

WHEN LIFE STINKS

**What do you do when life doesn't go the way you hoped?
Can you still trust God when you don't understand what He's
doing?**

Life doesn't always make sense. Plans fall apart. People let us down. Prayers seem unanswered. And sometimes we find ourselves in circumstances we never would have chosen.

In this five-week study, we'll follow the story of Joseph—a man who experienced betrayal, injustice, disappointment, and waiting. Through his story, we'll discover what it looks like to trust God, keep going, recognize His presence, and believe that He is still at work—even when life stinks.

To access the videos that go along with this study, go to:

www.thebridge.me/host-a-group

Small Group Ground Rules

This Should Be a Safe Place.

Please:

- **Keep things that are shared confidential.**
- **Respect those with different backgrounds, thoughts, and beliefs.
We are not all the same, and that is good.**
- **Discussion involves everyone. Be ready to participate as a listener and as a speaker.**
- **Let opinions submit to what the Bible has to say.**

Week 1 — Trust God Anyway

Life can change quickly. A relationship falls apart. A door closes. Someone hurts us. A plan we were counting on suddenly disappears.

Joseph knew what that felt like. He went from dreaming about his future to sitting in a pit, betrayed by the people closest to him. From Joseph's perspective, very little about what happened made sense. But there was something Joseph couldn't see yet: God had not left him, and God was still at work.

This week, we'll look at what it means to trust God when life doesn't look anything like we expected.

LET'S GET STARTED — Plan B

Think of a time when a small plan didn't work out the way you expected—a vacation mishap, a recipe disaster, getting lost, a canceled event, or something similar.

What happened? Did the change of plans make the story better, worse, or just funnier?

VIEW

Watch the video for Week 1: Trust God Anyway.

VIDEO NOTES:

DISCUSS

1. When life doesn't go according to plan, what is usually hardest for you—the disappointment, not knowing what comes next, feeling out of control, or something else?

READ ALOUD

Joseph was the favored son in a complicated family, and his brothers had grown deeply jealous of him. Joseph had also shared dreams that seemed to point to a future where his family would bow down to him, adding to their resentment. When they saw an opportunity to get rid of him, their jealousy turned into betrayal.

Genesis 37:18–28 NLT

¹⁸ When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him. ¹⁹ "Here comes the dreamer!" they said. ²⁰ "Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of

these cisterns. We can tell our father, 'A wild animal has eaten him.' Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!"

²¹ But when Reuben heard of their scheme, he came to Joseph's rescue. "Let's not kill him," he said. ²² "Why should we shed any blood? Let's just throw him into this empty cistern here in the wilderness. Then he'll die without our laying a hand on him." Reuben was secretly planning to rescue Joseph and return him to his father.

²³ So when Joseph arrived, his brothers ripped off the beautiful robe he was wearing. ²⁴ Then they grabbed him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. ²⁵ Then, just as they were sitting down to eat, they looked up and saw a caravan of camels in the distance coming toward them. It was a group of Ishmaelite traders taking a load of gum, balm, and aromatic resin from Gilead down to Egypt.

²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain by killing our brother? We'd have to cover up the crime. ²⁷ Instead of hurting him, let's sell him to those Ishmaelite traders. After all, he is our brother—our own flesh and blood!" And his brothers agreed. ²⁸ So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt.

2. Put yourself in Joseph's place. What parts of this experience do you think would have been hardest to understand or accept?

3. Joseph had received dreams about his future, but now his circumstances seemed to point in the exact opposite direction. Why can it be difficult to trust what we know about God when our circumstances seem to tell us something different?

4. When something painful or confusing happens, what are some conclusions we can be tempted to draw about God?

READ ALOUD

Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold as a slave to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. His circumstances were far from what he would have chosen, but Genesis gives us an important detail about what was happening behind the scenes.

Genesis 39:1–6a NLT

When Joseph was taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelite traders, he was purchased by Potiphar, an Egyptian officer. Potiphar was captain of the guard for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.

²The LORD was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master. ³Potiphar noticed this and realized that the LORD was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did. ⁴This pleased Potiphar, so he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned. ⁵From the day Joseph was put in charge of his master's household and property, the LORD began to bless Potiphar's household for Joseph's sake. All his household affairs ran smoothly, and his crops and livestock flourished. ⁶So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn't worry about a thing—except what kind of food to eat!

5. What evidence of God's presence or work do you see in these verses?

6. What *didn't* immediately change for Joseph? What does that teach us about the difference between God being with us and God immediately fixing our circumstances?

7. What is the difference between saying, "This situation is good" and saying, "God can still be trusted in this situation"?

READ ALOUD

Joseph isn't the only person in Scripture who struggled when life didn't make sense. In Psalm 13, David is painfully honest with God about how abandoned and forgotten he feels—and yet his prayer doesn't end there.

Psalm 13 NLT

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

¹ O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever?

How long will you look the other way?

² How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul,
with sorrow in my heart every day?

How long will my enemy have the upper hand?

³ Turn and answer me, O LORD my God!

Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die.

⁴ Don't let my enemies gloat, saying, "We have defeated him!"

Don't let them rejoice at my downfall.

⁵ But I trust in your unfailing love.

I will rejoice because you have rescued me.

⁶ I will sing to the LORD
because he is good to me.

8. What do you notice about the way David talks to God? What does this passage show us about the relationship between honest questions and genuine trust?

9. Have you ever felt like being honest about your disappointment or questions meant you weren't trusting God? Why do you think we feel that way?

READ ALOUD

Many years later, Joseph was able to look back and see his story from a very different perspective. His brothers had intended to hurt him, but Joseph could now recognize that God had been working even through what they had done.

Genesis 50:20

You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.

10. Joseph could say this in Genesis 50—but he didn't have the perspective of Genesis 50 while he was sitting in the pit in Genesis 37. How does that affect the way you think about seasons in your own life that don't make sense yet?

11. Looking back, can you identify a time when you eventually saw God working in something you couldn't

understand at the time? Or is there an area of your life right now where you're still waiting to see what God is doing?

APPLY IT

This week, think about one circumstance in your life that feels uncertain, disappointing, or outside of your control.

Take a few minutes to tell God honestly what you are feeling about it. You don't have to pretend it doesn't hurt or that you understand what He is doing.

Then finish this prayer:

**“God, I don’t understand _____,
but I know _____ is true about
You.”**

Ask God to help you trust His character while you wait to see more of the story.

PRAY

Take a few minutes to pray together as a group.