

Study 3 Growing through Difficulties

AHB

46 Our God, our help in ages past

48 Be still my soul

525 O Love that will not let me go

Psalm Praise

91 God is our strength and refuge

108 Safe in the shadow of the Lord

Ring of Praise

62 O Lord, the clouds are gathering

78 I will sing of the mercies of the Lord

85 Fear not, for I am with you

233 May the mind of Christ my Saviour

Study 4 Growing when Prospering

AHB

10 All people that on earth do dwell

30 Through all the changing scenes of life

56 Amazing grace

Psalm Praise

5 Let us sing to the God of salvation

114 Bless the Lord, O my soul

Ring of Praise

56 Lord for the years

65 Change my heart O God

191 Rejoice

222 I know whom I have believed

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GROWING WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED

STUDIES FROM THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

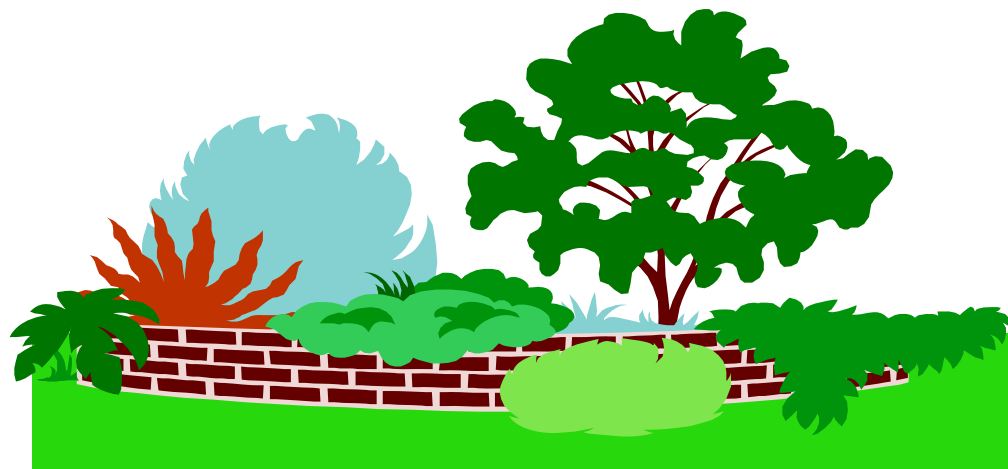
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INTRODUCTION

I'm not a very devoted gardener, and the plants in my garden tend to grow by a process of "survival of the fittest". Consequently, it's not uncommon for me to find one plant which is flourishing right next to a similar plant which is stunted and weak. The two plants are experiencing similar conditions, but while one grows, the other doesn't.

People can be like those plants. Given similar situations one person is able, not just to accept his or her limitations, but to thrive in the difficulties, growing spiritually and reaching out to others. A second person is overcome by the circumstances. They can't see past the difficulties and become emotionally and spiritually shriveled and



stunted. The Bible has examples of both: Abraham, David and Jesus' disciple John flourished, but Lot, King Saul and Judas shriveled. Many of us don't actually shrivel, but we don't exactly flourish, either. We grow for a bit, and then we stop and maybe even shrink before we have another growth spurt.

What is the secret of the flourishers? How do they manage to grow wherever they are planted?

One of the most outstanding examples of a person who flourished in every place that he was placed was Jacob's son, Joseph. He had plenty of opportunities to fail because he was uprooted and replanted three times. He went from favourite son in Canaan to slavery in Egypt. He was sent into prison in Egypt before becoming ruler of the kingdom, second in power only to Pharaoh.

How did Joseph keep growing when his life seemed to be going from bad to worse? Did he just have an incredibly resilient personality, or was there something else at work that enabled him not just to survive, but to triumph in every environment?

In our four studies we consider how he kept

- Growing in the family
- Growing under temptation
- Growing through difficulties
- Growing when prospering

As we study, let us not just look for Joseph's secrets, but let us aim to apply them to our own lives so that whatever changes the future brings us, we too will "grow where we are planted".

SUGGESTED HYMNS AND SONGS

Theme: Blessed is the man Psalm Praise 62

Study 1 Growing in the Family

Australian Hymn Book (AHB)

- 27 Sing Praise to God who reigns above
- 68 Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven
- 71 My God, how wonderful Thou art

Psalm Praise

- 123 I love my Lord
- 130 I lift my eyes to the quiet hills

Ring of Praise

- 51 Father of all things
- 135 The Servant King
- 183 Father Welcomes all His children
- 216 Brother, let me be your servant

Study 2 Growing under Temptation

AHB

- 14 Now thank we all our God
- 16 The Lord's my shepherd
- 28 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Psalm Praise

- 22 Tell out, my soul
- 38 Glory give to God in Heaven

Ring of Praise

- 39 Now unto Him who is able to keep
- 50 Father I thank You
- 64 Search me, O God
- 147 The Price is paid

GROWING IN THE FAMILY - SUMMARY

Like all of the rest of us, Joseph had no control over the family into which he was born. And also like the rest of us, once he was born he made his own particular contribution to the way that family operated.

