

Middle/High School Sunday School Lessons by

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Year 1: Session 2 – Getting to know Joseph / How Israel settles in Egypt

Class 4: Genesis 41:7b-40, 48, 53-57 - *Joseph the Dream Interpreter*

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Give background on Joseph between being sold into slavery and this lesson's story.
- Discuss the advantage Joseph experienced by paying attention to God
- Illustrate how hardship can change and prepare a person – (more likely to happen if the person invites God's presence and guidance into the hardship).

Materials needed

- Movie clip (*Princess Bride – Wager of wits*: Available on rfour.org)
- Electronics that show the movie
- Timer that will make noise after 3 minutes is up (cell phones work well for this)
- An easel and pad of paper
- Markers
- A list of words to draw. See last page of lesson.
- *Optional*: put each Pictionary/drawing word on a notecard for the player to see easily

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- For the opening question for today's class, I [the teacher] will ask the question, and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we'll go around the circle.
- When it's your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here's this week's question*: What kind of work / job do you think you might like to have at some point in your life?

REVIEW and INTRODUCTION (to new session)

- We're going to start our second session today, which will be about Joseph. This means that we're going to mostly pick up where we left off from our previous class.
- In our previous class, we were introduced to Joseph – he was very annoying. Very favored by Jacob (aka Israel). He had an easy life.
- But, his brothers REALLY did not like him.
- And, because his brothers lacked basic problem solving skills, they decided that the best plan of action was to KILL Joseph! Yikes! But then they decided it was better to sell Joseph into slavery (in Egypt).
- So for the next three stories in this second session, we will learn about Joseph and his time in Egypt.
- In today's scripture story, there will be some interpreting of dreams.
- To begin, let's talk a little bit about interpretation.

TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY

- What does it mean to “interpret” something? (A: a way of explaining something – usually there are more than one way to explain that something, so *one* interpretation should not be considered the only interpretation)
- How we interpret something depends on what we know and don't know, what we can see and what we can't see, what we are afraid of and what we are not afraid of.
- In other words, it is not easy to correctly interpret something.
- To prove this, we're going to play some win, lose, or draw (aka group Pictionary)
- One person from the group (or teacher) will draw an item on the easel and the group has to guess what the person is drawing. Once the group makes the correct guess (one of the teachers will be the ref), then the drawer is given a new item/word to draw.
- Person who is drawing cannot talk, use motions that give away what s/he is drawing, or write words on the paper.
- Person drawing gets three passes. A pass is when the person drawing doesn't want to draw an item because s/he/the class is stuck on it or it's too difficult to draw.
- The idea is to see how many items/drawing the class can correctly guess / interpret in 3 minutes
- Then, if we have time at the end of class, we can do some more rounds.

DO DRAWING/PICTIONARY ACTIVITY

ASK

- Ask person who drew: Were there images that you drew that were not guessed correctly that you thought were pretty obvious?
- Ask the people who were guessing: What items were you not able to guess? Why do you think you couldn't guess those items?
- Were there certain images that were easier to draw than other images?
- Was it easier to guess things that you were already familiar with or things you had never known about/heard about before?
- So the more familiar you were with something, the more likely it was that you would be able to guess what was being drawn, right?

TRANSITION to SCRIPTURE STORY

- There are a few things that happened after Joseph was sold into slavery and before the story we're going to read today.

- First, he was a slave in an Egyptian household. That actually went well to begin with, but then it went very badly for Joseph – through no fault of his own – and he was thrown in prison.
- While he was in prison, some servants of Pharaoh (the ruler of Egypt) were also thrown in jail.
- These two servants had dreams and Joseph interpreted what they meant for the two servants.
- Joseph's interpretations turned out to be correct – his interpretations of the dreams actually took place in real life
- One of those servants eventually remembers Joseph and his ability to interpret dreams well – as we'll see in today's story.
- One more thing to keep in mind: Joseph was 17 when his brothers sold him into slavery. Joseph is 30 years old in the story that we're going to read today. He's been either a slave or in prison for 13 years of his life now.

