

WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY TWELVE

Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

The grinding feelings of resentment are not resolved by acts of revenge. They're resolved by extending grace.

—Charles R. Swindoll

LOOK inside your heart's vest pocket. Are you carrying with you a little book of revenge? Most of us keep one handy so that when someone wrongs us, we can stick that offense like a trading stamp on the pages of the book. Collect enough stamps, and our revenge book is ready to cash in for an act of justifiable retaliation.

We all have been a victim of unfair, undeserved treatment. We've been betrayed, maligned, disrespected, and stabbed in the back by people who once said they loved us. The wounds are real, and the scars are deep—and our books are full.

What do we do with our books of revenge? Some might say that retaliation is fitting: "Give them a dose of their own medicine!" However, instead of healing our pain, revenge poisons our soul. Joseph, whose account appears in the book of Genesis, models a better solution. The catalog of offenses committed against Joseph could fill the thickest book in the library! However, rather than keep a detailed account of his hurts, the story of Joseph teaches us to tear up the list. Rather than even the score, we are to extend grace.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The abuse Joseph suffered at the hands of his family and his captors must have left deep physical and emotional scars. Perhaps you have suffered at the hands of others as well. When others' sins wound us, where can we go for comfort, protection, and justice? We run to the Savior, who, as the prophet Isaiah foretold, makes a safe place for victims:

*He will not crush the weakest reed
or put out a flickering candle.
He will bring justice to all who have been wronged. (Isaiah 42:3)*

Take a moment for quiet communion with your Savior. Ask the Lord to reveal His care for you through the account of Joseph's abuse and recovery. And pray that He will redeem your past, heal your wounds, then help you see His perfect plan for your life.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Let's dig into Scripture to discover what happened to Joseph when he was tested and how he responded to the tests. In the following chart, we've listed several ways he was victimized along with the corresponding biblical accounts. Read the passages to find out the details of the story and write down under the *Victimization* heading any other descriptors that come to mind.



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

Genesis Reference	Account	Victimization
37:3–4	Joseph’s brothers hated him because their father loved him best and made a special robe for him.	<u>Hatred</u> <u>Jealousy</u>
37:5–11	Joseph’s dreams turned his brothers against him.	<u>Bullying</u>
37:12–24	His brothers planned to kill Joseph and hide his body in a cistern.	<u>Conspiracy to murder</u> <u>Threats</u> <u>Assault</u>



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

<p>37:25–36</p>	<p>His brothers sold Joseph to Midianite traders, who transported him to Egypt where he was sold. The brothers lied to their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.</p>	<p><u>Enslavement</u></p> <p><u>Rejection</u></p> <p><u>Betrayal</u></p> <p><u>Cover-up</u></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>39–40</p>	<p>Potiphar’s wife accused Joseph of rape, so Potiphar threw him into prison. Another prisoner forgot his promise to help him when released.</p>	<p><u>False accusation</u></p> <p><u>Unjust imprisonment</u></p> <p><u>Forgotten</u></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

In just a few years, Joseph suffered almost every conceivable form of abuse that humans inflict on one another. From favored son to forgotten prisoner in a foreign land, Joseph was in a pit so deep he could not escape and there was no one who could rescue him. His father who loved him thought him dead, and his brothers didn’t care if he were dead. His only hope was the Lord.

 **Observation: God’s Grace toward Joseph**

A key technique in the *Searching the Scriptures* process is to use your imagination to enter a biblical scene.¹ For the next few moments, with your mind’s eye, picture a cavern in an underground Egyptian dungeon. Step into the filthy, dimly lit, stifling-hot chamber with Joseph the prisoner, and hear him recount his story.



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

For thirteen years, young Joseph suffered physical and mental abuse, mistreatment, and rejection beyond what most people could endure. “I was kidnapped from my homeland,” Joseph said, “the land of the Hebrews, and now I’m here in prison, but I did nothing to deserve it” (Genesis 40:15).

Can you sense the emotion in Joseph’s words? Imagine what a resentful, angry person might say to you if he or she were in Joseph’s situation. What thoughts might he or she express about the offender? About God?

God wraps victims in His arms of compassion and grace. Read *Isaiah 61:1–3*, imagining the Lord saying these words of hope to you. What phrases of comfort stand out in this passage for you?

At each stage of Joseph’s lonely saga, God blessed him with reminders of His presence. How did God bless Joseph in Potiphar’s house (Genesis 39:2–6)?



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

In prison, how did God bless Joseph (*Genesis 39:21–23*)?

Although all others abandoned him, “the LORD was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love” (39:21). God was extending grace to Joseph so when the time was right, Joseph had the resources to extend grace to his abusers.

In the mind of Joseph, there is a relationship with the living God that is so significant that none of the evil things happening to him blot it out. Hear me on this. It’s a remarkable thing, but it’s the background of grace. His relationship to God was greater than any of the punishment he was living with. His confidence in God’s plan was broader, deeper, bigger than anything anyone had ever done to him. —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Joseph’s Grace toward His Brothers

In the interpretation phase of Bible study, we look for the meaning of the narrative. What lessons did the author want his original audience to learn about God and how we relate to others who have harmed us? As you reflect on Joseph’s account, draw out three principles that capture the meaning of the passage and can be applied in any generation.

Joseph: When He Suffered

If Joseph could speak from his prison cell about his relationship with God through his suffering, what life principle might he give you based on what you know about Joseph from your study so far? Use this principle as you teach this story to others.



