

JOSEPH: A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND FORGIVENESS

A Classic Series

Favored Son, Hated Brother

Genesis 37



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The biography of Joseph is nothing short of remarkable, occupying as much or more space in Genesis than the biographies of Adam, Noah, Abraham, or even Joseph's father, Jacob. Joseph emerges from the pages of Scripture as a man with whom most of us can identify. His story begins at age 17 and ends at age 110 (Genesis 50:26). Over his long life, Joseph responded to broken dreams and impossible circumstances with a faith that propelled him from the pit of slavery to the pinnacle of power. In this message, we'll meet Joseph on the cusp of the pit and gain insight into the dangers of being a favorite son of a passive father.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Background Information (Genesis 37:1–11)

Joseph's home was anything but a place of shelter. In fact, it was a storm center of activity. To make sense of the hurricane that swept over Joseph's life, we must first understand that it originated in the character of his father, Jacob. Except for a few brief interludes of piety, Jacob couldn't be trusted. Unfortunately, his lack of integrity and his passivity had dire consequences for his family.

Jacob had two wives, Leah and Rachel, and he loved Rachel more. The result: a rivalry that led to a childbearing competition (Genesis 29:30), which involved two concubines. If you do the math, you get one husband, two wives, two concubines, four mothers, eleven sons, and one daughter—adding up to jealousy, anger, deceit, and secrecy.

By the time Joseph came along, Jacob was no longer a young man. After twenty years of toil and deception while working in Haran for Laban, Jacob took his family back to his homeland, Canaan. But on the way to Canaan, in Shechem, Jacob's daughter Dinah was raped. And Jacob did *nothing*! To make up for Jacob's passivity, Dinah's brothers killed the man who raped her, along with every man in the city (34:3–26).



Quotable

If you are a passive parent, you will discipline your child in anger. Take an active role in all aspects of your relationship.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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In the midst of family strife and passivity, Jacob added more fuel to the fire—he showed favoritism to Joseph, the son of his favorite wife, Rachel. Secure in his position as the most-loved son, Joseph boasted about a dream in which he ruled over his brothers (Genesis 37:5–8). The result: Joseph’s brothers *hated* him!

2. A Plan to Kill Joseph (Genesis 37:12–25)

As with any good shepherd, Jacob knew how to read the sky, but he couldn’t discern the danger brewing within his own family. Though Jacob expressed some concern as he watched the interactions between his sons, he did *nothing* to dispel the darkening clouds of hatred and jealousy surrounding Joseph. Instead, Jacob sent Joseph *alone* to check on his brothers—straight into the eye of the storm. Joseph’s brothers saw him coming, wearing the fancy coat Jacob had given him, and started planning their attack.

Their first plan was to kill Joseph. But Reuben persuaded them to put him *alive* in a pit, secretly intending to come back and rescue Joseph (Genesis 37:21–22). So when Joseph reached his brothers, they seized him, stripped off his robe, and threw him into a muddy cistern. Then they coolly sat down to eat lunch (37:23–25).



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3. A Caravan to Egypt (Genesis 37:25–36)

Sometime between the capture of Joseph and the meal, Reuben left. He didn't have an opportunity to intervene when Judah had the bright idea of enriching himself by selling Joseph into slavery.

While the brothers ate their lunch, they noticed a caravan of Ishmaelite traders passing by. Judah convinced the brothers to sell Joseph for twenty pieces of silver (Genesis 37:25–28). To deceive their father, the brothers ripped up Joseph's fancy coat and dipped it into goat's blood. Believing his son had been killed by a wild animal, Jacob mourned deeply (37:29–35).

While Jacob grieved, the Ishmaelite traders took Joseph to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard (37:36)



A CLOSER LOOK

Dealing with Jealousy

From the beginning, Joseph was his father's favorite—the son of Jacob's old age and of Jacob's beloved Rachel. But Joseph was also favored because he was faithful and righteous, unlike his brothers. Jacob determined that Joseph would receive the blessing—a choice confirmed by God, who gave Joseph divine dreams and their interpretations (Genesis 37:5–11). The envious brothers hated Joseph and plotted to kill him, but they settled instead on selling Joseph to an Egypt-bound caravan (37:19–28). The brothers' reaction to God's choice is like a boney finger poking us in the sternum. When we are passed over for a promotion or fail to win the praise of those we respect, our natural reaction is to express jealousy or hatred. But when jealousy creeps into our souls, we should confess and resist revenge, remembering God's ways are higher than our ways. In contentment we can learn to rejoice in God's choice.



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Genesis 37



LET'S LIVE IT

Imagine walking in Joseph's sandals. You're only 17 years old, and your siblings throw you into a pit and then sell you as a slave. We'll probably never know such hatred, but we can learn four important lessons from Joseph's experience.

First, *no family is exempt from adversity*. Every family is unique, but we all have one thing in common—we all have to deal with adversity and family conflict.

Second, *no enemy is more subtle than passivity*. Most passive parents avoid conflict until one day they explode in anger, propelling their kids toward anger and hatred.

Three, *no response is more cruel than jealousy*. If we let the seed of jealousy take root in our children, it will uproot family harmony and unity. Parents must weed out negativity in our kids and never forget to water our children with praise when they display positive attitudes.

Four, *no condition is more unfair than slavery*. Joseph didn't deserve to be enslaved and cut off from his family. But God knew exactly where Joseph was, and He was preparing to raise Joseph from the pit of slavery to the pinnacle of power.

If you are a parent, do you tend to favor one child over another? Why? Have you experienced favoritism? How did it make you feel?



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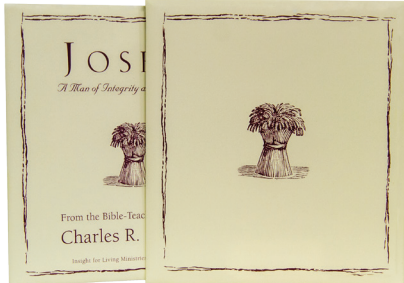
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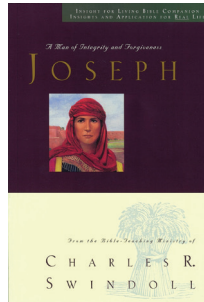
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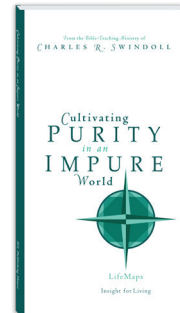
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Resisting Temptation

Genesis 39:1–20



LET'S BEGIN HERE

When it comes to temptation, our culture offers very little motivation to resist it. More often than not, we hear voices yelling, “Give in! You deserve to be happy!” Truly, yielding to temptation is much easier than resisting it. But for those who yield, the path of life is strewn with the litter of remorse and shame. Their souls grow sick, not for longing to taste forbidden fruit but because the fruit made them sick. If we wish to avoid such soul sickness, we must resist temptation. But how? Joseph provides a sterling example of one who could have cuddled lust and enjoyed its warm embrace but instead chose to resist its persistent, alluring offer in favor of righteousness. Let those of us who stand today take heed, lest we fall tomorrow.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. The Historical Situation (Genesis 39:1–6)

Every person who has cast a shadow upon the earth, including Jesus, has faced temptation. And every person who has ever lived, except Christ, has yielded to it. Temptation's appeal to our desires is lust disguised with many different masks. *Material temptation* is the lust for things. *Personal temptation* is the lust for status. *Sensual temptation* is the lust for physical pleasure. This message will address sensual temptation.

We live in a sex-saturated society. We can't escape that fact. And though we try to avoid it, temptation surrounds us. Our society resembles the society in which Joseph lived. So if we want to resist sensual temptation like Joseph, we must examine his response in Genesis 39.

After Joseph began working for Potiphar, Potiphar noticed that the Lord was with Joseph, giving him success. Potiphar, a shrewd man who recognized Joseph's diligence and trustworthiness, promoted Joseph to manager of all his business and household affairs. But behind Joseph's success—his increased responsibility, trust, and freedom—lurked great danger.



Quotable

In resisting temptation, don't allow the immediate results to confuse you. Think long-term.

—Charles R. Swindoll



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Resisting Temptation

Genesis 39:1–20

2. The Sensual Temptation (Genesis 39:7–12)

Joseph was a handsome young man, and his position put him in the path of a woman whose only desire was to seduce him. When Mrs. Potiphar pursued Joseph with a very direct approach—“lie with me” (Genesis 39:7)—Joseph responded with an equally straightforward and abrupt refusal. Joseph must have been acutely aware of the consequences of succumbing to sexual temptation. Joseph refused to violate his master’s trust and, more important, sin against God (39:9).

But Mrs. Potiphar wasn’t persuaded by Joseph’s reasoning. She kept pursuing Joseph day after day and always when they were alone (39:10–11). With each advance, Joseph refused. But one day, Mrs. Potiphar resorted to more than just words . . . she grabbed him (39:12). So Joseph ran.

When we face sensual temptation, we can’t reason with it. We can’t even stand there and quote Bible verses. All we can do is run! If we stay, we will probably give in.

