Preschool–Grade 6

Joseph and His Brothers

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

Main point: Joseph forgave his brothers, because he saw that God had been working for good the whole time. God can help us forgive people who hurt us.
Bible passage: Genesis 37–50. This lesson tells Genesis 37, 39–45 and 50:15–21. Read them before class.
Memory verse: "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." *Genesis 50:20 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each child (or one for every two children), a whiteboard or large paper, a marker, and one take-home sheet for each child.
Before class: write the memory verse on the board.

1. Opening game: It's Not Over Yet (5–10 minutes)

Read short stories one line at a time. After each line, kids show thumbs up (good) or thumbs down (bad). Example: "You got a new bike." *(Up.)* "It got a flat tire." *(Down.)* "You walked to the shop, and met a new friend there." *(Up.)* "It started to rain." *(Down.)* "Your new friend's mom drove you home." *(Up.)* Make up two more. Ask: *Could you tell how each story would end from the bad part?* Say: "In Joseph's life, lots of bad things happened, one after another. But God was working the whole time. Let's see how it ends."

2. Bible story: From the Pit to the Palace (15 minutes)

Kids open their Bibles to Genesis 37. When you reach a **Look up** line, a child finds the verse and reads it out loud. Tell the rest in your own words.

The coat and the dreams. Joseph was seventeen, feeding the flock with his brothers (Genesis 37:2). **Look up Genesis 37:3.** Jacob, also called Israel, loved Joseph more than all his children and made him "a coat of many colours." The Bible doesn't name the colors. His brothers hated him and "could not speak peaceably unto him," which means they couldn't talk to him in peace (37:4). Joseph dreamed that his brothers' **sheaves**, bundles of grain, bowed down to his sheaf (37:7). Then he dreamed that the sun, the moon and eleven stars made **obeisance**, which means they bowed down, to him (37:9). His brothers hated him even more and **envied** him, which means they were jealous (37:8, 37:11).

The pit. Jacob sent Joseph to see how his brothers were doing with the flocks (37:13–14). When they saw him coming, they **conspired**, made a secret plan, against him (37:18). Reuben said, "Let us not kill him," and told them to put him in a pit instead, so he could bring Joseph back to his father later (37:21–22). They took off Joseph's coat and put him in a pit that was empty, with no water in it (37:23–24). When traders came by on their way to Egypt, Judah said, "Let us sell him" (37:26–27). **Look up Genesis 37:28.** They sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver, and he was taken to Egypt. The brothers brought the coat to their father, and Jacob thought a wild animal had killed Joseph. Jacob mourned for his son many days (37:31–35).

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Potiphar's house. In Egypt, Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard, bought Joseph (39:1). **Look up Genesis 39:2.** "And the LORD was with Joseph." Potiphar saw that the LORD made everything Joseph did go well, and he made Joseph **overseer**, the one in charge, over his whole house (39:3–4). But Potiphar's wife told a lie about Joseph, and Potiphar put him in prison, even though Joseph had done nothing wrong (39:17–20). **Look up Genesis 39:21.** The LORD was with Joseph in prison too, and the keeper of the prison put him in charge of all the prisoners (39:22).

Dreams in prison. Pharaoh's chief butler (who served Pharaoh's cup) and chief baker were put in the same prison, and each had a dream (40:1–5). **Look up Genesis 40:8.** Joseph said, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" **Interpretations** means the meanings of dreams. God showed Joseph what both dreams meant, and they came true just as Joseph said (40:20–22). Joseph asked the butler to remember him, but the butler forgot him for two full years (40:14, 40:23, 41:1).

Pharaoh's dreams. Pharaoh dreamed that seven thin **kine** (cows) ate up seven fat kine, and seven thin ears of corn ate up seven full ears (41:1–7). No one in Egypt could tell him what it meant (41:8). The butler remembered Joseph, and Joseph was brought out of the prison (41:9–14). **Look up Genesis 41:16.** "It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." Joseph explained: seven years of great **plenty**, lots of food, were coming, and then seven years of **famine** (41:29–30). He said to store up food in the good years (41:35–36). Pharaoh said Joseph was a man "in whom the Spirit of God is" (41:38), and set him over all the land of Egypt (41:41). Pharaoh gave him his ring, fine linen clothes and a gold chain (41:42). Joseph was thirty years old (41:46). He gathered **corn**, which means grain, like the sand of the sea, so much that they stopped counting (41:49).

