Joseph Saves His Family



Scripture Reference: Genesis 41:53-47:12

Suggested Theme: God's forgiveness leads us to be close to Him. We should forgive others and try to make things right.

Memory Verse: **"**Be kind and loving to each other. Forgive each other just as God forgave you in Christ." Ephesians 4:32, ICB

Story Overview:

Egypt and the regions near it experienced a seven-year famine. When Joseph's brothers travelled to Egypt to obtain grain, Joseph did not reveal his identity until he saw that they were sorry for what they had done to him in the past. Joseph revealed his identity and forgave them for what they had done. After this, Joseph invited his father, Israel, to move the entire family to Egypt. Pharaoh welcomed Joseph's family and gave them the land of Goshen as a place in which to live.

Background Study:

(Genesis 41:53-57) Egypt and the surrounding regions suffered horrible famine, but because Joseph had correctly interpreted God's warnings, Egypt had properly prepared for the famine by storing grain.

(Genesis 42:1-38) The names "Jacob" and "Israel" are used interchangeably in these Scriptures, but both refer to Joseph's father. Israel sent all of his sons to Egypt to get grain. Just as he used to do to his son, Joseph, Israel kept his youngest son, Benjamin, home.

About twenty-two years had passed since the brothers sold Joseph to the slave traders. Joseph now spoke the Egyptian language and dressed and looked much like other Egyptians. It isn't surprising that Joseph's brothers didn't recognize Joseph when they saw him. On seeing him, they bowed to him in what was actually a fulfilment of the dreams Joseph used to tell them about (Genesis 37:5-9).



Joseph began questioning them as if they were spies. He was able to find out that his father and younger brother were still alive. Joseph's brother, Simeon, was kept in Egypt while the other brothers returned home with grain. He told them to come back with Benjamin or not come back at all.

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Joseph organised that his servants would plant the silver that the brothers had used to pay for the grain to be planted in their bags. When they discovered it on their journey home, the brothers knew they appeared guilty of theft. On their return, Israel was devastated that Simeon was also now lost to him.

(Genesis 43:1-44:34) As time went by, the famine became worse. Israel knew he would have to send his sons (including Benjamin) to Egypt to get more grain. He sent them with extra gifts and more silver, hoping to appease the man in charge of the grain.

Joseph's behaviour had his brothers confused, to say the least. One moment he was angry, and the next, he was inviting them to his home for dinner. All of this was Joseph's way of finding out more information and testing to see if they had changed from how they were when they sold him all those years ago.

Again, Joseph arranged for silver to be placed in their bags as they left Egypt. His favourite silver cup was planted in Benjamin's bag. Later, the silver cup was discovered. Knowing Benjamin could be enslaved or killed for this, Judah offered his own life in place of Benjamin's.

(Genesis 45) Joseph saw evidence in his brothers' eyes that God had worked in their hearts to bring repentance. He could no longer go on with the charade. He revealed himself with much weeping. When Joseph revealed who he was, his brothers must have been terrified. The one they had sold into slavery now had the power of life and death over them! Did Joseph hold a grudge? Would he pay them back? Human nature would have prodded Joseph to get even with his brothers. But his attitude was one of godly humility and understanding. In fulfilment of the dreams of his youth, Joseph knew God was using him to save his family. He said to his brothers:

> "So God sent me here ahead of you. This was to make sure you have some descendants left on earth. And it was to keep you alive in an amazing way. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. God has made me the highest officer of the king of Egypt. I am in charge of his palace. I am the master of all the land of Egypt." Genesis 45:7-8, ICB

(Genesis 46:1-47:12) Joseph's brothers returned to Canaan and told their father the news of finding Joseph. The whole family moved to Egypt. Israel's family numbered seventy people at that time, including Joseph and his sons.

Joseph knew that God had been at work to preserve His people. Instead of perishing in the famine, Jacob and his family were welcomed into Egypt. Joseph arranged a meeting with the Pharaoh. He told them that they could live in the nearby land of Goshen. During the famine, the Israelites lived in relative comfort in Egypt. Jacob lived there for seventeen years until his death at the age of 147 (Genesis 47:28). Joseph had repaid evil with good, and God was pleased.

