

A close-up photograph of a pair of blue denim jeans. The focus is on a pocket with orange stitching. Above the pocket, there is a horizontal seam with purple stitching. To the right of the pocket, there is a small, frayed piece of fabric with purple stitching. The denim fabric shows signs of wear and fading.

threads

The Story of Joseph



A QUOTE:

Watch your thoughts, for they become words.

Watch your words, for they become actions.

Watch your actions, for they become habits.

Watch your habits, for they become character.

Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.

— *Author Unknown*

Threads is about the story of Joseph. It is also about **your** life story and the way that God is weaving His character into the person you are becoming.

Your character is the sum total of your choices. It is developed over time. Think of it as though you were building a house. With each choice you make, you add bricks to the foundation. If that foundation is strong, the house will be strong. It can stand in gale force winds and will be a shelter from the storms of life.

Read on...

WEEK 2

The Coat of Many Colors

A QUOTE:

Character is doing the right thing when nobody's looking."

— J.C. Watts

Day 1

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how important are clothes to you? What do your clothes tell about you?
2. Although clothing can be a fun way to express oneself, it only reveals a tiny glimpse of who we are. Character, on the other hand, goes much deeper. Character is the group of qualities that make each of us who we are. Unlike outward appearances, character is rooted deep in the heart. According to the following verses, how do our hearts reveal our character?

Proverbs 27:19

Luke 6:45

3. Read this ad by a company that sells makeup. They define character this way:

Character (noun): *An accessory you wear daily. Unlike armor you hide behind, it's proudly worn on your chest, close to your heart. Character is you at your very best — and at times, at your worst. It is the real you. That is its beauty. That is your beauty.*

Do you agree with this definition? Why or why not?

4. How much time did you spend deciding what to wear this morning? Just as we think about our outfits, or the clothes in our closet, we can think about and work at what kind of character we're going to put on as we face the day's challenges. Over the course of this series, we're going to memorize a verse that says a lot about how to dress ourselves to look more like Jesus. Write **Colossians 3:12** in the space below:
5. Which of these characteristics do you most display?
6. Are these qualities that you look for in a friend?
7. How do you identify someone's character?
8. What are some other qualities that you look for that are not listed in **Colossians 3:12**?

Day 2

1. Clothes seem to play a key role in Joseph's story. Everyone in that culture wore a robe or cloak, which was useful for everything from keeping warm to wrapping babies to packing up items for a journey. Read **Genesis 37:1-4**. What made Joseph's coat so special?
2. Common people in that day only owned two garments: an outer garment and an under garment (which made getting dressed for school a breeze). To Joseph's brothers, his ornamental robe was a constant reminder of his position as Jacob's favorite son. What was their response?
☐ They babied Joseph.
☐ They ignored him.
☐ They were mean to him at every opportunity.
☐ They loved him just as their father did.
3. Read the rest of **Genesis 37**. God had a unique plan for Joseph, giving him a glimpse of it in his dreams (**Gen. 37:5-9**), but that plan would require him to go from a high position as Jacob's favorite son to a low position of a slave. When have your circumstances changed suddenly, causing you to go through a difficult time?

What positive or negative effects did it have on your character?

4. One of the character traits God was developing in Joseph through these early experiences was humility. How would you define humility? (Check all that apply)
☐ Shame and embarrassment
☐ Not thinking of yourself more highly than you should
☐ Feeling worthless
☐ Opposite of proud
☐ Other:
5. Although Joseph couldn't see it from the bottom of the pit where his brothers had thrown him, amazing things were in store for him. Why do you think it was important for Joseph to hit rock bottom before being put in a place of power?
6. Think about the things that decorate your life. Where do you get your sense of pride? From your grades? Your goals and touchdowns? The number of friends you have?
7. If all of those things were taken away, would you still seek God's dreams for you?

Making It Personal

Like Joseph, Jesus was stripped of his robe of glory and took on the nature of a servant (**Philippians 2:5-11**). Jesus' eyes were fixed on the long-term, knowing a reward awaited Him for his obedience. Pray and ask God what important lesson you can learn about humility....

The Coat of Many Colors

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- [] Pictures from old magazines showing different types of clothing
- [] Two T-shirts:
One shirt that has been torn up, muddied, stained
One clean white T-shirt
- [] Two paper bags in which to place each T-shirt
(see "Interactive Learning")

Lesson Objective:

To teach the difference between outward appearance and inward character. When we put on Christ's nature, it will be apparent to others that we belong to Him. We will look like Him!

Bible Passage(s):

Genesis 37; Isaiah 64:6, 61:10

Bible Truth:

We are able to clothe ourselves with Christ's character because of what He has done, not because of our own goodness.

Optional Opener: (10 minutes)

Prior to your ABS gathering, tear out several pictures from old magazines or newspaper ads depicting people in different styles of clothing (for example, an athlete, a supermodel, a businessman, a student). One by one, hold up the pictures and ask the students what each style tells about the person wearing it. Some discussion questions might include:

Just from looking at their clothing, what kind of character traits would you expect these people to have? (i.e., friendly, snob, workaholic, fun, smart)

Do you think it's wise to judge character from clothing? Why or why not?

What is character? (All the qualities that determine a person's heart. From these qualities we make moral choices.)

Transition: (2 minutes)

Character is something you can't buy off a clothing rack. Although we may be able to appear a certain way to others by the way we talk and dress — our actions will eventually give us away. Wearing a business suit doesn't make anyone smart. Wearing a cross around your neck doesn't make you holy. It's what's inside your heart that counts.

In this series, we're going to see how Joseph's story reveals the qualities of his character. As we do that, we want to talk about how God develops character in His children, and how you identify positive character qualities in your friends.

Bible Application: (15 minutes)

*In the devos this week, you read that as God's children we take on His character qualities of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Listen to this verse from The Message, **Romans 13:14**:*

Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!

Discussion Questions:

What does it mean to "dress yourselves in Christ"?

What are some of Jesus' character traits?

*Can we have those same qualities? (Can suggest turning to **Philippians 2:5-8**)*

Let's talk about humility for a moment. First of all, what is it? (Being modest; not proud; not thinking of yourself too highly)

*How did Joseph learn about humility in the chapter we read this week (**Gen. 37**)?*

Why do you think humility was an important character trait for God to build in Joseph?