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

Principle One: Relating to God through Suffering

Joseph: When He Was Tested

Finally, after two years in prison, a rescue party arrived for Joseph when his ex-prison mate mentioned his name to Pharaoh who called on him to interpret his dreams. God revealed the interpretation through Joseph to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh was so pleased that he made Joseph second-in-command over all of Egypt. Read [Genesis 41:1–46](#).

On wings of heavenly grace, Joseph rose out of the *pit* to the *pinnacle*. He prospered and had two sons: Manasseh and Ephraim. What did the births of these two boys signify to Joseph? The answer is in the meaning of their names ([Genesis 41:50–52](#)).

Although his pain was behind him, *Joseph's greatest test lay just ahead* when his brothers arrived disheveled, desperate, and starving because of a famine. They came to Egypt for the grain that Joseph had wisely stored for such a season.

As Joseph's brothers entered his ornate chamber, "they bowed before him with their faces to the ground" (42:6). Joseph's adolescent prophetic dream had become reality! At his feet begging for food were the same heartless brothers who turned a deaf ear when Joseph was at their feet begging for his life (42:21).

Would Joseph take revenge? Would he do to his brothers as they had done to him? Did Joseph lick his lips at the opportunity to crush his brothers? How tempting is the elixir of revenge—the intoxicating swill of power when you return hurt for hurt and show no mercy when your offender pleads for it.



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

You may be in a testing period like Joseph, caught in the emotional middle between the pain from the past and the relief of moving forward. Read the way he dealt with his brothers in Genesis 42–45 and, specifically, his emotional outbursts in [Genesis 42:21–24](#); [43:29–31](#); and [45:1–2](#). What principle does Joseph’s tears teach about the importance of working through emotions in the process of forgiveness? How would you communicate this principle to others?

Principle Two: The Process of Forgiveness

Joseph: How He Responded

Eventually, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers. As you read the passage, record in the space below the many times that Joseph focused on the sovereign plan of God. Also note the ways that Joseph extended grace to his undeserving brothers and their families. Read [Genesis 45:1–15](#); [47:1–12](#).

After Jacob died, Joseph’s brothers became afraid that Joseph might finally take his revenge. Joseph reassured his offenders with the following grace-filled, God-trusting message—a model for anyone who has been a victim:

“Don’t be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. No, don’t be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children.” So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them. (Genesis 50:19–21, emphasis added)



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

Like Joseph, we too can often see God’s plan at work within our victimization—without justifying or excusing the wrong but by honoring God and His redeeming power. Write a final principle based on what Joseph’s account teaches you about extending grace to your offender.

Principle Three: Extending Grace to My Offender



Correlation: Bible Exposition

Like Joseph’s imprisonment, perhaps your own victimization has been like staring at the four walls of a prison cell. And like Joseph, you did nothing to deserve mistreatment, yet it struck you down. We should emulate Joseph’s model of forgiveness and grace. In the correlation phase of Bible study, we look for similar teaching in other passages. What does *Romans 12:17–21* say about restraining revenge and extending grace?



Application: Throw away Your Book of Revenge

The offenses in your book of revenge may include a business partner who stole money from you. A friend who made a joke about you in public. An employer who fired you because a coworker pinned his or her mistakes on you. A person you tried to help who accused you of things you never did. You may bear the consequences of someone else’s sin, such as a spouse’s adultery or a parent’s alcoholism. The list could go on and on.



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

As you consider how to release offenses and extend grace, keep in mind the following guidelines:

- *When someone is afraid you will retaliate, extend grace by not doing so.*
- *When you have the authority to punish someone for hurting you, extend grace by refusing to play God and enact your own vengeance.*
- *When you recognize the wrong done against you, extend grace by realizing that God can redeem an act of evil for your ultimate good.*

Reflect on Joseph’s life story, the three principles you wrote previously, and the three guidelines above. What action is God leading you to take as you respond to those who have offended you?

The same grace that frees you from bitterness enables you to see God’s sovereign hand *through it all*. Allow Joseph’s words to his brothers to assure you that God can work in your life despite suffering. Keep his words in mind as you follow God’s plan through your hardship: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good” (Genesis 50:20).



A FINAL PRAYER

Dear Father, I am surrounded by hateful people who sometimes target me. Help me to learn from Joseph the important power of extending grace to those who do not deserve it. Just as Joseph showed grace, help me to show grace. Just as Jesus forgave, help me to forgive. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. We recommend you purchase Chuck’s *book Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* if you do not already have a copy. You can also read Chuck’s *Searching the Scriptures* introductions on sts.insight.org.



Extending Grace

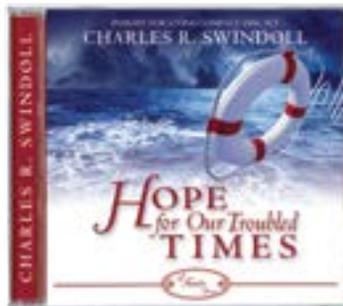
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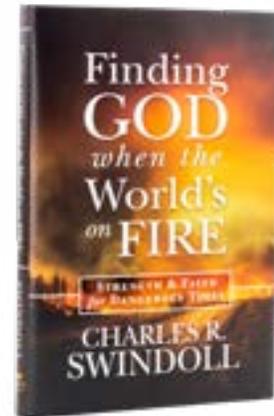
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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

