



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

Look inside your heart's vest pocket. Are you carrying with you a little book of revenge? Most of us keep one handy so that when someone wrongs us, we can stick that offense like a trading stamp on the pages of the book. Collect enough stamps, and our revenge book is ready to be cashed in for an act of justifiable retaliation.

We all have been a victim of unfair, undeserved treatment. We've been betrayed, maligned, disrespected, and stabbed in the back by people who once said they loved us, and the wounds are real and the scars are deep—and our books are full.

What do we do with our books of revenge? Some might say that retaliation is fitting. "Give them a dose of their own medicine!" However, instead of healing our pain, revenge poisons our soul. Joseph, whose account appears in the book of Genesis, models a better solution. Rather than catalog offenses, Joseph teaches us to release them; rather than even the score, we are to extend grace.



### DIGGING DEEPER

Joseph's catalog of offenses against him could fill the thickest book in the library! Let's dig into Scripture to discover what happened to him when he was tested and how he responded to the tests.

## Quotable

*The grinding feelings of resentment are not resolved by acts of revenge. They're resolved by extending grace.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



### Joseph: What Happened to Him?

In the chart below, we've listed the many ways that Joseph was victimized, along with the biblical accounts. Read the passages to find out the details of the story, and write down under the *Victimization* heading any other descriptors that come to mind.

Genesis Reference	Account	Victimization
37:3–4	Joseph's brothers hated him because their father loved him best and made a special robe for him.	Hatred Jealousy
37:5–11	Joseph's dreams turned his brothers against him.	Bullying
37:12–24	His brothers planned to kill Joseph and hide his body in a cistern.	Conspiracy to murder Threats Assault
37:25–36	His brothers sold Joseph to Midianite traders, who transported him to Egypt where he was sold. The brothers lied to their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.	Enslavement Rejection Betrayal Cover-up
39–40	Potiphar's wife accused Joseph of rape, so Potiphar threw him into prison. Another prisoner forgot his promise to help him when released.	False accusation Unjust imprisonment Forgotten

In just a few years, Joseph had tumbled from favored son to forgotten prisoner in a foreign land. Who could help him? His father who loved him thought him dead, and his brothers didn't care if he were dead. His only hope was the Lord.





### *Searching the Scriptures* Study Tool

A key technique in the *Searching the Scriptures* process is to use your imagination to enter a biblical scene. For the next few moments, with your mind's eye, picture a cavern in an underground Egyptian dungeon. Step into the filthy, dimly lit, stifling-hot chamber with Joseph the prisoner, and hear him recount his story.

For thirteen years, young Joseph suffered physical and mental abuse, mistreatment, and rejection beyond what most people could endure. "I was kidnapped from my homeland," Joseph said, "the land of the Hebrews, and now I'm here in prison, but I did nothing to deserve it" (Genesis 40:15 NLT).

Can you hear the emotion in Joseph's words? Imagine what a resentful, angry person might say to you if he or she were in Joseph's situation. What thoughts might he or she express about the offender? About God?

Perhaps you have stared at the four walls of Joseph's cell from the inside of your own victimization. Like Joseph, you did nothing to deserve what happened to you, and yet mistreatment struck you down. What thoughts have you had about your offender and about God?

God wraps victims in His arms of compassion and grace. Read Isaiah 61:1–3, imagining the Lord saying these words of hope to you. What phrases of comfort stand out in this passage for you?



At each stage of Joseph's lonely saga, God blessed him with reminders of His presence. In Potiphar's house, God blessed Joseph with responsibilities (Genesis 39:2–6). In prison, God blessed him with the trust of the warden (39:21–23). Although all others abandoned him, "the LORD was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love" (39:21).

In his sermon, Chuck Swindoll comments about Joseph's deep connection with God through his victimization:

In the mind of Joseph, there is a relationship with the living God that is so significant that none of the evil things happening to him blot it out. Hear me on this. It's a remarkable thing, but it's the background of grace. His relationship to God was greater than any of the punishment he was living with. His confidence in God's plan was broader, deeper, bigger than anything anyone had ever done to him.



### Key Principle One

When studying individuals like Joseph, a life principle will emerge from the pages of Scripture almost as if the person himself or herself is talking directly to you. If Joseph could speak from his prison cell about his relationship with God through his suffering, what life principle might he give you based on what you know about Joseph from your study so far? Use this principle as you teach this story to others.

