

MARK OF A DISCIPLE

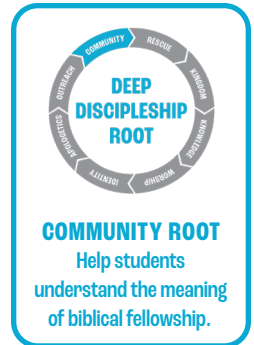
Disciples of Christ offer forgiveness and mercy to others (Eph. 4:32).

MAIN PASSAGES

GENESIS 45:1–11; 50:15–21

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF PASSAGE

Joseph was the favorite son of Jacob, and Jacob didn't even try to hide that fact. The special treatment Joseph received from his father, combined with the dreams Joseph had that showed his family bowing down to him, led his brothers to hate him (Gen. 37:4). As a result of their hate, Joseph's brothers contemplated killing him before they sold him into slavery (Gen. 37:26–28). Their evil choice sent Joseph down a path of slavery, then to prison. God pulled Joseph out of the dungeon and made him second in command of all Egypt, where Joseph eventually met his brothers once again. Unbelievably, Joseph offered his brothers forgiveness and protection instead of vengeance.



OPENING OPTIONS

10–15 minutes

Choose from the following options to give students opportunities to connect and have structured and unstructured fun.

I. SEMI-UNSTRUCTURED HANGOUT TIME

Based on your group's size, allow for unstructured hangout or play a game from **Deep Discipleship Games**—we recommend **Bordering States**. NOTE: Free Deep Discipleship Games are already included with your Deep Discipleship Account. View the game in advance in case you need supplies or slides.

II. ARRIVAL ACTIVITY

Forgiveness Freeze tag

Choose one to two students to be “freezers,” and the rest are “players.” When a freezer tags a player, the player must freeze in place. They can only be unfrozen when another player tags them and says, “I forgive you!”

Connection to Lesson

Forgiveness can release someone from a “frozen” or stuck place—and this can be true for both the person who caused the hurt and the one who was hurt.

III. ICEBREAKER

You can use this icebreaker question to transition students from activity to teaching time.

What is something unexpectedly good that happened this week?



LARGE GROUP MESSAGE

15–20 minutes

Use the following teaching points and suggested illustrations as a starting point to build your message. Incorporate the suggested discussion questions to keep students engaged with the message.

POINT #1: God brings good from hard situations

(Genesis 45:1–11)

Joseph had been sold into slavery in Egypt by his own brothers. There, he was put in prison for something he didn't do. Through all of Joseph's hardships, he remained faithful to God, and God was with him and made him succeed. Pharaoh appointed Joseph as second-in-command of all Egypt and put him in charge of storing food for the famine. In Genesis 45, the famine hit, and Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy food.

Eventually, Joseph is moved to tears and reveals his identity to them. This was Joseph's moment. With the authority he had, Joseph could have dished out whatever revenge he wanted against his brothers. Instead, Joseph told them not to be upset or angry with themselves because God used their mistreatment to preserve the lives of many, including theirs (v. 5)! He reassures them that God sent him there for good. God used Joseph's terrible situation to save thousands of people from starvation.

Not every bad, sad, or hard situation will turn into something good here on earth. But God does promise that "for those who love God all things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28), and he also promises that all things will be made right in eternity (Rev. 21:1–8).

ILLUSTRATION: Imagine there is a person you don't like. You refuse to let them play with you and your friends. You all make fun of them, and you tell them to leave. A few years later, you move to a new school, and you can't wait to play on the soccer team. Then, as you approach the field on tryout day, you see that same person standing there, and they get to decide who gets to play and who doesn't. To your amazement, that person chooses you first—and is actually happy to see you!