3. The Personal Ramifications (Genesis 39:13–20).

We might assume that once Joseph made it outdoors, having overcome temptation, he would have heard angels singing his praises and would have experienced peace. Instead, he heard the screams of rage and revenge—Mrs. Potiphar’s accusation of rape—hurling him from the heights as Potiphar’s overseer to the depths as Potiphar’s prisoner.

Imagine how Joseph must have felt! He had never read the book of Genesis, so he didn’t know how it would all turn out. All he knew was that he had done the right thing and he ended up in jail. But God accompanied him and prospered him. Just as he ruled over Potiphar’s house, so Joseph gained a leadership position in prison (Genesis 39:21–23).



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Resisting Temptation

Genesis 39:1–20



A CLOSER LOOK

The Danger of Internet Pornography

There is no greater danger to an idle mind than the Internet. Though it has potential to enrich our thinking, it has the power to corrupt it as well. Each month thousands of new pornographic sites are created. Don't be fooled into thinking that just one look won't hurt or that your behavior is harmless. Like a spider's web, the images stick in the mind, trapping victims until their life is sucked out by the spider of addiction.

And let's not make the mistake of assuming that the web of pornography allures only men. Women are often attracted to the flickering light of virtual sex too. And given the right set of emotional conditions, exchanges with an anonymous man via e-mail can evolve into much more. An emotional affair, fed by false intimacy, incubated in the secrecy and anonymity of cyberspace, can stifle a pure mind just as quickly as lurid images.

If you or someone you love is caught in the web of sexual sin, don't be deceived into believing that these habits will just go away. Address them directly. A variety of excellent books, support groups, and counseling programs exist to help people recover from the devastation and shame of sexual sin. Additionally, Insight for Living Ministries provides the services of pastoral counselors. You can correspond with one of our pastors using the contact information below.

Insight for Living Ministries
Biblical Counseling Department
Post Office Box 5000
Frisco, Texas 75034-0055
972-473-5097 (Monday through Friday,
8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. central time)
www.insight.org/contactapastor



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Resisting Temptation

Genesis 39:1–20



LET'S LIVE IT

Joseph's life provides us with four important insights to help us say no when our lust says yes.

First, *don't be weakened by your situation.*

Second, *don't be deceived by persuasion.*

Third, *don't be gentle with your emotions.*

Fourth, *don't be confused by the immediate results.*

Under what circumstances are you most vulnerable to sensual temptation? Do you make yourself accountable to people who can spot a lie and who will call you out on it?



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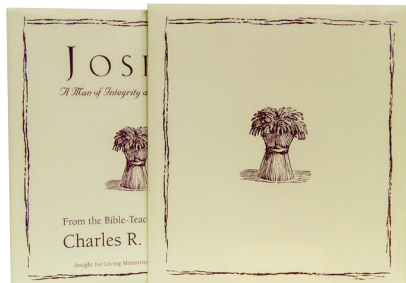
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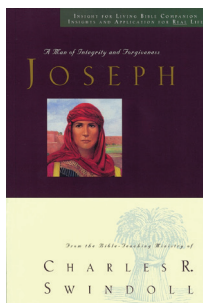
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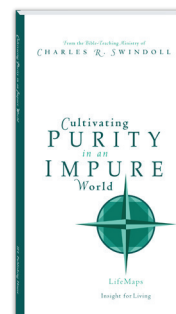
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Imprisoned and Forgotten

Genesis 39:19–40:23



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Joseph drifted like a lost raft on the ocean—sold into slavery, forced to learn a new language and lifestyle, accused of attempted rape, and finally dumped into prison. On top of all of this, even though he lived as a model prisoner deserving early release, the one man who could have requested his pardon totally forgot him. That hurts!

The pain of unjust suffering—one of the most severe trials we can experience—tests our faith like nothing else. In our world today, we can't escape it. As difficult as injustice is to endure, the greater challenge is facing it with an attitude that preserves faith. For the most part, we can't control what happens to us today or tomorrow, whether fair or foul. But we *can* choose our attitude.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Mistreatment: Common to Everyone

Joseph did the right thing yet suffered unjustly. From freedom to slavery to imprisonment, Joseph progressively lost his liberty. Everything about Joseph's situation pointed to the conclusion that God had forgotten him. As a result of his circumstances, Joseph had only one freedom left—the freedom to choose his attitude.

During his life, Joseph experienced several types of mistreatment:

Undeserved treatment from family. Face it—human beings are not perfect! Even the healthiest families experience the pain of mistreatment among their members. As the object of his brothers' cruelty, Joseph knew this pain well.

Unexpected restrictions from circumstances. Sometimes we feel limited by people or situations beyond our control. Joseph understood the weight of the manacles of slavery and imprisonment.



Quotable

Even when we are wronged, you are never forgotten or abandoned by God. He has a bigger plan we simply cannot see.

—Charles R. Swindoll



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Imprisoned and Forgotten

Genesis 39:19–40:23

Untrue accusations from people. All of us have suffered the mistreatment of a wagging tongue. The tongue is truly a fire (James 3:5–6). One careless spark can ignite an inferno that will blaze a path of destruction. Mrs. Potiphar lied and falsely accused Joseph of attempted rape, and Joseph ended up in jail.

2. Imprisonment: Joseph in Jail (Genesis 39:20–40:22)

The Bible is not a book of fantasy or fiction. It chronicles the lives of real people in real-life situations. Only two messages into Joseph's biography and already he has endured abuse from his brothers, the injustice of slavery, and the loss of reputation from slander. Now he's fallen to the very bottom of the pit—the dungeons of Egypt.

A false accusation landed Joseph in prison, and though he had to live with the physical restrictions, Joseph didn't have to live under emotional or spiritual confinement. Joseph chose to trust in God. As a result, God used Joseph strategically in the lives of two important men—Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker.

Sometime after Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker were thrown into prison with Joseph, they both had startling dreams. Joseph assured these men that the interpretation of dreams belonged to God, and Joseph offered to help them (Genesis 40:5–8). After interpreting the dreams of his fellow prisoners, Joseph asked the cupbearer to put in a good word for him with the king (40:14). Unfortunately, the cupbearer forgot all about Joseph.



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Genesis 39:19–40:23

3. Abandonment: Joseph Forgotten (Genesis 40:23)

Joseph had always trusted in God, but now he also trusted in man. And like everyone who has hung his or her hope on others, Joseph was abandoned, cast into the abyss of the forgotten.

After Joseph faithfully helped his friend, Pharaoh's cupbearer, he sat in prison for two whole years. We can make several important observations about Joseph's situation:

First, *Joseph was abandoned by a friend*. If the enemy abandons you, who cares? What else would you expect? But when a friend forgets you, it cuts deeply.

Second, *Joseph's abandonment lasted for a lengthy period of time*. Joseph didn't have to wait a few days or a few weeks but two full years. From his perspective, it probably felt like a lifetime.

Earlier we addressed three types of mistreatment. Now we can add a fourth: *unfair treatment by one we've helped*. Our natural response to this kind of mistreatment is to feel disillusioned and betrayed—first by the friend who abandoned us, then by God.



A CLOSER LOOK

The Test of Abandonment

In Potiphar's house, Joseph passed the purity test. In prison, he faced another: the faith test. The exam came in the form of a dream-interpretation sequence. Joseph passed this test when he testified that interpretations belong to God and when the interpretation Joseph offered came true. However, just because Joseph made an A+ on the faith test didn't mean the Lord was through with him. Joseph also had to pass the patience test; the cupbearer's neglect meant Joseph would remain in prison indefinitely. For many people, the patience test is the hardest exam of all. God often waits to promote His people to the next level of responsibility until after He has tested their faith in His promises, and such tests often involve discouraging situations during periods of waiting. It's the few who remain faithful and patient, particularly when life seems unfair, who prove their spiritual maturity and their readiness for God's next assignment.



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Genesis 39:19–40:23



LET'S LIVE IT

We all know the pain of disillusionment, but if we understand its cause and cure, we can avoid the attitude of cynicism.

First, *the cause of disillusionment is putting our hope and trust in people*. When we put fallible people on pedestals, we allow them to take the place of God. When they fail us, disillusionment sets in.

Next, *the cure for disillusionment is putting our hope and trust in the living Lord*. God knows just the right message to give us at just the right time, no matter what dungeon we're living in. All it takes is a sensitive heart, not one preoccupied with revenge, bitterness, hostility, or getting even but one that puts complete trust in God's sovereign plan.

Have you experienced one of the types of mistreatment explained above? How did that experience affect your relationship with God? Are you still harboring bitterness?



