

Let's Talk The Future

Leader's Notes

by Rev. Jim Butler

Where is God Leading Me?

Introduction

One of the struggles that we all deal with is wondering where God is leading us. What does our future hold? What will happen to us as we grow older?

For youth, the questions usually center around choice of college, future spouse, and career. You may see the older members of your group discuss college entrance exams and debate where to go to college (and what to study).

Certainly, concerns about the future change as we grow older. For young adults, issues of marriage, children, and possible disillusionment with a career choice are a major focus. Older adults may face the questions and doubts of mid-life and/or the empty nest. Regardless of age, all of us wonder what the future will hold. We may ask, "How do I know what God's will is?" or "How does this event in my life affect the future?"

In this study, we will touch down on the story of Joseph at several different times of his life and reflect on how God was leading him through life. We will apply the story of Joseph to our own lives and see how God leads us today. (The student pages should be copied and distributed to group members.)

Suggested Uses for this Resource

- Use for Sunday morning Bible study.
- Plan a youth night around the topic of the future and God's leading, with this piece as the focus.
- Discuss following God's leadership during a lock-in or weekend retreat.
- Make a copy of the questions page for a youth who comes to you with concerns.
- Have a special Bible study for the seniors who are approaching graduation and are faced with "future-stress".

Introduction

Joe is a seventeen-year old member of St. Joseph Lutheran Church. What are some of the changes that he will face in his life in the next ten years?

Have the group brainstorm all of the changes they can think of and write them on newsprint. Among them will be: graduating high school, graduating college, leaving home, marriage, possible divorce, birth of children, purchase of new car, possible purchase of first house, first steps in career, etc. Ask the students which changes they think would be more difficult or fearful. Discuss their feelings behind their choices. Which do they think would be the easiest changes? Again discuss why. Ask youth where God fits in all of these changes. Explain that we have a whole book full of examples of people who allowed God to lead them—it is the Bible! In this study we will look at one person's life—Joseph—and we will see through his eyes the worries and stresses about the future and the amazing outcome!

The Study

If you are doing this as a group Bible study, divide the group into five or more groups. Assign each group one of the sections of Scripture and the questions associated with it (found on the study copy). Tell them to read through the Scripture lesson and discuss the questions. Next, have them summarize the section for the whole group in whatever manner they desire (write a rap, make a skit, do a dramatic reading, etc.) and share their answers to the questions. At the conclusion of each section, ask both the participants and the presenters the following questions:

In Joseph's life, is this a high point, a low point, or somewhere in between?

What do you think Joseph's worries and concerns were at this point?

Wrap It Up

After every group has presented their part of Joseph's life, conclude with a group discussion about Joseph's entire life. You may wish to include some of the following discussion starters:

- This story is not over! Seven years later, the time of famine set in. Joseph's father sent his brothers to Egypt to buy food. They were led into Joseph's presence. They did not recognize him; they only saw an Egyptian official. In keeping with proper tradition, they bowed down before him. Joseph's dream had come true! It took twenty-five years to happen, but it came true! What kinds of things do you think God wanted Joseph to learn in those twenty-five years?
 - What did he learn as a slave?
 - What did he learn when he was falsely accused?
 - What did he learn as a prisoner?
 - What did he learn as a royal official?
- Look at the big picture. God used Joseph for an amazing task—to save His chosen people from the famine! Looking at the events as they unfolded, we might never have been able to predict God's plan for Joseph. Can you think of examples of other people who God has used for a great task? (Think of Peter, St. Paul, the prophets...)
- St. Paul writes, "All things work for the good for those who love God" (Romans 8:28). Apply those words to Joseph's life. How do they apply to your own life?
- Compare your own life to the life of Joseph. What are some similarities? What are differences?
- When do you think Joseph was able to see that God was using and guiding him? Is it ever difficult to see God's hand in your life through the good times and the bad?
- What are some of the "turning points" you've already experienced? What has God taught you through those experiences?
- Knowing how God cared for Joseph, what attitude should we have regarding our lives, the future, and God's leading and purpose?
- Close with a prayer thanking God for His leading through life.

