

How God Deals With Conscience (Part Five)

Joseph and His Brothers

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The story of Joseph and his brothers, told in Genesis 37-50, is a wonderful and straightforward story about a wonderful family situation.

Now let me ask a question. What do you think the climax is of this story? To me, it seems to be the moment at which Joseph reveals himself to his brothers for the first time. "I am Joseph!" he declares. In that declaration, Joseph's emotion peak and the brothers' experience reaches a crescendo. There are few more dramatic moments than this in history.

The verses are climatic in another way as well. As we have seen on other occasions, Joseph is an outstanding type of Jesus Christ. Consequently, his revelation of himself to his brothers amply illustrates the great personal climax of a human life as Jesus Christ reveals Himself as Savior to that person. I want you to see both of these as we turn to the story here in Genesis 45.

Genesis 45:1-4 Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt."

Let us look at the parallels here between Joseph and Jesus, they may be seen in several ways. One parallel is that Joseph knew his brothers before they knew him, but the brothers thought he was some mysterious Egyptian ruler, whom they knew nothing at all about, other than the fact that he was powerful. They did not perceive that he was Joseph until he revealed himself on this occasion.

Genesis 42:8 So Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.

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Is it not strange that we fail to know and recognize the God who has created us or Jesus Christ who is our Savior?

Isaiah 1:3 The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider."

When Jesus Christ appeared on earth, the same thing was true. John wrote in John 1:

John 1:10-13 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Before our calling we did not know Him, even though He knows us. He has known us from the beginning. In Psalm 139, David said that God knew him from the moment He formed him in his mother's womb.

Psalm 139:1-4 O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; you understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.

Psalm 139:13-16 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them.

So David came to know God at a very early age, but David would have been the first to acknowledge that God knew him before he knew God. The same is the case for every member of God's church. God is acting in our lives from the earliest times in our life and He was also doing so in the lives of Joseph and his brothers way back then.

Again Jesus Christ does not merely know you from the beginning in the sense that He might simply know of your existence and have you within His general frame of reference, but rather He knows you profoundly and deeply. He knows your secrets, even the guiltiest secrets of your heart.

This was the case with Joseph and his brothers. The brothers had acknowledge and confessed their sin to each other, but never openly. They supposed that there was not a creature on earth who knew of it and were therefore capable of exposing their transgression because they thought that Joseph was already dead because of his slavery. Yet Joseph had known all along and he was now bringing what he knew to light.

In the same way, Jesus Christ knows you and knows the sin you have tried to hide and have succeeded in hiding from everyone—except Him. You think you have buried that sin forever, but God knows it and is exposing it so that you may seek His forgiveness and find cleansing.

Do you remember what the apostle Paul pointed out to the Corinthians about what they should do in order that they may recognize God's ministry compared with the false teachers who were dogging them constantly?

II Corinthians 7:1-3 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. [So overcoming is hard work and we have a duty to take part in doing that.] Open your hearts to us. [Paul is speaking here about the ministry.] We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one. I [Paul] do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.

We are in this together, we are friends and we are spiritual brothers and sisters. There should not be an “us” and “them” mentality between God's ministry and the rest of the brethren. In this nation where we have management and employees, it seems that the culture we live in is always pitting management against the individual below them. Labor unions rise up because of that mentality. This should never happen among the church, although it has happened in the past where the people wound up being pitted against the ministry and vice versa.

This is the explanation of how God so often uses sermons to expose hidden sin. Although God's ministry usually preach sermons with the meaning and application of the

text in mind, sometimes someone comes up afterward and asks a question such as, "were you preaching about me?" This has happened to me before, but we do not preach directly to individuals, but occasionally something that is said might strike someone in a manner to bring something to light, as it were.

Now remember that you may hide from other people and even from yourself, but all things are open in the eyes of God and Christ. Even if the sin is not exposed here, it is nevertheless known to God and will be exposed for His perfect judgment at the last day unless it is acknowledged and repented of in this life.

Now there is another parallel between Joseph and Jesus and that is in the fact that Joseph loved His brothers when they did not love him. It is true that the brothers eventually came to love Joseph, but they hated him so much at first that they sold him into slavery twenty-two years earlier and then they had supposed that he disappeared off the face of the earth. As God worked on their consciences, they came to regret and eventually repent of their action, but they could hardly have affection for a person whom they had only known twenty years before and whom they may have even had hoped was dead!