His family was beset by jealousy and rivalry between Jacob's wives (see Genesis 29 & 30) which appears to have been passed on to their sons. Jacob showed favouritism to Joseph and demonstrated it in a way that would confront his other sons and remind them of his preference for Joseph every time he wore the richly ornamented robe that Jacob gave him (Genesis 37 v 3). These were things that Joseph had no control over.

There are things in our own family situation that we have no control over. Our parents, brothers and sisters and extended family are given to us. We do have a choice when we marry, but our new husband or wife brings a whole new set of relatives with different standards, customs, aims and ambitions to ours. We may (or may not) be able to determine how many children we have, but they make their own choices of career and lifestyle, and when they marry we find our family once again extended by people we haven't chosen.

These situations may have been surprises to us, but they were not a surprise to God, and although we didn't choose most of our relatives, God chose them for us. As Psalm 139 v 13 & 16 says:
"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb... your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."
He knows us completely, and He knows the type of training and experience we need to make us into the people He created us to be, as well as equipping us for the *"good works which God prepared in advance for us to do"* (Ephesians 2 v 10).

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STUDY 1: GROWING IN THE FAMILY

If you've sometimes felt your family has its problems, just think about the family into which Joseph was born. Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah, the older sister of Rachael, the woman he loved and had worked seven years to marry. He also married Rachael, at the cost of another seven year's work and, understandably, preferred her to Leah. Leah had four sons, but Rachael had no children, a great disgrace for a woman in those days, so she gave her maidservant, Bilhah, to Jacob in the hope of having children through her and Bilhah had two sons. Leah had now stopped having children, so she gave Jacob her maidservant, Zilpah, and she also had two sons. Then Leah had two more sons and a daughter, and finally Rachael had a son of her own, Joseph, followed some years later by Benjamin.

This tangle of deception, favouritism, jealousy and competition is written in Genesis 29 and 30. Jacob's

preference for Rachael over Leah flowed onto their sons and he favoured Joseph over his other sons.

We have many family situations which are not of our making or choosing.

QUESTIONS 11,12 Romans 8

v 28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

11) How can we apply Romans 8 v 28 to Joseph's situation?

12) How can we apply it (Romans 8 v 28) to the difficult situations in our families?

Joseph may not have appeared to flourish in his family situation. He was resented by his brothers to such an extent that they considered killing him. However, it was in this unpromising place that he came to know God, and it was God's presence with him that sustained him throughout his future trials.

Are you prepared to accept that "in ALL THINGS God works for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose"?

Will you accept that God is working for your YOUR good in the family or neighbourhood situation you are in right now?

What can you do to increase your awareness of God's presence with you in your daily life? Write down your thoughts.

plotted to kill him.

19 "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other.

20 "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."

21 When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said.

22 "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe--the richly ornamented robe he was wearing-- 24 and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

25 As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

26 Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?"

27 Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed.

28 So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

29 When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes.

30 He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?"

31 Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood.

32 They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe."

33 He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces."

34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days.

35 All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son." So his father wept for him.

36 Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

STUDY 1: GROWING IN THE FAMILY

Read **Genesis 37: 2 - 11**

- 1a) **What was Joseph's first action that brought him into conflict with his brothers? (Verse 2)**
- b) **How old was he at that time? (vs 2)**
- 2) **How did Jacob cause trouble between his sons? (vs 3 - 4)**
- 3) **Can you think of a situation you've seen where preference for one family member has caused trouble in a family? (not necessarily your own family).**
- 4) **What means did God use to make contact with Joseph and to prepare him for the future? (vs 5 - 9)**
- 5) **What did Joseph do about this and do you think he was wise to take this action? (vs 6 - 11)**

QUESTIONS 1,2,3,4,5 **Genesis 37**

2 This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him.

4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more.

6 He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had:

7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

8 His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

9 Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

10 When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"

11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

- 6) Refer to **Genesis 42 v 6; 43 v 26; 44 v 14.**
What did Joseph's brothers do in each of these verses?

QUESTION 6

Genesis 42 v 6 Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.

Genesis 43 v 26 When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground.

Genesis 44 v 14 Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him.

- 7a) **What does Psalm 139 v 13 & 16 say about each person?**
- b) **What does this say about the family we were born into and the family we created ourselves?**

QUESTION 7 Psalm 139 v 13;16

13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

16 your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

- 8a) **What was the brothers' emotion towards Joseph? (vs**

4,8,11,18)

- b) **What did this emotion lead them to do? (vs 20; 23 - 28)**
- 9a) **From verses 12-17, what was Joseph's attitude to the job his father gave him to do?**
- b) **Does he appear to have had the same feelings for his brothers that they had for him? Give your reasons.**

Presumably the brothers felt that by removing Joseph, they would experience more of their father's attention and favour.