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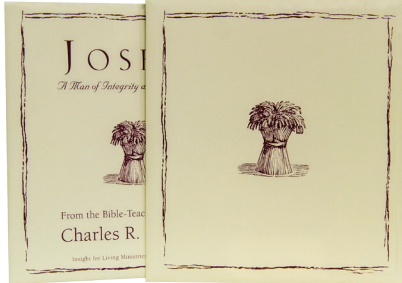
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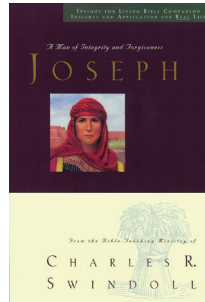
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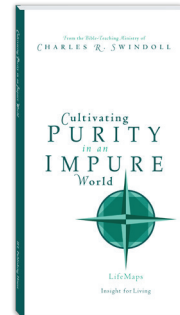
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JOSEPH: A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND FORGIVENESS

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Remembered and Promoted

Genesis 41:1–46



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Affliction, mistreatment, persecution, hardship, and pain often characterize the Christian walk. We see that truth in Peter's words: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12).

In life, testing is more often than not "par for the course." But sometimes God rescues us from our plight, bringing us into new circumstances. For thirteen years Joseph had been a slave in Egypt. But God was faithful; He never abandoned Joseph. And all the while, His plans for Joseph were in motion, leading Joseph to the cusp of his release from prison and an unexpected blessing. Through Joseph's example, we should be encouraged to trust God—even in difficult times of waiting.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. The Test: Darkness before Dawn (Genesis 40:23–41:1)

When life seems hopeless, the promises of God resonate in our hearts, giving us hope.

When the cupbearer returned to his trusted position, he immediately forgot about Joseph. For two years Joseph waited in prison, hoping the cupbearer would remember him and mention his name to Pharaoh.

So what happened during those two years? Why did God let that happen? The Lord was stoking the fire, burning away the impurities in Joseph's character, preparing Joseph for a new ministry.



Quotable

*Affliction is
gold in the
making for the
child of God.
He alone
determines the
timing.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Remembered and Promoted

Genesis 41:1–46

2. The Turning Point: Pharaoh's Dream (Genesis 41:1–36)

More than seven hundred mornings and evenings had come and gone since the day Joseph interpreted the cupbearer's dream. This morning dawned with no more promise than the ones before, but it would be the day when his life would change forever. Ironically, the change came about as the result of another dream.

As Joseph woke to face another monotonous day, Pharaoh awoke with his mind reeling over two dreams. Troubled by his dreams, Pharaoh called the magicians and wise men to interpret his dreams. When none of them could discern the dreams' meanings, the cupbearer finally remembered his friend Joseph who had accurately deciphered his dream. Pharaoh wasted no time—he immediately called for Joseph. After Joseph revealed the coming famine, he proposed a food storage and distribution plan to save the Egyptian empire from ruin. Now, Pharaoh needed a man of wisdom to execute this plan.

3. The Reward: Joseph's Promotion (Genesis 41:27–46)

Not once did Joseph ask for the job of overseer. Not once did he seek his freedom. Not once did he even mention the injustice done to him. Joseph spoke directly, honestly, for the glory of God. Though the young Hebrew never placed himself among the “discerning and wise” (Genesis 41:33), Pharaoh clearly saw his insight and skill. Pharaoh recognized Joseph's God-given qualities, the very ones needed to oversee the task of saving, storing, and distributing food (41:37–39). Then, in one unexpected move, Pharaoh promoted Joseph to the position of overseer of the food distribution program, as well as to the position of prime minister over the entire land of Egypt (41:40–46). Within the span of a few short moments, Joseph went from the pit to the pinnacle.



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JOSEPH: A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND FORGIVENESS

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Genesis 41:1–46



A CLOSER LOOK

The Source of Blessing

“God wants your life to be easy; He wants you to enjoy health and wealth right now. Prosperity, after all, is a sign of your faithfulness and God’s unique favor. . . .”

So say many preachers today.

Then why is life so hard? Why do Christians struggle with illness, financial difficulties, broken relationships, and more? The pat answer by the hucksters of prosperity preaching is to blame it on our own lack of faith. But if God’s plan is to make our lives easy, then someone forgot to tell Jesus! No one was more faithful to the will of God than Christ (Luke 22:42). And no one experienced suffering like He did (23:1–56).

Don’t be deceived, God will not be reduced to a dispenser of pills and bills. He is the sovereign Creator and King of the universe, and He can do as He pleases (Isaiah 45:9; 64:8). He may choose to reward His children with large bank accounts, business successes, or some other material blessings, but *He is under no obligation*. On the other hand, our world is a fallen, sinful place. God may allow His children to live in poverty, to deal with illness, or to suffer persecution as His own Son did. Regardless, we are to remain faithful. We can trust that His ultimate plan for our lives is in motion. And He has promised that His mercy and grace will sustain us (1 Peter 4:19).



LET’S LIVE IT

Joseph’s promotion was incredible! But let’s not focus on the signet ring and gold necklace he wore and forget the gold character it adorned. Joseph’s character, which had been forged in the fires of his lonely prison cell, reveals two important lessons for us.

First, *during the waiting period, trust God without panic*. We must learn to trust God to handle the cupbearers in our lives. Even if others forget or reject us, we should remain faithful to the God who will never forget or reject us. He loves us enough to use waiting to build character.



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Second, *during the time of reward, thank God without pride*. As we wait during the dungeon times of life, God strips away our pride. We spend hours asking God for endurance and promise to thank and glorify Him when we regain our liberty. But when the cell door swings open, we should resist the temptation to forget the suffering and waiting or believe we deserve the good that we have received. Instead, we must stay on our knees, thanking God for His blessing.

Have you experienced long periods of waiting where nothing seems to happen . . . or at least not quickly enough? How did you feel during that time—about yourself and about God?



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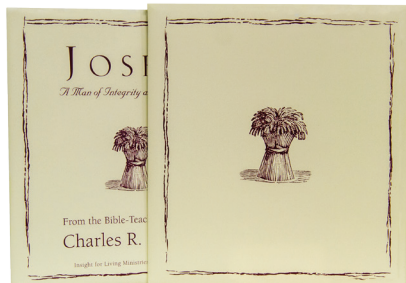
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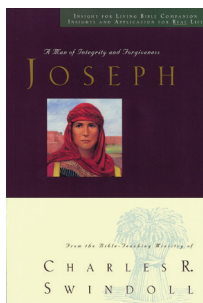
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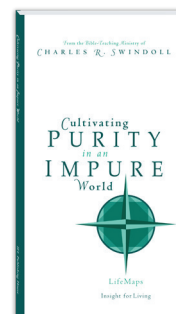
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JOSEPH: A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND FORGIVENESS

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Reaping the Rewards of Righteousness

Genesis 41:41–57



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Christians are notoriously negative. Usually we focus on the difficulties, the pressures, and the problems of walking with God rather than the benefits and blessings of a relationship with Him. Praying and trusting are hard work. Resisting temptation isn't much fun either. And though most would never admit it, we've all thought at one time or another that godliness doesn't pay—at least not in tangible ways. When we see Christians prosper, we tend to raise our eyebrows and become suspicious of their faith. It just doesn't seem "spiritual" to prosper. God is never obligated to give us health and wealth, but the story of Joseph is an example of a man who was rewarded for his righteousness and kept his integrity intact. From him we can learn a lesson in how to respond to those who prosper and those who suffer.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. A Brief Review

If Joseph were a Christian friend of ours, he and his family would be on our prayer list. We would dispatch pastors and counselors to comfort his grief-stricken father. We might even collect clothes for him and send a Bible to his prison cell.

Praying and comforting would seem like the least we could do for a friend who has the difficulties Joseph endured. His brothers abandoned him, he had to adjust to life as a slave, and finally he was falsely accused of a horrendous crime and ended up in jail. But would we pray as fervently for our friend if he were suddenly promoted to a position of power? Or would we point a boney finger and warn him of the dangers of wealth and power?



Quotable

*Some, by
the grace
of God, become
incredibly
significant for an
age that longs
for heroes.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Reaping the Rewards of Righteousness

Genesis 41:41–57

2. A Man Restored (Genesis 41:41–57)

Released from his dungeon cell, Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream and immediately received a new position, new authority, a new name, a new wife, and a new life in Egypt.

Pharaoh gave Joseph *territorial authority* over the whole land of Egypt, a land of natural resources, commerce, and wealth. Pharaoh also gave Joseph his signet ring and *financial authority* to buy anything he wished. Joseph also received *public authority*, including a government-issued chariot and bodyguards who commanded the public to bow as he passed (Genesis 41:43). Next to Pharaoh, Joseph was the most powerful man in Egypt (41:44).

Joseph had it all, or so it seemed. But his Hebrew name likely caused some suspicion to grow in the minds of the average Egyptians. So Pharaoh gave Joseph a new name, Zaphenath-paneah, and a wife, "Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On" (41:45).

We have noted Joseph's newfound outward power and prestige, but can we tell what was going on in his heart? In naming his sons, Joseph used a play on words, revealing his true nature. The boys' names were Hebrew names and commemorated God's provision, revealing Joseph's continued hope and trust in the Lord. He named the first son Manasseh because God made him forget the trials he endured at the hands of his brothers (41:51). He named his second son Ephraim because God had made Joseph fruitful in the land he entered as a slave (41:52).



