

## **“The Road to Reconciliation” (pt 2)**

Genesis 45:1-15

One of the most well-known classic novels ever written is *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexander Dumas. It is the story of a young sailor named Edmond Dantès who has everything going for him—he is about to become captain of a ship and marry the woman he loves. But jealousy and betrayal from those closest to him leads to his wrongful imprisonment on false charges for 14 long years. And he vows to seek revenge on those who betrayed him. While in prison, he befriends an older inmate, Abbé Faria, who teaches him languages, science, and philosophy, and also tells him the location of a hidden treasure. Dantès escapes prison and finds the treasure, transforming himself into the mysterious and wealthy Count of Monte Cristo.

With his new identity, Dantès returns to society, carefully concealing who he really is. One by one, he exposes and punishes those who betrayed him, while also rewarding those who were loyal. But along the way, he wrestles with questions of vengeance. His vengeance leads to suffering even for the innocent. Genuine peace isn't found through revenge, but comes through forgiveness.

The fact of the matter is that forgiving someone who has hurt you is one of the hardest things in life. If you do not forgive, you can find yourself like Dantès—resentment and vengeance can consume you. It will rob you of peace and joy. There is no joy like the joy of knowing that you are forgiven, that you have forgiven, and the freedom of living without resentment.

**Charles Spurgeon** — *“To be forgiven is such sweetness that honey is tasteless in comparison with it. But yet there is one thing sweeter still and that is to forgive.”*

Turn with me in your Bibles this morning to Genesis 45, as we now come to what is one of the most touching scenes in all of the Old Testament. It is not a story of vengeance, but is instead a story of forgiveness and reconciliation. And it too is the story of a man who has been terribly wronged by those close to him, and under a new identity, he is in a position to deal out retribution. But Joseph doesn't do that. Instead, he extends forgiveness to his brothers that results in reconciliation. (Read)

In these chapters in Genesis, we've been able to walk down the 'road to reconciliation' with Joseph and his brothers. And there are several important stops along the way before that reconciliation will happen. The first stop is brokenness leading to confession. Their pride is shattered through a series of circumstances by which they are forced to face their past. Then, they own up to their guilt through confession leading to repentance. No longer do they try to assign blame or evade responsibility. We saw in the previous chapter how Judah's repentance will be manifest through his selfless intercession and offer of himself in the place of Benjamin. And it is the third very important stop along the road to their reconciliation. It is repentance leading to forgiveness.

In terms of our relationship with God, before a person can ever be right with God, there must be brokenness over sin that results in honest confession before God. Confession is key to repentance, for there can be no forgiveness of sin apart from repentance. Repentance leads to forgiveness, and forgiveness results in reconciliation. To be forgiven in Jesus Christ is to be reconciled to God.

These same principles apply to our relationships with other people. When we've sinned against another person, there ought to be a brokenness and humility in our life that leads us to confess our wrongs. To confess our sin and to seek forgiveness shows repentance on our part, which can lead to forgiveness and

reconciliation in the relationship. What about the person who wounds us, and refuses to admit any wrongdoing? How can you forgive the person who doesn't apologize or show any signs of repentance? They've gone on living their life, while you've been left behind with all of the collateral damage. On one hand, you can be filled with resentment and bitterness. You can continue to nurse that hurt and revisit it constantly in your mind. But that won't do a thing but consume you as a person. That is like drinking poison and expecting someone else to be affected. On the other hand, you can choose to forgive.

Let me give you two or three principles about forgiveness leading to reconciliation, and these principles are illustrated for us here through Joseph's example.

### **1—Forgiveness RELEASES past wrongs (45:1-5)**

*"Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, 'Make everyone go out from me.' So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. So Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come near to me, please.' And they came near. And he said, 'I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life."*

The tension in Joseph's story has been building now for the last eight chapters in Genesis, bringing us to this climactic moment when he makes himself known to his brothers. It really is one of the greatest moments in all of the Bible. He clears

the room of everyone else but them and suddenly he breaks down emotionally. Before this, he had turned away from them to weep, or had gone off to another room. Here he breaks into tears before them. In my mind, I can almost see the tears running down his cheeks, and the emotional sobs so great that the Egyptians heard it. This mysterious lord whom they had feared is now openly weeping before them. It was a shocking thing. Have you ever witnessed a person in a display of emotions, maybe someone that you never saw cry before? It is a moving thing. To this day, I'm moved in the depth of my being when I see my daddy cry. It is something so rare, something so profound to me, that I cannot help but cry when I see it. Imagine the shock of the brothers as they hear this man in the midst of his sobs say to them in Hebrew, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" The text really captures the scene for us in verse 3, "But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence."

