



The Heart of the Matter

In the tapestry of God's creation, He has crafted each one of us as a unique individual, an absolute masterpiece from the hand of the Creator. Or as David put it, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). Many in our "it's-all-about-me" society believe *they* are wonderfully put together, but they certainly don't think those with special needs are masterpieces from God's hand. In fact, many of the "wonderful" people secretly think that God made a mistake in creating boys and girls, men and women, with special needs. Colleen Swindoll rejects that idea. The special people who have special needs, like her son, Jonathan, *are* works of art from the Master Artist.



Discovering the Way

1. Autism, a Spectrum Disorder

Colleen explains that autism, one of Jonathan's disorders, is on a spectrum, but not one of "good" and "bad."

2. A Work of Art from God's Hand

Colleen and her father, Chuck Swindoll, affirm the value of children with special needs because these children are "fearfully and wonderfully made" by the hand of God.

3. Becoming a "Human Doing," Not a "Human Being"

Colleen shares some of her personal struggles as a mom of a child with special needs.



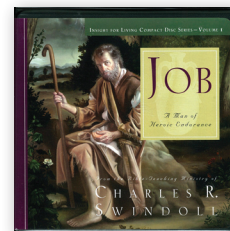
Starting Your Journey

"Weeping may last for the night, / But a shout of joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). The Lord sees your tears, but He will wipe them dry and give you joy with the rising of the sun.

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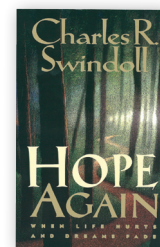
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SPECIAL WORDS FOR SPECIAL PEOPLE: OFFERING GRACE TO THE WEARY

WHEN GOD'S GIFT COMES SPECIALLY WRAPPED

SELECTED SCRIPTURES



The Heart of the Matter

This is a delicate subject, unfamiliar to many and even frightening to a few; however, it's a subject we dare not ignore or overlook. It is the world of physical, mental, and emotional challenges and disabilities . . . a world where millions of men and women, boys and girls, parents and grandparents live their lives. Nevertheless, it is also a world many fail to acknowledge, appreciate, and respect . . . unlike the Creator of bodies and brains—the Lord our God.



Discovering the Way

1. Believing in the Right Way: Theology (Selected Scriptures)

Here's a test for your theology: Is God sovereign when terrible things happen in life (Isaiah 45:5–7, 9–10)? What about when children are disabled? All children are a gift from God; no child is a mistake (Psalm 127:3). Every child is divinely formed and uniquely woven together by God (Psalm 139:13–16). Your child is specially wrapped for you with God's seal of approval.

2. Answering the Hard Questions: Reality (Exodus 4:10–11; John 9:1–3)

Let's press your theology a little further. Is God really involved in birth defects and disabilities? Are disabilities the consequences of someone's sin? How do I handle my confusion?



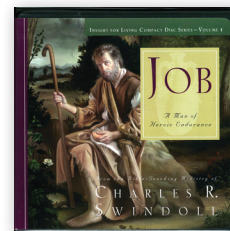
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Keeping the best perspective means being practical. To you who have a disabled child, trust God each new day for new strength. To you who don't have a disabled child, reach out every chance you get, even if you don't know what to do or what to say. And to the church, be committed to accepting, welcoming, and receiving everyone.

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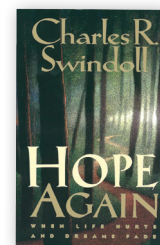
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SPECIAL WORDS FOR SPECIAL PEOPLE: OFFERING GRACE TO THE WEARY

UNRAVELING THE MYSTERY OF SUFFERING

2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-11



The Heart of the Matter

The Bible is full of mysteries: the “mystery” God revealed to Daniel (Daniel 2:17–19); the “mystery” of God’s hidden wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:6–8); the “mystery” of future events (1 Corinthians 15:51–52); the “mystery of His will” (Ephesians 1:9); the “great mystery” of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32 NLT); the “mystery of lawlessness” currently at work (2 Thessalonians 2:7). And though it isn’t specifically called one in the Bible, suffering is indeed a profound mystery. Paul’s words will help us unravel the mysterious subject of suffering.



Discovering the Way

1. Suffering: Understanding Its Reality

When in the midst of suffering, songs and poems don’t help, and solutions and answers don’t come easily.

2. Suffering: Unraveling Its Mystery (2 Corinthians 1:1–11)

Paul was a man well acquainted with suffering. After he provided warm words of introduction (1:1–2), Paul provided wise words of explanation for those who suffer (1:3–11).

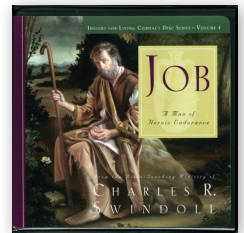


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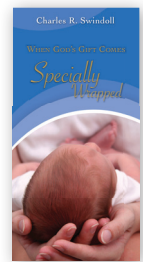
How do we handle the perplexities of suffering? First, instead of only focusing on yourself now, think of the benefits to others later. Second, rather than fighting, surrender; rather than resisting, release. Third, even though getting even seems to make sense, try giving thanks.



