



## THE STORY OF JOSEPH

The Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy... (Genesis 39:21).

When we look at everything that befell Joseph, it may not seem as if the Lord was with him. We may wonder why He allowed the brothers to put Joseph into a pit? Why did He allow the traders to sell him as a slave in Egypt? Why didn't He make sure that Joseph was released from prison much sooner? But the Lord, who is all-knowing, foresaw the evil that would be done to Joseph and arranged to bring good from it. The story of Joseph illustrates the way the Lord provides good whenever possible, looking out for our eternal welfare and happiness.

### FAMILY WORSHIP: The Joseph Story

Choose portions of Genesis 37, 39, 40, 41, 45 to read aloud (or retell for very young children).

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| <i>Genesis 37</i>      | Jacob (Israel) gave Joseph a coat of many colors. Joseph's brothers were jealous of him, and they sold him to traders who were going to Egypt.                                      |
| <i>Genesis 41</i>      | Pharaoh had a dream, which was interpreted by Joseph. As a result, Pharaoh gave Joseph a position of great responsibility to ensure that there would be food in the time of famine. |
| <i>Genesis 45:1-28</i> | Joseph is reunited with his brothers, and he expresses his forgiveness.   |

### Discussion Ideas:

- Why were Joseph's brothers unhappy with him? What did they do that was wrong?
- How did the Egyptian, Potiphar, come to realize that the Lord was with Joseph?
- How do we know that the Lord was with Joseph while he was in prison?
- How was it that Joseph became a great ruler in Egypt, second only to the pharaoh?
- Which of Joseph's dreams came true?
- How did Joseph's family respond to learning that their benefactor was their brother, Joseph?
- Like Joseph's brothers, we can have feelings of jealousy or anger. How can we handle these in a way that doesn't hurt anyone?
- Like Joseph, we may endure difficulties through no fault of our own. How can the story of Joseph help us see how the Lord works to bring good from evil and misfortune?
- What did Joseph do that helped the Lord protect him and make him prosper? (He believed in the Lord and obeyed Him. He also attributed the ability to interpret dreams to the Lord rather than to himself.)

**READ: “Joseph Grows Up” by Kathleen Orthwein** *(for primary level)*

This is part of the Jacob’s Ladder series of religion lessons that children can do at home. For more information or to order these lessons, please email the General Church Office of Education at [oed@newchurch.edu](mailto:oed@newchurch.edu).

**SING: Joseph’s Coat**

A CD with songs by Lori Odhner is available from the General Church Book Center.

**PROJECT: Joseph’s Coat**

Let each child make a special coat. You will need a man’s shirt for each child. (Try getting them from a rummage sale or thrift shop.) Cut the collars and cuffs off of the shirt. Then decorate it with paint, crayons, or potato stamps and dyes.

**COLORING PAGE: Coat of Many Colors**

**ACTIVITY: Story of Joseph—Story Strips for Sequencing**

Use story strips to sequence the story of Joseph. Here are 7 strips for younger children and blank strips for older children to make their own sequencing set.

**SING: The Twelve Sons of Israel**

One option is to write the names of the 12 sons of Israel on 4x6 index cards or 8.5 X 11 pieces of paper. Sit in a circle with a group of children and give each child one or two of the names. As you sing the song, have the children stand up whenever they hear their assigned names—and then sit down again (Glenview Primary Sunday School lesson 3.09).

**READ: “The Coat of Many Colors” by the Rev. Fred Chapin**

There are several layers of inner meaning in the story of Joseph. The Rev. Chapin explores its application in our own lives, looking at the way the evil spirits will try to attack us when we choose to follow the Lord and do what is good.

**PROJECT: A Mural of Pharaoh’s Dreams** *(for Genesis 41)*

Make a mural about the two different dreams that Joseph interpreted for Pharaoh.



**COLORING PAGE: Joseph in Egypt**

**SING: “I’m Joseph, I’m Your Brother” by Lori Odhner**

**PROJECT: Sacks of Grain from Egypt** *(for Genesis 41 and 44)*

This project involves either letting the children make small sacks out of felt or making the sacks ahead of time and then using them to dramatize the story (see below).

**PROJECT: Egyptian Shirts**

Start with a large plain white T-shirt (men’s size). Decorate the shirt around the neck, using fabric crayons or potato stamps (cut into Egyptian designs and used with paint). The colorful design around the neck will suggest an Egyptian necklace. Wear the shirt with a belt.

**ACTIVITY: Words That Describe Joseph**

A picture of Joseph in Egypt and 8 spaces for words that describe Joseph’s good qualities.

**DRAMATIZE: The Story of Joseph Receiving His Brothers** *(for young children)*

If you want to use costumes, let Joseph wear a special T-shirt with a necklace design (see above), and let the brothers wear old men's shirts that have the collar and cuffs cut off. You could also make a chariot by decorating the sides of a wagon with cardboard spray-painted gold. Retell the story or read selected portions from the Word as the children dramatize the story of the brothers going to Egypt and being reunited with Joseph.

**ACTIVITY: Make a Story Line for Joseph's Life**

Judge whether the events of his life were happy, sad, or somewhere in between.