What are some situations in your life where it's really hard to be humble?

Do you relate more to Joseph — the favorite child — or to his jealous brothers?

How can you show humility in those situations?

Interactive Learning: (10 minutes)

With all of this talk about clothing our character to look like Jesus, it's easy to start to think that it's all up to us — that God's happiness with us depends on how we act. Wrong!

Let's make this more clear through an illustration. Can I get two volunteers?

In advance of the lesson, prepare two paper bags: one containing a T-shirt that has been torn up, muddied, and stained, and one containing a clean white T-shirt. Fold the bags over so that the students cannot see what's inside. On the outside of the first bag (either directly on the bag or on a paper stapled to it), write **Isaiah 64:6**:

*All of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;
we all shrivel up like a leaf,
and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*

— Isaiah 64:6 (NIV)

You might also want to print The Message version below it:

*Is there any hope for us? Can we be saved?
We're all sin-infected, sin-contaminated.
Our best efforts are grease-stained rags.
We dry up like autumn leaves—
sin-dried, we're blown off by the wind.*

— Isaiah 64:6 (The Message)

At your instruction, the first volunteer will read the verses aloud, then open the bag and pull out the grease-stained T-shirt so that all of the students can see it. (The student can put it on over his/her clothes if they want to, but don't make them.) Remind the group that sin makes us unclean. We can't earn God's approval; even our best efforts look like filthy rags without Jesus because they are stained with sin. We desperately need Him to make us clean.

Have the second volunteer read the verse on the second bag, on which you will have written **Isaiah 61:10** from The Message:

*I will sing for joy in God, explode in praise from deep in my soul!
He dressed me up in a suit of salvation,
He outfitted me in a robe of righteousness,
As a bridegroom who puts on a tuxedo
and a bride a jeweled tiara.*

— Isaiah 61:10 (The Message)

The second student will then pull out of the bag a clean white T-shirt that looks very different from the first. Tell the students that this is how God sees His children when they have accepted Jesus. He doesn't see the filthy sin stains; He sees Christ's perfection. God is the one who clothes us with righteousness and gives us the ability to look like Jesus. We need to seek His help and recognize our dependence on Him if we are going to reflect His character.

Commitment: (3 minutes)

*Did anyone memorize **Colossians 3:12**? (Give those students an opportunity to recite the verse for the group.) Let's read it aloud together:*

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

I encourage you to memorize this verse as you go about your week. If it helps you, write it on an index card and put it where you will see it often. Remember that you are "dearly loved" by God. That is what gives us the ability to become like Christ.

Closing: (2 minutes)

Close in prayer, thanking Jesus for clothing us with His righteousness so that we are clean before God and are being made to look more like Him. Pray for any students that might have yet to accept Jesus' gift of salvation; He wants to make them clean. Ask for God's help as all of you seek to demonstrate humility in your relationships this week as a way to show Christ to others.

WEEK 2

The Coat He Left Behind

A QUOTE:

Live in such a way that you
would not be ashamed to sell
your parrot to the town gossip."

— Will Rogers

Day 1

1. Last week, we worked on memorizing **Colossians 3:12**. Write the verse (from memory, if you can!) in the space below:
2. Developing a great character doesn't just require taking on new things; it can also require getting rid of things. In this week's lesson, we'll see how Joseph obeyed God, even when it meant leaving his coat behind! Read **Genesis 39:1-20**.

In the chart below, write down the three main people in this story and one character trait that each displayed through their actions:

Person:	Character Trait:

3. Being in charge of Potiphar's home was a major promotion for Joseph. In Ancient Egypt, the rich lived in extravagant homes full of hand-carved furniture, costly rugs, paintings, flowers, and instead of silverware — goldware! What did Potiphar notice about Joseph that made him willing to put everything he owned under his care?
4. With all that Potiphar had entrusted to Joseph, what one thing was off-limits?
 - ☐ His chariot
 - ☐ His wife
 - ☐ His garden
 - ☐ His DVD collection
5. What reasons did Joseph give for refusing Potiphar's wife? (Check all that apply)
 - ☐ His master would be returning home at any minute.
 - ☐ He would not betray his master's trust.
 - ☐ He found her unattractive.
 - ☐ It would be wrong to sleep with another man's wife.
 - ☐ It would be a sin against God.
6. Was Joseph's temptation by Potiphar's wife a one-time incident?

7. What steps did he take to avoid her advances (v. 10)?
8. What does this story tell you about Joseph's character?

Day 2

1. Joseph's situation got a lot more serious when Potiphar's wife finally ambushed him. According to verse 11, when did she choose to attack?
 - ☐ When her husband left for work
 - ☐ When Joseph was taking his break
 - ☐ When she was feeling bored
 - ☐ When the servants were gone and the house was empty

2. Why are we especially vulnerable to temptation when we're alone?

3. How did Joseph respond to her attack?

- ☐ He ran — even leaving his cloak behind!
- ☐ He stayed and explained to her why it was a bad idea.
- ☐ He blushed and remained silent.
- ☐ He asked if he could pray with her.

Why was this the best possible response? (Hint: Read **1 Corinthians 10:13**.)

4. What do you think prompted Potiphar's wife to lie about what happened? What do you notice about the way she tells the story?
5. The normal punishment for such a crime would be death, but instead, Potiphar put Joseph with the king's prisoners. In light of this, do you think Potiphar really believed his wife's story? Why might he have reason to doubt?
6. Living with temptation is a struggle. In moments of weakness, we would be wise to run away, as Joseph did. But when we mess up, the last thing we should do is run away from God. He does not want us to live in guilt and shame. According to **1 John 1:9**, how will He respond when we confess our sins and repent?

Making It Personal

Taking on the character of Jesus means we have ask for God's help every single day, sometimes on a minute-by-minute basis. Joseph didn't make a one-time decision to obey God and that was the end of the story. He had to make that decision every time Potiphar's wife came around the corner.

Is there a temptation in your life that you seem to have to deal with over and over? How does Joseph's story encourage you? What practical steps can you take to stand strong in moments of weakness?

