Joseph and God’s Provision in the famine (Genesis 41-42)—**Who is Our True Provider?**

**Ask** the kids where the food they eat comes from. They might start with the grocery store, and work backwards to farms and farmers. Draw them out to help them realize that God ultimately provides everything we eat (not to mention everything else that we want or need!)

**Explain** that in today’s lesson we will hear the next part of Joseph’s story and how God used him to provide for the nation of Israel. Remind them that there were many people in Joseph’s life who wished to harm him (his brothers, and Potiphar’s wife to name a few) but God never abandoned Joseph. What people planned for evil, God planned for good.

**Pray** that God would open their hearts to his word today and thank Him for using even the sin in our lives to bring about blessings.

**Tell the Story**

**Ask:** Have you ever had something bad happen to you that you didn’t understand?

Sometimes God allows things to happen to us that might seem bad at first, but it turns out that God is using it to bring us closer to him. God is with us even when we suffer, and by His goodness and grace He shows us that he loves us even though we sin against him. In today’s story we are going to hear how God used Joseph to bring his brothers closer to Him. We will see that what people plan for evil, God plans for good.

Pharaoh had asked Joseph to interpret his dreams and Joseph told him that they were warnings about 7 years of abundance followed by a 7-year famine. God had revealed the dream’s interpretations as well as a brilliant plan to help save the nation of Egypt and surrounding countries. Pharaoh had put Joseph in charge of collecting and distributing all the food.

**Read:** (Genesis 41:56-42:2) “*When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout Egypt. And all the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe everywhere. When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you just keep looking at each other?” He continued, “I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die.”*

**Ask:** Where did Jacob send his sons? (*To Egypt.)*

**Ask:** Does anyone remember how Joseph got to Egypt? *(His brothers sold him into slavery there.)*

**Ask:** Do you think the brothers recognized Joseph when they arrived in Egypt? (*No!)*

The brothers bowed down to Joseph not realizing that he was the brother they had sold into slavery years earlier. They might not have recognized him, but Joseph certainly recognized them!

**Ask:** How do you think Joseph will react to seeing his brothers?

**Read:** (*Genesis 42: 9-10) “He remembered his dreams about them and said to them, ‘You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.’ ‘No, my lord,’ they answered. ‘Your servants have come to buy food. We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.’”*

**Ask:** Why do you think Joseph accused them of being spies?

God was using Joseph to test the older brothers to see if their hearts had truly been changed and if they were sorry for what they had done to Joseph. Let’s hear what Joseph does next…

**Read:** (*Genesis 42: 15-16)* “*Joseph said to them, ‘As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, to that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!’*

Joseph had the 10 brothers put in prison for 3 days. At the end of the 3 days he told them to return to their homeland and bring Benjamin back with them. Meanwhile, Joseph had Simeon (another brother) bound and kept in custody to ensure they would return. The brothers were frightened and believed that this was God punishing them for what they had done to Joseph years earlier.

**Ask:** Do you think the brothers were sorry for their sin?

Joseph gave the brothers food to take back to their families then sent them on their way. When they returned home, they reported to Jacob everything that had happened to them and how Joseph demanded that they return to Egypt with Benjamin. Jacob was afraid of losing another one of his sons, so he refused to allow Benjamin to go with them.

**Ask:** Do you think it was fair for Joseph to treat his brothers so harshly? Do you think it was because he was angry?

Sometimes God uses other people to allow us to see our own sin so that we will confess it and turn back to him. Though it seems like Joseph was doing something mean to his brothers, God was using it for good.

Just like Joseph’s brothers, we deserve to be punished for our sins. But God doesn’t treat us the way we deserve to be treated. Instead, God shows us his love and grace by paying the price that our sins deserve through Jesus’ death on the cross. Joseph’s brothers needed grain for food, and Joseph showed mercy to them and gave them what they needed to survive. Like them we need Jesus to save us from our sins, and God shows us mercy by providing for our salvation by sending His only Son! This is a truth that we can thank God for today!

**Review Questions**

* **What book of the Bible did we read from?** (Genesis)
* **Why was Joseph in Egypt?** (His brothers had sold him into slavery)
* **What was Joseph’s role in Egypt?** (He was in charge of storing and selling the grain during the famine.)
* **Why did Jacob send his sons to Egypt?** (The famine caused a great food shortage, but Joseph had stored plenty of food in Egypt. The brothers went to Egypt to buy food.)
* **In what way do we see God providing for his people in this story?** (God placed Joseph in a prominent position in Egypt to ensure that the Israelites would have enough food to survive the famine.)

**Learning Activity 1:** **How Does God Provide for You?** Supplies: Bread loaf outlines

You can click here to download a bread outline <https://ministry-to-children.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Bread-Outline.pdf>

* Encourage the kids to think about ways that God provides for them on a daily basis. (Ex: food, clothes, safe place to live, etc.) Then pass out the bread loaf outlines and have them write or draw a picture of some things they came up with. If there is time, have them share their drawings with the class.
* **Ask** one child to read **John 6:35** which says, *“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.’”*
* **Ask** one child to read the prayer Jesus taught his disciples in **Matthew 6:9-13** and notice that Jesus instructed them (and us) to ask for DAILY bread—God’s provision EACH DAY.
* **Ask:** what do you think it means that Jesus is the bread of life? (*Though we need food to keep our bodies alive, Jesus gives us lasting, eternal life when we come to Him. Our bodies will one day die, but Jesus gives life to our spirits which will live forever!)*

**Learning Activity 2:** **God at Work** Supplies: Bibles, Paper, and Pencils

* Allow the kids to work in groups of 2-4 for this activity. Give Bibles, paper, and pencils to each group
* **Say:** God is always at work in our lives, even when we can’t see it. In the story we just heard, God was working in different ways in different characters. Choose one character from the story and write how you think God was at work in their hearts to draw him closer to God.
* Give each child time to share what they wrote.
* **Explain** that even though we don’t see the brothers confess and repent to God in this story, it’s clear that they were made aware of their sin and knew that God was the one prompting them to confess. It can be difficult for us to confess our sin and, just like the brothers we may still try to hide from God.   God knows about our sin even before we do it, so we don’t have to try to hide from Him. We can trust in his love for us because of the evidence we see in Jesus dying for us on the cross.
* Give the kids a few minutes to think about the ways God is at work in their own lives. If anyone is comfortable sharing, allow them time to do so. Then spend a few minutes praying with your children that they would be open to God’s work in their hearts and that they would feel free to confess and repent of their sin to Jesus.