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Table of Contents

Week 4: Patience	Genesis 40:1-23 & Genesis 41:1-44	Page 2
Week 5: Forgiveness	Genesis 42-45	Page 6
Week 6: Perspective	Genesis 50:22-26 & Hebrews 11:22	Page 10

Best Year Ever

Week 4: Genesis 40:1-23 & Genesis 41:1-44

Description: Patience is not an easy thing. It's a learned discipline. Like Joseph, we all have areas in our lives where we need more patience. With God's help, we can learn to be patient in those areas.

Group Game: Snowball Fight

To prepare for this game, put two blank pieces of white paper on every seat before students arrive. Explain that one of your favorite activities during the holidays is snowball fights, and it doesn't make sense that snowball fights should stop happening just because the holidays are over. Instruct every student to crumple up their two pieces of paper into two "snowballs." When you say "GO," the right side of the room will compete with the left side of the room in an epic snowball fight. When you say "STOP," the side of the room with the most "snowballs" on it is the loser. The only two rules are that they must stay on their side of the room, and they must immediately throw the snowballs once they pick them up (In other words, no hoarding snowballs to throw at the last second). This game is great for getting some energy out. Have a camera ready for the initial throws! Feel free to play this game multiple times in 1-minute sequences.

Teach

Welcome back to week 4 of our series BEST YEAR EVER. We've been learning about the life of Joseph, who, quite frankly, isn't really having the best year ever. In fact, many of you are probably thinking he is having the worst year ever. So far, he has been rejected by his brothers, thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, accused of a crime he didn't commit, and thrown in jail. There isn't a lot of good happening in his life right now, but we're getting there!

For a lot of kids, the worst part about the day after Christmas is not that a toy isn't working or that there's no more hot turkey in the oven. Do you know what the worst part is? **Being forced to wait another 364 days until the next Christmas!** Am I right? How many of you experienced this as a kid? It's so fun building all the anticipation with the gifts under the tree, wondering what you might be receiving. And Christmas morning is epic, of course. But then you realize it's all over and now you have to be PATIENT for another year to have the same experience!

Patience is not something humans are generally good at. We live in a culture where anything we want is at the tip of our fingers. All you need is a smartphone and two thumbs, and you can order the newest video game, have a pizza delivered to your front

door, or buy a pet giraffe. (Okay, I'm not sure about that last one, but I bet there's a way!). When we are told we must wait for something, it's as if someone told us we're *never getting it ever!* We throw our hands up in frustration and pray that God would make our lives easier. Isn't that sad, but true?

So far in Joseph's life, we have read about a lot of bad things happening. Yet Joseph has not said one negative thing about God. He has continued to be patient and trust in God's plan. And today we're going to continue the story of Joseph and learn how that patience pays off.

Read Genesis 40:1-23 (*There are a lot of verses there, so break it up as you feel best for your group*)

- So what happened here? Joseph is just hanging out in his prison cell when an opportunity falls in his lap. If you remember from week one, Joseph once had a dream from God about how he would rule over his brothers. God was now giving him the chance to interpret other people's dreams.
- So he goes for it. He interprets their dreams with God's help. And he turns out to be right! His one request to the cup-bearer was that he would remember Joseph and plead to Pharaoh for some help, but the cup-bearer forgets him. Wouldn't that be incredibly frustrating?!
- Joseph's patience here must have been getting thin. He had been through so much, to no fault of his own. But his story is on the verge of a break-through.

Read or Paraphrase Genesis 41:1-36 (since you have talked through so much Scripture, it may be best to familiarize yourself with the content and summarize what happens)

- Finally some hope has come for Joseph! **But it took two years for the cup-bearer to remember.** He didn't really have a choice either way, but that shows incredible patience.

Read Genesis 41:37-44

- WOW! Talk about a turnaround! From a pit, to slavery, to prison, to **second-in-command of the nation of Egypt!**
- In this moment I believe Joseph received a full understanding of why he went through so many trials and so much suffering. God always had an amazing plan, and this is how God fulfilled Joseph's dream.

- But in order to realize God's plan for his life, Joseph had to remain *patient* during the trials!

Leader, this would be a great opportunity to tell a personal story of when you have needed to remain patient for one of God's blessings in your life.

