



If someone wrongs us, what do we do? One option is seek revenge.

Another option when someone wrongs us is to stuff the pain. This is like keeping a helium balloon from touching the ceiling. We push it down with our hand or foot but it always comes back up, and always will.

Another option is to commiserate with others who have been hurt. This is a recurring theme in music. Lyrics from the song *Bad Day* say:

You had a bad day
You're taking one down
You say you don't know
You tell me a lie
You work on a smile
And you go for a ride

The Biblical option when someone wrongs us is to forgive. A hard act, yet a freeing act. C.S. Lewis said, "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive."

Joseph is one man from the Bible who models this for us. His brothers hated and despised him. And because they hated him so much, they plotted to kill him. Then, only in the last moment they were persuaded to sell him as a slave in order to save their consciences.

After 13 years of slavery, imprisonment and separation from his family, we see that Joseph has dealt with the wrongs done to him in the past and has forgiven his brothers. We get this indication from Genesis 41:51 where we read that Joseph names his first son Manasseh and he gives this explanation for this name. "It is because God had made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household."

We know by the rest of this story that Joseph didn't literally forget everyone in his family. Instead, I think Manasseh reveals that Joseph has forgiven his brothers. This means that he made a healthy refusal to allow memories of injustice to fester within him. Because his brothers hurt him so badly, it would be natural for Joseph to resent them and punish them repeatedly each time he remembers them. Instead, he chose to forgive them, choosing not to hold their wrong actions against them.

Beyond forgiveness, the last option when someone has wronged us is reconciliation. The Bible shows us that this is the absolute best outcome between people who have had a conflict. Where

forgiveness releases a person from the punishment they deserve for hurting us, reconciliation goes beyond and restores the relationship between people who have had a conflict. Reconciliation is the word God uses to describe the relationship between a rebellious person who repents and Himself. "*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ*" (2 Corinthians 5:18).

As we read about Joseph and his family today in Genesis, God is showing us the wise process Joseph goes through as he reconciles with his brothers. The application for us strikes close to the heart because when we've been wronged, our hearts have been wounded. Perhaps there are people we need to forgive and today God might whisper in your ear, "It's time to forgive them. Let the pain go." Perhaps there are steps we need to wisely take toward reconciling with someone who's hurt us and God might whisper in your ear, "take a step toward rebuilding a relationship."

Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 42 and let's see the wise steps Joseph takes to reconcile with his estranged brothers. Joseph takes some steps that appear strange. A person could think that Joseph is seeking revenge by treating his brothers so harshly. And I have spent a lot of time wondering, "Why put the brothers through all of this, if not seeking revenge?" I'd like you to keep in mind that at each step, Joseph is testing his brothers to see if he can trust them. Is it safe for him to re-enter relationship with his brothers?

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die." Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for there was famine in the land of Canaan also. Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he asked. "From the land of Canaan," they replied, "to buy food." Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not

recognize him. Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, “You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.” “No, my lord,” they answered. “Your servants have come to buy food. We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.” “No!” he said to them. “You have come to see where our land is unprotected.” But they replied, “Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more.” Joseph said to them, “It is just as I told you: You are spies! And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!” And he put them all in custody for three days (verses 1-17).

Joseph is surprisingly reunited with 10 of his brothers. The last time he saw them, he was weeping, bound in ropes, being dragged away in a slave caravan. As he pleaded with his brothers for rescue, they passively and callously stood watching him walk away.

Imagine the emotions swirling within Joseph. His good, new life is interrupted by pain from his past. This is a test for Joseph. Will he act according to his fleshly desires? Or will he act like a man who has already forgiven his brothers?

On the third day, Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.” This they proceeded to do (verses 18–20).

Part of the test is set. Will the brothers come back to get their brother? Or will they stay home, forsaking their brother, and choose safety?

They said to one another, “Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come upon us.” Reuben replied, “Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn’t listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.” They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. He turned away from them and began to weep, but then turned back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes (verses 21–24).

Why does Joseph weep after he hears his brothers’ conversation? The brothers admit their wrongdoing. Joseph learns that Rueben was acting to protect him through the matter. Joseph’s tears are tears of relief and joy. His brothers have shown some regret.

Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man’s silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. After this was done for them, they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left (verses 25–26).

The second part of the test is now in place. As they are traveling home, they learn that their money is somehow in their grain bags. They now have to reevaluate their choice to return to Egypt for Simeon. Taking Benjamin back in order to release Simeon will now place them in the presence of the people they’ve accidentally stolen from. Upon their return home, they tell their father Jacob about everything that’s happened. And Jacob says, “*My son (Benjamin) will not go down there with you*” (Gen. 42:38).

After one year, the grain from Egypt has been used up, the famine continues and Jacob changes his mind. He instructs his sons to return to Egypt to get more grain. Lavish gifts are prepared for “the man” and double the money is taken, money to pay for the first load of grain and for a new load.

So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, “Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare dinner; they are to eat with me at noon.” The man did as Joseph told him and took the men to Joseph’s house. Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house. They thought, “We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack u and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys. So they went up to Joseph’s steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. “Please, sir,” they said, “we came down here the first time to buy food. But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver – the exact weight – in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us. We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don’t know who put our silver in our sacks.” “It’s all right,” he said. “Don’t be afraid. Your God, the God of our father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver.” Then he brought Simeon out to them (Gen. 43:15–23).

Test Number 1

Look how the brothers reacted to this first test. They bring Benjamin back for Simeon’s release. Complicating the matter the silver was put back in their sacks. Their choices? 1) Return

with Benjamin (and the trap of the money) and Simeon will be released, or 2) keep the money and Simeon will be kept a prisoner. What did their choice reveal? Honesty about the money was more important than personal safety; protection of one another is paramount.

