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How many of us have felt over the past six months as though we've been in the pits? We've heard numerous accounts of those without jobs who now have less income since being laid off work. That's the pits.

When customers can't get out to shop due to fear of COVID-19, they too may feel in the pits, as well as the merchants who long for more sales.

Those caught in the path of wildfires or hurricanes certainly feel as though it's the pits.

As we prepare for the presidential election, some suggest we're in the pits and we need a change in leadership, while others suggest that our current President has kept us out of the pits and warn what might happen with a change of leadership. Most of us, however, find the political arguing the pits!

This phrase about being in the pits provides a shorthand way of saying that things are really bad, terrible, lousy, awful. I'm not sure when the phrase "in the pits" originated, though some suggest the saying was first used in the 1950s. Although I don't know if the phrase "in the pits" was used thousands of years

ago, Joseph certainly found himself in the pits, literally.

I imagine most of us have been in the pits a few times in our lives, though I doubt many of us have been in the bottom of a literal hole in the ground, which is something that Joseph experienced when his brothers threw him in a hole.

The story of Joseph is one of the longest narratives about any person in the Bible, spanning chapters 37 through 50 in the book of Genesis, with only one of those chapters not mentioning him, for a total of 13 chapters! It's almost as though the biblical writer was using a yellow highlighter to call attention to Joseph's story, saying, "Listen up; this is important stuff."

The story is full of drama—from the opening chapter that describes how his father gave him a beautiful robe while his jealous brothers received nothing. Joseph seems to start off life as a boastful 17-year-old teenager who tattles on his brothers and brags about his dreams of ruling over them, getting all the brothers even more upset. They finally had enough, so they threw him in a pit and told his father

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that wild animals ate him, while later secretly selling him to a traveling caravan that took him to Egypt as a worker for the Pharaoh.

The story continues to be filled with drama and twists in the plot. Potiphar, the captain of the Pharaoh's guard, noticed Joseph's talent and gave him responsibilities. The plot twists when Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Joseph, and when Joseph doesn't comply, she yells and accuses him of attacking her, which lands Joseph in prison. Once again, Joseph is in the pits.

The story could have ended there, with Joseph rotting in prison, but when the Pharaoh has a troubling dream that he doesn't understand, someone remembered that Joseph could interpret dreams. When Joseph tells the Pharaoh that his dream signals they will have seven years of wonderful harvests followed by years of draught and that the Pharaoh should begin stocking up on food, Joseph gets appointed as the one to plan for the future.

The story could have ended there as well, with Joseph feeding many hungry people, but suddenly his starving brothers show up for food. Joseph recognized

them, and after tricking them to go home and return to Joseph with their youngest brother, he was barely able to control his tears when they reunited. It's unclear whether he sheds tears of sorrow or joy, but when he revealed himself to them, the brothers were terrified that he would harm them for throwing him in a pit and sending him away so many years ago. Now the tables were turned, and the brothers find themselves in the pits.

We may wonder why the Bible contains such a detailed story of Joseph, filled with so much drama and emotion. I often wonder if it's because the story reminds us of ourselves—how we can be deceptive, jealous, angry, and in trouble.

Sometimes children get in trouble for doing things they shouldn't do, and even parents get in trouble when making unrealistic threats to their children, as was the case with a father who in desperation would frustratingly say to his daughter when she was in trouble, "If you don't settle down, I'm going to call UPS and have them come get you."

One day their daughter had been [particularly ornery and things were in the pits]. There wasn't any kind of trouble the daughter hadn't gotten into

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that day. Dad was about ready to tear his hair out. Then three things happened. First, the daughter crossed the line. Second, Dad hollered, “If you don’t settle down, I’m going to call UPS and have them come get you.” And third, the doorbell rang.

All attention was drawn to the door as Dad opened it. The minute the door opened, the daughter took one look, screamed, and went running down the hall. Dad nearly fainted. Standing there with a look of total bewilderment was a UPS man with a package in his hands. That was the last time Dad used that phrase.<sup>1</sup>

We all make mistakes, get jealous, have ornery days, get in trouble, or find ourselves falsely accused. We all find ourselves in the pits. We might even devise ways to get even with those who put us in the pits, and when Joseph met his brothers many years after they threw him in the pits, they worried how he might respond. When their father died, they said to one another, “What if Joseph bears a grudge against us,

and wants to pay us back seriously for all the terrible things we did to him?”<sup>2</sup> They begged for forgiveness, and Joseph tearfully replied, “Don’t be afraid...You planned something bad for me, but God produced something good from it, in order to save the lives of many people.”<sup>3</sup>

I find comfort in Joseph’s story, for when I find myself in the pits, rather than trying to blame those who may have gotten me there, I’m learning how to look for what good might come from the experience. I don’t believe that God puts us in the pits to teach us something, so may we learn to trust that no matter what comes into our lives, God strives to bring new possibilities and hope. The next time you’re in the pits, look around, listen, and discover how God might bring something healing into your life and those around you as God helps you see beyond the pits.

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<sup>1</sup> Hodgkin, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #113.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 50:15, CEB.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 50:19-20, CEB.