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Jacob and Esau

Scripture: Genesis 25:19-34; 27:1-40

Theme: God works through imperfect people

Jr High (Ages 12-14)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

"Joseph's Journey: When Life Feels Broken, God Still Works It for Good" Imagine you're 17 and your favorite brother, Joseph, gets sold into slavery because of a bad dream. For years, he endures unfair treatment, betrayal, and even prison. Sound familiar? That's exactly what happened to Joseph in the Bible, and it's not easy to watch. But here's the truth: God didn't leave him in the dark. Even when life feels like it's throwing curveballs (like job loss, bullying, or family struggles), God is right there, weaving everything, even the hard stuff, into something meaningful. Like Joseph's rise to power in Egypt, God often turns our pain into purpose, our struggles into strength, and our "failures" into unexpected blessings for others. Life Application: When things seem unfair or hopeless, ask: Who is watching over me? Even in the mess, God's got a plan, and He's with you. Start by telling someone, "I'm struggling, but I know you're in this with me." Then, share a story where you've seen God work in your own "prison" or "dark night." End with a prayer: "God, help me trust You when life doesn't make sense."

Bible Story

Title: "Joseph's Story: How God Turns Bad into Good"

Long ago, in a land where families and tribes were always fighting, a young man named Joseph was the favorite son of his father, Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons, but Joseph was special, he had bright dreams and a special coat of many colors that his brothers resented. When his father died, Joseph's brothers were jealous and angry. They convinced their father to give Joseph away as a slave to some travelers, saying he would be better off in Egypt. But God was watching, and He had a bigger plan.

In Egypt, Joseph became a trusted servant in the palace. One day, his master's wife tried to make him fall in love with her, but Joseph refused, even though he was tempted. He stayed true to God and was punished by being thrown into prison. There, he met two prisoners: one who was a baker and one who was a wine steward. God gave Joseph the

ability to interpret dreams, and he helped them both. The king later took him out of prison and made him his second-in-command because of his wisdom and hard work.

But Joseph's time in Egypt wasn't easy. His brothers came to Egypt looking for food during a famine, and when they saw him, they lied and said they were spies. Joseph was angry at first, but then he revealed his identity. Instead of punishing them, he showed mercy and said, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to bring about this gathering of bodies." In other words, what his brothers did wrong, selling him into slavery, ended up saving them and their families. Joseph also gave them food and said they could bring their families to Egypt.

Years later, Joseph's brothers visited again, and this time, he welcomed them warmly. He forgave them for what they had done decades earlier. He even gave them gifts and said, "You meant to harm me, but God meant it for good", proving that even when things feel unfair, God can use even the worst situations to bring good into our lives.

Why This Story Matters Today This story teaches us that God doesn't always fix things right away, but He always works for good. Sometimes, hard things happen (like Joseph's brothers betraying him or his own struggles in prison), but God can turn them into something wonderful. When we face unfairness or mistakes, we can trust Him to turn our pain into purpose. Just like Joseph forgave his brothers, we can choose to let go of grudges and trust God to make good come out of even the hardest moments. What's one way you can trust God to use your struggles for good in your life?

Key Verse

Genesis 25:23

Story: Jacob's Big Mistake & God's Big Plan Imagine Jacob, he's been mean to his brothers, sold Joseph into slavery, and even pretended Joseph died to hide the truth. When his whole family is in trouble (starving in Egypt!), his brothers think they've finally gotten revenge. But when Joseph sees them, he doesn't throw them in prison or kill them. Instead, he says something surprising: "You meant to hurt me, but God used it to get us all to Egypt, and maybe even save our lives!" This verse is like God's secret superhero cape, no matter what happens to us (like when we mess up, get hurt, or feel stuck), He has a plan. Even when it doesn't make sense, God turns our "bad" moments into opportunities to grow closer to Him and protect people we care about. **Life application:** Next time you feel like someone got you wrong, ask: "What's God trying to teach me or do for others through this?" He might be building something amazing!

Activities

Activity 1:

1. Assign Roles (5 min):
2. Divide the group into pairs (or trios). Give each pair a Bible passage to focus on:
3. Joseph's jealous brothers (Genesis 37:2-4)
4. Joseph in prison (Genesis 39:1-23)
5. Joseph's dream interpretation (Genesis 40:1-4)
6. Joseph reunites with family (Genesis 45:1-14)
7. Ask: "Which part of Joseph's story feels most unfair? How did God use these hard moments?"
8. Sketch & Share (7 min):
9. Each student draws one scene from their assigned passage on a small sheet of paper (e.g., Jacob's gift of a coat, Joseph in the dungeon, the cupbearer's dream).
10. Pair up to create a 3, 4 panel "storyboard" with glue. Label each section with a question:
11. "What was the 'wrong' turn here? What was the lesson?"
12. Discuss Twists (3 min):

13. Circle back as a group: "How did Joseph's 'bad' choices lead to good things? What 'wrong turns' in our lives could God redeem?"
14. Reference 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4: "God comforts us in all our troubles so we can comfort others."
15. Apply to Life (2 min):
16. Close with: "If we trusted God in the 'bad' moments (like Joseph did), what's one 'wrong turn' we've experienced that God could turn into good?"