## **THE LORD'S DIVINE PROVIDENCE**

*When the Lord is with someone, He leads him and makes provision  
so that all that happens, whether sad or joyful, may bring him what is good.  
(see Arcana Coelestia 6303)*

When we face challenges, it can be helpful to remember that the Lord is looking out for our eternal welfare and providing that good can come of everything that happens to us.

**READ: "The Lord's Providence" by the Rev. Peter M. Buss, Jr.**

While discussing the story of Joseph, this sermon also gives an overview of how the Lord's providence works, discussing how we might get a "warped sense of Providence," how providence really works, and permissions.

**READ: "Divine Providence" by the Rev. Douglas Taylor** *(for teens)*

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT: God Meant It for Good** *(for teens and up)*

**ACTIVITY: Divine Providence Story-Telling**

People who trust in the Lord are constantly receiving good from Him. They realize that whatever happens, whether it seems to be advantageous or not, is good in that it serves as a means contributing to their eternal happiness (see *Arcana Coelestia* 8480). Have a family discussion about this teaching. Share examples from personal experience or draw on movies and books to illustrate this idea. Remember that it is granted that a person can see the operation of the Lord's Providence in the past but not the present (see *Divine Providence* 187).

**READ: "How Providence Works" by the Rev. B. David Holm**

**PROJECT: "Lo, I Am with You Always"**

When our lives are busy, it can be easy to lose sight of the Lord. Make a small picture of the Lord to display somewhere at home. Let this picture remind you of His loving nature and that He is constantly caring for us in all states of our life.

**PROJECT: The Lord's Constant Presence—A Project Using Quotes**

Here is another project to remind us of the Lord's loving presence. Choose one of the quotes to write on special paper and display in your home.

## PRESERVING OUR FREEDOM

Every person from early childhood is led and taught by the Lord, but because a person's freedom is never taken away, he can be led and taught only to the extent of his reception as though of himself.

*(Divine Providence 43)*

The Lord and the angels hope we won't make poor choices that bring misery upon ourselves and others. But the freedom to choose whether to do what is good or do what is evil is an essential part of our preparation for life in the spiritual world. For the Lord does not predestine or "send" us to heaven or hell. Rather, He gives us the freedom to determine what we love and so choose between eternal life in heaven or in hell. In the process, we will all experience struggles with evil—needing to fight the tendencies within ourselves and deal with the results of our actions *and* the free actions of others.

### ACTIVITY: Protection of the Eye

We are told that the Lord guards the freedom in a person as a person guards the pupil of his eye (*Divine Providence 97*). And if we look at the structure of the eye, we can see that it is well protected. With the Lord taking such care in creating the human body, just imagine how much He cares for your spiritual well-being!

## PERMISSIONS

In its dealings with evil, providence is nothing else but the directing and steering of evil towards a milder evil, and so far as possible towards good; but evil itself is foreseen.

*(Arcana Coelestia 5155)*

### READ: "The Story of Joseph" by the Rev. David Roth

In looking at the story of Joseph, this sermon discusses why the Lord permits evil.

### READ: "God Does Permit Some Bad Things" by the Rev. Donald Rose

### ACTIVITY: What Does the Lord Will and What Does He Permit?

Reflect on events touching your life in some way. These could be family or community happenings or world events in the news. Which of these do you think are of the Lord's will? Which are of the Lord's providence? Use the chart to separate them into the two columns.

### For Discussion: Why Does the Lord Permit Some Bad Things?

The permission of evil allows us to recognize evil for what it is and be led by the Lord to reject it. "If evils were not permitted to break out, a person would not see them and therefore would not acknowledge them, and so could not be brought to resist them" (*Divine Providence 251*).

- Why is it hard to see our own evils?
- Why is it easier to recognize evil actions when these are done by other people?
- How can the consequences of our poor choices help us make spiritual progress in our lives?

## TRUSTING IN THE LORD'S PROVIDENCE

Peace holds within itself trust in the Lord, the trust that He governs all things and provides all things, and that He leads toward an end that is good. When a person believes these things...he is at peace....

*(Arcana Coelestia 8455:1,2)*

Sometimes it can be challenging to trust in the Lord's providence. When things don't seem to be going well, we may wonder if the Lord is caring for us. Whether or not we believe it, He is always trying to lead us toward eternal happiness. If we can believe it, then we may feel at peace even when troubles come our way.

**SING:** "Wait on the Lord" by Lori Odhner

**ACTIVITY:** Maze or Labyrinth?

Make a maze to show what life is like when we lead ourselves and a labyrinth to reflect how the Lord leads us.

**For Reflection:** "The Fall of a Sparrow" (*teens and up*)

Look at how the idea of Divine Providence is given in a song and a play, as authors use an image from the New Testament in different ways in their work.

**GAME:** Stream of Providence (*for younger children*)

This game is about the Lord leading us toward His heavenly sheepfold. The name comes from the teaching that the Lord "leads a person as silently as an imperceptible stream or favoring current bears a vessel along" (*Divine Providence* 186). When we look to Him as our Shepherd, then our lives may seem to be going along peacefully, in the "stream of Providence." At other times, we may experience stormy seas or a forest maze. By looking to the Lord and applying His Word to our lives, we can find peace once again.

