

Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh

*All of us naturally avoid times of struggle, pain,
and hardship, but these moments in life might just be the tool
God uses to accomplish his will in and through us.*

Introduction

Pain avoidance is as natural as breathing. It is reflexive. Touch a hot plate and you will jerk your hand away without even thinking. If you see trouble down the road, you take an alternate route. It makes perfect sense to do what we can to avoid pain and struggle. But some of God's best work is done in the moments of life that feel more like a furnace than an afternoon sunbathing.

Sometimes a hard place is the right place for a person to meet God and become a useful instrument in the hand of the Master. This was true for Charles Colson, a brilliant political strategist and special counsel to President Richard Nixon in the 1970s. Though he was never actually prosecuted for any crime related to Watergate, he did plead guilty and was incarcerated for obstructing justice and spent time in prison.

It was this painful season that led Colson to seek the face of God and surrender his heart to Jesus Christ. In that low point God began to transform Colson into a new man. Since then he has led an amazing ministry called Prison Fellowship, founded the Wilberforce Forum, and impacted countless lives through his speaking, writing, and dynamic leadership.

Had Charles Colson never "gotten caught" and endured pain and struggle, he might never have encountered Jesus. He could testify that the hardest, darkest times are sometimes God's best times to capture our hearts and shape our lives.

Talk About It

If you have brothers or sisters, share about the general temperament among your siblings while growing up in your home.

DVD Teaching Notes

As you watch the video segment for session 3, use the following outline to record anything that stands out to you.

Meeting Joseph: favorite, dreamer, slave

Facing false accusations

Dream interpreter

A unique family reunion ... God works all things out for good

DVD Discussion

1. From a human standpoint (the Lower Story), Joseph was in the worst place: abandoned by family, sold into slavery, cast into prison (Genesis 39:20–23; *The Story*, pp. 29–32). From a divine perspective (Upper Story), he was in the best place. How do you see God working in Joseph and showing blessing, even in the pain of these moments of his life?
2. In the darkest times of Joseph's life we read that "the LORD was with Joseph." How have you experienced the Lord being with you in the hard times of life? What are some of the signs that God is with us, even in the dark places?
3. Joseph waited two years in prison for someone to remember him and send help. Tell about a time you waited for months or years on an answer from the Lord. How did you make it through this long season of waiting?

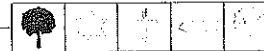
*You may be in a prison cell right now,
either real or figuratively speaking,
but if you align your life to God,
your story isn't finished yet.*

4. God has an amazing ability to bring good out of life's bad situations. Tell about a time when something hard and painful happened in your Lower Story, but later you saw God accomplish something wonderful in the Upper Story of his will.
5. At the end of chapter 3 of *The Story*, Joseph was reunited with his brothers twenty-two years after they sold him off as a slave. What strikes you about Joseph's attitude toward his brothers and the way he treats them? What does this teach us about the condition of his heart and the depth of his faith?
6. Joseph could have retaliated and gotten revenge on his brothers for all the wrong they had done to him. Instead, he provided for them and extended forgiveness. What makes it hard to forgive people who have intentionally wronged us? What can we do to forgive, even when it is difficult?

7. Charles Colson could say, "If I had not been caught and ended up in prison, I would never have become the man I am today." Joseph could say, "If my brothers had not turned on me, if Potiphar's wife had not falsely accused me, I would have never ended up meeting Pharaoh's servants in prison. I might have never become the king's right-hand man." Describe how your life would be different if you had never faced a specific time of challenge and struggle. Finish this statement: If I had not _____, I would never have _____.

If we love God and align our lives to his Upper Story purposes, everything in our lives—the ups and downs, the mountaintops and the valleys, the highs and the hurts, the raises and the rejections, the good and bad—is all working together to accomplish his will.

8. Romans 8:28 tells us, "In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." What is one situation in your life where you need to embrace and experience this truth? How can your small group pray for you as you walk through this season?



9. Read movement 1 of *The Story* (p. 10 of this participant's guide). How does God unfold his story in this first movement and how does this connect with your story?

Closing Prayer

As you take time to pray, here are some ideas to get you started:

- Pray for the families represented in your small group to be healthy and strong.
- Thank God for the hard times that have shaped your character and driven you closer to him.
- Pray for small group members who are traveling through a difficult season. Ask for God's comfort, but also for his work to be accomplished in their lives.

Between Sessions

Personal Reflections

Reflect back on your life. Where has God been at work shaping and forming you ... even in the hard times? Are there lessons God was seeking to teach you that you might have missed? Ask for eyes to see them and a heart to receive and learn. Are you facing something tough right now? If God wants to use this experience to grow you, ask for the courage to embrace it.

Personal Action

Forgiveness is one of life's hardest actions. When someone has really hurt us, it is extremely difficult to forgive. During the next week read Genesis 50:15 – 21, Matthew 6:9 – 15, and Matthew 18:21 – 35. Pray for the courage and strength you need to forgive those who have wronged you. Meditate on Romans 5:8 and ask God to help you understand the depth of his grace so that you can extend that grace to others.

Read for Next Session

Take time before your next small group to read chapter 4 of *The Story*.