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Best Year Ever

Week 1: Genesis 37:1-11 & 1 Corinthians 10:23-24

Description: If you're ready to have the BEST YEAR EVER, how you handle your relationships with family and friends will be a huge factor. Jesus put those people in your life for a reason.

Opening Game: "The Dollar Sing-Off"

Supplies

- One \$1 bill and two large spoons with a large amount of peanut butter on each (Note: Be sure the volunteers you pick don't have a peanut allergy.)

Introduce this game saying something like, "I want to help you guys have the best year ever, so I'd like to offer this crisp \$1 bill to one of you right now... if you're willing to be a little crazy." Ask for two volunteers to come up front. Explain that they are going to have a sing-off, and the crowd will vote for the most enthusiastic singer. You can choose any song, but be sure to have the lyrics ready on a piece of paper for each singer if it's an unfamiliar song. The trick to this game is that each volunteer must sing the song (at the same time) with a spoonful of peanut butter in their mouth. They're not allowed to eat the peanut butter or swallow it. It must sit inside of their mouths while they sing. It will be hilarious to watch them try to sing with that peanut butter! At the end of the song have the crowd cheer for who sang it best and award the dollar to them.

A couple things to be aware of:

- It's best to choose a very familiar song so the crowd will have an idea what they are trying to sing. Songs like the National Anthem, Take Me Out to the Ballgame, and Happy Birthday are all great options.
- When explaining the game, tell the volunteers they must SING! Some contestants may try to HUM or just say "do-do-do-do" for the words because it's easier. That's lame. They have to sing the words.

Transition Statement: Well hopefully that dollar bill will help (Student's Name) start this year out right so they can have the BEST YEAR EVER.

Teach

How many of you have started the new year saying something like...

- “This year will be different!”
- “Time to make a change”
- “I’m going to make this year better than last year.”

There’s something about a blank slate, a new beginning, a new calendar that brings hope and optimism into everyone’s hearts and minds. Once the clock hits midnight on New Year’s Eve, everyone goes crazy celebrating. Why? Because in that moment most people feel like anything is possible.

But then 364 days later most people find themselves excited again that the previous year and all its troubles are over, and they get to hit the “reset” button. Have you ever thought about how ironic it is that we’re always hoping for the new year or the new beginning? Why is it that we can’t just make good, wise decisions throughout the year that make the whole year great? Why can’t a random day like March 19th or September 7th or November 20th be just as awesome as January 1st?!

We all want the BEST YEAR EVER but we’re not willing to do the work or change our perspective to make it happen!

In this series we’re going to break down what it means to have the best year ever. And before you think we’re going to give you tips on making more money, having more friends, and being more awesome, think again. The road to having the best year ever looks different for a Jesus-follower than for someone else. In fact, sometimes the first step towards the best year ever is having the worst year ever—as was the case in the life of Joseph.

For the next 6 weeks we are going to immerse ourselves in the story of Joseph from the book of Genesis. He had his moments of brilliance and moments of ignorance, but he always kept his eyes on God. And because of this—by the end of his life—Joseph could say without a doubt that he had the best LIFE ever.

Leader: Read Genesis 37:1-4

- Immediately we find out that Joseph started his journey at the young age of 17, which isn’t much older than you guys!
- Apparently Joseph was basically the “parent favorite.” It seems as if Jacob, his dad, didn’t even try to hide it. He made him an awesome robe! This didn’t sit well with Joseph’s brothers. The text actually says they hated him. Ouch. This sounds

like a little more than sibling rivalry. How many of you have felt like a sibling or family member was making your life more difficult than you wanted it to be? Okay, now let me ask you this. How many of you have made life more difficult for a sibling or family member? Every hand in this room should be up! Joseph did the same thing.

Leader: Read Genesis 37:5-11

- Alright, so here we see that Joseph is going to be used by God in a huge way. But the way he communicates this to his family is not the wisest way. In fact, Joseph probably knows that his brothers don't like him, and what does he do? He throws fuel on the fire. He tells them about his dreams that he is going to rule over them.
- Now, we know that God is the one who gave Joseph the dreams. So the issue here isn't that Joseph HAD the dreams. The issue is the PRIDE that snuck into his heart that caused him to boast about his dreams to his brothers. And here we learn an important lesson: **Just because you can doesn't mean you should.**
- Paul said it like this in 1 Corinthians 10:23–24” “I have the right to do anything,’ you say - but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’ - but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.”