Additional Activities

- Make journey balloons. This is a great way to have youth step back and take a look at their lives as a whole. Give each youth a balloon (which they will blow up and tie) and a permanent marker. Have youth draw a timeline of their life's journey—with pictures, words, or important dates. Sit in a circle and give each youth a chance to share their story.
- Ask youth to search Scripture (use a concordance if necessary) to find other verses of comfort and hope when considering the future. Some examples: Jeremiah 29:11-13, Isaiah 43:1-5, Romans 5:1-5.
- Invite (or visit) an older member of your congregation and ask him/her to share with everyone how God has led him/her. Ask him/her what life was like when s/he was young.
- Have students bring music from home to listen for messages of hope or despair. Look for lyrics that give questions and answers. Secular and Christian music can be compared. Where are the messages of meaning and hope?

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Dreams of Destiny (Genesis 37:1-11)

Have you ever wondered what you would do for your life? Through a dream, God tells Joseph exactly what will happen one day: his brothers will bow down before him!

Think about the following...

- How did Joseph get his coat? Is this a good way to go about getting things? If you were Joseph, what would you think about your new coat?
- What did Joseph's dreams mean? How would you feel about these dreams?
- What kinds of questions might you have about them?
- What kinds of doubts would be in your mind?
- If you were the brothers, how would you feel about these dreams? About Joseph himself?
- At this time, do you think Joseph is at a high point in his life, a low point, or kind of medium?

Leaving Home and Looking for that First Job (Genesis 37:12-35)

Joseph's brothers didn't much care for his career plans. Here they help him get that first important job!

Think about the following...

- Why did the brothers sell Joseph into slavery?
- If you were Joseph what would have been going through your mind when:
 - you were stripped of your coat and thrown into the cistern (dry well)?
 - you heard your brothers deciding what to do with you?
 - you were being sold by your own brothers?
 - you were chained and walking to Egypt?
- What would you have thought about your dreams?
- At this time, do you think Joseph is at a high point in his life, a low point, or kind of medium?

I'm innocent, I Tell Ya, Innocent! (Genesis 39:1-20)

Joseph must be part cat: he always lands on his feet. But then he is punished for doing nothing wrong.

Think about the following...

- At the beginning of this section, how does Joseph's life look? What's he doing for a living? Do you think he's at a high point, a low point, or kind of medium?
- How would you describe Potiphar's wife? How many guys do you think would have been able to resist her advances day after day (39:10)?
- If you were Joseph, what would you have thought when Potiphar's wife accused you of attempted rape? What would be going through your mind as you are arrested and thrown into prison? What would you think about your dreams?
- Do you think Joseph, now in prison, is at a high point in his life, a low point, or kind of medium?

The Answer Is... (Genesis 40:1-23)

There were few men in the kingdom as important and trusted as the cup-bearer and the baker. They were responsible for Pharaoh's food and drink. If anyone wanted to poison him, these two were in the position to do it. Would these men be Joseph's ticket out of prison? Or would he suffer more disappointment?

Think about the following...

- What kinds of feelings do you think Joseph might have had at meeting these two important men?
- What do you think of Joseph attributing his gifts to God? Is he sincere or is he simply showing off?
- How do you think Joseph felt about spending two more years in prison?
- Do you think Joseph is at a high point in his life, a low point, or kind of medium?

Crown Me! (Genesis 41:1-40)

The end is near! It's been seventeen years since Joseph had his dream about his brothers bowing down before him. Joseph's big chance is here at last! How will he meet this last challenge?

Think about the following...

- Why did the cup bearer finally remember Joseph? Do we sometimes remember other people only when it's beneficial for us?
- What kinds of feelings do you think went through Joseph when they came for him and brought him before the king?
- What do you think it would have been like to go from prison to the throne in the same day?
- Has there ever been a time in your life when things looked horrible only to turn around for the better? Please share it with the group.
- Do you think Joseph is at a high point in his life, a low point, or kind of medium?