



5 Joseph the Dreamer

Scripture

[Genesis 37; 39:1-2](#)

Focus

When Joseph was frightened and alone, God was with him.

Faith Nurture Goals

- Feel sure that God is with us in times of trouble.
- Wonder how Joseph could tell that God was with him.
- Describe times when we have felt frightened and alone like Joseph did.



Leader Reflection

Preparing to Tell God's Story

While we tend to think of Joseph as a kind of heroic figure in the Bible, the story doesn't start out that way. This seventeen-year-old boy comes across as something of a show-off and a tattler. Jacob loved Joseph, the son of his old age by his favorite wife, more than all his other sons. That can happen to parents, but to his discredit he showed it. Jacob gave Joseph an expensive and exclusive gift in the multicolor coat. His brothers hated him, and we can understand why.

Joseph had dreams, and in each one it turns out that he's at the center, shining with importance. Having a dream is one thing, but telling it to your brothers is another, especially when you know it's bound to make them even more jealous. Joseph was either naïve or malicious, for he related his dreams to his brothers with great gusto. He even succeeded in getting his father angry at him: "Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" (Gen. 37:10).

The brothers get their chance for revenge when Jacob sends Joseph to check on them when they are away with the flocks. Earlier it was reported that Joseph had "brought their father a bad report about them," and now here comes the tattle-tale again. They spot him a long way off (probably the multicolor coat): "Here comes that dreamer!" With a quick acceleration of rage, they begin plotting to murder him. We can sense how deep their jealousy had become.

The plan was to kill Joseph and make it look like the work of a wild animal. Interestingly, the oldest brother, Reuben, wanted to spare Joseph and bring him back home. But the brothers took Joseph's "richly

ornamented" robe, and threw him into a deep cistern.

Reuben was gone while the brothers sat down to eat and noticed a trading caravan passing by. One of the brothers injects another motive: greed. "What good will it do just to kill him? We can get rid of him and make some money too, if we sell him to the Ishmaelites." And that's what they did.

By the time Reuben returned it was all over. He tore his clothes, but the text doesn't say that the brothers told him what they had done. Perhaps they didn't tell him, and Reuben assumed that somehow Joseph had been kidnapped. At any rate, the brothers hatched a plan to soak the infamous robe in blood and bring it to Jacob. They didn't even have to lie to their father. All they did was show him the robe, and Jacob jumped to his own logical conclusion---that Joseph had been killed by an animal.

There was mourning and wailing in the tents of Jacob, who didn't see his son again till years later. The chapter ends on this ominous note: "The Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials."

This is not a nice story. It's all about human pride, jealousy, greed, and violence. And there's not a word about God in it, until we get to 39:2---"The Lord was with Joseph." God is there, and God's purposes will come to fruition.

Steps

Step 1 Breathe

Use this time to focus your attention on God.

Do this with me: calm your head, heart, and hands as you slowly breathe in . . . and out. (*Demonstrate a few deep "in and out breaths" with eyes closed.*)

Step 2 Tell and Wonder

Files: [Story Symbols \(full unit\): Year 2 Unit 2](#)

Let's enter God's story together. Here's the story symbol for the part of God's story that we'll be spending time in today. I wonder what clues it gives us about the story we're about to hear? (*Show the story symbol. Accept any answers without giving away whether or not the kids have guessed correctly.*)

Listen closely as we read the story together to see which story our symbol represents.

Read "Joseph the Dreamer" aloud, pausing throughout to allow children to answer the wondering questions.

NOTE: *It's always a good idea to read through the story beforehand so you'll be able to tell it well.*

You can also read the story from a children's Bible or a simplified translation of Scripture like the New International Reader's Version (NIRV). Remember to pause throughout to allow time to wonder.

Re★formed

Notice that God is not mentioned in this story till 39:2. The fact that Joseph turns out to be a heroic savior of his family (and his brothers end up bowing down to him just as Joseph dreamed) does not justify Joseph's naive pride and the brothers' hateful violence. God works even through our twisted motives and youthful mistakes.

Story: Joseph the Dreamer

Genesis 37; 39:1-2

Joseph was around seventeen years old, and he was a very happy guy! His father, Jacob, had just given him a new coat—the most beautiful coat he had ever seen. It was bright and colorful. It made Joseph feel like a prince. He couldn't wait to show it to his older brothers!

But when Joseph proudly paraded past his brothers in his new coat, they didn't smile. They didn't even tell him how good he looked. Instead they whispered angrily to each other: "Why did Father give Joseph that beautiful coat? We're older than Joseph is. We work harder than he does too. But our father, Jacob, only gives us ordinary clothes. He must love Joseph more than he loves us." The more they talked together, and the more they watched Joseph in the new coat, the angrier the brothers became.

Have you ever felt that someone else got more than his or her fair share? Tell us about the feelings you had when that happened. *(Pause for responses.)*

One of the brothers said, "I can't stand to be in the same room with Joseph." Another one said, "I wish he were dead."

One night Joseph had a dream. He dreamed that he and his brothers were out in a field, tying grain into big bundles. Suddenly Joseph's bundle stood up straight. His brothers' bundles gathered around his and bowed down to it!

