

Joseph Forgives His Brothers

(Genesis 44-45)

Introduction

God has a special plan for your life. He knows how your whole life will go from beginning to end. He has had every day mapped out since before He created the world. Sometimes we don't understand exactly how God will work out His special plan. Sometimes life might seem hopeless. But believe me, things always work out.

Maybe some of you know the verse, "All things work together for good to those who love God..." (Rom 8:28) it was one of our memory verses. This verse has always been true for me.

But, have you ever known God's plan for your life to work out in a strange way? Joseph did.

What bad things happened to Joseph?

- He was nearly killed; but then sold into slavery.
- Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of a terrible sin and he was sent to prison.
- Before Pharaoh's cup-bearer got out of prison he promised to put in a good word for Joseph, but he forgot for 2 whole years.

Life must have seemed hopeless to Joseph at that point in his life.

Today, we're going to continue the story of Joseph and see how God was at work in all of these things.

Opening Prayer

Father, when we can't see how You're working in our lives, help us to be patient, like Joseph was. Help us to remember that You truly do make all things work together for good for those of us that love You and are called according to Your purpose. Help us to learn the wonderful life lessons You have for us in this passage of the Bible. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

*Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
(Matthew 6:12)*

Lesson

Last week we learned that Joseph's brothers went down to Egypt two times to get grain. The second time they came with their youngest brother, Benjamin, and Joseph gave them a big feast. But they still didn't know who Joseph was!

Today we will pick up the story at Genesis 44. After the big feast, Joseph's brothers were ready to load up the grain they had come to buy and head back to the land of Canaan where their dad was living.

Joseph came up with a final test to make sure his brothers had changed for the better. He wanted to see if they were only pretending to be good. So, he decided to put his own special silver cup in Benjamin's sack to see if they'd be honest.

Genesis 44:1-2

When his brothers were ready to leave, Joseph gave these instructions to his palace manager: "Fill each of their sacks with as much grain as they can carry, and put each man's money back into his sack. ²Then put my personal silver cup at the top of the youngest brother's sack, along with the money for his grain." So the manager did as Joseph instructed him.

The brothers started on their way, happy that everything had gone well and that Benjamin was safe. Suddenly, they saw a horseman galloping toward them. As he came nearer, they recognized the rider as a servant of the governor of Egypt.

When Joseph's servant got there, he accused them of stealing something of great value. But the brothers denied it.

Genesis 44:8-9

Didn't we return the money we found in our sacks? We brought it back all the way from the land of Canaan. Why would we steal silver or gold

from your master's house? ⁹If you find his cup with any one of us, let that man die. And all the rest of us, my lord, will be your slaves."

So they opened their sacks to prove they were not thieves...

Genesis 44:11-12

They all quickly took their sacks from the backs of their donkeys and opened them. ¹²The palace manager searched the brothers' sacks, from the oldest to the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack!

They were all heartsick so they went back to town. When they found Joseph, they bowed down before him, just like in his dreams.

Genesis 44:16

Judah answered, "Oh, my lord, what can we say to you? How can we explain this? How can we prove our innocence? God is punishing us for our sins. My lord, we have all returned to be your slaves—all of us, not just our brother who had your cup in his sack."

Judah is so sorry that he offers all of them to become Joseph's slaves. But Joseph says, "No, I only want one slave, Benjamin."

Genesis 44:17

"No," Joseph said. "I would never do such a thing! Only the man who stole the cup will be my slave. The rest of you may go back to your father in peace."

Joseph was testing to see if his brothers were still mean and selfish and would let Benjamin suffer if they could go free.

Well, you can imagine how upset the brothers were. They promised their father that they would keep their youngest brother safe.

Judah stepped forward and pleaded with Joseph.

Genesis 44:33-34

"So please, my lord, let me stay here as a slave instead of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. ³⁴For how can I return to my father if the boy is not with me? I couldn't bear to see the anguish this would cause my father!"

Judah is saying, "Let me be your slave instead of Benjamin. My father will die if my youngest brother does not return home."

How different Judah was now from the time when he convinced his brothers to sell Joseph as a slave, and then lied to his father about what happened to Joseph! Now Judah was so concerned for his father and youngest brother that he was willing to die for them.

Joseph now knew his brothers were better men. Their hearts were changed. Joseph knows it is time to reveal to them who he really is.

Genesis 45:1

Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, "Out, all of you!" So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was.

Joseph had completely forgiven his brothers of all their wrong doing against him.