Patience is not an easy thing. It's a learned discipline. But if you can learn to trust in Jesus' plan for your life, he will lead you through the trials because he loves you! He wouldn't have died on the cross or have risen from the grave if he didn't love you!

So where in your life do you need more patience? Who is that person in your life who can benefit from your patience? Maybe it's a sibling, or a classmate, or a teammate. Whoever it is, remember that Jesus loves them too, and God is asking you to be patient. You never know what God is going to do with your life because you were patient.

Small Group

Activity: As a lesson for patience, bring some kind of food to your small group that has a powerful and alluring smell. Freshly popped popcorn would be an excellent option. Put the food in the middle of the group and explain that they are going to have a feast today but not until the last minutes of the group. This is a test of patience!

1. How hard is it for you to resist the smell of the food right now?
2. Why is it so hard for us to wait for good things in life?
3. Many times it's easy to expect other people to be patient, but it's nearly impossible to ask ourselves to be patient. Why is that?
4. Joseph's life was a test of patience. How do you think he remained faithful to the Lord amidst so many trials?
5. Why do you think it took God so long to make something good happen in Joseph's life? Why didn't he just make him second-in-command of Egypt from the very beginning?
6. In what areas of your life right now do you need to show more patience? Be specific!
7. How can we as a group hold you accountable to those areas?

Best Year Ever

Week 5 - Genesis 42-45

Description: We can experience freedom if we will let go of a grudge. Who have you been holding a grudge against? Who do you need to forgive? And on the flip side, whom do you need to seek forgiveness from? Holding a grudge won't help any of us, like Joseph we need to move on.

Opening Game: Marshmallow Home Run Derby

This is a fun game to play for both the players and spectators. The spectators end up being a part of the game as they dodge marshmallows that are hit by the players. All you need is a plastic baseball bat and a bag of large marshmallows. Bring up 3 students to be the batters. Pitch the marshmallows underhand to the batters one at a time and give them a target to try to hit in the back of the room. Each batter gets 3 hits. It ends up being very entertaining because they are hitting the marshmallows *towards* the spectators. It gives a lot of energy to the room as people try to dodge getting hit, even though getting hit by a marshmallow will not hurt at all. The winner is whoever gets the biggest hits.

(If you want to give it a good & fun competitive feel, get 3 of your volunteer leaders to be the panel of celebrity judges. Give them each ten pieces of paper with the numbers 1-10 for them to hold up after each hit. Coach the volunteers on being dramatic with the reveal of their scores. This can be a fun way for students to get to know the volunteers.)

Teach

There are many things that can happen to prevent us from having the BEST YEAR EVER, such as:

- Your favorite football team loses the Super Bowl; or
- Taco Bell discontinues your favorite item on the menu; or
- Your parents buy you a cat instead of a dog (We all know that dogs are better than cats); or
- One Direction decides to break up the band and never make music again.

Okay, maybe those are just funny examples, but some people can be very deeply affected by things that other people do, ruining their chances at having the best year ever.

But there's another category of things that can keep you from having the best year ever, and it's the things **you do to yourself**.

- You make a conscious decision to never do homework and you're forced to repeat a year in school.
- You decide you enjoy gossip more than being a good friend, so you talk behind everyone's back, leaving tons of people mad at you and becoming friendless in the process.
- You get angry with someone and refuse to forgive them, leaving you bitter and upset.

We have a tendency to sabotage ourselves with our own actions. Jesus loves us and has a great plan for our lives, but we somehow find ways to interfere with Him.

Joseph, as we've discussed for the past 4 weeks, was having a tough life. But then life seemed to turn the corner when the Pharaoh made him second-in-command of all of Egypt. Life was starting to be fun again for Joseph. In fact, it was almost going *too well* for him. This leads us into the next part of the story today. He is going to have to make a decision that could either propel him into an even *better* year, or make it nearly impossible to have the best year ever.

(Leader, for the next part, you will need to familiarize yourself well with the text of chapters 42, 43, 44, and 45. There are too many verses to read in this kind of setting, so you will need to summarize large sections of Scripture.)