**"Dismayed"** —*terrified and rendered speechless*

If Joseph had been held in the grip of bitterness, he very well may have ordered them locked up and then throw away the key. If vengeance were on the menu, he would have reacted in anger, with power, and retribution. But he doesn't. Instead, Joseph chooses forgiveness.

Our English word 'forgive' comes from an old term which means to give up, to grant, or to pardon. At the core of its meaning, to 'forgive' is to release someone from a debt, an offense, or wrongdoing, and choosing to not hold it against them any longer. The biblical understanding of forgiveness carries the idea of canceling a moral debt. Several Hebrew words in the Old Testament convey the idea of forgiveness, but two are most common. One word (*nāśā'*) means to lift up, to carry away, to bear. This word is used for bearing away guilt or sin (Gen. 50:17; Ex. 32:32). The idea is that God 'lifts' the burden of sin off someone. A

second word (sālah) means to pardon, and is used almost exclusively of God forgiving sin (Num. 14:19-20; Ps. 103:3). The idea is that of a divine act of granting pardon, something only God can do. And so in Hebrew thought, to forgive involves both lifting away guilt and pardoning the sinner.

Throughout the New Testament, two main Greek words are used. One word (aphiēmi) means to send away, release, let go. It is used of debts (Matt. 6:12), sins (Luke 7:48), or releasing someone from obligation. The idea is that sin is likened to a debt that is canceled or released. The second word (charizomai) means to show grace, and emphasizes forgiveness as an act of undeserved favor (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). So, in New Testament, forgiveness is both canceling a debt and graciously pardoning. When God forgives sin, He is not simply ignoring it or pretending the offense didn't happen. He removes it, canceling the debt, and restores a relationship that has been lost. To forgive means:

- To pardon an offense—not demanding repayment or punishment
- To release resentment or anger—letting go of bitterness toward the offender
- To show mercy or grace—extending kindness instead of vengeance

**1 John 1:9—“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”**

Now, apply this understanding to the way Joseph responds to his brothers. He doesn't hold the debt over their heads, nor does he pursue vengeance. Instead, he forgives them and reconciles them to himself. However, I do think that its important for us to understand a couple of things about that forgiveness. Notice first that it:

Doesn't excuse the offense

Upon telling them who he is, notice how Joseph tells them in verse 4, “I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.” Then in verse 5, “Don’t be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here.” And the point is that he doesn’t minimize their sin or pretend that it did not happen. He forgives them, but in order for that forgiveness to be realized in their lives, their sin against him has to be met with honesty. Sometimes, we wrestle with forgiveness because in our minds we think it pretends the offense didn’t happen. But we misunderstand forgiveness if we think that way. It is a distortion of what true forgiveness really is. Let me mention a few of these misunderstandings:

- Confusing forgiveness with denial

Some people think forgiving means minimizing the offense, sweeping it under the rug, or acting like it wasn’t really that serious. In reality, forgiveness requires acknowledging that a real wrong was done. You can’t forgive what you refuse to name as sin or harm. Joseph doesn’t shy away from mentioning their offense.

- Mistaking forgiveness with forgetting

To “forgive and forget” is a popular phrase, but biblically forgiveness does not mean erasing memory. Instead, it means choosing not to hold the offense against the person even if you remember it. Pretending that it didn’t happen cheapens forgiveness. It makes it about amnesia instead of grace.

- Assuming forgiveness removes consequences

Some assume forgiving someone means you automatically restore trust or remove all consequences. But forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same. Forgiveness releases personal vengeance, but it does not erase accountability or wisdom in how you relate going forward.

- Equating forgiveness with excusing

Pretending an offense didn't happen often means a person naïvely excuses harmful behavior—"they didn't mean it" or "it wasn't that bad." True forgiveness acknowledges that it was that bad, but it chooses to release the offender from personal retaliation. Pretending nothing happened is really the opposite of forgiveness. It avoids dealing with the truth of the offense. Real forgiveness faces an offense honestly, it calls it what it is, but then it chooses to show mercy rather than seek revenge. That's what Joseph does. Then notice how it:

#### Doesn't resent the offender

Verse 4 says, "So Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come near to me, please.' And they came near." He tells them who he is, and they are rendered speechless. He tells them to come close, and though they must have feared it was for the sake of harm, much to their surprise they find out that it is not an angry master who calls them but a loving brother. The fact that he calls them close to himself is evidence that he no longer holds their offense over their heads. He longs for them to be reconciled and restored. There is no root of bitterness toward them in his heart.

**Hebrews 12:15—"See to it that no fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled."**

Bitterness takes root when we fail to see the circumstances of our lives from God's point of view. It grows in us when our expectations of what life should be are different from the experience of what life really is. The more we hold on to hurts and disappointment, the more we become slaves to bitterness and

unforgiveness. That bitterness is like an infection that festers and works its way into our system until we begin viewing everything through the eyes of our hurt.

