

you'll  
get  
through  
this

HOPE AND HELP FOR YOUR TURBULENT TIMES

MAX LUCADO



THOMAS NELSON  
*Since 1798*

NASHVILLE MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

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For Cheryl Green

Steady, wise, full of joy and faith.

Thank you for the innumerable hours of service you  
have given to the UpWords ministry and the Oak  
Hills Church. You model servanthood.



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She had a tremble to her, the inner tremble you could feel with just a hand on her shoulder. I saw her in a grocery store. Had not seen her in some months. I asked about her kids and husband, and when I did, her eyes watered, her chin quivered, and the story spilled out. He'd left her. After twenty years of marriage, three kids, and a dozen moves, gone. Traded her in for a younger model. She did her best to maintain her composure but couldn't. The grocery store produce section became a sanctuary of sorts. Right there between the tomatoes and the heads of lettuce, she wept. We prayed. Then I said, "You'll get through this. It won't be painless. It won't be quick. But God will use this mess for good. In the meantime don't be foolish or naive. But don't despair either. With God's help you will get through this."

Two days later a friend called. He'd just been fired. The dismissal was his fault. He'd made stupid, inappropriate remarks at work. Crude, offensive statements. His boss kicked him out. Now he's a fifty-seven-year-old unemployed manager in a rotten economy. He feels terrible and sounds worse. Wife angry. Kids confused. He needed assurance, so I gave it: "You'll get through this. It won't be painless. It won't be quick. But God will use this mess for good. In the meantime don't be foolish or naive. But don't despair either. With God's help you will get through this."

Then there is the teenager I met at the café where she works.



you'll get through this

She's fresh out of high school, hoping to get into college next month. Her life, as it turns out, hasn't been easy. When she was six years old, her parents divorced. When she was fifteen, they remarried, only to divorce again a few months ago. Recently her parents told her to choose: live with Mom or live with Dad. She got misty-eyed as she described their announcement. I didn't have a chance to tell her this, but if I see her again, you can bet your sweet September I am going to look her square in the eyes and say, "You'll get through this. It won't be painless. It won't be quick. But God will use this mess for good. In the meantime don't be foolish or naive. But don't despair either. With God's help you will get through this."

Audacious of me, right? How dare I say such words? Where did I get the nerve to speak such a promise into tragedy? In a pit, actually. A deep, dark pit. So steep, the boy could not climb out. Had he been able to, his brothers would have shoved him back down. They were the ones who had thrown him in.

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)

It was an abandoned cistern. Jagged rocks and roots extended from its sides. The seventeen-year-old boy lay 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” (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” (37:4–5, 8, 11).

Here’s why. Their father pampered Joseph like a 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, multi-colored 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” (vv. 23–24).<sup>1</sup> 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’” (v. 20).

you'll get through this

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.

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. Not simply 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 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

Graduate 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. (50:20 NASB)

*In God's hands intended evil becomes eventual good.*

Joseph 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, 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."<sup>2</sup> "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 are at his command. He passes the shuttle back and forth across the generations, and as he does, a design emerges. Satan weaves; God reweaves.

And God, the Master Builder. This is the meaning behind Joseph's words "God meant it for good in order to *bring about* . . ."<sup>3</sup> The

you'll get through this

Hebrew word translated here as *bring about* is a construction term.<sup>4</sup> It describes a task or building project akin to the one I drive through every morning. The state of Texas is rebuilding a highway overpass near my house. Three lanes have been reduced to one, transforming a morning commute into a daily stew. The interstate project, like human history, has been in development since before time began. Cranes hover overhead daily. Workers hold signs and shovels, and several million of us grumble. Well, at least I do. *How long is this going to last?*

My next-door neighbors have a different attitude toward the project. The husband and wife are highway engineers, consultants to the department of transportation. They endure the same traffic jams and detours as the rest of us but do so with a better attitude. Why? They know how these projects develop. "It will take time," they respond to my grumbles, "but it will get finished. It's doable." They've seen the plans.

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

But watch the Master Builder at work. He cleared debris, stabilized the structure, and bolted trusses until the chaos of Genesis 37:24 ("They . . . cast him into a pit") became the triumph of Genesis 50:20 ("life for many people").<sup>5</sup>

God as Master Weaver, Master Builder. He redeemed the story of Joseph. Can't he redeem your story as well?

