



PESPECTIVE: The Reality of Tough Stuff

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

This week's CGS launches our "Cord of Three Strands" Fall Gather Teaching series. This week's teaching focused on the question "From where does the tough stuff come?"

It may well be that your group is just getting back from a summer flurry of activity, and perhaps even some "time off" from your group. **Warm up things** by having each person share 3 personal highlights (things experienced and really enjoyed) from the summer.

GETTING STARTED – This week's teaching quoted from Dr. D.A. Carson who observed that "Many believers are not troubled by intellectual questions about suffering. They have brief theological answers that satisfy them...God loves them...that is enough. And **then**, something takes place in their lives that jolts them to the core. Suddenly, questions about suffering become vital."

- When for you did questions about suffering move from "theory" to personal reality?
- What was that "something" that took place?
- What kind of questions did you have? Have they been answered?

IN THE SCRIPTURES – Os Hillman, in *The Upside of Adversity*, speaks about the "Joseph Pit" experience. Let's investigate where such a category of experience comes from?

READ

Genesis 37:1-28

- Who was Joseph? What happened to him? Why did it happen?
- From what you know about "the rest of the story," did things get "worse before better" or "better before worse"?
- Discuss some of the likely thoughts and feelings Joseph had while these things were happening?

DISCUSS

Hillman writes, *What does your Pit look like? How deep is it? How wide? How dark? How painful?...one thing is consistent in every Joseph Pit experience. Our life is interrupted. We lose control over our circumstances. We are cast upon a sea of uncertainty with a raft but no oars. For the first time in our life we are forced to depend entirely on God and others.*ⁱ

Do you agree with this? What is particularly insightful about his description of "the pit"?
Anyone in the group feel in the Joseph Pit currently?

SOME TIME TO APPLY - "forced to depend entirely on God and others"

- ✓ What are some practical things we can do to personally, increasingly, depend on God?
- ✓ What are some practical things we can do to accept help from others?

Be sure to share
"your tough stuff" in
prayer together."

FINISH – by reading Genesis 50:15-21. Seeing their brother Joseph in authority, and with Jacob passing away, his brothers wonder if Joseph will finally "get back" at them for selling into slavery. However, what is Joseph's attitude...and what can we personally learn about God's hand in our suffering, from his assurances to his brothers?

ⁱOs Hillman, *The Upside of Adversity: Rising from the Pit to Greatness* (Regal Books, 2006), 25.