GETTING TO THE ROOT

A New Name

Ancient names were usually selected not because the parents favored a particular name but because names held meaning. Often they memorialized an important event or revealed something about the person's character. For example, Yoseph (Joseph) is closely linked to two Hebrew verbs: *'asaf* and *yosef*—"to take away" and "to add."¹ At Joseph's birth, Rachel declared, "God has taken away my reproach" (Genesis 30:23). Then she prayed, "May [YHAWEH] give me another son" (30:24).

Renaming was equally significant, and it was common practice (Genesis 17:3–5, 15; 32:27–28; Daniel 1:7; Matthew 16:17–18; Acts 13:9). For Joseph, his new name, Zaphenath-paneah, was an attempt to erase his Hebrew background. Literally, Zaphenath-paneah is translated, "the god speaks and he lives," from the root word *nath*.² In his way of thinking, Pharaoh may have been honoring the Egyptian goddess Neith for giving Joseph the ability to interpret dreams.

Interestingly, the Bible never again refers to Joseph as Zaphenath-paneah.



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Reaping the Rewards of Righteousness

Genesis 41:41–57



LET'S LIVE IT

Though Joseph had the trappings of high office, he wasn't pompous, and he didn't abuse his authority. Very few of us will ever have Joseph's power and outward prosperity, but we can cultivate his integrity and solid character by learning these three lessons.

First, *lengthy affliction need not discourage us*. Imagine the emotional and physical anguish Joseph endured during his thirteen years of unrelenting hardship. And yet, Joseph didn't allow discouragement to imprison his heart. He maintained his hope by focusing on God and committing his life to Him.

Second, *bad memories need not defeat us*. Joseph was the ideal candidate for bitterness. But Joseph didn't let these memories keep him in the pit of despair and anger.

Third, *great blessings need not disqualify us*. Many Christians wrestle with discouragement and bitter memories and remain committed to God. But those who are wealthy by the world's standards may even face a tougher challenge as they seek to keep their eyes focused on the Lord. But as Joseph shows us, wealthy Christians can also be wealthy by God's standards.

In your own words, define *prosperity*. What is your attitude toward Christians who are rich by the world's standards? What can you do to encourage, affirm, and pray for the "Josephs" in your life?

ENDNOTES

1. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 62, 414–15.
2. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, eds., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 861.



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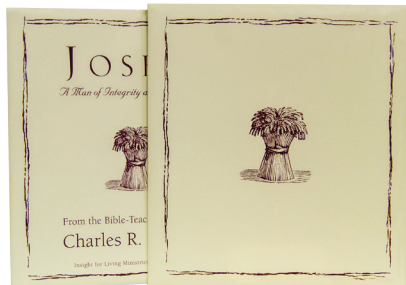
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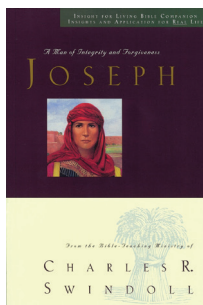
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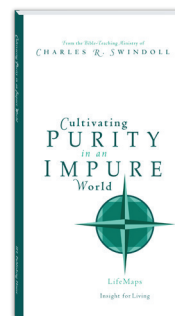
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Activating a Seared Conscience

Genesis 42:1–28



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Are you the type of person who remembers what you ought to forget and forgets what you ought to remember? Think about that provocative question for a moment. Joseph had many years to ponder his answer. After seven years of blessing and abundance, the famine was in full bloom. People from the surrounding lands came to Egypt for grain—including Joseph's brothers. Upon recognizing the men who threw him into a pit and sold him as a slave, Joseph faced a difficult decision. Should he review his mental blacklist or shred it? Should he punish or forgive? Would he be the type of person who remembers what he ought to forget and forgets what he ought to remember? Are you?



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. A Famine in Canaan (Genesis 42:1–5)

Seven bountiful years brought Egyptian granaries to overflowing (Genesis 41:49). But now, few crops grew in the sunbaked soil, and what managed to break through was burned up under the scorching sun. The long-predicted famine had arrived, and it had two important qualities. It was *widespread*, not limited (41:54, 56–57), and it was *severe*, not slight (41:55–57).

Sweeping out of Egypt and into surrounding areas, the cruelty of the famine reached Canaan, stealing food from the mouths of Joseph's family. So ten of Joseph's brothers packed their bags and left, leaving behind Benjamin because Jacob worried that something might happen to him on the journey (42:3–5).

As we follow the path of Jacob's sons, keep in mind that neither they nor Jacob knew what had become of Joseph. They only had one assignment: bring back groceries. Sitting in his plush office in Egypt, Joseph had no idea that the brothers who had sold him into slavery were on their way to buy grain from him. Their encounter would change their lives forever.



Quotable

*God often
awakens our
conscience when
we experience
similar treatment
we once gave
someone else.*

—Charles R. Swindoll



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Activating a Seared Conscience

Genesis 42:1–28

2. An Encounter in Egypt (Genesis 42:6–28)

Egypt had become the soup kitchen for a starving world. Each week, thousands of hungry people stood in line, waiting to buy food from the wise prime minister who had shrewdly prepared for the seven-year famine.

Joseph's day began like any other day, looking at the gaunt faces of foreigners. Bowing and then standing before him, he saw ten bearded men clad in Hebrew garb, but these men looked familiar (Genesis 42:6). They were his brothers!

Joseph recognized his brothers, but they didn't recognize him. It had been more than twenty years since the brothers had last seen Joseph at the age of 17. While the Hebrews usually wore rough, handwoven clothing and maintained full beards, Joseph was clean-shaven and wore Egyptian linen. Joseph spoke Egyptian fluently, and he "spoke to them harshly" (42:6). No wonder they didn't recognize him!



A CLOSER LOOK

The Test

God is not in the business of blessing His wayward children; rather, He is in the business of bringing them to a point of blessing . . . through discipline. Suffering under the famine, Joseph's brothers journeyed to Egypt and bowed and stood before him to buy grain . . . and Joseph remembered his dream he had dreamed as a teenager (Genesis 42:1–9). Accusing them of spying, Joseph incarcerated his brothers. After three days, Joseph released all but Simeon, telling the brothers not to return unless they brought Benjamin with them. Joseph's test accomplished its desired result: the brothers finally acknowledged their sin (42:21–22). In the same way today, God will not let the consciences of the faithful rest until we deal with unresolved sin. And if He must use severe trials to break through our sin-hardened hearts, He will.



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Activating a Seared Conscience

Genesis 42:1–28



LET'S LIVE IT

Though most of us would hate to admit it, we usually act more like the brothers than like Joseph. But just as God awakened the consciences of these brothers, so God can rouse our own.

First, *God activates our seared consciences when we're victims of unfair treatment similar to what we once gave someone else.* Joseph accused the brothers of being spies, threw them into prison, and kept one from returning home. Sounds a lot like what Joseph endured at the hands of his brothers. And the soulful distress his brothers experienced reminded them of Joseph and began to stir their consciences.

Second, *God activates our seared consciences when we're recipients of undeserved expressions of grace.* As the prime minister of Egypt, Joseph could have given his brothers what they deserved—slavery and imprisonment. Instead, they received grain, money, and freedom. This act of grace finally roused their sleeping consciences.

Think of a time when you deserved punishment but received grace instead. How did it make you feel? Have you ever treated someone unfairly and later received similar treatment from someone else? How did you react?



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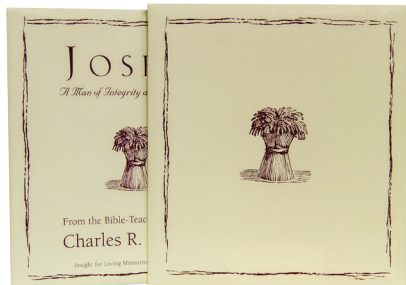
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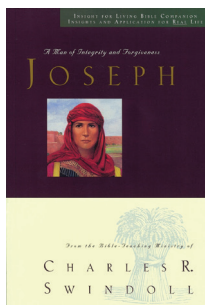
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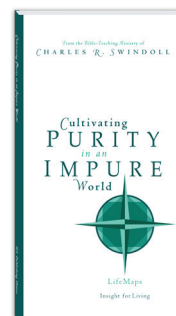
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LET'S BEGIN HERE

Have you ever accidentally dropped an open-faced peanut butter and jelly sandwich? In that split second before impact, your eyes widen with both childlike optimism and horror. You hope against hope that maybe, despite gravity and Murphy's Law, your little sandwich will be the miracle sandwich that lands right-side up. Maybe, oh just maybe . . . *splat!* Much of Jacob's life was just like that — peanut-butter-and-jelly-side-down. Though seasoned in walking with God, he remained a victim of his own carnal clumsiness. Instead of seeing the Lord's hand of protection on his sons' lives, he became paralyzed by fear, worry, and resentment. Jacob relied on himself rather than on God's strength. And his reluctance to trust God almost led to disaster. Sometimes we tend to be just like Jacob — expecting the worst rather than trusting God's best.

