

# EPOCHAL EVENTS NOBODY EXPECTED

## STUDY TWO

### An Abused Man and His Brothers

*Genesis 41:37–44; 45:1–8; 50:18–21*

*God gave Joseph a long-range view and delivered him from the narrow tunnel of his past.*

—Charles R. Swindoll

**J**OSEPH was the favored son of his father Jacob and heir to God's covenant with his great grandfather Abraham. As a teen, Joseph had a promising future, as hopeful as the sun rising over the green hills where he tended his father's sheep. But then, just as *every epochal event begins with an unexpected trial*, a sudden storm of adversity blew through Joseph's life and tore apart his world.

Jealous of Joseph's favored status, Joseph's older brothers nabbed him one day when he came to check on them in the fields; they intended to kill their brother. However, figuring there was no profit in murder, they decided to sell Joseph to slave traders instead. Then, to cover their sin, they soaked Joseph's coat in blood and led their father to believe a wild beast had killed his beloved son (Genesis 37:18–33).

Carted to Egypt, Joseph was auctioned off as a house servant to Potiphar and worked hard to win the favor of his master. But then, when Joseph refused Potiphar's wife's sexual advances, Mrs. Potiphar falsely accused Joseph of attacking her, so Potiphar threw Joseph into prison (39:1–20). This life was *not* the life of young Joseph's dreams!

As a boy in Canaan, Joseph had dreams—two very vivid, God-given dreams. They foretold that he would be a ruler someday and that his family, including his hateful older brothers, would bow down to him (37:5–11). How *impossible* those dreams must have seemed in prison! Joseph's "throne room" was a dingy, rat-infested cell and his "royal bed" a hard, bare floor. In this lonely place, Joseph sat day after day . . . *rehearsing every offense, nursing a grudge against those who had done him wrong, and bitterly plotting his revenge*. Well, that's what we'd expect him to do, right?



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

## An Abused Man and His Brothers

*Genesis 41:37–44; 45:1–8; 50:18–21*

We'll find out Joseph's response to his abusers as we examine the rest of Joseph's story and the epochal moment when God made Joseph's impossible dreams possible. But first, let's prepare our hearts to study God's Word and receive His message of love to victims like Joseph.



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

The abuse Joseph suffered at the hands of his family and his captors must have left deep physical and emotional scars. Perhaps you have suffered at the hands of others as well. When others' sins wound us, where can we go for comfort, protection, and justice? We run to the Savior, who, as the prophet Isaiah foretold, makes a safe place for victims:

*He will not crush the weakest reed  
or put out a flickering candle.  
He will bring justice to all who have been wronged. (Isaiah 42:3)*

Take a moment for quiet communion with your Savior. Ask the Lord to reveal His care for you through the account of Joseph's abuse and recovery. And pray that He will redeem your past, heal your wounds, then help you see His perfect plan for your life.



### YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Up to now, Joseph's life was a downward spiral of injustices that forced Joseph into a pit so deep that there seemed no hope of rescue. Let's take a closer look at what happened to him and how God remained with Joseph even when all others abandoned him.



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#### Observation: The Lord Was with Joseph

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method, a crucial first step is observation, which involves examining the text as if we're looking through a magnifying glass. What specific abuses did Joseph suffer?

#### A Tragic Account of Abuse

Let's review the ways Joseph experienced abuse. Read each verse below and write down what form of abuse Joseph suffered. The first two are filled in as examples.

