

the
Jesus 
Storybook
Bible
Curriculum

The forgiving prince

Joseph and his brothers, from Genesis 37–50

☉ Please see the curriculum Introduction .pdf for more guidance on praying with your group and on Scripture memory.

☉ The total allotted time per lesson is 45 minutes. This is the minimum amount of time it would take to complete the whole lesson. The time can easily be extended to increase the lesson to as much as 1.5 hours. If you have more than the allocated 45 minutes, please use the extra time to extend the time for activities, to learn the memory verse, and to pray.

☉ The “Notes for Teachers on the Text” section is intended as explanation of the Bible text and advance preparation for you only; it is not expressed in terms or language the children could understand.

The Jesus Storybook Bible Curriculum
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Recap of the Previous Story

3 min. 

☉ Welcome the children and ask them to sit in a circle.

☉ Briefly recap the main points of the previous stories: “We have been learning about Abraham and his family. God promised Abraham that he would give him a very big family and that God would rescue his people though Abraham’s family. God kept his promise to Abraham and he had a son, Isaac. Last time we read about one of Isaac’s sons, Jacob, who married Rachel and Leah. And we learned that God can bring good out of things that seem to us very bad. We memorized a verse about that.”

☉ Ask them to recite together the verse they learned at home about the story. “Genesis 50:20 — ‘You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.’”

☉ To lead into the theme of today’s story, say: “The words we just recited were spoken by Joseph. Joseph was one of the sons of Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons altogether. Abraham’s family was starting to get very big, just as God had promised.”

Activity Introducing the Story

10 min. 

Aim: To expend energy and become familiar with the names of the family.

Materials: 12 large cards, each with the name of one of the 12 sons written/printed on it (see Genesis 35:23–26); crayons; copies of the handout (the last page of this document).

1. Say: “On these cards are the names of Jacob’s 12 sons.”
2. Pass the first card around the circle. Ask each child to stand up and call out the name as the card gets to them, then sit down again. The last child in the circle keeps the card. Pass around the second card, again asking each child to stand and call out the name as the card gets to them. The last child in the circle who does not already have a card keeps the card.
3. Pass around the rest of cards in the same manner until every card is being held by a child. Help the children if they are struggling to read a name. (If you have less than 12 children, then ask the teachers to hold cards or ask some of the children to hold more than one card.)
4. Have the children hold up the cards, one at a time, and say the name together. Get faster and faster.
5. Do this one last time, but this time ask them to take the card to the center of the circle and leave it there.

6. Put the cards away and give each child a copy of the handout and a crayon. Ask them to write their name on the top of the handout.

7. Say: “What you see on your paper is called a family tree. It is a diagram that looks a bit like a tree that shows Abraham’s family. Starting at the top, we have Abraham, and Abraham married who? Say it together. That’s right, Sarah. Abraham and Sarah had a son whom Abraham loved. His name was? Say it together. That’s right, Isaac. Isaac married Rebekah and they had two sons, Esau and who? That’s right, Jacob. Jacob married two sisters named? That’s right, Rachel and Leah.”

8. Say: “We are now at the bottom of the diagram. Jacob had 12 sons. But look at their names. Some of the vowels — the A, E, I, O, and U’s — are missing. Fill in the missing vowels of their names as quickly as you can. When you finish, raise your hand and I will collect your paper. Ready? Go!”

9. You may want to write the five vowels on a blackboard to help them. Check their work as you collect back the handouts.

10. Say: “Nicely done, everyone. Now that we know their names, let’s find out what happened to this family.”

For larger groups: You may want to divide the group into smaller circles, each with a teacher so that every child gets a card. Each teacher can then help their circle accurately fill out the family tree.

Join the children in the circle and announce the title of the story. Read aloud pages 76–83 from *The Jesus Storybook Bible* or listen to CD1 track 9.

Notes for Teachers on the Text

The story of Joseph stretches from chapter 37 through 50 of the book of Genesis. One of the main points of the story is that no one can by sin or disobedience thwart God's saving purposes. Even the enemies of God can only help establish his plans. This was the case with Jesus: when world rulers, religious rulers, and Satan sought to destroy him, they only lifted him up. This was the case with Joseph. If he hadn't been betrayed, his family would not have been saved physically (from famine) or spiritually (from their besetting sins).