How deeply Joseph loved his brothers appears in the story here when he was overcome by Judah's touching pleadings for Benjamin. Joseph breaks down and has to require his Egyptian attendants to leave him. We read this earlier in Genesis 45.

Genesis 45:1 Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

It was a very emotional period for him. This is a moving story but it is not all that remarkable. Joseph had been a lonely man for twenty years. He must have wondered if he would ever see his family again and then when he did see his brothers, he kept his feelings bottled up while God worked through him to bring about their conversion and test their new natures.

Now it would have been a surprise if Joseph had not broken down at this point, but what are we to say of Jesus whom we see weeping over Jerusalem? Was there ever a love like this? Joseph's love was great, but Jesus' love was far greater. In fact it is beyond human imagination.

I am sure you have noticed, as the story progresses, that Joseph loved his brothers

despite any appearances to the contrary, and there had been some. He had spoken to them harshly when they had first come to Egypt; later he had placed a heavy demand on them which was to bring their youngest brother with them when they came again to Egypt. Joseph had imprisoned Simeon; then he had hidden his cup in Benjamin's sack in order to break their self-confidence. He was putting them through some fairly severe emotional trials.

From the brothers' perspective, these were hardly acts of love, yet they were actually the works of love. The truly loveless thing would have been for Joseph to ignore his brothers and to have allowed them to go on in their Godless way and eventually perish in the grave.

If you think God is pounding on you, it is for your own benefit. It is because He loves you and is strengthening you and disciplining you as a son or daughter. It is not because He does not love you. Learn from the story of Joseph that God is using these circumstances to drive you from sin and draw you to Himself. Look at it as a positive thing, something to be thankful for.

Now another parallel with Jesus is that Joseph saved them before they were aware of their salvation. It was a process, but Joseph had already decided to save them right from the very beginning when he recognized them. Everything that has happened in the story to this point has been an aspect of the salvation of these godless men. God was bringing this about through Joseph, but they did not know it here, and when they had repented of their sin and given evidence that they were becoming converted men, they were so unaware of what had happened that they were terrified and feared a harsh revenge at Joseph's hand.

As a reminder, let us briefly review what God had done to awake their consciences. First, He subjected them to the anxiety of deprivation. They were starving and forced to go down to Egypt to find food. Second, He had subjected them to the sting of tough treatment. These men were not used to such treatment. Joseph's words were a blow to their self-esteem and to their pride.

Third, they had known the beneficial pressure of solitude or physical imprisonment as they had been forced to be still and think in Joseph's prison.

The fourth thing was that there had been the proof of God's presence through the inexplicable return of their money, which they had discovered on their first trip home.

Fifth, there had been the pattern of necessity. In spite of their wishes, they were unable

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to simply return to business as usual. Their consciences and their anxiety of what Joseph might do to them would not let them.

Sixth, they were moved by the power of Joseph's affection which they could not miss, though they also could not fully understand it either.

And seventh, there was the purge of self- confidence through the discovery of Joseph's cup in the sack of young Benjamin.

These were the means that God used to turn them from sin and bring them to new life, yet the brothers did not know it. It is only at this time, after all of these things, that they discovered what God had been doing all along.

Their condition was actually worse than that of mere ignorance. Not only did they not know they were being saved, but actually feared the opposite. They were terrified because they believed that they were lost forever. The condition of the brothers when Joseph revealed himself to them is the condition of every truly awakened sinner. They were miserable, they knew they were sinners who had no excuse for their sin, and earlier in Genesis 42, they had said "surely we are being punished because of our brother" and "what is this that God has done to us!"

Now when the cup was uncovered in Benjamin's sack they saw it as an uncovering of their guilt. Earlier in Genesis 44, they had said, "how can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt." We were given an insight there into what was happening in their hearts, it was an awakening; an awareness of not only God acting within their lives, but also a realization of what they were really and truly like.

In this part of the story, when Joseph is revealed to them and the enormity of their guilt, and its public disclosure is poured out in them, it is significant that they find themselves speechless, unable to say a thing. As those who will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ, they found their mouths stopped and found themselves accountable.

Furthermore, these brothers were not only overwhelmed by their guilt, but conscious that they were in Joseph's absolute power. He was the ruler and he could do with them according to his good pleasure. The brothers were never more lost than when they supposed their sin was forgotten and that in this life it would not rise up to haunt them. If they had been right, theirs would have been a tragic story, but thankfully for them, they were wrong.

