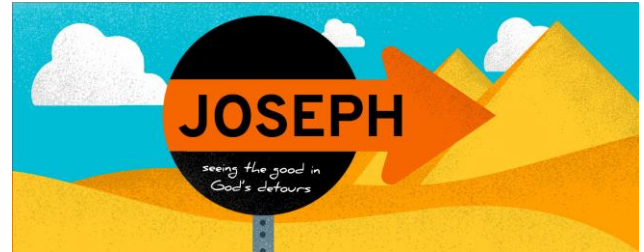




VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

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Joseph: Seeing the Good in God's Detours



Part 9: One Moment in Time

Tim Badal | November 27, 2016 | Genesis 45

As we've been chronicling Joseph's life, we've seen how this favored son, who had been given a coat of many colors by his dad, endured harsh treatment from his brothers. This would culminate in his being beaten, having his coat ripped off his back, and being thrown into a pit by his brothers who hated him. They knew he had had dreams from God indicating that he would become something great and that they would one day bow down to him. So they wanted to rid themselves of Joseph once and for all.

After throwing him into the pit, they decided to sell him to a group of traders who would take Joseph to Egypt as a slave. There Joseph found himself under a master named Potiphar, who was Pharaoh's "chief of police" in Egypt. While Joseph was a slave in Potiphar's home, he worked up the "corporate ladder," going from a household slave to being the second in command over all Potiphar's possessions. We're told that this was because the Lord was with Joseph and blessed everything he touched in every way. That is until Mrs. Potiphar decided to hit on Joseph. He was handsome and successful in many ways and that attracted her to him. But being a man of godly character, he rebuffed her advances. Not getting what she wanted, she accused him of rape, resulting in his being imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. For over ten years he endured this incarceration. But instead of moaning and complaining, Joseph chose to serve the prison warden very well. Again, God was with him and everything he touched or was involved with prospered.

While he was in prison, he met two very important prisoners: Pharaoh's cupbearer and Pharaoh's baker. Both these men had close ties to the most powerful man in all of Egypt. One evening both the baker and cupbearer had dreams that they wanted to have interpreted. Joseph heard about their dreams and interpreted them: one being a very good dream and the other a nightmare.

First, the nightmare. In the baker's dream, he saw baskets of bread over his head with birds coming to devour that bread. When he asked what the dream meant, Joseph told him, "In three days, Pharaoh will take you out of prison and will hang you. You will be killed for your crimes."

The cupbearer then told Joseph his dream, about vineyards and grapes and cups overflowing with wine. Joseph told him that in three days he would be released from prison and would be restored to his place as the cupbearer standing next to Pharaoh. He would again be able to serve Pharaoh as he had done before. As a final request, Joseph asked the cupbearer, "Remember me when you stand before Pharaoh. Tell him I've been brought here to Egypt as a slave and that I'm in prison for a crime I did not commit. Maybe in his mercy Pharaoh might release me." But we're told that the cupbearer forgot Joseph.

Two years later Pharaoh had a set of dreams that none of the magicians or wise men in all of Egypt could interpret. It was then that the cupbearer remembered Joseph. So they took Joseph out of prison, cleaned him up and took him to Pharaoh who said, "I hear you can interpret dreams." Joseph responded, "Dreams and their interpretations are given by God. But if you tell me your dreams, my God will give me the interpretation" (Genesis 40:8). So Pharaoh told Joseph his dreams. Joseph told Pharaoh the dreams meant there would be seven years of plentiful harvest in Egypt, followed by seven years of the worst famine Egypt had ever faced. Joseph then made two recommendations to Pharaoh. First, he should believe that the dreams actually came from God. Second, he should find a person to put in charge of gathering and storing one-fifth of all the crops during the seven years of

bounty, in preparation for the seven years of famine. Pharaoh believed that his dreams were from God, and he then assigned Joseph to be the administrator over all the planting, building and reaping that would take place during the first seven years.

