

Joseph: Faith in a Foreign Land

Passages: Gen 37–50

Memory Verse

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
Joseph’s entire life was in God’s hands, and his constant faith allowed him to glorify God before many nations.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. God controls the course of history.2. God is faithful.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. We must strive to keep our faith in a foreign land.2. Remain faithful to God and remember that everything is under His control, no matter what ups or downs we experience.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. Faith in Adversity
- B. God’s Faithfulness to Joseph
- C. Faithfulness that Is Clearly Seen

Life Application

1. Faith in a Foreign Land
2. Maintaining Our Faith in God

Memory Verse

Conclusion: Like Joseph, we must learn to hold on to our faith in a foreign land and shine the light of Christ on the world around us through the ups and downs we experience, until the day God brings us to our home in heaven.

Spiritual Teachings

Introduction

How does the world define a “successful life”? (*Allow students to brainstorm.*) The world today often focuses on getting ahead of others by spending more and more time on academic studies, by practicing in a chosen field, or by spending days and nights in the workplace. When faced with adversity, we are supposed to overcome problems with our wits, knowledge, and intelligence. But we know that the Bible teaches us otherwise.

Joseph is a classic example of a “from rags to riches” success story. Sold into slavery by his brothers and thrown into prison for a wrong he did not commit, Joseph rose amazingly high later in life. But what was the key to his success? Even from a young age, Joseph was someone with a strong sense of right and wrong. This quality stemmed from his strong relationship with God from a young age. But the key characteristic that lasted for Joseph’s entire life was his faith.

A. Faith in Adversity

Joseph’s character changed very little throughout his life. His direct honesty in speaking his dreams and his faithful obedience to his father, despite his brothers’ envy, show us an honest boy who was without any secrets. This didn’t change even after being sold into slavery. Joseph’s most important characteristic, however, was his faithfulness. Joseph’s faith can be clearly seen in his obedience.

As a young boy, Joseph obediently followed his father’s commands even though he was likely aware of his brothers’ jealousy. Later, Potiphar trusted Joseph to the extent that he did not even know what he owned, beyond the food that was placed in front of him (Gen 39:5–6). Although sold by his brothers, Joseph fulfilled his responsibilities, remained faithful in his duties, and refused to sin with his master’s wife. Let’s take a closer look at Joseph’s faithful character.

1. Joseph and his brothers (Gen 37:12–35)

Joseph’s first test of faith was in the face of his brothers’ envy. Jealousy was a common source of conflict in the Book of Genesis, and Joseph’s generation was no exception. His brothers saw that Jacob loved Joseph more than them, and Joseph’s frank retelling of his dreams only increased their antagonism towards him (Gen 37:4, 8). They even allowed their envy to lead them to consider the murder of their own brother. We can see the stark contrast in attitudes between them and Joseph.

Let’s read Genesis 37:12–15. Despite their antagonism, Joseph faithfully and obediently went to his brothers to see if they were well. He did not avoid his responsibilities, though he may have had reason to be afraid of being with his brothers.

2. Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39:7–23)

Even in a foreign land, Joseph adhered strictly to the commands of his Father in heaven. It did not matter that he was far away from the sight of his own family, or far from anyone who knew or understood his belief in the true God. He adamantly refused to sin with Potiphar’s wife. Let’s read Genesis 39:7–10.

We can see from Joseph’s response that he was resolute in refusing to sin against God, even though Potiphar’s wife pestered him daily. The test did not lie in the possibility of succumbing to the temptation of lying with her, but in the suffering that he had to endure from such a persistent woman. If she had been any other person, he could have easily dealt with the

problem. But because she was his master's wife, the situation was complicated and difficult for him to handle, due to the uncertainty of what may happen if he told his master. In the end, his master's wife's false accusation brought about the most unjust turn of events for Joseph.

It must have been a difficult pill for Joseph to swallow, to be thrown into prison after he had spent such a long time refusing to sin. Potiphar had not even given Joseph a chance to speak. Perhaps even if Potiphar had given Joseph a chance to explain, the truth of his wife's behavior would have been too shameful to expose. Placing him in prison would have been an easy way of sweeping the whole problem under the carpet.

3. Joseph imprisoned (Gen 39:20–23)

Despite his unjust circumstances, Joseph did not become angry with God, nor did he lash out in his behavior or speech. Let's read verses 21–23. We continue to see Joseph's good nature, shown in his care towards his fellow prisoners, and in his diligence towards all that the keeper of the prison had placed under him. Let's now read Genesis 40:5–8.