They had put Joseph in a pit, but God took him out of the pit and placed him on a

throne. What a miracle that was in itself. They had embittered their father's life for twenty-two long years and did not care a bit for his anguish. But God caused them anguish instead and restored the lost son. In this moment, to their dread, the brothers saw that sin is futile, it cannot be hidden, the consequences cannot be escaped, and God must judge it fiercely.

Seeing this was their salvation. If you see it, though you justly fear judgment, you have actually been awakened by God and in the process of being saved. We must be aware of our sin first before there can be repentance, because we have to know what to repent of. God gives us that awareness first.

Now the last parallel between Joseph and Jesus is that Joseph called his brothers when they would have preferred to run from him, and he called effectively. This is the way Joseph's announcement of his identity ends, he had told them who he was and they were terrified, but he commanded them to come close to him, and although they must have feared that it was because he wished to harm them, to their surprise, they discovered that it was not an angry master who was calling them, but rather a loving brother.

Under different circumstances, Joseph could have been angry, they could have been judged, but Joseph was not calling them in anger. He had turned them from sin and they were changed men and now he was calling them with the kindness of a powerful and embracing love. Christ is calling us in a similar way. If we hear His voice, it is because He has already made us one of His sheep.

John 10:27-28 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

Though He could have judged us while we were still in our sin, He has turned it from us. That is why we hear Him and know He wants us close to Him, similar to what Joseph was doing with his brothers.

Now how does God call us through Christ? We notice that like Joseph—who is a type of Christ at this point—Christ usually calls in secret. It is when the attendants are put out—and Jesus Christ is alone with us in the quiet of our heart and mind, that we hear the same still, small voice of God that Elijah heard that calmed him and made him able to listen.

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This actually has application to those who were baptized but yet insist on dating outside the church. It is like playing Russian roulette, and this is why we should be cautious of many “missionary dating” conversions. While I am sure some people may be called among the noise and drama of the missionary style dating, it is still something one should be wary of.

The Christian Broadcast Network ran an article by Todd Hertz entitled, “Unhappy Ever After.” This is what he has seen as the usual pattern: “The basic premise of missionary dating is purposeful deception. Do we really want to trick or lure someone to Christ using our love as bait?” We must always remember Psalm 127:1.

Psalm 127:1 Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

So we know through experience that people are called more often as God speaks to them quietly as they wait, sometimes trembling before Him.

I am sure that Joseph also called his eleven brothers by name. Later, in Genesis 45:14-15, we are told that he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and that he kissed all of his brothers and wept over them. Can we imagine him doing that without calling their names? Christ calls us in the same manner. He is not calling all of your neighbors, He is calling you. Finally, Jesus Christ is calling you as His brother because He loves us, just as Joseph called his brothers, and He is willing to provide for us from now until eternity. It is not hard to win a brother’s love, it is not hard to enjoy a brother’s true affection.

Galatians 4:4-7 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Jesus Christ is our spiritual brother and He is calling us on behalf of His Father, so should we not respond to His call and draw near to Him as we have never done before? All He has done in our lives is because of His love for us and we must reciprocate that love to our Father in heaven and to our Savior.

Now in studying the character of Joseph, we have seen that his single most distinguishing feature was his ability to relate everything to God. God was in his thoughts constantly and there was hardly a sentence on his lips that does not have the name of God in it.

When Joseph was taken to Egypt and was tempted to commit sexual immorality with the wife of Potiphar, God's will was primarily what Joseph cared about. Joseph asked the woman, "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" That is who he was answering to, not his physical father or mother, but to God Himself and that is who we all answer to for our sins.

When he was put in prison and told that the chief cup-bearer and the chief baker of Pharaoh had dreams that they were unable to interpret, Joseph responded, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams." Joseph said the same to Pharaoh, "I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

Later, Joseph said, "God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do." Joseph named his first son Manasseh because he said, "God has made me forget all of my trouble and all of my father's household." Manasseh means forgetting. Joseph named his second son Ephraim because, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." Ephraim means twice fruitful.

At the very end of Genesis, Joseph tells his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended for good to accomplish what is now being done; the saving of many lives. Again I am about to die, but God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land."

To Joseph it was all about God and His sovereignty and that his life was always in God's hands and God was always there to give him wisdom and to pull him out of whatever situation he was in. And, if he was in a trial, God would help him through it for good, for the good of others as well as for his own good.