As predicted, the famine was the worst they had ever known, going far beyond the borders of Egypt, even into the land of Canaan, Joseph's homeland. This caused Joseph's brothers to travel to Egypt looking for food—and unknowingly they were face to face again with the brother they had sold into slavery. Joseph immediately recognized them and over the course of a couple chapters we read of test upon test that he put his brothers through.

There were a couple reasons for this. First, this gave them a small taste of the mistreatment that they had given him. But second, Joseph wanted to see if their hearts had been softened in any way; if they had become truly repentant of their mistreatment of him over 20 years earlier. And indeed we read that their hearts had become soft. They were also realizing that the hardships Joseph was putting them through were a punishment for their former sins. As they left Egypt with the grain, they asked themselves, "What is this that God is doing to us?" They recognized that God was having His way in their lives, bringing retribution for what they had done.

All of this will culminate in one final test that we'll read about today, what I believe to be the climax of the story. Genesis 45 records a moment Joseph and his brothers will never forget. You and I live thousands of moments in time every week. This last week we watched hundreds of minutes and hours leave our lives, probably never to be thought of again. But there are those few moments which are unforgettable, that are so different from every other moment in life that we remember exactly what we were doing and feeling at the time. We may remember who we were with or what we were wearing or details of our surroundings.

For those of us who are old enough to remember, let me ask: how many of you remember the moment when you heard that John F. Kennedy had been assassinated? You can't forget it.

I remember as a fifth-grader, at school on a January day, that we were going to have an assembly to watch a space shuttle take off. We'd never done that before. This space shuttle, the Challenger, was special because it carried the first science teacher ever to be an astronaut. I remember who was sitting on either side of me. If we were to go back to that school, I could show you exactly where I was sitting. Why? Because that space shuttle didn't go very far before it blew up. It was the first time I had ever witnessed that kind of tragedy. I had just watched, on broadcast television, a group of people lose their lives. I remember that the teachers scurried to turn off the television and hustled us back to our rooms. I remember the principal's announcement, trying to explain what our little eyes had just seen. I can never forget it.

Of course, a new generation of people can remember that exact moment when the 9/11 events took place—the planes crashing into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and that Pennsylvania field. We remember those events as a nation. We remember because they're so different from any other experience that we've been part of. Those moments in time have forever been paused and recorded in our minds, never to be forgotten. Our nation has these momentous events, among others: JFK's assassination, the Challenger explosion, the events of 9/11.

There are other moments we remember personally. Some are great. I remember seeing Amanda for the very first time. I tell people it was like this glow from heaven came down into a classroom at Waubensee College. She said there was a glow about me, but it wasn't heavenly. I remember when I asked Amanda to marry me. I remember standing here with Amanda taking our vows of commitment on our wedding day. I remember the births of my three boys. And most recently I remember sitting in a doctor's office with a handful of doctors coming in when we learned that my wife had cancer. Those are moments in time that I can't shake.

Many of you have those moments as well. Genesis 45 records one of those moments when everybody in the room would never forget what they were thinking, what they were wearing, what was going on around them, because it was the culmination, I believe, of their lives. This was the first time in 20 years that the brothers are going to discover that Joseph, whom they had betrayed and whom they presumed to be dead, is alive—and that his dream has come true. They are bowing down to him because he is in fact greater.

1. Chapter 45 records the scene in Egypt

I want to quickly walk through the scene in Egypt that Moses has recorded for us in Genesis 45.

Joseph examines his brothers' hearts.

We are told first that Joseph had finished his examination of his brothers' hearts. Benjamin had stayed home during their first visit then the final test he had given them was requiring them to bring Benjamin to Egypt. As we saw in chapters 43 and 44, Jacob had

strongly objected to this. “You guys have got to be kidding. I left you with Joseph, and he died. I’m not going to give you Benjamin, because you’ll come back telling me he’s dead. So no, Benjamin cannot go with you.” But the famine continued to be severe and they had no food. So reluctantly Jacob let Benjamin go, realizing they might all die if he didn’t. When Joseph saw Benjamin, he was filled with great joy at seeing his full brother.

