

What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do / Week 2

But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. (Genesis 37:18 NIV).

“Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. “Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.” (Genesis 37:19-20 NIV).

When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. “Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don’t lay a hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. (Genesis 37:21-22 NIV).

They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, “We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son’s robe.” (Genesis 37:32 NIV).

The Lord was with Joseph... (Genesis 39:2a NIV).

How often do you use emojis when communicating? Emojis are often used to help portray how we feel without using words or to clarify the tone of our text. However, there are some emojis that we don’t use often because it is rare that they apply to what we are saying. But, when we do use these emojis, they say a lot. And these set the stage for what we’re talking about today. It’s these emojis: 😬 (face with no mouth), 😬 (face with open mouth), and 😬 (face with an open mouth and raised eyebrows). - emojis sound weird when you try to describe them using words.

We’ve all had those situations where we’re like “I have NO WORDS for this.” We’re SHOCKED. I like the first one the best—the face without a mouth—because it represents those moments when you simply don’t have words to say. It’s when we hear about something—or something happens—that we can’t make sense of.

I’d venture to say that most of the time, these shock emojis are sent along with a text that reports something happening that was shocking in a *bad* way. Something that catches us off guard and hits us out of nowhere.

That is what we’re talking about today. Can you think of a time when you felt this way? Unfortunately, we eventually will experience a time or multiple times when our world will get rocked by some shocking news or circumstances.

We are currently living through one of those moments, when the world seems to have flipped upside down when COVID-19 entered our world and we entered into a global pandemic. How has this impacted your life? Which emoji would you use to describe the changes we are experiencing since March?

The thing about these shockingly painful moments is that they often hit us out of nowhere. And because of that, it’s difficult for us to know how they’ll make us feel. And because of *that*, it’s difficult for us to know how we’ll respond.

- **Sometimes we surprise ourselves by how well we handle it.** We think, “Wow, I figured news like this would take me to the edge. But I’m actually doing okay.”
- **Sometimes we surprise ourselves by how much it tears us apart.** We think, “I don’t even know why I’m so upset about this, but I’m a mess!”

- **Sometimes we feel closer to God when stuff rocks us, but other times we wonder where God is at all.**

Because we're all wired differently, we experience hurt differently. **But that doesn't change the fact that hurt, hurts. And when life hurts, we all find ourselves wondering what to do next.** That's why we're doing this series, *What To Do When You Don't Know What To Do*. Because we all encounter those no words emoji moments. And so did Joseph. We began this series by talking about him last week and this week his story continues in a way that can only be described as 😐 (face with a straight mouth).

Joseph is one of the most famous people in the Old Testament of the Bible. Joseph had some family drama—drama he definitely played a part in creating. He was his dad's favorite child and therefore given special treatment compared to his brothers. On top of that, he had a dream that his brothers—and even his parents—bowed down to him out of respect and honor. And because Joseph seemed to have a hard time picking up on social cues, he shared his dream with his family!

You can imagine how well that went over.

- His brothers were NOT okay with him being dad's favorite.
- His brothers were NOT okay with him sharing his dreams of ruling over them one day.

So how did they respond? Check this out...

But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. (Genesis 37:18 NIV).

That just went from 0 to 100 *really quick!* It continues...

"Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams." (Genesis 37:19-20 NIV).

Despite his anger towards Joseph, one of his brothers actually had a conscience in the moment...

When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. (Genesis 37:21-22 NIV).

Thank goodness for Reuben. He convinced his brothers to throw Joseph into a well instead of going homicidal on him. He even planned on coming back to rescue Joseph later.

The brothers listened to Reuben. And when Joseph approached, they ripped off the special coat his father had given him, and they threw him in a well.

If Joseph had a phone, this is when he would've texted his best friend...

"When your brothers tear up your jacket and throw you in a well" (insert shocked face emoji).

But they're still not done with him.

They notice a caravan of traders approaching. Judah, another one of Joseph's many brothers, suggests they sell Joseph to these traders. After all, selling Joseph to a group of people who would most likely make him a slave is much better than murdering him, right?

So that's exactly what they do. And they dip Joseph's coat in the blood of a wild animal, take it to their father, and tell him that Joseph was likely attacked and killed by an animal. What a cover story...

They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe." (Genesis 37:32 NIV).

That last line tells us everything we need to know about the situation. The brothers obviously knew that the coat belonged to Joseph. They brought it up to let their dad know that they noticed the way he favored Joseph. They were mad about it. They didn't call it *Joseph's robe* or *our brother's robe*. They said *your son's robe*.

What a bunch of jealous jerks!

Insert text #2: "Good news: out of the well. Bad news: They SOLD me. Like actually SOLD." (insert shocked emoji).

