

Forgive Like Joseph
[Genesis 45:1-15](#)

Revenge: Revenge is sweet. An eye for an eye. He's finally getting what he deserves. Justice is served.

Forgiveness: Turning the other cheek. Accepting that someone has done wrong against you, but you vow not to retaliate. Forgiving like Joseph.

Joseph, the youngest son of Jacob, and grandson of Isaac and Rebecca, finds himself in a role of leadership over his brothers. Once again we need to step back a little to see what brought Joseph to the point of showing forgiveness to his brothers.

Jacob had 12 sons, Joseph being the youngest. Jacob foolishly showed favoritism to Joseph over his brothers. This was cemented when Jacob presented Joseph with a colorful coat – in modern terms a “Technicolor Dreamcoat”. You may recall that Jacob had experienced favoritism from his mother Rebecca, while Jacob's brother

Esau experienced favoritism from his father Isaac. After experiencing the difficulties presented as a result of that favoritism you would think Jacob would have learned an important lesson. However, one thing we learned about Jacob is that he often had to learn things the hard way. So Jacob expressed his favoritism for his youngest son, Joseph. The Bible tells us that one day Joseph went out in the field to check on his brothers. He was some 65 miles away from his home and the security of his father. His brothers saw an opportunity – this sounds like a family trait. Recall that their father Jacob was a master at seeing opportunities (the name Jacob means ‘trickster’). Joseph’s older brothers ceased Joseph, took his coat, faked his death and sold him as a slave for more than twice the annual salary of a shepherd.

At this point Joseph may have been more than a little confused. Joseph had had 2 dreams from God that indicated he would rule over his brothers, and Joseph was not shy in sharing those dreams with his brothers. I'm sure this did not foster brotherly love. But Joseph loved God, and God was with Joseph. At the ripe old age of 17, Joseph found himself to be a slave in Egypt, yet the Lord was with him. In Genesis 39:3, it states, "When his master [Potiphar] saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant." From that time on his master Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his household. The Lord blessed the entire household and all was well.

Not long after, Joseph was falsely accused of a crime and imprisoned. But God was with Joseph even in prison

and once again Joseph was put in charge answering directly to the warden. Joseph prospered even in prison because God was with him. Notice that God did not shield Joseph from difficulties, but God stayed with Joseph during the hard times as well as the good times.

Years later, the Pharaoh had a disturbing dream and it was known that God through Joseph could interpret the dream for him. Joseph told the Pharaoh that his dream meant that Egypt would experience 7 years of prosperity followed by 7 years of famine. Joseph even presented the Pharaoh with a plan to help all of Egypt survive the lean years. It was made clear to the Pharaoh that God was with Joseph and Joseph was placed as second in command answering only to the Pharaoh.

From slave, to prisoner, to second in command – God was most definitely with Joseph. However, it would have

been easy for Joseph to harbor intense anger at the betrayal of his brothers. He could have wallowed in self-pity to the point where God would not be able to use him at all. He could have gone through life performing less than his best while he pondered revenge against the ones who betrayed him. He could have festered a hatred that would have eventually destroyed him. Instead, Joseph gave his best effort in everything he did and this was eventually recognized. Even when Joseph was falsely accused and imprisoned, he did not harbor or dwell on his hatred. I'm sure he was confused and questioned why this was happening to him. He probably spent some time in anger as well. The Bible teaches us that it is ok to be angry, but we are not to fall to sin in times of anger. I think some of us feel guilty with our anger, but as long as we can get past

the anger and move on, we will not succumb to the sin that our anger could lead.

So at the ripe old age of 30 Joseph began to serve as 2nd in command to Pharaoh. He worked diligently during the 7 years of prosperity to preserve as much food stores as possible in preparation for the 7 years of famine. Joseph knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God had sent him to Egypt for this purpose. It was not the jealousy of his brothers but the will of God that led Joseph to a foreign land and a position of leadership to save all of Egypt and eventually all those in the surrounding areas as well, including his father's entire household.

After the 7 years of prosperity, famine struck Egypt just as Joseph had foreseen. It was during the second year of the famine that Joseph was inadvertently reunited with his traitorous brothers. Jacob sent his sons to buy grain

from Egypt and they came face to face with their brother Joseph, however they did not recognize him. Joseph knew them immediately but did not reveal himself to them until some time later. Joseph decided to test his brothers to see if they had changed at all and in fact they had. One of his brothers, Simeon, willingly stayed behind while the others left to return food and grain to their father with a message. The second youngest brother, Benjamin, was not with the others and Joseph, still unknown to his brothers, insisted on seeing Benjamin and kept Simeon as an assurance of their return. So Simeon was willing to sacrifice his life to save the lives of his family.

Joseph's brother Judah made a similar sacrifice during their second trip to Egypt when Joseph, still unknown to his brothers, insisted that Benjamin remain. Judah volunteered to stay in Benjamin's place. At this point we come to the

scripture lesson that was read for us in Genesis 45. Joseph can no longer contain his joy and reveals himself to his brothers. Understand that Joseph was literally rejoicing at being reunited with his family. He insisted that it was not his brothers will but God's will that had send him to Egypt in order to save countless lives during the 7 years of famine. He reassured his brothers several times that they should not be afraid for all that was done was according to God's purpose. Joseph was reunited with his father as well and made sure his family was well cared for in the years to come. In spite of the fact that Joseph was in a perfect position to return revenge on his brothers, he chose forgiveness and saw everything that had happened to him as being a part of God's purpose and plan.

Forgive like Joseph – how hard that can be. When someone has wronged us in some way, it is very easy to

want justice and revenge. Even if it is something so simple as someone cutting in front of us while driving, we want so badly to get back at that irresponsible driver and make them pay. But we are called to forgive like Joseph. Note that Joseph does not say that his brothers did the right thing by selling him into slavery – in other words he does not condone the action. Rather, Joseph saw this as a method God used to get Joseph to where he needed to be. When we forgive, we are not accepting the other person's actions as being right, we are letting go of our vow to retaliate. We are letting go of our anger and hatred which can literally cripple us. I have heard of numerous accounts of World War II concentration camp survivors being able to forgive those who were responsible for their misery and the deaths of their family members. These survivors were not saying the actions of their captors were right and acceptable, they

were saying they would not exact revenge for what was done to them. That kind of forgiveness can only come from God.

Jesus showed us the same kind of unconditional forgiveness when he uttered, 'Father, forgive them' from the cross. He was asking God not to retaliate against those who were responsible for putting Jesus to death. Jesus did not condone their actions as acceptable or correct, he was only asking God to let go of any possible retaliation or revenge for their actions. Can we forgive like Joseph? Can we forgive like Jesus?

One of my problem areas is driving in traffic. Invariably someone comes barreling along, cuts me off and proceeds to extend the same treatment to others. I would get so angry that I could literally feel my blood pressure rise and it would weight on me for the entire day. Finally,

one day a women in a very large SUV did the same and cut me off to the point that I had to swerve a little off the road in order to avoid getting hit. I drive a little Toyota Corolla so it's a little hard to be intimidating! I was about to launch into one of my tirades when I decided to pray for her. I'll admit my prayer was a bit sarcastic, "God PLEASE help her get to where she needs to be safely, because clearly she needs to get there first." One thing I noticed right away is that I was not stewing anymore. It was not eating away at me and I was able to let go of my own anger. That may not be in the same category as forgiving like Joseph but for me it was a start. Can we forgive like Joseph? Can we forgive like Jesus? Thanks be to God who has provided us with the perfect example through his son Jesus Christ. Amen.