

**THE STORY**  
**STUDY 3**  
**CHAPTER 3**

*1. Why did Joseph's brothers want to get rid of him?*

I think the obvious reason is the fact that he was an arrogant, precocious spoilt brat!!!! He was his dad's favourite, and his dad made no bones about that. He spoilt him with things and obviously with affection. It is noteworthy that Joseph was not out looking after sheep with his brothers. We are told that on a previous occasion when he was he brought back bad reports about his brothers. Did his dad then spoil him by keeping him back?

So there was already that resentment.

But then there were his dreams. And it is obvious from his dreams that he was the one to whom they were all bowing down. I mean, what gave him the right to think that? We are also not given an indication that Joseph attributed the dreams to God. He was simply telling his brothers – and his father – his dreams. And they all got the message that he was the one to whom they were bowing down.

*2. Why does God allow hurtful things to happen to people?*

The area of theology devoted to answering this question is Theodicy – the area of study that looks at vindicating God's goodness in view of the existence of evil. There are countless philosophical arguments, most of which are incomprehensible! However, the story of Joseph gives an opportunity to look at this from a practical point of view.

When an author writes a book, the author is like God – he or she knows the outcome they are looking for, and they are able to write characters into the story to accomplish that outcome. Early on in the story, an apparently arbitrary event occurs with a seemingly insignificant character. And that event and character is allowed to sit there – without explanation. Then, towards the end of the book, the author brings that event and character back into the mainstream of the story, and that earlier event now makes sense.

The point is that it wasn't until the end that that event made sense. It was always integral to the overall plan and outcome, the author always knew that purpose and the significance, but to those involved in the day to workings of their lives, it didn't.

Mainly life makes sense in reverse. Trouble is, we need to live it going forward!

We look at Joseph, as Joseph would have experienced his life, and we see hurtful things happening to him, that do not make sense. In the end, we see the master plan unfolding: the promised seed of Abraham has been saved from extinction.

Why did God allow those hurtful things to happen to Joseph? We can see what God was busy accomplishing. Our faith requires that we accept there was no other way to get Joseph, a foreigner, into that number 2 position in Egypt. Our faith also requires that we accept that part of what Joseph was enduring was moulding him to be adequate for the job.

“Without faith it is impossible to please God.” “The righteous will live by faith.”

When we face hurt, we have a story like that of Joseph to which we can turn and see that even though it may make no sense to us – it didn't to Joseph – yet we can see that God doesn't summarily allow hurt. He only allows what is necessary to accomplish his good purposes.

*3. What were the positive effects of Joseph being sold into slavery?*

By the time we get to this question I think we may have answered it!

The seed of Abraham was saved from extinction. But more than that, the Hebrew people were brought into Egypt. It was while they were there as slaves, we are told in Exodus Ch. 1, that they multiplied and became a great nation.

4. *What does Joseph's statement to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good," tell you about God?*

God is sovereign, God is bigger than the evil intentions of people, God can use the evil intentions of people to accomplish his good and holy purposes.

*You might want to ask for biblical examples of this principle:*

There is no way that we can condone adultery, betrayal, murder. I am sure that the devil is the prime mover in all of those. Yet David committed them all – adultery with Bathsheba, betraying her husband Uriah, then conspiring with Joab the army commander to murdering Uriah. I am sure the devil meant all that for evil, for harm. Yet God was able to leverage that to become the line through which Jesus was born.

But the example *par excellence* is the cross. All involved conspired to do harm. Yet God leveraged the judicial murder of his son for the salvation of the world.

5. *In what ways have you seen God work through the most bleak and hopeless situations to cause a greater good?*

The group will by now have the principle pretty well established. Can they make the connection to what they have observed, or maybe experienced in their own lives.

A reasonably contemporary example is the spread of Christianity. Mao kicked all the missionaries believing that he could stamp out Christianity. Even the missions organisations feared the most for the fledgling church. Yet 40 years later when it became possible once again for Christians to enter China, the church was stronger and more vibrant than it had ever been. Mao meant it for evil, but God intended it for good, and was at work in what seemed to be a bleak and hopeless situation.

The "danger" to be avoided to people trying to "second guess" God while they are going through a dark period, or their "counsellors" trying to do that. By that I mean they are trying to find reasons why God might be allowing the hardship, they are trying to justify the actions of God by finding a good enough reason for the pain and hardship. We eventually reach the place where the "OK-NESS" of what God has allowed is judged by what we believe is an adequate reason.

Remember: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." "The righteous will live by faith."

We need to come to the place we can believe that God, the Divine Author, would not have allowed this if it were not going to be significant to the "plot" of the "story." His Story.

6. *Why can God be trusted at all times?*

I think that question needs to be answered mainly from our text.

Page 31 – twice: the Lord was with Joseph

Page 32 – twice: the Lord was with him/Joseph

Page 39 – twice - God sent me ahead of you; it was not you who sent me here, but God; He (God) made me father of pharaoh; God has made me lord over Egypt

Page 42 – You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good

Initially Joseph may not have been aware of God's presence – but the text makes it clear that God was with Joseph.

Later, looking back, Joseph can see God's hand.

Times don't much darker than that for any of us. The bible makes it clear: God knew, God was at work.

Surely the God who was there and at work under those circumstances will likewise never leave us, nor forsake? History shows us that God can be trusted at all times.