Nothing is more characteristic of Joseph than his ability to relate everything that happened to him to God. But nowhere in this story is this evident than in Genesis 45. Here are five verse in which Joseph sought to allay his brothers' fears after he had revealed himself to them. In these verses the name of God occurs four times.

Genesis 45:5-9 But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and here

are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. 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.

The credit was always going to God. By looking past secondary causes to God, who was the first cause, Joseph gained a stabilizing perspective on life and achieved a frame of mind in which he was able to forgive and reassure his brothers. Had he not had this perspective of God being first and foremost in his life, he would not have been able to have the character, and the wisdom, and the will to be able to forgive his brothers for what they had done to him.

This is a perspective to be held by every last Christian. This God-centered perspective provides profound insight that is not to be taken lightly as if it were just Joseph's wishful thinking, nor is it as if Joseph had experienced only good in his life and was simply acknowledging that all good gifts come from God. We know that all good gifts come from God as the apostle James was inspired to write.

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

On the contrary, Joseph had experienced much evil. He had been unreasonably hated, treacherously enslaved, falsely accused, and wrongly imprisoned, and again it was not as if he was merely ignoring the evil or denying it. He was acutely aware of his brothers' evil and of their need to turn from it.

The unique importance of these statements lies in Joseph's attributing what was evil in its intent to God's providence. He was not saying that God was the author of evil, because He is not, but rather God is in charge even of the wicked designs and evil deeds of men so that *His* purposes are accomplished, not theirs. This means that since God is the author of Scripture and sets his seal to what Joseph is declaring, that God assumes ultimate responsibility for allowing the evil of men and for evil events besides. We may have trouble understanding how an all-powerful but good God can allow the evil in this world, but one thing is certain, God does not pass off responsibility for what

happens.

The proper relationship between the goodness and sovereignty of God on the one hand, and the prevalence of evil on the other, is seen in the story of Job. Job suffered many things he did not seem to deserve. Desert raiders carried away his oxen and donkeys; lightning destroyed his sheep; Babylonian bandits destroyed his camels; his seven sons and three daughters were killed suddenly by the collapse of the house in which they had been dining. He also had boils that were so painful that he mourned the day he was born.

In all of his suffering, Job had not the slightest indication that any of this was for a meaningful purpose or that any good could come from it. Even after God had appealed to him later and overwhelmed him with a reminder of His greatness and Job's impotence, there was still no explanation. Yet the story begins with a scene in heaven which Job could not see, but was provided for the benefit of the readers of the book. Showing that not only was God in charge of what was happening and limited it, but that He actually initiated the test by calling Satan's attention to Job's godly character.

Job 1:8 Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"

In this story, we learn that God had a purpose in Job's suffering. He was demonstrating to Satan and his hosts that love for God really does exist apart from the benefits people get from the relationship. God showed that the invisible things are greater than the visible things; that love is greater than selfishness; and also God was working in Job's life to bring about a marked growth in faith and maturing of his character.

The point is that none of this was accidental, God was in charge. Job could not see it, but God, who give us this story, assumes full responsibility for every evil thing that occurred, but God did not do the evil. Evil came from the malicious spirit of our great enemy, "the Satan" as it is written here, yet God permitted evil and assumed responsibility for allowing it. The reason bad things happen to good people is because He decrees it. Joseph saw this and declared it when he said:

Genesis 45:8 So now it was not you who sent me here, but God.

Joseph was not merely saying that God was behind the evil that had happened, as

important as that preliminary statement is. By itself the statement means that the tragedies are not accidents, it may even mean that God has some wise purpose in the tragedy and that is helpful.

It is always easier to bear something if you know that there was a purpose to it, but Joseph was claiming more than that in his four-fold reference to God's hand in the details of his life. Besides saying that God was in charge of what happened, Joseph says that God was accomplishing a good purpose in it so that the end was good, despite the evil.

God is not the origin of evil even though God sometimes uses it, allows it, and sometimes even declares it by what He said to Satan about Job. Now remember what Joseph said in Genesis 45.

Genesis 45:5 But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.

Genesis 45:7 And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

Here we can see how Joseph's statements regarding God's good purposes were true. The hatred of Joseph's brothers, which was evil, was the cause of their selling him into slavery which got him to Egypt. The lust and lying of Potiphar's adulterous wife, which were evil, were the means of getting Joseph into prison where he met the chief cup bearer and chief baker of Pharaoh. The forgetfulness of the cup bearer, whether unintentionally or intentionally cruel, meant that Joseph was still imprisoned to be brought out at the proper time, two years later, when Pharaoh had his dream.