A note about what will happen in the years following this story:

Israel lived in Egypt for seventeen years before his death. In the last chapters of Genesis, Israel blessed his sons and claimed Joseph's sons as his own. This helps explain how Ephraim and Manasseh are later named among the tribes of Israel. After Israel's death, his family continued to multiply and flourish. Years later, when the book of Exodus opens, we will find the Israelites had increased greatly. The Pharaoh of Exodus had made the Israelites slaves, and by the time Moses was born, the story of Joseph saving Egypt had become a dim memory to many.

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Way to Introduce the Story:

“Has anyone ever been to a family reunion? That’s when everyone in a family gets together to visit with each other. Sometimes you see aunts and uncles and cousins that you haven’t seen in a long time. In today’s lesson, we are going to find out how Joseph had a family reunion with his family that he had not seen in twenty-two years. Let’s see who Joseph’s family is:” Draw a family tree from Abraham down to Joseph and his brothers. Make boxes and leave the squares blank so the children can fill them in.

The Story:

There was a famine in the land. A famine is a time when no plants grow, and people do not have enough food to eat.

At that time, there was only one place where there was plenty of food to eat. That place was Egypt. Egypt had enough food because Joseph was in charge. He had correctly interpreted a dream for the Pharaoh, so he knew Egypt had to store grain in the years before the famine had come. Joseph told everyone to save some of the grain when there was extra. Then, when the famine came, Egypt had enough food stored.

Joseph was very wealthy and had a family. He was second in command only to the Pharaoh. But it had not always been this way for Joseph. Many years before, he was living in Canaan with his father and brothers. His brothers had been so angry with him that they sold him as a slave. Joseph’s father did not know Joseph had been sold as a slave. He thought Joseph was dead.

But now Joseph’s brothers and father were in trouble. Because of the famine, they did not have enough food. Joseph’s father, Israel, sent his ten oldest sons to Egypt to buy grain. Only his youngest son, Benjamin, stayed home with Israel.

The brothers did not recognise Joseph when they saw him, but he knew who they were. Since the Pharaoh had put Joseph in charge of the grain, his brothers had to ask him for it. He was a very important man, so they all bowed before him to ask for the grain. This brought back many memories for Joseph. Years ago, when he was just a boy, he told them about his dreams. “In my dream we were all sheaves of grain. All of you bowed down to me.”

“We are older than you!” they had replied, “We will never bow down to you!” That was then, but look at them now! All of his brothers were bowing down to him to ask for grain. Joseph was glad to see his brothers, but he wanted to know if they still hated him like they used to and if they were sorry for what they had done to him.

Joseph did not tell them who he was. He told them he would give them grain if they brought Benjamin back with them the next time. He said that Simeon would stay with him until they came back. He told them not to come back unless they brought Benjamin. The brothers took their bags of grain and went back home.

On their way home, the brothers looked in their bags of grain and were shocked to find not only the grain but also their silver! They were afraid. That silver was what they had paid the Egyptians for the grain. What if the Egyptians thought they had stolen the silver? (They did not know Joseph had put the money in the bags to test them.)

As time went by, the grain was all used up, and Israel and his family became hungry again. Israel did not want the brothers to take his youngest son, Benjamin, to Egypt, but he knew that if Benjamin didn’t go, the official in charge of the grain would not give them any. Benjamin said goodbye to his father and went with his brothers.

Joseph was so happy to see his brother Benjamin! But he still did not tell the brothers who he was. They still thought he was just an important Egyptian. They had no idea this was their brother, Joseph. The brothers tried to give the money back from last time, but Joseph’s servants would not take it. The brothers were very

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confused.

Joseph held a large feast for all of his brothers and gave Benjamin five times as much food as everyone else. Joseph and Benjamin had the same mother, so Joseph felt connected and affectionate toward him. He wanted to show love to Benjamin, but he was not yet ready to tell his brothers who he really was. He had to ensure they understood what they had done to him was wrong.