- Emotional and verbal abuse: "His brothers hated Joseph. . . . They couldn't say a kind word to him" (Genesis 37:4).
- Murder conspiracy: "Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns" (37:20).
- \_\_\_\_\_: "His brothers ripped off the beautiful robe he was wearing. Then they grabbed him and threw him into the cistern" (37:23–24).
- \_\_\_\_\_: "Joseph's brothers . . . sold him to [the Ishmaelites] for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt" (37:28).
- \_\_\_\_\_: "The brothers . . . dipped Joseph's robe in [goat's] blood" and "sent the beautiful robe to their father" (37:31–32).
- \_\_\_\_\_: "the Midianite traders . . . sold Joseph to Potiphar" (37:36).
- \_\_\_\_\_: "[Potiphar's wife] kept putting pressure on Joseph day after day, but he refused to sleep with her. . . . She came and grabbed him by his cloak, demanding, 'Come on, sleep with me!'" (39:10, 12).
- \_\_\_\_\_: "'That Hebrew slave you've brought into our house tried to come in and fool around with me,' she said" (39:17).
- \_\_\_\_\_: "[Potiphar] took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king's prisoners were held, and there he remained" (39:20).



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Joseph endured unimaginable abuses, experiencing some of the worst forms of evil that humans can inflict on one another. Assault, fraud, confinement, kidnapping, human trafficking, sexual harassment, false accusation, and more. What impacts you most about this list? How would you have responded if you had been Joseph?

*What a shock for Joseph to go from favored son to forgotten boy. From a pampered child to an enslaved, unknown, young man. How easy it would have been for him to nurse a grudge and lick his wounds as he rehearsed his abuses, none of which were deserved.*  
—Chuck Swindoll

### An Inspiring Example of Character

And yet, as deep into the pit as Joseph descended, he never sunk into despair. What clue does the text give as the source of Joseph's stability during his storms? Read [Genesis 39:2](#) and [39:21](#).

Although people betrayed Joseph, God walked with him each painful step of the way. What character traits did Joseph's closeness with God highlight in Joseph? Draw your answers from Joseph's integrity displayed while in Potiphar's household and while in prison ([Genesis 39:2–9; 21–23](#)).



**An Abused Man and His Brothers**

*Genesis 41:37–44; 45:1–8; 50:18–21*

No one could have predicted the events that led teenaged Joseph from his home in Canaan to a prison in Egypt. It is the nature of epochal events that no one sees the storms coming, and rescue is humanly impossible. Only rays from heaven can light the way through the pitch-black darkness. For Joseph, God’s guiding light came in the form of dreams.

**A Providential Rescue through Dreams**

Joseph’s dreams and their fulfillment played a crucial role in God rescuing Joseph from prison and, ultimately, rescuing Joseph’s family from famine in Canaan. They also testify to Joseph’s *intimate walk with God*, which is both the reason for Joseph’s survival and success in Egypt and the secret to his positive and indomitable attitude.

In the following chart, write down the elements of the dreams and the interpretations.

Verses	Dream Elements	Interpretation
<i>Genesis 37:5–11</i>		
<i>Genesis 40:5–23</i>		
<i>Genesis 41:1–36</i>		

“Interpreting dreams is God’s business” (Genesis 40:8), Joseph told his prison mates. Why? Because God was the source of their dreams, and God held the prisoners’ future in His hands. What did Joseph say when Pharaoh asked Joseph to interpret his dreams (41:16)?



### An Abused Man and His Brothers

*Genesis 41:37–44; 45:1–8; 50:18–21*

When he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph made it clear that he was merely God's mouthpiece. Pharaoh, who was considered a god by the Egyptians, marveled at Joseph's closeness with God: "Can we find anyone else like this man so obviously filled with the spirit of God?" (Genesis 41:38).

In the previous study, the epochal moment occurred when an angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven (22:11–12). In this epochal moment, God spoke through Joseph as he interpreted Pharaoh's dream. This divine word from the Lord forever altered Joseph's future and the future of Abraham's entire lineage. It moved the hand of Pharaoh to rescue Joseph from prison and give Joseph a God-ordained mission. What was this mission (41:37–57)?

When famine struck, Joseph's brothers, humbled by hunger, came to Egypt for food. Fulfilling Joseph's prophetic boyhood dreams, his brothers bowed before the one they had abused. Instead of taking revenge, however, Joseph took his family under his care and gloried in the providence of God who had brought good from evil (42–46).