The Coat He Left Behind

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- [] Large bowl filled with candy (such as M&Ms)

Lesson Objective:

To show, through the life of Joseph, the importance of self-control in taking on the character of Christ. The decisions we make in the heat of the moment can have lasting effects on our character.

Bible Passages:

Genesis 39, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 1 John 1:9

Bible Truth:

Every day we get dressed; every day we must clothe ourselves in obedience, asking God to help us stand strong against temptation. If we have sinned, we need to give that over to God and repent. He does not want us to live in guilt and defeat. He will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Optional Opener: (2 minutes)

As you sit down to begin the lesson, present the group with a large bowl of some tantalizing treat, such as M&Ms, saying: *"Hey guys, as a little something special this week, I brought you some M&Ms to enjoy."* As they "ooh" and "aah" over the candy, tell them: *"There's just one rule. You can only eat one."* Instruct the students to pass the bowl around and select one M&M and no more. Once the bowl has made its way back to you, set it in the middle of your circle or right next to you, in plain sight of everyone. Don't explain to them why they can only have one. Just stick to the rule, and let them drool over the sight of the remaining candy. (To be continued in the "Interactive Learning" section.)

Transition: (3 minutes)

Can anyone recite **Colossians 3:12** for me? (Encourage them to work on their memorization, and to move on to verses 13 & 14 if they want another challenge.)

As a refresher, can someone tell me what we're focusing on in this series on Joseph? (Character)

What is character? (The qualities that make up your heart; from them you make your moral decisions.)

Name as many positive character traits as you can in one minute.

Bible Application: (20 minutes)

Begin the lesson by reading **Genesis 39:1-20** aloud. If you prefer, divide up the passage into sections and assign them to students.

Who were the main people in these events, and what kind of people were they?

What did Potiphar observe about Joseph, and what did he do as a result?

Was life in Potiphar's house easy for Joseph? Why or why not?

What character traits did Joseph display in those moments of temptation?

*Since we're learning how to clothe ourselves in the character of Christ, let's take a look at how Jesus responded to temptation in **Luke 4:1-13**. (Ask for three volunteers to read the passage aloud: one person to "narrate," one to read the devil's part aloud, and one to read the words of Jesus. Have them stand at the front of the room.)*

Discussion Questions:

When and where did the devil tempt Jesus? Why do you think Satan chose this particular time to attack?

How did Jesus respond to the devil? (With Scripture — the Word of God)

What character traits does Jesus display in this passage?

How do you see those same traits reflected in Joseph?

What happens when rely on our own power to resist temptation, not God's power?

Let's turn to **Hebrews 4:15-16**. What gives us the right to approach God's throne with confidence?
What are some times when you have been vulnerable?
What are the things that most tempt you?

Interactive Learning: (20 minutes)

Going back to the "Opener," hold up the candy bowl and ask the students:

How many of you like M&Ms?

Would you say it was easy or hard to eat just one? Were you distracted during the first part of the lesson by having them here in front of you?

What would you do for a handful of these? Would you sing me "Happy Birthday"? (See if you can get a volunteer to do it, then pay them with a handful of M&Ms.) Would you do the chicken dance? (Again, see if anyone volunteers.) Would you stand on your head? (You can continue you this if you'd like, coming up with silly challenges for the students in exchange for M&Ms, just be sure you save enough for the remaining illustration.)

Now make your point, sharing something along these lines:

Think about it: all you got was a taste of this candy, and immediately you wanted more. Who can stop at just one M&M? I bet that most of you were wondering if I was really serious. The more you thought about the M&Ms and looked at them, the more you wanted them. You were even willing to do crazy stunts in exchange for one more taste.

Now imagine if Joseph hadn't steered clear of Potiphar's wife. She was surely a temptation to him, as this candy is to you. She was – gorgeous, rich, desirable, eager – day after day after day. What if he'd flirted with her, just for fun? (Place one M&M in your open palm.) What if he'd hung around her room to tell her all the reasons why they would be a bad idea? (Place three more M&Ms in your palm.) What if he'd let her rub his shoulders after a long day of work? (Place a handful of M&Ms in your palm.)

Joseph knew his trouble spots. He knew what temptations were too much for him. So what did he do? (Refused her, stayed away from her, ran from her)

That's right. Joseph exercised self-control by keeping his distance. A big part of self-control is knowing your weaknesses and taking steps to avoid situations where you'll be vulnerable. What are some temptations that students your age face (in general)? What are some practical ways to exercise self-control in those types of situations? How can you lean on God's power?

Commitment/Closing: (10 minutes)

We have been having some fun here with the M&M illustration, but on a serious note, temptation is very real, and usually it isn't funny. There will be a time in your life when you are staring temptation right in the face, and you will have to decide whether to run like Joseph did and obey God, or to stay put and risk compromising your character.

Ask for a volunteer to read **1 Corinthians 10:13** aloud. Then you read it from The Message:

No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it.

Encourage your students to be on the lookout for that way out when they are in a tempting situation, and to flee as Joseph did.

Remind them that God does not want us to live in guilt and fear. There is no sin in our past so ugly that God cannot free us from it (**1 John 1:9**). Encourage them to talk to you or to another youth leader if they need prayer or counsel for a specific situation.

Close in prayer.



WEEK 3

Prison Rags

A VERSE:

It's better to suffer for doing good, if that's what God wants, than to be punished for doing bad.

— 1 Peter 3:17 (The Message)

Day 1

1. Have you ever been accused of something you didn't do? How did that make you feel? What did you do?
2. Even though Joseph had proved himself trustworthy, he still landed in jail when Potiphar's wife falsely accused him. His position as head servant was taken from him as quickly as the cloak off his back. Read **Genesis 39:19-23**. Despite his troubles, how was Joseph treated in prison?
3. Staying strong in the middle of this difficult situation required perseverance. What does it mean to persevere? (Check all that apply)
 - ☐ To plot revenge
 - ☐ To keep going even when you're discouraged and facing tough times
 - ☐ To let life pass you by
 - ☐ To rely only on yourself
 - ☐ To surrender your circumstances to God and trust Him to get you through
4. Perseverance requires strength. We get that strength from God. Use **Romans 5:3-5** (NIV) and fill in the blanks below:

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our _____, because we know that suffering produces _____; _____; and _____, _____. And _____ does not _____ us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.
5. Joseph had to deal with a lot of disappointment in life, but God continued to pour out His love on him, even in prison. What evidence did God give Joseph that He was with him?
6. Describe a time when you were in a difficult place and you sensed God was with you.