*You'll get through this.* You fear you won't. We all do. We fear that 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?

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)<sup>6</sup>

*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 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.<sup>7</sup> 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

you'll get through this

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.

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 and Master Builder, redeems for good.

Joseph would be the first to tell you that life in the pit stinks. Yet for all its rotteness 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.

down, down,  
down to egypt





---

Joseph's troubles started when his mouth did. He came to breakfast one morning, bubbling and blabbing in sickening detail about the images he had seen in his sleep: sheaves of wheat lying in a circle, all bundled up, ready for harvest. Each one tagged with the name of a different brother—Reuben, Gad, Levi, Zebulun, Judah . . . Right in the center of the circle was Joseph's sheaf. In his dream only his sheaf stood up. The implication: you will bow down to me.

Did he expect his brothers to be excited about this? To pat him on the back and proclaim, "We will gladly kneel before you, our dear baby brother"? They didn't. They kicked dust in his face and told him to get lost.

He didn't take the hint. He came back with another dream. Instead of sheaves it was now stars, a sun, and a moon. The stars represented the brothers. The sun and moon symbolized Joseph's father and deceased mother. All were bowing to Joseph. Joseph! The kid with the elegant coat and soft skin. They, bow down to him?

He should have kept his dreams to himself.

Perhaps Joseph was thinking that very thing as he sat in the bottom of that cistern. His calls for help hadn't done any good. His brothers had seized the chance to seize and silence him once and for all.

But from deep in the pit, Joseph detected a new sound—the sound of a wagon and a camel, maybe two. Then a new set of voices.

you'll get through this

Foreign. They spoke to the brothers with an accent. Joseph strained to understand the conversation.

“We'll sell him to you . . .”

“How much?”

“ . . . trade for your camels . . .”

Joseph looked up to see a circle of faces staring down at him.

Finally one of the brothers was lowered into the pit on the end of a rope. He wrapped both arms around Joseph, and the others pulled them out.

The traders examined Joseph from head to toe. They stuck fingers in his mouth and counted his teeth. They pinched his arms for muscle. The brothers made their pitch: “Not an ounce of fat on those bones. Strong as an ox. He can work all day.”

The merchants huddled, and when they came back with an offer, Joseph realized what was happening. “Stop this! Stop this right now! I am your brother! You can't sell me!” His brothers shoved him to the side and began to barter.

“What will you pay for him?”

“We'll give you ten coins.”

“No less than thirty.”

“Fifteen and no more.”

“Twenty-five.”

“Twenty, and that is our last offer.”

The brothers took the coins, grabbed the fancy coat, and walked away. Joseph fell on his knees and wailed. The merchants tied one end of a rope around his neck and the other to the wagon. Joseph, dirty and tearstained, had no choice but to follow. He fell in behind the creaking wagon and the rack-ribbed camels. He cast one final glance over his shoulder at the backs of his brothers, who disappeared over the horizon.

“Help me!”

No one turned around.

“His brothers . . . sold him for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites who took Joseph with them down to Egypt” (Gen. 37:28 MSG).

*Down to Egypt.* Just a few hours ago Joseph’s life was looking up. He had a new coat and a pampered place in the house. He dreamed his brothers and parents would look up to him. But what goes up must come down, and Joseph’s life came down with a crash. Put down by his siblings. Thrown down into an empty well. Let down by his brothers and sold down the river as a slave. Then led down the road to Egypt.

Down, down, down. Stripped of name, status, position. Everything he had, everything he thought he’d ever have—gone. Vanished. Poof. Just like that.

Just like you? Have you been down in the mouth, down to your last dollar, down to the custody hearing, down to the bottom of the pecking order, down on your luck, down on your life . . . down . . . down to Egypt?

Life pulls us down.

Joseph arrived in Egypt with nothing. Not a penny to his name or a name worth a penny. His family tree was meaningless. His occupation was despised.<sup>1</sup> The clean-shaven people of the pyramids avoided the woolly bedouins of the desert.