#### **Interpretation: God Intended It All for Good**

In the interpretive phase, we seek to understand the meaning of Joseph's life story. The key to understanding is found in a statement Joseph made to his brothers after they moved to Egypt: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good" (Genesis 50:20).

What had just occurred before Joseph made this statement (49:33–50:13)?



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What were Joseph's brothers afraid of after their father died (*Genesis 50:14–18*)?

How did Joseph reassure his brothers (*50:19–21*)?

What was Joseph's view of God that made it possible for him to forgive his brothers?

Joseph told his abusers, in effect, “You weren't in charge of my life; God brought me here, and His plan is right!” At the core of Joseph's faith was an unwavering trust in the grace and goodness of God.

*God gave Joseph a long-range view and delivered him from the narrow tunnel of his past. This is the same man who was hated by his siblings. Same man who was abandoned and sold. Same man who was falsely accused of rape, thrown in prison, and left to die. He was the same man who had the chance to get even but said, “Am I God, that I can punish you?” . . . Grace was the one concept the brothers could not fathom. —Chuck Swindoll*



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### Correlation: God Offers Grace

God shows grace to victims like Joseph by walking close to them through their trials. God also shows grace to sinners like Joseph's brothers by forgiving them when they humbly repent. What do the following verses say about the healing power of God's amazing grace toward those who sin and those who suffer?

*2 Corinthians 12:9*

*1 Peter 5:5–7*



### Application: Grace for the Abused and the Abusers

We began our study focusing on Joseph as a model for sufferers. If you, like Joseph, have felt the sting of other people's sins, what about Joseph's walk with God encourages you today?



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What principle about God’s redemptive plan for our lives can you apply from Joseph’s words to his abusers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good” (Genesis 50:20)?

On the other hand, you may identify with Joseph’s brothers—as one who struggles to receive God’s gracious forgiveness. How does Joseph’s attitude of restoration toward his brothers reveal God’s heart toward you?

From the pit of prison to the pinnacle of the palace, our sojourn in Joseph’s life has been nothing short of incredible. Joseph ended his days in right standing with God and free from the bitterness of his past. He faced death with no resentment toward those who harmed him. How can we experience this kind of peace? By daily embracing God’s grace. God will never abandon us, even through our deepest trials.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, God of grace and glory, master of my life, and planner of all that is good and best, hear my prayer of trust as I bring to You my pain and heartache. Relieve me of the guilt of my sin and heal me from the hurt caused by the sin of others. I release my resentment and bitterness to You, my Savior who loves me and walks with me through every trial I face. Amen.*



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## STUDY TWO

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

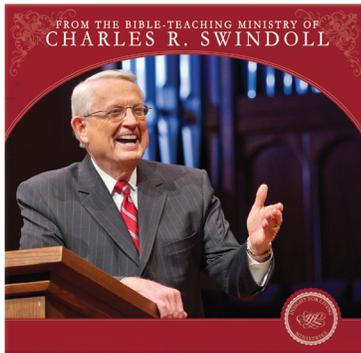
STUDY

## An Abused Man and His Brothers

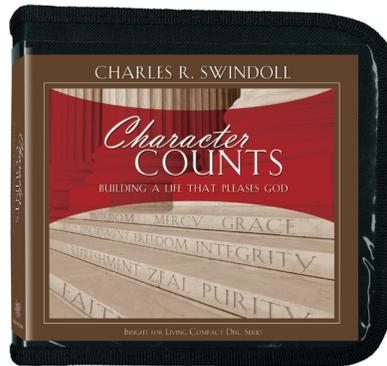
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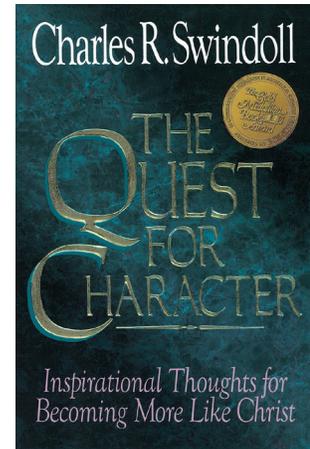
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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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