Jacob's family was to be the bearer of the true faith and the messianic seed. But, spiritually speaking, it was heading toward shipwreck because of sin. Jacob's emotional rejection of Leah and idolization of Rachel had sown terrible discord in the lives of their children. Jacob built his life around Rachel's child—Joseph—and was cold and uncaring to his other children.

As a result, Joseph was on his way to becoming cruel, shallow, and arrogant, while his brothers were embittered and hateful. But God intervened. God used the brothers' own venomous intentions in order to have Joseph sold into slavery in Egypt and, ultimately, for Joseph to become the instrument of his brothers' physical and spiritual regeneration. Joseph becomes the savior of those who rejected him.

Joseph says to his brothers in Genesis 45:4–7: "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.... God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance."

Notice how Joseph twice says "you sold me" and twice says "God sent me." He sets these against one another. Which is it? Is Joseph in Egypt because they sold him or because God sent him? The answer is in Genesis 50:20 where Joseph says, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good."

This is a very rich and sophisticated view of how God relates to historical events. On the one hand, Joseph does not say, "You didn't do anything wrong; you couldn't help it; God made you do it." If that were the case, and they had only been God's puppets, then they would not have actually sinned and could not be held accountable for their evil deeds. On the other hand, Joseph does not say, "You did it; God only allowed it; then he had to fix things." If that were the case, and God had been only a bystander, he would not be the sovereign Lord who ordains, plans, and controls all things. Instead, Joseph says that the brothers most definitely chose to betray him, and they are responsible for that action. Yet, God all along arranged to work through their sin to further his good purposes.

Joseph's understanding of human history is remarkably like that of Peter's in Acts 2:23 and Acts 4:27–28. In the former Peter says, "[Jesus] was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." Notice that the betrayal of Jesus (like the betrayal of Joseph) was completely, actively planned and accomplished by God. It had to happen—it was set. Yet the people who betrayed Jesus were nonetheless "wicked." This is neither "fatalism," where God determines all things in spite of our choices; nor is it "humanism," where we determine all things through our choices. It is a nuanced biblical view, which says that God determines all things through our choices.

Understanding the Story

15 min. 

Aim: To understand that God is in control of everything.

Materials: Crayons; the handouts from the first activity.

1. At the end of the story, say: “Isn’t that a wonderful story; so much happened to this family and especially to Joseph. I’m going to say some things about the story. Some of the things I say will be true and some will not be true. I will then say ‘Go!’ If what I say is true, stand up and raise both your hands in the air. If what I say is not true, then curl up into a ball. Ready?”

2. Read aloud the statements in the following table, saying “Go!” after each one. When the children have either stood up or curled up, use the questions/comments to check understanding. After commenting, ask them to sit down or uncurl. Say “Ready?” and announce the next statement.

STATEMENT	ANSWER	QUESTIONS/COMMENTS
Joseph was his father’s favorite son.	TRUE	Yes, it is true. You should be standing up with your hands in the air.
Jacob gave Joseph a new rainbow hat.	NOT TRUE	Not true, you should be curled up. What did Jacob give Joseph? Say it together. Yes, a new rainbow robe.
Joseph dreamed that he was the greatest and that his brothers all bowed down before him.	TRUE	How did this make his brothers feel? Raise your hand if you think the brothers wanted to kill Joseph and end his dreams. Good, hands down.
Joseph’s brothers hated him so much that one day they tickled and tickled him.	NOT TRUE	They didn’t tickle him — they sold him as a slave.
Joseph’s brothers sold him for 20 pieces of chocolate.	NOT TRUE	What did Joseph’s brothers sell him for? Raise your hand if it was 20 pieces of gold. Raise your hand if it was 20 pieces of silver. Correct, hands down.
The brothers told their father that Joseph had run away. *	NOT TRUE	What was the lie the brothers told their father? Yes, they said Joseph was dead.
Joseph ended up in Egypt.	TRUE	True, Joseph ended up a slave in Egypt.
Joseph was put in jail in Egypt even though he had done nothing wrong. *	TRUE	It is true.
God was not with Joseph when he was in jail. *	NOT TRUE	It’s not true. God was always with Joseph.
Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, had a scary dream about thin chickens eating fat chickens. *	NOT TRUE	What did the king of Egypt dream about? Raise your hand if it was camels? Raise your hand if it was cows. Correct, hands down.