Day 2

1. Read **Genesis 40**. The actual word for "dungeon" in verse 40:15 (NIV) is the same word used for "pit" in **Genesis 37:30** (KJV). Compare the two situations that Joseph was in. How are they similar?
2. What two very important prisoners were placed under Joseph's care while in jail?

3. What specifically had upset these two prisoners (40:8)?

- ☐ They knew they were going to die.
- ☐ They felt they deserved better treatment.
- ☐ They were jealous of Joseph.
- ☐ They both experienced strange dreams and had no one to interpret them.

4. Use **Genesis 40:9-19** to fill in the chart below:

Prisoner	Dreamed of:	Interpretation:
#1		
#2		

5. Think about how this story might have been different if Joseph had not been accustomed to going to God for the interpretation of his own dreams. Did Joseph take credit for interpreting the dreams?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

6. What specific request did Joseph make of the cupbearer (40:14-15)? Did the cupbearer follow through (40:23)?

7. To "lift up your head" (**Genesis 40:13, 20**) means "to summon for the purpose of taking up your case." How does that change your understanding of David's song in **Psalms 3:3** – "But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head"?

In what way does Jesus "take up our case"?

Making It Personal

What situations in your life right now make you feel trapped or powerless, like Joseph must have felt? Ask God to show you how He is working in those situations. Remember that He is with you always, even in the darkest of times (**Isaiah 43:2**).



Prison Rags

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- [] Pipe cleaners (one for each student)
- [] Poster board or white board and markers (optional)

Lesson Objective:

To teach students that God's presence in our lives makes a difference, enabling us to persevere in tough times.

Bible Passage:

Genesis 39:19-23 & Genesis 40

Bible Truth:

God is always with us. He will never leave or forsake us (**Deut. 31:6**).

Optional Opener: Pipe Cleaner Sculpture (10 minutes)

Hand each student a pipe cleaner. Instruct them to shape it into something that represents how they are feeling this week. For example, you can shape it into a "G" if you are feeling "great," or an "L" for "lousy." You can shape it into a heart if you're feeling loved. You can shape it into a circle if you are feeling hollow or empty. Give the students three minutes to create their sculptures, then go around and have them share what they made and why. If time permits, instruct the students to pass their sculptures to the right twice. Looking at their new items, each student should say something positive or encouraging to the person who made it.

*From "The Source for Youth Ministry" at <http://www.thesource4ym.com>.

Transition:

Life is funny, isn't it? One week things will be going well and you'll be feeling happy; another week your circumstances might change and you'll be down in the dumps. Joseph is a prime example of how life can throw you for a loop. The way he handled those ups and downs says a lot about his character.

Interactive Learning: (20 minutes)

Let's recap some of the highs and lows in Joseph's life so far. Can someone name the first high point?

Ask for volunteers to help recall Joseph's experiences so far. If you have a poster board or white board available you can jot them down, writing the "highs" higher on the board and the "lows" beneath. When finished, draw a line to connect all of these events, which should look like a roller coaster. Ask:

How would you describe Joseph's life so far?

What are some of the emotions you think Joseph might have felt throughout his life? (Write them down in a different color marker next to the events; for example, "fear" next to his ordeal with Potiphar's wife.)

Can you relate to some of these feelings?

How do you generally respond when bad things happen?

Why is it difficult to trust God in difficult situations?

What makes persevering so difficult?

Where do you go for strength when you are ready to give up on something?

Who are the people that help you when you are feeling discouraged?

Bible Application: (15 minutes)

Divide your group into smaller groups. Ask them a series of questions to discuss with each other based on **Genesis 40**. Bring them back together to share their answers.

1. How many ways can you see the evidence of God in Joseph's life in this part of the story? Are you as quick to see Him in your own life?
2. How might this story have been different without God's intervention? How would your story have been different?

3. What evidence do you see that would tell you if Joseph was aware of God's presence and working?

Commitment: (3 minutes)

In this week's devo, you were challenged to consider what situations in your life are making you feel trapped, like Joseph, and to ask God to show you how He is at work amid those circumstances. Now, as we wrap up our time together, I want you to bow your head and think about what God is building in your character as a result of those challenges. What character traits are being revealed? Are they honoring to God? Where is He giving you opportunities to display His character? I encourage you to look for those opportunities this week, and to continue to think over these questions.

Remind the students that they can talk to you afterwards if they need prayer for a specific situation.

Closing: (5 minutes)

Ask for two or three volunteers to pray. Then close by asking God to teach this lesson to each student this week, helping them to remember that He is always with them and will give them the strength to persevere.



WEEK 4

A Close Shave

A QUOTE:

In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.”

— *Albert Einstein*

Day 1

1. Which of the following best describes you?

- ☐ I'm an optimist. I look on the bright side of life.
- ☐ I'm a pessimist. I don't expect things to go my way.
- ☐ I stay pretty calm whether things are good or bad.
- ☐ Ask me tomorrow. I can never predict my moods.

2. Name a time when you were presented with a great opportunity that caught you completely by surprise (such as a trip, a day off, a new friendship, etc.).

3. Opportunity can come knocking anytime — even on the locked door of a dungeon. When we last saw Joseph, he was still in prison, forgotten by the chief cupbearer...and everyone else, it seemed. Day after day passed, until two full years had gone by. But in all this time, Joseph did not forget about God, and God certainly did not forget about him. Read **Genesis 41:1-40**.

What happened to Pharaoh that caused him to send for Joseph?

- ☐ Joseph appeared to him in a dream.
- ☐ Pharaoh had a dream that no one could interpret.
- ☐ Pharaoh had a change of heart and decided to release all prisoners.
- ☐ Potiphar told Pharaoh he had made a mistake in sending Joseph to prison.