Because of his good nature, Joseph saw that the butler and the baker were sad, so he sought to find out why. Joseph's incredible faith was once again evident when they told him that they had dreams that needed to be interpreted. He knew that interpretations belonged to God, so he did not hesitate to help the two. He had no idea this event would trigger events that would lead to an audience with the Pharaoh years later! His kindness was heartfelt, and his confidence that he could help was based entirely on his faith in God.

4. Joseph before Pharaoh (Gen 41:14–41)

The butler did not remember Joseph, even though the dream came true exactly as Joseph had spoken a mere three days later. However, when we recall God's power, we know that all events were unfolding according to His timing and will.

It was another two years before Joseph saw an opportunity for his release. It may have seemed entirely unfair for the cupbearer to have forgotten him for that long, but what would have happened if Joseph had been released before Pharaoh's dream occurred? God's timing was such that the Lord would be glorified, and Joseph would be esteemed before the most powerful man in Egypt. Pharaoh's dream, which no one could interpret, provided a platform for Joseph to shine. Let's read Genesis 41:15–16.

This moment before Pharaoh was a shining ray of hope for Joseph. Human reasoning dictates that he should seize the opportunity to elevate himself in Pharaoh's eyes and aim for his release. Any normal person would have done so. But Joseph refused to take any credit for the interpretation. He gave all the glory to God (vv. 16, 25). Even while offering a solution, Joseph did not even hint that it should be himself in that position; he simply gave the best response that he could and attributed all the credit to the Lord (vv. 33–36, 38). Even after years of slavery and imprisonment, Joseph remained humble and showed a faithful heart to God.

B. God's Faithfulness to Joseph

God was faithful to Joseph – He took care of him during adversity and granted him success. It is important to note that even in times of success, Joseph also did not forget God. Many people forget God entirely when their lives are blessed and free of trials. Swept away by their own success, they forget that God is the source of everything they have and lose sight of their faith. Joseph is a good example of

someone who never forgot God, whether in dire situations or in blessed circumstances. And his faith did not go unanswered.

1. Bought by Potiphar (Gen 39:1–6)

Because the Lord was with Joseph, he became a successful man, and his master could see that the Lord was with him. Joseph was made the overseer of his house, and God blessed Potiphar because of Joseph. The extent of Potiphar's trust was clear from the fact that he did not even know what he possessed except for the bread he ate. At this early stage of Joseph's new life, God had already given him favor and glorified Himself through Joseph.

2. Second in command over Egypt (Gen 41:37–57)

Although separated from his family, Joseph was now at the pinnacle of his life due to his incredibly high status on the world stage. Egypt was a superpower, and Joseph was effectively running the nation. Egypt and other nations beyond bowed to him because he was able to save them. From a worldly perspective, his position was beyond anyone's wildest imaginations. After his years-long, unjustified imprisonment, it was now clear that God had not forgotten Joseph, but remained faithful to him, giving him a position that didn't just free Joseph from his unjust punishment. Ultimately, Joseph's freedom gave glory to God and played a crucial part in God's plan to save Joseph's family.

3. Joseph's brothers come to Egypt (Gen 42:1–5)

At this stage of Joseph's life, we can begin to see how amazingly scripted it is. The famine forced Jacob's sons to travel to a foreign country that had been saved by the hands of Joseph. And that same man was now also saving other nations, including that of his own brothers. Joseph's dream from years ago was now made entirely clear.

Joseph's reaction shows the depth of his love, despite their treatment of him and the many years they had been apart. From the moment he had been sold, Joseph had no idea whether he would see his family again, not knowing the plans that God had in store for him. For years, he must have wondered whether they were doing well, or whether his beloved father was still alive (Gen 43:27). But because Joseph remained faithful, eventually, God not only reunited him with his family again, but also let him spend another seventeen years with his father before Jacob's death (Gen 47:28).

C. Faithfulness that Is Clearly Seen

We can see that Joseph was faithful, but what exactly about his actions convey such faith? There are two characteristics that we can clearly see when examining his life: his diligent servitude, and his trust in God's absolute sovereignty.

1. Joseph served God wholeheartedly

While serving Potiphar, Joseph served with diligence and obedience. Despite his unjust situation, he was industrious and trustworthy, and as a result of his diligence, "The blessing of the LORD was on all that [Potiphar] had in the house and in the field" (Gen 39:5). In prison, he still did not exhibit any self-pity, but served the keeper of the prison with diligence. Once again, because of his faithfulness, "whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper" (Gen 39:23).

