

GOD'S GOT THIS

1. Joseph - Why did it happen? SECONDARY



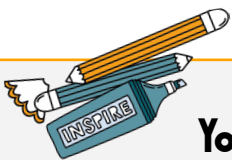
Bible Passage

Genesis 37; 39:1 – 46:7



Aim

To help young people understand that we will all go through difficult times and this may feel unfair. However, God wants us to trust in him to bring us through those times; he is often working through the troubles to bring good in a way we don't expect and may not understand.



You will need

- ◆ Bibles or print outs of Genesis 45:4-8; Genesis 50:20; John 16:33; Revelation 21:3,4. If your group is online, you could have the verses in PowerPoint to share on the screen
- ◆ Paper and pens

INTRODUCTION (8 minutes)

Play a game of 'Would You Rather...?' asking the young people about which choice they would make. This may lead on to an interesting discussion about why people would choose certain things. Some examples:

Would you rather...

- ◆ Read a good book or watch a film?
- ◆ Spill your cola over yourself or over a stranger?
- ◆ Be good at sport or at singing?
- ◆ Have the power to fly or the power to be invisible?
- ◆ Lose your phone or lose all your schoolwork?
- ◆ Be able to forgive others or have others forgive you?
- ◆ Lose your sense of taste or the ability to see colours?

Think through with the group how some of these choices are just a matter of taste but some are quite tricky as we might not want either option, but making choices is part of our life every day. As a general rule, we know that if we make poor choices we can suffer bad consequences and end up regretting the choices we made.

However, sometimes we have difficult situations to deal with that are nothing to do with the choices we made, we can go through experiences that are really tough but are not our fault and are outside our control. The events over the last few months might feel like that.

At this point you might want to discuss with the group about how they felt when school closed and lockdown happened. This will need to be handled sensitively, as some may describe feelings of fear,

confusion, sadness, disappointment, frustration or anger.

In our world, things happen that are sad and difficult to deal with, but God knows what we are going through and, even though we don't see it at the time, he can work for good through these situations.

Today we are going to think about someone who went through many tough experiences which were outside his control, but later discovered that God used those experiences to bring a good outcome.

BIBLE (5 minutes)

THE STORY OF JOSEPH

Summarise the story of Joseph from Genesis chapters 37 and 39-45 using the script in Appendix 1. Alternatively, if you have the means to show it, you may want to use this video if you have a young group around S1 age:
youtube.com/watch?v=NQ7wLTBnF84

CHAT (7 minutes)

Discuss together the following questions. Possible answers are provided in *italics*.

- ◆ What unfair things happened to Joseph?
Being thrown in a pit, sold as a slave, falsely accused and sent to prison
- ◆ How might Joseph have felt in each of these situations?
e.g. shocked, afraid, depressed, frustrated, angry
- ◆ When each of these events occurred, how would the future have looked to Joseph?
e.g. bleak, unknown, terrifying

Reflect with the group that while it is easy for us to look back at the story and see that it had a happy ending, Joseph would not have known that at the time. When he was sitting in an Egyptian prison, Joseph could not possibly have imagined that he would end up as Pharaoh's second-in-command. However, God was with Joseph and was working through all the

difficulties and unfair events.

Read Genesis 45:4-8

- ◆ What good came from Joseph's experiences?
He was able to effectively rescue Egypt from starvation and provide for the Israelites, protecting the family tree from which the Saviour would come
- ◆ What change do you see in Joseph through his experiences?
He went from being the spoiled brother to someone who sought the best for others and honoured God

However miserable Joseph's situation appeared to him at the time, he was never left to go through it alone. God was with him in Potiphar's house, God was with him in prison and God worked to bring good from this bad situation.

The brothers were guilty for selling Joseph, yet God allowed it to happen. Joseph was finally able to see God's love in what he had allowed him to go through.

It is often through the painful and unpleasant times in our lives that we grow spiritually. At the time, we long for the pain to be over, but at the end we look back and realise how much more we understand.

