Joseph 2 September 20, 2020

**Bible Verses:** Genesis 50:15-24

**Spark Story Bible:** pages 60 to 65

**--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------**

Overall Lesson Takeaways

* **"Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good"**

This famous line from Genesis 50 is a wonderful summary of Joseph's long and winding journey – but it can also open us to some important discussions about how we experience God in our lives today. Issues like the problem of evil, or how God intervenes in our lives, are questions that people of faith have wrestled with for several millennia – and this verse seems to suggest that even when we can't see God at work, God is still there working for good. We believe that we as human beings are afforded free will – but sometimes our choices, or others' choices, end up doing harm. Even with these mistakes and willful disobedience, though, God is still able to accomplish great things in us, through us… and sometimes despite us. This text presents us (both kids and adults!) with an opportunity to reflect on times in our lives when a mistake that we made ended up being a good thing. How might God have been a part of that? How can we see mistakes as an opportunity to grow and learn?

* **The important role of reconciliation and forgiveness in our lives.**

Given the above statement – that sometimes our choices, or others' choices, end up doing harm – it is imperative at times that we find ways to forgive and reconcile with others when they hurt us. This process is not easy – and there are debates on whether or not forgiveness and reconciliation is even possible without some sort of contrition or changed behavior on the part of the one perpetrated the hurt – but the biblical text *over and over* emphasizes that forgiveness is vital as a way to break cycles of violence and hurt. You may ask kids to reflect on what Joseph *could* have done to his brothers in his position of authority. What's the difference between what is fair versus what is right? It would have been fair for him to punish them… but would it have been right?

* **The challenge of famine and how it affects our world today.**

Even though it has a happy ending, our passage today begins with the very real issue of famine. None of us have probably been in a situation where there is a famine, but it is still a very real and scary thing in our world today. Ongoing famines in Yemen and South Sudan have left millions without consistent access to food the past two years, and our changing climate is a threat to global food security in nations around the world. Joseph using his gifts to prevent a widespread crisis is a reminder that we too are called to do what we can. We may not have the ability to create a decade-long food plan like Joseph, but we can still advocate, donate, and provide for those in need!

Checking In

**Before the reading:**

* **Check in with the kids –practicing names and learning about them**
	+ Names, what has it been like doing school online this year?
	+ Younger kids: Show and Tell – what room do you do school in?
	+ Older kids: Highs and Lows from their past week
* **Can anyone remember what happened to Joseph, and who did that to him? If you were Joseph, what would you say or do if you saw them?**

Bible Lesson / Discussion

**Reading the Bible:**

* **Today's reading is the last chapter of the Book of Genesis, and you’ll find out what happens with Joseph and his brothers.**
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
	+ You’ll need to screen share the passage for the day in Zoom.
	+ Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
	+ Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!

**Questions About the Passage**

* Think about a time when one of your parents or a sibling were away for a long time – how did it feel to have them return home?
* Should Joseph have punished his brothers for throwing him into the pit? Why do you think he chose to forgive them?
* Joseph says that God was able to turn the bad thing that his brothers did into something good – what does he mean by that?

**Connections To Our Lives**

* Forgiveness is an important part of this passage – what helps you forgive someone who has hurt you? What do you do if you’ve hurt them?
* Famine and hunger are still a big problem in our world today. What could we do as individuals to help? As a church? As a country?
* Joseph was able to plan ahead for the famine because he could interpret the future from people’s dreams – what special ability would you like?

**Biblical/Church Connections**

* Pharaoh is kind to Joseph’s family, but another Pharaoh many years later is not as kind… what are the qualities of a good leader?

People of Faith

In addition to reading our weekly Bible story, I'd love for our older grade school students to learn more about people whose lives were changed by their faith in Jesus. We'll lift up a new person each Sunday, trying to connect their story to our Bible passage as much as possible!

**Desmond Tutu**

Although he was one of the great human rights leaders of the 20th century, few probably would have believed that Desmond Tutu would become a leader at all. Tutu grew up poor in a small village in the northwest of South Africa and was very sick as a child. His family moved frequently and often lived apart from one another, as his father and mother travelled to find work wherever they could.