4. God often brings opportunities into our lives with only a moment's notice. Readiness is an important character quality that keeps us on the lookout for what God is doing. How did Joseph respond to Pharaoh's call and his questions? (**Genesis 41:14-16**)

5. Picture the contrasting scenes: one minute Joseph was sweating in a filthy prison; the next minute he was clean-shaven and standing in the presence of the ruler of Egypt. What emotions do you think he felt?

6. How might his years in prison have prepared him for this very moment?

7. In what situation in your life right now do you sense God preparing you for something bigger? What is He teaching you?

Day 2

1. How did Joseph interpret Pharaoh's dream?

Seven good cows & good heads of grain equals...

Seven ugly cows & bad heads of grain equals....

2. In Egyptian culture, the Pharaoh was considered to be god incarnate ("in the flesh"). What does Joseph's response to Pharaoh and his interpretation of the dream tell you about his faith?
3. After interpreting Pharaoh's dream, Joseph recommended a four-step action plan to rescue Egypt. Use **Genesis 41:33-36** to fill in the chart below:

Verse	Action Step
Genesis 41:33	
Genesis 41:34	
Genesis 41:35	
Genesis 41:36	

4. What did Pharaoh notice about Joseph that both Potiphar and the jailer had also noticed (v. 38)?

Is that a character quality that you notice in your friends? Name three people in whom you can see God at work (and make a point to tell them this week!).

5. Many of the people with whom we come in contact do not know God. Joseph had to stand before a man who thought he himself was god! But Joseph was ready and willing to deliver the Lord's message. What instructions do we find in **1 Peter 3:15** that emphasize this?

6. Read **Ephesians 2:10**. What can you do to be prepared for unexpected opportunities to serve God?

What is God doing to prepare you?

Making It Personal

Following Jesus requires us to keep our eyes on Him. When we look down and concentrate on our situation rather than on God, we risk losing sight of the opportunities He has prepared for us. Ask Him to give you a spirit that is ready and willing to follow Him — anytime, any place.

A Close Shave

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- [] “Pop Quiz” handout
- [] Prize, such as candy, for winning team (optional — see *Interactive Learning*)

Lesson Objectives:

To teach the importance of readiness in our relationship with God. God can use even our trials to open windows of opportunity for us to grow closer to Him and to be a part of what He is doing in the world. We need to be ready and watching!

Bible Passage:

Genesis 41:1-40

Bible Truth:

In everything that happens to us, God is working for our good as He shapes our character to look more like Christ (**Romans 8:28**). Along the way, He provides opportunities to do the good works He has prepared for us (**Ephesians 2:10**).

Optional Opener: The Human Knot (10-15 minutes)

Instruct your group to stand up and form a circle. Ask everyone to each place a hand in the middle of the circle and grab another person's hand. (Have them introduce themselves to the person whose hand they are holding if they don't know it already.) Next, instruct the students to put their other hand in the circle and grab a different person's hand. No letting go! Explain that you'd like them to untangle themselves into a circle without letting go of hands. They are allowed to change their grip for comfort's sake, but no letting go as a way of undoing the knot! (Be patient — it can take up to 10 minutes before you see any progress, depending on the size of your group. The ideal group size for this game is 7 to 16 people.)

Transition: (3 minutes)

Sometimes life looks like a big, tangled knot, wouldn't you agree? We can't always see the way forward. You can imagine how Joseph felt when he was locked away in a dungeon. Two whole years had passed since he'd asked the chief cupbearer to speak to Pharaoh on his behalf, and for all he knew, everyone had forgotten him. But God had not abandoned Joseph. In fact, God was preparing the way for Joseph to become the second most powerful man in all of Egypt.

This week we are studying how important it is to be ready for the opportunities God puts in our lives. This part of our character encourages us to know God and His Word more deeply, so that when opportunity knocks, we are able to respond in a way that pleases Him.

Interactive Learning: (15 minutes)

Since we're talking about being ready, we're going to start with a little game to see how ready you are for today's lesson.

Divide the group into two teams. Distribute copies of the "Pop Quiz" handout located at the end of the lesson plan. Pass them out facedown so that the teams can't peek at the questions. When you say, "Go!", the teams will race to complete the quiz. The first team to answer all of the questions correctly wins. Be sure to inform them that they cannot use their Bibles or ABS devos to complete the handout. It must be from memory.

Once the first group has submitted their completed handout, quickly check their answers. If all of the answers are correct, announce the winners and regroup so that you can go over the answers together. If an answer is wrong, they must keep trying and the other team has a chance to "steal" the victory. If you run out of time or both groups are stumped on a question, allow them to use their Bibles.

Pop Quiz Answers:

1. Two **2.** Seven skinny cows **3.** The skinny cows ate up the fat cows **4.** Seven healthy heads of grain, followed by seven thin heads of grain **5.** Magicians, wise men of Egypt — either answer is acceptable **6.** God **7.** Same **8.** Plenty/abundance; famine **9.** The matter had been firmly decided by God; God would do it soon. **10.** Put a wise man in charge of the land of Egypt; appoint commissioners to take a fifth of the harvest during the seven years of abundance; store up the grain in the good years, to be kept in the cities for food; hold the food in reserve for the famine years. **11.** In him was the spirit of God; he was discerning and wise **12.** Freebie – just for fun!

Bible Application: (15 minutes)

Listen as I read to you The Message version of 1 Peter 3:13-18:

If with heart and soul you're doing good, do you think you can be stopped? Even if you suffer for it, you're still better off. Don't give the opposition a second thought. Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy. Keep a clear conscience before God so that when people throw mud at you, none of it will stick. They'll end up realizing that they're the ones who need a bath. It's better to suffer for doing good, if that's what God wants, than to be punished for doing bad. That's what Christ did definitively: suffered because of others' sins, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones. He went through it all — was put to death and then made alive — to bring us to God.

Discussion Questions:

This passage instructs us, "Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention." What does this mean?

What evidence do you see that Joseph "kept his heart at attention" while in prison?

How did Joseph show courtesy to Pharaoh when he came before him? Why is it important to show courtesy and respect when we share our faith?