I'm being a bit lighthearted, but there was NOTHING lighthearted about this situation! We simply cannot imagine the fear, despair, uncertainty, anger, and hurt that he felt. Betrayed by his own flesh and blood, sold into very real slavery by the brothers he grew up with. The message being sent was loud and clear: "We're all better off without you."

I mean, what would you even do?! How do you get yourself unsold?! This was clearly a "what to do when you don't know what to do" moment!

Our stories are different than Joseph's. But we will all experience pain of some kind. We'll all have scary, painful or dangerous moments that catch us off guard. We'll all have moments when life doesn't make sense and we don't have the words to process what's happening.

Unfortunately for Joseph, he had more shocking moments in his future. We'll look at some of those in the next few weeks. But I want to highlight five powerful words that show up in the historical account of his life. While they didn't keep him from getting thrown into a pit and they didn't keep him from getting sold, these five words literally made *all* the difference and helped Joseph maybe more than anything else. . .

The Lord was with Joseph... (Genesis 39:2a NIV).

Joseph didn't have a lot going for him in the pit and even less afterward, but when Joseph was in despair and wondering how life would turn out, he could rely on a single truth: God was with him.

- This truth didn't change the reality of Joseph's situation. But it was better than being alone.
- This truth didn't mean that Joseph could see where the story was going. But he could know that he wasn't entirely dependent on himself to get out of this situation.
- This truth didn't mean that Joseph could easily deal with the things that happened to him. It didn't mean that he had a reason or explanation for the pain in his life. But he didn't have to figure out things all by himself.

And the same is true for you.

**WHEN THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO,
GOD IS WITH YOU.**

When life hands you shocking news and you don't know what to do, God is with you. Truthfully, we hear that ALL THE TIME. So often, that the words lose their meaning. We don't feel them. But think about it for a second. God is with YOU, not in some abstract way but He is literally present, near you, next to you when you feel alone. When you and I can truly understand and embrace this truth, it changes things. Our circumstances may not change: after all, Joseph wasn't immediately returned to his family. But it changes our perspective on our situation. And maybe more than anything, it gives us hope that we can keep going even when it feels like we can't. Knowing that God is with us may not change our circumstances: but it might just change us. It might just give us enough hope to keep going, even in the midst of our hopeless circumstances.

It's easy to give into the hurt we've experienced. It's easy to let fear overwhelm us or anger consume us. We have a lot of reasons to let difficult and sometimes unfair situations get the last word. But when we know that God is with us, the uncertainty of life doesn't get the last word. God does.

But what does that look like for us? There are no formulas or easy answers for getting through hard times. But here are some things to do in the meantime...

- 1. Be real.** Feel your feelings. Not everyone will experience incredible luck in life. But *everyone* will go through tough times and pain. All throughout the Bible, people went through difficulties. And there are *many* accounts of them being real and honest with God about their struggles. There are no clichés to make the hard times go away. And our job isn't to just "suck it up" and act like everything is okay. If we believe that God is with us, then we should know that God is more-than-okay with our honest questions, doubts, and fears.
- 2. REMIND yourself (and each other) that God is with you.** Here's a spoiler alert. Things did eventually work out for Joseph. But we know that because we can read the whole story in the Bible. But when Joseph was in it, he didn't know how it would turn out. There were no spoiler alerts for him. All he could do is face another day wondering how things would turn out. But he held onto one thing—that God was with him. In moments when life is toughest, that's when this reminder is most important. God is with you, and your story isn't over yet!

Our life will be full of moments when we don't know what to do about our pain. And finish this lesson, I want you to know that's exactly why small groups are a thing. We'll want to insert the shocked face emoji a lot of times! In those moments, nobody wants to be alone. And it's important to know that **when you don't know what to do, God is with you.** And so are we. So is your small group. It will give you hope when things feel hopeless. It won't make the difficult circumstances go away, but you will have something to count on—you will *know* that you're not alone.

We are currently meeting Sunday (although not this Sunday due to Father's Day) nights virtually at 5:30pm to 6:30pm. All you need to do is go to the URL:
<https://meet.biggorilla.com/CornerstoneYouth>.

As always, you can always reach out to me as well at anytime: 224-221-3167

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe a situation where you felt things were out of your control. (Examples: being stuck in traffic, when the electricity goes out, etc).
2. What are some words you would use to describe what you felt in that situation? What's the worst part of being in that situation?
3. In your own words, describe Joseph's situation. What do you think were some thoughts Joseph had while in the cistern? What would be some of your thoughts?
4. One of the worst parts of Joseph's situation was his being alone. Why do you think situations that feel out of our control are more difficult to handle when you feel alone?
5. If you weren't alone in that situation, how would it have changed how you felt about it?
6. What are some ways we can be reminded that God is with us?
7. Why do we often want to have perfect resolutions, even when we know they don't always happen?
- 8. What could help you get through situations when you feel stuck?**
9. If one of your friends were in that situation, what would you say to them or remind th