YOUTH CURRICULUM



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***RUN THE RACE*!  Hebrews 12:1-2**

Endurance. Team Spirit. Discipline. Focus. These are the things that make great sports teams, but more importantly – great *SERVANTS* of God! Join us as we learn about Paul while we *run the race!*

We will have classes for all ages. Classes will be held in designated areas. The Adult Class will be held in the sanctuary.

**SERIES ON RUN THE RACE**

**OVERVIEW**

 “Running Your Race: Persevering in Faith” Hebrews 12:1-2

Life as a teenager can feel like a race—full of challenges, obstacles, and moments when you want to give up. Whether it’s school pressures, friendship struggles, or questions about your future, the journey can be exhausting. But God has called us to run the race of faith with perseverance, keeping our eyes on Jesus. This lesson will encourage you to keep going when life gets tough and focus on the ultimate prize: a life lived for God’s glory.

**YOUTH LESSONS FOR DISCUSSION**

Lesson No. 1 Jochebed

Lesson No. 2 Paul

Lesson No. 3 Joseph

Lesson No. 4 Esther

LESSON 1 \* **JOCHEBED**

Main Scripture Text : **Hebrews 12:1-2**

**Lesson Text**  Hebrews 11:6,

**Lesson Focus:** Mother With a Mission

**Memory Verse:**   “Without faith it is impossible to please God,” include the concept of sustaining faith.

**Introduction**

There is a lot written about Jochebed’s sons Moses and Aaron and even her daughter, Miriam, but there isn’t much about her. For that reason, we have to utilize other techniques to learn more about her.

**Meaning of Jochebed**

In the Bible, the meaning of a person’s name can tell you something significant about their character or the role they play in the story. Jochebed is no exception. Her name is the Hebrew word Yôwkebed, (pronounced yo-keh’-bed) and means Jehovah-gloried or whose glory is Jehovah. Isn’t that awesome? I love the way her name hints at how God used her to save the child who would eventually become the man God used to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage.

Most people don’t think of Jochebed when they think about the heroes of faith.

* Jochebed lived in Egypt – Goshen, to be exact.
* She had two children – a daughter and a son.

When we read the story of Moses’ birth in Exodus 2, though she is not mentioned by name, we learn a bit more about Jochebed.

* Jochebed became pregnant a third time.
* She hid her son for three months.
* She made an ark of bulrushes and laid her son in it.

When Jochebed had her first two children, there was no need to hide them. But, by the time she had her second son, the situation had changed. The Pharaoh of Egypt had begun to fear the Israelites. He was worried they would ally with his enemies. If they did, it would mean sure defeat for Egypt because there were a ***lot*** of Israelites.

If she had a daughter, everything would be fine. But if she had another son… he would be killed. I imagine troops of Egyptian soldiers patrolling the land. They examined every woman. They made note of women who were pregnant and visited their homes often – demanding to see the child as soon as it was born. They seized every boy child who was born in Goshen. But Jochebed – Somehow, she managed to conceal her son for three months.

**Discussion**

When Jochebed hid her son for three months regardless of the consequences, she decided to exercise her faith which makes her a hero of faith. When she made a basket to put Moses in, she showed the strength of her faith. She had no way of knowing that anyone was going to intervene to save her son. She did not know that God had already made provisions for his care and protection. All she knew at that time was that she didn’t want her son to be killed. She took a risk and put him in God’s hands.

Can you imagine the level of self-control Jochebed demonstrated when she stood in front of Pharaoh’s daughter and accepted the care – and wages – for the very son whom Pharaoh wanted to destroy? I don’t know if I could have done it. The glee on my face would have told Pharaoh’s daughter I was the child’s mother. I would have been so giddy maybe Pharaoh’s daughter would have thought I was crazy and asked Miriam to find her another woman to take care of Moses.

It takes a certain presence of mind to exhibit grace under pressure and Jochebed had it. She raised her son as another woman’s child and then, at the appointed time, she handed him over to her care. That took a lot of self-control and discipline.