We all have days when an inexorable force seems to be thwarting and frustrating our every move. We wash the car, and it rains. We make a sandwich, turn around for a moment, and suddenly the plate is empty, the dog licking his chops. Stuff happens — and it's often out of our control. But we *can* control our response to it.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Natural Tendencies in All of Us

When we experience multiple, consecutive P-B-J-side-down days, it can feel like the world is against us. We often become defensive, closed-minded, and suspicious, following a three-step pattern that's deeply rooted in human nature.

First, we tend to respond *negatively* rather than *positively*. In the middle of a crisis, many people would throw a pity party rather than look to God to work in extraordinary ways.

Second, we tend to view problems *horizontally*, from a strictly human perspective, rather than *vertically*, from a godly perspective. If we do shift to a vertical view, it's usually *after* we've made things worse by trying to solve the problem ourselves.



Quotable

*Fathers, we
need our children
to feel free speak
to us. Why?
They often help
bring us back
to reality.*

—Charles R. Swindoll



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Third, we tend to *resist* what is new rather than *accept* it—especially if it seems to offer something for nothing. “There’s no such thing as a free lunch,” we’re told. So we remain suspicious of anything that sounds too good to be true.

If not dealt with, these natural tendencies will grow stronger as we get older. Jacob could testify to that. Even though he walked with God for well over a hundred years, he constantly undermined his faith by his negativism, horizontal thinking, and closed-mindedness.

2. Jacob’s Initial Resistance and Reluctance (Genesis 42:29–38)

Back in Jacob’s tent, nine sons had returned safely from buying grain in Egypt. But what should have been a happy occasion instead became morose.

As the boys unloaded their donkeys and shook the dust from their robes, Jacob must have been counting noses. One was missing—*Simeon*. After setting Jacob down, the brothers explained what had happened in Egypt (Genesis 42:29–34).

As the brothers poured out their grain, bundles of money tumbled out of each of their sacks. What a wonderful provision from the Lord! But did they praise God? Hardly. They were afraid (42:35).

Immediately, Jacob’s fear ran wild. He blamed his sons for the loss of Joseph and Simeon, and he felt distressed that they wanted to take Benjamin (42:36). If Jacob had slowed down to ponder the situation, perhaps he could have discerned the Lord’s hand. But he never did.

Reuben, the oldest son, sensing that Jacob was utterly resistant to letting Benjamin go, made a last-ditch appeal (42:37–38). But Jacob refused! Benjamin was all he had left from his beloved Rachel. Jacob couldn’t entertain the thought that Benjamin might be harmed.

3. Jacob’s Final Acceptance (Genesis 43:1–15)

Changing Jacob’s stubborn heart was no quick and easy task. But continued hardship has a way of peeling back layers of resistance. God had to peel away Jacob’s denial, delay, blame, and deceit to reveal Jacob’s tolerance, acceptance, guarded faith, and abandonment to God’s plan. Finally, Jacob came to the conclusion that Benjamin must accompany the brothers on the return trip to Egypt.



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GETTING TO THE ROOT

From Jacob to Israel

Jacob was renamed “Israel,” meaning “God strives,” after he wrestled with God (Genesis 32:22–32).¹ But as the biblical narrative continues, he is still referred to as “Jacob,” which means “deceiver.”² So why does the text in Genesis 43 suddenly begin calling him “Israel”? The name “Jacob” represents the patriarch’s propensity to doubt God’s faithfulness, while “Israel” reveals his headship over God’s chosen people. Though we see his suffering in Genesis 43, the primary focus of this passage is on his official role of instructing his sons and committing them to the care of El Shaddai, the Lord Almighty.



LET’S LIVE IT

Perhaps we shouldn’t be too hard on Jacob. We’ve all struggled against the undercurrents of negativism, a horizontal perspective, and resistance to new ideas. But we don’t have to go with the flow of our natural tendencies. We can swim upstream, if we learn to cultivate the following three habits.

First, *recognize and admit your negative mentality*. This may sound elementary, but if you’re going to major in godly thinking, no matter how smart you are, then confession is the first test you must pass.

Second, *force a vertical focus until it begins to flow*. Our natural tendency is to trust in ourselves, to look at life from the horizontal perspective. We can begin to cultivate a vertical focus by asking ourselves, “What is God trying to say to me in this situation?”

Third, *stay open to a new idea at least five minutes*. Once you make a hasty decision, your pride will do everything it can to keep you from backing down. Try holding off for five minutes before deciding whether to accept or reject a new idea, perspective, or proposal.

Do you tend toward negativity? What circumstances or challenges kept you from seeing God’s hand in the things that you couldn’t handle this week? This month?

ENDNOTES

1. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 975.
2. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 784.



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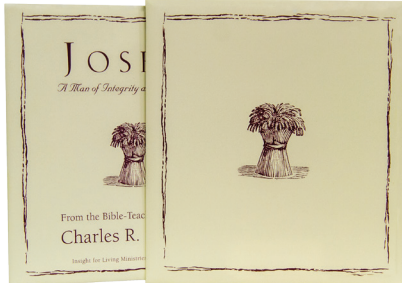
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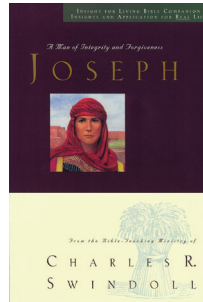
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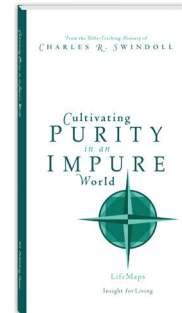
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A Classic Series Fear Displaced by Grace Genesis 43:15–34



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Over time, some words tend to spoil, like milk left out too long on the kitchen counter. But there are two words that remain unspoiled: *fear* and *grace*. Fear reminds us that life is filled with guilt and uncertainty. Grace reminds us that there is forgiveness and assurance in the midst of blame and doubt. Joseph's brothers were well acquainted with guilt and uncertainty. Their return trip to Egypt brought hope of proving they weren't spies, of ransoming Simeon, and of buying more food. But they only had hope—they didn't know what would happen when they reached Egypt.

Modeling God's grace, Joseph welcomed his brothers into his home, responded to their mistreatment with kindness and blessing, and gathered into a family those who had long felt alienated. As we watch Joseph's shamefaced brothers receive his outpouring of grace, we will be challenged to set aside our guilt and fear and accept God's free gift of grace.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. En Route from Canaan to Egypt (Genesis 43:15)

Leaving their father behind, the brothers took along three prized possessions.

They carried large baskets, filled with delicacies of “balm and . . . honey, aromatic gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds” (Genesis 43:11). They carried double the amount of money to pay for the grain, plus the money that had been returned to them on their last trip. And most important, they brought Benjamin.

These were the things they carried outwardly. Inwardly, they carried the heavy baggage of guilt for mistreating Joseph (42:21) and deep-seated anxiety about seeing the Egyptian prime minister again. Would he release Simeon? Would he use the money found in their sacks as an excuse to throw them into the dungeon too?



Quotable

*Part of God's
plan for
our growth
includes a
waiting period
so He can show
us His grace.*

—Charles R. Swindoll



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JOSEPH: A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND FORGIVENESS

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Fear Displaced by Grace

Genesis 43:15–34

2. Fearful Brothers with Joseph's Butler (Genesis 43:16–25)

One morning Joseph looked out his window and saw ten men approaching, including his beloved brother Benjamin. He immediately ordered a feast, anticipating a reunion with his family.

But something seemed terrifyingly wrong to the brothers. They had expected to meet the prime minister at the public granary, not at his home. The brothers, who were haunted with guilt for selling Joseph into slavery two decades before, fretted that this turn of events came about because of the money found in their sacks. Certainly the prime minister would enslave them, along with their donkeys (Genesis 43:18).

Fear and guilt had eaten away at the brothers' consciences until they felt utterly miserable. But unexpectedly, they received from Joseph's butler several gracious gifts.

3. Grateful Brothers with Joseph (Genesis 43:26–34)

Standing in the prime minister's house, waiting for him to arrive, must have been like standing in the Oval Office awaiting the President — very intimidating. But there they stood, shuffling their clean feet, wondering if he would be angry and what their fate might be. Then Joseph entered the room.

Joseph entered the house, and the brothers bowed in submission. After inquiring about their father, Joseph blessed Benjamin and then ran out of the room and broke down in tears. Composing himself, Joseph seated the brothers for a banquet, arranging them in order from oldest to youngest. They were flabbergasted. How did the Egyptian official know them so well?

Then Joseph served them food from his own table, in violation of Egyptian custom, and gave Benjamin five servings of everything. Imagine — five rolls, five helpings of mashed potatoes and peas, five ears of corn on the cob, five pieces of fried chicken, five glasses of iced tea. Joseph may have been testing the others. Would they resent the special treatment lavished on the youngest? Not this time. They were no longer fearful but grateful, feasting and drinking freely with their unrecognized brother (43:34).



