

Aim of lesson

To show that God asks us to serve him uncomplainingly even in very bad situations and that he is always there to help us.

Bible background

Genesis 39-41.

Outline of lesson

There is a lot of material to cover in this lesson. You may decide to take two weeks over it if the children are not already familiar with the story, or if you want to make more of 1 Corinthians 6:18.

From dreamer to slave

Question the class about Joseph's dreams and their meaning. Move on to his feelings as he is sold by his brothers into slavery, a very different position to that which he saw in his dreams. Ask how Joseph must have felt on that journey as a slave going to Egypt to be sold to the highest bidder, not knowing how he would be treated. How would the class have felt in his position?

In the house of Potiphar

Read together Genesis 39:1-6. Using the first section in the workbook, look at Joseph's attitude; his acceptance of what had happened and his determination to make the best of things. Though he must have had feelings of hurt and misery, there is no evidence that he showed bitterness or resentment. He obviously worked honestly and hard.

Read together Genesis 39:7-9 and draw out from the class what it shows of Joseph's character and his attitude to God. His faithfulness to God when tempted can be mentioned in response to the question 'How did he act?'. Read or summarise verses 10-20. You may wish to use this opportunity to emphasise the Bible teaching on adultery for example, by asking the class, which of the ten commandments Joseph was being tempted to break or by noting how Joseph did what was later taught by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:18.

Imprisoned

Read together Genesis 39:21-23. Ask the young people to think again about Joseph's feelings, this time when thrown into prison. 'They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons' (Psalm 105:18, NIV). How easy it would have been to have questioned God's justice when he suffered for doing what was right. But there is no record of Joseph complaining. He longs to be out, yet he works patiently even in prison. Use the second section in the workbook for this discussion.

Forgotten?

Summarise chapter 40. Ask the class to draw or describe the dreams of the butler and baker in the workbook and give their meanings. Discuss how Joseph must have felt when his hopes had been raised by the freedom of the butler but then after two years found that he was still in prison.

Remembered

Ask the class to search in Genesis 41:1-7 for the details of Pharaoh's two dreams, and to draw or describe them in the workbook. End with the change in the position of Joseph, now out of prison and having great power in the land. Consider together how he might look back on all his experiences (see Genesis 45:5). Perhaps you might include a discussion of how he might have prayed.

Digging deeper

Some things about 'The eldest'

This exercise brings out that God's choices are not always what ours would be.

Relevance to our lives

Ask the class to consider Joseph in the light of 1 Peter 2:18-21. Also ask for instances of how the class could 'do right, suffer for it and take it patiently' at school or at home.

Prayer

Lord, help us to know that you care even when everything seems to be going wrong and everyone appears to be letting us down.

Other suggestions for activities

- If you have talented musicians you could write a song together about Joseph's experiences.
- Produce a play based on chapter 40, encouraging the class to script it themselves.
- Continue to look at Joseph as a type of Christ. Look at the events in this lesson and compare them with Jesus' experiences. The following references may be helpful:

Joseph

Genesis 39:4: Joseph in charge of Potiphar's house.

Jesus

John 3:35: God gave all things into Jesus' hand.

Joseph

Genesis 40:2-3: The butler and baker were imprisoned with Joseph.

Genesis 40:15: Joseph didn't deserve his punishment.

Genesis 41:46: Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh.

Genesis 41:44: Pharaoh gave Joseph authority over Egypt.

Jesus

Luke 23:32: Two criminals were crucified with Jesus.

Hebrews 4:15: Jesus was without sin.

Luke 3:23: Jesus was thirty when he began his ministry.

Matthew 28:18: God has given Jesus authority in heaven and on earth.