

Journey Into Victorious Living

LESSON 1 . . . When Life Is the “Pits” (Genesis 37:1-36)

How can we be victorious over feelings of revenge, bitterness, and hatred? How can we find victory in the midst of life’s problems and adversity? We find out in the life of Joseph. God uses one-fourth of the book of Genesis (chps. 37-50) to record Joseph’s life. Why does God record his life in such detail? Undoubtedly, it is because we can all easily identify with so much of his life. Joseph has to deal with much adversity—including envy, injustice, temptation, family problems, false accusations, etc. He is the role model for our “journey into victorious living.” Joseph is a wonderful example of what fact found in 1 John 5:4b?



NOTES

Joseph is the great-grandson of Abraham, grandson of Isaac, and the son of Jacob (Israel). Joseph is now seventeen years old as we begin our study of his life (37:2). In this section of Joseph’s life we can find **three** things we should do **when life is the “pits.”** First is . . .

Refuse to be envious (37:2-22).

We meet Joseph as he brings his father *a bad report* (37:2) concerning his half-brothers. Joseph has only one full brother, Benjamin, who is less than a year old at this time. Joseph and Benjamin are Jacob’s sons by his beloved wife Rachel, for whom he worked fourteen years (29:16-28). We are not told the details of the report, but this incident reveals Joseph would not go along with anything bad or hide things from his father. He was a faithful and honorable son.

The first recorded adversity in Joseph’s life is the result of favoritism shown him by his father Jacob, who loved Joseph more than his other children. Jacob’s special love stems from Joseph being born to Jacob in his old age to his favorite wife. As a token of his love for Joseph, Jacob makes him *a robe of many colors* (37:3). This multi-colored *robe*, or “coat,” (KUTTÖNET, keth-oh´-neth) reached to the wrists and ankles. It was a type of coat worn by royalty, not intended for manual laborers. This gift clearly reveals to Joseph’s brothers that he is favored by his father. As a result, what do we read about his brothers in Genesis 37:4b?

Also, Joseph has a dream that implies he will one day reign over his family. Being young and naïve, Joseph shares his dream with his brothers. This only adds to their resentment of him (37:5-8). Joseph continues to

have dreams about his family bowing down before him; therefore, his brothers are envious and hate him more and more (37:9-11).

One particular day Joseph's brothers are feeding Jacob's flock. Concerned about his sons, Jacob sends Joseph to check on them (37:12-14). When his brothers see him at a distance, what happens, according to Genesis 37:18b?

The brothers decide to kill Joseph, put him into a pit, and tell their father he was eaten by a wild animal. They then say, "*we will see what will become of his dreams*" (37:20). However, the eldest brother, Reuben, intervenes and suggests that killing Joseph is excessive. He proposes they just put Joseph into a pit and let nature take its course. Reuben offers this plan so he can return later to *rescue* Joseph and take him back to his father (37:21-22). Years later in Egypt, when Joseph learns about Reuben saving his life, he is moved to tears (42:22-24).

From time to time, we all face the temptation to feel envious when we see someone receive an honor, promotion, or blessing we think is undeserved. At those times we must be very careful because of what ominous warning in James 3:16?

When life is the "pits," it's tempting to look at others whose lives seem to be going great and be envious of their blessings. Therefore, when you are in the "pits," **refuse to be envious** and . . .

Reflect on the long term (37:23-35).

Following Reuben's suggestion, Joseph's brothers strip him of his robe and throw him into a dry pit (37:23-24). With Joseph in the pit, his brothers sit down to eat a meal. Though not recorded here, we later discover Joseph pleads for his life (42:21). So, as the brothers sit down to eat, they can hear Joseph nearby begging for his life.

When life is the "pits" and you feel like no one cares, the "pit" just seems to become deeper and darker. You are ill, and no one calls. You have marital problems and can't find a compassionate ear. A loved one dies, and you feel forgotten. At those times, you may experience Psalm 69:20b. Write it below:

However, an even worse situation is knowing someone else is in the “pits” and not doing something to let them know you care. The Christian life is not just praying, memorizing scriptures, attending Bible study and worship services, etc. Jesus said, “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*” (Jn 14:15). How do we *keep* all of Christ’s commands? How does Galatians 6:2 answer that question?

As Joseph’s brothers (with the exception of Reuben) are eating their meal and ignoring Joseph’s pleas, they see a caravan of Ishmaelites approaching. Ishmaelites, also called Midianites, are descendants of Abraham through Hagar. These traders have camels loaded with goods and are headed for Egypt (37:25). Judah suggests they sell Joseph to them. Why should they



kill him when there is more profit in selling him? Therefore, they sell Joseph for twenty shekels, or about eight ounces, of silver (37:26-28).

When life is the “pits,” things sometimes get worse before they get better, as in the life of Joseph. For days he travels as a slave of the Ishmaelites. He probably lies under the stars at night, looking toward heaven and wondering why God is allowing this to happen to him. Joseph needs a word from God, but God is silent. I’m sure Joseph feels like the psalmist in Psalm 22:2. Write it below:

Reuben has no part in selling Joseph. Therefore, when he returns to the pit and finds Joseph is gone, he tears his clothes in grief. To cover up their evil deeds, the brothers kill a goat and dip Joseph’s coat in the blood. They bring the coat back to their father, telling him they found the coat and wonder if it is Joseph’s. As they expect, Jacob recognizes the coat. Assuming wild animals have killed Joseph, Jacob mourns for many days. He is so overcome with grief none of his children can console him (37:31-35).

Things look hopeless for Joseph. However, **when life is the “pits”:** refuse to be envious, reflect on the long term, and . . .

Rely on God’s promises (37:36).

In Egypt, the Midianites sell Joseph to *Potiphar*, one of Pharaoh’s officials, who is *the captain of the guard* (37:36). This means Potiphar is the commanding officer of the royal bodyguards, like the Secret Service agents

who guard the President of the United States. Joseph doesn't know God is placing him in a strategic location for fulfilling His purpose for his life. When the Lord had earlier promised the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants, He told Abraham they would be strangers in a land not their own (15:13a). What else did God tell him in Genesis 15:13b?

There is no way Joseph can understand God's good purpose at the time. Just as God has a good reason for allowing Joseph's life to be the "pits," the same is true when our lives are the "pits."

Joseph's life is an illustration of a wonderful promise for us to remember **when life is the "pits."** It is so familiar that if I just mention the reference, you can probably quote the verse. But it is not enough just to quote it. We must believe it. The promise is: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose* (Rom. 8:28).

This verse doesn't say *all things* that happen to us are good; they are not. It doesn't say God causes *all things* to happen to us; He doesn't. However, it **does** say God uses *all things* that happen in our lives, even the very bad things, and causes *good* to come out of them. Romans 8:28 cannot be properly understood without the first phrase of the next verse. What does Romans 8:29a tell us?

When life is the "pits," God is sculpting our lives with the hammer of adversity to make us more and more like Jesus Christ.

Because God worked in Joseph's life, when we are in the "pits," we can be assured that in His time, God will bring something *good* out of our adversity, too. We can be confident God will keep what wonderful promise in Psalm 34:17?



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reflect on the long term, and
rely on God's promises.