**Conclusion**

The lessons we learn from Jochebed are love, faith and self-control. When faced with her greatest fear, she didn’t panic. She planned and boldly executed it. The Bible doesn’t mention it, but I believe she prayed. I believe Jochebed had a connection with Jehovah, and it was this connection that caused her to go forward in faith.

Jochebed knew as long as she trusted Jehovah, she had nothing to fear. Likewise, we have nothing to fear when we learn to rely on God. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us – including overcoming our greatest fears. How will you be encouraged by Jochebed to boldly face your fears today?

**Questions/Discussion**

* What other lessons can you learn from Jochebed’s life?
* How is God speaking to you through her story?

LESSON 2 \* **PAUL**

**Main Scripture Text** : Hebrews 12:1-2

**Lesson Text** *1 Corinthians 9:24*

**Lesson Focus**: **We Must Run to Win**

**Memory Verse:**  *“Don’t you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!” (NLT)*

**Introduction**

Paul used the analogy of a runner in a race many times in his writings. Each one of these instances reminds us of a different aspect of running the race of life. Hebrews 12:1 is a powerful verse that provides guidance and encouragement for our daily walk with God.

Understanding and applying this verse can transform how we approach life’s challenges and our relationship with God. It helps us to run the race with endurance.

You must run in such a way that you will win! There is no point in running for second or third place. Go for the gold! Don’t settle for mediocrity as a follower of Jesus.

Understand, however, that his point is not that only one Christian can succeed spiritually. Your “opponents” are not fellow Christians. I am not running the race of life to beat you or anyone else. Our competitors are the world, the flesh, and the devil. This race is not a competition like the Olympics. We each are running an individual race designed just for us.

**Discussion**

**How to run the race with endurance**

Life can be really hard at times. There are things that we must do that we simply don’t want to do. Even Jesus had a physical struggle with what was facing Him, the cross.

Endurance or perseverance means continuing in our faith despite obstacles and difficulties. It’s not about speed but about steadfastness. We need to:

* Remember those who ran the race with endurance (we are “surrounded” by those cheering us on)
* Throw off hindrances

**Throwing off hindrances**

To run the race effectively, we must identify and remove anything that hinders our progress. This includes distractions and burdens that weigh us down.

My grumbling about uncomfortable things is a weight and a sin that sets me back.

There actually are some benefits to this “sand burr” eradication project if I am willing to look for them.

**Throwing off sin**

Sin entangles us, making it difficult to move forward.

 **Be Careful to Not Get Off Track**

Galatians 5:7 says, “You were running the race so well. Who has held you back from following the truth?” (NLT)

Sometimes, due to poor choices in friends and companions, we get “off track.” They tend to drag us away from our commitment, instead of encouraging us in it. At the very least, they slow us down. At worst, they sidetrack us.

Philippians 3:12–16 reads, “I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. But we must hold on to the progress we have already made” (NLT).

**Conclusion: Running for the Prize**

Life’s race isn’t always easy, but it’s worth it. God has called you to run with perseverance, letting go of distractions and focusing on the eternal prize. You’re not running alone—Jesus is with you every step of the way. Keep your eyes on Him and trust that He’ll give you the strength to finish strong.

**Closing Prayer**

*“Lord, thank You for setting the race of faith before us. Help us to throw off distractions and run with perseverance, keeping our eyes on Jesus. Strengthen us when we feel weak and remind us of the eternal prize You’ve promised. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”*

**Questions/Discussion**

1. Discuss how obstacles and distractions felt like real-life challenges
2. How does thinking about eternity motivate you to keep running your race?
3. Is there something from your past that you need to let go of to run your race better?
4. How does focusing on Jesus help you persevere through challenges?
5. Who are some examples of people who inspire you to run your race well?

LESSON 3 \* **JOSEPH**

Main Scripture Text : Hebrews 12:1-2

Lesson Text  Gen. 45:5-8:

Lesson Focus: **Embracing the Unexpected**

Memory Verse:

*And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.*

**Introduction**

Life often throws us unexpected challenges, much like the biblical story of Joseph, whose journey from favorite son to slave and eventually to a ruler in Egypt provides profound lessons for navigating life’s uncertainties.

