

Joseph's School - the school of hard knocks

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[0:00] Joseph's School. We could call this the School of Saint Joseph. Sounds a bit funny saying that but really it is Saint Joseph we're talking about.

! The first Saint Joseph, and it's not the Pope who makes saints, but God. And we're talking about the Saint Joseph. You know there's a Saint David here, a Saint Margaret, a Saint Bobby, and a Saint Eponi here this morning.

Now you're all saints that have trusted Christ. We're talking about the School of Saint Joseph if you like. And the story of Joseph takes about 14 chapters in the book of Genesis. It's about a quarter of the book. A quarter of the entire book of Genesis.

The book of beginnings. And we're going to follow his life together as it were as a school. We're going to enter the School of Joseph. The School of Saint Joseph if you like.

And what do I mean about using this analogy of a school? I put to you that Joseph's life was the School of Hard Knocks. And some of you know what that is like.

[1:09] And Joseph graduated with honours from this School of Learning. He is for us a living example of godly character and integrity.

And he got straight D's. We're going to cover three D's that Joseph received.

He got straight D's. And I'm going to put it in an analogy here of lessons. And lesson number one. The first D. Discipline.

Joseph got discipline. Now discipline is a word we sometimes shy away from. We'll talk more about that in time.

But first let's go to the word to Genesis 37 verse 4. Genesis 37 verse 4. We first meet Joseph here in Genesis 37 verse 2.

[2:12] He was 17 years old. The son of Jacob. One of his younger sons. And Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons of the twelve.

Jacob favoured Joseph. And he made him a richly ornamented robe for him to wear. A robe of many colours. And verse 4 of 37 says.

When his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren. They hated him. And could not speak peaceably unto him.

Now this word hate. It's got a very strong sense of they wished him harm. They wanted to do him in. They wanted to do him harm. And Joseph had two dreams.

And he just couldn't wait to share them with his brothers. In his dream they were all binding sheaves of grain. And then suddenly his sheave.

[3:12] Now this bundle of grain. This sheave. Stands upright. And all their sheaves gather around and bow down to his. And verse 8.

His brethren said to him. Shalt thou indeed reign over us? Or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him. Yet the more.

For his dreams. And for his words. Joseph's brothers hated Joseph for his dreams. And for his words. But he went on.

Told of a second dream. Where the sun, the moon and stars. Eleven stars. Bow down to him. Even then. This time. His father rebuked him. Thought you're going a bit too far now.

Joseph. That I would bow down. To you. Later on. His brothers set off to graze the sheep. Down near Shechem. And Jacob sent Joseph to find them. They saw him coming. And they planned to kill him. That's how hateful their hatred was. They argued.

[4:11] And eventually. They agreed to throw him into a pit. If you like. Year one. We're going to have five of them. Year one. Of Joseph's school. But. Just to. Use that analogy of a school. To some of those.

To some of those. To some of those. To some of those. To some of those. To some of those. To some of those. To some of those. To some of those. To some of those.

To some of those. To some of those. To some of those. To some of those. To some of those. he went into his first class as it were his first classroom was the pit they argued and eventually they agreed to throw him into a pit into this dark hole in the ground where he couldn't escape and his brother Reuben had hopes of coming back later to save Joseph to rescue him but then the brothers saw this group of Midianites passing by these Midianite traders and they were going to Egypt to trade they had various goods that they were carrying in their train of camels and Judah convinced his brothers hey look, look at these Midianites these Arabs going to Egypt we could sell Joseph for 20 shekels of silver and so they did the brothers traded their own brother for a few measly coins and then the brothers slaughtered a goat and covered Jacob, Joseph's coat with blood and they took that bloodied robe back to their father and when he saw it he went to pieces

