Preschool–Grade 6

Joseph and His Brothers

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

Main point: Joseph forgave the brothers who sold him, because he trusted that God had been working for good the whole time. Forgiving is a choice we make because God has forgiven us.
Bible passage: Genesis 37–50. Students read Genesis 37:18–28, 41:14–16 and 41:38–41, 45:1–8 and 50:15–21 out loud themselves.
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)* and "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." *Ephesians 4:32 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, a backpack and 5 books, 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 and 39–50, and Ephesians 4:32. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses, or go around the room a few verses each.

1. Opening game: The Heavy Backpack (5–10 minutes)

Ask a volunteer to put on the empty backpack. Read hurts one at a time, and for each one, put a book in the backpack: "A friend told a lie about you." "Your brother broke your favorite thing." "Someone left you out on purpose." "A classmate laughed at you." "Someone took the credit for your work." Ask the volunteer: *How would it feel to carry this all day? All year?* Say: "Joseph had thirteen years of reasons to carry a heavy backpack: he was seventeen when the story starts (Genesis 37:2) and thirty when he stood before Pharaoh (41:46). Let's see what he did with it."

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

Tell the beginning in your own words: Jacob (Israel) loved Joseph more than all his children and made him "a coat of many colours" (37:3). His brothers hated him and could not speak peaceably to him (37:4). Joseph told them two dreams: their sheaves bowed down to his sheaf, and the sun, the moon and eleven stars bowed down to him (37:5–9). They hated him even more and envied him (37:8, 37:11). Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers in the fields (37:13–14).

Read out loud: Genesis 37:18–28. Old words in this passage:

- **afar off** (37:18): far away; **conspired against him to slay him** (37:18): made a secret plan to kill him
- **this dreamer cometh** (37:19): here comes the dreamer; **some evil beast hath devoured him** (37:20): a wild animal ate him
- **delivered him out of their hands** (37:21): saved him from them; **shed no blood** (37:22): don't kill him
- **stript** (37:23): pulled off; **spicery and balm and myrrh** (37:25): spices and sweet-smelling oils
- **what profit is it** (37:26): what good would it do us; **content** (37:27): they agreed

Free to print & copy for church, classroom & home · Please don't resell or re-post

Tell the middle part in your own words: The brothers took the coat home, and Jacob thought a wild animal had killed Joseph and mourned many days (37:31–35). In Egypt, Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's guard, bought Joseph (39:1). "The LORD was with Joseph" (39:2), and Potiphar put him over his whole house (39:4). Potiphar's wife told a lie about Joseph, and he was put in prison for something he had not done (39:17–20). "But the LORD was with Joseph" there too (39:21), and he was put in charge of the prisoners (39:22). He told Pharaoh's butler and baker the meaning of their dreams, saying, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" (40:8). It happened as he said, but the butler forgot him for two full years (40:20–23, 41:1). Then Pharaoh dreamed of seven fat and seven thin kine (cows) and seven full and seven thin ears of corn, and no one could explain it (41:1–8). The butler remembered Joseph (41:9–13).

Read out loud: Genesis 41:14–16 and 41:38–41. Old words in this passage:

- **hastily out of the dungeon** (41:14): quickly out of the prison; **raiment** (41:14): clothes
- **it is not in me** (41:16): I can't do it by myself; **an answer of peace** (41:16): an answer for Pharaoh's good
- **forasmuch as** (41:39): because; **discreet** (41:39): careful and wise
- **according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled** (41:40): everyone will do what you say

Tell the next part in your own words: God showed Joseph that seven years of plenty would come, then seven years of famine (41:29–30). Joseph, now thirty (41:46), stored up corn like the sand of the sea (41:49). In the famine, ten brothers came to buy corn and bowed before him; he knew them, but they didn't know him (42:3–8). He tested them, kept Simeon, and heard them say, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother" (42:21, 42:24). When they came back with Benjamin, his silver cup was found in Benjamin's sack, and Judah offered to stay as a servant in Benjamin's place (44:2, 44:12, 44:33).