Joseph could have really benefited from Paul's wisdom! While Joseph could be confident that God had called him to a great life, he didn't need to throw it in the face of his family. What he lacked the most was wisdom.

OBJECT LESSON: *Start blowing up a balloon. Explain that the balloon represents your heart. Every time you blow air into the balloon, the air represents something that gives you confidence: a good grade on a test, a date to the dance, a new video game from your parents. Explain that if we're not careful, the balloon (our heart) will continue to grow bigger and bigger until it's so big that it POPS (You will either need to blow it up until it pops or have a little pin to pop it). That's how pride works— it takes the good things of our lives and makes you feel the need to throw it in other people's faces so that they become jealous. But the more you do that, the quicker your balloon pops.*

So if you're ready to have the BEST YEAR EVER, your relationships and how you handle your pride will be a huge factor. Jesus put those people in your life for a reason. He died not just for you, but for them as well.

So here are a few thoughts for handling your family & friend relationships:

- **When in doubt, say nothing.**
 - Sometimes the best thing you can say in a situation is nothing. There's a saying out there: "The wisest person in the room is often the quietest person in the room." Your words affect people more than you realize. If you're not directly encouraging someone, try saying nothing instead. You'll learn to "weigh your words" differently.

- **Be confident, not cocky.**
 - Joseph started the story as a young man confident in God's plan. But he tipped the scale to cockiness when he started boasting in front of his brothers. Be aware that when things are good in our lives, we can easily become prideful. Learn to be confident without being cocky.

Next week we are going to continue to the next part of Joseph's story, and we'll see how his pride caused his brothers to do something pretty drastic. Be sure to come next week to discover more about how to have the BEST YEAR EVER.

Small Groups

Activity: Blessings & Struggles

For this activity you will need a large item that a student can hold. Explain that if you do not have the item, you may only speak in questions. The group will pass around the item. When you have the item, you must tell the group about a blessing in your life that God has given you and a struggle that you are currently dealing with. When you have shared both the blessing and the struggle, the group must ask you questions about the blessing and struggle. They cannot make comments, only questions. This is a great way to teach your group to care for each other and ask good questions about each other's lives.

Questions

1. How many of you have ever made a New Year's resolution? What was it?
2. If someone came up to you and genuinely asked you how they could have the BEST YEAR EVER, what advice would you give them?
3. In the story today, Joseph found out through a dream that God had something awesome planned for him. Do you remember what it was?
4. What did Joseph do with this new information?
5. Do you think the brothers were justified in being angry with Joseph? Why or why not?
6. We also learned today that in order to have the best year ever, you have to handle your family and friend relationships well. Someone help me finish these two sentences from earlier:
 - a. When in doubt, say _____. (*nothing*)
 - b. Be confident, not _____. (*cocky*)
7. Why do you think God cares if we are prideful or not? Shouldn't we be able to say whatever we want? What do you think?
8. What is one way you can apply what you've learned to your relationships with your family and friends this week?

Best Year Ever

Week 2: Genesis 37:18-28 & Proverbs 3:5-6

Description: When your life begins to stink, what's your natural response? Do you lean more into God's embrace and trust him? Or do you throw your hands in the air in frustration and run from him? We will learn that if Joseph had given up when life was rough, he would have missed out on A LOT!

Opening Game: Simon Says Volleyball

Supplies

- A volleyball net, or at the very least a long rope that you can designate as the top of the net, and a large rubber ball that's easy to hit in the air.

To start this game, just split the room down the middle with the volleyball net. Explain that you are going to play a version of volleyball where each side can hit the ball as many times as you need to, but everyone must be doing whatever the Game-Master says (a la "Simon Says" style). Every time the ball hits the ground, the opposite team is awarded a point. Each round the Game Master will announce an action that everyone must do while playing. If the Game Master sees someone playing without doing the action, they will lose the point.

