

The Revelation


 JOSEPH


He wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" (Genesis 45:2-3a).



DEVOTIONAL

Though Joseph endured many low points in his life (Genesis 37:28; 39:20; 40:9–23), God used the betrayal of his brothers to get Joseph administrative experience in Potiphar's house, and He used the Egyptian prison to get Joseph into Egypt's highest court, preparing him to lead the empire safely through a great famine (chapter 41). Painful and circuitous was the path on which the Lord's hand of providence took Joseph, but the loss of his many-colored coat led finally to Jacob's favorite son wearing the Egyptian colors of authority.

Mercifully, God included in His plan for Joseph the salvation of those brothers who had done what would have been—apart from divine, empowering grace—an unforgivable act. Clearly, Joseph wanted his relationship with them to be restored from the moment they came to Egypt in search of food. We see this in his demanding that Benjamin be brought before him and then in his weeping because of the overwhelming joy and love he felt toward them (chapters 42–43). Engaging in an elaborate plan to put the fear of God into his brothers and to discern whether they still hated their father's favorite son, Joseph finally saw their repentance for all the sins they had committed against him (chapter 44). This set the stage for Joseph to reveal himself dramatically to his brothers in one of the most ironic episodes of all history—the man whom the brothers had tried to kill ended up being their savior (chapter 45).

Few things are lovelier than reconciliation, and Joseph's restoration to his brothers was so incredible that even the strongest king in the world rejoiced to see it (45:16). This reconciliation was possible because the brothers were repentant and because Joseph was willing to pardon them, which is instructive for us. On a human level, when someone sins grievously against us or we sin grievously against another, forgiveness can be extended. But forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation, which requires genuine repentance accompanied by a willingness to do what it takes to make things right. The offending party cannot expect the offended to pretend nothing has happened, but the offended party must accept reconciliation when humble repentance is evident. As we respond to repentance with reconciliation, we imitate God, who in Christ "was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

CORAM DEO (In the Presence of God)

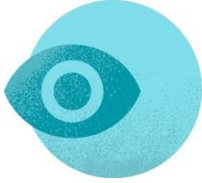
We often long for things to be "just as they were before [fill in the blank] happened" in our relationships with other people. If we are the main offending party, however, we cannot realistically expect this to happen if our tendency is to sweep the offense under the rug without making an effort to make things right. At the same time, we cannot hold the sins of others against them if they show genuine repentance.¹

¹ <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/revelation/>



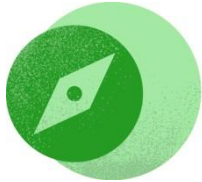
OPEN IT

1. Describe a time you were totally surprised. Looking back to that moment, were there any indicators that a surprise was coming?



READ IT

Genesis 45



EXPLORE IT

2. What caused Joseph to disclose his identity to his brothers (verses 1–3)?
3. How does Joseph treat his brothers after his disclosure (verses 4–5)?
4. What reason does Joseph give for his circumstances (verse 7)?
5. How did Pharaoh respond to Joseph's news (verses 16–24)?
6. What was Jacob's response to the news about Joseph (verses 25–28)?



APPLY IT

There is so much that is striking about the account before us in Genesis 45. Joseph forgave not in word only, but also in deed. Consider what he did for the brothers who had mistreated him so cruelly. Simply put, the events of Genesis 45 are an amazing illustration of Joseph's forgiving heart. Joseph's brothers had driven him as far away from them as they could. But when it was his turn to be in control, he said, "Come close to me" (v. 4). Joseph's brothers had sent him off as a captive to Egypt on the back of a mangy camel. But he gave them fine Egyptian carts for their journey home (v. 21). Joseph's brothers were willing to leave him to die of thirst and starvation in the pit. But he gave them provisions for the trip back to Canaan (v. 21). Joseph's brothers had torn his clothes off, but he gave them clothes (v. 22). Joseph's brothers had sold him for money, but he gave Benjamin three hundred shekels of silver (v. 22). Joseph even gave his brothers wise counsel, knowing their tendencies. "Don't quarrel on the way!" (v. 24). Do you see what is happening here? Joseph returned their every evil, cruel, and merciless acts with goodness and kindness and mercy. Centuries before Paul's words were ever written, Joseph was a living illustration of the admonition, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:20–21; see also Matthew 5:44–48).²

² The Hand of God: Finding His Care in All Circumstances by Alistair Begg

a person who is a child of God will forgive. A true believer must manifest the character of the Father. If we don't forgive we show that we have not experienced (or don't appreciate) God's forgiveness.⁴

11. How does reflecting on our sin against God help us to forgive when others hurt us?

12. Why does God command His people to forgive? How does following this command bring blessing to His people?

Forgiveness is not contingent on the attitude of the offending party. We would all like to believe that we don't have to forgive unless a person requests forgiveness. Perhaps, it seems that Joseph doesn't forgive his brothers until they show that they have repented. Only then does he embrace them. But to draw that conclusion is to beg the question. I suggest that Joseph had a forgiving heart from the very beginning. From the first moment he saw his brothers, he was working to restore their relationship, not to avenge the wrong done to him.

