

JOSEPH: A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND FORGIVENESS

A Classic Series

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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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 Potiphra 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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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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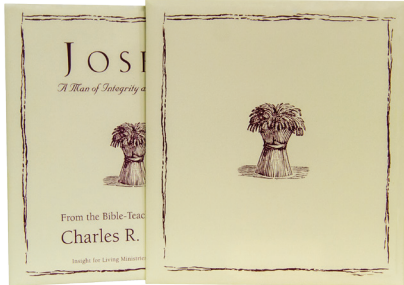
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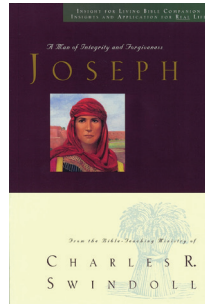
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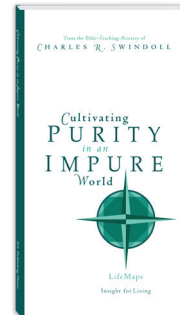
Tools for Digging Deeper



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