Genesis 45:3-4

"I am Joseph!" he said to his brothers. "Is my father still alive?" But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. ⁴"Please, come closer," he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt."

The brothers are stunned! They didn't know what to say!

Genesis 45:5-6

But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your

lives. ⁶This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.

God had it all planned. God had seen to it that Joseph became a powerful ruler in Egypt.

God sometimes has strange ways of getting his plan for our lives to work out. There will be times in your life when you are totally surprised by the way God turns the events of your life out for the best. Truly, "All things work together for good." We just have to be patient. Joseph waited over 20 years to see how good could have come out of his being sold into slavery!

Genesis 45:8

So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.

Joseph tells them to go get their dad and bring him down to Egypt.

Genesis 45:9

"Now hurry back to my father and tell him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. So come down to me immediately!'

Joseph tells them they can live in the land of Goshen. [Teacher, show the children where this fertile, delta land is on a map.]

Genesis 45:11

I will take care of you there, for there are still five years of famine ahead of us. Otherwise you, your household, and all your animals will starve."

Pharaoh heard about Joseph's brothers.

Genesis 45:17-18

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'This is what you must do: Load your pack animals, and hurry back to the land of Canaan. ¹⁸Then

get your father and all of your families, and return here to me. I will give you the very best land in Egypt, and you will eat from the best that the land produces.'"

What happiness there was when Joseph was finally reunited with his father and all his brothers in the land of Egypt.

Sometimes we don't understand why God allows certain things to happen in our lives. But, like Joseph, we, too, must learn to trust God and His perfect timing for our lives. Joseph did, and great was his reward.

Even though many bad things had happened to Joseph, God blessed him. He had learned that no matter what evil happens, God will cause events to turn to good if we desire His will.

Joseph and his brothers stayed in the land of Egypt for many years. But Joseph remembered that someday God would take them back to the land He promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Teacher, as a final thought, discuss how Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers is like Jesus' forgiveness of us:

- Joseph did not hold his brother's sin against them.
- Beyond forgiving them, he poured out undeserving grace in giving them what they needed to survive and conquer death.
- He provided a place for them to go and live free of the fear of death.
- He never brought up their sin again, but saw it all as a part of God's plan to save His people.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, You don't want us to hold bitterness and anger in our hearts towards anyone. Please help us to forgive others when they sin against us, just like Joseph did. We want to live our lives in a way that brings glory to Your name. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

CRAFT CORNER

Word Search:

Have the children work on a word search or cross word in class or send home as a “take home” paper.

GAME CENTER

Charades

Each participant will receive a word (a person's name) taken from the story of Joseph. The clue giver should act out the clues in order that the class might guess, but can say nothing, not even a sound. He or she may encourage the direction of the guessing by nodding or shaking his head. Or, he may use his arms to gesture or his fingers to show numbers. Topics for pantomime or game of charades:

- Joseph
- Baker
- Cupbearer
- Pharaoh
- Potiphar's Wife

Review Questions:

Or, use the following questions in another game of your choice:

1. Why was Joseph in Egypt? (His brothers sold him into slavery.)
2. Why did Jacob send his sons to Egypt? (To buy grain.)

3. Why didn't Joseph's brothers recognize him? (They thought he might be dead by now and they certainly weren't expecting to see him in Egypt dressed as a prince in royal clothing.)
4. Why didn't Joseph tell his brothers who he was right away? (He wanted to see if they were sorry for the wrong they had done.)
5. What was Joseph's final test to see if his brothers had changed after 20 years? (He decided to put his own special silver cup in Benjamin's sack to see what their reaction would be. To see if they'd be honest.)
6. Whose sack was the silver cup found in? (Benjamin's)
7. Judah was so sorry, that he suggested that all of the brothers become Joseph's _____ (slaves.)
8. How Judah had changed from 20 years earlier when he convinced his brothers to sell Joseph into slavery! What was the biggest change in Judah's heart? (Now he was so concerned for his father and youngest brother's happiness that he was willing to die for them.)
9. What did Joseph do when he saw the wonderful change in his brother's hearts? (Joseph made himself known to his brothers; he had completely forgiven them of all their wrong doings against him.)
10. What did Joseph do for his family after he told them who he was? (Invited them to come live in Egypt.)
11. Why did Joseph tell his brothers not to be unhappy about selling him into slavery? (Because it was obviously God's plan.)
12. What did Pharaoh tell Joseph to do regarding their father? (Go get him and bring him and their household to live in Egypt.)
13. They all stayed in Egypt for many, many years. But what land had God promised to the children of Israel? (The land of Canaan.)