Preschool–Grade 6

Joseph in Prison

Sunday School Lesson for 3rd to 5th Grade, 45–60 minutes

Main point: Joseph gave God the credit and served faithfully where he was, even when he was forgotten. God never forgets us.
Bible passage: Genesis 40:1–23. Read Genesis 39:20–41:14 before class.
Memory verse: "And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you." *Genesis 40:8 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each child (or one for every two children), a whiteboard or large paper, a marker, paper and pencils, and one take-home sheet for each child.
Before class: write the memory verse on the board.

1. Opening game: What Does It Mean? (5–10 minutes)

Draw three simple pictures on the board without saying anything: three lines, a cup, and a bunch of grapes. Kids guess what story the pictures tell. Write down every guess. Then say: "Only the person who drew them knows for sure what they mean." Ask: *Who knows what everything means?* Say: "Today two men had dreams with pictures like these, and Joseph said only God knows what they mean."

2. Bible story: Do Not Interpretations Belong to God? (15 minutes)

Kids open their Bibles to Genesis 40. When you reach a **Look up** line, a child finds the verse and reads it out loud. Tell the rest in your own words.

Joseph in prison. Joseph's brothers had sold him, and he was taken to Egypt (Genesis 37:28). Someone lied about him, and he was put in prison (39:20). **Look up Genesis 39:21.** ("But the LORD was with Joseph.") The keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of the prisoners (39:22).

Two new prisoners. Pharaoh's chief **butler** (the officer who served the king's drinks) and his chief **baker offended** him, which means they did wrong against him. Pharaoh was **wroth** (very angry) and put them **in ward**, under guard, in the prison where Joseph was (40:1–3). **Look up Genesis 40:4.** The captain of the guard put Joseph in charge of them, and Joseph served them.

Sad faces. The two men each dreamed a dream on the same night (40:5). In the morning Joseph saw that they were sad and asked why (40:6–7). **Look up Genesis 40:8.** No one could tell them what the dreams meant, and Joseph said, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" Joseph gave God the credit before he said a word about the dreams.

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The butler's dream. Look up Genesis 40:9–11. A vine with three branches budded, blossomed and brought forth ripe grapes. The butler pressed the grapes into Pharaoh's cup and gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand. Joseph said the three branches were three days. In three days Pharaoh would **lift up** the butler's **head**, which means bring him out and honor him, and give him back his place (40:12–13).

"Think on me." Look up Genesis 40:14–15. Joseph asked the butler to remember him, to tell Pharaoh about him and help him get out. Joseph said he had been stolen away from the land of the Hebrews, and he had done nothing to be put in the **dungeon**, the prison.

The baker's dream. The baker had three white baskets on his head, and birds ate the baked food for Pharaoh out of the top basket (40:16–17). Joseph told him the truth: it was bad news, and in three days Pharaoh would put him to death (40:18–19). Joseph was honest even when the answer was hard.

Three days later. It was Pharaoh's birthday, and he made a feast (40:20). He gave the butler his job back, and the butler gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand (40:21). Everything happened as Joseph had said (40:22). **Look up Genesis 40:23.** The butler forgot Joseph. Two full years went by. Then Pharaoh dreamed, the butler remembered Joseph, and Joseph was brought out of the dungeon (41:1, 41:9–14).

3. Questions to ask (10 minutes)

Thinking questions (no single right answer; let kids talk)

1. Joseph was in prison for something he didn't do (40:15), but he still served the other prisoners (40:4). Why is it hard to do your best when things are unfair?
2. Joseph noticed the men were sad and asked why (40:6–7). Why does noticing other people matter?
3. Joseph said, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" (40:8). Why do you think he said that before telling what the dreams meant?
4. The butler forgot Joseph for two whole years (40:23; 41:1). How do you think Joseph felt? How can we keep trusting God when we have to wait?
5. What is something good in your life that you can give God the credit for?

Recall questions

1. How many branches were on the vine? *(Three, Genesis 40:10)*
2. What did the three branches mean? *(Three days, 40:12)*
3. What day was it when the butler got his job back? *(Pharaoh's birthday, 40:20)*

4. Memory verse: Erase a Word (5 minutes)

Explain the old words: an **interpreter** is someone who tells what something means, an **interpretation** is what it means, and **I pray you** means please. Read the verse on the board together. Erase two words and read it again. Keep erasing two words at a time until the board is empty and the class can say it alone. Then kids say it to a partner.

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5. What this means for us (5 minutes)

Say: "Joseph gave God the credit, and God never forgot Joseph. God has not forgotten you either. God loves you. The Bible says: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). That means all of us have done wrong, and none of us is as good as God. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, which means God came to earth as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). How do we obey the gospel? '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) To **repent** means to turn away from sin; our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are **buried with Jesus in baptism**, all the way under the water, in Jesus' name. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we come up to live a 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 the words (Acts 2:4). The Bible calls this being born again (John 3:5)."
Pray with the kids, 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.
This week: every time someone praises you, say "Thank you," and then thank God for helping you.

6. Activity: Bible Look-Up Race (10–15 minutes)

Kids work in pairs with one Bible. Read a reference and a question. The first pair to find the verse and read the answer out loud wins the point.

1. Genesis 39:22: What did the keeper of the prison put in Joseph's hand? *(All the prisoners)*
2. Genesis 40:3: Whose house was the prison in? *(The captain of the guard)*
3. Genesis 40:7: What did Joseph ask them? *("Wherefore look ye so sadly to day?" Why do you look so sad today?)*
4. Genesis 40:10: What came out on the vine? *(Buds, blossoms and ripe grapes)*
5. Genesis 40:16: How many white baskets were on the baker's head? *(Three)*
6. Genesis 40:21: What did the butler give into Pharaoh's hand? *(The cup)*

For more, use the **word search, crossword, maze or worksheet** (vbshq.com/bible-stories/joseph-in-prison).

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You that You were with Joseph in prison and never forgot him. Help us to give You the credit for every good thing, to notice people who are sad, and to serve You wherever we are. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a child asks why Joseph was in prison: his master's wife lied about him (Genesis 39:17–20). Keep it short: someone told a lie, and Joseph was punished for something he did not do.
If a child asks about their own dreams: Joseph said interpretations belong to God (40:8). Encourage them to pray and talk with their parents. God speaks to us clearly through His Word.

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