

When Disaster Strikes

1. Warm-up question: Jeff said the musical *Hamilton* is the most powerful artistic presentation he's ever experienced. What's the most powerful artistic experience you've ever had?
2. Life is full of bitter disappointments, painful losses, broken dreams, and demoralizing failures. Given the prevalence of tragedy, to live well we first have to learn how to fail well.
 - a. One of the tragedies in Hamilton's life was his affair with Maria Reynolds. When Hamilton's wife, Eliza, learns of his betrayal, she pours out her pain in a song, saying things like, "I knew you were mine, you said you were mine, I thought you were mine," and "I'm rereading the letters you wrote me, I'm searching and scanning for answers in every line," and "You have torn [my heart] all apart, I am watching it burn, watching it burn . . . , I'm burning the memories. . . . I hope you burn." Betrayal is one of the most painful things we'll ever experience. Tell us about a time you were betrayed. How did that feel?
 - b. Tragedy in life can take many forms. What would you say is the greatest tragedy of your life heretofore?
3. Joseph's life was punctuated by a series of dramatic disasters, beginning with betrayal by his brothers. At the time, Joseph was the youngest of 11 brothers and his father's favorite. His father famously gave him a "coat of many colors" that he wore with pride. His brothers were not amused. Read Genesis 37:5-28, selected verses.
 - a. Growing up, did you ever experience sibling rivalry or jealousy? Tell us about it.
 - b. When you were a kid, if your brother or sister had told you about a dream in which you bowed down to them, how would you have reacted?
 - c. Picture that moment when Joseph is in the pit or the moment when he's sold. Picture him as he's being hauled away by the trading caravan and looks back at his brothers one last time. What do you imagine Joseph was feeling?
4. In Egypt, Joseph rose to become the chief slave in Potiphar's household, but then was thrown in prison after Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of attempted rape. In prison, Joseph interpreted a favorable dream for Pharaoh's former cupbearer and the cupbearer promised to tell Pharaoh about his case when he was restored as cupbearer. But the cupbearer forgot Joseph. It wasn't until much later, when Pharaoh had a troubling dream, that the cupbearer remembered to tell Pharaoh about Joseph. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream, warned him of a coming famine, and was appointed to lead preparation for the famine. When the famine hit, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to beg for food only to discover that Joseph was in charge of food relief. If not

for all that had happened, every twist and turn, all the sons of Jacob would have died in the famine and there never would have been a nation of Israel.

- a. Looking back on his wild ride in life, how do you think Joseph felt?
 - b. In Genesis 50:20, Joseph told his brothers, “Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good.” When in your life has a harmful experience ultimately led to great good? In human history, when has a harmful experience ultimately brought about great good?
 - c. Romans 8:28 says, “For we know all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purposes.” What do you think that means? What’s being promised here? What’s not being promised here?
5. Some people believe God causes everything to happen, even bad experiences. Jeff disagreed, saying that while God knows everything that will happen in advance, even bad things, that doesn’t mean God wants all those bad things to happen. There’s a difference between knowing something will happen and causing it to happen. But when bad things do happen, God stands ready to help us draw good from the bad.
- a. Instead of saying, “There’s a purpose for everything that happens,” Jeff suggested we should say, “A purpose can be found in everything.” What’s the difference?
 - b. The Chinese word for “crisis” is formed from two characters that, loosely translated, mean “opportunity riding on the dangerous wind.” Do you like that insight? Why or why not?
 - c. Winston Churchill said, “Never let a good crisis go to waste.” What do you think he meant?
6. Hebrews 11:3 says, “By faith we understand that the worlds were created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.” Romans 4:17 says, “God . . . calls into existence things that do not exist.” Theologians call this “creation *ex nihilo*.” *Ex nihilo* means “out of nothing.” In other words, God specializes in creating something from nothing. As children of God, we’re expected to partner with God in replicating that creative process in our own lives. To help us practice this faith-based way of seeing things, have two or three people in your group volunteer to answer the following questions.
- a. Tell us about a crisis in your life right now.
 - b. Can you imagine how good might come out of the crisis? How can you partner with God in finding the good that could emerge from the crisis?
 - c. How does this new Romans 8:28 way of thinking and seeing things change the dynamic and the feel of the crisis you’re facing right now?

Genesis 37:5-28, selected verses

⁵ Once Joseph had a dream, and told it to his brothers, ⁶ "Listen to this dream that I dreamed. ⁷ There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸ His brothers said, "Are you indeed to reign over us?" So they hated him even more because of his dreams.

¹² Now Joseph's brothers went to pasture their father's flock.

¹³ His father said to Joseph, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and bring word back to me." ¹⁷ So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. ¹⁸ They saw him from a distance and said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰ Let's kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams."

²⁵ Then looking up they saw a caravan coming with their camels on their way to Egypt. ²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come, let's sell him to the caravan." And his brothers agreed. ²⁸ So when the traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took Joseph to Egypt.