- 10a) **What was Jacob's reaction to the news they brought him? (vs 34 - 35)**
- b) **Do you think that removing Joseph brought them the result that they had intended?**

QUESTIONS 8 - 10 Genesis 37

12 Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, 13 and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them." "Very well," he replied.

14 So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived at Shechem, 15 a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?" 16 He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?"

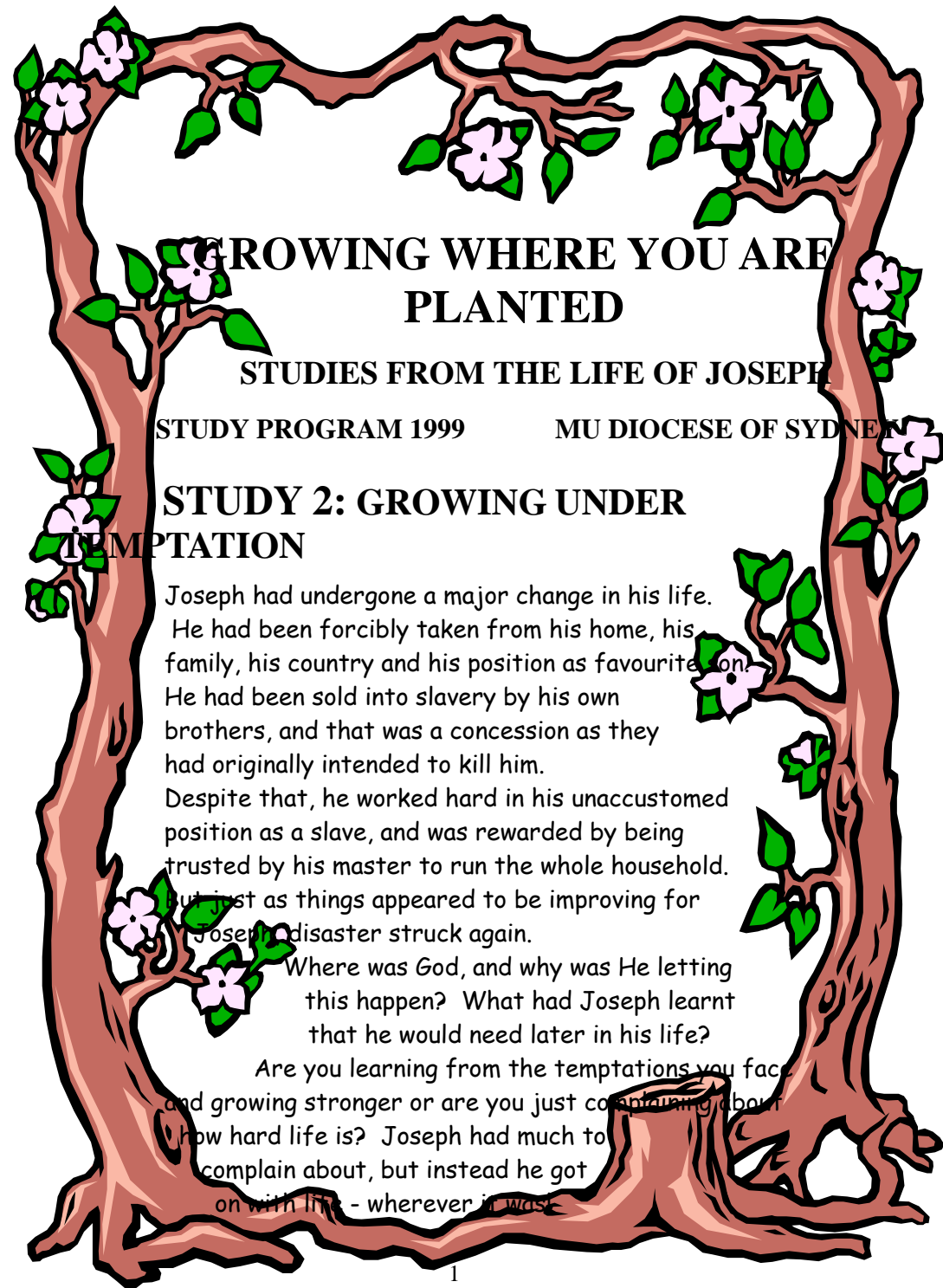
17 "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan.

18 But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they

didn't try and stand up to the temptation, he left the cloak behind that she was clutching, and immediately removed himself from the situation - he fled. Sometimes we linger in a situation of temptation because we feel we should be strong enough to stand firm in it. 1 Corinthians 10 v 13 tells us that God will always provide a way out so we can withstand temptation. However, we need to look for God's way out, not impose our own, and we need to accept that the best way to avoid giving in to temptation is to avoid the temptation itself. If we can't avoid it, we should remove ourselves from the situation as quickly as possible. It is only when that is impossible that we ask God for the strength to stand firm IN the temptation.

Are you attempting to stand firm through any temptations you should be leaving or avoiding at present?

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STUDY 2: GROWING UNDER TEMPTATION

Joseph had undergone a major change in his life.