Here are some examples that work great:

- Game Master says you must hop on one foot during the whole round.
- Game Master says you must link arms with a buddy for the whole round.
- Game Master says you must sing Happy Birthday to the Game Master during the whole round.
- Game Master says you must do the "chicken dance" during the whole round.

Get creative! Sometimes it's fun to let a student pick the action for the next round. Be sure to take lots of pictures too. It gets really crazy!

Teach

Welcome to week 2 of our series “BEST YEAR EVER.” Let’s be serious here. Nobody wants to have a *bad* year, right? You don’t hit New Years Day saying, “My New Years resolution is to be terrible at life.” That would be ridiculous, wouldn’t it?

So in this series we are trying to discover what it means to have the *best year ever* as a Christ-follower. We’re not trying to have a good year in the eyes of the world. This is not a get-rich-quick series. This is all about how to follow Jesus and have the most joyful, purpose-filled life this year.

Last week we started talking about Joseph and some dreams he had about ruling over his brothers. God gave him these dreams to give him hope, but he turned around and boasted about them in front of his brothers, which caused them to hate him even more. We learned that to have the best year ever, we have to be wise in our family and friend relationships. Most of the time, this means watching the words we speak or not speaking at all. It’s good to be confident, but it’s dangerous to get cocky.

Today we’re going to talk about what happened next. But first I want you to pair up with someone near you and talk about a time when you ended up in a *pit of despair*. By this, I mean, when in your life did you feel unfairly treated? Talk about what happened and how you felt about it all. Ready, GO!

Leader, give students about two minutes to share. Around the one minute mark, be sure to coach them to switch so each person has a chance to share.

It stinks to be unfairly treated, right? There’s something about it that makes you feel violated, cheated, and un-loved. So how do you deal with these situations as a follower of Jesus? The way of the world would respond with words like *revenge*, *anger*, and *hate*. But that’s not the way of Christ.

Joseph dealt with a tough situation. After he messed up and got prideful about how God was going to use him, the brothers got together and made a plan. That’s where we pick up in the story. Joseph’s father sent him to go check with his brothers out in the field.

Read Genesis 37:18-28

- Can you even imagine the hurt and confusion that Joseph must have been experiencing? His own family, his flesh and blood, hated him so much that they threw him into a pit and then sold him into slavery. A couple of his brothers even wanted to kill him! (And you thought YOUR sibling rivalry was bad!)

- What Joseph did—boasting about his dreams—was not good, but certainly it didn't warrant this kind of treatment. There was nothing loving or just about this action.
- How would YOU have responded to this situation?

The truth is, we don't know much about how Joseph responded during these events. The text doesn't say if he screamed at his brothers or if he cursed God. It doesn't say if he went kicking and yelling while being dragged off into slavery. HOWEVER, we do have the benefit of knowing the end of the story. I don't want to spoil it for you, but at the end of Joseph's life he is still praising God for being so wonderful to him. And because of this, I like to believe that Joseph never abandoned God during this trial or gave up on His plan. He remained faithful, even when life stank.

OBJECT LESSON: THE SNOT SUCKER

For this illustration, you'll need to have this little tool that parents use on newborns to "suck the snot" out of the baby's nostrils. The official name is the "nasal aspirator," but with junior high students, it's fun to call it by its function: the snot sucker.

Explain that if you ever watch a new mother use the snot sucker to suck un-wanted stuff out of their baby's nose, the baby generally does not like this process. It's uncomfortable, and probably a little painful. They will cry or even scream loudly at times. In the baby's mind, the mother is letting them go through too much pain and discomfort.

You can only imagine a 6 month old trying to process in their tiny little mind why the one person they trust would let them go through this snot-sucking pain. However, if the mom doesn't suck the snot out, the baby would not be able to breathe through its nose. When babies are very young, they don't know how to naturally breathe through their mouths yet. So if the snot builds up too much, the baby would stop breathing and most likely die.

So in the end, the mother allows the baby to go through a little bit of pain and discomfort in order to give the baby a full life. In the same way, God as our Father often allows us, his children, to go through a little bit of pain and discomfort because he sees the bigger picture. In this bigger picture, he knows that these situations will teach us and guide us into his love and wisdom.