It is easy to see all of this in retrospect as Joseph did, but this was twenty-two years later, after Joseph's initial captivity. God was working all along, every step of the way in everything that happened to Joseph. It was all according to God's purpose over those years.

During the early years it was not obvious how or even if God was going to bring good out of evil, yet Joseph lived by faith in God during those years just as much as he did after the purposes of God began to be disclosed, and so did Job. When God first permitted Satan to attack Job, causing the loss of his property and the death of his children, Job did not understand what was happening and he was so distressed that he tore his robe and shaved his head, two ancient symbols of deep mourning. Yet look

what we read about Job:

Job 1:20-22 Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

He did not charge God with wrong and neither did Joseph. Are we able to say that during our trials? Or do we just complain and moan? We all complain and moan through trials, but we can certainly take Joseph's and Job's example and try to remember and apply it in our lives when we come upon a trial.

When God permitted Satan to afflict Job with boils all over his body, Job still had no idea what God's purpose was, yet although Job left his house, sat in ashes, and scraped his sores, he did not curse God for his trouble.

Job 2:10 But he [Job] said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Job was quite a man of character and of faith. Job did not even have an explanation of what God was doing during that long and painful time. When he was receiving comfort from his friends, he defended himself arguing that he had done nothing to deserve the extraordinary measure of calamity that had been sent upon him. He did not understand it, but like Joseph, Job was willing to believe that God was still in charge and that He would bring good out of his suffering.

There were three good things that Joseph claimed God accomplished by his suffering. First, God prospered Joseph making him lord of all Egypt. This was the highest position other than Pharaoh could enjoy in that day. But in Joseph's case it was reached by someone in the lowest of all positions, an imprisoned slave. What a miracle that was.

There is a spiritual lesson here, mainly that those whom God wishes greatly to honor He often greatly abases, no doubt because the humbling is necessary for the greatness. We are familiar Proverbs 15:3 and Proverbs 18:2 which say:

Proverbs 15:33 The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and before

honor is humility.

Proverbs 18:12 Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor is humility.

Moses was a man greatly used of God in the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. He was Israel's first great leader, but before he was called by God and sent to Egypt with the command, "Let my people go." He was driven from Egypt as a fugitive and spent forty years on the backside of the desert as a shepherd.

David was greatly used by God as well, yet David spent many years being harassed and pursued from place to place by the jealous and vindictive king Saul. It was during these dog-days that both Moses and David developed the necessary character for true greatness.

So do not despair if life has not prospered you yet. God may be preparing you for great things to come. Whatever the future holds, you can be sure that God controls it and that the eventual outcome of any evil will be good to you personally.

The second good thing is that God saved the lives of the brothers through Joseph's fall and eventual rise to power. God was doing a number of things by Joseph being sold to into Egypt. For instance, this was His way of getting Jacob and the brothers to Egypt where they would prosper and grow into a great nation.

God plans thing out way in advance as seen in this example here. In order to get Jacob to Egypt, God had to get Benjamin to Egypt; in order to get Benjamin to Egypt, He had to get the brothers to Egypt; in order to get them to Egypt, He first had to get Joseph to Egypt. All this was for the good of the brothers and eventually for the good of the nation of Israel.

Now in addition to this and even of more immediate importance, Joseph's suffering was the means of saving their lives. This was a severe famine, and Joseph's family would have died if God had not have sent Joseph ahead of the others. Genesis 45 tells us, speaking of both physically and spiritually:

Genesis 45:7 And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. [speaking both physically and spiritually]

Remember this when you go through difficult times, because hard times maybe be God's means of saving you and others from an even greater disaster. In Psalm 119, David says:

Psalm 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.

David's affliction led to greater obedience.

Now the third good thing is that God saved other lives in the process of saving Jacob's household. As Joseph said in verse 5

Genesis 45:5 But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.

The world does not see this but the Scripture teaches us that the wicked experience many special provisions because of God's care for the righteous. God has spared whole nations because of an oppressed but faithful minority. We see this in the story having to do with Egypt. Not only Jacob and his sons, Joseph included, were saved from the famine, but all of Egypt was, thanks to the revelation that God gave to Joseph. God does save whole nations for the sake of the few faithful minority.