This dedicated servitude continued even when he was placed in charge of the country. Out of his faithfulness, Egypt prospered and was saved from the famine. Still, Joseph did not attribute

any of this to himself, but told his brothers that “God sent me before you” (Gen 45:7).

2. Joseph trusted in God’s sovereignty

God revealed to Joseph early on in his life that his family would bow down to him. His circumstances after being sold may have made this seem very unlikely. But Joseph continued to trust in God even in prison (Gen 40:7–8), and he clearly gave glory to God even before Pharaoh (Gen 41:16, 25). In the end, God used all circumstances – including the sins of those around him – to bring about his deliverance, both of Joseph himself, and of his family.

While Joseph had an understanding of God in his early life, in the twenty years it took for his dreams to come to light, Joseph grew to have a clearer understanding of God’s sovereignty. Joseph did not act for the sake of any reward, but told the butler and the baker, “Do not interpretations belong to God?” (Gen 40:8). Later, he again said to Pharaoh that the interpretations of his dreams were not in himself, but that “God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace” (Gen 41:16). Later, this understanding is reflected in his names for his children (Gen 41:51–52), and his reassurance towards his brothers that they “meant evil against [Joseph], but God meant it for good” (Gen 50:20).

Even after he was reunited with his family, Joseph maintained his faith in God until his very death (Gen 50:24). His very life glorified God because he kept his faith until the very end. Overall, Joseph trusted God through hardships, suffering, and many disappointments. There were so many twists and turns in his life, but God is faithful, and we see that God’s plan brought unimaginable blessings. He prepared Joseph for His purpose, and He is likewise preparing us for His glory.

Check for Understanding

1. **What was Joseph’s most important characteristic, and how can we see this in his actions?** Joseph’s faithfulness is his most important characteristic, which can be seen clearly in his obedience towards his father, his faithfulness to his duties under Potiphar, and his refusal to sin with Potiphar’s wife.
2. **How did Joseph act before Pharaoh?** He refused to take any credit for the interpretation. He gave all the glory to God. Even while offering a solution, he did not even hint that it should be himself in that position.
3. **How can we see God’s faithfulness to Joseph?** He took care of Joseph during adversity and granted him success. He blessed Potiphar while Joseph served his household, granted him a position beyond anyone’s wildest imaginations, and allowed him to reunite with his family.
4. **Through what two key characteristics can Joseph’s faith be clearly seen?** His diligent servitude, and his trust in God’s absolute sovereignty.

Life Application

1. Faith in a Foreign Land

One of the more remarkable facets of Joseph’s faith was his ability to hold on to God even when surrounded by a nation of pagan worshippers. No one in Egypt understood or shared his faith. But Joseph continued to abide by the qualities taught to him by his father – dedication, care, and the refusal to sin in the eyes of God. Trials and adversity very often reveal a person’s true character. Joseph, when faced with adversity, did not fail to hold on to his faith and give glory to God. How can we do this in our own lives? Consider the following scenarios and brainstorm ways to maintain the integrity of your faith.

Scenario 1:

Like your classmates, you thought Lucy was a little bit weird. She always wore drab clothes, barely spoke, and ate strange foods for lunch. The differences were small, but the rest of the class soon isolated her. Eventually, you learn that Lucy is being bullied through social media by some of your classmates. One day, your teacher places you in a group with her for a project. It's the first time you've really had to interact with her, and as a child of God, you know that He wants you to love your neighbors. You want to follow His command, but if you are too friendly, then perhaps your other classmates will also start bullying you. How should you act towards her?

- *Possible answers: These types of circumstances are ways for God to test our faith, just as Joseph was tested. Will you respond by reaching out to her, or by ignoring her? (Jas 4:17). God has reminded us to love our neighbor as ourselves. When we live out this love, we react differently to those in need. In this case, it may be a great moment to share God's love with her by treating her kindly, perhaps even building up a friendship and eventually introducing her to Christ. With the knowledge of God comes the understanding that she may not feel accepted by her classmates, but God will look at her heart and accept her.*

Scenario 2:

Your sibling has been unable to find a job, and money has been tight for your family the past year or so despite the work that your parents do. You've continuously prayed about it together, but still no opportunities have appeared. After several months of waiting, she is finally able to find a job, one that offers even higher pay if she can work on weekends. When she discusses it with your parents, you can see that she is seriously considering taking up the offer – it has been a long time since your family has been able to live comfortably, and you know that they are worried about the many bills they have to pay. But you also remember from your RE classes that Sabbath is a day of rest and a blessing when we keep it wholeheartedly. When we put Him first, God will bless us and take care of all our needs. What kind of suggestion can you offer to your sister?