Read Genesis 42:1-7

- This is like the climax in the "movie" of Joseph's life. He has an opportunity for sweet revenge or loving reconciliation. You can almost feel the tension in the room as you envision the brothers entering Joseph's presence.
- Take a second and put yourself in Joseph's shoes. How would YOU respond if you were him? The brothers don't recognize him in his new role and life. What would YOU do if you were him? Your answer reveals much about the condition of your heart.

Summarize Genesis 42:8-44:34 *(Don't feel like you need to tell every detail, but hit the main points)*

Read Genesis 45:1-8

- I believe that Joseph had an incredible epiphany here. He finally understood God's provision and care throughout his entire life. Every trial, every suffering

was one step on the journey of Joseph being in his position of power and saving the lives of thousands of people.

- Can you imagine how hard it would be to let your brothers off the hook like he did? He didn't blame them at all! He said it was God, not the brothers, who allowed him to go through what he went through.
- Joseph refused to hold on to the bitterness and rage. He *chose to love*.

There's an old saying like goes something like this: **"Holding a grudge is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die."** Think about that saying for a second. It makes sense, doesn't it? We convince ourselves that the longer we hold a grudge, the angrier we make ourselves feel towards someone. And the more powerful our bitterness, the more it will hurt the other person. And sure, it may hurt them a little bit. BUT the bigger damage happens to our own hearts as we hold on to bitterness, like poison eating away at our souls.

Why is this? Well Jesus died on the cross for our sins, despite the fact that we never deserved it. In fact, we still go through life sinning against God as if it doesn't matter. And yet Jesus forgives us time and time again. He doesn't hold a grudge against us.

So when we hold grudges and become bitter, it's like us saying to God that we deserve forgiveness from Him for all of our junk, but the people in our lives who hurt us don't deserve forgiveness. It's a double standard. Jesus calls us to forgive!

It will never be easy. And sometimes you may need to say "I forgive you" before you actually believe those words in your heart. But eventually—after time goes by—you will begin to believe the words coming out of your mouth.

Joseph understood that the only one standing in the way of him having the *Best Year Ever* was himself and his own bitterness. He learned to release his grudge and his bitterness. And because of his decision, he experienced freedom!

Who have you been holding a grudge against? Who do you need to forgive? And on the flip side, who do you need to seek forgiveness from? Today in our small groups you'll have the opportunity to talk more about this topic, and I urge you to be honest and open up. This is not an easy topic, but that's why we have community!

Small Groups

Get-To-Know-You-Game: This or That

Have everyone sit in a circle. The first person says two things that are related (i.e. “chicken or steak”). The next person has 3 seconds to choose one of those items that they prefer, plus a new item that is related (In the example above, they might say “pork” or “fish”). The next person has 3 seconds to choose one of those items and add a new one, and so forth. You can make it into a game, or you can just keep going around and around to get to know each other.

Questions

1. Can someone re-cap what happened in today’s portion of Joseph’s story?
2. Why do you think Joseph chose to forgive his brothers? He could have done anything he wanted to them. Why did he choose forgiveness?
3. Do you think your quality of life improves by forgiving people who have hurt you? Why or why not?
4. Has anyone here decided to forgive someone, even though they were really hurt by them? Tell us about it.
5. Is anyone here willing to share about someone in their life who they’re having trouble forgiving? Remember, this is a safe place to share.

Let’s take some time to pray that God would remind us about how much he forgave us through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, and that he would give us the grace and courage to forgive others who have hurt us.

Best Year Ever

Week 6: Genesis 50:22-26 & Hebrews 11:22

Description: See life through a long-term lens. We need to see that there are things we can do to improve our perspective on life. In order to see life through a long-term lens we can pray, seek out a mentor, and write down our goals.

Up-Front Game: Ice Chest

For this game you'll need 3 XXL t-shirts, a tarp or trash bags, and a lot of ice. Start the game by inviting the toughest guys in the room to volunteer for a game which will show just how "cool" they are. When they volunteer, have them go to a back-room or bathroom to change into the shirts. Instruct them to tuck the shirts into their pants and stand on the tarp or trash bags. Then have 3 other volunteers come up. The game is a race to see how much ice each pair can scoop inside the shirt in one minute. (You may have to cut the game short and award a winner if any of them give up from the frigidness). Be sure to set the ice cooler a good distance away from the guys with the shirts on, so that the other volunteer has to run back and forth.