Most of us have been betrayed. Perhaps we were abused as a child, abandoned by a spouse, falsely accused, denied what was promised, lured into trusting the untrustworthy, or deceived into commitment. Betrayal struck Joseph the son of Jacob more than once.

Joseph’s ten older brothers were jealous that their father favored Joseph and sold him into slavery when he was seventeen. He served his slave master Potiphar faithfully, but Potiphar jailed him after hearing a false accusation. An inmate he’d aided forgot his promise to help clear his name, leaving Joseph imprisoned until he was thirty. Yet Joseph triumphed over these betrayals. How did he do it?

Joseph's story, a powerful testament to resilience and forgiveness, depicts his rise from being betrayed and sold into slavery by his brothers to becoming a powerful leader in Egypt, ultimately saving his family and many others from famine.

 Joseph recognized that God used the betrayals for good.

Joseph’s understanding of the good God had brought through his sufferings was so ingrained in him that immediately upon revealing himself he was able to tell his brothers not to be angry with themselves over what they had done to him, for God had used it to save lives (Genesis 45:4). It is here that his faith in God’s hand in his life is most poignantly portrayed, for he shows not a hint of bitterness. Yes, God had allowed him to suffer, but God had worked all for good.

Joseph’s story begins with him as the favored son of Jacob, adorned in a coat of many colors, symbolizing his father’s special love. However, this favoritism sparked jealousy among his brothers, leading them to betray Joseph by selling him into slavery. Imagine the heartbreak Joseph must have felt—betrayed by his own flesh and blood, stripped of his freedom, and cast into an uncertain future.

Betrayal is a bitter pill, often leaving scars that are slow to heal. Yet, Joseph’s response to his brothers’ actions teaches us about resilience and forgiveness. Instead of letting bitterness consume him, Joseph remained faithful and hopeful, even in dire circumstances. This aspect of his character invites us to consider how we handle our own experiences of betrayal and hurt. Can we, like Joseph, find it within ourselves to forgive and move forward?

**Discussion**

The Joseph story serves as a bridge between the patriarch narratives and the Exodus account. Joseph is the one through whom the nation of Israel comes. Some 70 people (Ex. 1:5) in his extended family eventually move to Egypt. So, God is providentially protecting them for his purposes.

He had two dreams which he reported to his brothers, but perhaps not in a very wise fashion, and that sealed his fate. While the dreams were from God and would one day be completely fulfilled, the idea that they would bow down to him was not well received.

So, they dumped him in a pit and left him to die. But then he was sold to Ishmaelite/Midianite traders. He ended up in Potiphar’s household in Egypt. But “the Lord was with him” (Gen. 39:2), so he was put in charge of it. Acts 7:9 also says that God was with him.

However, while there, Potiphar’s wife tries to seduce him. He resists her temptations, and for that he is thrown into prison (Gen. 39).

While in there he interprets the dreams of two officials from Pharaoh’s court who are also imprisoned. He hopes the cupbearer will remember him (40:14-15) but he forgets (v. 23). So Joseph remains there for two full years. Then Pharaoh has two dreams (ch. 41) which Joseph interprets. Both speak of 7 years of abundance followed by 7 years of famine.

He is released from prison and elevated to second in command. “Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Gen. 41:46). So, he had to wait 13 years to see the promises of God begin to be fulfilled in his life. The famine extended beyond Egypt, so Jacob sent ten of Joseph’s brothers to Egypt to buy grain, while keeping Benjamin behind. After some tests, Joseph finally reveals himself to them.

Wow, talk about an amazing man. Instead of exacting revenge and getting back at his brothers, he shows love and kindness to them. He shows complete forgiveness. And he also sees the hand of God fully behind all these circumstances. He can see the bigger picture here.

**Conclusion (Applying Joseph’s Lessons to Our Lives)**

Joseph’s journey from the pit to the palace is more than a historical account; it is a blueprint for navigating our own challenges. Here are some practical applications based on the overarching narrative:

1. **Resilience in the Face of Betrayal**: When we encounter betrayal, we can choose to respond with resilience and forgiveness, recognizing that holding onto bitterness only harms us further.
2. **Maintaining Integrity**: In moments of trial and temptation, our integrity is our strongest asset. Staying true to our values will guide us through difficult times and open doors we might not see initially.
3. **Trusting God’s Timing**: Patience is key when God’s timing doesn’t align with our own. Trust that He is preparing us for future blessings and roles that we cannot yet imagine.
4. **Practicing Forgiveness**: Embracing forgiveness not only heals relationships but also frees us to move forward without the burden of grudges. Seeing God’s purpose in our struggles allows us to forgive more freely.