- *Possible answers: God often uses adversity to test our faith, and to see whether we will continue following Him or not. As difficult as it is, He wants us to "[trust] in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Prov 3:5). Even if we are younger, we can support our family spiritually by reminding them that we need to put God first, and that we shouldn't rely on human wisdom. Instead, when we wait on the Lord, we will be renewed and lifted up like eagles.*

2. Maintaining Our Faith in God

Do you recall what Joseph asked his family to do with his bones? Joseph understood that their stay in Egypt was only temporary. He looked towards God's promises, even those that would be fulfilled long after his death, and he had complete faith that they would one day come to pass, including their inheritance of the promised land. Let's read Hebrews 11:13–16.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Like Joseph, we need to keep faith in God's promise that one day, we will inherit the heavenly kingdom. As long as we remember this promise, it is easier for us to recall that our home on this earth is only

temporary. But how should this knowledge affect our words or deeds? We learned today how Joseph was able to maintain his faith despite the many ups and downs that he went through in his life. This is because of his faith in God and His promises. He knew that no matter what happened to him, God never broke His promises. Let's now reflect on our own lives.

Activity: Charting Our Ups and Downs

(Teachers: Prepare some colored pencils or markers, as well as some blank paper if your students do not have their own notebooks. You can prepare a blank chart ahead of time for the students with "time" or "event" as the x-axis and "faith" as the y-axis. Or you may let the students set up their own charts, or simply list out the events of their lives. The activity is flexible depending on your class time and needs.)

First, draw a timeline of your life, starting from the earliest point you can remember until today. Then recall the major events in your life, from as early as you can remember. Examples may be meeting someone important to you, failing or passing an important exam or test, moving houses, or being baptized. Note each major event on your timeline and whether it is an "up" or a "down" in your life, either by position or color. Then, using a different colored pencil or pen, as best as you can, chart the level of your faith throughout each event. Did you pray consistently and rely on God no matter what? Or did your faith go up and down? Once you have finished your charts, discuss the following questions either as a group or with a partner.

- How has God worked in your life so far? Can you see that everything is under His control, and that it has all occurred for a reason?
- How do you feel about where your life is right now? Are you facing tribulations, or do you feel blessed?
- Have you had a lot of ups and downs in your faith? How do you think you can better maintain a constant level of faith?

Memory Verse

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Meaning

Paul talks of suffering persecution for the sake of the gospel as "light affliction." This is in comparison to the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" that we shall receive in the future. As followers and servants of Christ, we will no doubt encounter sufferings to one extent or another, but we should not focus on the temporary things around us, be it physical suffering or prosperity. Instead, we should look to the things that are not seen, that is, the eternal reward of the promises of God.

Conclusion

Because of Joseph's remarkable faith, God was able to use him as the perfect candidate to demonstrate His control over all things, His faithfulness, and His power, even to those who did not worship Him. Like Joseph, we must learn to hold on to our faith in a foreign land until the day God brings us to our home in heaven.

Lesson 9 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What does the memory verse teach us about our attitude towards suffering?
We should not focus on the temporary things around us, be it physical suffering or prosperity. Instead, we should look to the things that are not seen, that is, the eternal reward of God's promises.
2. "But as for you, you meant _____ against me; but _____ meant it for _____, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to _____ many people alive." (Genesis 50:20)
evil, God, good, save
3. What was unique about Joseph's attitude before Pharaoh?
It would have been normal to curry favor with Pharaoh to obtain freedom. Instead, Joseph attributed all glory to God and did not take any credit for himself.
4. In what way was Joseph's faith clearly seen?
From examining his life, we can see his diligent servitude and his trust in God's absolute sovereignty.
5. In a time of great success, did you forget God? How can you prevent this in the future?
Personal answers.
6. Considering what we studied about Joseph's faithfulness, how do you think you can show your own faithfulness to God while experiencing either adversity or success? Think of a memorable situation that you have experienced in the past, then write down how you can react better in the future as a child of faith.
Personal answers.