He had been forcibly taken from his home, his family, his country and his position as favourite son.

He had been sold into slavery by his own brothers, and that was a concession as they had originally intended to kill him.

Despite that, he worked hard in his unaccustomed position as a slave, and was rewarded by being trusted by his master to run the whole household.

But just as things appeared to be improving for Joseph, disaster struck again.

Where was God, and why was He letting this happen? What had Joseph learnt that he would need later in his life?

Are you learning from the temptations you face and growing stronger or are you just complaining about how hard life is?

Joseph had much to complain about, but instead he got on with life - wherever it was.

STUDY 2: GROWING UNDER TEMPTATION

Read Genesis 39 v 1-10

Joseph's brothers had cut him off from his family and everything that was familiar to him.

- 1a) **Who was with Joseph? (v2)**
- b) **What effect did that have on Joseph's situation? (v3,4)**
- 2) **What responsibilities did Potiphar give Joseph? (v4 -6)**
- 3) **How did Joseph view these responsibilities? (v8,9)**
- 4) **What temptations would Joseph have experienced besides the one mentioned in verse 7?**
- 5a) **In v9, how does Joseph regard deceiving Potiphar?**
- b) **How does God look on deception today?**
- c) **What explanations do we make to excuse our deceptions?**

Joseph had been unfairly sold as a slave

- 6a) **Did Joseph use Potiphar's resources to bring himself personal advantage? Did he abuse his trusted position in any way?**

Our society encourages us to look after our own interests first and foremost.

- b) **How do you think Joseph would react to that viewpoint?**
- c) **How do you think God considers that viewpoint?**

GROWING UNDER TEMPTATION - SUMMARY

Joseph suffered more than one temptation when he was sold as a slave to Potiphar. The first must surely have been to sink into a mire of self-pity, and to refuse to do more than the minimum amount of work. However, we are told in verses 2 and 3 that, although his brothers had cut him off from all his family and his familiar world, he was not alone because "the Lord was with him". Not only was God with him, but God caused him to prosper and have success in everything he did.

His master, Potiphar, was so impressed that he put his entire household and everything he owned into Joseph's care. Now Joseph would be tempted to use Potiphar's resources to his own advantage, especially as Potiphar didn't supervise him and only concerned himself with his own food. However, we are shown Joseph's attitude to his responsibilities when the next temptation arose and Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce him. Joseph is aware of his position of authority in Potiphar's household, but refuses to take advantage of it, realising that to deceive or defraud Potiphar in any way is to sin against God.

We can try to justify a wrong thought or action by explaining, to others or to ourselves, that we were put in an unjust situation. Since we had been sinned against we were simply trying to even up the situation. God does not allow the end to justify the means. He requires us to maintain strict honesty in each situation. Joseph could easily have told himself that he had a right to cheat and steal from Potiphar, he should never have been a slave in the first place. But Joseph accepted each situation he was placed in, and worked hard and honestly every time.

Is there somewhere that you feel you've been taken advantage of? Are you treating that situation as one where you can show God's way of reacting, or are you "giving as good (or as bad) as you get", like the world does?

It is interesting to compare Joseph's reaction to a persistent, nagging temptation with Samson's reaction. (Judges 16 v 16 - 17) Samson continued to seek Delilah's company, and her nagging finally wore him down. Joseph not only refused Potiphar's wife, he avoided her company as well.

When Potiphar's wife caught him in the house one day, Joseph

Probably one of the most discouraging things that can happen to us is to be falsely accused of doing something we have worked hard to avoid doing. Our initial righteous indignation can easily turn into bitter recriminations against our accuser, and a sense of self-pity because we have been badly misunderstood. How can we avoid giving in to these temptations?

Even in this situation Romans 8 v 28 still applies, and if we are confident that God is working for our good, we will be able to patiently wait for His time to see His long-term plans for us. We live in a world that demands instant responses and instant gratification, but we are not always quickly rewarded when we do the right thing. God is a god of eternity, and His time is not ours:

"But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." (2 Peter 3:8)

Are you prepared to accept God's strength and help IN your temptation, waiting for His time to bring you through?

Or are you demanding that He deliver you from that situation NOW?

Whose timetable are you running to, yours or God's?

What can you learn now from the temptations you are currently facing?

QUESTIONS 1,2,3,4,5,6

Genesis 39

1 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

2 The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

3 When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did,

4 Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.

5 From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field.

6 So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, 7 and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

8 But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. 9 No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

10 And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

Read Judges 16 v 16 - 17

- 7a) How did Samson treat a persistent temptation?
- b) How did Joseph treat an equally persistent temptation?
(Genesis 39v7-10)
- c) What are some general ways we can avoid being under temptation?
- d) *(To consider, not necessarily to share)*
Do you have any temptation that you could avoid, but are choosing to step into or linger in?
What steps can you take to avoid that temptation altogether?

QUESTION 7 Judges 16

16 With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death.

17 So he told her everything. "No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man."

Although some temptations are avoidable, others will face us, no matter how hard we try to avoid them.

