Joseph in Prison

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

Main point: Give God the credit, serve faithfully where you are, and trust Him when people forget you.
Bible passage: Genesis 40:1–23. Students read it out loud themselves.
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)* and "And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." *Genesis 41:16 (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 39:20–41:16. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses, or go around the room a few verses each.

1. Opening game: Who Gets the Credit? (5–10 minutes)

Read each situation. Students stand if they would want the credit, and stay seated if they would give it to someone else: 1) Your team wins, and you scored the last point. 2) You get an A on a project your older brother helped you with. 3) A friend thanks you for advice you got from your pastor. 4) Someone praises you for a talent you were born with. Ask: *Why do we like getting credit? What does it look like to give it away?* Say: "Joseph had the perfect chance to take credit, twice. Watch what he did."

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

Background: Joseph was sold by his brothers (Genesis 37:28), served in Potiphar's house, and was put in prison after a false accusation (39:20). "But the LORD was with Joseph" (39:21), and the keeper of the prison put him in charge of the prisoners (39:22).
Read out loud: Genesis 40:1–15. Students take turns, a few verses each. Old words in this passage:

- **butler** (40:1): the officer who served the king's drinks; **baker**: the officer who made his bread
- **offended** (40:1): did wrong against; **wroth** (40:2): very angry
- **in ward** (40:3): under guard, in custody; **charged Joseph with them** (40:4): put him in charge of them
- **a season** (40:4): a while
- **wherefore look ye so sadly** (40:7): why do you look so sad
- **interpretation** (40:8): the meaning; **I pray you**: please
- **lift up thine head** (40:13): bring you out and honor you; **restore thee unto thy place**: give you back your job
- **think on me** (40:14): remember me; **make mention of me**: tell about me; **dungeon** (40:15): prison

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Read out loud: Genesis 40:16–23. Old words in this passage:

- **bakemeats** (40:17): baked foods
- **thereof** (40:18): of it
- **butlership** (40:21): his job as butler
- **forgat** (40:23): forgot

A gentle note on 40:19 and 40:22: Joseph told the baker the truth, that in three days Pharaoh would put him to death, and it happened as he said. Read it as written, and keep the focus on Joseph's honesty and God's knowledge.
Then tell what happened next: "at the end of two full years" Pharaoh dreamed (41:1). The butler finally remembered Joseph (41:9–13), and Joseph was brought out of the dungeon (41:14). **Read Genesis 41:16 out loud:** standing before the king, Joseph again gave God the credit.

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Joseph was in prison for something he didn't do (40:15), yet he served the other prisoners (40:4). What does faithfulness look like in a situation that isn't fair?
2. Joseph noticed the men's sad faces (40:6–7). What does that tell you about him? Who around you might be sad without anyone noticing?
3. Joseph said, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" (40:8), and later, "It is not in me" (41:16). Why is giving God the credit hard? Why does it matter?
4. Joseph told the baker the truth even though it was bad news (40:18–19). When is it hard for you to be honest?
5. Joseph asked the butler to remember him (40:14), and he forgot for two full years (40:23; 41:1). How do you handle it when people let you down? Who never forgets?
6. Psalm 105:19 says "the word of the LORD tried him," which means God's word tested Joseph while he waited. What might God be growing in you while you wait?

4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words: an **interpreter** tells what something means; an **interpretation** is the meaning; **I pray you** means please. In Genesis 41:16, **it is not in me** means "I can't do it by myself," and **an answer of peace** means a good answer.
Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Genesis 40:8 this week; keep working on Genesis 41:16 next week too.

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

Say: "Joseph kept pointing people to God. 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.

6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

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

1. What is one good thing in my life that I usually take the credit for? How can I give God the credit?
2. Where am I in a "prison" season, a hard or unfair place? How can I serve faithfully there?
3. Write a short prayer, thanking God that He never forgets you.
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: each time someone praises you, thank them, and then tell God (or someone else) how He helped you.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You that You were with Joseph in the prison and never forgot him. Teach us to say, 'It is not in me,' and to give You the credit. Help us to serve faithfully where we are, and to trust You while we wait. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a student asks about their own dreams: Joseph said interpretations belong to God (40:8). Encourage them to pray, to talk with their parents and pastor, and to measure everything by God's Word.

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