

Week Three: Joseph - Walking in Forgiveness

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Step into the Story

Another familiar Bible story involves Joseph, his brothers, and the coat of many colors. Recall that Jacob, Joseph's father, was the son of Isaac and Rebekah and the twin brother of Esau. Jacob's name was changed by God to *Israel* and his twelve sons became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. Their descendants were known as the children of Israel. Keep that brief background in mind as you read this story.

Joseph and His Brothers

Read [Genesis 37](#)

1. How old was Joseph when this story took place? (v.2) Why did Joseph's brothers hate him? (v.3-4)
2. What was the first dream Joseph reported to his brothers? (v.6-8) How did his brothers respond?
3. What was Joseph's second dream? (v.9-11) How did his father and brothers respond?
4. With what responsibility was Joseph charged in v.14? Before he ever arrived, what were his brothers plotting? (v.18-21)
5. What did Joseph's brothers do when he arrived? (v.23-24) How did Judah's reasoning change the plan? (v.26-28)
6. How did the brothers cover up what they had done? How did Jacob respond to seeing Joseph's coat which had been dipped in blood? (v.29-35)
7. According to v.36, where did Joseph go?
8. Can you identify with the strife in Joseph's family? Have you worked through the pain and anguish that broken family relationships can cause? Has God brought healing to your family or are you still struggling with difficult relationships?

Keep reading to see how Joseph dealt with his situation.

After Joseph was sold into slavery, he was falsely accused of attempted rape, put in prison, and forgotten by those in prison who promised to help him. In every situation, Joseph was a leader and God's favor was on him. Eventually, he interpreted Pharaoh's dream and went from prison to the palace of Egypt. He became a ruler in Egypt and used his leadership and administrative skills to save the people from famine. Years after they sold Joseph into slavery, his brothers traveled to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph did not reveal his identity to them immediately, but

eventually the family was reunited in Egypt. Although Joseph had forgiven his brothers, they assumed that his attitude would change when their father Jacob died. We pick up the story just after the death of Jacob.

Read [Genesis 50:1-22](#)

1. Who went with Joseph to bury Jacob? (v.7-10)
2. When everyone returned to Egypt, what concern did Joseph's brothers have? (v.15)
3. What did Joseph do when his brothers approached him for forgiveness? (v.17) According to v.18, how did they think Joseph would treat them?
4. Recall the chain of events that was set in motion by the actions of Joseph's brothers. Joseph was thrown in a pit, sold to traders, taken to Egypt, made a slave in Potiphar's house, falsely accused and convicted of attempted rape, and put in prison. In spite of all these injustices, Joseph forgave his brothers. If you were in Joseph's place, do you think you could have forgiven your brothers for all they did and for all they caused you to go through?
5. How did Joseph explain his forgiveness for what his brothers had done? (v.19-20) How did his theology affect his relationships?

The principle in [Genesis 50:20](#) is extremely important. Joseph recognized God's sovereignty in his life and he saw that God had taken what his brothers meant for evil and used it for good. This same idea is expressed in the New Testament in [Romans 8:28](#). Copy it here.

Sometimes we fail to recognize that God is in control. He will take the circumstances of our lives and work them together for good because we love Him and we are called according to His purpose. Does this make what Joseph's brothers did acceptable or right? Does this make Potiphar's wife's false accusation right? Does this make Joseph's prison experience easy? Absolutely not!

What this story tells us is that no person, no place, no thing, no event can override God's purpose for our lives. When we trust God, He will take all the people and events and places of our lives and work them together for good. From the pit and from the prison, who could have imagined that Joseph would end up in such a high position in Egypt?

Perhaps nothing is more hurtful than strained or broken relationships within a family. The Bible tells us that "as far as it depends on us" we are to be at peace with all people. The problem is that sometimes, despite our best efforts, other people do not have the same desire to have a good

relationship that we do. At some point, we have to recognize our inability to “fix” everything and everyone and pray for God’s grace. Joseph was separated from his entire family and could not reconcile the relationship with his brothers in person. However, we do know that he forgave them.

Joseph not only had issues in his family, but also issues with the negative circumstances that resulted from his brothers’ sin. We might expect him to be resentful when their sin caused him to suffer. All of us have experienced negative consequences because of someone else’s sin. How do we deal with the things in our lives that are just not “fair”?

I have seen God direct friends through circumstances that were not (from my perspective) fair. When they were told “no” to a job or to an opportunity, these women looked for God’s direction. God had a bigger and better plan than these women could have ever imagined. They would have settled for something less had God not closed the door to the opportunity they were initially seeking. I have experienced this myself and although I was very disappointed when an opportunity did not open up, I did not leave God out of the decision. I knew He could change the hearts and minds of those making the decision. I can now see God’s wisdom in saying “no” to one direction in order to be able to say “yes” to another.