- 8) What did Joseph do when confronted with a temptation he couldn't avoid? (Genesis 39v12)

We sometimes think that running away from anything is cowardly and yet we run the risk of adding the sin of pride to our temptation if we refuse The way of escape God has provided.

- 9a) What does 1 Corinthians 10 v 13 say about temptation?
- b) Who will provide the way out?

- c) What is our responsibility?

QUESTION 9 I Corinthians 13 v 10

13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Sometimes it's hard to know if we are following God's way out, or if we are trying to make our own way?

- 10) What are some characteristics that God's way will have?
- 11) What false accusation did Potiphar's wife make about Joseph?
- 12) How was Joseph's faithfulness to Potiphar treated?

QUESTION 7,8,11,12 Genesis 39

11 One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside.

12 She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

13 When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, 14 she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. 15 When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

16 She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home.

17 Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. 18 But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

19 When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger.

20 Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

at accepting the situation and making the best of it.

Genesis 40 & 41 tell us the story of Joseph's God-given ability to correctly interpret dreams. When Pharaoh's cupbearer was taken from prison and re-instated in Pharaoh's court, Joseph must have hoped that soon he too would be released. He asked the cupbearer to plead his case, but the cupbearer forgot and it was two more years before the situation changed.

When Joseph finally had his chance to impress Pharaoh, he was very careful not to take credit for God's work. In Genesis 41 v 16 Joseph plainly stated that HE COULDN'T interpret dreams, but that GOD WILL. Again in Genesis 41 vs 25 & 28 he explained that the dreams were sent to Pharaoh by God, and that God would do what He had said. Joseph's determination not to take God's glory for himself resulted in Pharaoh recognising that God's spirit was in him (Genesis 41 v 38), and appointing him second-in-charge of the whole land. Finally, God's preparation of Joseph was complete. He had been purified and strengthened through his trials, and he was now ready for the task of governing a mighty people and preparing for famine during a time of plenty.

Are you still in God's waiting room? The future is not clear, the present is difficult, the hope you had seems to have been disappointed. Do you think God has forgotten you?

"NEVER WILL I LEAVE YOU, NEVER FORSAKE YOU"

Hebrews 13 v 5.

His promise and His word is sure. Wait on God's time, and don't waste the difficulties. Use them to teach you to cling tighter to God.

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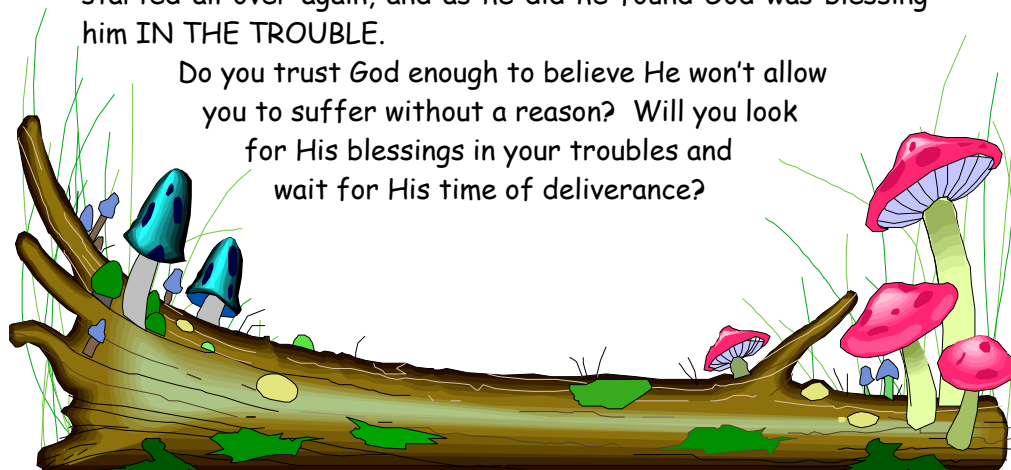
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Joseph had already proved to be a very resilient young man. He had coped with the change from "favoured son" to slave in a foreign country. He had trusted God in his new environment and seen God's blessing on everything that he did. Except for the problem of his master's wife, he was probably quite comfortable as head of his master's household and could have spent the rest of his life there without complaint. BUT HE WAS STILL A SLAVE.

We are sometimes prepared to settle for second, or even third best because the alternatives involve hardship and suffering. We let hardship overwhelm us, and feel that God has let us down and deserted us.

Joseph didn't give up. He trusted that God had a reason for permitting this apparent disaster to happen. Then he started all over again, and as he did he found God was blessing him IN THE TROUBLE.

Do you trust God enough to believe He won't allow you to suffer without a reason? Will you look for His blessings in your troubles and wait for His time of deliverance?



