

Lesson 8 18th June, 2017

Joseph Forgives His Brothers

Lesson Scope: Genesis 45

Reference in brackets refer to Genesis 45 unless otherwise noted

Lesson Focus

Jacob's family had a history of jealousy. Leah was jealous of Rachel; the brothers had been jealous of Joseph. Jacob had a history of deceiving his father; his sons deceived him about the fate of Joseph. In the years prior to the famine, Judah and Simeon married Canaanite women while various brothers committed violent or immoral acts. What was to become of the family of promise? Through a prolonged famine, God reunited Jacob's family into the formative core of the Hebrew tribes.

The story would read so much differently had Joseph been preoccupied by vengeance when he reencountered his brothers that day they came with sacks in hand to purchase grain. But he had chosen forgiveness long before that momentous day, and so he decisively broke the cycle of jealousy. Through the combination of a worldwide famine and the responses of His faithful servant Joseph, God was faithful to the promises He made to the three patriarchs of Israel.

Jealousy, hatred, and mistreatment mar good relationships. A forgiving spirit, however, opens the way for healing and restoration.

Forgiveness is hard and painful, and the devil has produced a myriad of counterfeits to true forgiveness. He tempts us with appealing shortcuts, such as aloofness or avoidance.

Highlight the differences between forgiveness and reconciliation. We must forgive, whether the other party responds correctly or not. Only reconciliation requires the cooperation of two parties. Forgiveness is releasing the perpetrator of responsibility for the wrong he did. Christ and Stephen are New Testament examples of forgiveness.

True forgiveness is not forgetting; that is a trivialization of forgiveness. We have memories and personalities that can be forever shaped by the wrongs we have suffered. True forgiveness is not avoiding the other person, although sometimes that may be appropriate depending on the nature of the offense. Forgiveness brings healing (2 Chronicles 7:14). We are forgiven in the measure we extend forgiveness to others: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

Lesson Aim: To see involvements of forgiveness.

Theme Verses: [Colossians 3:12-13](#). Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

Lesson Text

"Come Near to Me"

[Genesis 45:1-4](#)

Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. ² And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. ³ And Joseph said unto his brethren, I *am* Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. ⁴ And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I *am* Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

"There Will I Nourish Thee"

[Genesis 45:5-17](#)

Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For these two years *hath* the famine *been* in the land: and yet *there are* five years, in the which *there shall* neither *be* earing nor harvest. ⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ⁸ So now *it was* not you *that* sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: ¹⁰ And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: ¹¹ And there will I nourish thee; for yet *there are* five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. ¹² And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that *it is* my mouth that speaketh unto you. ¹³ And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down

my father hither. ¹⁴ And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵ Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him. ¹⁶ And the fame thereof was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, Joseph's brethren are come: and it pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants. ¹⁷ And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Say unto thy brethren, This do ye; lade your beasts, and go, get you unto the land of Canaan;

"Fall Not Out by the Way"

Genesis 45:21-24

And the children of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the commandment of Pharaoh, and gave them provision for the way. ²² To all of them he gave each man changes of raiment; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred *pieces* of silver, and five changes of raiment. ²³ And to his father he sent after this *manner*; ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she asses laden with corn and bread and meat for his father by the way. ²⁴ So he sent his brethren away, and they departed: and he said unto them, See that ye fall not out by the way.

Questions for Study

"Come Near to Me"

1. How does verse 3 confirm the wisdom of Joseph's handling of the whole situation?

2. What can we learn from Joseph's conduct as he revealed himself?

"There Will I Nourish Thee"

3. What was the secret to Joseph's serenity?

4. How did Joseph prove the sincerity and fullness of his forgiveness?

5. When we are wronged, what should be our response and goals?

"Fall Not Out by the Way"

6. How was Joseph a father to his brothers?

7. What times might we need the warning to avoid "falling out by the way"?

Analyzing the Passage

We are given a synopsis of this passage in 45:1, 2: "Joseph could not refrain himself" (45:1). His tears released a dam of pent-up emotions that he had successfully hidden up to this time. Very likely the Egyptians never knew the details of his separation from his family. In a manner that did not implicate his brothers, Joseph had explained how he came to Egypt (40:15).

"I am Joseph" (45:3) identified him as a Hebrew through his speech and name. His brothers struggled to comprehend the implications of this revelation; troubled in 45:3 means "to be disturbed." They were completely at Joseph's mercy, and it was perfectly reasonable to fear that he "will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him."

"A father to Pharaoh" (45:8) was a title given to the assistant ruler of Egypt and refers especially to his advisory function to Pharaoh.

Principles and Applications

"Come Near to Me"

1. A forgiving spirit longs for reconciliation and does not exploit offenses (45:1). We are always to forgive, and to effect reconciliation where possible. But we are to leave judgment in the hands of God, the omniscient and impartial Judge. The process of reconciliation should happen in the lowest profile possible, involving the fewest people required to fully clear the matter.

2. Forgiveness provides a remedy for restoring strained relationships (45:3-4). Strained or broken relationships cannot be mended when neither party is willing to forgive first, even without the assurance of knowing the response of the other party.

3. Forgiveness requires dealing with sin for what it is (45:4). The root problem must be exposed and dealt with candidly but gently. Evading parts of the issue leaves the situation in a partially resolved state, which further complicates the relationship rather than restoring it.

"There Will I Nourish Thee"

4. Forgiveness involves learning from and gaining victory over offenses—whether we are the cause or recipient (45:5). Society today is fascinated with victim status. Individuals and larger interest groups claim victim status to inflict guilt on their opponents or to extract rewards for wrongs suffered. This is not the Bible pattern of gaining victory over offenses. Nor does rising above offenses put us in a better position to judge the offending party or to permit thoughts of vengeance.

