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From Prison to Palace: Joseph's Story

Scripture: Genesis 37:1-36; 39:1-41:57

Theme: God works all things together for good

Jr High (Ages 12-14)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

Lesson Overview: "God Calls Us Too!" (Moses & the Burning Bush , Exodus 3:1-4:17) Imagine being told, "Hey, kid, you're the one to lead my people out of slavery!" Moses probably thought, "Me? A shepherd? I'm too awkward, too unsure, too normal for this!" But God didn't care about his excuses, He called him anyway. Today, we'll explore how God uses us, even when we feel like we don't measure up. Real question: What would make you say "yes" to God's big plan for you? Life Application: God's calling isn't about perfection, it's about trust. Just like Moses had to step out in faith, you might feel called to volunteer, share your faith, or serve others. The key? Start small. God's not asking you to be perfect, He's asking you to be present. Teacher Tip: End with a quick reflection, "Where am I hesitant to take the next step in faith? What's one small way I can trust God this week?"

Bible Story

"Moses and the Burning Bush: When God Calls Us to Be Bold" (Exodus 3:1, 4:17)

Imagine this: Moses was just another shepherd tending his flocks near Mount Horeb in midday heat. His staff was heavy, his feet achy, and his sheep were thirsty. When he paused to rest, something unusual happened, he saw a bush blazing with fire, yet it wasn't consumed! His curiosity got the better of him, and he stepped closer to investigate. That's when God spoke.

God's voice wasn't a loud booming, but a quiet whisper: "I see you. I've noticed you." (Exodus 3:7) At first, Moses didn't know what to make of this. He was no king, no hero, just a lowly shepherd who couldn't even read his own name in Hebrew! When God asked him to free the Israelites from slavery, Moses said, "Who am I? I'm not even a strong leader!" (Exodus 3:11). But God replied, "I'll be with you" (v. 20), and then gave Moses clear instructions: "Tell the people to go home, but bring the elders with you." Moses hesitated again, what if they laughed? What if he failed? God reminded him that he had been chosen, even if he didn't feel worthy. "I'll show you what to do," God said (v. 12).

Things got even harder. When Moses tried to tell the Israelite leaders that God had sent him, they doubted. "Who is he that I should listen to you?" (Exodus 4:14) Moses even asked God to send someone else, anyone but him. But God wasn't done with excuses. He gave Moses three signs: turning his staff into a snake (which Moses didn't believe!), turning water into blood (which worked but still scared him), and finally, parting a river (which he couldn't do himself). Still, Moses kept thinking, "I'm not enough."

Yet here's the thing: God doesn't ask us to be perfect. He asks us to trust. Moses took his family and went to Egypt, but he was still nervous. When he confronted Pharaoh, he forgot the signs God had given him and just asked, "What if I'm wrong?" (Exodus 5:22). The more he resisted, the harder it became. But God didn't abandon Moses, he kept guiding him, reminding him: "I've seen you, I've called you, and I'll never leave you." (Exodus 3:7).

Why This Story Matters Today This isn't just about Moses, it's about us. Sometimes God calls us to do things we're not ready for: stand up for what's right, share our faith, or even just trust Him when life feels uncertain. Moses' excuses (I'm not enough, they'll laugh, I'll fail) are our excuses too. But God doesn't want us to be perfect, He wants us to be courageous. He's the same God who called Moses, and He'll be with us every step of the way. So next time God speaks to you, don't hide behind doubt. Answer: "Yes, Lord!" and take one small step forward.

Life Application: - Ask God to show you when He's calling you to step out of your comfort zone. - Remember: God's power isn't in your strength, it's in His. - When you doubt, say like Moses (v. 11): "But who am I?", and then trust God to equip you.