### Joseph: When He Was Tested

Finally, after two years in prison, a rescue party arrived for Joseph when his ex-prison mate mentioned his name to Pharaoh who called on him to interpret his dreams. God revealed the interpretation through Joseph to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh was so pleased that he made Joseph second-in-command over all of Egypt (Genesis 41:1–46).



On wings of heavenly grace, Joseph rose out of the pit to the pinnacle. He prospered and had two sons: Manasseh and Ephraim. What did the births of these two boys signify to Joseph? The answer is in the meaning of their names (Genesis 41:50–52).

Although his pain was behind him, Joseph's greatest test lay just ahead when his brothers arrived disheveled, desperate, and starving because of a famine. They came to Egypt for the grain that Joseph had wisely stored for such a season.

As Joseph's brothers entered his ornate chamber, "they bowed before him with their faces to the ground" (42:6). Joseph's adolescent prophetic dream had become reality! At his feet begging for food were the same heartless brothers who turned a deaf ear when he was at their feet begging for his life (42:21).

Would he take revenge? Would he do to his brothers as they had done to him? Did Joseph lick his lips at the opportunity to crush his brothers? How tempting is the elixir of revenge—the intoxicating swill of power when you return hurt for hurt and show no mercy when your offender pleads for it.



### Key Principle Two

You may be in a testing period like Joseph, caught in the emotional middle between the pain from the past and the relief of moving forward. Read the way he dealt with his brothers in Genesis 42–45 and, specifically, his emotional outbursts in Genesis 42:21–24, 43:29–31, and 45:1–2. What principle do Joseph's tears teach about the importance of working through emotions in the process of forgiveness? How would you communicate this principle to others?



### Joseph: How He Responded

Eventually, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. As you read the passage, record in the space below the many times Joseph focused on the sovereign plan of God. Also note the ways Joseph extended grace to his undeserving brothers and their families. Read Genesis 45:1–15; 47:1–12.

After Jacob died, Joseph’s brothers feared that Joseph might finally take his revenge. Joseph reassured them in the following grace-filled, God-trusting message to his offenders, one that is a model for anyone who has been a victim.

But Joseph replied, “Don’t be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? *You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good.* He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. No, don’t be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children.” So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them. (Genesis 50:19–21, emphasis added)



### Key Principle Three

You can see God’s plan through your victimization, just as Joseph did—without justifying or excusing the wrong but by honoring God and His redeeming power. Write a final principle based on what you think Joseph would teach you about extending grace to your offender.





### Bring It Home

The offenses in your book of revenge may include a business partner who stole money from you. A friend who made a joke about you in public. An employer who fired you because a coworker pinned his or her mistakes on you. A person you tried to help who accused you of things you never did. You may bear the consequences of someone else's sin, such as a spouse's adultery or a parent's alcoholism. The list could go on and on.

As you consider how to release offenses and extend grace, keep in mind the following guidelines:

- *When someone is afraid you will retaliate, extend grace by not doing so.*
- *When you have the authority to punish someone for hurting you, extend grace by refusing to play God and enact your own vengeance.*
- *When you recognize the wrong that was done against you, extend grace by realizing that God can redeem an act of evil for your ultimate good.*

The same grace that frees you from bitterness enables you to see God's sovereign hand through it all.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Dear Father, I am surrounded by hateful people who sometimes target me. Help me learn from Joseph the important power of extending grace. Just as Joseph showed grace, help me to show grace. Just as Jesus forgave, help me to forgive. Amen.*



# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

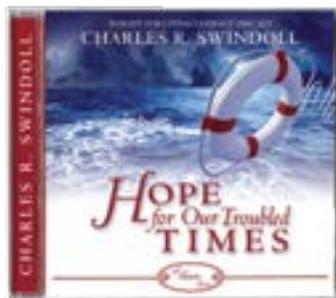
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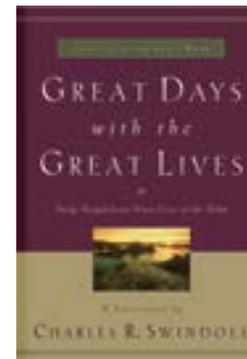
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