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JOSEPH: A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND FORGIVENESS

A Classic Series Fear Displaced by Grace *Genesis 43:15–34*



DOORWAY TO HISTORY

Egyptian Dining Customs

“Wash your hands before you eat.” How many times did you hear that growing up? This admonishment doesn’t come only from modern moms; ancient Egyptian moms probably said something very much like it. Egyptians were known to be a fastidious people, often bathing daily and adhering to strict dietary customs. For example, Egyptians held cows as sacred—their goddess Isis had the body of a woman and the horns of a cow—and therefore would not eat beef. They would not use foreign cooking utensils for fear that such utensils might have prepared a meal of beef. Nor would they kiss a non-Egyptian, such as a Greek, because that non-Egyptian might have eaten beef for supper.

Egyptian dietary customs also applied to sheep. Egyptians detested shepherds (Genesis 46:34) and would not eat the flesh of sheep—a staple in the Hebrew diet (Deuteronomy 14:4). Egyptians viewed themselves as racially and religiously superior to their foreign neighbors. Therefore, they “could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians” (Genesis 43:32). It’s no surprise, then, that when Joseph hosted a meal for his Hebrew brothers, he seated them at a separate table from the Egyptians.



LET’S LIVE IT

Joseph’s life offers us a magnificent portrayal of the grace of God as He came to our rescue in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. We come to God as Joseph’s guilty brothers came to Joseph, feeling the distance and fearing the worst, only to have God demonstrate incredible generosity and mercy. Instead of being blamed, we are forgiven. Instead of being imprisoned by guilt, we are freed. And instead of experiencing punishment, which we certainly deserve, we are seated at His table and served more than we can ever take in.

Two important lessons emerge from Joseph’s extension of grace to his brothers. First, *waiting allows time for repentance*. Second, *waiting results in learning how to rest*.

Have you chosen to accept the gift of God’s grace (salvation)? Or are you still wrestling with fear and guilt? If you have received God’s grace, how can you share it with someone in your life today?



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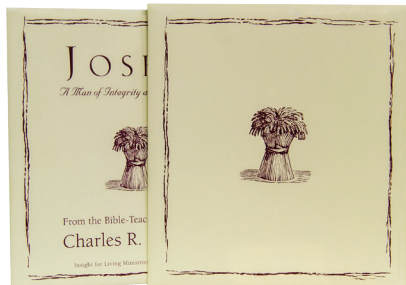
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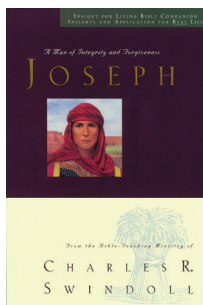
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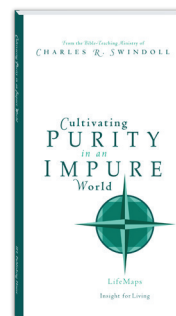
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JOSEPH: A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND FORGIVENESS

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“I Am Joseph!”

Genesis 44:1–45:15



LET’S BEGIN HERE

Joseph was one of the greatest men of the Bible. Yet he never did anything we normally associate with biblical greatness. He never performed a miracle. He never slew a giant. He never saw a burning bush. He never defeated pagan prophets. In fact, he never wrote one word of Scripture. He was just a plain, ordinary man who grew up in a dysfunctional family. So, what made Joseph so great? Why does the Lord devote so much space in Genesis to tell his story? It’s simple really. Joseph’s *attitude* set him apart. Joseph displayed greatness not because of some miraculous actions, but because he demonstrated a daily positive attitude toward God and others. And his example stands as a challenge for us today.



LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. The Trap: Silver in the Sack (Genesis 44:1–17)

In contrast to Joseph, his brothers were selfish and callous. Wanting to see if they had developed a positive mind-set toward God and others, Joseph devised a test using an expensive silver cup.

As soon as the feast ended, Joseph took his butler aside and told him to place the brothers’ money in their sacks and fill them with grain. Joseph then instructed him to place one other item in Benjamin’s sack — Joseph’s silver cup (Genesis 44:1–2).

Joseph told his butler to follow the men and accuse them of theft. In a desperate panic, they denied the charge. What reason could they have to steal from the prime minister (44:6–8)?

When the butler found the cup in Benjamin’s sack (44:9–12), the brothers gasped. Ripping their clothes in grief, they did something extraordinary — they returned to Egypt to face punishment with Benjamin. They didn’t abandon their little brother this time (44:13).

Upon returning to Joseph’s house, the brothers threw themselves at his feet (44:14). Then Judah, looking up into the stern face of the prime minister, pled guilty. Finally, a confession came from a broken and contrite heart. But this



Quotable

*Greatness comes
in the attitudes
of humility,
forgiveness,
eternal perspective,
and love
for others.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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“I Am Joseph!”

Genesis 44:1–45:15

was not an admission of guilt regarding the cup. This confession was twenty years in the making. And with it, Judah and the brothers passed Joseph’s first test: sensitivity to God’s work in their lives.

2. The Bargain: Brother for the Brother (Genesis 44:18–34)

After Judah’s great confession, why didn’t Joseph reveal himself? Why continue the ruse and threaten to enslave Benjamin? Joseph was devising another test for his brothers. By placing Benjamin in a similar situation to the one Joseph was in twenty years earlier, Joseph targeted their hearts. The brothers passed the vertical, godly test, but would they pass the horizontal, human one? Were they sensitive to the needs of others? Would they stand with Benjamin regardless of the cost? And what of Jacob—would they tell him another lie about a lost son?

3. The Disclosure: Identity of the Governor (Genesis 45:1–4)

These were clearly not the same brothers who sold Joseph into slavery. Like the Grinch in Dr. Seuss’s classic tale *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* their hearts had grown three sizes. They were mature enough to see God’s sovereign hand in their lives and selfless enough to sacrifice their own lives for their little brother. It was too much for Joseph—he could wear the mask no longer. They now modeled the characteristics Joseph himself had learned.

4. The Response: Grace to the Guilty (Genesis 45:5–15)

The greatness of Joseph came into full bloom as he revealed a sensitivity toward God and deep compassion toward his brothers. A lesser man would have punished the brothers for what they had done. But not Joseph. He knew his brothers felt overwhelmed with anxiety and guilt. Joseph responded with compassion and support: “Do not be grieved or angry” (Genesis 45:5).

How could Joseph demonstrate such kindness? He had maintained a godward perspective in the trials of his life. Three times Joseph told his brothers that God was the one who had sent him to Egypt, to save lives from the sickle of famine (45:5–8).



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Genesis 44:1–45:15

With excitement and impatience, Joseph commanded his brothers to hurry back to Canaan to tell Jacob what God had done and to ask Jacob to pack up the family and move (Genesis 45:9).

The grace of compassion and generosity is made complete with the grace of total forgiveness. Falling upon Benjamin’s neck, Joseph wept. And then going to each brother, he kissed them. At long last, Joseph was reconciled with his brothers (45:14–15).



A CLOSER LOOK

A Self-Assessment

In addition to having a vertical perspective, Joseph ranked high in compassion toward others, generosity, and forgiveness. How would you rank yourself in these areas?

Unfeeling 1	2	3	4	Compassionate 5
Stingy 1	2	3	4	Generous 5
Unforgiving 1	2	3	4	Forgiving 5

With which attitude do you tend to struggle the most?

What attitudes do the following verses command us to demonstrate?

Ephesians 4:32

Colossians 3:12–13



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LET'S LIVE IT

When we have a wrong attitude, we look at life *humanly*. But when we have a right *attitude*, we look at life *divinely*. Here are three tests of a godly attitude.

First, *when we're able to see God's plan in our location, we're getting the right attitude.*

Second, *when we're able to sense God's hand in our situation, we're getting the right attitude.*

Third, *when we're able to accept both as good, even when there's been evil in the process, we're getting the right attitude.*

Where do you live and work right now? What is your attitude toward your location? Can you see God's plan in your location? If not, pray that God would open your eyes to see His sovereignty in placing you where you are.



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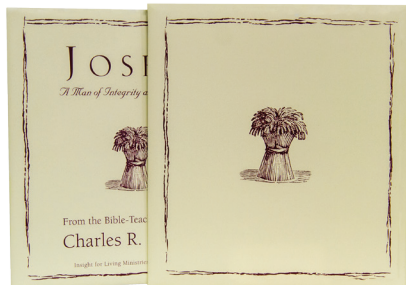
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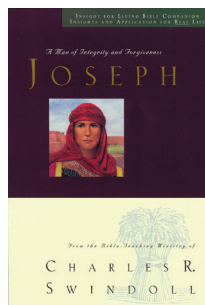
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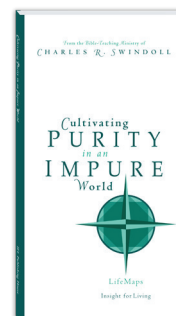
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The Ultimate Family Reunion

Genesis 45:16–46:30



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Few things are more poignant than the reconciliation and reunion of a family long separated by distance or circumstance. The story of Joseph provides a moving example not just of reconciliation but of long-awaited reunion. Studying the reunion of Joseph and Jacob reminds us of that joyful day when we will be united with our heavenly Father. As we wait for the reunion of the family of God, how do we prepare? This lesson explores how we should live today in light of eternity.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Plans for the Reunion (Genesis 45:16–28)

Joseph told his brothers that he would give them the best land in Egypt, but he hadn't consulted with Pharaoh. When Pharaoh heard about Joseph's family, he threw open the doors to the country.