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good

in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”

[Genesis 50:20](#) NASB

Journey through the Principle

Joseph exemplified the biblical principle of forgiveness. We have already seen that what Joseph knew about God and His providence allowed him to forgive his brothers. Jesus spoke to this same issue when He answers Peter’s question about forgiving someone who repeatedly offends you in [Matthew 18](#). Let’s read what the Lord has to say about forgiveness in the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Read [Matthew 18:21-35](#).

1. What was the situation between the king and the first servant? How much did the servant owe the king? How did the king respond to the servant’s request? (v.23-28)

2. What was the situation between the first servant and his fellow servant? How much did the second servant owe? How did the first servant respond to his fellow servant’s request? (v.29-30)

Note: The contrast between the debt we owed God and the debt others owe us is represented by the 10,000 talents and the 100 denarii. The 10,000 talents, the amount that the servant owed the king, is several million dollars, a debt too large to be repaid. The 100 denarii, approximately 100 days’ wages, the amount that the servant owed his fellow servant, is a much smaller amount which could be paid back in a reasonable amount of time.⁵

3. What happened when the king found out how the first servant treated his fellow servant?
(v.31-35)

4. Because we have been forgiven, what does God expect us to do? Ask the Lord to call specific people to mind as you think about forgiveness.

5. Look back at the parable and write down the verse or verses where you find the following principles.

a. God graciously forgives us rather than giving us more time to pay back our debt to Him.

b. Believers are to show others mercy in the same way that God has been merciful to them.

c. True forgiveness is a heart issue. _____

d. The forgiveness we need to extend to others is very small in comparison with the forgiveness that God extends to us. _____

Walk It Out in Life

Of course, it is easy to talk about forgiveness, but very difficult to practice forgiveness. Is there someone you need to forgive? Don't wait for that person to ask for your forgiveness. Release him or her from the debt even before he or she asks for forgiveness. Forgiveness is not pretending something never happened. Forgiveness is not saying that what happened was good or right. Forgiveness is not a casual glossing over of an offense. Forgiveness is not deciding to let people run all over you. Forgiveness is a choice we make to release someone from a debt they owe us. Be honest about your feelings but then be obedient.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander

be put away from you, along with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other,

just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

[Ephesians 4:31-32](#) NASB

Will you choose to forgive? Ask the Lord to show you specific people, perhaps some that you are not aware of, that you need to forgive. Write out a prayer expressing your willingness for God to change your heart toward someone you need to forgive. Don't forget to thank Him for forgiving you!

Walk It Out in Parenting

My husband and I attended a home Bible study when we were first married. One night the guest speaker was Dr. Howard Hendricks from Dallas Theological Seminary. He and his wife Jeanne shared and then answered questions. I remember that when someone asked him about sibling rivalry, Dr. Hendricks gave a classic response. “Disgustingly normal,” he said without hesitation. I have thought about those words many times because they apply to things other than just sibling rivalry. Sibling rivalry may be normal, but it certainly is disgusting.

One year on our vacation after a few days of being together night and day, our three children were not getting along with each other. My husband and I had all three of them sit down at a table with pencil and paper and write out three things that were positive about each of their siblings. We hoped that this exercise would shift their focus and remind them of some of the strengths of the other family members. I think this did calm things down a little, but what I remember most is one thing both boys independently wrote about their four year old sister. “Organized,” they both said about a pre-school child. I am not sure how much that encouraged her, but it gave us all a good laugh!

We want our children to get along with each other and we want them to forgive each other. Although we cannot prevent every disagreement among siblings, we can be wise in how we treat our children in order to minimize competition and confrontation. When conflicts arise, we want to teach them to forgive.

What are some ways you can discourage sibling rivalry? As a parent, what are some ways you can avoid showing favoritism to one child over another? How can you help your children learn to forgive? Share any ideas you have with your small group.

Hold His Hand

Joseph let us in on the secret to forgiving his brothers. We read his words in [Genesis 50:20](#). He affirmed that in spite of his brothers’ evil intentions, “God meant it for good.” As we walk through difficult and unfair circumstances, we can know that God is sovereign and He will use even the things that hurt us most as He works all things together for good in our lives.

The greatest provision that God has made for us is in Jesus Christ. The day of the Crucifixion looked like the bleakest day in history. All hope seemed lost when Jesus died on the cross, but God had the final word when He raised Jesus from the dead. Will you thank God today for being the **God who meant it for good**? You can hold His hand as you walk through life’s darkest moments.

The same God who took Joseph from slavery and prison to a position of great power in Egypt is available to you. Call on Him today and ask Him for wisdom, for forgiveness, and for a fresh sense of His presence in the midst of your circumstances.