Jacob rent his clothes and put sand cloth upon his loins and mourned for his son many, many days he was heartbroken now the school of hard knocks teaches the lesson of discipline here was Joseph getting this lesson well and truly the lesson of discipline and really it goes right through his life but who can remember back in the old schoolyard days back in the old school days I remember when in those bad old days of being in school the bullies, the teasing the name calling you know I used to get caught all kinds of horrible names but I've got through it I've survived the bloodied noses from fighting and it wasn't all one way you had to stick up for yourself it was doggy dog it was survival of the fittest and I remember with shame still that I was not always fair with my classmates I can remember sometimes where I teased and bullied others on a couple of occasions and I say that with shame I still regret really that I wasn't kind to some of my fellow classmates but I was more on the receiving end than the other way around but I remember in England maybe I was seven years old and the bullies in England and at wintry times we wore scarves someone grabbed my scarf and wiped it on a urinal and that was that was a horrible experience for me getting bullied it's discipline isn't it the discipline of the schoolyard days kids can be pretty mean and nasty can't they and when I came over here to South Australia maybe I was eight or nine at Hope Valley Primary School at the time and kids would bring drink bottles with juice or cordial in them some kids grabbed some poor boys bottle and filled it up with another kind of liquid and then they watched and waited gleefully for him to take a swig

[8 : 15] I wasn't one of the ringleaders but I was a bystander I was a bystander I was just as guilty it watched on and really didn't help much discipline in the school times isn't it remember there's a certain amount of discipline in the schoolyard that's the lesson of discipline even from your classmates the bullies and Joseph got his fair share of discipline here of that bit of discipline that bit of medicine from his own brothers I still remember too the old principal's office at Hope Valley Primary School and a visit I paid there one day and it wasn't it was just the one time that I have got a blot on my character here and this school no longer stands Hope Valley Primary School but the building housing the principal's office is still standing there today and I sometimes drive past and I remember that day it was there that I was rounded up with some other kids I'm not sure what we were doing wrong

I think I was more hanging around with the bad guys that day but I learnt a lesson of discipline that day and I remember that discipline as I pass by that place as I might drive past that building that still stands discipline now discipline in the Bible is a good thing because it's restorative isn't it God's kind of discipline restores us it aims to build us not break us it aims for us to learn and like one of my colleagues at work has said to me when he gets some correction he says to his manager thanks for the learning opportunity thanks for the learning opportunity that's the attitude we have to have isn't it because discipline is a learning opportunity because discipline is related when you think about it discipline disciple disciple it's related to the word disciple which means learner and repeatedly our Lord calls us to be his disciples to learn of him and the word teacher in the New Testament refers on occasion to a servant who was appointed as a supervisor as an overseer authorised to train to bring up a child by administering amongst other things discipline chastisement and instruction in other words doing what was necessary to promote development that's discipline the school of hard knocks there's a certain amount of discipline in it you know wrestlers and boxers and athletes have to discipline their bodies to make them stronger to develop that resilience that fortitude that strength likewise military people have to test themselves to the limits and that discipline that military discipline makes them fit and able to fight let's go back to Joseph to Joseph's school now he enters the second year of his schooling he went from the pit to Potiphar's house now to Potiphar's house he's he's graduated from the pit taken by these slave traders and now he gets traded in to a new

slave master in Genesis 39

I've just got verse 4 there from verse 2 it tells how the Lord was with Joseph the Lord was with Joseph and he was a prosperous man and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian and his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand now we see verse 4 here verse 4 and Joseph found grace in his sight and he served him and he Potiphar made him overseer over his house and all that he had he put into his into Joseph's hand so here we see Joseph taken from the pit now to Potiphar's house Potiphar was an official a captain of the guard and it says that Joseph found grace in the sight of Potiphar his Egyptian master and it says the Lord was with

Joseph this is what made all the difference for Joseph this was true of Joseph wherever he went the Lord was with Joseph it's a repeated statement Joseph's master recognized the favor of God in Joseph's life and verse 5 which we don't have projected it says it came to pass that Potiphar made Joseph overseer in his house and over all that he had the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house and the field so soon the master Potiphar placed Joseph in charge of his household he recognized Joseph had that quality that God's presence was with him and Potiphar trusted Joseph completely and it tells us how verse 6 Joseph's master Potiphar left all that he had in Joseph's hand this is