Joseph rounded up wagons, opened up the storehouses, and ordered supplies. For Jacob, Joseph loaded down ten male donkeys with the finest Egyptian clothes, goods, and delicacies and ten female donkeys with enough food to feed him like an Egyptian prince (Genesis 45:23). It must have been an unbelievable sight—a caravan of such overwhelming abundance, passing through a famine-scarred land strewn with the carcasses of dead animals.

Dressed to the hilt in their designer tunics and weighed down with donkeys and treasures from Egypt, the brothers walked up to Jacob, who had been watching this caravan approaching. The brothers exclaimed: "Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt" (45:26). No confession of their sin. No long explanation. Just simple and direct.

How did Jacob take the news? The Hebrew words in Genesis 45:26 are translated literally as "his heart grew numb."¹ Most likely, Jacob had a mild heart attack. Seeing their father's reaction, the brothers sat him down and explained what Joseph had said to them. Hearing these words and seeing the wagons and donkeys loaded with goods, Jacob's spirit was revived (45:27). And he responded as any loving father would: "I will go and see him before I die" (45:28).



Quotable

*The ultimate
family reunion
will be when
all God's people
join together
in the presence
of Christ.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Genesis 45:16–46:30

2. Journey from Canaan to Egypt (Genesis 46:1–7, 27)

No doubt the brothers told Jacob about Joseph's desire to relocate the family to Egypt. But pulling up tent stakes and moving to a foreign land filled with foreign gods and customs is a life-altering decision. Relocating to Egypt was not simply a personal move for Jacob and his family. It was a national move, affecting the entire nation of Israel.

Making his way south to Beersheba, Jacob sought the Lord, offering sacrifices (Genesis 46:1). Though impetuous by nature, Jacob had finally learned to seek the Lord before rushing ahead. His little nation was about to enter a fast-paced, polytheistic society that could swallow them whole. He needed to know, should he make such a move?

After seeking God and hearing from Him, the next morning Jacob woke with confidence. The Lord had told him not to be afraid, because He would make him into a great nation (46:2–3). With the blessing of God, Jacob and his entire family loaded the wagons and headed south. From a small seed—seventy of Jacob's male descendants and their families—the Lord would grow a nation (Israel) within a nation (Egypt).

3. Reunion with Joseph (Genesis 46:28–30)

When the tiny nation of Israel crossed the border, they must have looked ragged. And they weren't even sure where to go! So Jacob sent Judah ahead to ask Joseph for directions. Finding their way, they began to unpack and set up camp in the fertile valley of Goshen (Genesis 46:28).

Joseph had waited for this day for twenty years. He washed his chariot and struck out for Goshen. He probably broke every speed limit, pushing his horses faster and faster. Then, jumping off his chariot, Joseph ran to his father and embraced him with tears of utter delight.

Linger here for a moment. Imagine the scene. No words were spoken. What could be said? Father and son were reunited, embracing each other with tears of joy. Hugging tight. Neither wanted to let the other go.

Pulling away for just a moment, cupping Joseph's face in his hands, Jacob, through a cloud of tears, declared his life complete. "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive" (46:30).



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The Ultimate Family Reunion

Genesis 45:16–46:30



A CLOSER LOOK

Trusting God's Promise

Jacob spent twenty years outside the land of promise while working for Laban. And once Jacob made it back in the land, he planned on dying there. But God had different plans. Jacob and his family would sojourn in Egypt, and the patriarch would die in that foreign land. But Jacob (Israel) received this promise from God: He would remember His covenant (Genesis 46:2–4). Joseph would take care of Jacob, and he would prosper. When father and son reunited after twenty-two years, both wept for a long time (46:29). Jacob's life is a roadmap of what it's like to walk with God—hopes and disappointments, obedience and disobedience, faith and fears. God is never finished maturing us on our journey of faith, taking us down roads that twist and turn. But we can trust that “He who began a good work in [us] will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).



LET'S LIVE IT

Family reunions are wonderful events, especially when distance has been caused by disappointment or sin. The Bible speaks of other joy-filled reunions, like the *national reunion* found in Ezra 8 or the *personal reunion* of another father who lost a son in Luke 15:11–32.

All of these are wonderful and moving stories, but the greatest reunion is yet to come. It is the one all children of God long for—being reunited with our heavenly Father. And best of all, the *ultimate family reunion* is an *eternal reunion*.

Are you facing any life-altering decisions right now? What is your usual process for making major decisions? How does knowing of the certainty of God's presence with you now and of your future reunion with the Lord affect your decision-making in situations like these?

ENDNOTE

1. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 806.



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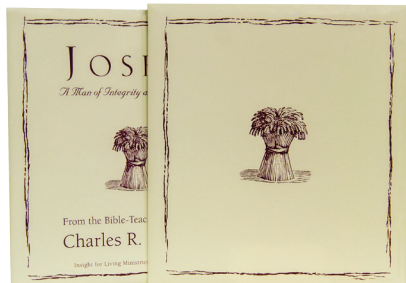
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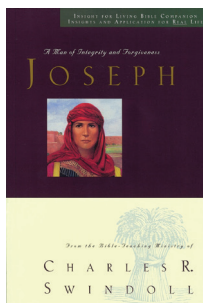
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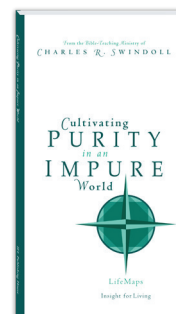
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On-the-Job Integrity

Genesis 46:31–47:26



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Can you be a person of integrity and a successful businessperson at the same time? A Christian should be. Christians are to demonstrate how God would negotiate a deal, try a case, diagnose an illness, teach a class, or build a building. But too often Christians don't demonstrate integrity to the world. The world doesn't judge our integrity on Sunday morning. The world judges our integrity by the way we live on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday . . . God measures our integrity quotient every day of the week.

If you need a standard by which to gauge your own business integrity, Joseph is a perfect example—he demonstrated integrity in every aspect of his life. And by observing his business life, we'll learn how to order our priorities and test our motives.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Some General Observations about Business

Before we turn the page on Joseph's business ledger, let's take a moment to consider how business can affect our Christian witness.

First, *work reveals our character*. Sadly, too many Christians are Sunday-morning Christians and Monday-morning heathens. They refuse to view their work as divine. How can you tell? Observe their character over a forty-hour workweek. Do they demonstrate positive traits or negative traits? How do they approach their work? How do they treat other people?

Second, *work is a demanding arena of pressure*. Some jobs test the limits of a Christian's love for God and others. Every job brings pressure—office politics, deadlines, criticism, evaluations, pettiness . . . The list could go on and on. The pressure-cooker of business causes true beliefs to bubble to the surface.

Third, *work is an exacting test of efficiency*. All jobs require some level of efficiency; some standards must be met. But if you are an inefficient worker, your tasks can be a chore rather than a joy.



Quotable

Work is an exacting test of our integrity: including our efficiency, organization, determination, and creativity.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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On-the-Job Integrity

Genesis 46:31–47:26

2. A Specific Example: Joseph (Genesis 46:31–47:26)

If Joseph had written a book on business efficiency and integrity or on crisis management and leadership, it would have included at least four traits every professional should possess.

With his family now relocated in Egypt, Joseph didn't abuse his position as prime minister and presume upon Pharaoh by permanently settling his family in Goshen. He didn't remind Pharaoh that he was the one who had warned Egypt about the famine so Pharaoh would offer special privileges to his family. Rather, *he planned ahead with wise objectivity.*

Joseph was a powerful man, but he was a man under authority. He didn't want to do anything that might appear as usurpation or give Pharaoh any indication that he wasn't completely faithful. So, *he submitted to authority with loyal accountability.*

As the keeper of the keys to the granaries, Joseph could have easily taken advantage of the people's desperate plight. He could have raised the prices, gouged the people, and pocketed the excess. Lesser men would have succumbed to these temptations, but Joseph had too much integrity. He turned every dime over to the treasury (Genesis 47:13–14). *He arranged for survival with personal integrity.*

Joseph was never one of those who stifled new ideas with a “We've never done that before” attitude. He couldn't afford such defeatist thinking—lives were at stake. So what did Joseph do with millions of starving people? *He accepted the challenge with innovative creativity.*



GETTING TO THE ROOT

God promised to make Abraham a great nation and to bless those who blessed him (Genesis 12:2–3). This promise came true in Egypt during the days of Joseph. Joseph moved his family to Egypt and, at the command of Pharaoh, gave them the best land where they then prospered (47:27). Such a blessing on God's people brought blessings upon Egypt, as Joseph administered the affairs of state with wisdom—saving the lives of many, prospering Pharaoh, and glorifying God (47:13–26).