But then Joseph created another test, this time putting his own cup in Benjamin’s grain sack. Then he sent his servant to stop the brothers, accusing them of being thieves. They protested, but the servant opened each bag. One by one, only grain fell out, until he got to Benjamin’s sack. This time, there was the cup in the grain sack.

So Joseph took Benjamin, saying, “Because of your treason, you’re going to stay here in prison.” But the brothers’ response showed their real repentance and contrition. “No! You can’t keep Benjamin. He’s the favorite son of our father. If you take him, that will break our father’s heart.” Then Judah, the one who had proposed that they sell Joseph into slavery, rose up and offered to stay in Benjamin’s place. “I will pay his penalty instead. Benjamin’s life is more important than mine. Let him go, and I will stay.”

This was the final affirmation to Joseph that his brothers were sorry for what they had done. They now recognized that their decision to sell their own brother, giving him over to die for their own benefit, was wrong. And now they had become willing to lay their own lives down on this brother’s behalf. It’s a total 180 turnaround.

Joseph’s emotions overwhelm him.

Now in chapter 45 we learn what Joseph did in response to his brothers’ change of heart. Verse one: *“Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him.”* After all the examinations were done, Joseph’s emotions finally overwhelmed him. He sent everybody out of the room, and he cried. We might think he cried a couple tears in a Hallmark sort of way, but commentators agree that Joseph cried so loudly that everyone in the palace could hear him. It was a deep wailing and weeping, an extreme overflow of emotion.

But before you think Joseph needed to turn his “man card” in, we need to consider the emotional stability he maintained through this entire ordeal. The only other time we know he cried was when he was thrown into the pit. And who can blame him for that? He was probably injured. He was afraid for his life. Even the hardest of men should recognize that’s the kind of place where you would cry. But Moses never recorded that Joseph cried or even complained during his season of slavery, or after he was accused by Potiphar’s wife. But here we read that Joseph broke down and lost emotional control. I believe it was right and good that he did that.

I need to admit that I’m not much of a crier. I have cried—especially when I watch *Rudy*—but crying doesn’t come easily for me. We who are non-criers feel spiritually superior to our crying brothers, as if we have more faith. “Look, I can stand strong amidst the harshest of times.” We might tend to look down on people who are more emotional. I have a friend whose wife cries at almost everything. When we watch movies together, I’ll always find the worst tear-jerking movie I can find so I can watch this poor gal just blubber away. It’s beautiful. She’s bawling her eyes out—I’m laughing.

We have this idea that the “Four Seasons” taught us that “Big Girls Don’t Cry.” And if big girls don’t cry, big boys don’t cry. That’s hogwash. Throughout the Bible we see people cry. They cry in the good times; they cry in the bad times. We are told that Jesus Christ Himself wept when looking at Lazarus’ tomb and seeing the heartbreak of His friends (John 11). We’re told that we can grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). So crying and grieving and weeping are altogether good and right in certain moments, because it shows our hearts. It shows the depths of the pain or joy in our lives.

Joseph wept and all of Pharaoh’s house heard it. He was overwhelmed by what was before him. He had seen God’s hand of providence being brought to fruition in his life and it brought him to tears.

Joseph exposes his true identity.

There are times when families have to have conversations with nobody else involved; when we can speak freely as family members. So Joseph sent everyone except his family out of the room, then exposed his true identity to his brothers. Verse three: *“And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?’ But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.”*

I used to watch the “Tom and Jerry” cartoon when I was young, and I remember there were moments when something shocking would happen and Tom’s mouth would fall to the floor. I wonder if the brothers’ jaws hit the floor when he said, “I am Joseph.” We don’t know how he said it, but we know he probably took off his royal headdress. Maybe he wiped away the mascara Egyptian men wore in those days. But probably the thing that shocked them most was when this royal figure began to speak in Hebrew.

We were told earlier that every time he spoke there was an interpreter who translated the Egyptian language into Hebrew for the brothers. But when he announced in Hebrew, "I'm Joseph" they were shocked. They were unable to speak. They *"could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence."* That phrase "dismayed at his presence" in the Hebrew is literally the shock the shepherds felt in the countryside when the host of angels stood around them (Luke 2:8-12). "Wow! What is happening?" They're filled with fear.