Egyptians were taught to treat Pharaoh as God, but Joseph gave credit to His God for interpreting the dreams when speaking to Pharaoh. What does this reveal about Joseph's character? (Faith, courage, truthfulness)

After two years, Joseph couldn't wait to get out of prison. But he didn't compromise his beliefs in order to please Pharaoh by telling him what he wanted to hear. He spoke the truth, even if it would mean more suffering. Why is it better to "suffer for doing good, if that's what God wants, than to be punished for doing bad"?

When have you had an opportunity to take a stand for what you believe in?

What are some practical ways that we can "get ready" for God?

Commitment:

The point is, we miss so many wonderful things when we don't pay attention to what God is doing in our lives. He will bring good out of everything. But we need to watch with expectant hearts. Joseph was just an ordinary man that was used by God in an extraordinary way. You are no less gifted by God. He has opportunities waiting for you, too. So how can you be ready? I encourage you to pray about that this week.

Give students an opportunity to recite **Colossians 3:12**, if time permits.

Closing:

Ask for a volunteer to close in prayer.

1. How many years had passed since Joseph's conversation with the chief cupbearer?
2. In Pharaoh's first dream, seven sleek, fat cows came out of the Nile River. What followed them up the riverbank?
3. What happened to the fat cows?
4. What did Pharaoh see in his second dream?
5. Who did Pharaoh ask first to interpret his dream?
6. When Pharaoh told Joseph he'd heard of his ability to interpret dreams, Joseph replied: "_____ will give Pharaoh the answer he desires" (41:16).
7. According to Joseph's interpretation, were Pharaoh's two dreams the same or different?
8. The dreams revealed that Egypt would undergo seven years of _____ and seven years of _____.
9. Name one reason why the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms (41:32).
10. Name two of the recommendations Joseph gave Pharaoh for the future (41:33-36).
11. What did Pharaoh observe about Joseph?
12. What color were Pharaoh's pajamas?



NOTES:



WEEK 5

Bling-Bling

A QUOTE:

Every job is a self-portrait of the person who does it. Autograph your work with excellence.

— *Anonymous*

Day 1

1. Name one job that you are responsible for. It may be a paid job (mowing lawns or babysitting) or just one of your routine chores. It could also be a position of leadership at your school or in your extra activities.

What responsibilities go along with that job?

2. To be trustworthy means to be “worthy of confidence,” meaning that people can count on you to be honest and reliable. In the job you named, how would you rate your trustworthiness?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Totally unreliable

Somewhat reliable

Completely trustworthy

Who are the people who are depending on you to get the job done?

3. As a student, you may be tempted to think: At my age, what does it really matter? Once I’m out on my own and have more responsibilities, I’ll work hard and be trustworthy. According to Jesus in **Luke 16:10**, how does your current behavior shape your future character?

What do you think God is asking you to do with the “very little” He has given you? Why?

4. Your level of trustworthiness affects all of your relationships, not just work-related ones. Name some other relationships where trust plays an important role.
5. If trustworthiness is marked by honesty and dependability, the opposite of trustworthiness is deceptiveness. Lies, cheating, stealing, betrayal — all of these are enemies of relationship, and they are among Satan’s favorite weapons. Why is deception so destructive to a relationship?
6. What does **Psalms 34:12-14** teach about this?

7. What are some ways you can demonstrate greater trustworthiness in the following relationships?

With my parents:

With my friends:

With my teachers:

With my coach/boss/mentor:

Day 2

1. If you were looking for a spokesperson for trustworthiness, Joseph would make a pretty good choice. Though he had to deal with some shady characters, Joseph made sure to base his character on what God asked of him, not on the behavior of the people around him. Read **Genesis 41:41-57**.

Based on what you've studied so far, how did Joseph demonstrate trustworthiness in the following situations?

Situation	Bible Verses	Examples of trustworthiness
As Potiphar's head servant	Genesis 39:8-10	
When he was thrown in jail	Genesis 39:20-23	
During the years of plenty	Genesis 41:46-49	
During the years of famine	Genesis 41:55-57	

2. What was the secret to Joseph's success? (**Genesis 41:38-39**)
3. Though Joseph's wardrobe had changed many times — from his richly ornamented robe, to a servant's cloak, to prison rags — his character stayed consistent throughout. How did his wardrobe change once again when Pharaoh made him his second-in-command? (**Genesis 41:41-43**)

4. With such a big promotion, it would have been easy for Joseph to get distracted by his newfound power and prestige (not to mention all that bling-bling!). How might his past experiences have helped him stay focused? (Hint: remember **Luke 16:10**.)
5. If Joseph hadn't remained trustworthy during the years of plenty (**Genesis 41:47-49**), what would have been the consequences?
6. How did Joseph give credit to God in **Genesis 41:50-52**?
7. Joseph was able to prove himself trustworthy because He believed God to be trustworthy, even in his darkest moments. What are some ways that God has shown Himself trustworthy in your life? If you are experiencing a time of struggle, how does Joseph's story encourage you to stay strong and trust God?

Making It Personal

What temptations are you currently experiencing to avoid being trustworthy with your parents, your teachers — even with God? Who in your life is influencing you to fall into deception?

Be very careful what voices you allow to speak into your life. Surround yourself with friends who will encourage you to be honest and do the right thing. Remember, in all you do, it is the Lord Christ you are serving (**Colossians 3:24**).

Bling-Bling

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- [] Neck tie and/or clipboard
(see *Opener*)

Lesson Objectives:

To teach students the importance of trustworthiness in all relationships: with God, with those in authority over us, and with our peers. God calls us to reflect His trustworthy character and He will use it to accomplish great things for His Kingdom.

Bible Passage:

Genesis 39 & 41:41-57

Bible Truths:

God is always with us.

He is faithful and trustworthy.

If we reflect His nature, we too will be faithful and trustworthy.

Opener: (25 minutes)

Begin by conducting mock job interviews for some mundane task, such as serving the refreshments, passing out papers, holding your Bible for you during the discussion, etc. The key is to act like the task at hand is a high privilege, and that you are taking this interview process very seriously. To add to the fun, you might want to wear a tie and/or hold a clipboard.