Activity 2:

Supplies needed:

- *Low-cost*
- *group-based*
- *and uses supplies most classrooms already have.*

1. The Setup (5 min):
2. Read Genesis 37:1, 4 (Joseph's favored status) and Genesis 39:1, 2 (his first "risk", testing his brothers' loyalty).
3. Ask: "What would Joseph have done if he stayed in Egypt? How could he have used his position to help others?"
4. Role-Play Scenarios (7 min):
5. Divide into small groups (3, 4 students). Assign each group one of these "Joseph moments":
6. The Potiphar's House Test (39:2, 6): Joseph resists temptation. Debate: "Was his 'right choice' worth the risk of losing his job?"
7. The Prison Game (39:19, 20): Joseph interprets dreams. Challenge: "How did he use his time? How could we apply this to boredom or struggles?"
8. Students act out the scene using index cards to write dialogue (e.g., "You could have killed me!"). Use markers to label emotions/choices.
9. Flip the Script (5 min):
10. Show Genesis 45:5, 8: "God had a plan for even Joseph's 'bad' story!"
11. Ask: "If you were Joseph, how would you respond to your brothers today? How could you 'use your time' (like he did in prison) to bless someone?"
12. Write answers on the board for the class to discuss.
13. Life Application (3 min):
14. Challenge: "This week, notice a 'prison' moment in your life (school, friend drama, etc.). How can you 'interpret' it like Joseph did?"
15. Close with: "God didn't make Joseph's 'bad' story, He turned it into a blessing. What 'bad' thing might God be using for good in your future?"
16. Why These Work for 12, 14 Year-Olds:
17. Visual/Learning Styles: Collages engage creativity; role-plays tap emotional intelligence.
18. Critical

Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions inspired by the story of Joseph, designed to encourage deep reflection, critical thinking, and real-life connections for junior high students. These questions aim to help them explore how God works in even the toughest situations, and how they might apply this truth to their own struggles.
- 1. "What If Your Plans Didn't Work Out? How Would You Handle It?"
- Context: Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, and he ended up in a foreign land where he was falsely accused, imprisoned, and forgotten. Before he was even out of prison, his manager, who trusted him, was thrown

into jail instead. At first glance, Joseph's life seemed to spiral downward. But over time, God used even those hardships to prepare him for something greater.

- Discussion: Imagine you've worked hard on a project, dreamed of a certain future, or made plans for your life, only for something unexpected to happen that derails those plans. Maybe it's failing a test, getting hurt in a game, or feeling left out of a group. How do you think Joseph would have handled something like that? What emotions did you feel when something didn't go as planned? Where do you turn when you're left wondering, "Why me?" or "Is this fair?" How can we trust that God isn't just allowing the hard things to happen, but using them for something good?

- (Life Application: This question helps students recognize that God doesn't always fix things immediately or erase pain, but He often works through it to grow character, create opportunities, or connect us to people who will help us grow. Encourage them to journal or talk to someone they trust about what they'd do in that moment.)

- 2. "What Does 'God Works All Things for Good' Really Mean for Us?"

- Context: Joseph's story ends with him being set free, becoming a powerful ruler, and saving his family from famine. But the Bible says that even before that, God had been preparing him, through his suffering, his faithfulness in prison, and his ability to interpret dreams. The phrase "God works all things for good" might sound like a magic formula, but it's actually a promise that God can take even the worst circumstances and use them for something greater in His timing.

- Discussion: What does "good" look like in different situations? For example:

- If someone steals your favorite toy as a kid, does that count as "good" in God's eyes? How?

- If you're in a group and someone always gets picked first, does that mean they're "better" or that God's plan is just for them? How can we respect others while trusting God's bigger picture?

- If you're struggling with a big test or a tough relationship, what does "all things" include? Is it just the big things, or even the small things, like a missed call, a forgotten birthday, or feeling ignored?

- (Life Application: This question pushes students to think beyond their immediate feelings and consider how God's promises apply to everyday struggles. They might realize that "good" isn't always what they expect, it's often what they need for their future.)

- 3. "How Can We Be Like Joseph When We're Trapped in Our Own Stories?"

