** (45:5): very sad; **hither**: here; **preserve life**: keep people alive
- **earing** (45:6): plowing; **posterity** (45:7): family line, the children to come; **deliverance**: rescue
- **haste** (45:9): hurry; **tarry not**: don't wait
- **nourish** (45:11): feed and care for; **come to poverty**: become poor and needy

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3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Joseph had every reason and every chance to pay his brothers back. What do you think was going on in his heart when he "could not refrain himself" (Genesis 45:1–2)?
2. Joseph said, "whom ye sold into Egypt" (45:4). Forgiveness did not pretend nothing happened. Why is it important to be honest about a wrong and still forgive?
3. Joseph said three times that God sent him (45:5, 45:7, 45:8). Later he told his brothers, "ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (50:20). How does seeing God at work help a person forgive?
4. Joseph didn't only stop being angry; he gave his brothers a place near him in Goshen and promised to nourish them (45:10–11). What does it look like to do good to someone who hurt you?
5. Colossians 3:13 says to forgive "even as Christ forgave you." How does remembering how much God has forgiven you change how you treat others?
6. Is there someone you need to forgive, or someone you need to ask to forgive you? What is one step you could take?

4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words in Genesis 45:5: **grieved** means very sad; **ye** means you; **hither** means here; **preserve life** means keep people alive. In Colossians 3:13, **forbearing** means putting up with each other patiently, and **a quarrel against any** means a complaint against someone.
Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Genesis 45:5 this week; keep working on Colossians 3:13 next week too.

5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "Joseph's brothers could never undo what they did. We can't undo our sin either. But God offers forgiveness: in Jesus 'we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins' (Colossians 1:14, KJV). God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We obey the gospel the way Peter preached it: 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the Holy Ghost, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5)."
Pray with the students, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

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6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. Who has hurt me? Without writing their name, what happened, and how did it make me feel?
2. Joseph said, "God did send me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5). Where might God be at work in my hard situation?
3. Write a short prayer asking God to help you forgive, and thanking Him for forgiving you.
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: take one step toward forgiving someone: pray for them by name, stop retelling what they did, or do one kind thing for them.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You for forgiving us through Jesus. Help us forgive the people who have hurt us, to be honest about what happened and still let go of payback. Help us trust You to bring good out of hard things, like You did for Joseph. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a student shares that someone is hurting them: forgiveness never means keeping abuse secret or staying in danger. Joseph forgave, and he also named the wrong (Genesis 45:4). Listen, thank them for telling you, and follow your church's child safety policy right away.

What comes next (if students ask): Joseph sent wagons to bring his father (Genesis 45:21), and Jacob said, "Joseph my son is yet alive" (45:28). Years later the brothers asked Joseph to forgive them (50:17), and he answered, "ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (50:20).

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