Genesis 39 verse 6 and he knew not all that he had save the bread which he did eat and Joseph was a goodly person and well favored Potiphar put everything in Joseph's charge and verse 7 it says that it came to pass after these things that his master's wife Potiphar's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph and she said lie with me Joseph refused her he did not yield to this temptation no matter what it would cost him and he said there is none greater in this house than I neither have I he Potiphar kept back anything from me but thee the wife because thou art his wife how then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God Joseph wanted to honour God how can I sin and dishonour and sin and sin against God how can I do this great wickedness he understood that he was accountable not just to Potiphar in his earthly responsibility but he was accountable completely to God and he was completely dependent upon God and in her anger at Joseph's rejection

[15:07] Potiphar's wife lied to the master she accused him of forcing himself on her and verse 19 we pick it up again and it came to pass when his master heard these words the words of his wife these false accusations against Joseph Potiphar took him and put him into the prison Potiphar believed his wife's lies and became enraged with Joseph and he threw Joseph into the prison what a change of circumstance now it's like he's gone backwards here he's flunked he's gone to his third year now he's gone from the pit to Potiphar's house now he's graduated year three if you like class three is the prison the prison of Pharaoh here's the third stage or phase verse 21 of 39 it says but and I know my dad did a great study on the butts of the bible and you can see my dad for that and if you're interested but the lord was with

Joseph the lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison it goes on to say how the keeper of the prison this jail supervisor gave into Joseph's hand all the prisoners all the responsibilities he gave him he gave him that delegation to take charge under him for the prison and verse 23 it says the keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hand because the lord was with him and that which he did the lord made it to prosper it's like potiphar he gave he didn't hold anything back he gave it all to Joseph and the jail keeper likewise gave it all to Joseph to take that responsibility he trusted him he had a proven character then we see lesson number one was discipline lesson number two for Joseph and for us in that last school of Knox is determination

I put to you that Joseph was learning determination determination despite all those setbacks despite the false accusations despite the hatred of his brothers despite everything going wrong and ending up in a dungeon Joseph demonstrated the second D determination it was characteristic of Joseph's life wherever he was he was determined he was resolute he was determined not to be overcome not to be overcome by the bullying of his brothers the bully behaviour by the false accusations of the master's wife and now the privations have been held in Pharaoh's dungeon notice what it said the Lord was with Joseph the Lord was with Joseph the Lord was with him there with him there still in the dungeon and later on

Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and baker were sent to the prison they were assigned to Joseph the cupbearer and the baker these high officials in Pharaoh's service were also cast into prison they'd done something to offend the Pharaoh and they were assigned to Joseph because Joseph had

charge of the prison under the jail keeper and in prison these two the cupbearer and the baker both had a dream but they had no one to interpret the dreams and it says in chapter 40 verse 8 and Joseph said unto them do not interpretations belong to God tell me then I pray you Joseph demonstrated his trust and his dependence in the Lord and he interpreted their dreams he gave the meaning of the cupbearers dream that he would be restored to his post but the baker would not be he asked the cupbearer to remember him when he came back to Pharaoh's court but despite the miracle of the interpretations the butler said this cupbearer the butler said nothing of Joseph for two years two long years

Joseph languished in this dungeon in the prison of Pharaoh for two more years the cupbearer the butler forgot Joseph most people would have given up but not Joseph Joseph had determination he knew God's plan would be fulfilled he held on to God's promise he held on to his hope his dream his faith his trust in God two full years went by before Pharaoh himself had a dream about seven plump and seven lean cows standing by the Nile and the Pharaoh the king of Egypt said he called all the magicians of Egypt to him to help him understand to interpret the dream but nobody could then the chief butler suddenly said oh Joseph he remembered Joseph how God had revealed the meaning of his dreams to Joseph and so they called for Joseph from the prison and Joseph told how God was revealing to Pharaoh what he was to do and what he intended for Pharaoh to do this is chapter 41 verse 16 and Joseph answered Pharaoh saying it is not in me

