



Joseph: It wasn't all dreams come true

Outline Plan



Aim/s - select from or choose your own

- To show the importance of forgiveness
- To show that forgiving people can be a struggle and can take time.

Key Bible verse

You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good... Genesis 50:20

Bible references

Genesis 37-50, excluding 38; 48; 49

Luke 11:4 – forgive us as we forgive others

Psalm 103:8-12 - as far as the east is from the west ...

Romans 8:28 – God works everything for good ...

Alternative stories on forgiveness:

1 Samuel 18-31 - The story of David and Saul

Luke 7:37-50 - The parable of the two debtors

Matthew 18:21-35 - The parable of the unforgiving servant

Starter Activities

Go, go, go Joseph!

Have a talent contest for making the best 'coat' out of scrap materials, paper etc.

Aim: general fun relating to the story

Limbo dancing

The person who can lean back the lowest under a thin pole is the winner.

Aim: Joseph had to lower himself and be humble before he was fit to rule.

Chat: Ask them to -

- Think of a character, real or fictional who has to become a servant despite being talented or from a powerful family etc. The BBC series 'Merlin' would be one example.
- OR think of someone who rises from being a servant to being someone with status e.g. Cinderella, Maid in Manhattan, Lord Alan Sugar.

'Get your own back' game

We played a game based on the TV show 'Deal or No Deal' called 'Forgive or No Forgive'.

Alternatively, you could play a game called 'Get your own back'. Some groups would enjoy using their imaginations to think of suggestions for 'getting your own back' for the situations you make. See 'Leaders' Notes +Activity Ideas' page 5 for details on this and other interactive ideas.

Main story - Leaders Notes - Talk/discussion on Joseph

Storyboarding with large groups

You could split them into small groups and give each one a scene from Joseph's life. They could plan a way to present that to the group using a drama, song or whatever they like.

Talk through Joseph's life highlighting areas where he was wronged. Ask if these were situations that were easy to forgive or hard to forgive.

The following notes are intended to help leaders think through how they want to approach this topic. They could be used as a basis for some group discussion or given out for the group to use as Bible readings for the week.

Scene 1 – At home with the Jacobson's. Genesis 37:1-11

- Was Joseph born into a happy home or a dysfunctional one?

The 'richly ornamented robe' was not only a sign that Joseph was Jacob's favourite son, but that he regarded him as his heir (due to his being Rachel's son, as he had been tricked into marrying Leah first). He's also gifted and good-looking. Plus he's 17 and he's a guy! How do you think he's going to handle this? Of course he thinks the universe revolves around him! Would you have done any better? (Romans 12:3)

- Was it Joseph's fault that he was the favourite?
- Has anyone ever disliked you in similar circumstances?
- Why do you think God gave him dreams that only added to his sense of self-importance?

Scene 2 – Out with the lads! Genesis 37:12-36

Hatred is a prequel to murder. If you hate someone enough you can wish them dead or at least out of your life. How much hatred does it take to actually murder someone? How much did Joseph's brothers hate him? How many of them tried to 'save' him? Do you think they all secretly wanted to hold back or was male peer group pressure pushing them on?

- Is there anyone you have hated enough to wish them out of your life forever? Have you ever been on the receiving end of such treatment? How can we deal with that?
- How do you handle pressure to do the wrong thing when you're out with the crowd?

Scene 3 – An offer you can't refuse? Potiphar's wife ruins everything! Genesis 39

Becoming a slave brought a significant change of lifestyle for Joseph, but to his credit he had made the most of it. He found a niche running Potiphar's household that gave him a sense of value & achievement. Not only that, but his boss's wife was a nymph who fancied him – and her bedroom door was wide open! He could so easily have slept with her but he didn't & then he was punished for doing the right thing!

- Do you think that Potiphar entirely believed the story?
- Who would it have been harder to forgive – Potiphar or his wife?
- Does it sometimes seem that it doesn't pay to be a Christian?
- Have you ever been accused of something you haven't done?
- How does it feel?
- How have you come to terms with it?

Scene 4 – Dream on baby! Genesis 40-41

Were the dreams of the butler, baker & pharaoh difficult to interpret or do they sound fairly obvious?

- So what's the x factor here? Why did Joseph need God's help to explain them?