C.S. Lewis, the Christian author who wrote *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, experienced many difficulties in his own life. In his book *The Problem of Pain* he wrote, "Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

It might be appropriate at this time to share about times that you have gone through which have brought you close to God, particularly any lessons you learned through the lockdown experience. Ask the young people if they want to share anything they have learned e.g. some may have reassessed their priorities, valuing family or friends more highly than previously.

ACTIVITY (4 minutes)

There is a well-known poem called *Footprints in the Sand* (see Appendix 2) In the poem someone talks about a dream they had. In this dream they saw two sets of footprints going along a beach and they realised that they showed God walking with them through their life. However, on looking more closely, they noticed that at the difficult times in their life, there was only one set of footprints. They asked God why he had allowed them to go through the painful parts of life alone. God replied that he would never leave them or abandon them. At those difficult times, the one set of footprints belonged to God, he had carried them through those times.

Explain that we know when God made the world it was good, but when sin entered the world everything changed. All the hunger, pain and suffering we know is a result of living in a fallen world. Jesus does not say that if we follow him everything in life will be easy. Far from it, he says that in this world we will have trouble. He also reminds us that he has overcome the world. For those who are trusting in Jesus to be saved, he promises an eternal future with him with no tears or pain.

Get each person in the group to draw a footprint shape on a piece of paper. On one side of the footprint they should write a verse to help them remember that God is with us through difficult times. Possible verses include:

Genesis 50:20

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.” (NLT)

John 16:33

“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” (NLT)

Revelation 21:3-4

“I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”

CHAT (5 minutes)

Talk about the things that help us trust God and stay close to him such as: remembering we can speak to God at any time because he is never too busy to hear us and always understands what we are going through, speaking to other Christians to encourage each other, reading the Bible and remembering God’s promises.

Reflect with the group that we can read Joseph’s story and think that he did not deserve some of the things that happened to him. What about Jesus? Was he treated fairly by men? Yet Jesus would leave the glory of heaven knowing that he would be betrayed and handed over to die a horrific death but chose to do it to make a way to restore us to God. Joseph’s trials ended up with him saving Egypt, and surrounding lands, from starvation. Jesus suffered to save the world from sin and eternal separation from God.

PRAY (2 minutes)

Pray to thank God for loving us so much that right from the beginning, he had a plan to rescue us from our sin and the consequences of our sin. Ask him to help us to trust in him and focus on him when we are going through hard times. Encourage the young people who are willing to pray out loud to be part of this prayer time.

APPENDIX 1

THE STORY OF JOSEPH

This is quite a long story, it is important to practise beforehand and be comfortable with telling it.

Joseph was his father's favourite son. Even though he already had ten sons before Joseph was born, and then another one after, Joseph was his favourite. He loved Joseph more than the others and what was worse, everyone knew this was the case. Joseph even got to swan around in a special, fancy coat his father had given him. His brothers hated him and couldn't say a kind word to him.

Then Joseph began to have dreams. These dreams seemed really cool to him, they made him seem even more important. His brothers, however, did not appreciate Joseph telling them of his dreams of them bowing down before him!

One day Joseph was sent out to where his brothers were working in the fields. When they saw him coming, alone, they saw an opportunity. They seized Joseph, took his fancy coat from him, and threw him in a pit. Some even wanted to kill him.

I know brothers can be annoying, but really, did Joseph deserve that? What might he have been feeling while he was stuck in that pit? Maybe he was asking himself, 'Why is this happening?'

Do you think that maybe the brothers just wanted Joseph to have some time out? Do you think that maybe they felt bad about being so mean and got him out, dusted him off and gave him his coat back? Actually, no. As the brothers sat eating their lunch, some men came past on their way to Egypt to sell spices. One brother had the bright idea that rather than simply killing Joseph off, they would do better to sell him as a slave. That way they could get rid of him but also gain some money in the process. Genius! (At least, his brother Judah thought so).

So poor Joseph was taken away to be sold in Egypt. His deceiving brothers killed a goat, dipped Joseph's coat in the blood and took it to their father saying that they had found the blood-soaked coat and that Joseph must have been killed by a wild animal. His father was devastated, he thought his beloved son was dead.