When Joseph told his brothers about the dream, they looked at him with angry eyes. One of them said, "I suppose you think that means you're going to be king over us someday, doesn't it, Joseph? Well, dream on!"

A little later God sent Joseph another dream much like the first one. Again Joseph told it to his family. "Listen," he said. "This time I dreamed that my brothers and I were all stars in the sky. Father and Mother were the sun and the moon. All at once the sun and the moon and the eleven stars bowed down to my star." When the brothers heard this, they hated Joseph even more than before.

Since God is giving these specific dreams to Joseph, they must mean something. What do you think they could mean? *(Pause for responses.)*

Some time later Joseph's brothers had to travel a long way from home to find green grass for their sheep. They were gone a long time, and Jacob was worried about them. He decided to send Joseph out to find them. "Go and check on your brothers," Jacob said to Joseph. "Make sure they're OK."

The brothers saw Joseph coming in the distance. "Look," they said to each other. "Here comes the dreamer in that fancy coat of his. This is our chance to get rid of him!"

"I don't think we should hurt him. Why don't you throw him in that empty well over there. He'll never be able to climb out!" said Reuben, the oldest brother. He figured he could come back later and save Joseph and take him back to their father.

So when Joseph came near, his brothers grabbed him, took off the beautiful coat, and threw him in the well.

Joseph yelled out again and again, "Come on—let me out! Father's waiting for me to come back and tell him how you're doing!" But the brothers ignored him.

Imagine that you are Joseph in that pit. What thoughts are going through your mind right now?

(Pause for responses.)

As the brothers were eating lunch, they saw a group of people and camels coming toward them. "Look!" said Judah to his brothers as he pointed to the people. "Those people must be on their way to Egypt. We could sell Joseph to them. Then we would be rid of him for good!"

The brothers remembered that their older brother, Reuben, had said they shouldn't harm Joseph, only scare him. But Reuben had gone to check on the sheep, and Judah's idea sounded great. So when the merchants came near, Joseph's brothers hauled him out of the well and sold him for twenty pieces of silver. The merchants tied Joseph's hands and led him away as a slave.

Joseph is now wearing the coat of a slave. Describe what you think that coat might look like. *(Pause for responses.)*

A little while later Reuben came back to the camp. When he saw that the well was empty, Reuben was very upset. "What am I going to tell our father?" he cried.

So the brothers thought up a plan. They killed a goat and dipped Joseph's beautiful coat into the blood. Then they traveled all the way home and handed it to Jacob. "Look what we found, Father," they said, pretending to be sad. "It looks like Joseph's coat!"

When Jacob saw the blood on Joseph's coat, he figured that a wild animal must have attacked and killed his precious son, Joseph. Jacob tore his own clothes and wept. He cried for many days, and no one could comfort him.

Let's find out what happened to Joseph. *(Open your bible to Genesis 39:1-2 and read this passage to the group. Then close your Bible.)* While Father Jacob was crying for the son he thought was dead, God was watching over Joseph and blessing him. God was with him all the time!

Do you think Joseph knew that God was with him? *(Pause for responses.)*

Step **3** Pray

Close with prayer. Have kids repeat each line after you:

Dear God, thank you for your promise to be with us always.

Thank you for being with Joseph and caring for him.

Thank you for keeping that same promise to us.

We love you, Lord. Amen.

See [5 Ways to Pray with Kids](#) for other ways to pray.

Step **4** Respond

Select and do one or more of the response activities from God's Big Story card #20 or check out [5 Ways to Retell a Bible Story with Kids](#) for some fun ways to retell this story. Include older kids in the retelling by

having them read the story aloud while the younger children act it out.

*God's Big Story cards can be ordered from FaithAliveResources.org.

Easy Extras

1. Arrival Activity: Coats

Materials: Joseph and Coat pattern printed on cardstock • coloring materials • clear tape • fabric scraps (optional)

Files: [Printable : Joseph and Coat Pattern](#)

Before the session begins, print the Joseph figure and coat onto cardstock or heavy paper, one for each child. Cut out the shapes in advance.

Take a few moments to wonder into the story together, using these wondering questions:

- **Would you want to be Joseph in this story?**
- **Which things that happened would scare you the most?**
- **I wonder if you would feel sure that God was taking care of you—even in the deep, dark hole . . . even when your brothers sold you to people you didn't know . . . and even when those people carried you off to a faraway land.**
- **Have you ever felt scared and alone?**
- **I wonder if you know that God will always take care of you, no matter where you are.**

Pass out the Joseph figures and coat shapes and invite kids to add facial features to Joseph and to decorate the coat with bright colors. When the kids are finished decorating their coats, demonstrate how to fold the coat along the dotted line so it can be placed on Joseph's shoulders. Encourage kids to use their Joseph to retell the story to their families at home.

Tip

You could also bring scraps of fabric for the kids to use to decorate the coat. This might be a simple way to engage some of the older children in your group with this activity.

2. Age-Specific Activities

Click below to access the full age-specific *Dwell* session for this story:

- **Preschool:** [God Takes Care of Joseph](#)
- **Kindergarten-1st Grade:** [God Cares for Joseph](#)
- **2nd-3rd Grade:** [Joseph the Dreamer](#)