Paul tells us, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). And to the Colossian church Paul wrote, "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13). Our pattern for forgiveness is supposed to be Christ.⁵

13. It would seem right and proper for an offender to begin the process of reconciliation, but within the story it is the offended who initiates it. Why was this the case? What advantages/disadvantages can be seen from this approach?

*We must all continually acknowledge that we do not practice the forgiving heart as we should. We are to have a forgiving spirit before the other person expresses regret for his wrong. The Lord's Prayer does not suggest that when the other man is sorry, then we are to show a oneness by having a forgiving spirit. Rather, we are called upon to have a forgiving spirit without the other man having made the first step. We may still say that he is wrong, but in the midst of saying that he is wrong, we must be forgiving.*⁶

14. Read the above quote. What characteristics and activities must be active in the life of the believer so that we might fulfill our calling to forgive?

⁴ Sermon by Bruce Goettsche found @ <http://www.unionchurch.com/archive/030500.html>

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Francis Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer* Crossway Books 1985

Is it realistic to think we can forget? We are told that we should forgive and forget. But some scars are so deep that we feel we could never forget what happened. And we are not sure we should forget. We know the old saying, "Burn me once, shame on you. Burn me twice, shame on me." Anyone can be taken in once . . . but if you make yourself vulnerable a second time . . . you are the fool.⁷

15. How would you answer the following question: If I forgive them, am I not setting myself up to be hurt again?

Forgiveness does not mean subjecting ourselves to the same hurt over and over. I think we see this in Joseph. Joseph had no animosity for his brothers . . . but he was not going to make himself vulnerable again until he knew that they had changed. Joseph had no bitterness but he also had no desire to be victimized again.

In other words, forgiveness precedes a restored relationship. But for a relationship to be restored, one must acknowledge the wrong they have committed.... Forgetting (and with that, trusting) comes as we see genuine change and repentance. Forgetting becomes possible when both parties seek to establish a new relationship that will keep this kind of thing from happening in the future. Forgetting requires true repentance on the part of the offender and a resolve not to wallow in self-pity in the offended.⁸

16. In what circumstances might it be appropriate for boundaries to be established with someone else even after you have forgiven them of their wrongdoing?

MOVING TOWARD FORGIVENESS

I hope you have come to realize what the Bible requires and what God calls us to do. But the real issue is not what forgiveness means . . . it is the question: How do I obey what I am directed to do? Well, I certainly don't want to pass myself off as someone who has mastered the issue of forgiveness, but I can give several practical suggestions.

Give Yourself Time.

We are to forgive as He has forgiven. However, we must never forget that we are not Christ. Our love is not perfect. And even in the case of Joseph, we are seeing him over twenty years after the initial offense of his brothers. Let's not jump to the conclusion that since Joseph was willing to forgive at this point that he was willing to forgive immediately.

I imagine that it took time for Joseph to work things through with God. I'm sure that it took awhile before Joseph saw God's hand in the circumstances that surrounded him. But Joseph kept working on it. I don't know how long it took. And I don't know how long it will take you. What happened to Joseph was certainly awful, but I know that many of you have had awful things happen to you as well.

- someone took the life of someone you love (intentionally or accidentally)
- you were abused either as a child or an adult
- your trust in marriage was violated
- someone told lies about you
- someone mistreated your children
- you were attacked

⁷Sermon by Bruce Goettsche found @ <http://www.unionchurch.com/archive/030500.html>

⁸ ibid

21. What advice would you give to the person who says they can't forgive?

Ask God to help you.

You're not superman. Our desire for revenge is strong. We are much better at being angry than we are at being loving. Even when we want to do what is right, we need God's help to do so. Ask God to help you to let go and to "remember no more."¹¹

22. From whom do you need to seek forgiveness? What steps need to take place today for that to become a reality?

23. Who needs your forgiveness? In what ways can you help to achieve this?

¹¹ ibid

My Story Challenge

We're excited.

December is around the corner, and that means we get to celebrate the hundreds of stories of life change we've seen at Village this last year. But we need your help.

WOULD YOU SHARE YOUR STORY?

Take 10 minutes to answer the following questions with about 2 or 3 sentences each. If any question doesn't apply, then don't worry about that one.

1. Share one way you've gotten closer to Jesus this year through a ministry or individual at Village.

2. What's one way you felt supported or strengthened at Village this year? How has that impacted your life?

3. Share one fulfilling way you've been able to serve others, whether people inside or outside the church?

4. What has been one of the most meaningful moments of the last year (January-December) at Village?

5. Anything else you'd like to share that might be encouraging to others?

NAME

If you're alright with us sharing your story with our church family, would you share your name with us?
We'd really appreciate the chance to encourage others.
