



THE STORY OF JOSEPH
and the
SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

**Discussion Group
Leader's Guide**

connection
ministries

INTRODUCTION

This three-day study on the life of Joseph will help our friends with disabilities, families, and caregivers understand and be encouraged to grow in their faith. As they grow in faith, they will find increased peace and contentment, no matter their circumstances. The life of Joseph demonstrates how God grows our faith through circumstances which drive us to Him.

Joseph is often thought of as a man of great faith, but he didn't start out that way. **He needed to grow in faith, and trust God during each stage of his life.**

We live lives of faith so others may know that Jesus lives. People notice when we become more like Him as we grow in our faith. Scripture paints the picture of the branches who are connected to the vine (Jesus), and God the Father as the gardener. **The Father prunes and takes care of His garden, so that it bears much fruit.** But left on its own, the plant will not bear fruit.

God often grows our faith through difficult situations and trials. God is pruning us and causing us to produce His fruit. He is working to make us more like Him, just as He did with Joseph.

It is not pleasant to be pruned. Many of us experience difficulties in our lives, especially our friends with disabilities. We need to remember that God is always with us, even in hard times. **Psalm 139** tells us that no matter where we go, and no matter what happens, God is guiding us with His right hand. **The life of Joseph shows that to be true.**

OBJECT LESSONS

Day 1

A package of flower seeds and a small peat pot planter will be provided for each small group.

Use the picture to show that a flower grows from the seeds, and bears fruit. The group leader will plant a seed in the small peat pot. **Explain how the seed has to die in order for the plant to grow from it.**

Water the seed and explain that water is needed for the seed to grow. After the plant merges from the soil, it will also need light.

God is always there to give us what we need to grow. Give a real-life example.

Day 2

One flowering plant with several branches will be provided for each small group.

Water the plant, and shine a flashlight on it to show that the plant needs water and sunlight to grow. Snip off some branches, explaining the plant needs to focus energy on growing branches that will grow flowers. **This is called pruning.** The gardener knows which branches to keep, and which to cut off. **God waters, provides light, and prunes us.** It doesn't feel good to be cut. Ask the group what in our lives take away from our ability to grow fruit.

Day 3

One large plant with many flowers will be provided for the large group.

Explain that the seeds from day one were harvested from a plant. Show the small peat pot with a seed planted on day one, and compare it to the plant that grew from a seed.

As our faith and trust grows, God's fruit grows and becomes beneficial for others. **With sunlight, water, and pruning, the plant grows to bear fruit.** The Bible tells us that we grow in faith when we allow God to give us what we need, including pruning. **When we grow, other people also come to know and love God.**

HELPFUL HINTS

BE PREPARED!

To be properly prepared to lead a small group, please read through this guide and study the following Biblical passages prior to the event:

REVIEW EACH DAY'S OUTLINE

In each day's outline, you will find 3 sections: Important Points to Remember, Discussion Questions, and Personal Reflections. These are to help you in leading your small group.

HAVE GROUP PARTICIPANTS READ ALOUD

If you have adult friends with disabilities, a caregiver, volunteer, or family member in your group that is a good reader, consider having them read aloud Bible passage references, if time allows. This encourages group participation and involvement.

WAIT PATIENTLY FOR A RESPONSE

When asking an adult friend a question, take a moment to wait for his/her response. Those with disabilities sometimes need a moment to process the question, and to formulate their answer. If he/she does not respond after a minute, ask the question again or rephrase it. Do not hesitate to ask for help from our friend's caregivers and housemates in the group.

INVOLVE EVERYONE IN THE GROUP

Anyone in the group can participate in the discussion, including the adult friends, caregivers, and volunteers. It will be important to moderate the conversation so all participants have a chance to share.

CONNECT BIBLE LESSON TO REAL LIFE

Whenever possible, help to connect the Bible lesson to a real-life situation. This helps our adult friends relate the Bible lesson to their lives.

DAY 1:

Genesis 37

DAY 2:

Genesis 39-41

DAY 3:

Genesis 42-45

DAY 1

Genesis 37

THOUGHT OF THE DAY:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28 (NIRV)

LESSON OBJECTIVES:

When someone puts their trust in God and He makes them part of His family, He promises that everything which happens in their life will help them to know and love Jesus more. It might not be right away, especially if it is something hard. Joseph also had to keep learning this. Introduce the plant/seed visual.

Important Points to Remember

God's Word was not written down during Joseph's life. In those days, God sometimes spoke to His people through dreams. He also spoke to them through parables and prophets (**Hosea 12:10**). Now, we have the Bible and Jesus, and prayer (**Hebrew 1:1**). The Bible tells us everything we need to know to follow God, and live a Christian life. God promised Abraham that Jesus would descend from his family. Abraham had only one son, Isaac, who became the father of Jacob. Jesus would one day be born through Jacob's family. It was through this important family that Jesus would one day be born.