Joseph went through a very "snot sucker" situation. I am sure that he was very hurt and confused, and probably a little bit mad at God. But he never lost his faith.

So, when your life begins to stink, what's your natural response? Do you lean more into God's embrace and trust him? Or do you throw your hands in the air in frustration and run from him? We will learn that if Joseph had given up on God in this moment, he would have missed out on, well, everything.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and he will make your paths straight." Write this on your hand, put it in your locker, tape it to your mirror at home. Eventually this truth will begin to plant itself in your heart. And when hard times come, whether it's because family hurt you or your friends abandoned you, you will learn to trust in the love and goodness of Jesus.

Small Groups

Activity: The Item Extravaganza

This is a great activity to help junior high students name their emotions, using objects as their guide. You will need to collect a bag of random objects from around the office or home, such as rubber bands, crushed soda cans, pieces of cloth, rubix cubes, etc. Honestly the more diverse, the better. When you gather for group time, pour the objects out into the middle of the group. Explain that you are going to ask a question, and each person should choose an object that best represents his or her answer to the questions.

For example, you may ask, “Choose an object that best represents your relationship with your family.” And one student may pick up the crushed soda can. One by one each student should explain why he or she chose that item. That particular student could say something like, “I chose the crushed soda can because my relationship with my family used to be sweet like the soda in this can, but now all I feel is crushed and pressured by my parents to be better at school and other things.”

Here is a good sequence of questions (though you can ask any questions that may fit your group):

- Choose an object that best represents this school year so far for you.
- Choose an object that best represents the state of your friendships right now.
- Choose an object that best represents your relationship with your family.
- Choose an object that best represents your relationship with God right now.
- Choose an object that best represents a difficult situation that you are either dealing with right now, or one that you dealt with recently.

Discussion Questions

1. Joseph went through a pretty rough situation, much like the ones you just shared about during our activity. How do you think he felt about his brothers’ actions?
2. Why do you think God allowed Joseph to go through this trial?
3. Do you think it was really difficult for Joseph to trust God during this trial? Why or why not?
4. Explain the “Snot Sucker” object lesson that we talked about in the message.
5. *Read Proverbs 3:5-6 as a group together.* What keeps us from trusting in the Lord at times? What can we do to remove those obstacles?
6. What can we be praying for you as a group?

Best Year Ever

Week 3: Genesis 39:1-20

Description: Develop a long-term view of life and you will experience victory over temptation like Joseph.

OPENING GAME: HOLIDAY LEFTOVERS

Supplies

- Blender
- Two cups
- Can of gravy
- Can of corn
- Can of cranberry sauce

Well, the holiday season is over. You've cleaned up the decorations and removed the tree. But wait, what's that smell? Oh goodness, all the food from the holiday meals is wasting away in the refrigerator. You can either throw it out or use it in an awesome game like this one.

You're welcome.

Get two brave volunteers to come up and play Holiday Leftovers. You will need one blender, two cups, a can of gravy, a can of corn, and a can of cranberry sauce. Open the cans and pour them into the blender and mix them up! Pour out two equal cups and it's a race to see who can finish their leftovers first.

Hint: You may want to have a trash can close if one of the contestants can't take all of the holiday goodness!

Teach

So last week we finished off with Joseph being thrown into a pit and being sold into slavery. Not exactly a happy ending, but thankfully our story is not over yet.

How many of you have been in a situation where you were trying to be a good person, but there was a nagging temptation that was keeping you from making a good decision? Well you're not the only one.

Check out this video clip from *Shrek: Forever After*.

SHOW VIDEO CLIP: "Waffles"

Here is the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zo2rkKXL2gk>

Donkey just couldn't resist the temptation. He wanted the waffles. He knew deep down that it probably wasn't a good idea, but when your *appetite* attacks, it's hard to say no. I know I've been there myself. (*Leader, this would be a great moment to share a personal story about a time when you felt tempted to do something. At this moment of the message, a funny story would fit better than a serious story.*)

The issue is that temptation will never allow us to have the *Best Year Ever*. It will always pull you away from God's greater plan. Satan wants you to fail and will put anything and everything in your way to stop you. And Joseph was no exception!

