

Reunited
February 24, 2019
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Genesis 45:1-15

Opening: The Bible clearly calls God's people to forgive, but does biblical forgiveness mean we are to forgive and forget? Is it even possible?

When someone has intentionally caused us harm and pain our human nature is to harbor bitterness and perhaps to seek revenge. We justify those feelings with ideas like: *"You should fight fire with fire!" "That person is going to pay for what they've done!" "I will never let them off the hook!" And some believe "success is the best revenge!"*

A few weeks ago we talked a lot about fixing broken relationships when we looked at the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau. As bad as things were between those two brothers, the situation between Jacob's sons (Joseph and his older brothers) took family dysfunction and sibling abuse to an extreme level.

Imagine, your brothers decide to murder you and instead sell you into slavery. Slavery turns into years of abuse and suffering including imprisonment for a crime you didn't commit! How could you forgive and get past the bitterness?

I don't know about you but I'm reasonably good at forgiving and moving on. However, even as a follower of Christ, I struggle when I see parents who publicly forgive the killers of their child. How do they do that? I don't think I could! In fact, on my own I can't.

- Big Idea in three points:
- Forgiveness is not a test of how good I am. Forgiveness is a test of my belief in God's power over creation and His love for me. (How so?)
- I can only forgive those who have hurt me if I believe God loves me and is in control of everything that happens in my life. (What does that mean?)

- I can only let go of bitterness and offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me if I trust in God's promise to use even the painful things in life for my good and His glory. (God's sovereignty)

The story of how Joseph's reunion with his brothers and father shows us only God can give us the grace to forgive and move on.

- Years had passed since Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams.
- The famine had come as predicted and in Canaan, Joseph's family faced starvation. Ten of his brothers came to Egypt to purchase grain.
- The brothers didn't recognize that the Egyptian official was their brother.
- Joseph recognized THEM, imprisoned one, and sent nine of them home.
- Simeon's release was contingent on bringing Benjamin when they returned. Benjamin, Rachel's youngest son had become Jacob's favorite.
- Jacob pushed back on this idea. *"I can't lose another favorite son!"*
- The threat of starvation forced him to give in. They took Benjamin and left.
- Joseph tested the integrity of his older brothers by hiding his silver cup in Benjamin's sack of grain. In response, his brother Judah begged for Benjamin's freedom by offering himself as a substitute.
- The brothers still didn't recognize Joseph. The moment was tense.
- Joseph held all the cards, yet his heart was soft with emotion.
- To keep the Egyptians from seeing him lose it, he sent them out.

Genesis 45:1–15 (NLT)

Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, "Out, all of you!" So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was.² Then he broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh's palace.

³ “I am Joseph!” he said to his brothers. “Is my father still alive?” But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. ⁴ “Please, come closer,” he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, “I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt.

- Put yourself in the shoes of Joseph’s older brothers. Imagine the fear. *“Our kid brother we sold into slavery is the number two man in Egypt!”*
- When Joseph said, “come closer” in verse four, **if you were writing a screenplay of this story how would you have played Joseph’s response at this “could have heard a pin drop” moment?**
- What a shift from verse four to verse five. Joseph replied:

⁵ But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. ⁶ This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. ⁷ God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. ⁸ So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.

- The key to Joseph being able to forgive his horrible brothers is summed up in those four verses. *“It was God” who sent me here, “...not you!”*
- *“Take a breath brothers! You think I’m about to have you executed for how you treated me. You don’t understand. You guys were just ‘bit players’ in God’s amazing plan! God put me here. God made me number two to Pharaoh, and He did it all for His glory and the survival of thousands.”*
- Joseph had the upper hand to give them what they deserved, but during the years of pain God gave him a new heart and the big picture.
- When we’ve been mistreated and abused we might be tempted to say it was God’s fault, but have you ever thought about it as God’s plan?

