

# International Development Week Teaching Starter

## Background and Introduction

The theme of this year's International Development Week is 'New Beginnings'. It aims to highlight the work of The Salvation Army around the world in offering people a fresh start. The week's theme will also explore how we are offered a new beginning in Christ if we take up the invitation to follow him as his disciples.

The projects in which The Salvation Army is involved around the world provide many examples of new beginnings - from new boreholes that improve health and hygiene for whole communities, to agricultural training that equips small-scale farmers to overcome malnutrition and food insecurity.

As International Development Week (19-25 October) overlaps with Anti-Slavery Week (14-20 October) this year, our sermon outline will focus on the topic of anti-trafficking and the 'new beginnings' that survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery can experience.

There are many biblical stories that could be used to unpack this theme, but the story of Joseph, told in Genesis 37-50, not only incorporates the issue of human trafficking but also illustrates the theme of new beginnings. We see Joseph navigate from oppression to opportunity, rejection to reconciliation and persecution to purpose.

The story of Joseph and his 'dreamcoat' may be quite familiar to us. Many of us have sung 'Any dream will do' by Sir Tim Rice and Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber from the musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. The musical chronicles our focus for today and has brought the story of Joseph to millions across the world.

Joseph was a shepherd alongside his brothers, but he had elevated status in their father's eyes. 'Because he was the son of his old age', Joseph was loved more. Jacob repeated the mistakes of his own father by favouring one of his sons and he did little to conceal this favouritism. He gives Joseph an ornamented, colourful robe (or one with long sleeves) which distinguishes him and serves as a physical reminder to Joseph's brothers of his superiority. In addition to this, Joseph does little to endear himself to his siblings, even reporting back their misdeeds to their father.

In their hatred and jealousy, the brothers plot to kill Joseph. Ultimately, they choose to spare his life (for where is the profit in killing him?) and instead sell him to slavery.

Still today, family members can be culpable in human trafficking. At times it is with malicious intent, at times in desperation, and at times without knowledge of the true risk. Many are deceived by false promises and a dream presented by people whose only aim is to profit.

## New beginnings

Throughout his life, Joseph experienced numerous new beginnings. Not all of them were positive, but God was with him through all things and worked through Joseph for good - as he says to his brothers, 'You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.' (Genesis 50:20)



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*Animation of Joseph's life by Saddleback Kids:*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndETu4bzwAY>  
*Alternative animation from Crossroads Kids Club:*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQ7wLTBnF84>

If we visualise Joseph's story as a wave diagram, we can see many peaks and troughs. Knowing the whole story, we know that the difficult times such as being sold into slavery and imprisonment, come before the peak moments such as Joseph finding favour with his superiors and attaining positions of authority.

*You may choose to plot Joseph's story on a flipchart at the front or have a pre-prepared slide to display. See the prayer and worship ideas document for more suggestions.*

In the distressingly frequent low moments, it would be understandable for Joseph to have felt abandoned by God, and to turn his back on him. Yet Joseph remained faithful, and we read that 'the Lord was with him' (Genesis 39:2,21,23).

Many survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery state that their faith is what they held on to throughout their ordeal, and knowing that God was with them was what kept them going.

With each new experience there was a new opportunity for Joseph to put his trust in God and for God to work through Joseph. When he could have chosen betrayal, he chose integrity; when he could have chosen bitterness, he chose faithfulness; when he could have chosen arrogance, he chose humility; and when he could have chosen vengeance, he chose forgiveness. Despite not knowing what God's plan was (that there was a peak on the horizon), Joseph remained faithful to it.

## New beginning in Christ

But what does this mean for us today? Most of us are likely never to have experienced anything like Joseph did. Yet when we choose to follow Jesus, we experience a new beginning. We're given a fresh start, and by pursuing and investing in our relationship with Christ, we grow and change. As we deepen our understanding of God's word and as we pray, we gain a new outlook, increasingly journeying closer to who God wants us to be - seeing others and the world as Christ does.

Relationship with Jesus not only has the power to transform our own lives, but as we partner with God we are also moved to love and serve others in a way that can be transformative to their lives, to our communities and beyond.

## Application

1. Human trafficking is still a reality. How often do we question whether something we want to buy is from a trusted source? Consider what you buy and whether it is ethically sourced, made and sold.
2. We may not all personally experience modern slavery, but are there things in our lives that are keeping us trapped? Is anything getting in the way of our relationship with Jesus?



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3. What can we learn from Joseph's unwavering faithfulness, even in the face of unimaginable hardship?
4. Joseph used his ability to interpret dreams to help others. He never used this for his own glory but always told people it was God working through him. How can we identify our own giftings and use them to serve God and others? Are there gifts you know you have, but are not yet using?
5. How can we trust that God has a purpose for our lives, even when we cannot see it clearly? What can we do to align our lives with what God wants for us?



**NEW  
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A thick, orange, textured path graphic that starts from the bottom right and curves upwards and to the left, ending near the text "NEW BEGINNINGS".