Key Verse

Genesis 50:20

Verse: "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14) Imagine Moses is running away from the king, he's scared, tired, and feeling lost. But when God calls him, Moses asks, "What if I'm not strong enough? What if I fail?" God's reply isn't "I'll be with you" or "Trust me." Instead, He says, "I AM WHO I AM." That means He's not just going to help, He's always there, always enough, always the same (no matter what happens). Why it matters: Life throws us surprises, fear, mistakes, or big dreams. But God isn't just a backup plan; He's the I AM. Even when we feel weak, He's the One who holds us up. The next time you feel unsure, ask: "Does God still I AM?" And remember, He's not just with you, but is you in ways you can't see yet. Life test: What's one thing you're afraid to try because you feel "not enough"? God isn't asking you to become someone else, He's saying, "I'm already there with you." Try it with His promise!

Activities

Activity 1:

Supplies needed:

- Uses basic supplies and lets students explore God's word in their own way.

1. Divide into Groups (3, 5 students per team):
2. Assign roles: Moses (the reluctant leader), Aaron (Moses' brother-in-law, a skeptic), Israelites (the people questioning God's plan), and God (a silent observer).
3. Scene Setup: The Burning Bush
4. Place a paper "Bush" (red/orange paper cut into a bush shape) on a table.
5. Read Exodus 3:2, 6 aloud: "God speaks to Moses from the bush, 'I am who I am'" (Exodus 3:14). Pause for dramatic effect, is Moses scared?
6. Ask: "What would YOU do if God asked you to step into something new?"
7. Debate Prompt:
8. Moses' Fear: "I'm not good enough!" (Exodus 4:10, 11)
9. Aaron's Doubt: "What if we're wrong? What if God changes His mind?"

10. Israelites' Complaints: "Why should we trust YOU, Moses?" (Exodus 5:23)
11. God's Challenge: "Who am I to lead?" (Exodus 3:11)
12. Let teams argue back and forth for 5 minutes. End with: "How would YOU respond?"
13. Wrap-Up Discussion:
14. Write answers on the board as students share:
15. "What was harder for you to trust God with? Why?"
16. "How can we be brave like Moses when God calls us?"
17. Connect to life: "God doesn't call us for our strengths, He calls us to trust Him anyway. What's one thing we're scared to do for Him?"
18. Life Application Tie-In:
19. This activity mirrors real-life moments where God asks us to step out of comfort zones (e.g., faith-sharing, volunteering, or facing criticism). The debate forces students to confront their fears and ask: "What would Moses do?"
2. "Design Your Divine Mandate"
21. A creative collage activity where students craft their own "calling card" from God's lesson in Exodus 3, blending art with spiritual reflection.
22. Prep the Template:
23. Give each student a large sheet of paper divided into 3 sections:
24. Top (Bush): "A sign from God" (draw a bush with flames, or write "I see you!")
25. Middle (Voice): "God's call" (write "I am who I am" or "I've got this")
26. Bottom (Mandate): "My response" (leave blank for their own words)
27. Study the Story:
28. Read Exodus 3:1, 6 together. Ask: "What did God do that changed Moses' life?"
29. Emphasize: God speaks, reveals Himself, and asks us to step out, even if we're scared.
30. Create Your Poster:
31. Bush Section: Draw a "burning bush" or write "God saw my struggle" (use Exodus 3:7).
32. Voice Section: Write a phrase like "God's voice says I'm needed" or "I'm not alone!"
33. Mandate Section: Fill in a specific way they feel called to serve (e.g., "I'll share my faith" or "I'll listen when people need advice").
34. Share & Reflect:
35. Have students present their posters for 1 minute. Others write a compliment or question on their paper.
36. Discuss:
37. "What's one thing God is calling YOU to do differently?"
38. "How does it feel to hear that call?"
39. Challenge: "Write down one step you'll take this week to trust God more."
40. Life Application Tie-In:
41. This activity encourages students to own their role in God's story. Just as Moses had to "go" (Exodus 3:10), they must ask: "What's the next step I need to take based on what God's saying to me?" The collage helps them visualize their own "burning bush", their moment of divine calling.
42. Why These Work for Junior High:
43. Debate: Sparks critical thinking and empathy for others' fears.
44. Collage: Combines creativity with Scripture memory and reflection.

Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions designed to engage junior high students (ages 12-14) in thinking deeply about the story of Moses and the Burning Bush while connecting it to their own lives and real-world challenges:

- 1. Fear and Comfort in the Unknown

- When Moses first saw the burning bush, he was terrified because he didn't understand what was happening. He asked God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" (Exodus 3:11). In your life, have you ever been in a situation where you felt completely overwhelmed or unsure, like you weren't sure what to do or who to trust? What made you feel that way, and how did you respond? How could God speak to you in a way that reassured you, like He did with Moses?

- (Life Application: This question encourages students to reflect on moments of fear or hesitation and how they (or God) might respond, finding comfort in Him when we don't know what's next.)

- 2. Why Do You Think God Called Moses to Speak for Him?

- Moses had a big problem: he was a rude talker (Exodus 4:10), and he was scared he wouldn't be good at this leadership role. But God didn't just pick Moses because he was perfect, He picked him because Moses had a heart for justice. God said, "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12). Why do you think God chose someone who wasn't the most confident or outgoing? How can you be the kind of person God can use, even if you don't feel the most prepared or brave?

- (Life Application: Helps students see that God often works through imperfect people, and it's okay to admit we're not always the best at things, we just need to trust Him and learn as we go.)

- 3. What Would You Have Asked God if You Were Moses?

- Moses had a lot of questions, Who am I? (I'm not a leader!) Why me? (I don't know Hebrew!) What if Pharaoh doesn't listen? (I'm not strong!) What would you have asked God if you were in Moses' shoes? Why did Moses' questions matter, and how did God respond?

- (Life Application: Encourages students to think about their own fears or doubts and how they might turn to God in prayer, even if their questions seem small or big.)

- 4. How Can We Use God's Power to Change What's Wrong in the World?

- Moses was told to speak for God, but he had to learn how, first by asking for help, then by obeying, and finally by trusting that God would empower him. In the world today, there are so many injustices, bullying, unfair treatment, inequality, that people want to change. If you had the chance to use God's power to make a difference, what would you do? How can you, even in small ways, stand up for what's right or help someone who's been treated unfairly? What might hold you back, and how can you overcome it?

- (Life Application: Connects the story to real-life calls to action, encouraging students to think about how they can be agents of change, just like Moses, but in their own lives.)

- These questions are designed to spark conversation, encourage critical thinking, and help students see the Bible story as relevant to their own struggles and hopes. Would you like any adjustments to better fit a specific group or context?

Prayer Focus

Prayer Focus: "When You Hear Your Name Called, What Will You Do?" [Pause for a moment, maybe while you read Exodus 3:1, 4 together as a class.] "Lord, sometimes we're so busy running from our problems, or hiding in our phones, or pretending we're not scared that we don't even listen when You're trying to say something. But Moses? He stepped out in the middle of the fire, right there in the bush that wasn't burning him away, but calling him! You know what happened next? He did something unexpected: he answered. He said, 'Here I am!' Not 'No, I'm too busy!' Not 'That's not fair!', just 'I'm here.' Lord, help us today to be like that. When You speak, whether it's through a dream, a text, a friend, or even just a quiet voice in our hearts, help us answer, even if it scares us. Help

us step out of the bushes we've made (the excuses, the fears, the 'I don't deserve this') and say, 'I hear You. Here I am.' Because sometimes, the only thing holding us back is the fear that You're the one who's really asking." Why it works for 12, 14-year-olds: - Relatable tension: Their fears (school, friends, mistakes) feel like that burning bush, threatening if they stay, but also calling them to something bigger. - Moses' example: He didn't fix everything, he just answered. Their job is the same: answer, not perfect. - Life application: Burnout, anxiety, or distraction? This prayer says, "What if God's calling is louder than our noise?" Optional follow-up for class discussion: "Where have you heard God's voice lately, and did you answer? What's one 'burning bush' you're avoiding right now?"

>> Missions Spotlight

The Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews) have preserved ancient traditions about Moses and the Exodus for centuries. Missionaries working in Ethiopia have found that the burning bush story opens doors to share about the God who still speaks today.

-> To the Cross

God revealed Himself as 'I AM WHO I AM', the self-existent, eternal God. Jesus later said, 'Before Abraham was, I AM' (John 8:58). The same God who spoke from the bush sent His Son to deliver us from sin.