Now, had I been Joseph, this is when my sinister laugh would overtake the room. For those who have older siblings who have harassed you for any amount of time, you're begging for this day, right? This past week was tough for my youngest son Luke. Noah is thirteen, Josh is eleven and Luke is eight. It's tough to be an eight-year-old with two older brothers. Luke came into my room yesterday and said, "Dad, I'm not happy." Luke's always happy. "Why aren't you happy?" "It's no fun being the youngest. My brothers aren't very nice to me, Dad." I said, "Think about this, Luke. One day they'll be elderly and you'll still be young. What will happen then, Luke?" "They'll get it!" We teach revenge in the Badal house. Please forgive us. Any younger sibling who's endured harsh treatment from their older brothers or sisters will understand.

But whatever Luke has endured in the Badal household pales in comparison to what Joseph endured over 22 years. His brothers sold him into slavery. We threaten selling others to carnival people, right? But they actually did it and he endured harsh treatment as a result. If I had been Joseph identifying myself, I would have brought in the royal guard and said, "Take them away," because like many of you, I struggle with forgiveness.

Joseph encourages his brothers.

But Joseph encourages his brothers instead. Verse four: *"So Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come near to me, please.'" Why would a royal figure say, "Please"?* Because he's going back in some ways to being the youngest brother. He invites them to come near.

⁴ And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt."

Joseph encourages them by inviting them to draw near. What's their first thought? Run away, like cockroaches in the light. Run—get out of the light! But he tells them, "Come close. You have nothing to fear. I know you're struggling with guilt." But he addresses that right away. "Listen, you only played a small part in my coming to Egypt. God is mainly responsible for my being here. Don't blame yourselves, because He was the key player in bringing me to this place."

Second, he moves the conversation away from their sin to something they have in common. He immediately asks about his father. They tell him, "Dad's okay. He's old now, and not as healthy, but he's alive." Joseph changes the subject so they don't have to wallow in their self-shame.

Finally, he expresses his love to them. Verse nine:

⁹ "Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. ¹⁰ You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.' ¹² And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. ¹³ You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." ¹⁴ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

¹⁶ When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, "Joseph's brothers have come," it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. ¹⁷ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your beasts and go back to the land of Canaan, ¹⁸ and take your father and your households, and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat the fat of the land.' ¹⁹ And you, Joseph, are commanded to say, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. ²⁰ Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'" ²¹ The sons of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. ²² To each and all of them he gave a change of clothes, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five changes of clothes.

Hint, hint. Why would he do that? One final test—a test we don't think about very often. You see, we are easily convicted in times of need or disaster. "God, I need You. I'm willing to humble myself. If You get me out of this mess, Lord—if You come to my rescue—then I will surely do X, Y and Z." But the greater test comes when everything is going well. When success is all you see, do you revert to your old ways?

So what does Joseph do? He brings back the old insidious test of favoritism. He gives Benjamin money and clothes. How are they going to treat him now? When they return, will Joseph find that Benjamin has been mistreated or abused? Maybe they've learned not to sell him into slavery, but might he come back with a black eye or something that shows they haven't fully learned their lesson?

²³ To his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. ²⁴ Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the way."

Their brother knows more about them than they wish he did. "Don't fight. Don't mess with Benjamin. Don't point fingers at one another. Don't quarrel on the way. You have been shown forgiveness, mercy and grace and now you should do likewise." Joseph encourages his brothers, he expresses his love toward his family, and he gives them all they need. We'll pick up the story next week to see what happens when Jacob hears the good news. But let's stop here for a moment.

We have seen over and over again in Joseph's story a picture of Christ. We can see a picture of our own salvation in the saving of Joseph's brothers from the penalty due them. In his forgiveness, Joseph shows us a picture of God's forgiveness toward us sinners.

