

When Things Get Tough



YOU'LL NEED

- five containers of different sizes
- a plastic tablecloth
- masking tape
- marshmallows
- photocopies of the "Hard Times" handout (p. 67)
- pencils or markers

LESSON AIM

To help kids believe that ★ God will help us through hard times.

OBJECTIVES

Kids will

- experience receiving a prize that isn't what they had hoped for,
- act out Joseph's story of troubles and triumph,
- describe responses to tough situations, and
- commit to trusting God when they face tough times.

BIBLE BASIS

Genesis 39–45

It's impossible to read the story of Joseph without marveling at how he handled the incredible ups and downs of his life. Favorite son to slave. Favored servant to prisoner. Prisoner to second in command of all Egypt. Whew! Most amazing of all is Joseph's steady, level-headed dedication to serving God by doing his best in every circumstance.

In our culture we've come to believe that life owes us a steady job with good retirement income, a comfortable home, more than we need to eat, and regular opportunities for rest and recreation. If illness, loss of a job, or other financial setbacks come our way, we tend to think that God owes us an explanation.

Joseph might smile at us and shake his head. He didn't find

his security in his family or his job. Joseph was content to place his life in the hands of the living God who was as much present in a dark prison as in Pharaoh's palace.

In his adult years, Joseph stands out as one of the Bible's few sterling characters. There's no moral slip, no greed, no glaring faults—just a man who trusted God completely.

Psalm 37:3a, 5

“Trust the Lord and do good” is the Christian's response to every situation in life, good or bad, deserved or undeserved. We can trust God to bring us through no matter how defeating the circumstances may seem.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR KIDS

Few kids in Western societies realize how much their lifestyles contrast with those of people in less-privileged countries. But affluence doesn't necessarily result in contentment. No matter what their ages are, kids focus on the next gadget they plan to acquire rather than on the bounty they already enjoy.

Kids can learn a lot from the story of Joseph. He shifted from the ranks of the haves to those of the have-nots on a regular basis. Yet we don't hear a whisper of complaint. He always did his best, even when he was treated unfairly. Because he was so focused on God, Joseph could take the best and worst life had to offer.

Use this lesson to challenge kids to look for God's hand in every situation and to rely on God's strength when the going gets tough.

ATTENTION GRABBER

No Fair!

Set up a marshmallow-toss using five containers set in a line, the smallest container in front and the largest in back. Any containers will do. You might start with a #2 tin can and end with a bucket, adding three other containers of increasingly large sizes in between. Spread a plastic tablecloth under the containers so kids will be able to eat the marshmallows



The Lesson

that bounce on the floor.

Place one masking tape line on the floor two feet from the first container and a second line three feet from the first container. Younger kids will toss from the closer line, and older kids from the farther.

As kids arrive, give them each five marshmallows.

Say: **I have great prizes for kids who can toss their marshmallows into all five containers.**

Have each student try to toss a marshmallow in each container. After kids have each had their turn, let them retrieve their marshmallows from the containers or from the floor, but don't allow them to eat their marshmallows yet.

After everyone has played, congratulate the kids who got all or most of their marshmallows in the containers.

Then say: **I promised great prizes for getting all your marshmallows in the containers. Here's your prize: You get to eat your marshmallows. By the way, everyone else can eat their marshmallows, too.**

When kids protest, ask:

● **What's wrong?** (This isn't fair; you promised us a great prize, but kids who didn't win got the same thing we did.)

Say: **Hmm. This isn't what you expected, is it? But, you see, when I promised you a prize, I never said that the other kids wouldn't get a prize, too.**

Ask:

● **Do you still think it's unfair? Why or why not?** (Yes, because I think we should get a better prize; no, because this way everyone gets a treat.)

