

MAX LUCADO

**NEVER
GIVE
UP**

**GOD IS
GOOD**
WHEN LIFE
ISN'T



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

Never Give Up

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ISBN 978-1-4003-4899-2 (HC)

ISBN 978-1-4003-4898-5 (audiobook)

ISBN 978-1-4003-4897-8 (ePub)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

978-1-4003-4899-2

Printed in the United States of America

\$PrintCode

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ONE

DOWN IN A HOLE

The boy's body slammed against the pit's clammy walls as he plummeted down, down the dank hole to the bottom. He landed with a thump, his aching head bobbing like a rag doll's. Yet the wounds of his body were overrun by the unimaginable reality of betrayal. Rejection. Hopelessness.

So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him. Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it.

And they sat down to eat a meal. (Gen. 37:23–25)

He was in an abandoned cistern, jagged rocks and roots extending from its sides. A seventeen-year-old boy

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alone at the bottom. Downy beard, spindly arms and legs. His hands were bound, ankles tied. He lay on his side, knees to chest, cramped in the small space. The sand was wet with spittle, where he had drooled. His eyes were wide with fear. His voice was hoarse from screaming. It wasn't that his brothers didn't hear him. Twenty-two years later, when a famine had tamed their swagger and guilt had dampened their pride, they would confess, "We saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear" (Gen. 42:21).

These are the great-grandsons of Abraham. The sons of Jacob. Couriers of God's covenant to a galaxy of people. Tribes will bear their banners. The name of Jesus Christ will appear on their family tree. They are the Scriptures' equivalent of royalty. Yet on this day they were the Bronze Age version of a dysfunctional family. They could have had their own reality TV show. In the shadow of a sycamore, in earshot of Joseph's appeals, they chewed on venison and passed the wineskin. Cruel and oafish. Hearts as hard as the Canaanite desert. Lunch mattered more than their brother. They despised the boy. "They hated him and could not speak peaceably to him. . . . They hated him even more. . . . They hated him. . . . His brothers envied him" (37:4-11).

Here's why. Their father pampered Joseph like a

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prized calf. Jacob had two wives, Leah and Rachel, but one love—Rachel. When Rachel died, Jacob kept her memory alive by fawning over their first son. The brothers worked all day. Joseph played all day. They wore clothes from a secondhand store. Jacob gave Joseph a hand-stitched, multicolored cloak with embroidered sleeves. They slept in the bunkhouse. He had a queen-sized bed in his own room. While they ran the family herd, Joseph, Daddy’s little darling, stayed home. Jacob treated the eleventh-born like a firstborn. The brothers spat at the sight of Joseph.

To say the family was in crisis would be like saying a grass hut might be unstable in a hurricane.

The brothers caught Joseph far from home, sixty miles away from Daddy’s protection, and went nuclear on him. “They *stripped* Joseph of his tunic. . . . They *took* him and *cast* him into a pit” (Gen. 37:23–24). Defiant verbs. They wanted not only to kill Joseph but also hide his body. This was a murderous cover-up from the get-go. “We shall say, ‘Some wild beast has devoured him’” (37:20).

Joseph didn’t see this assault coming. He didn’t climb out of bed that morning and think, *I’d better dress in padded clothing because this is the day I get tossed into a hole*. The attack caught him off guard.

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So did yours. Joseph's pit came in the form of a cistern. Maybe yours came in the form of a diagnosis, a foster home, or a traumatic injury. Joseph was thrown in a hole and despised. And you? Thrown in an unemployment line and forgotten. Thrown into a divorce and abandoned. Into a bed and abused. The pit. A kind of death, waterless and austere. Some people never recover. Life is reduced to one quest: Get out and never be hurt again.

Easier said than done. Pits have no easy exits.

Joseph's story got worse before it got better. Abandonment led to enslavement, then entrapment, and finally imprisonment. He was sucker punched. Sold out. Mistreated. People made promises only to break them, offered gifts only to take them back. If hurt were a swampland, then Joseph was sentenced to a life of hard labor in the Everglades.

Yet he never gave up. Bitterness never staked its claim. Anger never metastasized into hatred. His heart never hardened; his resolve never vanished. He not only survived; he thrived. He ascended like a helium balloon. An Egyptian official promoted him to chief servant. The prison warden placed him over the inmates. And Pharaoh, the highest ruler on the planet, shoulder-tapped Joseph to serve as his prime minister. By the end of his life, Joseph was the second-most powerful man of

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his generation. It is not hyperbole to state that he saved the world from starvation. How would that look on a résumé?

JOSEPH

Son of Jacob

Graduated with honors from the
University of Hard Knocks
Director of Global Effort to Save Humanity
Succeeded

How? How did he flourish in the midst of tragedy? We don't have to speculate. Some twenty years later the roles were reversed, Joseph as the strong one and his brothers the weak ones. They came to him in dread. They feared he would settle the score and throw them into a pit of his own making. But Joseph didn't. And in his explanation, we find his inspiration.

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. (Gen. 50:20 NASB)

In God's hands, intended evil becomes eventual good—which is why we should never give up.

NEVER GIVE UP

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Joseph never gave up. He tied himself to the pillar of this promise and held on for dear life. Nothing in his story glosses over the *presence* of evil. Quite the contrary. Bloodstains and tearstains are everywhere. Joseph's heart was rubbed raw against the rocks of disloyalty and miscarried justice. Yet time and time again God redeemed the pain. The torn robe became a royal one. The pit became a palace. The broken family grew old together. The very acts intended to destroy God's servant turned out to strengthen him.