First, God, like Joseph, is the initiator of love toward us. It is not we who sought God, but God Who sought us. It wasn't his brothers who sought out Joseph, but Joseph who sought out his brothers. It wasn't the brothers who demonstrated love toward Joseph, nor was it we who demonstrated love toward God. Romans 5:8 says, "*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"

In each of his tests, Joseph was demonstrating a love for his brothers. That's what God does for us. When we go astray, when we do the litany of sins found in the catalog of Romans one and two—going our own way—it is God Who shows His infinite love and mercy to us when we would rather not have it at all. God is the initiator of love.

Second, just as with Joseph, God is moving in our lives even when we don't recognize it. The brothers think they're in front of this Egyptian leader who's never seen them before and who thinks they're spies. Little do they know that through Joseph God has been working a set of tests and opportunities for them to come to repentance. Likewise, if you have bowed your knee to Jesus Christ, then you recognize there were a series of activities that brought you to the place where you said, "Jesus, be my Savior."

In my own life, it took a group of about 15 teenaged Christian missionaries—Navigators—from Colorado in the early '60s, who were on fire for the Lord. They went on a short-term mission trip to—of all places—Baghdad, Iraq where they led my father to the Lord in his younger years. My father then got on fire for the Lord in Iraq, moved to America, married my mom and together raised three children in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

Now, was my dad the only one? No, my mom had a huge impact on my life as well. I think of my Sunday school teachers. I think of the young girl in my Sunday school class at a church in Plano who said, "I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior." And I said, "What is that all about?" I was only eight years old. "Dad, what does it mean that she'll go to heaven and not hell? What does it mean that her sins are taken care of?" It was an August afternoon after church when I bowed the knee and accepted Christ as my Savior. But if I think that that moment in time only happened right then and there, I don't give any allowance for God's providence in all the lives He changed so mine would one day be changed as well.

You've heard of this website called Ancestry.com. We want to know our background, our ethnicity, so we go to a computer. But spiritually, you can look back over time as well, and you'll be amazed at all God has done to save you from your sins. God has been at work long before you said, "Jesus, save me."

Third, Joseph calls his brothers to come close when they would rather have run away. When we are found in our sin, Jesus gives us an invitation. "Come, all who are weary, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). He invites us, but many upon many will run away and want nothing to do with Him. But God continues to say, "Come." He continues to invite. He continues to draw us close. And those who by the grace of God allow themselves to draw close to Him, He will in no way cast away (John 6:37).

You see, the story in Genesis 45 is a call to all unbelievers to come close to Jesus Christ so He can save you from your sins. It's a reminder for those of us who have bowed the knee to Him of the love God has shown us by providing a way not only through His

Son but also through the lives of a myriad of individuals who brought us to the place of salvation. He was the initiator of that love, just as Joseph was.

2. Chapter 45 reflects a story Jesus told His followers.

This whole story brings us to a theme of forgiveness. How could Joseph have forgiven his brothers in this way? His story is reflected in a story Jesus told His followers in Matthew 18. What precipitates this story is Peter's question in verse 21: *"Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"* Jesus said to him, *"I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven."* In fact, if your brother sins against you an infinite amount of times, that's how many times you will need to forgive him. That's what you're called to do.

Jesus then tells this memorable story. *"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants."* That sounds like Joseph, doesn't it? I don't know if Jesus is intending to make an exact correlation, but it is someone in authority dealing with servants about a debt they owe. *"When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents."* That is more money than you could ever put together in a lifetime.

²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, "Pay what you owe." ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." ³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

We have an example here in Genesis 45 of what forgiveness looks like. Instead of punishment, grace. Instead of wrath, mercy. Instead of prison, a palace. Joseph shows us that. Jesus reiterates that by telling us we ought to forgive, and here is why.

Joseph and Jesus remind us that we are all offenders.

First of all, we have all sinned against God. We are all offenders. We owe the greatest debt to God. We're all felons. If we were to do a background check, there would be red flags on each of us, because we've sinned against God. The Bible tells us there is none righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10). *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). We're all offenders. We've all done wrong.

