

Faces OF Perseverance

JUANITA PURCELL

Dedication

To my dear husband, J. O., who has taught me what it means to persevere. His philosophy is that you keep going whether you feel like it or not. As I write this, he has been preaching for 47 years and has never missed a Sunday he was scheduled to preach. I attribute this to God's good hand of blessing on him and J. O.'s tenacious spirit of perseverance.

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God's Plan of Salvation

Carefully ponder these Scripture verses, as they explain how you can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

God loves you and wants you to enjoy the abundant life He offers you.

- John 3:16—“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”
- John 10:10—Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

Man is sinful, and his sin separates him from God.

- Romans 3:23—“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”
- Romans 6:23—“For the wages of sin is death [spiritual separation from God].”

Jesus Christ's death is the only provision God has made to pay for man's sin.

- Romans 5:8—“But God commendeth [demonstrated] his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
- John 14:6—“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

You must receive Jesus Christ as your Savior before you can personally experience His love for you and the abundant life He has planned for you.

- John 1:12—“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”

You can invite Christ into your life right now by an act of faith.

- Ephesians 2:8, 9—“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Are you ready to invite Christ into your life to be your Savior? Use the following prayer as a guide to help you express your desire to God: “Lord God, I know I am a

sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe Jesus died for my sins. Right now I receive Him as my Savior. Take control of my life, and replace all the restlessness and anxiety with peace and contentment.”

If you have prayed this prayer, tell your Bible study leader or a friend who has been trying to help you.

Learn to trust God’s Word—not your feelings—when doubts come.

- Romans 10:13—“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
- 1 John 5:11–13—“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

Preface

The Bible is one of the best books you will ever read for seeing the diversity of people's personalities. From Genesis to Revelation the extreme differences are vividly painted as portraits for us to remember.

In this study, we will see the faces of four men and women who teach us valuable lessons in perseverance. They experienced vastly different circumstances, and from their stories God teaches us, warns us, and encourages us. My prayer is that the portraits of Joseph, Ruth, Job, and Esther will weave new truths into our hearts and minds that will help us persevere when we feel like quitting.

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

Part One: Joseph's Perseverance

L E S S O N 1

From the Pit to the Palace

“And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him; and they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it” (Genesis 37:23, 24).

Joseph was one of the twelve sons of Jacob, or Israel. Jacob had two wives, Leah, whom he was tricked into marrying, and Rachel, the one he loved. Leah and her maid, who represented her, bore Jacob eight sons. So Rachel gave her maid to Jacob as a surrogate for herself. This maid had two sons. Then the Lord allowed Rachel to bear a son. The ten older brothers knew that this child of their father's favorite wife was also their father's favorite son. Jacob never hid that Joseph was his pet. Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph spurred the ten brothers to hate their younger brother.

Genesis 37

Verses 1–4

1. List the reasons the older brothers hated Joseph. If you have a Bible dictionary or commentary, try to find how the coat of many colors demonstrated favoritism.

Verse 2

Verse 3

Verses 5–10

Joseph told his family they would all bow down to and give him obeisance, or homage.

2. If you were to ask the Lord one question about your childhood, what would it be? Why is it important that we not dwell on our past if it is full of unpleasant memories (Philippians 3:13, 14)?

As we move through the story of Joseph's life, we will be impressed with one amazing truth: Joseph did not hang onto his past.

Verses 12–36

3. How did the brothers show their hatred for Joseph and then try to cover up their actions?

Genesis 39

Verses 1–6

Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold as a slave. Potiphar, the captain of the pharaoh's guards, bought Joseph, who must have felt terribly alone. But he was not alone. Verse 2 says, "And the LORD was with Joseph." Potiphar saw that God's hand was on Joseph and blessed him in special ways (v. 3). So it appears that Joseph adjusted to his new place in life and flourished (v. 4). Potiphar made Joseph overseer of his whole household (v. 5). Why did he do so well? Because the Lord was with him (v. 2). Joseph went from a pit to a palace.

Verses 7–20

4. However, Joseph was mistreated again. Who vented anger against him this time?
5. What two reasons did Joseph give for resisting the seductive enticements?
6. How did Potiphar's wife retaliate?
7. When someone makes sexual remarks or advances toward a woman in her workplace or in other situations, what might it cost her to flee the enticements?

Verses 21–23

At seventeen years of age, Joseph was put into a pit but ended up in a palace, or estate. Then, as overseer of Potiphar's household, he went from the palace back to a pit, or prison. Yet while he was in prison, Joseph accepted his circumstances without complaining or having a "poor-me" spirit. Why? Joseph knew God had allowed it and was showing him mercy and favor (v. 21). Joseph became prominent in the prison, just as he had as a slave in Potiphar's house. In both situations the masters promoted him to be director of affairs (vv. 5, 22).

Genesis 40

Joseph was thrown into the king's prison, the Egyptian equivalent to our prisons for white-collar criminals. The king's cupbearer and chief baker were put in the prison with Joseph. Both had perplexing dreams, and Joseph offered to try to interpret the dreams for them with God's help: "Do not interpretations belong to God?" he asked (v. 8). After interpreting their dreams, Joseph asked the cupbearer to speak on his behalf (vv. 14, 15). However, after the cupbearer was released, he forgot about Joseph (v. 23). Joseph could have railed against God and those who had mistreated him. He could have bailed out, giving up on God and others. He didn't rail out or bail out—he persevered. He trusted God to fulfill the dream he had had as a boy (37:6–10).