5. By faith a forgiving spirit rests in the sovereign purposes of God (45:5, 8). Someone has said that forgiveness is the hardest thing that humans can do. Likely we have all felt that way. It hurts to release those who wrong us; it tears the wounds open again to refuse to hold their conduct against them. Forgiveness is not forgetting; but it is release, a refusal to hold the action against the perpetrator. Through the anguish, we must learn that God's requirement of forgiveness is for the primary benefit of the victim. For-

giveness enables the recipient of the wrong to put it behind him and move on. Reconciliation requires the cooperation of two parties. Forgiveness only requires the consent of one party and thus is within the reach of every person who suffered wrongly. Only as we forgive can we experience God's blessing.

6. A forgiving spirit is willing to talk face to face in an effort to clear up misunderstanding and offenses (45:12, 15). The process of reconciliation may be fraught with tension. We expose ourselves to the possibility of still more misunderstandings. But aloofness and distance cannot accomplish reconciliation. We need to desire reconciliation more than we fear additional hurts or slights.

7. Tears of compassion contribute to healing and restoration (45:14-15). Reconciliation can be an emotional process. Even if we are the wronged party, tears are still appropriate, as all of us have offended others at some time. May we be willing to see through our own hurts enough to consider the shame and embarrassment of the one who did the wrong.

8. Restored relationships are noticed and appreciated by others (45:16). The house of Pharaoh likely expected a whole family of the caliber of Joseph. Due to the reconciliation that had just begun, they were more likely to find men of Joseph's character than any time prior.

"Fall Not Out by the Way"

9. Forgiveness includes the desire to avoid repeated failure (45:24). We must learn the grace of forgiveness because we live in a fallen world and because we are surrounded by imperfect men and women. If we are caught in an endless cycle of causing offense and reconciliation, we should evaluate the sincerity of our repentance and the sincerity of our forgiveness. Genuine repentance and forgiveness result in healing (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Important Teachings

1. A forgiving spirit longs for reconciliation and does not exploit offenses (45:1).

2. Forgiveness provides a remedy for restoring strained relationships (45:3, 4).

3. Forgiveness requires dealing with sin for what it is (45:4).

4. Forgiveness involves learning from and gaining victory over offenses—whether we are the cause or recipient (45:5).

5. By faith a forgiving spirit rests in the sovereign purposes of God (45:5, 8).

6. A forgiving spirit is willing to talk face to face in an effort to clear up

misunderstanding and offenses (45:12, 15).

7. Tears of compassion contribute to healing and restoration (45:14,-15).

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9. Forgiveness includes the desire to avoid repeated failure (45:24).

Answers to Questions

1. How does verse 3 confirm the wisdom of Joseph's handling of the whole situation?

Joseph's physical appearance, his rank, and his complete power over them made this revelation most difficult to receive. His brothers' shock shows that this whole process of reconciliation required utmost prudence and sensitivity at every step. Had Joseph revealed his identity when they first met, the situation would likely have been so complicated that full reconciliation would not have been possible. We can be thankful that our reconciliations generally are not as complicated as this one had to be.

2. What can we learn from Joseph's conduct as he revealed himself? Sensitive matters like this are best handled privately. Tears of heartfelt emotion help to sooth and heal the distress of the encounter. He made no rebuke whatsoever. Every word spoken was to console, heal, and repair the relationship. He invited them to come close to him.

3. What was the secret to Joseph's serenity?

At every stage, he had learned to trust the providence of God to direct his life. He had forgiven his brothers many years before encountering them. He realized that he was instrumental in saving even the lives of his brothers, who had once sought to destroy him.

4. How did Joseph prove the sincerity and fullness of his forgiveness?

He insisted on reuniting the family in the best area of Egypt. He was not content to give only a few provisions to transport back to Canaan. He was not ashamed of his brothers before Pharaoh. He announced their coming kindly, without explaining the scandal of their role in his own presence in Egypt.

5. When we are wronged, what should be our response and goals?

Not every relationship can be restored to its precise prior condition. But reconciliation and clearing the air must be our primary goal. We should be willing to make the first steps toward restoration, even if we were the wronged party.

6. How was Joseph a father to his brothers?

He recognized the stressful journey ahead of his brothers as they returned homeward and broke the news to their father. His parting counsel made it

clear that he expected them to avoid internal strife and recrimination among themselves. He aided them by sending along royal supplies to facilitate their journey to Egypt.

7. What times might we need the warning to avoid "falling out by the way"?

At times, completely one-sided misunderstandings arise where the fault is totally on our side, which we find difficult to accept. As life moves on, relationships change: former students become our ministers; those whom we rebuked or nurtured along the way become responsible for our character in various ways. Parents become enfeebled and require the care of their children. Siblings must work together in times of crisis, whether financial, health, or moral failure.

8. What blessings follow restored relationships?

A cycle of sin and misery is broken. We can once more enjoy the blessing of human fellowship. A cycle of blessing is begun; the very person we once disliked or misused may well become the one who brings us aid and succor. We have the smile of God's approval upon us; restoration is divine work. When following the pattern God prescribes, He can extend the influence of our actions far beyond our ability to perceive.

Summarizing the Lesson

This lesson gives a beautiful picture of Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers. He had forgiven them many years ago, as his conduct in this lesson makes clear. An embittered person could not have wept on the shoulders of his brothers and caused their restoration as a family.

Joseph gives us a lofty example of the power of forgiveness. Let us resolve that come what may, we will respond in loving forgiveness so that God can accomplish His work of healing.

Research Guide

Read the Scriptures listed under "Forgiveness" in Nave's Topical Bible.