STUDY 3: GROWING THROUGH DIFFICULTIES

QUESTIONS 1,2,3 Genesis 39

20 Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison,

21 the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

22 So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there.

23 The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

- 1) **Joseph refused Potiphar's wife's determined attempts to seduce him. What was the result of his holding to his principles? (Genesis 39 v20)**

- 2) **Can you describe another example (not necessarily from the Bible) where someone has been disadvantaged, or persecuted because they've held to their principles?**

- 3a) **Who was still with Joseph even in prison?(v21)**

- b) **What result did this bring?(v21-23)**

- c) **Can you describe a kindness God showed to you while you were going through a difficulty?**

- 4) **Apart from gaols, what prisons do people find themselves in today?**

QUESTION 5 Romans 8

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

GROWING THROUGH DIFFICULTIES - SUMMARY

Joseph's loyalty to his master, Potiphar, appeared to bring him disaster. He rejected Potiphar's wife's advances and ended up in prison, as the result of her lies. Once again he was starting at the bottom, this time even lower than before. But once again we see that although the situation appeared disastrous and hopeless, it wasn't because God was still with him. God showed Joseph kindness in his difficult situation, and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden (Genesis 39 v 21). The warden appointed him in charge of everything that was done in the prison, and God gave him success in whatever he did.

There are many forms of prison: prisons of illness, poverty, responsibility, dependence, tiredness, pain; circumstances that hold us trapped in jobs or relationships that we would like to leave, but can't. However, when we have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we find as Joseph did, that God is always with us, no matter how deep or dark our prison. It was in the depths of prison that Joseph experienced the truth expressed 2000 years later by the apostle Paul :

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8 v 35, 37-39

Are you experiencing God's presence with you in the prisons of your life? Are you allowing God to bring you closer to Himself through the difficulties you experience? If not, will you ask Him to show you what is getting in the way, and then will you allow Him to remove it - whatever it is?

Are you seeing God's kindnesses to you, and the successes He is giving you even while you're in the difficult situation? It's easy to become overwhelmed by the problems, and to feel that nothing is going right. Stop and look for the little things that are good; the small successes and victories; the little mercies God sends to remind you that He is with you. Focus on the things you can do, rather than the things you can't do. Look at what you do have, not at what you're lacking. Joseph was an expert

31 The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe.

32 The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.

33 "And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt.

34 Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance.

35 They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food.

36 This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine."

37 The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials.

38 So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?"

39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you.

40 You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."

11 a) Joseph continues to emphasise that the dream interpretation does not come from him (Genesis 41v 25, 28, 32) How does he do this?

b) What does Pharaoh recognise about Joseph in Genesis 41 v 38?

c) What result does this have in Genesis 41 v 39 & 40?

QUESTION 12 Hebrews 13

5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

5a) Read Romans 8 v 35, 37 - 39

What things does Paul say CANNOT separate us from God's love?

b) (Personal, to consider, not necessarily to share)

Has this been your experience? Is it your current experience? Is there anything or anyone who is coming between you and God? Will you ask God to show you if there is, and are you prepared to let Him put them back in their proper place in your life?

QUESTIONS 6,7,8 Genesis 40

2 Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, 3 and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined.

4 The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them. After they had been in custody for some time, 5 each of the two men--the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison-- had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.

6 When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected.

7 So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?"

8 "We both had dreams," they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."

9 So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, "In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, 10 and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes.

11 Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and put the cup in his hand."

12 "This is what it means," Joseph said to him. "The three branches are three

days.

13 Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer.

14 But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison.

15 For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon."

16 When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, "I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread. 17 In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head."

18 "This is what it means," Joseph said. "The three baskets are three days.

19 Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat away your flesh."

20 Now the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials: 21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand, 22 but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation.

23 The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

**6a) When faced with a new problem, what does Joseph do ?
(Genesis 40 v 8)**

b) To whom does he give the credit?

7) How do Joseph's interpretations correspond with what actually happened to the cupbearer and the baker in Genesis 40 vs 12 & 13; 18 & 19; 21 & 22 ?

8) What did Joseph ask of the cupbearer in Genesis 40 v 14, and what did the cupbearer do (v23)?

QUESTION 9 2 Corinthians 3

4 Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God.

5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but

our competence comes from God.

6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

9a) From 2 Corinthians 3 v 4 & 5, where can we place our confidence today?

b) How is this relevant when we are deciding if we should take on a particular ministry?

QUESTION 10 Genesis 41

14 So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh.

15 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

16 "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

10a) Read Genesis 41 v 15,16

How did Joseph reply when Pharaoh asked him to interpret his dream?

b) What risk did he run by giving that answer?

QUESTION 11 Genesis 41

25 Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.

26 The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream.

27 The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterward are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine.

28 "It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do.

29 Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt,

30 but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land.

