

Lesson 6 | October 8, 2023

Joseph Reunited with His Brothers

Study Text: Genesis 44:1 through 45:28

Central Truth: God desires for families and the family of God to be unified around His Word.

Key Verse: 2 Corinthians 13:11

Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you (KJV).

Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will note what the story of Joseph’s reconciliation with his brothers can teach us about reconciliation with others today.
- Students will identify ways in which Joseph’s story affirms that God works out His promises even through flawed human beings.
- Students will pray that God will bring restoration and unity to members of the body of Christ.

Introducing the Study

Say: The desire for revenge is a common human impulse. In an increasingly rude culture, the temptation can seem overwhelming at times.

Opening Activity—I’m Gonna Get You!

Ask: Have you ever had the chance to get back at someone who wronged you, no questions asked? How did you respond? Examples range from doing something at work that would be blamed on a spiteful coworker to pouring soda on the window of a car that cut you off in a parking lot. We might even struggle to admit such temptation; such moments “test our sanctification,” as some might say.

Say: Nobody likes to admit to holding a grudge. But acting on grudges—and therefore grudges themselves—can be destructive. In Joseph, we see the value of forgiveness, both in our relationships with others and in our walk with God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Romans 12:21 can be one of the most challenging verses in the Bible: “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (KJV). Normally, we focus on the first half of the verse, but the second half can be the most difficult. What do we do when people do evil things to us: hate us, gossip about us, hurt our reputation, or take something from us? What happens when they get away with it and we suffer as a result?

These are not easy questions because there are a lot of seemingly legitimate reasons to repay evil with evil. Joseph had the opportunity to do this very thing in Genesis 44–45. Yet he chose

instead to repay evil with good, thus restoring family relationships that seemed hopelessly broken and propelling forward the journey of the Jews—God’s chosen people—toward His precious promises.

Part 1—Joseph Tests His Brothers

The Silver Cup

Genesis 44:1–13

Say: A lot has happened since we last saw Joseph in Genesis 41. The famine reached Joseph’s family, compelling them to go to Egypt for food. Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. Since Jacob’s youngest son did not go to Egypt with them, Joseph required them to retrieve Benjamin and bring him to Egypt. As we move into chapter 44, we see how God is shaping events in such a way that His plan will move forward. And He does so through one of the most beautiful scenes of reconciliation in all of Scripture. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

To understand the full impact of Genesis 44–45, it can be very helpful to read chapters 42–43. Joseph has treated his brothers harshly at first, but then very kindly. In the midst of this, the brothers concluded the terrible act of selling Joseph into slavery had brought this trouble to them (see 42:21–22). Then they were forced to return home and take Benjamin (the only other, and younger, son from Rachel) away from Jacob. Yet on their return, Joseph treated them with exceptional kindness, sharing a feast that brought him to tears (see 43:29–30). Amid this very tumultuous two-chapter account, the seeds of reconciliation were planted.

Genesis 44 opens as Joseph and his brothers are concluding the great banquet he has prepared for them. But while the brothers believe that they will be returning to Jacob with grain and—perhaps more importantly—his beloved son Benjamin, Joseph has other plans. Upon his instruction, his “steward” (KJV) or “palace manager” (NLT) planted Joseph’s personal silver cup in Benjamin’s bag of grain (verses 1–2). In this way, Joseph has set the stage for the brothers to face the same dilemma they faced with him: Would they abandon Benjamin in Egypt like they did Joseph or would they refuse to betray him?

The brothers didn’t get far before Joseph’s ruse began to unfold. The steward caught up to them and accused them of the theft (verses 3–6). Verse 5 includes an important detail. Joseph has made it part of the ruse that his cup is a cup of divination. That is, a cup that was used “to predict the future” (NLT). This was done by pouring oil or wine into the cup then adding another liquid, such as water, then observing the surface patterns. But this was not mentioned in verse 2, since Joseph did not actually take part in divination. As a servant of the God of Jacob, he relied on the Lord alone—as has been established in previous chapters. The manager likely mentioned this to emphasize the seriousness of the theft.

The brothers were shocked. They had been entirely honest with Joseph and the other officials (verses 7–10). Earlier, on their first trip to Egypt, the money they’d paid for grain had been placed back in their sacks, making them look like thieves (and leaving them wondering if God was judging them; see 42:27–28; 43:21–22). But they had returned that money, demonstrating

their honesty. Yet now their integrity was questioned. Thus, they felt secure in and passionate about swearing an oath. They would suffer dire consequences if they'd stolen anything. The guilty man would be put to death.

To their horror, the cup was found in Benjamin's sack (verses 11–13). Jacob's beloved, youngest son would, by their oath, become a slave in Egypt. The terrible injustice that they had inflicted on Joseph was now to be inflicted on Benjamin. Their father's heart would be broken.

Discuss

? Why do you think Joseph set up the situation where the brothers would be made to look like thieves?

? Have you ever been falsely accused or set up to look guilty of something you did not do? How did it make you feel?