Now, that's true of our relationship with God. And likewise it is true that when we sin against God we also impact our relationship with Him and our relationships with others. We've offended one another. But we may say, using court terms, "I may have committed misdemeanors, but you've had Class X felonies. So I'm not as bad as you."

Listen. It doesn't matter. In the high court of God, a sin is a sin. It's all missing the mark. So we've sinned against God and we've offended one another.

Joseph and Jesus remind us that we have been offered forgiveness.

God pronounces us all offenders—and then He offers forgiveness to every one of us. Like the master in Jesus' story, He has released us from our debts. We have been shown mercy. On the cross of Calvary, Jesus paid a debt we could never have paid ourselves. When He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30), all of our crimes against God and humanity were paid and forgiven, and our crimson sin was made white as snow (Isaiah 1:18).

Joseph and Jesus remind us that we must open our hearts to forgive others.

So now we're children of forgiveness. God has lavished His forgiveness, grace and mercy on us. And we have been given one job. Because we're offenders who have received forgiveness, we must now open our hearts to forgive others. We cannot do as the servant in the parable did. It would be unthinkable to receive forgiveness ourselves for the greatest debt known to man, and then in a petty way grab the throat of the person next to us, shaking and threatening him to pay or else.

You see, when we recognize that we are offenders, we realize that "To err is human, but to forgive is divine" (Alexander Pope). As Christians, we cannot be unforgiving people. Might I go so far as to say that the litmus test of your pure Christianity is tested by whether you can forgive others? If you can't forgive others, then you don't know what you were forgiven from. When we realize

how bad we were and how much God forgave us, then what would keep us from forgiving the small debt that is owed to us? Joseph exhibits it, Jesus teaches it and now we must live it.

3. Chapter 45 reminds us of the steps toward forgiveness.

So how do we forgive? Chapter 45 gives us some practical steps. How did Joseph forgive? What was the secret to his success?

We must refocus our lens.

First, Joseph had to refocus the lens through which he viewed his life. He told his brothers, "It wasn't you who got me here. It was God. To be sure, God allowed you to do some things to me. He used your sinful acts for His good. But it's all Him. He's the major player in this drama of my life."

Many of us must take our eyes off the offender and put them on God. Having our eyes on the one who hurt us does no good. It teaches us a lesson we already know: sinful people are going to sin against others, because they are sinful. We know that already. But the greater lesson is that God is working in our lives.

Here's what you need to understand. Not a single act of harm that has been done to us—this is hard to swallow—has been done without God's involvement. This was hard for me to accept. But let me remind you of some good theology. There is not a single thing that happens to us without the "express written consent" of God. That means your trial, that wrong that someone did, that abuse you experienced, that hostile behavior, did not catch God by surprise. He said, "I'll let it happen." He gave us an entire book of the Bible—Job—to demonstrate this. The devil comes to God and says, "I want to do things," and God says, "You can do this, but you can't do that." Why would a good God allow that? Because it allows Him to work all things together for the good of those He loves (Romans 8:28). So we have to trust that He does all things well, just as Joseph had to trust that there was a reason he got thrown in the pit and sold into slavery and alleged to be a rapist. There was a reason he had to be a prisoner. Those are hard things to swallow. But when he took his eyes off his own life and saw what God was doing, it was glorious.

The great preacher of preachers, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, once said this regarding providence: "It's a lot like a tapestry. From the bottom, it looks like a great big mess. From the top it's a beautiful picture." So it is with the providence of God. We look up from the bottom and see frayed edges and a tangled mess. But from the top, a beautiful picture is being produced in our lives. Right now we're looking at the mess, but one day we'll see the portrait and it will be beautiful. We must refocus our lens.

We must remind ourselves of our connection with the offenders.

Some of you just experienced a Thanksgiving from hell, right? Someone said something and your blood was boiling. "How could they say that? How could they do that?" Take your eyes off that and remember that you've probably done something like that in the past. You've wronged someone. You've hurt someone. You've stuck your foot in your mouth through words that have come out too quickly. Remind yourself that they're not the only offenders in the room. When there's one finger pointed at someone else, three fingers are pointing back at you.