The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest; and they looked at each other in astonishment. When portions were served to them from Joseph’s table, Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as anyone else’s. So they feasted and drank freely with him (verses 33–34).

Test Number 2

Benjamin is given five times more food than his brothers. How will his brothers deal with this preferential treatment? In the past, the brothers hated Joseph because of preferential treatment. Have they changed? Their choices? 1) Jealously will cause them to despise him and ostracize him like they did to Joseph, or 2) joyously include Benjamin in the celebration. They passed this second test by feasting and drinking with him. No animosity is shown.

Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: “Fill the men’s sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man’s silver in the mouth of his sack. Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one’s sack, along with the silver for his grain.” And he did as Joseph said. As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, “Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid good with evil? Isn’t this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.’” When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. But they said to him, “Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that! We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks. So why would we steal silver or gold from your master’s house? If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die; and the rest of us will become my lord’s slaves.” “Very well then” he said, “let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame.” Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. Then the steward preceded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. At this, they tore their clothes. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city (Gen. 44:1–13).

Joseph confronts them about stealing the silver cup. The brothers stand together, offering to all be slaves to Joseph as punishment.

Joseph says, “no.” Only the man who stole the cup will be kept – Benjamin.

“Now then, please let your servant (Judah) remain here as my lord’s slave (Joseph’s slave) in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father (verses 33–34).

Test Number 3

Joseph’s silver cup is placed inside Benjamin’s grain sack. How will the brothers react to the peril of their youngest brother? Their choices? 1) The other brothers can return home while Benjamin stays as a slave in Egypt, or 2) Judah can offer himself as a substitute in Benjamin’s place.

Observe how differently the brothers act now, compared to when they sold Joseph as a slave. Their character has grown over time, hard circumstances and God’s refining.

Remember Pharaoh called Joseph discerning and wise in chapter 41. In these chapters, we see another example of it. Joseph is wisely testing if he should reconcile with his family. His family has hurt him greatly. And while he’s made peace with his past and forgiven them, remember the name of his first child, Manasseh, meaning “God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” He is wisely deciding if he should reestablish a relationship with them.

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, “Have everyone leave my presence!” So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it. Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence (Gen. 45:1–3).

Joseph is overwhelmed with emotion as he finally moves beyond forgiveness and reconciles with his brothers. He’s tested them three times. He’s seen that their bad character has changed to good character. He’s seen that they are repentant for what they did to him. He can trust them.

Biblical Principles

Forgiveness is expected for all followers of Jesus.

It is our choice. An act of obedience. It is something between you and God. “*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you*” (Col. 3:13). It’s a vertical deal between you and God. We release the person from the offense they’ve committed against us and we open ourselves up to God’s healing hand. There’s an acceptance of God’s sovereign hand, even in the wrong done against us.

Beyond forgiveness, reconciliation is a restored relationship, after forgiveness has been given and accepted.

This is the ideal relationship between people. But it isn't always possible because it is between two willing parties. It's a horizontal deal between you and others. Forgiveness is communicated to the offender.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you" (verses 4–5). Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him (verses 14–15).

Forgiveness is accepted by the offender. This results in peace between the people; Joseph's entire family moves to Egypt. There is peace and prosperity. It's not until the end of the book of Genesis that we sadly learn that this reconciliation is not as full as it could be.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" (Gen. 50:15). Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?" So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children. And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them (verses 19–21).

Hindrances to Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Unwilling to face the pain. Because we're afraid of the pain we seek protection by stuffing the pain deeply inside. When we do this we hope that the pain will go away. Consider a woman whose boyfriend cheated on her. Trust was broken. The relationship was over 10 years ago. She was unwilling to face the pain; she had not forgiven him. Now she's stuck. "There is nothing so deeply imbedded in your heart that God's grace cannot reach down and remove it. No area in your life is so painful that God's grace cannot bring total healing. No offense committed against you is so heinous that God's love cannot enable you to forgive" (Henry Blackaby).

Pride. A prideful person lacks the humility to see their mistake and sin in the situation. Or we think the other person doesn't deserve forgiveness, so we prolong their punishment. If that's the case, forgiveness and reconciliation will never happen. Clinched

hands are holding on to the punishment they deserve. Release your hands and let God deal justly with them.

A dangerous/untrustworthy person. While we are called to forgive everyone who has wronged us, sometimes reconciliation is not possible. We learn from Joseph's testing of his brothers that we should only reconcile with a person if they've shown that they are safe and trustworthy.

Consider a woman who has been abused physically, emotionally and sexually by her father. She's in her upper 30's, living in the same city as her abuser. The physical and sexual abuse is in the past, but the emotional abuse still continues. Reconciliation cannot occur until there are two willing parties. Sadly, in this situation, the perpetrator refuses to see his wrong, continues to heap verbal abuse out and the daughter has had to cut off their relationship until healthier communication can be agreed to. *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone"* (Rom. 12:18).

Focusing on the situation. If you focus on the pain, the offense or the person, you will be powerless to forgive or reconcile. You'll be stuck in your pain. By shifting your focus onto Jesus, you are filled with new perspective—His love, His truth and His power. I was listening to a new worship song this week and this truth struck me as Chris Tomlin sang, "Open the heavens. Come Living Water. All my fountains are in you. You're strong like a river. Your love is running through. All my fountains are in You."

Jesus set the example of forgiveness and reconciliation for us in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. *"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."*

Conclusion

As we consider this topic of forgiveness and reconciliation, here are a few questions to consider:

Is there anyone you need to forgive?

Is there anyone you need to take steps toward reconciliation?

Do you need to accept the forgiveness and reconciliation that God is offering you?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1350-31FC