Judah Pleads with Joseph

Genesis 44:14–34

Say: Joseph's brothers are coming face-to-face with the consequences of injustice. They receive a terrifying reminder of the pain their own injustice has caused. But this time, they responded differently when their youngest brother was threatened. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 44:14–34 indicates that Judah has clearly emerged as the leader among the brothers as they all are brought in to face Joseph. They quickly fall on their faces before him in an act of humiliation and recognition of his authority.

Joseph responded in an interesting way: “Don't you know that a man like me can predict the future?” (verse 15, NLT). As noted earlier, Joseph did not take part in divination. So, this should not be taken in a literal sense any more than his feigned anger at them. Rather, Joseph was establishing that they had no way of proving their innocence. They stood before a man who held absolute power over them—a man with a reputation for discerning the truth. They could not expect justice, but only beg for mercy.

Judah's response in verse 16 reveals the reality of the situation. He openly admitted that this terrible predicament seemed to be divine punishment for their sins, which, as we know, were sins of injustice. When he said that all of them were returning to be Joseph's slaves, he was owning up to their previous guilt. He did not admit any guilt for the cup. This situation had become a matter of what happened with Joseph years earlier.

Joseph countered that he would not make all of them slaves (verse 17). It would be unjust to do so. They were innocent. Only the guilty one—Benjamin—would stay. The rest could return to their father in peace. Yet Joseph said this knowing that peace would not be possible if Benjamin stayed. Joseph was, in a sense, forcing them to relive the events of years earlier. Would they follow the same course?

Over the next seventeen verses, Judah, who had convinced his brothers to sell Joseph into slavery, proceeded to recount all that had happened, bringing them to this point. Note that his focus was on Jacob; he is referred to as father more than a dozen times in this passage. To leave Benjamin behind would cause indescribable grief. Years earlier, with Joseph, they had no concern for their father (or for Joseph). Now Jacob was their chief concern. Truly, they had changed.

Discuss

? What signs do you see in Genesis 44 that the brothers had changed since they'd sold Joseph into slavery?

? What are some signs that change is taking place in our lives, as we begin to let go of past resentment against others?

Part 2—Joseph Reveals His Identity to His Brothers

“It Was God Who Sent Me Here”

Genesis 45:1–8

Say: As Christians, we know that God calls us to show mercy. This was the teaching of Christ, who called the merciful “blessed” (Matthew 5:7) and instructed Peter that our willingness to forgive should be without limit (Matthew 18:21–22). But words can be hard to put into action. In Genesis 45, Joseph shows us the key to mercy and forgiveness—recognizing that our Lord has our lives in His hands. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 45 describes the climactic moment when all the events of chapters 42–44 come together to reveal something amazing. Years of suffering, grief, and injustice are resolved. And God’s marvelous plan emerges unscathed.

After Judah’s speech, Joseph could no longer restrain his emotions. So, he ordered everyone except for his brothers from the room. Then he began to weep uncontrollably (verses 1–2). “I am Joseph!” he declared to his brothers. “Is my father still alive?” (verse 3, NLT).

Not surprisingly, the brothers were shocked. They were in such disbelief that they needed a chance to look closely at him before they would believe (verse 4). Notice especially that in verses 4–5, Joseph mentioned they had sold him into slavery, but then says, “Don’t be angry with yourselves” (verse 5, NLT). Any bad feelings that had come about because of what they’d done were now gone. Joseph no longer held it against them. He had forgiven them.

Joseph’s forgiveness is amazing in a number of ways. He had been wronged in such a cruel way, separated from his father who dearly loved him. Now, after many years, he had an opportunity to exact revenge on his brothers without fear of retribution. But Joseph was a godly man, a man who heard from God and trusted God. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that he saw God’s hand in all that had happened (verses 5–8). As a result of what they had done, he would be able “to preserve life” (verse 5, KJV). This would include the lives of strangers—Egyptians and others. And it would include the lives of his brothers and his father. Thus, the life of the covenant family was preserved. God had used this terrible situation and the unjust actions of the brothers to

preserve the Jewish people and the worldwide promise that He would bring into the world through them.

Resource Packet Item 1: Forgiveness

Distribute the worksheet and complete it as a class. Talk about why forgiveness is important as well as how we can overcome challenges to forgiveness. Have students complete the bottom of their sheet on their own.

Discuss

? Why might God sometimes use difficult circumstances to bring good results?

? Describe a time when God has brought forth something good from a bad experience in your life.

“You Can Live Safely in Goshen”

Genesis 45:9–15

Say: Have you ever been part of a family reunion? This can be a joyous time of reconnecting. It can even help heal wounds that have occurred over the years. In Genesis 45:9–15, Joseph called for a kind of family reunion in which they could all come and live together. What a change from how things had been before. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In verses 9–15, Joseph told his brothers to return to Canaan to gather their entire family and possessions. Then they were to return to Egypt, where Joseph could care for them throughout the five years that remained in the famine. He recognized that unless they all found safety and provision from him, they would die.

Joseph focused especially on his father in verses 12–15. He wanted to make sure Jacob knew what had happened to him. Benjamin would be able to vouch for the truthfulness of their words, since the rest had been involved in Joseph’s disappearance. Joseph wanted to see his father as soon as possible.