[21 : 20] God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace so Joseph didn't brag oh I've got this wonderful talent to interpret dreams he said God will give you the answer and Joseph by God's spirit interpreted the king's dream he gave Pharaoh the meaning of his dream that there would be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine Pharaoh realised the spirit of God was in Joseph he saw that in Joseph he had a gift of wisdom he said there is none so discreet and wise as thou art thou shalt be over my house and I haven't got all the words here but it goes on to say you shall be over my house and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled only in the throne will I be greater than thou

Pharaoh said unto Joseph see I have set thee over all the land of Egypt now we've seen the various phases of Joseph's life number one was what the pit number two was Potiphar's house number three was the prison and now we go number four the palace he's graduated to a new year level if you like as much as it was more than certainly more than one year that he was in the prison but he graduated to the palace Pharaoh knew that God had made all that known to Joseph from his dream placed him in charge and he sealed the arrangement he gave Joseph his signet ring the royal seal to mark documents and to make transactions and he dressed him in robes of splendor we read there in verse 42 of Genesis 41 and Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand and he put it upon Joseph's hand and arrayed him in vestures of linen and put a gold chain about his neck it goes on to say that he made him ride in the second chariot which he had and the crowd before him bowed the knee and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt further he gave him Asenath the daughter of a priest to be his wife and at this point Joseph was 30 years old took a long time for him to get there but he was lifted to that place of blessing so if he had come there when he was maybe 17 he'd been in Egypt for 13 years and he and his wife Asenath had two sons Manasseh and Ephraim and Joseph said he called the name of the first Manasseh for God said he have made me forget all my toil and all my father's house and he called the name of the second

Ephraim for God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction Manasseh means causing to forget Ephraim means fruitful what a blessing to forget the hardships the loss the toil the grief put behind you and to have fruitfulness that was what Joseph marked in the names of his two sons God gave him great blessing everything Joseph had dreamed about was coming to pass but I put to you that Joseph learned what was the first D discipline he went from discipline he learnt determination and now number three he got to distinction he got the straight three D's here distinction you know sometimes it's good when you're doing a further study and getting a D's good isn't it getting a distinction not only a HD high distinction well he had a high distinction if you like Joseph he'd serve with distinction with distinction and with integrity he excelled past all expectations he'd acted with nobility of character of heart and of mind he'd used his God given gifts to bless to flourish and despite mean people and circumstances as God's people today we're all in the hard squirt at times maybe harder for some but we're all in that same earthly phase of where things don't always go right and we can have some set backs and hardships and tough things and we will all experience those things in the school of hard knocks we're still living on a fallen earth a fallen planet

and the rain falls on the just and the unjust we're still subject to the frailties of human flesh we're still flesh but distinction marked

[26 : 42] Joseph's life it distinction marked his life through all his years and he stood out from the crowd where he was given acknowledgement through all those phases that he went as much as he had setbacks he learnt some things you know discipline it's an opportunity for learning an opportunity for growth we see that discipleship is as we learn of our Lord as we come to let God humble us as he did for Joseph through those years of famine his brothers then come to hear of the grain in Egypt and his brothers come before him wanting grain in that time of famine it says in 42 verse 5 that the sons of Israel sons of Jacob they come to buy corn from among those that came from the famine they come amongst others because the famine was in the land of

Canaan so many come including these sons of Jacob Joseph's brothers and it says in Joseph was the governor of the land and he it was that sold to all the people of the land and Joseph's brethren came and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth Joseph's dream was coming true he saw his brothers bowing down themselves before him they did not recognize him but he recognized them he even talked through an interpreter so that they weren't even aware that when they were talking amongst themselves he knew what they were saying and he accused them of being spies saying they'd only come to spy out land where it was unprotected but they reassured him they were only there to buy food they said we are all the sons of one man they said how really there were twelve brothers but one stayed home and one is no more Joseph sent them home with the grain of