Tutu was baptized into the Methodist church as a baby, but his family would also attend Episcopal and Anglican parishes. When he was 16, Tutu was hospitalized from tuberculosis for 18 months – and during this time had numerous visits from an area priest that helped change his life. Although he initially began a career as a teacher, the South African government enacted a system of apartheid in schools in 1953 (separating black and white students), which led to Tutu leaving education to study as a priest.

Over the next few decades, Desmond Tutu would demonstrate an exceptional ability as both a student and teacher – serving in many different faculty positions at seminaries. He became a proponent of *black theology*, which focuses on liberating people of color from oppression – something that had continued to be a major issue in his home country of South Africa.

During the 1980s, Tutu would go on to lead the South African Council of Churches during an important period of time in the anti-apartheid movement, as many church and civil leaders worked to end segregation in South Africa – in 1984 he won the Nobel Peace Prize, and helped end apartheid in the 1990’s.

Tutu continues to be a strong advocate for justice around the globe today, both as a gay rights activist and in international politics – and his passion came from his faith in God. He is a deep believer that it is our Christian duty to fight against injustice – but he is also quoted as saying, “Without forgiveness, there’s no future”; always wanting to help bring about a better, more loving world.

Crafts / Activities

**Family Tree**

**(Ages 3+ with help, 10 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* [Tree Template](https://www.craftsonsea.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Tree-Template-Crafts-on-Sea.pdf)
* Construction Paper
* Scissors/Glue Sticks
* Crayons/Markers

Instructions:

* Have kids trace their hand onto construction paper, cut it out, and paste onto the tree template. Add a hand for every member of the family!

**Family Photo Frame**

**(Ages 5+, 10 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Popsicle Sticks

* Glue

Instructions:

* Not everyone will have popsicle sticks, so you’d need an alternative craft too, but encourage kids to lay several popsicle sticks next to one another and glue them together using two vertical sticks on the back.

**Notes for our Bagged Lunch Program**

**(1st through 5th Grade, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Piece of paper
* Pen/crayon/marker

Fourth Church gives out LOTS of bagged lunches each week and we’d love to have notes to put in the bags to bring smiles and joy! Write a few notes and mail them to: Matt Helms, 126 East Chestnut Street, Chicago, IL 60516.

Biblical Background – Genesis 37-50[[1]](#footnote-1) **(Same as last week)**

It may seem bizarre to begin our year at the end of Genesis, but in many ways Joseph is a perfect pivot point between what we studied last Fall and the theme of “leaders and prophets” that we’ll be exploring this Fall.

The family strife that we witness between Joseph and his brothers is certainly a common theme throughout Genesis – think Cain & Abel, Hagar & Sarah, or Jacob & Esau – but the overarching narrative helps transition us from Genesis’ focus on a particular family (Abram and his descendants) to God’s wider family in Exodus and beyond, as we begin to focus on the Hebrew people. God’s faithfulness and adherence to the covenant with Abram and his descendants is still at the core of much of the Old Testament – it should be noted that Joseph and his brothers are the names of the future 12 tribes of Israel – after all their father, Jacob, is Israel (see Genesis 32:22-32). However, the books of the Bible after Genesis deal more directly with the Hebrew people and the founding of Israel – and the leaders and prophets who try to help it align with God’s will.

Attentive readers may note that God does not appear in Genesis 37 – in fact, one of the fascinating aspects of the Joseph account is how little God is referenced throughout the course of these 14 chapters! After being a consistent and vocal presence throughout the vast majority of Genesis, God only speaks once (to Jacob in Genesis 46:1-4) – and that certainly transitions us into the rest of the Old Testament where God speaks more sparingly. By the end of the story, though, it is clear that Joseph sees God as having played a vital role throughout his journey (see the famous Genesis 50:20 verse) – something that I think has many lessons and implications for our faith journeys as well. Although we desire it, God rarely feels in constant communication with us during the course of our lives – our experiences of God's presence and calling often fall within transcendent moments. Joseph's experience, though, is a reminder that even when we aren't hearing from God directly, that does not mean that God has left us or isn't playing a role in our lives – and that’s something that we’ll return to again and again this semester.

1. Your ability to share this info with kids will vary depending on their age – this section is mainly written for teachers and parents to learn a bit more about the background to each week's passage! [↑](#footnote-ref-1)