Read Genesis 39:1-20

- The text makes it pretty clear that Joseph was a good guy. He took care of things. He didn't complain. He was just trying to live honestly before the Lord.
- But that's typically how temptation works. You will be minding your own business, trying to live according to the Bible, and then, BAM! Some temptation is thrown in your face! The question is not, "Will you be tempted?" The question is, "When will you be tempted?"
- In this particular situation, Potiphar's wife was not taking "no" for an answer. She wanted Joseph, and if she couldn't have him, then he would have to pay for it. So she lied in order to cover up her sin.
- Do you think it was fair that Joseph did the right thing but was still put in prison? *Of course not.* From all aspects of this situation, it does not look like Joseph is having the *Best Year Ever*. But wait a second. Before your mind goes there, I

want you to think about this life. Think about how long this life lasts in comparison to all of eternity. It's as if this life is a tiny grain of sand and eternity is all of the seashores in the world combined. Every time we sin, we move farther and farther from God's plan for our lives. It's a lot like saying to God, "We don't care that you died on the cross for us. We want to have fun in this life in any way possible."

And so we begin to give up eternity in heaven for a temporary moment of pleasure or fun here on earth.

- I believe Joseph understood this concept. He understood that his integrity and his purity were more important than anything else. Could he have gotten away with giving in to Potiphar's wife? Absolutely. But he knew God wanted more for his life than that! And, as we'll see in the next few weeks, his perseverance under pressure ended up giving him a HUGE reward!

Check out this hilarious video of kids dealing with the idea of temporary fun vs. a later reward!

SHOW VIDEO CLIP – MARSHMALLOW TEST

Here is the link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX_oy9614HQ

Don't you just love their faces when they're wrestling with the temptation? Whether to eat one marshmallow now, or wait and get a reward of TWO marshmallows? There is so much agony in each of their faces!

I wonder how many of you have felt the same way when faced with temptation. That was a silly video, but many of you have made a similar face when temptations attacked you like:

- Whether to go to that party or not;
- Whether to watch that movie you're not supposed to watch or not;
- Whether to hang out with that one friend who makes bad decisions or not.

The good news is God does not leave us alone when faced with temptation. He has given us the Holy Spirit inside of us, who guides us into wisdom. He whispers into our heart when we are confused and lost. He is present in every decision!

If you can develop a long-term view of life, understanding that eternity matters more than temporary pleasure, and you can remember that the Holy Spirit is inside of you to guide you into wise decisions, you will experience victory over temptation like Joseph.

And next week, we'll learn just how God used Joseph's prison time to completely change the direction of his life!

Small Groups

Object Lesson: A Glass of Toilet Water

Many times temptation looks good on the outside, but it can make us sick when we give in to it. For this object lesson, you'll want two clear glasses or cups of water. One cup of water should be from the tap. One cup of water should be from the toilet (Hey, you never asked for a cushy job when you started doing student ministry!). Explain to the students that you would like to give these two glasses of water away to anyone who is thirsty. Get a volunteer to come up and check out the water. Ask the volunteer if the water looks okay in both glasses. Once they approve, explain that the first cup is indeed from the tap. But the second glass... Well, it's from the toilet. (You can even take a picture of you taking the water from the toilet for a bigger effect and show it to them!).

Here's the point: Temptation often comes looking like a tall, refreshing glass of water on a hot day. We've been sweating and we need some refreshment, so it always looks good. But temptation has a disguise. It's really just a tall glass of toilet water. It looks good on the outside, but when you consider the source of the water, you'd never want to drink it. It could make you sick, or even make you throw up. What begins as an enticing temptation ends as a disturbingly gross encounter.

Discussion:

1. How did you feel about that object lesson? Did it gross you out? Why?
2. What are some temptations that students face today?
3. Why does God care so much about whether we give in to temptation or not?
4. How can the Holy Spirit inside of us help us when we are tempted to sin?
5. In order to have the *Best Year Ever*, we often have to stand up for our purity and integrity, even if it means losing friends, or losing popularity, or whatever. This is never an easy thing. What are some tips or advice you would give to a friend who is wrestling with this concept?