Catsimeon till they returned with their youngest brother and also slipped their money back into their sands Jacob refused to send Benjamin that was what Joseph asked for that the youngest Benjamin would come to Egypt brothers returned to Egypt with Benjamin when the grain did run out and they were given more grain but Joseph slipped his cup into Benjamin's sand and his guards stopped them on the way home found the cup and returned all of them to Egypt so they all had to come back to Egypt and when Joseph came home they brought him a present that came from Jacob they bowed themselves to him to the earth this is Genesis 43 verse 26 and they begged for Benjamin's life they told him the whole story then Joseph told them how he was the one they sold to Egypt this is Genesis 45 now it all comes to a head here in

Genesis 45 and he started to he could not refrain himself he says in Genesis 45 he couldn't hold back his pretense any longer because he was just grieving he just wanted to embrace his brothers and to love them and to show his forgiveness to them to make himself known to his brethren and it says from verse 4 and Joseph said unto his brethren come near to me I pray and then they came near and he said I am Joseph your brother whom he sold into Egypt what a shocking moment that would have been for him to reveal and as much as he had an Egyptian appearance you would expect he was decked out as an Egyptian they would have thought they would have reflected that he was the Joseph that they once knew decked out and looking like a Hebrew he was looking like someone completely different but when he started speaking to them in their own Hebrew language and he said I am

Joseph your brother then he sold into Egypt how their hearts would stop they would have been just so shocked and thinking wow we're gone us now he's the governor of this country and surely he's going to wreak his vengeance on us and pour out his hatred and his revenge upon us which we are very much due for what we have done and they started to get really worried here and it says they were grieved and they said now therefore be not grieved he says to them nor angry with yourselves but you sold me here for God did send me before you to preserve life Joseph acted with distinction didn't he such distinction such noble spirit and character to those who had wronged him his own brothers he could have smashed them and imprisoned them and slain them for what they had done but he acted with distinction he acted with nobility and forgiveness and mercy and extended love and grace he was a man of distinction his trials had not made him a bitter man but a better man

[32 : 10] God had developed his character and it's interesting what he says here for God did send me God sent me here God sent me here God sent me to the peak God sent me to Potiphar's house God sent me to the prison and God sent me to the palace God sent me here to preserve life Joseph recognised truly here's the distinction of a man he recognised truly that it was God who orchestrated all of this all of his trials all of those stages of his life from the pit to the palace God was behind it God made it happen the Lord was behind it all even in the hardness even in the temptation the injustice the false accusation in that waiting phase and finally the graduation and we see that

Joseph we don't have all these words here to reject but Genesis 45 verse 16 says the fame thereof was heard in Pharaoh's house saying Joseph's brethren are come everybody could hear it they could hear it when he was telling them I am Joseph your brother and the excitement the wonder of it all everyone heard about and it says it pleased Pharaoh well and Pharaoh said say to thy brethren take your beasts and go into the land of Canaan and take your father I will give you the good of the land of Egypt and you shall eat the fat of the land there's much more that could be said here but the point is that God overruled in all the circumstances and in your hard school of knowledge you may still be you're not graduated to that point yet as it were you're still going through the pit or the dungeon as it were but God is in charge and like

Joseph we can recognise God sent me through this God sent me through even these hard times it tells how Joseph lived to be 110 years old he took care of his family and all that he owned truly he shows for us the school of hard knocks brother sister keep on in that school that school of hard knocks he's been serving as a servant as a slave imprisoned some 17 years of suffering and hardship until God's purpose was revealed and fulfilled Joseph's dream we can learn from Joseph's story how to be patient and trust in the Lord now when that butler the chief cup bearer forgot Joseph for two whole years Joseph was patient he trusted in the Lord he remained dependent on God he never lost his way in the midst of such power and wealth as well that could have gone to his head he could have got prideful but he kept his