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The brothers come. The famine came, but in Egypt there was bread (41:54). Jacob sent ten brothers to buy corn and kept Benjamin, the youngest, at home (42:3–4). They bowed down to Joseph with their faces to the earth (42:6). **Look up Genesis 42:8.** "Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him." Joseph tested them. He kept Simeon in Egypt and told them to bring Benjamin (42:19–20, 42:24). The brothers said, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother" (42:21), which means, "We really are guilty for what we did to our brother." Joseph turned away and wept (42:24).

The silver cup. When the brothers came back with Benjamin (43:15), Joseph had his silver cup put in Benjamin's sack (44:2). The cup was found there, and Joseph said Benjamin must stay as his servant (44:12, 44:17). But Judah, who once said "Let us sell him," now begged to stay as a servant in Benjamin's place so Benjamin could go home to their father (44:33). The brothers had changed.

"I am Joseph." Look up Genesis 45:4. "I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt." The brothers were **troubled**, very afraid (45:3). **Look up Genesis 45:5.** Joseph said, "Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves... for God did send me before you to preserve life." **Preserve** means save. He kissed all his brothers and wept (45:15), and the whole family came to live in Egypt (46:5–7). Joseph and his father Jacob hugged and wept a good while (46:29).

Forgiven. After Jacob died, the brothers were afraid Joseph would pay them back for the evil they had done. They asked him to forgive them (50:15–17). **Look up Genesis 50:20.** "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." Joseph said, "Fear not," and promised to **nourish**, feed and care for, them and their little ones. He comforted them and spoke kindly to them (50:19–21).

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3. Questions to ask (10 minutes)

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

1. Joseph was a servant, then a prisoner, for something he didn't do. But the Bible says again and again, "the LORD was with Joseph" (39:2, 39:21). Does God being with us mean nothing bad will happen? What does it mean?
2. Joseph could have paid his brothers back when they bowed in front of him. Why do you think he chose to forgive (45:5, 50:19–21)?
3. Judah once said, "Let us sell him" (37:27). Later he offered to stay in Benjamin's place (44:33). What changed?
4. Joseph said, "It is not in me" (41:16). Why did he want Pharaoh to know the answer came from God?
5. Is there someone you need to forgive? What could Genesis 50:20 help you remember?

Recall questions

1. How much silver did the brothers get for Joseph? *(Twenty pieces of silver, Genesis 37:28)*
2. How many years of plenty and how many years of famine were there? *(Seven and seven, 41:29–30)*
3. Whose sack had the silver cup in it? *(Benjamin's, 44:12)*

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

Explain the old words: **ye** means you; **thought evil against me** means planned something bad for me; **meant it unto good** means God planned it for good; **to bring to pass** means to make it happen; **to save much people alive** means to keep many people alive. Say: "Joseph said this to the same brothers who sold him." 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.

5. What this means for us (5 minutes)

Say: "Joseph forgave the brothers who sold him. God wants to forgive us too. 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.

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This week: when someone hurts you, pray for them, forgive them, and do one kind thing for them, like Joseph (Genesis 50:21).

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 37:2: How old was Joseph when he was feeding the flock with his brothers? *(Seventeen)*
2. Genesis 37:17: Where did Joseph find his brothers? *(In Dothan)*
3. Genesis 39:1: What was Potiphar's job? *(An officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard)*
4. Genesis 40:10: How many branches were on the vine in the butler's dream? *(Three)*
5. Genesis 41:42: What did Pharaoh put on Joseph's hand? *(His ring)*
6. Genesis 41:46: How old was Joseph when he stood before Pharaoh? *(Thirty)*
7. Genesis 42:3: How many brothers went to buy corn the first time? *(Ten)*
8. Genesis 45:10: In what land did Joseph tell his family to live? *(The land of Goshen)*

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You that You were with Joseph in the pit, in the prison and in the palace. Help us remember that You are with us too. Help us forgive the people who hurt us and speak kindly to them. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a child asks what lie Potiphar's wife told: this lesson says only that she told a lie about Joseph, and he was put in prison (39:17–20). Read Genesis 39:7–20 yourself before class. Answer simply: she said Joseph had done something bad, and he had not. Joseph had refused to do wrong, saying, "how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (39:9).
If a child asks about the baker's dream: Joseph told him it meant that within three days Pharaoh would put him to death, and it happened as Joseph said (40:18–22). Answer calmly and briefly; don't add detail.
If a child asks why Joseph was rough with his brothers: the Bible says he "spake roughly unto them" (42:7), but it doesn't explain all his reasons. It does show him weeping over them (42:24, 43:30) and forgiving them (45:5, 50:21). Don't add a reason the Bible doesn't give.
Left out on purpose: Genesis 38 (a separate account about Judah) and the goat's blood on the coat (37:31).

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