READ Genesis 41:7b-40, 48, 53-57 (recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse)

Pharaoh awoke, and it was a dream. **8** In the morning his spirit was troubled; so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh. **9** Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "I remember my faults today. **10** Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard. **11** We dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own meaning. **12** A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each according to his dream. **13** As he interpreted to us, so it turned out; I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged." **14** Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was hurriedly brought out of the dungeon. When he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. **15** And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." **16** Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." **17** Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile; **18** and seven cows, fat and sleek, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. **19** Then seven other cows came up after them, poor, very ugly, and thin. Never had I seen such ugly ones in all the land of Egypt. **20** The thin and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows, **21** but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had done so, for they were still as ugly as before. Then I awoke. **22** I fell asleep a second time and I saw in my dream seven ears of grain, full and good, growing on one stalk, **23** and seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouting after them; **24** and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. But when I told it to the magicians, there was no one who could explain it to me." **25** Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. **26** The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. **27** The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, as are the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind. They are seven years of famine. **28** It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. **29** There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. **30** After them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land. **31** The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous. **32** And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. **33** Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. **34** Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years. **35** Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. **36** That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine." **37** The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. **38** Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?" **39** So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. **40** You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you."

48 He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it.

53 The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; **54** and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. **55** When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do." **56** And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. **57** Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.

ASK

- Verse 8 – what task does Pharaoh want done? (he wants someone to tell him what his dreams meant)
- Verse 9 - How does Pharaoh hear about Joseph? (the chief baker was in prison with Joseph and finally remembers him)
- Verse 16 – How does Joseph respond when Pharaoh asks/tells Joseph to interpret his dreams? (Joseph gives credit to God and not himself)
- Does this sound like a different Joseph than the Joseph we met in the last lesson's story? (yes, indeed it does! Joseph sounds a lot less self-absorbed and less entitled and more mature and more humble)
- To summarize, why is Joseph able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams when no one else could? (because God is helping Joseph -- if only you had known about this type of help from God earlier during the Pictionary activity!)
- Verse 26 and 27 – What does Joseph say the dreams mean? (there will be seven good years of crops and then 7 years of famine)
- Verse 33-37 – Joseph keeps talking after he interprets the dream – what does he tell Pharaoh to do? (he gives Pharaoh a plan, including putting someone in charge of it)
- Verse 38-40 – What is Pharaoh's response to Joseph? (He agrees with Joseph's interpretation and his suggested plan and then puts Joseph, a slave/prisoner, in that position – makes him the second most powerful individual in the country)
- Verse 53 – 57 – Does Joseph successfully enact the plan he told Pharaoh? (yes, yes he does)
- Verse 56 and 57 – who benefits from Joseph's plan? (the entire world!)

TELL (optional)

Some things to consider (Teachers: #1-3 are optional to share – but definitely consider saying something about #2):

1. Egypt in this time and place is by far the largest, strongest, most technologically advanced country in the world other than maybe China. But nobody in Egypt or the surrounding land knows about China – that type of travel, those kind of trade routes are not yet possible or established. This means that Pharaoh (an Egyptian title that means "king,") was considered the most powerful person in the world.
 - a. In fact, Pharaoh's were often worshiped and considered gods
(<http://www.ancient.eu/pharaoh/>)
2. In today's time and place, we have sayings like, "What do you want to be when you grow up" and "You can do whatever you want in life if you just put your mind to it." These sayings suggest that we have the ability to choose our work and position in life. But, such concepts and possibilities did not exist in the time and place where Joseph was alive. You were born into your position. If your family were shepherds, then you were a shepherd your whole life (unless your brothers sold you into a life of slavery). If you were born a slave, then

you were a slave your whole life (unless you started life as a shepherd and then your brothers sold you in to a life of slavery). And, if you were born to the Pharaoh, then you lived a life of power.