As we reflect on Joseph’s life, let’s remember that our journey, too, is part of a larger story crafted by God.

All the evil and malice and envy and hate he had to endure from his brothers did not embitter him and turn him against them. Instead, it all served in the sovereign purposes and plans of God. God’s people were kept alive during this time of famine, and the Messiah would come as a result.

Triumphing over betrayal requires faith in God’s power and love: He can and will work all things for our good.

But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. ~*Genesis 50:19-21*

**Questions/Discussion**

Have you ever known injustice, betrayal and hatred?

Have you ever done that which was right, and what you felt was of God’s clear leading, yet been reviled and abused for it?

LESSON 4 \* **ESTHER**

Main Scripture Text : Hebrews 12:1-2

Lesson Text  *Esther 4:14*

Lesson Focus: **For Such a Time as This: Finding Courage in Life's Pivotal Moments**

Memory Verse: *"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position****for such a time as this****?"*

**Introduction**

Imagine a nation in exile, living under the rule of a foreign empire, suddenly facing the threat of genocide. This was the harsh reality for the Jews in Persia during Esther’s time. The decree, issued under the influence of the king’s advisor Haman, called for **the annihilation of all Jews—young and old, women and children**—on a single day. This wasn’t just a political maneuver; it was a deliberate attempt to erase an entire people from the empire.

As a minority scattered across the Persian Empire, the Jews were at the mercy of the ruling powers. Now, with this decree, their very existence was under threat, and there seemed to be no escape. In such circumstances, it’s natural to question where God is amid our struggles. Yet, as we're about to discover, **God was already moving** behind the scenes, positioning a young woman for an extraordinary mission.

**Discussion**

**Esther's Dilemma: When Faith Meets Fear**

Esther found herself at a crossroads. Mordecai, her cousin and guardian, urged her to approach the king and plead for her people. But this was no simple task. Approaching the king uninvited could mean death. Esther's response reflects the very **human struggle between self-preservation and sacrificial love**.

*"All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives." (Esther 4:11)*

How often do we face similar dilemmas in our lives? Perhaps not as dramatic, but just as real – **moments when doing the right thing comes at a personal cost.**

For Such a Time as This: Embracing Divine Purpose.

It's in this moment of hesitation that Mordecai speaks the words that would echo through history:

*"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position****for such a time as this****?" (Esther 4:14)*

These words remind us that **our circumstances are not accidental**. God positions us strategically, often in ways we don't understand at the time. Your job, your relationships, your skills – all might be preparation for a greater purpose.

**Parallels Between Esther and Jesus: The Ultimate Intercessor**

Esther's story foreshadows an even greater act of intercession. Just as Esther risked her life to save her people, Jesus Christ willingly gave His life for all of humanity. Consider these parallels:

1. **Identity:** Esther kept her Jewish identity a secret, echoing the hidden divine nature of Jesus.
2. **Sacrifice:** Esther risked her life by approaching the king uninvited. Jesus willingly laid down His life on the cross.
3. **Intercession:** Esther pleaded for her people before the king. Jesus continually intercedes for us before God the Father.

**Divine Reversals: The Gospel Narrative in Esther's Story**

Esther's story is filled with dramatic reversals that mirror the larger narrative of Scripture. Haman's plot for destruction is turned on its head, and the Jews are saved - echoing the ultimate reversal in human history: Christ's resurrection turning death into life. This arc - from threat to deliverance - reflects the gospel story:

1. **Creation:** God's perfect design
2. **Fall:** The threat of destruction (sin)
3. **Redemption:** The intervention of a savior
4. **Restoration:** The joy of deliverance

In our own lives, we may face situations that seem hopeless. But Esther's story reminds us that God can turn mourning into dancing and ashes into beauty. It's a reassuring example of how our individual stories are intertwined with God's larger narrative of redemption and transformation in the world.