How can you know if hurt has turned to bitterness in your life? Sometimes it likes to hide beneath the surface, and we may try to convince ourselves that resentment isn't an issue for us when it really is. How can you tell? Well, see if you relate to any of these statements (Nancy Demoss Wolgemuth):

- "I often replay in my mind the situation that hurt me."
- "When I think of a particular person or situation, I still feel angry."
- "I have a secret desire to see this person pay for what he or she did to me."
- "Deep in my heart, I wouldn't mind if something bad happened to the person who hurt me."
- "I often find myself telling others how much this person has hurt me."
- "Whenever their name comes up, I am more likely to say something negative than something positive about him or her."

Now, if you can identify with any of those statements, then you may indeed have more of an issue with bitterness and resentment than you realize. I'm not trying to saddle you with guilt on top of the hurt that you already feel. But if you want to be free, then you have to acknowledge the reality of unforgiveness in your heart. It is slowly poisoning your life, my friend. And we need to deal honestly with the fact that unforgiveness is a sin, just as the original offense was. It is no worse of a sin, but it is certainly no less of one. We learn from Joseph's life that forgiveness doesn't excuse the offense, but neither does it resent the offender. There is a second thing that we need to understand:



## **2—Forgiveness RECOGNIZES divine providence (45:6-8)**

*“For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.”*

Rather than seeing himself as a victim, Joseph looks at his life from the perspective of providence. And that’s a theme we have kept referring to all throughout our study of these chapters. Providence is God working through the details of our circumstances to accomplish His purposes in our lives. And that includes the hurtful things which we have received from the hands of others. Providence means that even the sinful decisions of man cannot thwart the purposes of God. Forgiving others means that we need to recognize divine providence:

### In orchestrating life’s circumstances

One of things we’ve seen throughout these chapters is that Joseph is a God-centered man. There is hardly a sentence that he speaks that doesn’t have the name of God in it. For instance, when he is tempted by Potiphar’s wife, he says:

**Genesis 39:9—“How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”**

When he is put in prison and told that the chief baker and chief cupbearer had dreams they were unable to interpret, he responds:

**Genesis 40:8—“Do not interpretations belong to God?”**

When summoned to stand before Pharaoh who hears that he can interpret dreams, he says:

**Genesis 41:16—“I cannot do it, but God will give to Pharaoh the answer he desires.”**

When he gives the names Manasseh and Ephraim to his two sons born to him in Egypt, he says:

**Genesis 41:51-52—“God has made me forget all my trouble...God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”**

Notice how the name of God is used in the passage before us some four times by Joseph. In verse 5, “God sent me before you to preserve life.” Then in verse 7, “God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant.” Then in verse 8, “It was not you who sent me here, but God.” And then in verse 9, “God has made me lord of all Egypt.” It is the outlook of a God-centered, God-focused man. Joseph can forgive his brothers because his number one focus is not on the damage they caused but on the Deity he served.

People who have a small view of God often have a high view of themselves, which is why they find it all the more difficult to forgive other people. The bigger your view of God, the better able you are to forgive. Forgiving someone else isn't so much an issue of psychology as it is a matter of theology.

**James Montgomery Boice**—*“By looking past secondary causes to God, who is the first cause, Joseph gained a stabilizing perspective on life and achieved a frame of mind out of which he was able to forgive and reassure his brothers. It is a perspective to be held by every Christian.”*

In overruling man's sin

The providence of God had overruled man's sin. Despite all they had done to harm him, he is able to see the hand of God working through it to bring blessing. He wasn't able to see it in the midst of it, but now looking back, he is able to trace the faithfulness of God. He doesn't ignore the reality of what they had done, but he recognizes that God used it in his life.

### In obtaining God's purposes

Look at what Joseph says in verse 5, "And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life." In fact, no less than three times does he say this. God has made me who I am, and God has placed me where I am. That is a perspective that we all need. I am both what I am as well as where I am by the grace of God. The actions of others against us doesn't take God by surprise, nor is He puzzled about how He will achieve His purposes in our lives. He is sovereign over both the good and the bad that comes.

**Genesis 50:20—"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."**

There are at least three 'good' things which Joseph claimed God accomplished through his ordeal.

- God prospered him, making him 'lord of all Egypt'
- God preserved life, saving their family during famine
- God provided for them, positioning Joseph strategically

In a very real sense, we are here this morning because of God's providential working through Joseph. We're able to call on the name of the Lord Jesus

because of providence. Were it not for the faithfulness of God to bring beauty from ashes, we'd have no hope today. Were it not for His divine providence, hope would have died in an Egyptian famine, having long since been buried and forgotten in an Egyptian prison. But God!

