

JOSEPH: A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND FORGIVENESS

A Classic Series Fear Displaced by Grace Genesis 43:15–34



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Over time, some words tend to spoil, like milk left out too long on the kitchen counter. But there are two words that remain unspoiled: *fear* and *grace*. Fear reminds us that life is filled with guilt and uncertainty. Grace reminds us that there is forgiveness and assurance in the midst of blame and doubt. Joseph's brothers were well acquainted with guilt and uncertainty. Their return trip to Egypt brought hope of proving they weren't spies, of ransoming Simeon, and of buying more food. But they only had hope—they didn't know what would happen when they reached Egypt.

Modeling God's grace, Joseph welcomed his brothers into his home, responded to their mistreatment with kindness and blessing, and gathered into a family those who had long felt alienated. As we watch Joseph's shamefaced brothers receive his outpouring of grace, we will be challenged to set aside our guilt and fear and accept God's free gift of grace.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. En Route from Canaan to Egypt (Genesis 43:15)

Leaving their father behind, the brothers took along three prized possessions.

They carried large baskets, filled with delicacies of “balm and . . . honey, aromatic gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds” (Genesis 43:11). They carried double the amount of money to pay for the grain, plus the money that had been returned to them on their last trip. And most important, they brought Benjamin.

These were the things they carried outwardly. Inwardly, they carried the heavy baggage of guilt for mistreating Joseph (42:21) and deep-seated anxiety about seeing the Egyptian prime minister again. Would he release Simeon? Would he use the money found in their sacks as an excuse to throw them into the dungeon too?



Quotable

*Part of God's
plan for
our growth
includes a
waiting period
so He can show
us His grace.*

—Charles R. Swindoll



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2. Fearful Brothers with Joseph's Butler (Genesis 43:16–25)

One morning Joseph looked out his window and saw ten men approaching, including his beloved brother Benjamin. He immediately ordered a feast, anticipating a reunion with his family.

But something seemed terrifyingly wrong to the brothers. They had expected to meet the prime minister at the public granary, not at his home. The brothers, who were haunted with guilt for selling Joseph into slavery two decades before, fretted that this turn of events came about because of the money found in their sacks. Certainly the prime minister would enslave them, along with their donkeys (Genesis 43:18).

Fear and guilt had eaten away at the brothers' consciences until they felt utterly miserable. But unexpectedly, they received from Joseph's butler several gracious gifts.

3. Grateful Brothers with Joseph (Genesis 43:26–34)

Standing in the prime minister's house, waiting for him to arrive, must have been like standing in the Oval Office awaiting the President — very intimidating. But there they stood, shuffling their clean feet, wondering if he would be angry and what their fate might be. Then Joseph entered the room.

Joseph entered the house, and the brothers bowed in submission. After inquiring about their father, Joseph blessed Benjamin and then ran out of the room and broke down in tears. Composing himself, Joseph seated the brothers for a banquet, arranging them in order from oldest to youngest. They were flabbergasted. How did the Egyptian official know them so well?

Then Joseph served them food from his own table, in violation of Egyptian custom, and gave Benjamin five servings of everything. Imagine — five rolls, five helpings of mashed potatoes and peas, five ears of corn on the cob, five pieces of fried chicken, five glasses of iced tea. Joseph may have been testing the others. Would they resent the special treatment lavished on the youngest? Not this time. They were no longer fearful but grateful, feasting and drinking freely with their unrecognized brother (43:34).



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DOORWAY TO HISTORY

Egyptian Dining Customs

“Wash your hands before you eat.” How many times did you hear that growing up? This admonishment doesn’t come only from modern moms; ancient Egyptian moms probably said something very much like it. Egyptians were known to be a fastidious people, often bathing daily and adhering to strict dietary customs. For example, Egyptians held cows as sacred—their goddess Isis had the body of a woman and the horns of a cow—and therefore would not eat beef. They would not use foreign cooking utensils for fear that such utensils might have prepared a meal of beef. Nor would they kiss a non-Egyptian, such as a Greek, because that non-Egyptian might have eaten beef for supper.

Egyptian dietary customs also applied to sheep. Egyptians detested shepherds (Genesis 46:34) and would not eat the flesh of sheep—a staple in the Hebrew diet (Deuteronomy 14:4). Egyptians viewed themselves as racially and religiously superior to their foreign neighbors. Therefore, they “could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians” (Genesis 43:32). It’s no surprise, then, that when Joseph hosted a meal for his Hebrew brothers, he seated them at a separate table from the Egyptians.



LET’S LIVE IT

Joseph’s life offers us a magnificent portrayal of the grace of God as He came to our rescue in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. We come to God as Joseph’s guilty brothers came to Joseph, feeling the distance and fearing the worst, only to have God demonstrate incredible generosity and mercy. Instead of being blamed, we are forgiven. Instead of being imprisoned by guilt, we are freed. And instead of experiencing punishment, which we certainly deserve, we are seated at His table and served more than we can ever take in.

Two important lessons emerge from Joseph’s extension of grace to his brothers. First, *waiting allows time for repentance*. Second, *waiting results in learning how to rest*.

Have you chosen to accept the gift of God’s grace (salvation)? Or are you still wrestling with fear and guilt? If you have received God’s grace, how can you share it with someone in your life today?



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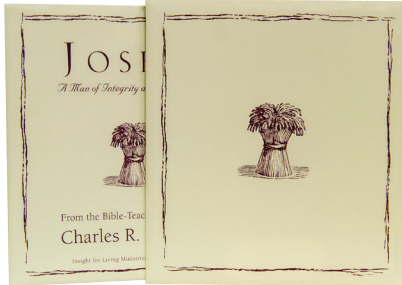
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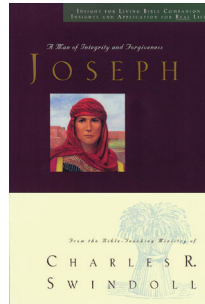
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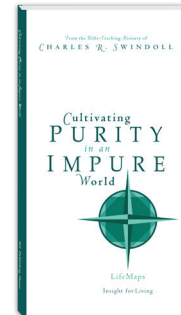
Tools for Digging Deeper



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