"You *meant* evil against me," Joseph told his brothers, using a Hebrew verb that traces its meaning to "weave" or "plait."¹ "You *wove* evil," he was saying, "but God *reweave* it together for good."

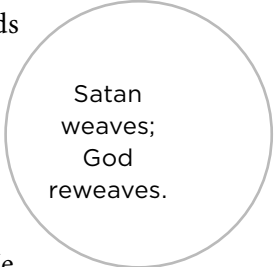
God, the Master Weaver. He stretches the yarn and intertwines the colors, the ragged twine with the velvet strings, the pains with the pleasures. Nothing escapes his reach. Every king, despot, weather pattern, and molecule is at his command. He passes the shuttle back and forth across the generations, and as he does, a design emerges.

Satan weaves; God reweaves.

By giving us stories like Joseph's, God allows us to study his plans. Such disarray! Brothers dumping

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brother. Entitlements. Famines and family feuds scattered about like nails and cement bags on a vacant lot. Satan's logic was sinister and simple: Destroy the family of Abraham and thereby destroy his seed, Jesus Christ. All of hell, it seems, set its target on Jacob's boys.



Satan
weaves;
God
reweaves.

But watch the Master Weaver at work. He zigged when the enemy zagged. Created a pattern. Blended the pain into a palette until the chaos of Genesis 37:24 ("They . . . cast him into a pit") became the triumph of "life for many people" (Gen. 50:20 MSG).

God redeemed the story of Joseph. Can't he redeem your story as well?

Perhaps that's tough to hear in the midst of your pain. But God never changes. Our Father is good even when life isn't. If you're in the bottom of a pit, let me urge you: Don't give up. And though it's hard to imagine during the heaviest storms—*you'll get through this.*

You fear you won't. We all do. We fear the depression will never lift, the yelling will never stop, the pain will never leave. Here in the pits, surrounded by steep walls and angry brothers, we wonder, *Will this gray sky ever brighten? This load ever lighten?* We feel stuck, trapped, locked in. Predestined for failure. Will we ever exit this pit?



NEVER GIVE UP

Our
Father
is good
even
when life
isn't.

Yes! Deliverance is to the Bible what jazz music is to Mardi Gras: bold, brassy, and everywhere.

Out of the lions' den for Daniel, the prison for Peter, the whale's belly for Jonah, Goliath's shadow for David, the storm for the disciples, disease for the lepers, doubt for Thomas, the grave for Lazarus, and the shackles for Paul. God gets us through stuff. *Through* the Red Sea onto dry ground (Ex. 14:22), *through* the wilderness (Deut. 29:5), *through* the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23:4), and *through* the deep sea (Ps. 77:19).

Through is a favorite word of God's:

When you pass *through* the waters, I will be
with you;

And *through* the rivers, they shall not
overflow you.

When you walk *through* the fire, you shall not
be burned,

Nor shall the flame scorch you. (Isa. 43:2)

It won't be painless. Have you wept your final tear or received your last round of chemotherapy? Not necessarily. Will your unhappy marriage become happy in a heartbeat? Not likely. Are you exempt from any trip to the



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cemetery? Does God guarantee the absence of struggle and the abundance of strength? Not in this life. But he does pledge to reweave your pain for a higher purpose.

It won't be quick. Joseph was seventeen years old when his brothers abandoned him. He was at least thirty-seven when he saw them again. Another couple of years passed before he saw his father.² Sometimes God takes his time: One hundred twenty years to prepare Noah for the flood, eighty years to prepare Moses for his work. God called young David to be king but returned him to the sheep pasture. He called Paul to be an apostle and then isolated him in Arabia for perhaps three years. Jesus was on the earth for three decades before he built anything more than a kitchen table.

How long will God take with you? He may take his time. His history is redeemed not in minutes but in lifetimes.

But God will use your mess for good. We see a perfect mess; God sees a perfect chance to train, test, and teach the future prime minister. We see a prison; God sees a kiln. We see famine; God sees the relocation of his chosen lineage. We call it Egypt; God calls it protective custody, where the sons of Jacob can escape barbaric Canaan and multiply abundantly in peace. We see Satan's tricks and ploys. God sees Satan tripped and foiled.

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We see
Satan's tricks
and ploys.
God sees
Satan tripped
and foiled.

Let me be clear. You are a version of Joseph in your generation. You represent a challenge to Satan's plan. You carry something of God within you, something noble and holy, something the world needs—wisdom, kindness, mercy, skill. If Satan can neutralize you, he can mute your influence.

The story of Joseph is in the Bible for this reason: to teach you to trust God to trump evil. What Satan intends for evil, God the Master Weaver redeems for good.

Joseph would be the first to tell you that life in the pit stinks. Yet for all its rottenness doesn't the pit do this much? It forces you to look upward. Someone from *up there* must come *down here* and give you a hand. God did for Joseph. At the right time, in the right way, he will do the same for you.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have you stood at the bedside of a dying family member or friend? Describe that moment and how it affected your faith.
2. Think of a moment from your past that was difficult to handle. A tough spot. How did people attempt to comfort you or advise you during that season?
3. Read through Genesis 37 to gain some background information about Joseph's family and the origins of his story. What are some red flags from verses 1–11 that foreshadow what happened in verses 12–36?
4. Joseph kept being thrown “down” throughout the second half of this chapter. Down to the pit. Down to Egypt. Down to the auction block. How do you typically handle the “downs” of life?
5. How would you *like* to handle the downs of life? Meaning, if you could choose the right response ahead of time, what would it be? What would that look like?

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6. Here is a core promise from this chapter: *In God's hands, intended evil becomes eventual good.* When have you experienced that reality in your story?