He needed boldness, faith, confidence – Joseph had to be right over this. Pharaoh was supposed to be a god and controlling the Nile was part of his job! If the harvest failed, he was not doing his job properly, so he was pretty scared & his advisers were scared. Joseph's prophetic gift meant that he had a sense that God was speaking through him & he wasn't just guessing or making it up. But if he got it wrong, it could cost him his life!

- If God gives us a message for someone, do we have to be certain we are right or is it ok to say, "I may have got this wrong but does xxx mean anything to you?"
- Is God encouraging you to do this at times?

Scene 5 – Crunch time – face to face with your worst nightmare! Genesis 42-45

Money, sex & power – Joseph had it all (+ 2 sons by now).

Over 20 years have passed, and everyone has changed a bit, but there was no mistaking that rabble when they wandered in, travel weary, hoping to buy grain. Joseph's long-lost brothers!

- How do you think Joseph felt when he saw them?
- What dilemma he is faced with?
- What does he have to gain from forgiving them?
- He alternates between harshness & kindness. Why?
- What helps him come to terms with this dilemma?
- Joseph & his brothers were all very different now. What had brought about these changes?

➤ Where is the real enemy – other people or our own wrong attitudes that eat away inside us?

Summary of the 'play out' between Joseph & his brothers

- 1st response: Joseph falsely accuses them of spying (42:9-12) & locks them all up for 3 days (42:17)
- Their guilty conscience about Joseph is apparent (21-24). Joseph weeps secretly
- Sells them food but takes Simeon as hostage (24); returns their money (25)
- About a year later, they return with Ben & are invited to dinner at Joseph's house (43:16). Joseph weeps at seeing Ben. VIP treatment for Ben
- Hides silver cup in Ben's sack & falsely accuses him. Judah offers himself as a slave in place of Ben (44:33-34). Joseph breaks down & initiates reconciliation.

Forgiving his brothers could not have been easy for Joseph. There is a battle going on here. He gradually softens and God does not rush him over this. The turning point comes when Judah offers his own life to Joseph as a slave in place of his brother Benjamin, when on this occasion he has done nothing wrong. Joseph finally breaks down and is able to forgive his brothers. Many years later, Judah's descendant, Jesus also offered his own life in place of his brothers and this can help us to forgive other people when they wrong us.

Key verse

Genesis 50:20 - You intended to harm me, but God **intended it all for good...** compare with Romans 8:28

Activities – select details in leaders' notes

- Forgiveness Quotes collage
- Make a Coat of Forgiveness
- Forgiveness - IS / IS NOT
- Activity – newspaper or biography
- Look at some modern / contemporary situations e.g. Corrie ten Boom, a newspaper report or someone known to the group – a personal story would be brilliant.

Discussion groups - suggestions for questions

- What is the importance of forgiveness?
- What types of things are easy / difficult to forgive?
- Is it easier to forgive someone we love or someone with whom we don't have a meaningful relationship?
- Who is affected the most if we don't forgive?
- How does it feel to be forgiven?
- How does it feel to hold a grudge?
- Is there anything that helps you when you're struggling to forgive someone?

Reflection/Worship/Prayer time – suggestions

1. Write down any situation where you need to forgive someone. (If you can't think of anything, ask God to remind you or pray for someone you know who is struggling with this.)
2. If there are painful memories, ask God to heal that & to help you to forgive them.
3. Pray for anyone who has hurt you. They struggle with life too. It may have been a misunderstanding.
4. Commit yourself to continue to pray for them. It is much harder to hold a grudge against someone we are praying for.
5. If you still have a problem, repeat steps 2-4 at regular intervals and read more on this.
6. Ask God to show you whether you maybe sometimes hurt other people and how to avoid that.

Pray for anyone in the group who is battling with this problem. Pray for healing for them and blessing on the other person.

The ability to go and ask someone for forgiveness is also very important. Everyone expects that someone else will come and say "Please, forgive me", but it's much harder to go and ask someone "Can you please forgive me?" Saying 'sorry' can mean so much to people.

Extra / Challenge for the week

- Read the story – Genesis 37-50, skipping 38, 48-49. It doesn't take long really!
- Ask God to teach you something personally through the story.
- How much of the life of Jesus can you find hidden in the life of Joseph?

Credits: Writers Brenda Lord, Ian Mullens, Noema Brádňanská; Image: Creative Innovation © freshidea -Fotolia.com
This was part of an overview of the Old Testament series.