God-given vision alive and he served wholeheartedly it was nine years from the time Joseph was placed in power before his brothers came to Egypt seeking help he could have acted in vengeance and pride in the flesh but rather he extended God's grace to them he showed distinction he showed character he showed integrity he showed forgiveness and love when you go through those trials of the school of hard knocks we can learn to be fair and kind we know to be a bully like the rest of them we can put aside put away childish things that kind of attitude of I'll give what I'll give back what I'm given rather give to those who don't deserve it it's God's grace isn't it Joseph shows God's grace doesn't he Joseph shows

God's kind of love a giving love a forgiving love a love that's not conditional on being loved back and at the end of it all at the graduation of his life at that culmination at that closing chapter of his life Genesis 50 verse 20 Joseph says as he addresses his brothers he says but as for you he thought evil against me but God meant it unto good God meant it unto good to bring to pass as it is this day to save much people alive the Lord brought Joseph's dream to fulfilment God is able to turn situations around and don't think God has left you when hard things happen to you God meant it for good wow sometimes we can't get our head around it why is this happening to me right now why is this going on right now actually

[37 : 57] God needs it for your good we don't necessarily understand it at the time it's happening but God brought good out of the evil that was against Joseph and he can for us too in all these situations we face and what matters is the Lord was with Joseph and he is guess what with you isn't that isn't that a comfort isn't that a joy God is with us Emmanuel and his character transformed before God such that God could use him now maybe in the early stages some have reckoned maybe he was a little bit of a brag I'm not sure that it says such in so many words but maybe he wasn't so wise in how he said some of the things that he said about the dreams maybe he was a little bit prideful possibly but it doesn't actually say that directly really it says nothing bad about

Joseph he's one of the few Bible characters men and women the Bible says nothing against him but maybe that young Joseph learned a lesson or two didn't he he learned a lesson or two he learned some discipline he learned some determination and he learned how to live with distinction he learned through those character forming stages of his life and God used Joseph's brothers he used Potiphar's wife to name a few who's he using in your life maybe there's some people that you'd rather not have in your life that are actually helping you to form that character to make you a man a woman of distinction for God God gave Joseph the opportunity of a lifetime and he remained faithful to God and to man he didn't go to his head when he was the governor of Egypt he still had that fairness that character that integrity and what a demonstration it is for us of the school of hard knocks of what

God is wanting to do in our lives what God is doing in the here and now the school of hard knocks maybe you're going through it right now God gave Joseph the opportunity of a lifetime because he remained faithful both to man and to God even in unbearable pressure and he demonstrates for us faith and trust in God devotion to serving God and man with honour and faithfulness steadiness

when facing hatred and betrayal and forgetfulness of others we show forgiveness of wrongs committed by others and we see God's wonderful workings in all the seasons of his life and brother sister so can you we can be like Joseph we can learn those lessons the school of hard knocks we can graduate as it were and see the seasons of life where we've done things that we regret and we can learn we suffer things against us we can learn from that and ultimately we're going to graduate from the school of hard knocks so brother sister don't be overwhelmed don't be overcome by what is going on if you do face hard trials that precious faith is more precious than a gold that perishes let's pray

Lord we thank you that Joseph is for us a great testimony a great challenge that speaks to us today still of what you can do with a man a woman who puts their trust in you as Joseph had his trust in you it tells us Lord that you are with him you are with him in all of those parts of his life in all of those dark times you are with him still and yet Lord too you are with us that put our trust in you Lord we can't fathom we can't reckon!

what blessing it is we can't put it into human words what you have done for us Lord we pray if there's any here today that it feels like there's a lot a lot of hard knocks coming that we'll keep determined we'll trust that that discipline that we're learning is going to ultimately lead to us to have a distinction to be a people set apart who can be overcomers more than overcomers more than conquerors because you love us in Jesus name we pray Amen