It should be clear that one of the benefits of Joseph seeing everything that happened to him as having come from God, was that he was able to forgive his brothers easily. He would not have been able to do so if he had focused only on their responsibility for his suffering. It is a shame, but many times that is what we do. We spend all of our time focusing on what wrongs we think have been done to us rather than focusing on our need to overcome certain things or to be forgiving of others.

By seeing God's good purpose in everything, in both good and evil, we are motivated to easily forgive those who harm us. It does not cause us to condone the wrongs, as if they were unconscious instruments without the will to decide between good and evil or to resist Satan's influence, but we can pray, forgive, and have pity on those who are slaves to their own desires and enemies to their own well being.

This is strongly exemplified in Joseph, because he saw the hand of God overruling the designs of his brothers and from that consideration he not only readily forgave them, but implored them not to be grieved or angry with themselves. Since whatever had been their intentions, God had used their errors to accomplish His own good purposes.

Do you have trouble forgiving someone? Has someone deeply wronged you or does your body tense up in anger whenever you think of him or her? Have you prayed about it and had a little relief? If so, try thinking of the wrong as part of God's providence. Notice His hand in it, think of the good He is accomplishing. If you gain that perspective, you will find your anger softening and finally discover that you are actually able to forgive the one who has wronged you even greatly.

There is something that has been obvious in Genesis 45 from the beginning, mainly the prominent repetition of God's name, and when God repeats something it is never for mere literary effect, but rather to help our simple minds finally grasp some great spiritual principle.

Psalm 14:1-3 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one.

This truth is so important that David repeats this passage almost word for word in Psalm 53:1-3. Now in Romans 3:10, the apostle Paul paraphrases the first parts of Psalm 14 and Psalm 53, "to the brethren of God's church in Rome."

Romans 3:10-12 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one."

So we were in that situation. We were of those who did not do righteousness, but with God's Holy Spirit in us we are able to do certain acts of righteousness and to work with God in improving our character.

Now this is something God wants us to know, human beings choose to be ignorant of God, rebellious and dead in trespasses in sin. Also here God wants us to know that He is in charge of the events of our lives. He is sovereign!

Back in Genesis 45:5-9 we notice that Joseph said such things as, "God sent me ahead of you and it is not you who sent me here, but God. God has made me lord of all Egypt."

So we must keep in mind that people will do things wrong. Brethren will do things wrong and they will even wrong us, but we must forgive them.

Ultimately the lesson of this story is God's will will be done and that He is sovereign. Is not that the theme of the entire Bible? We are going to pick up the story again here in Genesis 45:10-16. This is speaking of Joseph's future care of his brothers that they are so concerned about.

Genesis 45:10-16 You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine. And behold, your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my mouth that speaks to you. So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hurry and bring my father down here." Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him. Now the report of it was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, "Joseph's brothers have come." So it pleased Pharaoh and his servants well.

Now the Egyptians of Joseph's day were known to be Sphinx-like and enigmatic, impenetrable, unknowable, and mysterious as a people. When you live in a place long enough, you tend to become like that place, similar to the people among whom you live. So Joseph must have had at least some of that influence. When we read the account of his many years in Egypt, particularly of his dealings with his brothers on the occasions of their visits to buy food, we sense that he was acting as mysteriously as the Egyptians were known for. Twenty-two long years in Egypt had taught Joseph to hide his feelings, so when his brothers came to Egypt, there was not the slightest clue that he was actually their long lost brother.

Even the Egyptians, who knew something of Joseph's background as a former slave, did not suspect it. Joseph's face revealed nothing. But deep inside, Joseph was no Egyptian, he was a Hebrew like his fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob before him and it was not the way of the Hebrews to be stoics. Hebrews had feelings and they expressed them and they let their emotions be known. Consequently we are not surprised to find a place in the story, the place to which we have now come, at which Joseph had at last broken down and wept so loudly and profusely that the Egyptians heard him and reported his unusual behavior to Pharaoh.

When Joseph was about to make himself known to his brothers, he sent his attendants away, they were Egyptians attendants most likely. But they, no doubt, lingered outside the doors as servants will, and heard the commotion.

Genesis 45:2 And he [Joseph] wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it.

Genesis 45:14-15 Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him.