Ask for a few volunteers, or "job applicants" (no more than three). Call them up one at a time and seat them in the empty chair next to you. Ask them a series of interview questions, such as the ones listed below (use different questions with different students). This exercise is intended to: (1) serve as an icebreaker, allowing the students to learn a little bit more about each other; (2) see what they've learned; and (3) serve as a springboard to a deeper discussion of the topic.

Once you have completed the interviews, announce that though all of them are very qualified, you have chosen [name]. Applause! That student will then begin his/her job responsibilities immediately.

Sample Interview Questions: (Some informative, some silly, some serious)

What is your name/grade/school?

Why should I hire you for this job? Do you have any past experience?

What would you say is your best talent?

What time do you wake up in the morning? Go to bed at night?

If you had to give up music or TV, which would you choose?

If you were to receive a lifetime supply of the snack of your choice, what would it be?

Name a person who inspires you and tell me why.

What skills are important for this job?

What character qualities are important for this job?

What is character, anyway?

What does it mean to be trustworthy?

Name a person you trust. What makes him/her trustworthy?

Would you say that trustworthiness is important to relationships? Why/why not?

What makes trustworthiness important in a job situation?

Why do you want this job?

Transition: (2 minutes)

Trustworthiness. When you break that word down, you see its definition: "worthy of trust." What makes a person worthy of trust? (Tells the truth, keeps his/her promises, does the right thing, reliable, doesn't lie/cheat/steal)

Being trustworthy is an important part of your character, because it reflects the character of God. The opposite of trustworthiness — deceptiveness (or dishonesty) — reflects the character of Satan, the enemy. Trust strengthens a relationship; lies and deceit tear it down.

*What made Joseph so successful, even in tough times, was that he remained trustworthy and faithful to God. He put his relationship with God above everything else, and Genesis tells us, "The LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did" (**Genesis 39:23b**).*

Interactive Learning/Bible Application: (20 minutes)

Divide your group into three groups and assign each group one of the following passages:

Genesis 39:2-10 (Potiphar's household)

Genesis 39:20-23 (Jail)

Genesis 41:37-44 (With Pharaoh)

Ask them a series of questions to respond to within their group. Each group should nominate a recorder to jot down notes and a reporter to share what they've learned with the larger group at the end. Give them time to look over the passage before asking the questions.

In this passage, who put his trust in Joseph? Why?

What responsibilities were given to Joseph?

Was anything off-limits?

How did Joseph prove himself trustworthy in that role?

What temptations do you think Joseph might have faced?

How did he stay strong?

What lesson(s) do you learn from this part of Joseph's story?

Regroup and ask the "reporters" to share their answers with everyone.

Commitment: (2 minutes)

In this week's devo you were challenged to name the temptations you're currently experiencing to be untrustworthy. Think about some of the temptations that Joseph faced. Do you see any similarities in your situations? How is God asking you to respond?

What is awesome about Joseph's story isn't just his trustworthy character. What really stands out is the character of God. It's God who was with Joseph and got him through the tough times. It's God who gave him success in whatever he did. God is with you, too, and you can trust Him with your deepest struggles. He is worthy of your trust.

Closing: (2 minutes)

Give the students a minute to bow their heads and pray, submitting those temptations to God, then offer a closing prayer.



WEEK 6

The Naked Truth

A VERSE:

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of
God.

— *Matthew 5:9*

A QUOTE:

Peacemaking is a daring act of
obedience to God.

— *Ken Sande*

Day 1

1. What's the longest period of time you've been separated from your family? How did that feel? What was the reunion like?
2. Which is more difficult: to be separated by distance, or hard feelings?
3. When the famine began, Joseph had been separated from his family for over 20 years! All that time, his brothers had lived with the guilty knowledge of what they had done to Joseph. As Genesis 42 begins, they are just setting out on the long journey to Egypt to buy grain. Read **Genesis 42:6-26**.

What did Joseph do when he recognized his brothers?

- ☐ Revealed who he was
- ☐ Ordered them to be put to death
- ☐ Embraced them
- ☐ Spoke harshly to them

4. What dreams came to mind when Joseph saw his brothers standing before him? (See **Genesis 37:5-11**)
5. If there ever was an opportunity for revenge, this was it. Joseph had complete power over his brothers, their lives, and their future. He might even have used his dreams as an excuse to punish them. What hint do we see in **Genesis 42:24** that Joseph was experiencing a moment of deep personal struggle?
6. When someone has wronged you, are you more likely to seek revenge or to offer forgiveness?

Why is it hard to make peace with someone who has hurt you deeply?

7. At the beginning of this series, you memorized **Colossians 3:12**. Now continue reading **Colossians 3:13-14** and fill in the blanks below:

Bear with each other and _____ whatever grievances you may have against one another.

_____ as the _____ . And over all these

virtues put on _____ , which binds them all together in _____ .

8. As we put on the character of Jesus, what makes forgiveness such an important part of our “wardrobe,” according to this verse?

Day 2

1. When you are face-to-face with conflict, as Joseph was, is it a good idea to always say the first thing that comes to your mind?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Doesn't matter

Why do you think Joseph took his time in revealing his identity?

2. In a move toward making peace with his brothers, Joseph began a series of tests to see how they had changed since their last meeting. Meanwhile, what did the brothers think was happening to them? (v. 21-22)

What did they need to seek from God?

3. In the scene of forgiveness in **Genesis 45**, Joseph's true character is revealed. As you read over the chapter, think about what it took for Joseph to make peace with his brothers. After revealing his identity, what were Joseph's first instructions to them? (v. 5) _____

4. What reasons did Joseph give for his suffering in **Genesis 45:5-7**?

5. In **Genesis 45:22**, what did Joseph give to his brothers — the same people who had once stripped him of his robe?

6. How might the character of Joseph's brothers change, from this point forward, now that they have experienced his forgiveness and blessing?

7. What evidence have you seen of how forgiveness transforms lives?

8. How does forgiveness transform you?

Making It Personal

With whom do you need to make peace rather than seek revenge? Pray for God to soften your heart toward that person so that you can forgive them. Even if they do not respond as you would like, you are being obedient to God and displaying the character of Jesus. As someone once wrote, "Your life may be the only Bible some people read."