And the ultimate place where we see the wisdom and providence of God on display is the cross. It was the sin and wickedness of humanity that resulted in the death of Jesus, so that the cross is a picture of man at his worst while at the same time is also a picture of God at His best. What man intended for evil, what the enemy of our soul meant for harm, God meant it for good. For while we were without strength, unable to do anything about our situation, we were helplessly and hopelessly lost in sin, guilty and deserving of death. And yet the Bible says at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. But God!

**Romans 5:8—“But God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**

These brothers were in the same position. They deserved justice, but they received mercy. But God!

### **3—Forgiveness RESTORES broken relationships (45:9-15)**

*“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. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.’ And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that*

*you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.’ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.”*

Forgiveness releases past wrongs, and it recognizes divine providence. A third thing to see from this text is that it also restores broken relationships. Having brought his brothers close to himself, notice how he gives them:

### Reassurance of grace

He says in verse 9, “Go tell my father how God has made me lord of Egypt. Bring the whole family down here, you will be near to me, and I will provide for you.” Proximity—he wants them close. Provision—he meets their needs. Joseph is a picture of grace that goes the extra mile. Look at all the ways that he shows unmerited kindness towards his brothers. For instance:

- They drove him away, but he brings them close (v. 4)
- They left him to die, but he gives them provisions (v. 21)
- They stripped him, but he gives them clothes (v. 22)
- They sold him out, but he loads their wagons (v. 24)

The point is that he returned their every cruel, merciless act with goodness and mercy. He is a living illustration of what Paul described in Romans 12 when he said, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” I love what one person has said:

**Alistair Begg** — *“Jesus Christ revolutionizes lives by His forgiveness in order that those forgiven lives might be revolutionary in their impact.”*

Joseph overcomes evil with good. What might it look like if we were to practice the same kindness in our daily living? I believe it would cause the world around us to take notice of our faith. Our words will only make an impact when they're backed up by a lifestyle that's different from the world. And friends, nowhere is a Christian more different than the world than in the area of grace and forgiveness.

### Renewal of affection

Verse 14 says that Joseph falls upon Benjamin's neck and wept, and then he affectionately embraced all his brothers. It is the 'kiss' of reconciliation and renewed affection. Compare this to the kiss with which Judas betrayed Jesus. Here, Joseph is kissing the ones who betrayed him. And in doing so, he is a picture of the grace and acceptance that sinners find in Christ and a reconciled relationship with God through Him. Sinners who are now brought near!

Before I finish, let me give you some statements to take and apply to your life personally. Listen carefully to these:

- We all owe a debt to God
- We cannot repay that debt ourselves
- Jesus paid the debt through His death on the cross
- Forgiven people must forgive others

It should not be too hard for those who have been forgiven to forgive another person. Forgiveness is a choice. It is often misunderstood as a feeling, but it is a decision of the will. Feelings follow choices, not the other way around. If we

wait until we feel like forgiving, we may never forgive, because hurt, anger, and bitterness don't naturally go away on their own. Forgiveness begins with a conscious and an intentional decision that says, "I will release this person from the debt they owe me." Over time, emotions can align with that choice, but the initial step is an act of the will.

Forgiveness is an act of obedience, not sentiment. The Bible repeatedly commands believers to forgive (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13; Matthew 18:21-22). Commands are directed to the will, not to feelings. God doesn't ask us to feel the warm fuzzies toward those who hurt us. He tells us to forgive. If forgiveness depended on emotion, then we would remain captive to bitterness until our heart softens. But when forgiveness is understood as a choice, we can act in faith—releasing the offender into God's hands—even if our emotions are still raw. This decision frees us to move on, even before the feelings catch up.

And a big takeaway from Joseph's life is that forgiveness is about releasing, not excusing. It doesn't deny the offense or say the offense didn't matter. No, it's a deliberate choice to let go of resentment and entrust justice to God. Friend, that act is a matter of willful surrender, not fleeting feelings. With that being said, I can't help but wonder if some of us need to 'release' some things this morning. Perhaps you have been holding on to things for far too long. Someone has hurt you along the way, said something to you or about you, maybe did something to you or to someone you love. Resentment has locked you up in its dark prison. Bitterness has affected your life at the deepest level. Choose to forgive. And not on the basis of whether another person deserves it, neither on the basis of what you currently feel. But forgive on the basis of how God has forgiven you in Jesus Christ. Reconciliation took place between Joseph and his brothers. I wouldn't go so far as to say that it will always take place. It can by the grace of God, and if

both parties have met the necessary conditions. But even if the other person refuses to admit the wrong they've done, you can still forgive nonetheless. That way you will be free from vengeance, entrusting the matter to God, and you can go on living your life. Jesus said:

**Matthew 6:14-15—“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”**

Forgiven people forgive people on the basis of having been forgiven in Christ!