

# JOSEPH: A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND FORGIVENESS

## A Classic Series

### 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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*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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#### 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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#### 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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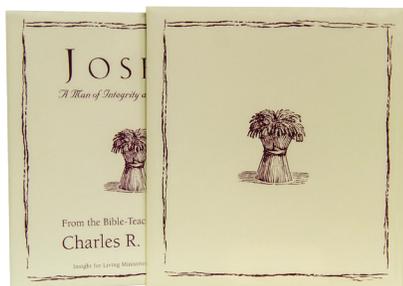
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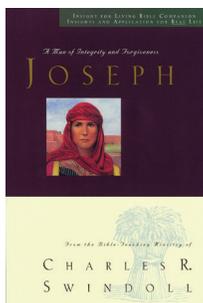
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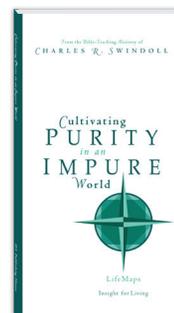
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