Say: **Sometimes life surprises us in ways we think are unfair. For instance, you might study hard for a test but get a poor grade. You might get blamed for something you didn't do. Or someone you trust might fail to keep a promise. It seems unfair, but there's not a whole lot you can do about it. The good news is that ★ God helps us through tough times.**

BIBLE STUDY

Troubles and Triumph (Genesis 37; 39; 41-45)

Say: **Today's Bible story is about a young man who had one tough time after another, and none of it was really his fault. I'll tell the story as a ballad. Watch me carefully and do exactly what I do.**

Read "The Favorite Son" (pp. 64-65) and do the motions in parentheses.

Give a round of applause for kids' participation in the story. Then ask:

● **What happened to Joseph that was especially hard or unfair?** (He was sold as a slave; he was put in prison for something he didn't do.)

● **Suppose you were put in prison even though you'd never committed a crime. How would you feel? What would you do?** (I'd be angry; I'd try to break out.)

● **What special things did Joseph do?** (He still did his best, even though bad things happened to him; he forgave his brothers even though they'd been really mean to him; he saved up enough food for everyone.)

● **Why do you think Joseph could do all these good things even when bad things kept happening to him?** (He trusted God; he knew God would work things out.)

Say: ★ **God will help us through hard times. Joseph knew that. Because Joseph trusted God, he kept doing his best in every situation. And that's not always easy to do. Let's explore ways we can follow Joseph's example today.**

LIFE APPLICATION

Hard Times

Distribute photocopies of the "Hard Times" handout (p. 67). Help kids form three groups. Assign each group one of the articles on the handout. Have a volunteer read aloud the verse at the top of the handout.

Then say: **This verse could be Joseph's motto! Joseph was always willing to trust God and do good.**

In just a moment, I'll have you read through your article together and decide how the people in your story could trust God and do good, just as Joseph did.

Explain that each group will need a reader to read the article aloud, a reporter to share the group's discussion with the rest of the class, and several encouragers to make sure everyone gets involved in the discussion.

Call time after about three minutes. Have the reporters tell how their groups decided the people in their stories could trust God and do good.

After each report, open the discussion to the rest of the class and encourage the whole class to brainstorm other ways to trust God and do good in that situation.

TEACHER TIP

Rehearse the ballad several times before class so you can do the motions along with the story. Or, choose an older student to tell the story with you. The student can lead the motions as you read the ballad.

If you taught lesson 6 last week, say: **Last week we learned how Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave. Today we're going to review that story, then see what happened to Joseph next.**

TEACHER TIP

Explain that readers and reporters don't necessarily have to be older kids. Encourage groups to give responsibility to younger kids as well.

The Favorite Son

(from Genesis 37; 39; 41-45)

Fathers, brothers, sisters, mothers.
Me, my cat, my dog, and others.
Grandmas, uncles, aunts, and cousins.
Family members by the dozens.
How many people live with you?
Eleven or 12, or one or two?

Joseph lived with many others.
Joseph had 11 brothers!
(Count on fingers as you name the
brothers.)

Brothers Levi, Asher, Dan,
Judah, Gad, and Simeon.
Reuben, Issachar, Benjamin.
Naphtali and Zebulun.
But Joseph was the favorite son—
his father Jacob's #1.
(Hold up one finger.)

Jacob gave his son a coat.
A brand new coat—then he could gloat.
(Pretend to hold up a coat.)
Joseph had more than the others—
there were no coats for his brothers.
Joseph's coat was the only one,
for Joseph was the favorite son.
(Hug yourself.)

That special coat was quite a sight!
(Make glasses with your fingers.)
Colorful and very bright.
Purple, yellow, pink, and green—
the prettiest coat you've ever seen.
Joseph's coat fit perfectly!
It's beautiful, don't you agree?

The other brothers made a fuss.
(Put hands on hips.)

"Why does he get more than us?"
They began to grumble and pout.
(Make a sour face.)
"Why did father leave us out?"
Tell me now what you would do
if there'd been no gift for you.
One night Joseph had a dream—
his brothers all bowed down to him!
(Bow down.)
The older boys had had enough,
so they decided to get rough.
(Hold up fists.)
"This favorite son has got to go!
Then maybe Dad will love us, too."