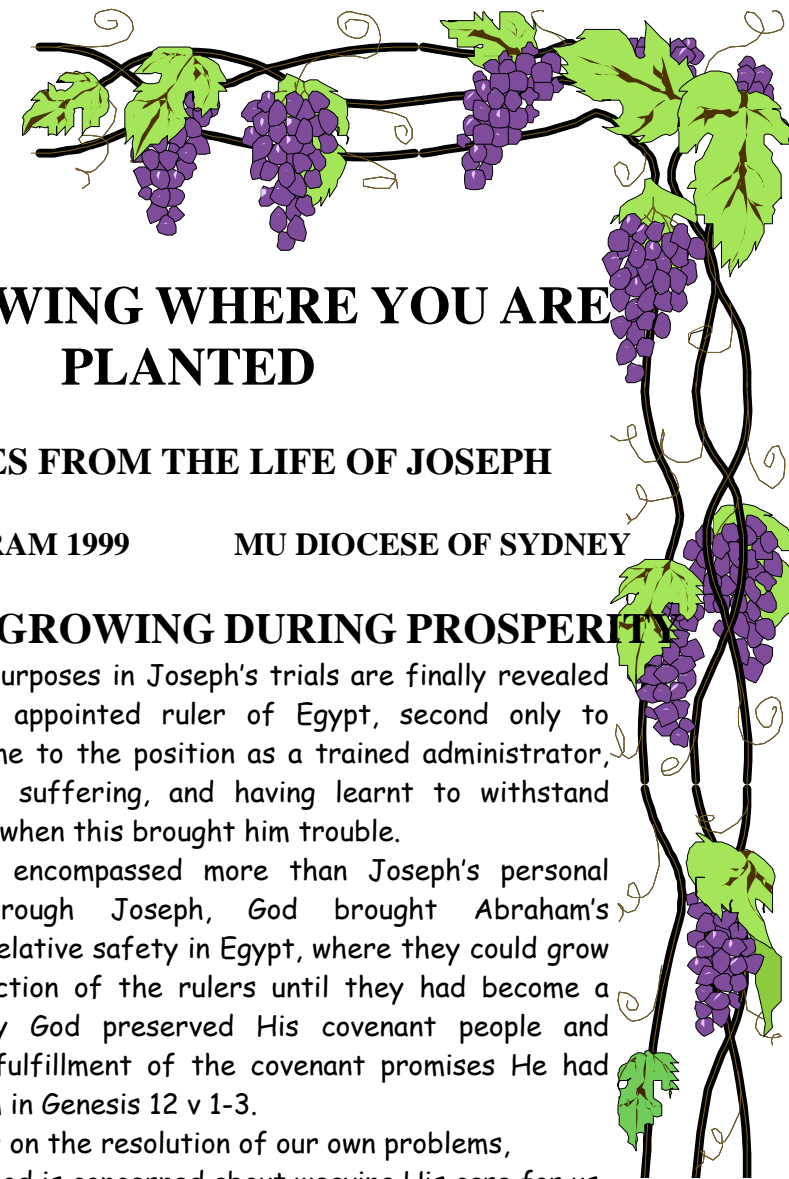
Who do you tell when you have been badly treated? Your family, friends, anyone who will listen? Or do you tell God alone? Sometimes God does provide us with a special friend to discuss our problems with, but we need to watch our own behaviour, and make sure we are limiting our confidences, not pouring them out freely. A friend who comes from God will encourage us to take our pain to God. He is the one who really understands, and He is the only one who can help us turn the desire for revenge into the desire to forgive.

Joseph's brothers obviously weren't convinced that his forgiveness was complete and final. Once Jacob died, they were afraid Joseph would now take revenge on them. Sometimes, like the brothers, we can find it hard to accept that we are forgiven. We don't like to be in the wrong and so we wonder if we really are totally forgiven. We may even try and provoke an argument with the one who has forgiven us to see if he or she will use our past against us.

Sometimes we find it hard to believe that God has forgiven all our sins: past, present and future. If Joseph could forgive his brothers' sins against him, how much more can God forgive the sins of those who accept the way of salvation He has provided at the cost of Jesus' life. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, as the one who died in our place, we can believe God's promise that *"as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."* Psalm 103 v 12.

God has said it and HE WILL DO IT!

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GROWING WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED

STUDIES FROM THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

STUDY PROGRAM 1999

MU DIOCESE OF SYDNEY

STUDY 4: GROWING DURING PROSPERITY

God's plans and purposes in Joseph's trials are finally revealed when Joseph is appointed ruler of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. He came to the position as a trained administrator, strengthened by suffering, and having learnt to withstand temptation, even when this brought him trouble.

But God's plans encompassed more than Joseph's personal situation. Through Joseph, God brought Abraham's descendents to relative safety in Egypt, where they could grow under the protection of the rulers until they had become a nation. This way God preserved His covenant people and guaranteed the fulfillment of the covenant promises He had made to Abraham in Genesis 12 v 1-3.

We tend to focus on the resolution of our own problems, forgetting that God is concerned about weaving His care for us into the much larger tapestry of furthering His saving purposes for the world.

