

Homeless to the NFL – Story of Josh Jacobs

This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before each session.

Lesson Goals

Help students:

- attain a deeper level of understanding, empathy and compassion for those who experience homelessness
- see how our circumstances in life don't have to define us and our future in that through our own work and the support of others we can define and achieve our own goals
- appreciate the value of determination and perseverance in helping us to achieve our goals and how these two virtues work together
- see how together we are stronger to engage whatever challenges life presents
- appreciate the importance of parents and especially in this story the importance of fathers, to protect and care for their children and to help them strive for their goals
- be inspired to be resilient in the face of the inevitable difficulties that will come in each of our lives
- see how social media can be used to promote the goodness of others and to help others

Virtues / Character Traits

Compassion: feeling of sympathy for the distress of others, with the desire to help

Determination: firmness of purpose; complete commitment to achieving a goal

Empathy: trying to understand another person's situation, entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation.

Family Dedication / Support: complete dedication for the well-being of other members of our family, physically, emotionally and spiritually, motivated by love

Perseverance: trying hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties

Resilience: the ability to recover from or adjust to change and difficulties. Choosing to use setbacks as an opportunity to learn and grow

Solidarity: unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others

Leader Introduction

If you're a football fan, you may know the name Josh Jacobs. Jacobs played for Alabama, was selected as a first-round pick for the Oakland Raiders and was featured in a Super Bowl commercial. But before he became an NFL superstar, Jacobs was homeless, living with his five siblings and his father in their car. Often unsure of when and what he was going to eat, Jacobs became determined to succeed in life and he chose football as his path.

Videos

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=dndpFOB4Blo>

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Z292IC9fyL8>

Leader Summary

Jacobs not only made it to the NFL but became the rookie offensive player of the year through his determination, work ethic and perseverance. But as we saw, Jacob's story isn't only about individual effort, it's also about the support of others and especially the support from his father that didn't include many things, but importantly did include love and encouragement. Let's consider how Jacob's story speaks to our lives.

Discussion Question Options *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses or bullet points if needed)*

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions - included within the online lesson as a separate document.

1. Josh Jacobs viewed his father as his hero, even when he couldn't provide his siblings and him with a home. What did Josh's father do for his children even when they were homeless that made such a positive impression on Josh?

(Mr. Jacobs worked tirelessly, he didn't get much sleep so he could take care of his children by working, washing their clothes by hand, checking their homework and watching over them at night to make sure they were safe.)

In addition to the work Mr. Jacob's did for Josh, what else did he do that both of them spoke about?

(Mr. Jacobs encouraged Josh to play football, to dream of succeeding and to work for success. Mr. Jacob's also spoke of how God told him about his children "to protect their destiny".)

What does the positive relationship between Mr. Jacobs and Josh, despite living in extreme poverty, tell us about what is truly important in life?

(That **family support and love** and encouraging each other to strive to be our best are much more important than money and things.)

2. No child should have to grow up without a home or unsure of where they will get their next meal, but how did these experiences form Josh Jacobs in a positive way?

(He became **determined** to succeed and to **persevere** in working hard to overcome obstacles to achieve his goals. He spoke of how he had to find a positive outlet for his negative experiences and found that on the football field.)

Do you think that in our lives negative experiences can make us stronger? (This is also a journal writing option below)

3. In addition to his father, who helped Josh to achieve his goals?

(Gerald Smith the recruiting coordinator saw his potential and convinced him to post his videos on Twitter; his coaches growing up who helped him by allowing him to play even though his dad couldn't afford the fees; his college coach who gave him a scholarship to play college at Alabama...)

Let's share some stories from our lives of when we succeeded in something, big or small, but it wouldn't have happened without the help of other people.

What virtues do these other people live out when they help us? (compassion, generosity, solidarity)

4. Jacobs' work ethic and **determination** has put him in a place where he can give back to those that have helped him along the way, what was he able to do for his dad?

(He bought his dad a home.)

5. Jacobs says, "When I first got drafted, it wasn't really a relief to me. It was like, 'now I gotta really work.'" What does this attitude say about Jacobs?

(He is not-complacent; he won't let himself get comfortable and slack off; he values hard work to achieve his goals.)

Do you remember any other statements Josh or others made in the film clips that reflect his attitude toward life as a whole and his work ethic? Or, read a couple of these quotes to the students that you think will be best for them to spur discussion.

"I don't regret going through anything I went through. It made me who I am."

"If I give it everything I have and I fail, or I don't reach the goal then I'm good with it because I know at the end of the day I can't look back and say what if."

"I wouldn't get complacent because I never had it easy."

"Sleeping in the car, always looking back on it, it motivates me, it might have been rough but it's my life"

Josh's friend said, "He was always putting in the extra work, nobody else was doing that."

6. **Determination** and **perseverance** are similar virtues, but have some important differences. Do you think that Jacobs could have achieved what he has without both of them? Why?

(**Determination** in complete commitment to achieving a goal is necessary to be successful and reach it, but without **perseverance** and trying hard and continuously we cannot overcome the obstacles that will often come up as we work to achieve our goals.)

7. Jacobs deserved a scholarship to play football at a university, but wasn't getting the attention that he and many others expected. How did he **persevere** through this obstacle?

(He made a Twitter account to reach more people; he didn't give up or get upset; he just put in more work to achieve his goal. He also had the very important support of the man who gave him the idea in the first place.)

Journal Writing Options

1. Write about a goal or dream that you want to achieve. What things in your life may get in the way of that dream? How do you plan on overcoming those difficulties and what virtues will you use to overcome them?
2. Imagine there is a child in your neighborhood who is going through what Jacobs went through as a kid. What could you do and say to encourage them?
3. Write about a negative experience in your life that made you stronger and a better person.

Extended Activity:

1. Participate in Illinois Fatherhood Institute essay contest where students submit essays for "What my father means to me." Please note that this can be written by a child for their father or a father-figure. You can download the essay packet at <http://www.4fathers.org/>

This can also simply be a journal writing option within your class or group. If your class isn't in IL your students could organize a similar competition for their school.

Character Action Media

Connecting Virtues to Our World

www.characteractionmedia.com

Current Links in Education

Copyright 2016