

A black and white photograph showing the silhouettes of a group of people standing on a hill or ridge. The background is a bright, hazy sky, and a single bright light source, possibly the sun, is visible behind the people, creating a lens flare effect. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

# Reconcile

*Acknowledging God's sovereignty helps us seek reconciliation with others.*

## **GENESIS 45:1-15**

Every human being who has ever walked on this planet has been wronged by someone. As difficult as it is to be mistreated by others, it is often more difficult to forgive others for what they've done to us. We may even think that reconciliation circumvents justice. We can learn from Joseph's example that God is directing our lives for His purposes—even when we experience mistreatment by others.

How does acknowledging God's sovereignty help us seek reconciliation with others?

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## **UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

### **GENESIS 42:1–46:34**

Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams came to pass. For seven years there was abundance in the land of Egypt, then seven years of severe famine. The famine reached as far as Canaan, where Jacob and his family lived. Learning there was grain in Egypt, Jacob sent all of his sons except Benjamin, his youngest, to Egypt to buy grain (Gen. 41:56–42:4).

Genesis 42:5-26 describes how the brothers arrived in Egypt and bowed down before Joseph. In that culture, they would have avoided looking directly at an Egyptian ruler as much as possible. So it is no surprise they did not recognize it was Joseph to whom they were bowing. The scene recalls the dreams Joseph had as a teenage

boy that fueled his brothers' hatred for him and led to their selling him into slavery. Their reprehensible actions could not thwart God's purposes for Joseph (37:5-11,19,25-28).

Though they did not recognize Joseph, he recognized them. He accused them of being spies and put them into prison. He then released them, keeping Simeon as a hostage, and instructed them to bring their youngest brother back to prove they were not spies. He also had their money returned to their sacks. When they discovered the money on their way home, they were deeply troubled (42:27-28).

Initially, Jacob would not allow Benjamin to return to Egypt with the brothers (42:36-38). Only after their food ran out did he allow it. When the brothers again stood before Joseph, Joseph released Simeon and threw a banquet for them in his home (43:1-34). This time, he had his silver cup stashed in Benjamin's bag. As the brothers exited the city, Joseph ordered his steward to overtake them and to accuse them of stealing his cup. When Joseph declared Benjamin would be his slave, the other brothers were deeply disturbed. They were concerned about the welfare of Benjamin and the devastating effect that the loss of his youngest son would have on Jacob (44:1-34).

Read Genesis 45:1-15. What truth did Joseph know that made it possible for him to reconcile with his brothers?

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## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### I AM JOSEPH (GEN. 45:1-3)

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. <sup>3</sup> 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.

#### VERSE 1

When Joseph's steward brought his brothers back after "discovering" Joseph's silver cup in Benjamin's bag, they fell prostrate before him. Judah exclaimed that God had "found out" their "guilt" (44:16). He was not referring to the silver cup, because they did not steal it. Instead, Judah was referring to what they had done to Joseph many years prior. Judah realized their sin against their brother had caught up with them (see Num. 32:23b). Next, Judah stated that all of them would be Joseph's slaves. Joseph replied that only Benjamin would become his slave, the others could go home to their father. Judah explained that if they returned home without Benjamin, their father would die in his grief. He begged Joseph to allow him to stay in Benjamin's place (Gen. 44:33).

As Joseph watched his brothers and listened to Judah's plea, he knew they had passed his test. They were not willing to abandon Benjamin as they had so callously done with him. Now, after all that had transpired, **Joseph could not control himself**. He ordered everyone to leave the room except his brothers so that he could retain his dignity and not make himself become a public spectacle with his sobbing. What's more, this was an intimate family matter between Joseph and his brothers. No one else was present when he revealed his true identity to them.

#### VERSE 2

This is the third time in the Joseph narrative Moses recorded that Joseph wept (42:24; 43:30). On the first two occasions, Joseph removed himself from before his brothers so they would not witness it. Even though his brothers had treated him unkindly and were the cause of his separation from his family for many years, he still had a tender heart toward them and wanted to be reconciled with them.

Even though Joseph didn't want his Egyptian attendants to witness his emotional outburst, **he wept** so loudly that not only his servants heard him but so did those who were in **the household of Pharaoh**. Joseph's residence

evidently was close to Pharaoh's palace. The open windows that provided airflow to their homes in the hot environment allowed the sound of Joseph's crying to travel.

### VERSE 3

Now that Joseph was alone with his brothers, he spoke to them in their own language for the first time. Getting directly to the point, Joseph blurted out, ***I am Joseph!*** He quickly followed his announcement by asking, ***Is my father still alive?*** This is the second time Joseph had asked them about his father, revealing his deep love and concern for Jacob (43:27). Previously, he called Jacob "your father," but now he could say, *my father*. Joseph also recognized that his loss to his father and the threat of losing Benjamin was difficult for Jacob.

The brothers were frozen in consternation as they heard Joseph's revelation. They had just heard the second most powerful man in Egypt declare that their youngest brother was to become his slave. It must have seemed as if matters could not have gotten any worse. Now, years later, they stood face to face with the brother whom they had stripped and thrown into a cistern, sold into slavery, and was now a ruler of Egypt. Upon hearing Joseph's words, they were ***dismayed*** and too stunned to reply. Their response was understandable. If Joseph chose to treat them as they had treated him, then what hope did they have?

Why do people long for reconciliation? What frightens them about it?

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### GOD SENT ME (GEN. 45:4-8)

**<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. <sup>8</sup> 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.**

### VERSE 4

Recognizing their consternation and fear, Joseph called them to come closer. As they came near, he said to them, ***I am your brother, Joseph***, identifying not only his name but his kinship to them. He did not see them as enemies on whom to seek revenge, but as brothers.