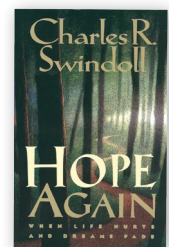
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SPECIAL WORDS FOR SPECIAL PEOPLE: OFFERING GRACE TO THE WEARY

WHAT JOB TEACHES US ABOUT OURSELVES

SELECTIONS FROM JOB



The Heart of the Matter

At the most basic level, the Bible has two purposes: first, to teach us truths about our God, and second, to teach us truths about ourselves. Truths, oftentimes, are hard to face, especially truths about ourselves—but face them we must. Knowing the truth about ourselves is particularly important when the bottom drops out of life. And because God chose to preserve the story of Job, we, thankfully, have a good teacher to teach us seven vital lessons.



Discovering the Way

1. We Never Know Ahead of Time the Plans God Has for Us (Job 1:1–19)

Because we don't know what lies ahead, be ready for anything.

2. A Vertical Perspective Will Keep Us from Horizontal Panic (Job 1:20–22)

When calamity comes, turn your attention heavenward.

3. Great Discernment Is Needed to Detect Wrong Advice from a Well-Meaning Person (Job 2:7–10)

When offering advice and when receiving advice, make sure it squares with the Scriptures.

4. When Things Turn from Bad to Worse, Sound Theology Helps Us Remain Strong and Stable (Job 2:7–10)

During difficult days, stay with sound theology and avoid “pop psychology.”

5. Caring and Sensitive Friends Know When to Come, How to Stay Quiet, and What to Say (Job 2:11–13)

Place yourself in the other person's position; it will keep you sensitive.

6. It's Easy to Be Monday-Morning Quarterbacks when We Encounter and Respond to Another's Suffering (Job 3:1, 11, 25–26)

Before you criticize one who expresses his or her suffering, remember you may never have been there.

7. The Cultivation of Obedient Endurance Is a Mark of Maturity (Job 42:7–8)

Never forget, maturity is a slow and painful process.



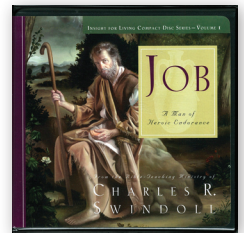
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Where are you today? In a difficult place? Review these seven principles that teach us about ourselves and apply the ones you need to your situation.

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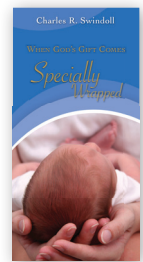


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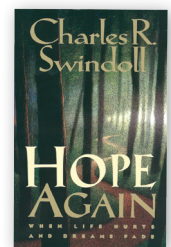
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SPECIAL WORDS FOR SPECIAL PEOPLE: OFFERING GRACE TO THE WEARY

WHAT JOB TEACHES US ABOUT OUR GOD

JOB 42



The Heart of the Matter

Humanity has questioned God's goodness for millennia, especially in the face of evil and suffering. "Why would a good God allow the Hebrews to remain in Egyptian bondage for more than 400 years?" "Why would a loving God order the destruction of the Canaanites when Joshua led troops into the Promised Land?" "How could a holy God call the adulterous David a man after His own heart?" And "How could a compassionate God allow righteous Job to suffer?" Job gives us insight into that question and teaches us seven truths about our God.



Discovering the Way

1. There Is Nothing God Cannot Do (Job 42:1–2)

Nothing is impossible for God.

2. It Is Impossible to Restrain or Nullify God's Purposes (42:2)

Nothing can alter or disrupt God's intentions.

3. God's Plans Are beyond Our Understanding and Too Deep for Us to Explain (42:3)

God doesn't always give answers, but He gives Himself—that is enough.

4. Only through God's Instruction Are We Able to Humble Ourselves and Rest in His Will (42:4–6)

Contrite hearts make no demands and have no expectations.

5. When the Day of Reckoning Arrives, God Is Always Fair (42:7–9)

All of God's accounts are not settled at the end of the month, according to our timetable.

6. No One Can Be Compared to God When It Comes to Blessings (42:10–15)

God pours out His blessings because He pours out His grace.

7. Only God Can Fill Our Final Years with Divine Music That Frees Us to Live above Our Circumstances (42:16–17)

Truth comes through suffering, and truth sets us free.