In prosperity, Joseph resisted the temptation to "get even" with those who had hurt him in the past. He continued to look to God's plan for his life and for those around him. Do we follow his example when things are going well, or do we allow times of peace and prosperity to draw us away

STUDY 4: GROWING WHEN PROSPERING

Some people use periods of success as a time to pay back others they feel have harmed them in the past. This was not Joseph's way. Genesis 42 - 44 shows Joseph did, indeed, test his brothers, but this was with the aim of seeing if they had changed from their previous attitudes of jealous rivalry and self interest that had caused their father so much grief.

Note: Remember that Benjamin was the only one of Jacob's sons who had the same mother as Joseph. From Genesis 42-44 it is apparent that Benjamin was now Jacob's favourite son.

QUESTION 1 Genesis 44

33 "Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers.

34 How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father."

1) **What does Genesis 44 v 33 & 34 show about Judah's attitude to the prospect of Benjamin's imprisonment in Egypt?**

QUESTION 2 Genesis 37

26 Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother (Joseph) and cover up his blood?

27 Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed.

2) **How had Judah changed since the time of Genesis 37?**

QUESTIONS 3,4,5,6,7,8,9 Genesis 45

1 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers.

2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 5 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.

GROWING WHEN PROSPERING - SUMMARY

God had a powerful position for Joseph to fill, but God knows us and He knows how easily humans are corrupted by power. We use it for revenge and punishment, when we should use it for justice and mercy. We allow pride to grow and tell us that our success is due to our own superiority and talents, rather than the hard work of many people and the fact that we were in the right place at the right time. Worst of all, we take credit for God's handiwork and think we could have succeeded without His permission and enabling.

Joseph didn't fall into any of those traps. He had been purified and refined in the furnace of life's trials. He had learnt to accept each situation as it came, good or bad, as coming from God. He had learnt to trust God's presence with him in all situations, and to lean on God. So when he revealed himself to his brothers, he was able to say "*it was not you who sent me here, but God*" (Genesis 45 v 8). There is no trace of resentment at their unjust and cruel treatment of him in the past. He can see how God allowed things to happen so he would be "*sent ahead of his brothers to preserve for them a remnant on earth and to save their lives by a great deliverance*" (Genesis 45 v 7).

The great deliverance was even greater than Joseph knew, because God used the time in Egypt to create a nation out of Jacob's family. And it was as a member of this nation that God entered the human race in the person of Jesus, the Saviour of the world.

Have you let go of past injustices, or are you holding onto a resentment that springs up each time you think about that past ill-treatment? God used the injustices and ill-treatments of Joseph's life to make him stronger, to teach him to depend on God and not circumstances, and to equip him for future work. God can do the same for you, if you will let Him. Ask God to give you faith to believe that He is working for good in all things, even when we can't see it at the time.

It is interesting that Joseph's family received such a warm welcome from Pharaoh and his court. Apparently Joseph had not complained about his brothers' treatment of him to the Egyptians. When he needed to present his case in Genesis 40 v 15, he simply said "*for I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews.*"

12a) From Genesis 45 v 1 - 18 & Genesis 50 v 15 - 21 (the 2 passages we just studied), what evidences are there that Joseph stayed close to God in the good times as well as the bad times?

**b) When things are going well for you, how do you keep depending on God?
Give some practical tips.**

6 For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping.
7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.
8 "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.
9 Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay.
10 You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me--you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have.
11 I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.'
12 "You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. 13 Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly."
14 Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping.
15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.
16 When the news reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had come, Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased.
17 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'Do this: Load your animals and return to the land of Canaan, 18 and bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land.'

3) How did Joseph reply to Judah in Genesis 45 v 1 - 3?

4a) What was the brothers' emotion on learning who Joseph was?(v3)

b) What did Joseph do? (v4,5)

5) What reason did Joseph give for his being sent to Egypt and who did he consider had sent him? (v5,7)

6a) In Genesis 45 v 9 - 11, what did Joseph tell his brothers to

do?

- b) **Who would benefit from this plan and what does this say about Joseph's attitude to his brothers' welfare?**
- 7) **What was Pharaoh's reaction to hearing that Joseph's brothers had come? (v 16-18)**
- 8) **What does that say about the way the Egyptian court regarded Joseph?**
- 9a) **What does it say about the things Joseph must have said about his family to the Egyptians?**
- b) **How do you talk about someone who has wronged you?**

With loving concern for their welfare, or with bitterness and a desire to have others reject them?

What can we do when we feel bitter towards someone?

QUESTIONS 10,11,12 Genesis 50 v 15 -21

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"

16 So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died:

17 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

18 His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

19 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?"

20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

21 So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

10) **What did Joseph's brothers fear after Jacob died?**

11a) **How did Joseph respond when his brothers asked his forgiveness for their past treatment of him? (v17)**

b) **What did Joseph say to them?(v17)**

QUESTION 11 Psalm 103

10 He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; 14 for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

c) **What does God say about our sins in Psalm 103 v 10 - 13?**

d) **Does that mean we can do anything we like and just say sorry when we've finished? If not, how does it affect our daily lives?**

Sometimes we find that problems cause us to turn to God, but when things are going well we think we can manage by ourselves, and we drift away from Him.