The Hebrew word for “bless,” *barak*, literally means “to kneel.”¹ It conveys the idea of bowing in honor or of attaching value to someone. In the Old Testament, blessings communicated spiritual, physical, and prophetic truths. The blessing of Abraham (12:1–3) was a promise to make him into a great nation and to settle his descendants in a homeland. But the promise also carried with it a spiritual and prophetic element—that Abraham's descendants would be a great blessing to the “families of the earth.” This was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, “the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1).



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On-the-Job Integrity

Genesis 46:31–47:26



LET'S LIVE IT

Joseph modeled integrity and wholeness in his business dealings—he had the right priorities and motives. Applying these helpful suggestions will help you to further develop integrity in your business life.

Our highest priority as Christian professionals should be our *commitment to Christian principles*. If we have to lie or step on people to succeed, then we've failed. And when we get to the top of the corporate ladder, we'll discover that the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall.

Our other priority should be the *careful investment of time*. Perhaps the hardest word to say in the English language is the easiest to spell: N–O.

Our motives must be pure, *continually watching how we relate to people and asking why we said yes or no to each request*. As business professionals who are Christian, we must always treat people with dignity and respect, show humility, and remember for whom we ultimately work—the Lord.

Take a moment to analyze your work priorities. Are you investing your time wisely? If your priorities are out of balance, make a list of things to which you should say no.

ENDNOTE

1. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 138..



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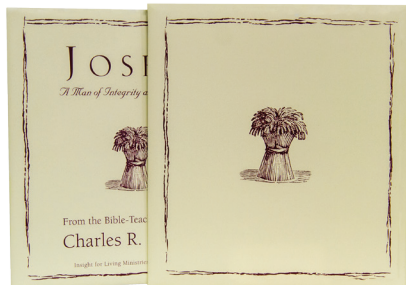
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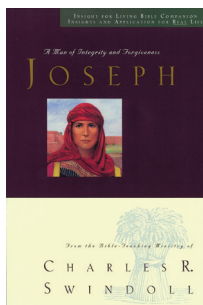
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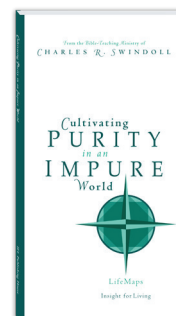
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LET'S BEGIN HERE

When your loved ones gather to reminisce about your life, what memories will they share? What do you hope they will remember? The story of Joseph's life—his journey from the pit to the pinnacle—leaves us in awe. Few have known such highs and lows, and fewer still have lived a life so full of grace and forgiveness. And as we have discovered in our study of this extraordinary man, if we choose to follow Joseph's example, our lives can be marked by such noble traits, creating a spiritual legacy for those who come after us. What greater memory could we leave to those who love us than that of a life well-lived—full of grace and truth?



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Jacob: Sickness, Blessing, and Death (Genesis 47:27–50:3)

The joyous, tear-filled reunion between father and son led to many rich years of fellowship. And their renewed relationship continued until the dignified, sorrowful death of the patriarch, Jacob.

When Jacob moved his family to Egypt, he was 130 years old and the famine was in its second year (Genesis 45:11). Seventeen years later, with the famine behind them, the tiny nation of Israel had settled permanently in Goshen and had flourished there (47:27–28).

How sweet those years must have been for Jacob—to see Joseph rule with authority and integrity, to see his family growing.

But Jacob became ill, and he knew he wouldn't recover. Thinking of the promise God made to his grandfather, Abraham (12:1–3), Jacob expressed his desire to be buried with his forefathers in Canaan. After promising to fulfill Jacob's request, Joseph was left with a precious memory of his father's humility as Jacob bowed before the Lord in worship (47:29–31).



Quotable

*Do your
forgiving now
so that you can
live a long,
full, aged life,
free of bitterness.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Then, after Jacob blessed his grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim and his sons, Jacob died. Scripture captures this beautifully: Jacob “was gathered to his people” (Genesis 49:33). The pain was almost more than Joseph could bear. Falling on his father, Joseph wept and kissed him (50:1).

Eventually composing himself, Joseph ordered the embalming of his father. When the word spread that Joseph’s father had died, the whole nation mourned for seventy days (50:2–3).

2. Joseph: Grief, Grace, and Glory (Genesis 50:4–26)

When the time of mourning for Jacob ended, Joseph sought permission from Pharaoh to bury his father in their homeland of Canaan (Genesis 50:4–5). With a long funeral procession trailing behind, Joseph buried his father in the cave at Machpelah (50:6–13). Then the funeral party returned to Egypt (50:14).

As soon as they arrived back in Egypt, the brothers began to relive a terrible memory—the sin of selling Joseph into slavery. What if Joseph chose to seek retribution now that Jacob was gone (50:15)? They sent a message from their deceased father, begging Joseph’s forgiveness. They even threw themselves at his feet and offered their lives in servitude (50:16–18).

Joseph wept over their fear and anxiety (50:17). They still didn’t understand that he had forgiven them! With a broken heart, Joseph uttered some of the most gracious words in the Bible. He put his brothers’ fears to rest, reminding them that he wasn’t in the place of God with the authority to seek retribution for sin (50:19). Joseph acknowledged their sin, but he had an eternal perspective—God had ensured the salvation of thousands in Egypt through their foolishness (50:20). Joseph continued to extend grace, committing to care for them (50:21).

Joseph lived to see his grandsons and great-grandsons (50:22–23). When Joseph realized that his time to die was fast approaching, he gathered his brothers and encouraged them to remember that God had promised to preserve and deliver them. Then he asked to be buried in the land of his fathers, Canaan (50:24–25). Simply and with dignity, Joseph died at the age of 110 (50:26). Marked by integrity, grace, and forgiveness, his was a life well-lived.



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DOORWAY TO HISTORY

Bring Out Your Dead

Death hits like a blow to the gut—and that's how it felt when the patriarch Jacob died. In the ancient Near East, various cultures dealt with death and the dead in different ways. The Greeks and Romans cremated their dead. The Hebrews buried their dead either in the ground or in caves. Though preparation and burial of the body were generally made in haste, funerals could be elaborate. But the Egyptians practiced the most elaborate and intimate burial rite of them all.

Egyptians buried their dead, but only after the body was embalmed. The purpose of embalming was to preserve as much of the body as possible so it might be reunited with its soul. Egyptians believed that decomposition robbed the soul of its essence, so they took great pains to halt that process.

Embalming might take up to forty days and involved the removal of most of the vital organs. The body was then entwined with linen treated with a mixture of salt, spices, and gums. After bandaging, the body was placed in a papyrus carton painted with religious symbols. Wealthy Egyptians and nobles might be placed within three different coffins, the last being a decoratively carved stone sarcophagus.

Egyptian law prescribed seventy-two days of mourning for deceased pharaohs. Scripture tells us the Egyptians mourned Jacob for seventy days (Genesis 50:3). This period of mourning included the forty days of embalming.



LET'S LIVE IT

The last page of Joseph's life has been turned and the book closed. But the lessons learned from his life are still being written, even today. So before you put the book on the shelf and get busy with your life, remember two enduring truths.

First, *to grow old free of bitterness is one of the finest legacies we can leave behind*. Too many people become hardened and embittered by life instead of allowing hardships to render them soft and humble. But we can choose our response to difficult times and circumstances. Joseph sets an example of one who left a legacy of grace and forgiveness rather than of bitter revenge.

The second enduring truth we can take from Joseph's life is that *to face death right with God and man is the finest way we can enter eternity*. Forgiveness is perhaps the greatest gift one can give and receive. And there is no more enduring legacy than living the words, "I forgive you."



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Is there someone from whom you need to seek forgiveness? Is anything keeping you from seeking forgiveness? If you were to die tomorrow, would everyone in your life have assurance that you hold no grudges? Is there someone you need to forgive?



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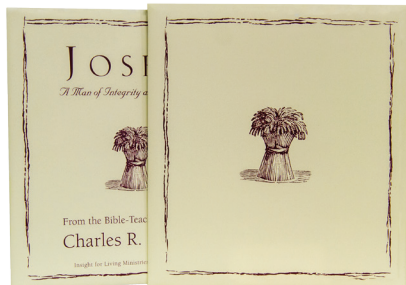
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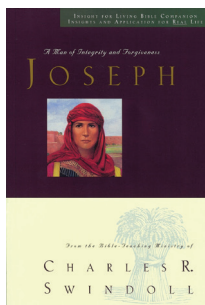
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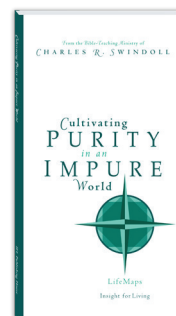
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