

JOSEPH: A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND FORGIVENESS

A Classic Series Groanings of a Sad Dad Genesis 42:29–43:15



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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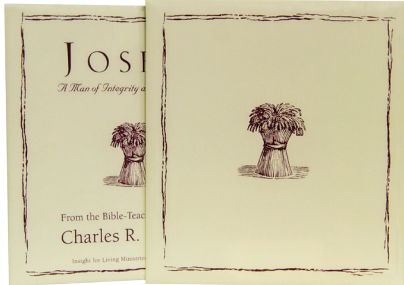
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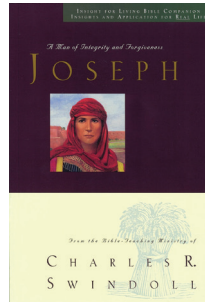
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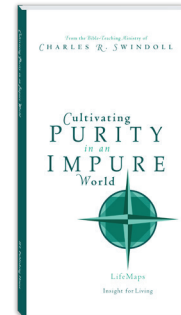
Tools for Digging Deeper



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