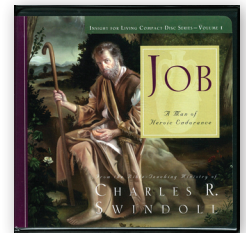
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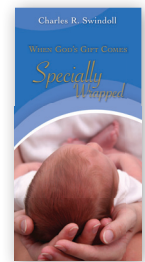


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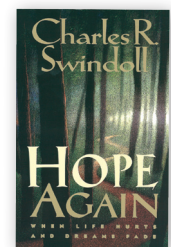
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SPECIAL WORDS FOR SPECIAL PEOPLE: OFFERING GRACE TO THE WEARY

— HOPE BEYOND DISSATISFACTION: A FORMULA THAT BRINGS RELIEF —

1 PETER 5:5–7



The Heart of the Matter

In an age such as ours — where emphasis is placed on self-promotion and polishing our image, when looking good is more important than being good, when making an impression is more important than integrity — who has time for submission, humility, dependence, and trust? But if we crave relief from dissatisfaction, there is a “formula” in the New Testament that will give us that relief.



Discovering the Way

1. Today’s Major Messages, Promising “Success”

Four words spell “success” today: *fortune, fame, power, and pleasure.*

2. God’s Ancient Plan, Bringing Relief (1 Peter 5:5–7)

Regarding authority, submit yourself to the wise. Regarding attitude, humble yourself under God’s hand. Regarding anxiety, throw yourself on the mercy and care of God.

A Simple Formula: Submission + Humility – Worry = Relief

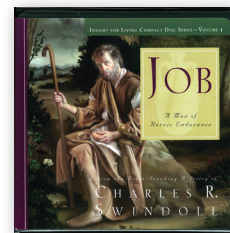


Starting Your Journey

Three great needs effect change in our lives. First, we need direction so we can know to whom we should submit. Second, we need discipline to restrain our hellish pride. Third, we need discernment so we can spot the beginnings of anxiety.



Tools for Digging Deeper



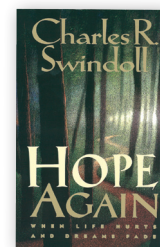
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SPECIAL WORDS FOR SPECIAL PEOPLE: OFFERING GRACE TO THE WEARY

HOPE BEYOND OUR TRIALS: "WHEN THROUGH FIERY TRIALS . . ."

1 PETER 4:12-19



The Heart of the Matter

Peter was not one to quote pious platitudes; he had lived too long and seen too much. So we should pay careful attention to what Peter wrote—especially when life seems to be passing us through fiery trials. Peter lived during the days when being a Christian could cost you your life; therefore, the truths he offered should help us get through the fire of affliction we can experience in our own lives.



Discovering the Way

1. Practical Truth about Trials (James 1:1-4)

It is common for Christians to encounter trials. Trials come in various categories. Trials put our faith to the test. Without trials there could be no maturity.

2. Biblical Strength for "Fiery Ordeals" (1 Peter 4:12-19)

Peter offered practical advice on how to react to fiery trials, what to remember, and on whom to rely.

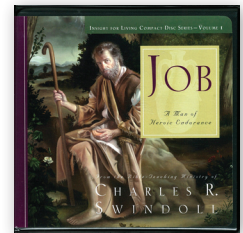


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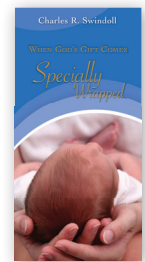
Personal growth through the heat comes in two forms. First, when trials come, remember that God is faithful—trust in Him. Second, when trials stay, remind yourself to do what is right—hide in Him.



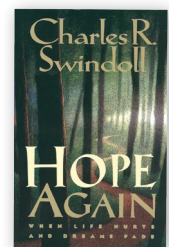
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The Heart of the Matter

We are all disabled spiritually. Compared to God's perfection, every one of us is misshapen and in need of special attention. Coming to terms with this truth—really grasping it—will change your life forever. It will give you a spirit of brokenness and a deeper compassion for those who live with lifelong physical and mental disabilities. Chuck Swindoll's daughter Colleen deeply understands the struggles of special-needs families because she has one. Ministering to families with special needs takes more than compassion—though that is the place to start—it also takes information, information Colleen shares in this interview.



Discovering the Way

1. What Do Special-Needs Families Need?

It shouldn't come as a surprise, though it often does, that special-needs families have the same needs as any family.

2. How Should I Speak to Families and Individuals with Special Needs?

You don't have to pretend the obvious isn't obvious—that this individual or family has special needs—but sometimes it's best just to be present with them without saying anything specific.

3. What Can My Church Do to Minister to Families with Special Needs?

Chuck and his daughter Colleen share some practical and encouraging steps churches can take to develop a special-needs ministry.

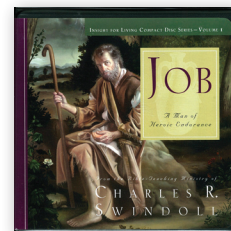


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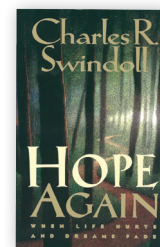
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