So Joseph was showing himself to be a Hebrew and that he showed his love in an emotional way at that time. This remarkable day was remembered in the oral traditions and then in the written records of Israel as the most memorable moment of all many memorable moments in Joseph's distinguished life. This incident marked the release of Joseph's long bottled up emotions, the salvation of the brothers, and the first bonding of the fathers of the tribes of Israel.

Verses 14-15 tell us how desperately isolated and lonely Joseph must have been during the long years of separation from his father and family, even after he had come to a position of great prestige in Egypt.

We do not have difficulty imagining how frightened he must have been as a boy of seventeen when he was seized by his brothers and sold into Egypt as a slave. Joseph was young and defenseless, he was being taken to a country where he would not even be able to speak the language. We can imagine how forgotten he must have felt during the two long years he spent in prison as the captain of the guard. He had hoped at one point that the chief cup-bearer of Pharaoh, whom he had encouraged by a favorable interpretation of his dream, might remember him and speak favorably to Pharaoh on his behalf, but he was forgotten.

He may well have expected to remain in Potiphar's prison indefinitely, so we can understand the loneliness. But Joseph was then brought out of the prison and promoted to the second highest position in Egypt. We expect his loneliness to have been removed at this point.

When his sons were born, he gave them uplifting names, signifying "forgotten" and "doubly fruitful" because as he said, "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household" and "God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." Joseph

certainly endured his afflictions well, but he had been blessed to the degree that he could claim forgetfulness of his trouble and his father's house, but he was as desperately lonely now as ever and it took only a moment for the anguish and isolation of twenty years to come into the open as a torrent.

Remember this as you look at someone who seems to be the pinnacle of success. We may see him or her in outward circumstances and say, "Certainly a person like this has everything. If anyone on earth was ever happy, it is that person." but we do not see the heart of the very one who seems so favored. Maybe the one who hides the greatest measure of despair and loneliness and most needs the love of God and others is that person. Even many members of God's church suffer deep tragedy. From Joseph we learn to be attuned to suffering and not to envy anyone.

This memorable picture of Joseph weeping with his brothers shows us something else about him, something even more commendable than the tender loneliness of his heart. It shows us love. It is not so evident that Joseph should have loved his brothers, even Benjamin, who was the child of his own mother as well as his father. Joseph had been absent from home for more than twenty years and his absence was the result of the hatred of his brothers.

There would be some in Joseph's position who would have allowed the injustice of this treatment to gnaw at them, petrify their emotions, and freeze their consciences. Over the years people like this become increasingly unable to like or love anyone, they turn inward in anger, and when at last they might meet brothers such as these, it might not be love that would erupt within them but rather the most virulent hatred and anger. They would plot to destroy the architects of their misery or if not that, they would certainly remind them that they were the cause of the person's own great sufferings and never allow them to forget it. Joseph did not do that, he did remind them earlier on, but he did not nag them on and on about it.

Joseph had endured twenty-two years of loneliness, but he had mastered his heart during those long decades and had not allowed adversity to make him bitter. How did he do that? He had drawn close to God, as we have seen repeatedly. If you are not close to God, bitterness will eventually grab a hold of you. The question is, however, will you be able to get rid of it if you are not close to God? Usually you cannot.

The third remarkable thing about Joseph was his ability to forgive, as seen here in the same incident. Reading about Joseph throwing his arms around his full brother, Benjamin, and weeping over him, we understand it to be an act of pure love. Benjamin was not with the others when they pounced upon Joseph and sold him into slavery, nor

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would he have been. There was a deep and wonderful bond between these two brothers and Joseph reasonably loved Benjamin, but in verse 15 it says that:

Genesis 45:15 Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him.

This was an expression of love of course, because Joseph truly loved all of them, but it was more than just brotherly love. Since these are the ones who wronged him so many years before, this love is love fused with grace. It is forgiveness.

Let us notice two comparisons here. The first comparison is between the actions of Joseph in this story and the prophesy of his father, Jacob, concerning all the brothers in Genesis 49. Verses 5-7 contain an analysis of the character of Simeon and Levi, who were in large part responsible for Joseph's suffering and concludes with a curse on their anger.

Genesis 49:5-7 "Simeon and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. Let not my soul enter their council; let not my honor be united to their assembly; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they hamstrung an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.

We know that God inspired this prophesy, but it seems that Jacob could not altogether forgive and forget their crimes, but Joseph did forget them. I am sure Jacob eventually did forgive them, but no doubt he was rather angry for what they had done to his son Joseph and not having had time with Joseph for the past twenty-two years.