Warning: Be prepared with empty coolers or trash cans for the guys to dump the ice in when the game is over.

Teach

Well guys, we finally made it to the end of Joseph's story; the end of Joseph's *best year ever*. We have learned so much in these 6 weeks, especially that in order to have the best year ever, you often have to go through trials and difficulties to get there.

Joseph had a knack for seeing life through a long-term lens, as opposed to a short-term lens. Here's what I mean by that:

- **Long-Term Lens:** Seeing life as a collection of events that ultimately combine to create a legacy over a lifetime
- **Short-Term Lens:** Seeing life as nothing but small moments, and living as if every event is an isolated experience

In other words, people who live by the long-term lens understand that there is a greater purpose for everything that happens. But people who live by the short-term lens just want to live for the moment. And they're usually deeply affected emotionally by whatever happens.

For example, Joseph was able to forgive his brothers for throwing him into a pit and selling him into slavery **BECAUSE** he saw through his long-term lens that God was using that experience to lead Joseph into a situation where he'd be second-in-command and save thousands of people from a famine.

Joseph didn't care about the individual moments. He cared about the *legacy he was leaving on the world*. If you want to have the best year ever, you have to see life through the long-term lens!

Today we pick up in the story when Joseph's time on the earth was just about up. And his last words here will probably shock you.

Read Genesis 50:22-24

- Even though Joseph had lived with the Egyptians, he understood that they were not his people. They were not followers of the one true God. And because of this, he knew where his roots were.
- He encouraged his family not to forget the promise that God made them; that even though they were wanderers in this moment, they would not stay that way because God would provide. This is another example of the **long-term lens!**

Read Genesis 50:25-26

- Does this scene confuse anyone? I know it confused me too! These are Joseph's last words. But they don't exactly pack the punch you expect them to. "Take my bones with you?" That's kind of weird.
- Well, not really. As we mentioned before, Joseph understood that Egypt was not his real home. His real home was the promised home from God. He did not want the gaudy, dramatic burial that most Egyptian rulers got. He wanted a humble end with HIS people, the people of God!
- Why did he want this? **Because his legacy meant more to him than wealth and fame.** And apparently people noticed, because he's mentioned again in the New Testament.

Read Hebrews 11:22

- This whole chapter is dedicated to people who lived with a **long-term lens of life**. They left a legacy of faith on the world. They wanted to be remembered not for their own accomplishments or victories, but for their faith in God over their whole lifetime.

Joseph's story is so cool because he saw past the trials and difficulties to see God's wonderful plan. And this is what Jesus wants from us, too.

So how do you keep yourself from seeing life through the short-term lens? Here are a few ideas:

- 1. When you're upset at something in your life, pray that God would help you trust him.** It's not an easy thing to trust him completely, but you can learn to trust him through every trial if you continue to pray.
- 2. Ask someone older and wiser to mentor you.** Mentors can help you see things in your life that you don't see. When you feel heated and emotional over a situation, mentors can help you see how God might be teaching you something.
- 3. Write down what you want your legacy to be.** How do you want to be remembered? What do you want people to say about you when you die? Write these things down. Keep the list where you'll see it daily. This will help remind you of your bigger picture goals for your legacy.

Want to have the best year ever? Leave a legacy on the world for the name of Jesus!

Small Groups

Questions:

1. What is the long-term lens that we talked about today?
2. How did Joseph view his life through the long-term lens?
3. Why is living life with the short-term lens dangerous?

Activity: Whose Is It?

Hand a piece of paper and pen to each member of the group. Have them write down one thing they'd like to be remembered for (their legacy). Tell them to be specific. After they write their legacy down, have them fold up the paper and turn them into you. One at a time read each piece of paper. Everyone must guess whose paper they think it is. This is a great way to learn about each other and what each member of the group wants to be remembered for. You can award points for whoever guesses the most correctly, or you can just use it as a get-to-know-you activity.

Questions

1. What did you learn about each other in that activity?
2. Is there anything you'd like to add to your legacy that you didn't write down?