- Joseph's forgiveness was not a demonstration of his goodness. Joseph's forgiveness was a demonstration of his belief in God's sovereignty.
- Joseph knew God had been in control of everything that had happened. Joseph knew God loved him and would use even the painful things for the good of Joseph, the people, and for His (God's) own glory.
- God's sovereign control of Joseph's journey was not just about saving people from a famine. Warren Wiersbe writes: *"God sent Joseph to Egypt so that Jacob's family could be preserved and the nation of Israel be born and ultimately give the Word of God and the Savior to the world. Without realizing it, Joseph's brothers were helping the Lord fulfill His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3)."*
- Have you ever considered that forgiveness is proof that you trust God?
- Like Joseph, I can only forgive those who have hurt me if I believe God loves me and is in control of everything that happens in my life.
- I can only let go of bitterness and offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me because I trust in God's promise to use even the painful things in life for my good and His glory. (God's sovereignty)
- Notice I said God will "use" painful experiences not "prevent" them.
- God never promised anyone a pass on the painful things sin brings into our lives, but He has promised to use those painful experiences for good. (Rom. 8:28)
- Joseph was not just an amazing example of forgiveness for us. The story of Joseph is an Old Testament picture of God's plan for reconciliation of all people to Himself. That's why we say Joseph was a "type of Christ."
- At the end of these notes are eighteen comparisons of Joseph to Jesus.
- W.A. Criswell summed it up well: *"When we read of the sufferings of Joseph and of his glorious exaltation, we are reading exactly what happened to our Lord Jesus Christ. When we speak of Joseph, we speak of a blameless life. We speak of his father's love. We speak of one sent for his lost brethren. We*

... speak of one placed in the pit, stripped of his robe, sold for silver, and delivered to the Gentiles. Then we speak of his life in the dark land of Egypt. Then we speak of his Gentile bride, his elevation to the kingship of the land. And finally, of the revelation of who he is to his brethren who have been saved from death through him.”ⁱⁱ

- Back to our original question: The Bible clearly calls God’s people to forgive, but are we to forgive and forget? **Do you think Joseph forgot?**
- **Other thoughts on forgiveness as trust in God’s love and control?**
- What happened to Joseph and his brothers?
- Joseph sent for his father. *“Tell him I’m alive, I’m a big deal in Egypt, and I want to move the whole clan to Goshen to be near me. There’s five more years of famine and I can take care of all of you.”*

¹⁵ Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and after that they began talking freely with him.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Forgiveness is not a test of how good I am. Forgiveness is a test of my belief in God’s power over my life and His love for me.
- I can only forgive those who have hurt me if I believe God loves me and is in control of everything that happens in my life.
- I can only let go of bitterness and offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me if I truly trust in God’s promise to use even the painful things in life for my good and His glory. (God’s sovereignty)
- What about you? Is there a terrible scar from a horrible event, and though you’ve tried, you just can’t exchange the bitterness for forgiveness?
- Even if the person who hurt you won’t communicate or perhaps isn’t even alive anymore, with God’s help you can STILL forgive for your own sake.
- You can turn to your loving Heavenly father and say, *“I believe You control everything, I believe You love me, and You will use this pain for good.”*

- Only by trusting His love, His plan, and His power can we be release the baggage of bitterness and embrace the freedom of forgiveness.

ⁱ The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old Testament © 2007 Warren W. Wiersbe

ⁱⁱ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/the-gospel-of-jesus-in-the-story-of-joseph/>

Comparisons of Joseph to Jesus as a “Type of Christ”

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/wonderful-similarities-joseph-jesus/>

Here is a list of similarities that should cause you to marvel at sovereignty.

1. He is the object of his father’s special love.
2. He had promises of divine exaltation.
3. He was mocked by his family.
4. He was sold for pieces of silver.
5. He was stripped of his robe.
6. He was delivered up to the Gentiles.
7. He was falsely accused.
8. He was faithful amid temptation.
9. He was thrown into prison.
10. He stood before rulers.
11. His power was acknowledged by those in authority.
12. He saves his rebellious brothers from death when they realize who he is.
13. He is exalted after and through humiliation.
14. He embraces God’s purpose even though it brings him intense physical harm.
15. He is the instrument God uses at the hands of the Gentiles to bless his people.
16. He welcomes Gentiles to be part of his family.
17. He gives hungry people bread.
18. People must bow their knee before him.