The second comparison is between Joseph and Moses. The reference here is to Deuteronomy 33, in which Moses is pronouncing a blessing upon the various tribes of Israel, but Simeon is omitted. There is no blessing, not even a mention of Simeon.

So this begs the question, in the forgiving of sins, does Joseph excel his father and Moses, since he does not mention his being sold into slavery? His father Jacob pronounced a God-inspired curse upon Simeon and Levi and Moses passes over Simeon in silence. In both cases God inspired these records, but there is a hint that Moses and Jacob may have been rather irritated at these men. God inspired these records, so they stand as they are.

Joseph alone addresses his brothers in a loving manner and deals with them very tenderly. At that time they were in his power and according to the laws, he could have avenged the injury he had received at their hands, but his outstanding compassion and kindness does not allow this.

He is not thinking of anything else but forgiveness, generosity, and comforting. Their consciences had been ripped open and they were in mental anguish that cannot be soothed or easily removed. This scene of Joseph embracing and kissing even the brothers who had wronged him, is unsurpassed in the Bible except for the descriptions of Jesus Christ, loving and even kissing those who wronged Him.

Now you recall Judas had lived with and learned from Christ for years and despite of this, Judas betrayed Him and Jesus did not withdraw from Judas' company. He ate the Passover with Judas, even passing the bread to him, and at that time it was a sign of special favor, although at this time, for prophecy's sake, it showed who was going to betray Him. And when Judas came to Him later in the garden with a kiss, we do not read that Jesus turned away His cheek. Always remember, this is the Jesus who reaches out to each and every one of us, with a warm embrace as our spiritual brother.

The last sentence of Genesis 45:15 suggests still another characteristic of Joseph. It tells us that, "after that, his brothers talked with him." Now we know from the verses preceding this and from the account following, that Joseph was anxious to see his father and that he was urging his brothers to go to him and bring him down to Egypt quickly. The verses contain three expressions of Joseph's understandable haste.

Genesis 45:9 "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."

Genesis 45:13 So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hurry and bring my father down here."

So obviously he was very anxious for Jacob to arrive. Yet in spite of his understandable impatience to see his father, the last phrase in verse 15 says, "and after that his brothers talked with him." So this indicates that Joseph took considerable time to be with his brothers, talk with them, and reassure them of his love and his forgiveness.

He knew their need for reassurance, because it was a shock for them to discover that the brother they thought they had killed was alive and in fact standing before them. They

had to get to know him again, overcome their anxiety, and be assured of his favor, so that is exactly what Joseph did. He took the time to comfort them and talk with them. This was so difficult for them that even years later, after they had brought Jacob down to Egypt where he eventually died, they were still afraid that Joseph would exact vengeance on them and Joseph had to reassure them again.

Genesis 50:15-21 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you." ' Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants." Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

So Joseph showed unusual wisdom in spending time with these men to reassure and comfort them. This characteristic of Joseph also has a parallel with the actions of Jesus and His disciples. Following His death and resurrection, Jesus did not return to heaven immediately, but rather spent forty days with His own, reassuring them and teaching them about what He had come to do and suffer. They probably felt guilty since they all deserted Him and Peter had even denied Him. But Jesus took the time to reassure them of His resurrection in Luke 24.

Luke 24:25-26 Then He [Jesus] said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"

In Peter's case Christ made a special effort to reassure him. Peter denied Jesus three times, so Jesus asked three times, "Peter, do you truly love me?" When Peter replied that he did, Christ repeated his commission, "feed my sheep." Jesus could have derided Peter for his dismal failure, but He did not, instead, He wisely spent time with him healing his wounds.

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Similarly, Joseph showed genuine kindness, great love, true forgiveness, and profound wisdom. He was not indifferent to the common emotions of people. He too was lonely and vulnerable to tears, but he gave himself up for his brethren. And even though he had been wronged, he did not hold it against his brothers, but rather he reached out to them to forgive their wrong and allay their fears. He took the time to reestablish a good relationship with these men and let them know that his love for them and his forgiveness of their wrong was both real and permanent.

It is important for us to understand the permanency of the promises that we have. Is that not what we are to do, especially with others in God's church? Joseph had been wronged but he had done no wrong himself to them. We have all been wronged before, but nevertheless, forgiveness is love fused to grace, and it is something we all must learn and do.