Read out loud: Genesis 45:1–8. Old words in this passage:

- **refrain himself** (45:1): hold back his tears; **troubled at his presence** (45:3): terrified to be in front of him
- **be not grieved** (45:5): don't be sad; **preserve life** (45:5): save lives; **earing** (45:6): plowing
- **to preserve you a posterity in the earth** (45:7): to keep your family line alive; **deliverance** (45:7): rescue

Free to print & copy for church, classroom & home · Please don't resell or re-post

Tell the next part in your own words: Joseph wept on Benjamin's neck and kissed all his brothers (45:14–15). Jacob and all his family moved to Egypt, and Joseph wept on his father's neck a good while (46:5–7, 46:29). Jacob lived in Egypt, and later he died there (49:33).

Read out loud: Genesis 50:15–21. Old words in this passage:

- **peradventure** (50:15): maybe; **requite us all the evil** (50:15): pay us back for all the evil
- **trespass** (50:17): wrong, sin; **am I in the place of God?** (50:19): is it my place to judge you? That belongs to God.
- **meant it unto good** (50:20): planned it for good; **to bring to pass** (50:20): to make it happen
- **nourish** (50:21): feed and take care of; **spake kindly unto them** (50:21): spoke kindly to them

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Joseph's brothers hated him because their father loved him more and because of his dreams (37:4, 37:8). Where do envy and jealousy lead in this story? Where can they lead us?
2. The Bible says "the LORD was with Joseph" while he was a servant and while he was in prison (39:2, 39:21). What does that tell you about where God is when things go wrong?
3. Joseph told Pharaoh, "It is not in me" (41:16). How did Joseph handle having power over the brothers who hurt him?
4. Joseph said, "Am I in the place of God?" (50:19). What does that teach about paying people back?
5. Joseph said, "Ye thought evil against me." He didn't pretend the wrong was small (50:20). Is forgiving the same as saying "it was no big deal"? Why or why not?
6. Ephesians 4:32 says to forgive "even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." How does God's forgiveness change the way we forgive?

4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words: in Genesis 50:20, **ye** means you, **thought evil against me** means planned harm for me, **meant it unto good** means God planned it for good, and **to save much people alive** means to keep many people alive. In Ephesians 4:32, **tenderhearted** means caring and gentle, and **for Christ's sake** means because of what Jesus did.
Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Genesis 50:20 this week; keep working on Ephesians 4:32 next week too.

Free to print & copy for church, classroom & home · Please don't resell or re-post

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

Say: "Joseph's brothers could not undo what they had done. They needed forgiveness, and so do we. 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. Who is one person I need to forgive? (Don't write their name if you don't want to.) What would it look like to speak kindly to them, like Joseph did (Genesis 50:21)?
2. Think of a hard time in your life. Where can you see that God was with you, like He was with Joseph (39:2, 39:21)?
3. Write a short prayer thanking God for His forgiveness and asking Him to help you forgive (Ephesians 4:32).
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: take one thing out of your "backpack." Forgive one person, pray for them, and do something kind for them.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You that You were with Joseph in every hard place, and that You are with us. Thank You for forgiving us. Help us forgive the people who have hurt us, even when it's hard, and help us trust that You can bring good out of it. In Jesus' name, amen."

Free to print & copy for church, classroom & home · Please don't resell or re-post

Notes for the teacher

If a student asks what lie Potiphar's wife told: this lesson says only that she told a lie about Joseph, and he was put in prison (Genesis 39:17–20). Read Genesis 39:7–20 yourself before class. Answer honestly and briefly: she wanted Joseph to do wrong, he refused and ran away, and then she falsely accused him. Point to Joseph's answer: "how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (39:9). Keep it at that.

If a student asks about the baker: Joseph told the chief baker that within three days Pharaoh would hang him, and Pharaoh hanged him on his birthday, as Joseph had said (40:18–22). Answer calmly and don't add detail.

If a student asks why Joseph tested his brothers: the Bible says he "made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly" (42:7), but it doesn't explain all his reasons. Let students notice what it does show: he wept over them (42:24, 43:30), the brothers admitted their guilt (42:21), and Judah offered himself for Benjamin (44:33). Don't add a reason the Bible doesn't give.

If a student asks whether forgiving means trusting someone who is still dangerous: forgiving means letting go of paying them back and leaving that to God (50:19). Tell a parent, pastor or teacher if someone is hurting you.

Left out on purpose: Genesis 38 (a separate account about Judah), the goat's blood on the coat (37:31), Jacob's blessings in Genesis 48–49 and the burial of Jacob (50:1–14).

Free to print & copy for church, classroom & home · Please don't resell or re-post