



## On your marks

Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. In Egypt, he is bought by General Potiphar and does well until he is falsely accused of 'making eyes' at Potiphar's wife and ends up in prison. There, he does well again, interpreting the dreams for the Pharaoh's butler and baker. But when the butler is released, he forgets to put in a good word for Joseph and he is in prison for two more years. Finally, Joseph is summoned to interpret the Pharaoh's dreams - God helps him. Pharaoh then promotes him to prime minister with a new Egyptian name (Zaph-enath-paneah, which means the one who is alive to God's voice). Joseph marries and settles down in Egypt managing the country's grain harvest. His children's names speak of forgetting the past (Manasseh) and making a new start (Ephraim), but can he really forget who he is and his true home?

## Get set

This feature-length Old Testament story raises lots of interesting questions:

- What is God up to when everything is going wrong?
- How can we go on trusting in God when bad things happen?

Joseph's prison years in Egypt seem to have taught him deep lessons about himself and about God. Psalm 105:19 (CEV): 'Joseph remained a slave until his own words had come true, and the Lord had finished testing him.'

For storytelling ideas for the other parts of Joseph's story, see [The story of Joseph - the peacock](#) and [The story of Joseph - the prime minister](#).

You will need:

- a picture of an arrow
- an example of the game Snakes and Ladders

You can find a retelling of the story from Genesis 39-41 in The Barnabas Children's Bible (stories 32 and 33).

## Go!

So, what happened next for Joseph after his brothers sold him into slavery? Was God with him? What was God doing?

## Opening up the story

Joseph's life in Egypt was a series of ups and downs, just like in the game Snakes and Ladders. But God was using all that happened to Joseph for good.



Invite your group to stand in a circle, for some 'up and down' activity. Firstly, get them to hold hands and pass a 'Mexican wave' of up and down. Next, tell them to let go of hands and challenge them to become up and down opposites - for example:

- mountains and valleys
- cranes and drills
- balloons and submarines
- rockets and mine shafts

Finally, get them to become lifts going up and then down slowly. Alternatively, play the game 'Duck, Duck, Goose' but as 'Down, Down, Up'.

### **Telling the story**

This is the story of Joseph's ups and down. The Bible says that it was a hard time for him but Joseph learned to trust God like never before... and become less of a proud peacock!

Use the picture of an arrow to illustrate the ups and downs in Joseph's life, and invite everyone to add an appropriate sound effect.

- Joseph was sold as a slave. The favourite son who wore the best outfit ever became a nobody wearing scruffy slave clothes.
- Joseph was bought by General Potiphar, who was in charge of the Pharaoh's palace army, and he did well as his slave. He learnt to read and write and became a trusted housekeeper in Potiphar's home.
- But Potiphar's wife fancied Joseph and tried to make him unfaithful to his master. Joseph knew it was the wrong thing to do. This was not what God wanted. He kept saying 'no' and Potiphar's wife grew more and more angry and eventually she accused him of trying to attack her. Potiphar was furious. He believed his wife and had Joseph thrown into prison.
- He was in a dark, dark prison cell and it seemed like there was no hope... but God was with him.
- He was a good prisoner and soon the prison guard began to trust him. He even helped him look after the other prisoners.
- The Pharaoh's butler and baker were in the same prison. Both of them had bad dreams and Joseph said that with God's help he could work out what their dreams meant.
- The butler's dream was about squeezing grapes into the Pharaoh's cup. There were three branches of grapes, which Joseph said meant he would have his old job back in three days.
- The baker's dream was about three baskets with birds pecking the bread from the top one. Joseph didn't want to explain this dream at first because it meant bad news for the baker.
- When the butler was released, he forgot all about Joseph and he had to stay in prison for two more years.
- But then it was the Pharaoh who had bad dreams - and they were really bad: dreams about 14 cows, then later about 14 ears of corn; the thin cows ate up the fat cows; the thin corn ate up the fat bits of corn. Nobody could work them out, not even the Pharaoh's cleverest men.



- But the butler suddenly remembered Joseph, at last, and Joseph was brought to the Pharaoh. Joseph knew what the dreams meant because God helped him.
- There would be seven good years followed by seven bad years and they would have to survive the bad years with what they saved from the good years. Joseph said that Pharaoh needed someone to collect all the crops from the good years so they could survive through the bad years.
- Pharaoh was delighted – and he knew just the man for the job. He made Joseph his prime minister. The proud young boy who had been a prisoner now became number 2 in Egypt. He was definitely on the up, up, up now.
- Joseph settled down in Egypt and even took on an Egyptian name (Zaph-enath-paneah), which meant the one who is alive to God's voice.
- He married and had two children, whose names were deliberately chosen to mean 'forget the past' and 'make a new start'. Forget the past and make a new start might have helped him but...
- ... could he really forget the past? Could he really make a new start when he knew deep down he didn't belong in Egypt and that he had a dad and brothers and family back home?

This could have been the end of the story, but it wasn't. God was with Joseph and God's plans for Joseph had not come to an end – there would be more ups and downs.