No credentials to stand on. No vocation to call on. No family to lean on. He had lost everything, with one exception. His destiny.

Those odd dreams had convinced Joseph that God had plans for him. The details were vague and ill defined, for sure. Joseph had no way of knowing the specifics of his future. But the dreams told him this much: he would have a place of prominence in the midst of his family. Joseph latched on to this dream for the life jacket it was.

How else do we explain his survival? The Bible says nothing

you'll get through this

about his training, education, superior skills, or talents. But the narrator made a lead story out of Joseph's destiny.

The Hebrew boy lost his family, dignity, and home country, but he never lost his belief in God's belief in him. Trudging through the desert toward Egypt, he resolved, *It won't end this way. God has a dream for my life.* While wearing the heavy chains of the slave owners, he remembered, *I've been called to more than this.* Dragged into a city of strange tongues and shaved faces, he told himself, *God has greater plans for me.*

God had a destiny for Joseph, and the boy believed in it.

Do you believe in God's destiny for you?

I'm entering my fourth decade as a pastor. Thirty years is plenty of time to hear Joseph stories. I've met many Egypt-bound people. Down, down, down. I've learned the question to ask. If you and I were having this talk over coffee, this is the point where I would lean across the table and say, "What do you still have that you cannot lose?" The difficulties have taken much away. I get that. But there is one gift your troubles cannot touch: your destiny. Can we talk about it?

*You are God's child.* He saw you, picked you, and placed you. "You did not choose me; I chose you" (John 15:16 NCV). Before you are a butcher, baker, or cabinetmaker, male or female, Asian or black, you are God's child. Replacement or fill-in? Hardly. You are his first choice.

Such isn't always the case in life. Once, just minutes before I officiated at a wedding, the groom leaned over to me and said, "You weren't my first choice."

"I wasn't?"

"No, the preacher I wanted couldn't make it."

"Oh."

"But thanks for filling in."

“Sure. Anytime.” I considered signing the marriage license “Substitute.”

You’ll never hear such words from God. He chose you. The choice wasn’t obligatory, required, compulsory, forced, or compelled. He selected you because he wanted to. You are his open, willful, voluntary choice. He walked onto the auction block where you stood, and he proclaimed, “This child is mine.” And he bought you “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). You are God’s child.

You are his child *forever*.

Don’t believe the tombstone. You are more than a dash between two dates. “When this tent we live in—our body here on earth—is torn down, God will have a house in heaven for us to live in, a home he himself has made, which will last forever” (2 Cor. 5:1 TEV). Don’t get sucked into short-term thinking. Your struggles will not last forever, but you will.

God will have his Eden. He is creating a garden in which Adams and Eves will share in his likeness and love, at peace with each other, animals, and nature. We will rule with him over lands, cities, and nations. “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim. 2:12).

Believe this. Clutch it. Tattoo it on the interior of your heart. It may seem that the calamity sucked your life out to sea, but it hasn’t. You still have your destiny.

My father walked the road to Egypt. Family didn’t betray him; his health did. He had just retired. He and Mom had saved their money and made their plans. They wanted to visit every national park in their travel trailer. Then came the diagnosis: amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS or Lou Gehrig’s disease), a cruel degenerative disease that affects the muscles. Within months he was unable to feed, dress, or bathe himself. His world, as he knew it, was gone.

At the time my wife, Denalyn, and I were preparing to do mission

you'll get through this

work in Brazil. When we got the news, I offered to change my plans. How could I leave the country while he was dying? Dad's reply was immediate and confident. He was not known for his long letters, but this one took up four pages and included the following imperative.

In regard to my disease and your going to Rio. That is really an easy answer for me, and that is *Go* . . . I have no fear of death or eternity . . . so don't be concerned about me. Just *Go*. Please him.

Dad lost much: his health, retirement, years with his children and grandchildren, years with his wife. The loss was severe, but it wasn't complete. "Dad," I could have asked, "what do you have that you cannot lose?" He still had God's call on his heart.

We forget this on the road to Egypt. Forgotten destinies litter the landscape like carcasses. We redefine ourselves according to our catastrophes. "I am the divorcée, the addict, the bankrupt businessperson, the kid with the disability, or the man with the scar." We settle for a small destiny: to make money, make friends, make a name, make muscle, or make love with anyone and everyone.