It is also noteworthy that Joseph also identified himself as the one they had ***sold into Egypt***. True forgiveness is not acting as if no wrong has been committed. Instead, forgiveness recognizes the wrong and chooses to show mercy, kindness, and grace in spite of it. This is what the Lord has done for every believer. Though God recognizes we have sinned against Him, and that it is impossible for us to atone for our offenses against Him, He gave His Son as payment for our sin. He made a way for us to be reconciled to Him by grace through faith.

### VERSE 5

Joseph communicated his concern for his brothers as he counseled them to not be ***distressed or angry*** with themselves for having sold him to slavery in Egypt. Again, Joseph did not act as if they had done him no wrong—they were certainly guilty of egregious sins against him. God was able to bring good out of their sins, but with every sin there are consequences and the loss of blessings that could have been. Joseph recognized that God was at work in his life even when his brothers had treated him wrongly. Recognizing the sovereignty of God in one's life means understanding that He rules and works according to His eternal purpose, even through events that seem to contradict or oppose His rule. God had sent Joseph to Egypt ahead of his family to preserve their lives and the lives of many others.

## KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father*

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. (See Psalms 47:8; 103:19.)

### VERSES 6-7

Joseph gave his brothers information about the famine they could not have otherwise known. Obviously, they knew there was a famine. What they did not know is that the famine was going to last **yet five years**. If God had not sent Joseph ahead of them to open the way for them to come to Egypt, they would not have survived. God was faithful to the covenant promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by saving their offspring. This is the central point of the entire Joseph narrative.

### VERSE 8

For the third time in verses 5-8, Joseph emphatically stated that it was God who ultimately sent him to Egypt, not his brothers. God's purposes transcended the jealousy and wrongdoing of Joseph's brothers. Joseph looked at everything that had happened to him up to this point and realized that God's hand was upon him, and that God had superintended his rise to become **ruler over all the land of Egypt**. It recalls Proverbs 16:9 which declares, "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps."

How does recognizing God's work in and through us help us cope with life's challenges?

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## SETTLE IN GOSHEN (GEN. 45:9-15)

<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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.' <sup>12</sup> And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. <sup>13</sup> 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.'" <sup>14</sup> Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. <sup>15</sup> And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

### VERSE 9

Joseph instructed his brothers, **hurry and go up to my father** and tell him, **God has made me lord of all Egypt**. Therefore, Jacob needed to **not tarry**. By acknowledging that God made him **lord of all Egypt**, Joseph declared that God alone could do what seemed impossible and bring about such a tremendous salvation.

### VERSES 10-11

Apparently, Joseph already had given thought to this as he revealed his plan for his family to come to Egypt. He told his brothers they could return with all that belonged to them and **dwell in the land of Goshen**. The *land of Goshen* was located in the northeast region of Egypt in the eastern delta of the Nile. It was well-suited for shepherding, an occupation Egyptians typically shunned. This must have been a significant tract of land to accommodate all of Jacob and his sons' families and herds. However, there would be five more years of famine. Therefore, until the land was able to produce what they needed, Joseph would sustain them.

### VERSES 12-13

Joseph instructed his brothers to bear witness to Jacob everything they had seen and experienced in Egypt regarding Joseph, especially Joseph's **honor in Egypt**. Joseph most likely mentioned **Benjamin** by name

because of their shared bloodline and also because he believed *Benjamin* would serve as a more dependable witness.

The other brothers' continued difficulty processing everything that was happening is evidenced by Joseph saying, *it is my mouth that speaks to you*, meaning "It's really me!" Furthermore, Benjamin would be a better witness because the brothers would have to confess to Jacob that they had sold Joseph into Egypt.

## VERSES 14-15

Joseph's reunion with his brothers reveals a marked difference between Joseph and Benjamin on the one hand, and Joseph with the rest of his brothers on the other. Hugging, kissing, and weeping were common expressions of reunion (29:11; 33:4; 46:29; Ex. 4:27; 2 Sam. 20:9; Song. 8:1). Joseph hugged Benjamin, and the two of them wept. However, only Joseph and Benjamin wept on this occasion. The rest of the brothers are reported as talking with Joseph. This fact may reflect that the other brothers were unconvinced Joseph's expressed desire for reconciliation with them was sincere. Later when their father died, they revealed their fear that Joseph might retaliate (Gen. 50:15-18). Nevertheless, Joseph's forgiveness was genuine (50:19-21).

Why is it important to include actions that demonstrate forgiveness when reconciling with others?

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### **BIBLE SKILL:** *Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.*

The initiative for reconciliation in the ancient world was typically made in one of two ways. A third party could help the two estranged parties reconcile, or an alienated person could take the first step. Read Genesis 45:1-15. In Joseph's reunion with his brothers, who took the initiative to seek reconciliation? Read 2 Corinthians 5:19. Who took the initiative to restore our broken relationship with God? In seeking reconciliation with us, God, the injured party, took the first step. Now read Matthew 5:23-24. Is there some person with whom you need to take the initiative in seeking reconciliation?

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## APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can rejoice over reconciliation with others.
- Believers can affirm God's plans for their lives.
- Believers can demonstrate forgiveness to others.

As a group, pray for those who need to experience reconciliation with others. Discuss ways that acknowledging God's sovereignty can help us in seeking reconciliation.

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What is something from this passage that you could share with a person seeking healing and restoration in a relationship? How do you need to demonstrate your forgiveness of someone who has wronged you?

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Memorize Genesis 45:5.

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**PRAYER NEEDS**

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