



“Taking the Long Way Around”

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Small Group Plan

The School of Hard Knocks is a phrase referring to the (sometimes painful) education a person receives from life's (often negative) experiences. The term was first coined by American columnist George Ade in 1912 and was popularized by the song “It’s the Hard Knock Life” from the 1977 musical *Annie*.

In the Genesis story it seems very clear that Joseph received a PhD from the School of Hard Knocks. His life was very difficult, but he always looked for what God was teaching him and how God was shaping his character.

Romans 8:27-28

²⁷ *He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.* 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.*

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- How would you define “The School of Hard Knocks?” Can you think of some current examples?
- How many times have you “graduated” (learned from difficulties)?

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

Allow God to **S H A P E** Your Future ...

SECURITY

Genesis 39:11-21

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. 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.

- How could Joseph recover and rise so quickly after being sold and abandoned by his brothers?
- What did Potiphar see in Joseph that caused him to trust him to run his household?
- How would you describe Joseph’s relationship and view of God as his life is thrown back and forth (abandoned/trusted/accused/favored)?
- How did he maintain his confidence in God?

HELP

Genesis 39:2-5

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.

- Why do some give up in prison, while others make something of themselves?
- What do you think was Joseph’s most important asset?

ATTITUDE

Genesis 45:4-15

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. 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.

- List and describe the life circumstances that were beyond Joseph’s control?
- How do people usually respond when they face a situation that they didn’t create and don’t want?
- Describe Joseph’s attitude. How did he respond to his circumstances?
- Why did he consistently respond in a positive, trusting, forgiving way?

PERSPECTIVE

Genesis 50:18-20

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.

- How would you define “providence?”
- How did God turn “harm” into “good” in Joseph’s life?
- How did Joseph’s analysis of his past help him to face his future?

EMPHATHY

Genesis 50:21

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

- After all that had happened to him, how was Joseph able to forgive his family and show them kindness?
- At any point during his “ups” and “downs” Joseph could have said, “I’ve had enough.” Why didn’t he?

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- When have you witnessed God's providence?
- How have you observe God use a difficult circumstance to bring about a greater good?
- Think about the turmoil that exists in many families today. What difference would it make if the "Joseph Attitude" were introduced and practiced in these families?
- How many Josephs would it take to begin such a process?
- Close by thanking God for His power to protect and change. Ask Him to take "the long way around" to instill in us the attitude of Joseph.