The boys threw Joseph in a well.
(Look down.)
Then decided they would tell
old Jacob that his son had died.
That would fix young Joseph's pride!
Then a caravan came by.
The boys said, "Hey—why don't we try
to sell our brother for some money?
Joseph a slave! Isn't that funny?"
(Hold your stomach and laugh.)

His brothers got him in a mess,
but Joseph chose to try his best.
And all along he thought, "You'll see
(point upward)—
the Lord, my God, will set me free."

Even when Joseph was a slave,
he was kind and smart and brave.
Then someone nasty told a tale,
and Joseph ended up in jail!
(Wrap hands around imaginary bars.)
But still he didn't

(continued)

moan or pout—
he trusted God to work things out.

One day Joseph got a call
to see King Pharaoh in his hall.
(Make a crown with your hands.)
The king was troubled by his dreams.
(Frown.)

He said, "Please tell me what this means."
Joseph helped him understand
that God in heaven had a plan.

"For seven years you'll have good crops
(thumbs up),
but after that, the growing stops.
(Thumbs down.)

Get someone to make a plan
to save up all the food you can."
The king said, "Joseph, you're my man!
(Point.)
I'll make you second in command."

Now that Joseph was in charge,
he built new barns that were quite large.
(Spread arms.)
He gathered food from everywhere
so there would be enough to share.
Then when the ground grew hard and dry,
people came to him to buy.
(Hold out a hand.)

Joseph's brothers came one day.
They traveled there from far away
to get some food for their empty bowls
(cup empty hands)
and stop their stomachs' hungry growls.
(Rub stomach.)

As they bowed before their brother
(bow down),

they mistook him for another.
They didn't see him as the one
who'd been their father's favorite son.
So Joseph tested them to find
(rub your chin)
if their hearts were mean or kind.

Joseph's brothers passed the test.
He knew they wanted what was best.
Joseph hugged them, one by one
(give hugs),
and then before the day was done,
he filled their baskets with good food.
(Circle arms like a basket.)
More and more—they overflowed!

When Joseph's brothers went to pack
(wave goodbye),
they promised to bring their father back.
The family moved to Egypt, where
they lived their lives in Joseph's care.
Then their days were filled with laughter,
and they lived happily ever after.
(Fold arms and nod.)

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COMMITMENT

TEACHER TIP

Circulate among the kids as they work on their stories. Brainstorm with kids who have trouble getting started.

My Times

Say: **The God who took care of Joseph during all his ups and downs is the same God who takes care of us today. ★ God will help us through hard times, just as he helped Joseph.**

Distribute pencils or markers. Help kids find partners. Make it a point to match older kids with younger partners, and shy kids with outgoing partners.

Say: **There's a blank space on your Hard Times newspaper where you can write or draw your own story. You can tell about a tough situation you faced in the past, one that you're facing right now, or a tough situation you may face in the future. I'll give you about three minutes to write or draw. Then I'll call time and ask you to share your story with your partner.**

After three minutes, call time and have kids share their stories with their partners.

Then say: **Now tell your partner how you could trust God and do good in this situation.**

After partners have shared, bring everyone together. Invite volunteers to tell about their partners' situations and how they could trust God in the midst of them.

CLOSING

Trust Pileup

Have kids form a circle, place their handouts on the floor behind them, and link arms.

Say: **Because Joseph trusted God and did his best, thousands and thousands of lives were saved during the great famine. Joseph was just one person. If all of us promise to trust God and do good, think of the good things that could happen. ★ God will help us through hard times. Let's celebrate that by making a pile of hands. When you add your hand to the pile, say, "Trust God and do good!"**

When all the hands are on the pile, pray: **Dear Lord, thank you for the way you helped Joseph through hard times. Help us to trust you and do good, just as Joseph did. Amen.**