**Finding Courage and Community in Our "Esther Moments"**

We may not wear a royal crown, but each of us has a sphere of influence. There will be times when we're called to step out in faith, to be a voice for the voiceless, to stand for what's right **even when it's costly**. *"We may not wear a royal crown, but each of us has a sphere of influence."*

**Better Together: Your Story Matters**

Remember, just as Esther had Mordecai and her community supporting her through prayer and fasting, you too have a community ready to stand with you. **We're stronger when we face life's challenges together**, supporting and encouraging one another in faith. In those moments, remember Esther. Remember that you too might be where you are **"for such a time as this."** And above all, remember Jesus, who faced the ultimate moment of decision in Gethsemane and chose to lay down His life for us all.

As you reflect on your own "for such a time as this" moments, remember that **you're not meant to face them alone**. Your purpose may be individual, but your journey towards it is meant to be shared.

**Conclusion**

Esther is the last of the historical books of the Bible. This story gives us powerful lessons about God’s relentless love for His people no matter how far they have wandered from His covering; it shows us how to live with courage in uncertain times, helps us to recognize divine appointments and to seize those God-given opportunities to make a difference with our lives, and to trust in the sovereignty of God over all things that are happening in our world today—good and bad.

Esther reminds us there are no accidents with God. He is always at work, especially behind the scenes in our lives. Through this study you will see that every single thing that has ever happened in your life is preparing you for something that’s meant to come. Everything in your life—the good and the bad, the pretty and the ugly, the blessing and the bleeding, the pleasant and the hurtful, the laughter and the tears, the privilege and the under privilege, the joy and the regret—has been working together to shape you for what God is up to right now in this very hour.

You have been uniquely designed and divinely positioned to live with purpose for such a time as this.

**Questions/Discussion**

1. What did this story teach you about God?
2. How do you think Esther felt when she was made queen?
3. Who do you want to help? Are you drawn to a certain group of people, or one person you know? (Suggestion: Pray together for God to help the children help those they talked about)

**SERIES CONCLUSION**

Life is full of trials that test our faith and resolve. The stories of Jochebed, Joseph, Esther, and Paul in the Bible teach us that perseverance through faith is crucial. These characters faced immense challenges but emerged victorious by trusting in God. When we face our trials, we must rely on our faith and persevere, knowing that God’s plan for us is ultimately for our good. As James 1:12 reminds us, *“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”* We can overcome any obstacle through faith and perseverance, finding strength and hope in God’s unwavering presence.

(Proverbs 3:5-6) says, if you trust in the Lord with all of your heart, lean not on your own understanding and acknowledge Him in all your ways- He will direct your path.

**Action Steps**

To help you apply these principles of perseverance and faith in your own life, consider these five simple action steps:

1. **Pray Daily**: Begin each day with prayer, asking God for strength and guidance to face the challenges ahead. Trust that He is with you, no matter the difficulty.
2. **Seek Wise Counsel**: When facing trials, remember the wisdom of seeking advice from trusted mentors or spiritual leaders. Their guidance and experience can provide the reassurance and direction you need to navigate your challenges.
3. **Stay Connected to Scripture**: Regularly read and meditate on Bible passages emphasizing perseverance and faith. Let God’s Word be your constant source of comfort and strength, guiding you through your trials.
4. **Take Proactive Steps**: Like Joseph, take practical steps to improve your situation. Whether reaching out to others for help or seeking new opportunities, act with faith and trust in God’s plan.
5. **Reflect on Past Victories**: Recall times when God has brought you through challenging situations. Let these memories bolster your faith as you face new challenges.

**Discussion Questions**

To further explore the themes of faith and perseverance, consider discussing these questions with a small group or in personal reflection:

1. Which biblical character’s story resonates most with your current life situation? Why?
2. How has your faith been tested during a recent trial, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. What role does prayer play in helping you persevere through difficult times?
4. In what ways can you take proactive steps to face a current challenge while still trusting in God’s timing?
5. How can recalling past instances of God’s faithfulness help you navigate future trials?

NOTES

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