Determine not to make this mistake. Think you have lost it all? You haven't. "God's gifts and God's call are under full warranty—never canceled, never rescinded" (Rom. 11:29 MSG). Hear and heed yours.

Here's how it works. Your company is laying off employees. Your boss finally calls you into his office. As kind as he tries to be, a layoff is a layoff. All of a sudden you are cleaning out your desk. Voices of doubt and fear raise their volume. *How will I pay the bills? Who is going to hire me?* Dread dominates your thoughts. But then you remember your destiny: *What do I have that I cannot lose?*

*Wait a second. I am still God's child. My life is more than this life. These days are a vapor, a passing breeze. This will eventually pass.*

*God will make something good out of this. I will work hard, stay faithful, and trust him no matter what.*

Bingo. You just trusted your destiny.

Try this one. Your fiancé wants his engagement ring back. All those promises and the proposal melted the moment he met the new girl at work. The jerk. The bum. The no-good pond scum. Like Joseph, you've been dumped into the pit. And, like Joseph, you choose to heed the call of God on your life. It's not easy. You're tempted to get even. But you choose instead to ponder your destiny. *I am God's child. My life is more than this life . . . more than this broken heart. This is God's promise, and unlike that sorry excuse for a guy, God won't break a promise.*

Another victory for God.

Survival in Egypt begins with a yes to God's call on your life.

Several years after Dad's death I received a letter from a woman who remembered him. Ginger was only six years old when her Sunday school class made get-well cards for ailing church members. She created a bright purple card out of construction paper and carefully lined it with stickers. On the inside she wrote, "I love you, but most of all God loves you." Her mom baked a pie, and the two made the delivery.

Dad was bedfast. The end was near. His jaw tended to drop, leaving his mouth open. He could extend his hand, but it was bent to a claw from the disease.

Somehow Ginger had a moment alone with him and asked a question as only a six-year-old can: "Are you going to die?"

He touched her hand and told her to come near. "Yes, I am going to die. When? I don't know."

She asked if he was afraid to go away. "Away is heaven," he told her. "I will be with my Father. I am ready to see him eye to eye."

About this point in the visit, her mother and mine returned. Ginger recalls:



you'll get through this

My mother consoled your parents with a fake smile on her face. But I smiled a big, beautiful, *real* smile, and he did the same and winked at me.

My purpose for telling you all this is my family and I are going to Kenya. We are going to take Jesus to a tribe on the coast. I am very scared for my children, because I know there will be hardships and disease. But for me, I am not afraid, because the worst thing that could happen is getting to see “my Father eye to eye.”

It was your father who taught me that earth is only a passing through and death is merely a rebirth.

A man near death winking at the thought of it. Stripped of everything? It only appeared that way. In the end Dad still had what no one could take. And in the end that is all he needed.

# Notes

## Chapter 1: You'll Get Through This

1. Emphasis mine.
2. Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible: Key Insights into God's Word, New American Standard Bible*, rev. ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2008), Genesis 50:20. See also "Greek/Hebrew Definitions," Bible Tools, Strong's #2803, *chashab*, [www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Lexicon.show/ID/H2803/chashab.htm](http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Lexicon.show/ID/H2803/chashab.htm).
3. The same term is used in Genesis 13:4 ("he had . . . *built* an altar" [NIV]), Job 9:9 ("He *made* the Bear"), and Proverbs 8:26 ("he *made* the earth" [NIV]).
4. Zodhiates, *The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, Genesis 50:20. See also *Strong's Exhaustive Bible Concordance Online*, #6213, [www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/asah.html](http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/asah.html).
5. Genesis 50:20 is from *The Message*.
6. Emphasis mine.
7. Joseph was probably seventeen when he was sold to the Midianites (Gen. 37:2). He was twenty-eight when the butler, who promised to help him get out of prison, was released (40:21–23). Two years later, when Joseph was thirty, Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams (41:1, 46). And Joseph was about thirty-nine when his brothers came to Egypt the second time (45:1–6), in the second year of the famine following the seven years of plenty.