Discussion Questions

1. WHY WAS IT WRONG FOR JOSEPH TO “BRAG” TO HIS BROTHERS AND HIS FATHER ABOUT HIS DREAMS FROM GOD?

- God wanted Joseph (just as He wants us) to do the work He gives us for His glory. We work for Him, not ourselves.
- When we brag, we are saying that we are better than other people. It shows that we put our trust in ourselves, and not God.
- We are not any better than anyone else. We are all sinners who need Jesus.
- Guide our adult friends into this understanding by asking questions like the following:

Is bragging right or wrong?

Is it ever right? Why or why not?

Is praising God for what He has done right or wrong?

How is praising God different than bragging?

2. WHY DID THE BROTHERS DISLIKE JOSEPH?

- We don't like someone saying that they will rule over us, according to God.
- Joseph's brothers knew their father Jacob loved him more, because of the special coat Jacob had given Joseph. Joseph then told his brothers that God was going to make him more powerful.
- How would you feel about that? (Cain killed Abel because of jealousy; **Genesis 4**).

3. INSTEAD OF KILLING JOSEPH, HOW DID HIS BROTHERS GET RID OF HIM?

- They threw him in a deep hole, and sold him as a slave in Egypt.

Discussion Questions, contin.

4. HOW CAN WE CELEBRATE SUCCESS WITHOUT BRAGGING THAT WE ARE BETTER THAN SOMEONE ELSE?

- We are to give God the credit and glory for anything that we do well. Every good and perfect gift comes from God (**James 1:17**).
- Have our friends think about praising God for our accomplishments. For example, if “Johnny” wins a medal at Special Olympics, how can he praise God for helping him to win it?

5. HOW IS GOD SOVEREIGN AND WORKING IN YOUR LIFE TO GROW YOUR FAITH?

- Ask for examples, and for our friends to think about hard things in their lives where they have no choice but to ask God for help.
- The author of **Proverbs 30** asks God not to give him everything, so he isn't tempted to forget about God. We often forget about God's blessings when things are going well for us. Point out that God can grow our faith and trust in Him through hard times.
- Sometimes we ask for things and have to wait a very long time for an answer. Sometimes the answer is no. Sometimes the answer is even better than we asked for. Regardless how God answers our prayers, it is always for His purpose.
- Read **Romans 8:28**.

6. WHERE DO WE TURN TO HEAR FROM GOD?

- The Bible; prayer; worship; pastors; Christians brothers and sisters who can give us Biblical advice, and show us how to turn to God.

Introduce the craft project. Participants will place the flower stickers on the picture to illustrate the fruit of the plant. On day two, participants will place stickers of character descriptions on each flower that defines the fruit from growing faith.



Personal Reflections

1. LIKE JOSEPH’S BROTHERS, ARE YOU JEALOUS OF SOMEONE? WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

- Don’t ask the adult friends to name people or situations, but to think of some examples.
- The Bible tells us that it is wrong to dislike or be jealous of someone. Ask the friends if they agree.
- Since it is wrong and we still do it a lot, we have to realize that we can’t fix ourselves. We need to ask Jesus to fix us.
- Encourage our friends to ask Jesus to help them not sin against others, and God.

2. WHAT DO YOU THINK JOSEPH WOULD HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT IN THE WELL?

3. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT WHEN YOU ARE IN A “PIT”?

- Do you look to God, to yourself, or the circumstance in pity, and try to find a way out without God’s help?



DAY 2

Genesis 39-41

THOUGHT OF THE DAY:

...We are full of joy even when we suffer. We know that our suffering gives us strength to go on. The strength to go on produces character. Character produces hope. And hope will never bring us shame. That's because God's love has been poured into our hearts...

Romans 5:3-5 (NIRV)

LESSON OBJECTIVES:

Introduce the small plant with many branches. Clip off a few and explain that this gives more strength to the branches that are best for making fruit. Explain that the life of each branch from the root is the life of God. Ask what are some things that take away from our ability to grow fruit in our lives. Jesus is the true vine. Just like the Holy Spirit living inside us to grow our faith. Others see our character by the way we respond to challenges.

Important Points to Remember

We learn how God carries us and we grow through trials. Did God leave Joseph all alone when Potiphar's wife said bad things about him? Did God forget about Joseph in prison for two years? No, He was waiting for His perfect time to bring Joseph out. Joseph learned to wait on God's way and on His timing through the experience. Being betrayed by his brothers and falsely accused by Potiphar's wife helped Joseph see that God is always at work. This helped Joseph to trust God.

Read **Psalm 139:7-12, 16**. God is always at work, and He is always with us. We cannot go anywhere that He has not already planned for us to be.



Important Points to Remember, contin.

Every trial is a lesson that prepares us for God's plan for us. Joseph had to learn not to brag or act without thinking about other people. If he had boasted to Potiphar or to the jailer, he could have been killed. But God was going to use him for good things, so Joseph had to learn not to brag. The trials in our lives, even though they are hard, teach us things that God knows we will need. Each trial also teaches us to trust God.

HOW GOD DEVELOPED JOSEPH'S CHARACTER:

Love Joy Peace Patience Kindness Goodness Faithful Gentle Self-Control
Hope Strength Forgiveness Trust Humility Courage Generosity Perseverance

Read **Galatians 6:22-26** (if time, read **Galatians 6:19-21** to contrast). God tells us how He will develop our character. It is a promise! And it is God's fruit He grows in us, not our own.