8. Has God ever put you through years of trying circumstances when you felt like bailing out but you persevered? What were the circumstances? What helped you persevere?

Genesis 41**Verses 1–36**

After two years, Joseph knew his request to the cupbearer had been forgotten (v. 1). But God had not forgotten Joseph. Pharaoh needed someone to interpret a troubling dream, and none of his magicians or wise men were able to interpret it (v. 8). The king's cupbearer told Pharaoh that when he was in prison, a young Hebrew servant had interpreted his dream (vv. 9–13). Joseph was then brought before the king (v. 14). "There will be seven years of plenty in Egypt, followed by seven years of famine,"

he told Pharaoh (vv. 25–32). Joseph counseled him to set aside reserves of grain in the seven good years of plenty so there would be sufficient grain during the years of famine (vv. 33–36). Joseph once again went from a pit to a palace.

Verses 37–45

9. Again God showed favor to Joseph. What honor did he receive from Pharaoh?

Verse 46

10. As a young man, Joseph had a dream that his father and eleven brothers would one day bow down to him. How old was Joseph when people began bowing down to him?

Verses 47–57

11. (a) Explain how the dream Joseph interpreted for the king came to pass.

(b) How was Joseph's counsel to Pharaoh to set aside grain during the abundant years a benefit to Egypt?

Verses 50–52

12. What do the names of Joseph's two sons tell you about Joseph?

Erwin Lutzer points out that “Joseph refused to allow his past to be the prism through which he would view his life. His past would not be allowed to color and destroy any hope of being fruitful in his present or in his future. . . . Perhaps you’ve never considered this before, but God is able to make us fruitful in the land of our suffering—the very point at which the pain is the deepest and our future most hopeless. God would never allow our pain if He did not intend that it bear fruit.”¹

13. Do you live with more bad memories than hopeful dreams for your future? Is there something in your painful past that you need to turn loose? If so, what is it? What action is needed on your part?

Genesis 42

Verses 1–5

Our story now switches back to Joseph's father, Jacob, who was still in Canaan, where the famine was severe. Hearing there was plenty of grain in Egypt, Jacob sent ten of his sons for supplies. Only Benjamin, his youngest son and Joseph's biological brother, remained at home. Jacob and his sons had no idea that Joseph was still alive and the governor of Egypt or that he was the one they would have to ask to sell them the grain.

Verses 6, 7

14. When Joseph saw his brothers, he knew them, but they didn't know him. How do 42:6 and 43:28 relate back to 37:10?

Verses 8–20

When Joseph saw his brothers, he treated them harshly and accused them of being spies (v. 9). He then had them put into prison for three days (v. 17). He told them to bring their youngest brother to him to prove they were not spies (vv. 15, 16, 18–20). Simeon was kept as a hostage, while the nine others returned to Canaan for Benjamin (v. 24).

15. How do we know that the brothers felt God was chastening them?

Verses 21–24

16. (a) The brothers did not know Joseph heard them talking about him, because he had spoken to them with an interpreter. How did Joseph react after hearing how they had treated him?

- (b) What does his reaction tell you about his feelings toward his brothers?

The brothers' emotions ranged from humiliation to fear to regret. The humiliation came from acknowledging their need to the Egyptian foreigners. The fear came when Joseph accused them of being spies, since Joseph could have them killed immediately (vv. 9–20). The regret came later (v. 21), although Reuben played the blame game (v. 22). Joseph heard and understood the entire conversation. The emotions he had pent up for twenty-plus years broke, and he wept (v. 24).²

Joseph could have poured out vengeance against his brothers, but he didn't! It appears he must have forgiven his brothers years before. He worked through his suffering and did not hang onto it. His life is a picture of perseverance.

17. Have you ever felt that years ago you had forgiven someone but realized you had to forgive again when you saw that person face-to-face? What was the situation?

Verses 25–35

18. (a) Again in verse 28 we see God bringing His hand against the brothers. What happened that made them say, "What is this that God hath done unto us?"

- (b) How did they react?

Genesis 43

Verses 1–14

When the brothers got home, they told their father what had happened in Egypt. Jacob was devastated when they told him that his youngest son, Benjamin, would have to be taken to Egypt at the governor's request. Jacob felt that would be more than he could bear.

19. At first, Jacob would not hear of sending Benjamin back to Egypt. Why did he change his mind?

Verses 15–34

20. On the brothers' return trip to Egypt, Joseph invited the brothers to his house (vv. 16–18). Why did this make them fearful?

21. What did Joseph do that amazed his brothers (vv. 33, 34)?



From My Heart

Were you raised in what our world calls a dysfunctional family? Wikipedia describes a dysfunctional family as “a family in which conflict, misbehavior, and often abuse on the part of individual members occur continually and regularly.”

No doubt Joseph's family would be labeled “dysfunctional” in today's society. However, Joseph did not dwell on the abuse and mistreatment he experienced as a young man. His confidence in God allowed him to persevere through the tough times.

None of us had perfect parents, and none of us are perfect parents. Years ago I turned loose of my childhood and teens years, realizing they should have and could have been so different. I also turned loose of my parenting years, realizing I should have and could have been a better mother. When I think of my past, I try to dwell on pleasant, positive times and not rehearse the hurts and failures.



From Your Heart

Do you have a painful past? Has rehearsing your painful past helped you? What did you learn from your study of Genesis 37—42 that can help you turn loose your past and help you start thinking about things that can brighten your future?

Notes

1. Erwin W. Lutzer, *When You've Been Wronged* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 123–24.
2. Paul Borthwick, *Joseph: How God Builds Character* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 58.