

JOSEPH: A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND FORGIVENESS

A Classic Series

Activating a Seared Conscience

Genesis 42:1–28



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Are you the type of person who remembers what you ought to forget and forgets what you ought to remember? Think about that provocative question for a moment. Joseph had many years to ponder his answer. After seven years of blessing and abundance, the famine was in full bloom. People from the surrounding lands came to Egypt for grain—including Joseph's brothers. Upon recognizing the men who threw him into a pit and sold him as a slave, Joseph faced a difficult decision. Should he review his mental blacklist or shred it? Should he punish or forgive? Would he be the type of person who remembers what he ought to forget and forgets what he ought to remember? Are you?



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. A Famine in Canaan (Genesis 42:1–5)

Seven bountiful years brought Egyptian granaries to overflowing (Genesis 41:49). But now, few crops grew in the sunbaked soil, and what managed to break through was burned up under the scorching sun. The long-predicted famine had arrived, and it had two important qualities. It was *widespread*, not limited (41:54, 56–57), and it was *severe*, not slight (41:55–57).

Sweeping out of Egypt and into surrounding areas, the cruelty of the famine reached Canaan, stealing food from the mouths of Joseph's family. So ten of Joseph's brothers packed their bags and left, leaving behind Benjamin because Jacob worried that something might happen to him on the journey (42:3–5).

As we follow the path of Jacob's sons, keep in mind that neither they nor Jacob knew what had become of Joseph. They only had one assignment: bring back groceries. Sitting in his plush office in Egypt, Joseph had no idea that the brothers who had sold him into slavery were on their way to buy grain from him. Their encounter would change their lives forever.



Quotable

*God often
awakens our
conscience when
we experience
similar treatment
we once gave
someone else.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. An Encounter in Egypt (Genesis 42:6–28)

Egypt had become the soup kitchen for a starving world. Each week, thousands of hungry people stood in line, waiting to buy food from the wise prime minister who had shrewdly prepared for the seven-year famine.

Joseph's day began like any other day, looking at the gaunt faces of foreigners. Bowing and then standing before him, he saw ten bearded men clad in Hebrew garb, but these men looked familiar (Genesis 42:6). They were his brothers!

Joseph recognized his brothers, but they didn't recognize him. It had been more than twenty years since the brothers had last seen Joseph at the age of 17. While the Hebrews usually wore rough, handwoven clothing and maintained full beards, Joseph was clean-shaven and wore Egyptian linen. Joseph spoke Egyptian fluently, and he "spoke to them harshly" (42:6). No wonder they didn't recognize him!



A CLOSER LOOK

The Test

God is not in the business of blessing His wayward children; rather, He is in the business of bringing them to a point of blessing . . . through discipline. Suffering under the famine, Joseph's brothers journeyed to Egypt and bowed and stood before him to buy grain . . . and Joseph remembered his dream he had dreamed as a teenager (Genesis 42:1–9). Accusing them of spying, Joseph incarcerated his brothers. After three days, Joseph released all but Simeon, telling the brothers not to return unless they brought Benjamin with them. Joseph's test accomplished its desired result: the brothers finally acknowledged their sin (42:21–22). In the same way today, God will not let the consciences of the faithful rest until we deal with unresolved sin. And if He must use severe trials to break through our sin-hardened hearts, He will.



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LET'S LIVE IT

Though most of us would hate to admit it, we usually act more like the brothers than like Joseph. But just as God awakened the consciences of these brothers, so God can rouse our own.

First, *God activates our seared consciences when we're victims of unfair treatment similar to what we once gave someone else.* Joseph accused the brothers of being spies, threw them into prison, and kept one from returning home. Sounds a lot like what Joseph endured at the hands of his brothers. And the soulful distress his brothers experienced reminded them of Joseph and began to stir their consciences.

Second, *God activates our seared consciences when we're recipients of undeserved expressions of grace.* As the prime minister of Egypt, Joseph could have given his brothers what they deserved—slavery and imprisonment. Instead, they received grain, money, and freedom. This act of grace finally roused their sleeping consciences.

Think of a time when you deserved punishment but received grace instead. How did it make you feel? Have you ever treated someone unfairly and later received similar treatment from someone else? How did you react?



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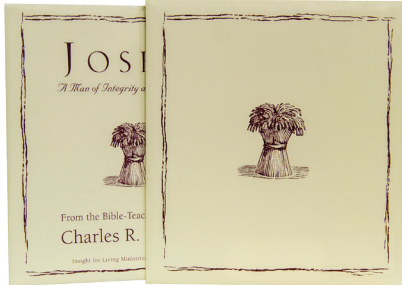
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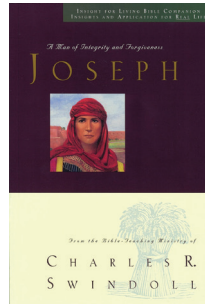
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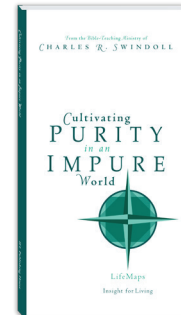
Tools for Digging Deeper



Joseph: A Man of Integrity and Forgiveness
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compact disc series



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