Discussion Questions

1. WHAT THINGS HAPPENED IN JOSEPH'S LIFE THAT SHOWED GOD WAS WITH HIM?

- Bragging to his brothers, and suffering the consequences with his brothers hating him, betraying him, and selling him as a slave in Egypt.
- Being good and honest with Potiphar, but being falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and going to jail.
- Being faithful to God giving God the glory to interpret dreams, and still having to stay in jail for 2 more years (**Genesis 40:8, 41:1-8**).

2. HOW DID JOSEPH RESPOND TO THE BAD THINGS THAT WERE HAPPENING IN HIS LIFE?

- After acting on his own with his dreams, Joseph then waited for God to act.



Discussion Questions, contin.

3. WHERE DID JOSEPH GIVE CREDIT FOR INTERPRETING PHARAOH'S DREAM? (GENESIS 41:25)

On day two, participants place stickers of character descriptions on each flower that defines the fruit. This results in growing closer to God through faith and trust.

Personal Reflections

1. HOW CAN YOU GIVE GOD THE GLORY FOR THE THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO YOU?

- Not just say them to others, but believe it in your heart.
- Give God praise for not just the good things, but the hard things. Know that God is doing good things for you in His long plan (**Romans 8:28**).

2. DOES BEING A CHRISTIAN AND LEADING A GOOD LIFE MEAN BAD THINGS WILL NEVER HAPPEN TO US?

- NO!! Jesus, Paul and Peter all tell us that we are to expect bad things will happen.
- However, nothing will happen that God is not allowing. In the end, we bring glory to Him.
- Bad things happen because we are sinners and live in a fallen world. But God has promised to give us the grace to get through them.
- These struggles are small in comparison to the glory that awaits us (**2 Corinthians**).

3. HOW DO YOU RESPOND WHEN PEOPLE SAY HURTFUL THINGS ABOUT YOU?

- Love them, through Jesus. Know they are saying hurtful things out of sin, and not out of God's love. His love is much stronger than hurtful words.



Personal Reflections, contin.

4. WHERE DO YOU FIND HELP TRUSTING GOD IN TOUGH TIMES?

- Bible, prayer, friends who love God and help you to ask Him for help.

5. HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO TRIALS? DO YOU PUT YOUR FOCUS TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES OR ON GOD?

- None of us really respond the way we want to. It can be hard to fully trust God.
- Encourage the adult friends to ask God for help. Encourage them to pray for help in hard times (**James 1:2-3**).



DAY 3

Genesis 42-45

NOTE: there will be no small group discussion, so make sure to talk about the following during the application part of the lesson after the story presentation:

THOUGHT OF THE DAY:

Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not want what belongs to others. It does not brag. It is not proud. It does not dishonor other people. It does not look out for its own interests. It does not easily become angry. It does not keep track of other people's wrongs. Love is not happy with evil. But it is full of joy when the truth is spoken. It always protects. It always trusts. It always hopes. It never gives up. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NIRV)

LESSON OBJECTIVES:

Show the small peat pot with a seed planted on day one, and compare it to the grown plant that grew from a seed. As our faith and trust grows, God's fruit (fruit of the Spirit) grows and becomes beneficial for others.

Important Points to Remember

Forgiveness is hard, because we want to hold onto angry feelings. It is only possible through the power of God. We cannot forgive others without God; we need to ask Him to help us forgive. And when we truly forgive, our hearts are free and God often blesses the relationship.



Important Points to Remember, contin.

Joseph had to first grow in faith and trust in God, in order to forgive his brothers. God grows our faith little by little, so that it is strong for when there are struggles in our lives. Just like a big apple cannot grow from a small little tree, God needs to grow our faith and trust to produce good fruit.

God used the circumstances in Joseph's life to grow his faith, and trust and teach him to forgive his brothers. God also uses the circumstances in your life to grow your faith and trust!

Personal Reflections

1. WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THAT WE KNOW JOSEPH'S BROTHERS HAD CHANGED?

- Joseph kept testing them, and they were protective of their father Jacob, and of the youngest brother, Benjamin.
- Joseph heard them talking about how they knew they were wrong.

2. HOW DID JOSEPH'S DREAMS COME TRUE?

- His brothers and his father had to come to him for food to stay alive.
- Joseph was the second most powerful man in Egypt, exceeded only by the Pharaoh.

3. HOW DO WE KNOW THAT JOSEPH REALLY FORGAVE HIS BROTHERS?

- Joseph cried!
- Joseph had his father Jacob, all of his brothers, and their families brought to Egypt. He then richly provided for their needs.



References:



<https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-International-Readers-Version-NIRV-Bible/>

New International Readers Version (NIRV) Bible



Equip Christian congregations to minister with adults with intellectual disabilities

Connection Ministries

P. O. Box 29495 Indianapolis, IN 46229

317-646-5067

www.connection-ministries.org

www.facebook.com/connectionministries1