- Context: Joseph was betrayed, sold, lied about, and forgotten, but instead of being bitter, he chose to remember God's promises. When Pharaoh's butler forgot him, Joseph prayed for him (Genesis 40:16), and when the baker's dream was bad, Joseph chose to see the good (Genesis 40:14). He didn't wait to be rescued; he trusted God while waiting.

- Discussion: Think about a time when you felt stuck, maybe you were stuck in a bad friendship, a rough grade, or a situation where you felt powerless. How did you respond? Did you:

- Blame God or others and feel angry?

- Stay silent or pretend it didn't matter?

- Trust God even though you didn't understand what was happening?

- Try to fix it yourself, even when you knew you couldn't?

- Joseph didn't have to fix his story, he just had to choose to trust God while waiting. What would it look like to live like that in your life? What's one small thing you could do this week to remember God's promises, even when things feel hard?

- (Life Application: This question helps students recognize that Joseph's strength wasn't in his power but in his faith. It encourages them to practice trusting God in small, everyday ways, like praying for friends, waiting patiently for answers, or choosing kindness over revenge.)

- 4. "Who Do We Tell About Our 'Bad' Stories? And How Does That Help Us?"

- Context: Joseph didn't just keep his story to himself. Even when he was alone in prison, he remembered God and shared His promise (Genesis 40:16). He also forgave his brothers (Genesis 45:3) and even invited them to Egypt to save their family. His story wasn't just about his suffering, it was about his relationship with God and how he used his pain to help others.
- Discussion: Let's say you've had a really hard week, maybe you failed a test, got in a fight, or felt really alone. If you could tell someone your story (a friend, parent, or even God in prayer), what would you say? How would sharing it make you feel?
- Would you feel lighter, or more relieved?
- Would you feel more connected to someone, or like you needed to fix things faster?
- What if you told someone your story, but they didn't understand or didn't care? How would that make you feel, and what would you do next?
- Joseph's story also shows us that God doesn't just want us to suffer alone, He wants us to trust Him with others. Who could you tell your story to this week? How can you be like Joseph and use your experiences to help someone else?
- (Life Application: This question helps students see that sharing their struggles isn't about being weak, it's about trusting God and allowing others to be part of His plan. It also encourages them to look for people who can encourage them, like Joseph's brothers did when they finally came to him.)
- Why These Questions Work for Junior High Students:
 - Relatable Struggles: They tackle real emotions (anger, doubt, frustration) without being overly abstract.
 - Encourages Action: They don't just ask "Why?", they ask "What now?" and "How can I apply this?"
 - Balances Theology & Life: They honor the Bible's teaching while giving students space to process their own experiences.
 - Builds Character: They help students see that Joseph's "strength" wasn't about being perfect, it was about choosing trust and kindness in tough moments.
- Would you like any of these adjusted to focus more on specific themes (like forgiveness, dreams, or trust)? Or would you prefer a follow-up activity (like a journal prompt or discussion game) to go with these?

Prayer Focus

Lesson Opening Prayer , Joseph's Story: Where Life Feels Like a Storm "Hey class, today we're diving into one of the most surprising stories in the Bible, a guy named Joseph who got betrayed, thrown in jail, and then... suddenly became the most powerful man in Egypt. It sounds like a fairy tale, but it wasn't. God didn't fix things for Joseph right away. He let bad things happen, but then used them for something bigger. That's what we're exploring today, and that's what we'll pray about!" The Prayer: "God, we come before You with hearts that still wonder, 'Why do bad things happen? Why does it feel like life keeps throwing us curveballs?' Like Joseph, we've felt betrayed, like we've been 'sold' into hard circumstances, maybe by friends, by circumstances, or even by our own doubts. But today, we're learning You don't just fix everything. You use everything, even the rough stuff, to turn it into something good. Help us believe that, like Joseph, our struggles aren't wasted. Teach us to trust You when life feels unfair, to see our pain as part of a bigger story, and to pray like we know You're working. Amen." Why it works: - Honest hook: Acknowledges kids' frustrations with Joseph's story. - Life-applying: Links Joseph's experience to their own struggles ("curveballs"). - Invites faith: Ends with a prayer that asks for belief, not just answers.

>> Missions Spotlight

The Maasai people of East Africa have a strong oral tradition of stories about suffering and redemption. Missionaries have found that Joseph's story connects deeply, and the Maasai concept of 'Enkai' (God) provides a starting point for sharing the full Gospel.

-> To the Cross

Joseph was betrayed, enslaved, and imprisoned, yet God used it all to save many lives. In the same way, Jesus was betrayed and crucified, the worst evil, yet God used it to save the world. What people meant for evil, God meant for good.