

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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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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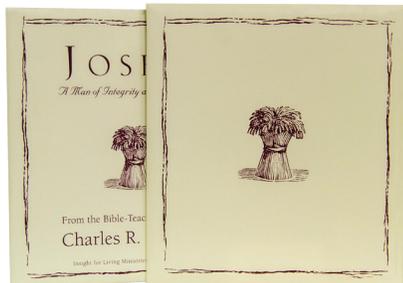
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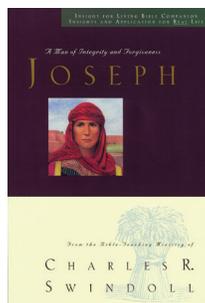
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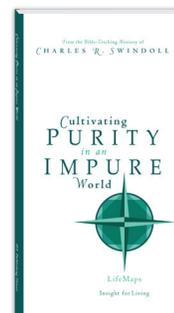
Tools for Digging Deeper



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