The brothers are probably feeling quite pleased with themselves at this point. But what about Joseph? He must have been struggling to get his head around what was going on. This morning he had got up, had his breakfast and set off to see his brothers, just as his father had told him to do. How had things gone so wrong? How could they be so unfair?

In Egypt, Joseph was sold as a slave to an important man called Potiphar. He must have felt so isolated, so far from everything and everyone he knew and loved. But even though he was far from home, he wasn't alone. God was with Joseph in Egypt. God made Joseph so good at what he did that Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his whole household. Everything Joseph did went brilliantly! Maybe things were beginning to look up...?

But no. There was more trouble ahead. Potiphar's wife noticed Joseph and wanted him to do something that was wrong. Joseph refused. He didn't want to betray his master who had

entrusted him with his whole household and he didn't want to sin against God. Even though she asked Joseph day after day, he refused to be with her.

Potiphar's wife was furious with Joseph because of his refusal. She told her husband that Joseph had tried to persuade her to do what was wrong. Her husband believed her story and had Joseph thrown in prison.

What must Joseph have thought? Was this fair? Was this his reward for doing the right thing?

In prison, it must have felt about that things were as bad as they could get. It must have felt like Joseph had hit rock bottom. But there is no place that is out of God's reach. God was with Joseph in prison. God was kind to Joseph, making the prison warden take notice of him and put him in charge of all the prisoners.

In prison Joseph met two of Pharaoh's servants. One day they he found them both upset as they had each had a dream which they were sure meant something but couldn't figure out what that meaning was. 'Doesn't God have the answer?' asked Joseph. 'Tell me your dreams.'

Joseph was able to explain the meaning of both dreams correctly; Pharaoh's baker was to be killed, but Pharaoh's butler restored to his position at the palace. 'When that happens, remember me,' Joseph told the butler. 'When you get back to the palace, tell Pharaoh how I am here in prison when I have done no wrong.'

Sadly, Joseph's hope of a quick release was in vain. The butler went back to the palace alright but forgot all about Joseph. Two more years passed with poor Joseph still in prison.

Finally, Pharaoh had a strange dream, and the butler remembered the man in prison who could explain. Joseph was brought to Pharaoh and was able to explain that, in his dreams, God was showing Pharaoh the future. There would be seven years of bumper harvests followed by seven years of famine. Joseph advised Pharaoh to choose a wise man to put in charge of Egypt, that he might store food during the seven good years, so that there would be food for the people when the famine hit.

Pharaoh was delighted with Joseph. 'If God has shown all this to you, I'll put you in charge,' he said. 'There is no one in Egypt wiser than you!'

Joseph was put in charge of all Egypt with only Pharaoh above him. He was dressed in fine Egyptian clothes, given Pharaoh's ring of authority and driven about in a chariot with people shouting, 'Make way!' before him. What a turnaround for Joseph! He organised the storing of food during the good years and the distribution during the famine.

When the famine hit Egypt, it also hit the lands around Egypt. When people heard that the Egyptians had food, they went to see if they could buy some. Among the people going to Egypt to buy food were Joseph's brothers.

The brothers had sold Joseph when he was just seventeen years old. He is now almost forty, dressed as an Egyptian and governor of Egypt. The brothers don't recognise Joseph. They

approach him as the man in charge, bowing to the ground (remember Joseph's dreams?) and asking if he will sell them food.

Joseph, on the other hand, recognises his brothers. He tests them to see if they are still as cruel or if they have changed, and then he forgives them. 'I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold as a slave,' he tells them. 'But don't be angry with yourselves that you did this. God has sent me ahead to save lives during the famine. Go back home and bring our whole family here and I will provide for you during the famine.'

The brothers went home and returned to Egypt with their families and Joseph was reunited with his father, who had thought his favourite son was dead.

APPENDIX 2

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the LORD.

Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand: one belonging to him, and the other to the LORD.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand.

He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints.

He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the LORD about it:

"LORD, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me."

The LORD replied:

"My son, my precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."