We must remember that forgiveness is a command.

Forgiveness is not a suggestion. It's not an idea that God wants us to think over. It's a command. When Paul says to the churches in Ephesus and Colossae, "Forgive as Christ forgave you," that word "forgive" is in the imperative. Do it. There's no playing games with it. You forgive. Why? Because Christ forgave you.

Now, why would God want Christians to forgive? So we can be doormats? No. God in His creative power and knowledge of who we are as His creation knows that bitterness and unresolved anger will hurt the person who's holding it more than it will hurt the person it's held against. Some of you are sitting here with anger and bitterness, but can the person you're angry at feel it? No. They don't even know you have those thoughts. You're dying inside and God wants to release you from that. God wants you to live an abundant life, not a bitter life (John 10:10). So He says, "Forgive. Don't hold people to their sins against you. Release them and release yourself from being worried about it." It makes sense. It will do your body good to forgive.

You might be sitting there thinking, "But Tim, you don't know how bad it is." Well, then these last two points are for you.

We must request help from God.

I get that there are some horrific things that are done to human beings, and some of you here have experienced them. You have great pain and sorrow, and you think, "There's no way I can forgive." Ask God for help. We're going to study the book of James

here next year, and in the first chapter we're going to learn, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."* If you lack wisdom on how to forgive, God says, "Ask Me for help, and I will give it to you. I'll show you. I'll empower you to forgive." Ask God for help, then also seek the help of other believers. "How can I forgive? How were you able to forgive?" As we have heard stories of how God has done that in others' lives, we might be able to do it in our own.

We must reserve some time to heal before trusting again.

When I say forgive, I am not saying, "Let bygones be bygones," then everything gets tied up in a nice bow. Here's what did not happen in Genesis 45: "And Joseph sent his brothers away and as they were far off he announced, 'Hey, wait a minute guys. Take Ephraim and Manasseh with you. You babysit them for a while.'" I'm not sure he could fully trust them yet. Remember, "Don't quarrel on the way. Don't be dumb. Don't do what you used to do."

Did Joseph fully trust them? No. He said, "This is what you will tell my father—exactly this. Don't add your spin to it. Don't add your ideas to it. This is what I want you to tell him." That tells me Joseph was not fully convinced that his brothers were trustworthy. So he created boundaries.

There are some here today who need boundaries because there have been offenders who should be forgiven, but who maybe can't be trusted. Just because you forgive doesn't mean you trust. It means giving opportunities to rebuild your trust in them.

So maybe your spouse has done something wrong, and you think I'm saying, "Get it together. Put a smile on your face. God forgave you, so you forgive them, and you're all good." No, no, no, no, no. What I'm saying is you should give your spouse some time to rebuild your trust in them. That's what forgiveness allows. Give them time and opportunities to show that they're aware of the error of their ways and that they're repentant.

Not only that, give yourself time for your own heart to change. Joseph must have been overjoyed when he saw his brothers do exactly what he commanded them to do. Now their relationship could begin to be restored over a period of time—because he did the hard step of forgiving first. Forgiving doesn't mean trust is reintroduced right away, but that the opportunity is at least offered.

So whatever you may be dealing with, whatever forgiveness you're struggling with, I want you to think about who you need to forgive today. It might even be from an argument you had on the way to church. Let me tell you, you will never find freedom to forgive the big stuff if you don't find it in forgiving the small stuff. I've come to learn how freeing it is to ask for people's forgiveness in the small stuff, because it makes asking for forgiveness in the big stuff a whole lot easier.

Who do you need to forgive? Is it small? Is it big? Is it as big as Joseph's issues? It might be. Seek forgiveness. Be the initiator. Show love and grace and mercy—just as God has shown these to you—and give people opportunities to rebuild the trust they need in your life, so you can be like Joseph, like God, and so you can show the gospel to the world around you. You can show what it's like to be a forgiven sinner who now forgives as a result.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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