This time, when the brothers left to go back home, Joseph tested them again. Joseph secretly told his workers to put all their payment money into the bags of grain they were taking home to Israel. He also told them to put his own expensive silver cup in Benjamin's bag. Then Joseph sent his brothers on their way home.

Joseph waited a little while, and then he sent his officials after his brothers. When the officials found the money and cup, they brought all of the brothers back to Joseph. Joseph told them that it looked as if Benjamin had stolen his cup. Benjamin would have to stay and be a slave in Egypt.

Joseph's brother, Judah, begged him not to keep Benjamin. "It will make my father so sad! First, my father's favourite son, Joseph, was taken away from him. Now he will die if we tell him that his son, Benjamin, is gone."

Joseph broke down when he heard about his father and how sorry his brothers were for hurting him. He saw that they really loved their father. Joseph said, "Don't you understand . . . I am Joseph!"

What a shock! Joseph's brothers were so happy to see their brother again. They were very sorry that they had been so mean to him before. Joseph forgave his brothers. Even though they had been mean to him when he was younger, he would not stay angry with them. He would not hold a grudge.

Joseph invited all his brothers to live in Egypt, where there was plenty of food. So the brothers went back to Canaan and told their father, Israel, the good news. Joseph is still alive!

Israel and all of his family moved to Egypt to be with Joseph. There were seventy people in Israel's family. Even the Pharaoh was happy for Joseph. He met Joseph's father and agreed that he and his family should live in the land of Goshen in Egypt.

Joseph forgave his brothers and always took care of his family. Even though there was a famine, Joseph's father and brothers were all safe in Egypt.

If someone did something bad to you, would you keep being mad at them and hold a grudge? Or would you forgive them?

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- Why did Joseph's brothers come to Egypt? (To buy grain during the famine)
- Why did Joseph treat his brothers like they were spies? (So he could learn more about his family and how they were doing without explaining that he was Joseph, their brother)
- Who did Joseph say his brothers must bring back the next time they came for grain? (Benjamin)
- In whose sack of grain did the officials find Joseph's missing silver cup? (Benjamin's)
- Did Joseph forgive his brothers for what they did to him? (Yes)
- Why did Israel and his entire family move to Egypt? (So they would have plenty of food during the famine)
- How did Joseph's dream about the sheaves of grain bowing down to him come true?
- Why do you think God let Joseph become a slave in Egypt instead of rescuing him from that situation?
- What do you learn about people from this story?

Reflection:

- What do you think Joseph looked like in this story?
- What is something you wonder about in this story?
- How do you think Joseph's brothers felt when he treated them like spies? What about when Joseph told them he was their brother?
- How do you think Joseph felt when he got to see his brothers again for the first time in over 20 years? What about when he saw his father, Israel, again in Egypt?
- Have you ever been forgiven of something sinful you did or said?
- Have you ever forgiven someone?
- What question do you have for God about this story?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- I've Got Peace Like a River Song
- Sons of Jacob Song

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- Sing songs about love and forgiveness out of the church songbook.
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Continue to review and learn the names of Jacob's 12 sons.
- Read and discuss Romans 12:17-19
- Review the story using paper doll figures.
- Look up Egypt and Palestine (Cana) on a map and measure how far Joseph's family had to travel.
- Read about Egyptian dress and make-up and dress up one or more of the children.
- Use a hand puppet and tell the story from different points of view (Joseph, Israel, Benjamin, Simeon, Judah). Pick one scene in the story and act it out (discovering the silver cup, Joseph revealing himself, etc.)

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Provide gingerbread men or cookies cut outs in the shape of people. Allow the children to decorate these and then use them to act out the story. At a minimum, have twelve cookies to depict the twelve brothers, but you may wish to add Jacob and the Pharaoah. Simple round cookies could be used instead and just the faces decorated.
- The same concept can be used by providing paper cutouts of people. Markers, buttons or fabric could be used to decorate them.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page with text (Ministry Spark)
- Colouring page Joseph Tests His Brothers and worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page Joseph Reveals Himself to His Brothers and worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)

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- Colouring page Jacob Moves to Egypt and worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)

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Date
2026/11/09

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