- a. What NEVER EVER HAPPENED was that a slave who was in prison would ever have the chance to speak to Pharaoh, much less give Pharaoh advice, much less become the second most powerful person in the land/world. That just DID NOT HAPPEN. But it happened in today's story.
3. It's difficult to tell what Pharaoh thinks about Joseph's statements about God, but one thing that we DO know about religion at that time is that *everyone* believed in some sort of God – usually in many, many different gods. The god of rain, the god of the sun, the god of death, the god of crops and on and on. So for Joseph to just say “God” and not “God of ___” would've been confusing.
- a. Also, to talk about a more powerful god in the presence of a god (aka Pharaoh) was a VERY brave thing for Joseph to do.

TELL

- Since we last heard from Joseph, it seems he has learned something about God. Remember in the previous story, there was no mention of God at all. But in this story, Joseph is pretty clear about God's role in the interpretation of dreams – it seems that he's learned something about God from his dad, Israel, after all.
- The story is basically telling us that there's an advantage to paying attention to God. Joseph is able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams when no one else can, not because Joseph is a magician (he isn't), but because he's paying attention to God. Note, though, that this advantage that comes from paying attention to God is not meant to give Joseph an *unfair* advantage, but is meant to make available God's care and attention to lots of people – and that's exactly what happens. Because Joseph pays attention to God, Joseph enacts a plan that basically helps the entire known world eat during the famine.
 - Throughout the Bible stories this particular advantage of paying attention to God keeps appearing: Paying attention to God provides a better developed ability to see and understand what is going on than those who do not pay attention to God.
- For 13 years, Joseph has had to live a very different life than he grew up living. He's had to do lots of hard work and hardship. And in that awfulness of having his family get rid of him, of being in a foreign land as a slave and then in prison, Joseph seems to have learned some things in that very difficult time: He's learned to rely on God and be humble.
- And because he's a different person, he's someone who Pharaoh is ready to trust and put in charge of the entire country.
- By no means are we saying that having bad things happen to you is a good thing. But at the same time, if and when you experience bad things, this Joseph story is a good story to remember because it reminds us that if we keep paying attention to God and inviting God into our hardship(s), then God might very well help the hardship become a form of preparation for the future.
- To help us think about that last idea (inviting God into today's hardship helps prepare us for the future), we're going to watch a movie clip from the Princess Bride.
- It is a battle of wits that, as we'll see, involved a lot of grueling preparation.
- Let's see who wins.

WATCH Princess Bride VIDEO CLIP

ASK

- What was the bald character trying to figure out (which cup was poisoned)
- And which cup was poisoned? (both)
- And why did the masked man not die? (because he had been taking the poison for many years, building up an immunity to it)

TELL

- The video clip is a somewhat fun illustration of how a hardship (i.e. ingesting poison every day for a number of years) can eventually change a person so that s/he will be ready for another difficult, but different, hardship.
- So just like the masked man in the movie clip, Joseph had to endure quite a lot of hardships, but because he kept ingesting God (and not poison), kept inviting God into his life even when things were difficult, Joseph was changed by his hardships in a way that made him well-prepared to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, give Pharaoh advice, and then be able to actually carry out the responsibilities of a very difficult job.
- So, if something is difficult for you, this story serves as a reminder that it is ok and even advantageous to invite God into the difficulties. And, it might take a long time, but the difficult times plus God's help will make you into a different/changed person -- for the better.
- Next lesson, we'll see if Joseph's brothers are at all different.

Return to doing Pictionary Activity (if there's time)

CLOSING PRAYER

(see next page for Pictionary words)

Pictionary words (might want to consider putting each word on a flash card)

PICTIONARY WORD LIST #1

Stop
Skip
Football
Alligator
Blind
Violin
Goldfish
Fetch
Spine
Beetle

Super-hard (worth 2 points each)

A dime a dozen
One smart cookie

PICTIONARY WORD LIST #2

Swing
Kick
Sunglasses
Pinch
Cage
Mailbox
Penguin
Shovel
Windmill
Year

Super-hard (worth 2 points each)

All bark and no bite
Hit the nail on the head