STATEMENT	ANSWER	QUESTIONS/COMMENTS
Joseph explained to the king that his dream meant there would be a famine.	TRUE	What does famine mean? Correct, it means there would not be enough food.
Because Joseph could explain his dreams, Pharaoh made Joseph a ruler, like a prince.	TRUE	It is true.
Joseph's brothers ran out of food, so they went to Egypt to buy food.	NOT TRUE	What did they run out of? Yes, it was food. The food had run out, and the family was going to starve.
At first, the brothers didn't know who Joseph was.	TRUE	When the brothers saw Joseph, they bowed down before him. But it was their brother Joseph! Joseph's dream had come true.
The brothers weren't too worried because they knew that Joseph would forgive them.	NOT TRUE	Not true. They thought Joseph would punish them for what they had done to him.
Joseph forgave his brothers; he rescued them and brought them to live in Egypt.	TRUE	True, Joseph loved them even though they had hated him and wanted him dead.
Joseph knew that behind all the bad things that had happened to him, God was doing something good. Everything happened just as God planned.	TRUE	Yes, it is true. The brothers intended bad things for Joseph, but God intended everything that happened to Joseph — even the bad things — for good. God is in complete control.

Note: * Indicates statements to skip if you are running out of time.

3. At the end of the activity, ask: "What bad things happened to Joseph in this story?"
4. Get answers; e.g., his brothers sold him; he became a slave; he had to live in Egypt, far away from his home and his father; he was put in jail even though he had done nothing wrong; etc.
5. Say: "But even though his brothers had made all these bad things happen, Joseph knew that God intended everything that happened to him — even the bad things — for good. God is always in control."
6. Give each child their copy of the handout from earlier and a crayon. Ask: "Can you think of another really bad thing in the Bible that people made happen, but God intended it for good? Yes, the cross."
7. Say: "Let me read you the end of the story again: 'Like Joseph, Jesus would leave his home and his Father. Like Joseph, Jesus' brothers would hate him and want him dead. Like Joseph, Jesus would be sold for pieces of silver. Like Joseph, Jesus would be punished even though he had done nothing wrong.' And, like Joseph, Jesus would forgive the people who had treated him badly."

For larger groups: You may want to divide the group into smaller circles, each with a teacher. Each teacher can then work with their circle on understanding what is true and not true.

Drawing the Story to a Close

1 min. 

Say: “Even though people intended bad things to happen to Joseph and Jesus — and bad things did happen — God intended good things to happen — and good things did happen. God is always in control.”

Say: “Joseph was left for dead by his brothers, but later Joseph rescued them—as God had planned. Jesus was killed by those he came to save, but his death provided a rescue for them—as God had planned.”

Jesus in the Story

2 min. 

Ask: “What did we discover about Jesus from today’s story?”

Get a few children to share their answers aloud, commenting appropriately; then ask everyone to write an answer in the space on their handout.

Praying about the Story

5 min. 

Pray aloud, thanking God that even though people intend bad things, he intends things for good. Thank him that because of Jesus you and the children can be forgiven, even when you have intended bad things.

Ask the children to pray praises to the Lord because he is always in control of everything.

A Verse from the Story to Learn at Home

2 min. 

☉ Introduce the verse: “The verse we memorized was actually something Joseph said to his brothers, and it sums up the point of today’s story very well.”

☉ Announce the verse: “The verse to practice at home is Genesis 50:20 — ‘You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.’”

☉ Read the verse out loud together as a group.

☉ Remind the children to give the handout to their parents and to memorize the verse for next time.