The Naked Truth

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- [] Ball (see “Opener”)
- [] Brown grocery bag
- [] Blank slips of paper or index cards, three per student
- [] “Character of God” Handout, torn out and cut into sections

Lesson Objectives:

To teach students that God has called us to be the peacemakers of the world. By forgiving and loving our enemies, we reflect the character of Christ.

Bible Passages:

Genesis 42:1-26, 43:15; Psalm 103

Bible Truths:

Blessed are the peacemakers (**Matthew 5:9**). Just as God made peace with us through Jesus, we are called to show His grace by making peace with our enemies (**Matthew 5:43-44**).

Optional Opener: “New and Good” Icebreaker (15 minutes)

This exercise is designed to get the group talking and find out what’s new before diving into the lesson. To play, pass a ball around the circle. The person holding the ball should share one thing from the week that is new (positive or negative), and one thing that is good.

Once everyone has had a turn, pass the ball around a second time. Ask them each to name one thing about Joseph’s character that they admire and why. (You go first — give them a moment to think!)

Transition: (5 minutes)

This is our last lesson in this series, and perhaps the most important one. When you look back at where we started, Joseph had been thrown into a pit by his older brothers. Now he has come full circle and is standing in the same room with the people who turned his life upside down. This would be the ultimate test of Joseph’s character.

Throughout Joseph’s story, we have seen him demonstrate humility, self-control, perseverance, courage, and trustworthiness. Now God is asking him to show forgiveness by making peace with his brothers, his enemies.

Bible Application: (20 minutes)

*The Bible tells us in **Matthew 5:9**, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” How would you describe a peacemaker?*

Why is being a peacemaker an important part of our character as Christians?

Seeing his brothers again was a very emotional time for Joseph. What are some of the feelings he probably experienced? Do you think it was easy for him to forgive and make peace with his brothers?

Why is it hard to make peace with someone who has hurt you deeply?

How might this story have been different if Joseph had decided to seek revenge?

*What instructions do we find in **Colossians 3:13-14**?*

Where do we get the kind of love that forgives enemies?

How does forgiveness reflect the character of Jesus?

Joseph had, in many ways, a difficult life. God used his difficult situations to build his character. Character is developed over time. Each new trait builds a foundation for the next. Joseph would not have been able to take this huge step and forgive his brothers if he had not developed great character through all his other choices. Forgiveness takes strength of character.

Remember, God cares about our relationships. He wants them to be godly. When we take revenge on someone, we stifle our own spiritual growth and lose an opportunity to be used by God in the life of that person. All of us know that we shouldn’t wrong people who wrong us, but that is hard to do because it goes against our “human” nature. Only God can give us the love we need to be able to forgive.

Interactive Learning/Commitment: (10 minutes)

Hold up a brown grocery bag for the students to see. If you are feeling creative, you can fill it with dry cereal or some other material to represent grain. Also, distribute three blank slips of paper or index cards to each student.

Offer the following explanation/instructions:

Joseph didn't send his brothers away empty-handed. After he had told them who he was and expressed his forgiveness, he loaded them up with grain, silver, new clothes — everything they needed for their journey, and then some.

Think of your character — who you are as a person — as this brown bag (hold it up). God wants to fill it up with everything you need to live in Him, like the grain that kept Joseph's brothers alive during the famine. The more we allow God to fill us up with His love, the more we reflect the character of Jesus and show His love to the world.

On the first slip of paper I gave you, I want you to write down the name of a person with whom you are in conflict. That person may have hurt you, or you may have hurt them. Fold the paper in half and put it in the bag. (Give them time to think, reflect.)

Now, on the second slip, write down a specific way that you can be a peacemaker in that relationship. Fold it and place it in the bag.

On the third slip, write down the character quality that you are asking God to build in you that will help you in that relationship. Again, fold it and place it in the bag.

Prayer: (3 minutes)

Instruct the students to spend a couple of minutes in silent prayer.

Close in prayer, holding the bag in front of you and submitting all the situations represented there to God.

Closing: (5 minutes)

As you end the lesson and wrap up the series, spend some time reflecting on the character of God. Prior to your gathering, tear out the "Character of God" Handout (at back) containing sections of **Psalms 103**, and cut along the dotted lines. Distribute these Scripture passages to your students (in order, to minimize confusion) and instruct them to read the verses aloud as your closing. Encourage the group to reflect on God's character as they hear and read these verses, and to ask God to let His character shine through them.

Character of God

(Psalm 103)

Reader #1: Psalm 103:1-5

Let all that I am praise the Lord;
 with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name.
 Let all that I am praise the Lord;
 may I never forget the good things he does for me.
 He forgives all my sins
 and heals all my diseases.
 He redeems me from death
 and crowns me with love and tender mercies.
 He fills my life with good things.
 My youth is renewed like the eagle's!

Reader #2: Psalm 103:6-9

The Lord gives righteousness
 and justice to all who are treated unfairly.
 He revealed his character to Moses
 and his deeds to the people of Israel.
 The Lord is compassionate and merciful,
 slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.
 He will not constantly accuse us,
 nor remain angry forever.

Reader #3: Psalm 103:10-13

He does not punish us for all our sins;
 he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve.
 For his unfailing love toward those who fear him
 is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.
 He has removed our sins as far from us
 as the east is from the west.
 The Lord is like a father to his children,
 tender and compassionate to those who fear him.

Reader #4: Psalm 103:14-18

For he knows how weak we are;
 he remembers we are only dust.
 Our days on earth are like grass;
 like wildflowers, we bloom and die.
 The wind blows, and we are gone—
 as though we had never been here.
 But the love of the Lord remains forever
 with those who fear him.
 His salvation extends to the children's children
 of those who are faithful to his covenant,
 of those who obey his commandments!

Reader #5: Psalm 103:19-22

The Lord has made the heavens his throne;
 from there he rules over everything.
 Praise the Lord, you angels,
 you mighty ones who carry out his plans,
 listening for each of his commands.
 Yes, praise the Lord, you armies of angels
 who serve him and do his will!
 Praise the Lord, everything he has created,
 everything in all his kingdom.

Let all that I am praise the Lord.

