

Genesis 41:53-57; chapters 42-44; 45:1-8

Aim of Lesson

To show the quality of Joseph's character and his understanding of God's purpose in his complete forgiveness of his brothers.

Background study

Familiarize yourself with the Egyptian way of life and that of the nomadic Israelites, in order to convey the striking contrast between the two.

Suggested outline of lesson

Remind the children that for seven years Joseph had been busy storing vast quantities of grain from the exceptional harvests. Ask them why this was necessary, and what inevitably followed. Emphasize that all food, even modern convenience food, is dependent upon crops growing. Describe the serious effects of famine in general, and discuss with the children the problems resulting from running out of food. Explain the necessity for the intervention of the government to see that resources are rationed and distributed fairly to prevent illness and starvation. It was now Joseph's responsibility to see that these measures were taken for the good of all the people.

Meanwhile, people in surrounding countries became desperately short of food. They had not been warned of the coming famine and so had made no provision. News spread along the trade routes that there was corn in Egypt. Joseph soon found that he was obliged to respond to appeals from foreign travellers. Suggest, by means of dramatic expression, the sense of shock experienced by Joseph at being unexpectedly confronted by his ten brothers. Although twenty-one years had passed since their cruel treatment of him, their looks and style of dress had scarcely changed. Joseph, however, was now far from being a simple shepherd boy. His speech, bearing and dress gave every indication of a mature, authoritative Egyptian ruler. He was a total stranger to them: a man, so they thought, to be feared. Little did they know what painful memories they had evoked in him.

Since the following narrative is complex in detail, it is suggested that the sequence of events be presented visually, by means of sketches, diagrams, pictures, models or puppets, which will enable the children to distinguish between the two visits, and clarify the development of the story.

In narrating the events which took place, draw out the feelings of those concerned - Joseph's long struggle to sustain his disguise while yearning for the reunion to take place, and his concern about his father's welfare; the brothers' fear of Joseph, their bewilderment at the turn of events, their anxiety for their father and, above all, the conviction of their guilt; Jacob's frailty and anxiety, since he could do nothing but wait. Build up to the climax when Joseph could no longer control his emotion and revealed himself. The immediate response of the brothers was that of horror. What would become of them now? Their fear was greater than ever. They were at his mercy. Joseph had to reassure them of his love and his forgiveness, and help them to overcome their feelings of guilt. He explained to them what he had known all along - that all that had happened had been under the guidance of God for the purpose of blessing his chosen people.

Relevance to the children's lives

What do we usually want to do to people who have been cruel to us? Joseph's reaction was very different from what his brothers expected. How was it different? What was the outcome of his forgiveness? How can we apply this to ourselves?

Worksheets

The solution to the puzzle is:

F	A	T	H	E	R		S	I	L	V	E	R
A			O									E
M		B	U	Y			C		P			U
I		S				M	O	U	T	H		B
N		T	E	N			P		A			E
E		W			B				R			N
		E			E		J	A	C	O	B	
D		L			N				A			F
R		V			J	O	S	E	P	H		A
E		E			A							M
A			D		M	Y	R	R	H			I
M			I		I				I			L
S	I	M	E	O	N		M	I	D	D	A	Y

Prayer

Dear Lord God, when we want to get our own back on someone who has been unkind to us, please help us to forgive them instead, so that we can be friends again. Amen.

Memory verse

“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another” (Ephesians 4:32).