At that point, they wept together and embraced one another. The hurts of the past found healing. Unlike their previous times together, they could talk freely and warmly as brother to brother. They were, as a family, more tightly bound at this moment than ever before. Joseph, who had been an object of their scorn, would now preserve the family line. He had not given in to any temptations toward revenge, but kept his heart pure and in close relationship with God. This moment, as much as any in the account of his life, allows us to see Joseph’s deep desire for and devotion to God. Through it all, God’s promise remained intact.

Resource Packet Item 2: God’s Promises

Distribute the worksheet and have students complete it individually or in groups. Discuss the sheet as a class.

Discuss

? Why do you think Joseph specifically mentioned telling his father that he was alive and held a high position in Egypt?

? What are your most favorite among all the promises of Scripture? Why?

Part 3—Jacob’s Family Saved and Restored

“The Best of Egypt Is Yours”

Genesis 45:16–24

Say: Have you ever found that sometimes God gives us blessings beyond what we ask for? Joseph and his family found unexpected blessings in Genesis 45. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Joseph’s story might best be described in a single word: providence. God’s purposes are fulfilled through—or even in spite of—human action. With every human failure or shortcoming, God makes a way for the final outcome to be good. Genesis 45:16–24 is a good example. When Pharaoh heard that Joseph’s brothers had arrived in Egypt, he made it possible for the entire family to ride out the famine in Egypt. There they could be assured of provision and protection, as Joseph himself could care for them. In this way, God preserved His plan through the favor of a pagan Pharaoh.

Notice some key points from Pharaoh’s instruction. He went beyond even Joseph’s invitation. Joseph called them to come to Goshen so he could be near them (verse 10), but Pharaoh added that they should come so they could “eat the fat of the land” (verse 18, KJV). Amid a terrible famine, Joseph’s family would enjoy the best food of Egypt. Likewise, they wouldn’t need to bring possessions, such as tents or furnishings. The best of Egypt would be theirs (verse 20).

They also received wagons and supplies for their journey, as well as new clothing (verses 21–22). It is fitting that a gift of clothing would be included. Just as a fine garment formed the basis of their animosity when Joseph was betrayed, now fine garments would become part of the reconciliation of the family.

Joseph also gave extra gifts to Benjamin—gifts that represented a special status (verse 22; *note also* 43:34). This serves to highlight the change that has taken place in the hearts of the brothers. They were no longer put off by personal grievances. Even though Benjamin received the extra food from Pharaoh’s second-in-command in 43:34, they were still willing to be enslaved for him.

As they prepared to depart, Joseph had one last word of instruction: “Don’t quarrel about all this along the way” (verse 24, NLT). Most scholars today see this as an instruction not to dispute with one another about the past, specifically to make accusations over what they did to Joseph. Their brother had forgiven them. Now they needed to forgive one another.

Joseph’s words are valuable for families today. Forgiveness plays a huge role in maintaining the unity and affection that holds families together. This is not to say that it is easy to put past hurts behind us. Rather, it is important to see the value of making the effort—and trusting in God’s help—to do so (see Ephesians 4:32).

Discuss

- ? In what ways do you see God’s providence in the story of Joseph?
? What are some valuable pieces of advice that would help us forgive or accept forgiveness, even after many years? Cite Scriptures that occur to you.

“Joseph Is Alive!”

Genesis 45:25–28

Say: Have you ever received good news that absolutely shocked you? As a feeble old man nearing the end of his life, Jacob had this wonderful experience. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The return to Jacob in Genesis 45:25 stands in stark contrast from the last two times Scripture recorded his sons returning to him (see 37:33–35; 42:36–38). In the past these were scenes of sorrow, grief, and fear for Jacob. But now he can exclaim, “Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die!” (verse 28, KJV).

Not only was Joseph alive, he had prospered beyond all imagination. Jacob could scarcely believe it and was only convinced when he saw the wagons. Yet what is shocking to humans is commonplace to God. This was God’s family of promise. He had preserved them by His hand, despite so many challenges. Nothing could—and nothing can—thwart God’s plan to bless the nations.

Resource Packet Item 3: Godly Principles for the Family

Distribute the worksheet and complete it as a class. Use this sheet to identify the value of strong, healthy family relationships.

Discuss

- ? What are some thoughts that may have gone through Jacob’s mind upon hearing that Joseph was alive?
? How would you describe, in your own words, God’s plan to bless the nations?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Nothing can stand in the way of God’s plan to bring salvation to the nations. This is great encouragement to us when we feel that we have fallen short of God’s plan for us. Remember—He is still working in us, and in the world.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Seek out someone you have wronged and, inasmuch as you are able, reconcile with them.
- Make an effort to tell the significant people in your life, be they family or friends, why they are important to you.
- Pray for unity in the family of God, that we may demonstrate to the world that we are one in Christ.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God Created the Family.
Genesis 5:1–5

Tuesday:

God Chose a Family.
Genesis 12:1–9

Wednesday:

A Family Restored.
Job 42:10–17

Thursday:

A Family Saved.
Acts 16:25–34

Friday:

Prayer for God's Family.
Ephesians 3:14–21

Saturday:

Encouragement to a Family.
2 John 1:1–6