- **Ask:** *If you were one of the brothers standing before Joseph, how would you feel?*
- **Ask:** *Why do you think Joseph was able to see the good that had come from his hardship?*

POINT #2: Forgiveness is not dependent on circumstances

(Genesis 50:15–21)

After living in Egypt for many years, Joseph's father, Jacob, died. His brothers were worried Joseph would now seek revenge for the evil they had done to him. They were so worried that they sent a messenger to Joseph (see Gen. 50:16–17). When the brothers felt it was safe to approach Joseph, they fell before him and vowed to be his servants (v. 18). Joseph told them they had nothing to fear—he knew he was not God and that what they had meant for evil, God had meant for good. Joseph knew God was sovereign over all things and that God had a plan, even if that meant he had to endure some hard times. Knowing he was not in God's seat and trusting in God's overall plan allowed Joseph to extend true forgiveness to his brothers.

ILLUSTRATION: Imagine you got into a big fight with a sibling, said mean things, and stormed off. You quickly felt sorry about the way you treated your sibling, but avoided them because you were worried they hadn't forgiven you. Later, you walk into a room as they are about to play a game. There's an empty seat right next to them. They pat the seat, smile, and invite you to sit down—no lecture, no argument, just an invitation to be close again.

That's what Joseph did with his brothers. Instead of revenge or holding a grudge, he invited them back into his life and took care of them and their families. This is a beautiful picture of forgiveness in action.

- **Ask:** *When have you expected someone to hold a grudge against you, but then were surprised by forgiveness instead?*
- **Ask:** *Why do you think Joseph chose to forgive instead of getting even?*



REFLECTION

5 minutes

Give students a chance to creatively process what they've just learned and to prepare for small group discussion.

Have students think about someone who has hurt or upset them. Using the space provided on page 2 of their Student Guide, have them write a response or draw a picture that answers this question: *What would it look like for me to forgive them like Joseph forgave his brothers?*

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Page 2 of Student Guide or blank paper
- Writing utensils
- Markers

SMALL GROUPS

10–15 minutes

Divide into small groups. Small Group Leaders can guide students through the following discussion questions.

What does the Word say?

- What did Joseph say was the real reason he ended up in Egypt?
God sent him to Egypt to save many lives (Gen. 50:20). Despite his brother's evil intentions, God demonstrates his ability to use even the worst of circumstances to bring about good.
- After their father died, what did Joseph's brothers fear he might do? What did he actually do?
They feared he would take revenge on them for selling him into slavery. Instead, he took care of them and showed them undeserved kindness.

What does the Word mean?

- What does Joseph's story teach us about how God can use hard times for good?
Even when things seem bad, God can use them to accomplish his good plan. Just because we choose to follow God doesn't mean we will never face difficulty (Job, Jesus, the 11 disciples, and Paul are all examples of faithful followers of God who faced terrible circumstances). But God promises to always be with us (Matt. 28:20) and "for those who love God all things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28), so we can trust in God's sovereign, good plan!
- How does Joseph set an example for us when it comes to forgiveness?
We can't control how people treat us, but we can control how we respond to them. Forgiveness doesn't depend on what others do or don't do; it's a choice to trust God's sovereignty and show kindness.

What should I do now?

- When something hard happens in your life, how can Joseph's story help you?
Answers will vary, but could include reminding us that God is still with us and can bring good from difficult times.
- Who is someone you need to forgive or can show undeserved kindness to this week?
Answers will vary. Come prepared to share your own answer, even if it's not a current situation.



APPLICATION

5 minutes

Reinforce the lesson and challenge students to apply it to their lives.

Using the space provided on page 4 of their Student Guide, have students write one difficult thing they've gone through. Underneath, have them write one good thing that has come from it, or one way they hope God can use it for good.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Page 4 of Student Guide or blank paper
- Writing utensils

Application Question

What can you do this week to help you see things from God's perspective instead of focusing on your own circumstances?

PRAY

Pray that your students will understand that when they repent of their sin, they *are* forgiven by God. Ask God to help them forgive others and show others undeserved kindness—as he has shown to them. Thank God for always being at work, even in their difficult situations.

NOTES

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