

**Foundations: Joseph IV**  
**Restoring Relationships**  
**Genesis 45:1-20 (AFBC 11/26/17)**

Back on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May this year, we recognized our graduates, and... we began a journey through the book of Genesis. We had already considered the Ten Commandments and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as part of our Foundations Series.

We still have a bit further to go with this series, though we will take a break from it for Advent and Christmas. But today's text does conclude our look at the book of Genesis and specifically, our focus on the patriarchs.

We finish with a fourth look at Joseph, who over the course of his remarkable life managed to make the most of the predicaments he got into; and, in the end, he was able to accomplish fully what God intended him to do.

This is our purpose as well—to reach the goals God has for us—to be good stewards of this gift of life so that we count for something worthwhile in this world.

This potential exists in each of us, yet there's so much that gets in the way of reaching it. In our text for today, we find Joseph overcoming a huge barrier in his life, which cleared the way for God to do great things through him. Let's turn to our Scripture:

**Genesis 45:1-20--** 1 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. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. 3 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.

4 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! 5 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. 6 For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. 7 But God sent me ahead

of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

8 "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. 9 Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. 10 You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. 11 I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.'

12 "You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. 13 Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly." 14 Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping.

15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him. 16 When the news reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had come, Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased. 17 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'Do this: Load your animals and return to the land of Canaan, 18 and bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land.'

19 "You are also directed to tell them, 'Do this: Take some carts from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come. 20 Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.' "

And with that, all of Israel moves from Canaan, where there is drought and famine, to Egypt, where because of Joseph's wise planning, there were ample provisions set aside.

So the Hebrews' stay in Egypt begins as a blessing, even though, as you recall, it leads eventually to their enslavement--setting up another great chapter in the story of God's people, the Exodus, and another great leader in time of crisis, Moses.

So what was the biggest obstacle Joseph had to overcome if God was to accomplish what He needed to do through his life? Well, you remember what happened—why Joseph spent years either enslaved or imprisoned.

His brothers—his own flesh and blood—threw him into a pit and sold him to slave-traders. That’s how he ended up in Egypt. And now, some fifteen years later, those same brothers have the audacity to show up asking him for help!

Of course, they had no idea Joseph would be the one hearing their request. Had they known this, do you think they would’ve even attempted it—I mean, given the way they’d treated him?

Probably not. They would’ve been too fearful that Joseph would kill them or at least enslave them—right?—an eye for any eye, tooth for tooth! They were terrified when he said, “I am Joseph.”

So, here’s what it came down to: for God to use Joseph to save His people, Joseph had to forgive his brothers. Terribly broken relationships would have to be restored.

Joseph had many wonderful qualities, but could he forgive? There are plenty of otherwise talented people who can’t. God wouldn’t be able to use Joseph unless Joseph could forgive his brothers.

There seem to be lots of pressures on relationships today. They come at us from many directions. They cause stresses and tensions that can do damage to our interactions with one another.

Joseph’s family would not have survived their troubles—and we may not survive them either—without some foundational qualities of the spirit, like forgiveness, and grace, and compassion. Let’s see what we can learn from Joseph.

**1.** In offering forgiveness to his brothers, I hope you noticed that **JOSEPH WAS DISCREET** in how he did it. "Have everyone leave my presence!" Joseph said. "So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers." (Genesis 45:1b)

There are some good deeds that should be done in full view of everyone--so that the light of our Christian witness can shine. There are other good deeds, though, that are best done privately, involving only those persons who must be included. Forgiving

others... falls into that latter category—so... Joseph cleared the room. Only he and his brothers were present.

Now, Joseph could have made a public spectacle of his brothers. Instead, he was discreet. If anyone heard about this, it wouldn't be from Joseph. This took a lot of maturity, friends—genuine forgiveness always does.

Think what life would have been like for them had Joseph made it known that--years before--his brothers threw him into a pit, sold him as a slave, and tricked his father into believing he was dead.

Joseph was popular—his approval numbers were high in Egypt. His leadership in preparing the country for drought had saved many from starvation. How could his family have ever moved to Egypt if Joseph had not been discrete about what had happened?

Has anyone ever truly forgiven another person if they insist that their words of forgiveness be shared publicly? Has a husband forgiven his wife, or vice versa, if he makes sure that family and friends know everything about the indiscretion before forgiveness is extended?

There are those rare times when an offence needs to be made public--because of safety issues or whatever--but forgiveness should be between only the parties involved. Anything more is something other than true forgiveness. Joseph was discreet in dealing with his brothers' sins—we should be too.

**2.** Something else we see here is that **JOSEPH TOOK THE INITIATIVE** in restoring these broken relationships. When his first attempt at breaking the news to them didn't work, it says in verse 4: "Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come close to me.' When they had done so, he said, 'I am your brother Joseph...'"

A forgiving spirit says a lot about the value of our relationships. I heard about a woman whose barn had burned down. She called the insurance company and said, "We had that barn insured for a hundred thousand dollars, and I want my money."

"Just a minute," the adjuster replied, "that's not how it works. First, we determine the worth of the old barn, and then we provide you with a new one of comparable value."

She thought about that for a moment...then she said, "In that case, I'd like to cancel the policy on my husband."

Well, life insurance policies are different; but maybe she just didn't value her husband highly enough. The witness of Scripture is that relationships matter and broken relationships need to be restored quickly.

But we want the other person to make the first move—don't we? They need to admit they were wrong. Look at Joseph's example though: he was the one offended, yet he took the initiative to restore the relationship between him and his brothers.

This is interesting. Joseph had two sons. We haven't talked about them, but they're mentioned several times in the last few chapters of Genesis. What Joseph named his sons says volumes about Joseph's heart:

1) His first son was named "Manasseh." The name comes from the Hebrew word meaning "forget."

2) His second son was "Ephraim," which means "fruitful."

For God to use Joseph to save his people, Joseph had to FORGET what his brothers did to him earlier. He had to let go of all the other problems that came his way as a result of what they did.

He forgot those old wounds and forgave his brothers; and this allowed him to live a truly FRUITFUL life. Joseph took the initiative in restoring relationships that had been terribly broken.

**3.** Something else we find here that's necessary for restoration to happen: **JOSEPH WAS EMOTIONALLY HONEST**. Verse 2 tells us that Joseph "wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him (those who had been ordered out of the room!), and Pharaoh's household heard about it." (Genesis 45:2)

Joseph didn't get the message that "real men don't cry." It seems like all the pent-up emotion, all the hurt and anger, the feelings of betrayal and the unfairness of it all came pouring out in this poignant moment.

We'll never be able to forgive anyone until first we come to grips with our pain, acknowledging it, recognizing its source, and

choosing to express it and deal with it. It's okay to be hurt, but it's not okay to stay hurt; to be angry--but not to remain that way forever. It will ruin your life if these emotions are unresolved.

Joseph didn't have to tell his brothers how they had made him feel—it was obvious in that moment. So many of our hurts are more subtle. In many cases, they really weren't intentional. The guilty party may not even realize that they caused the pain.

But it does not solve anything to keep all the hurt to ourselves. Be honest. Deal with it. Talk it over, clear it up, and be done with it. FORGIVE. Be completely honest about the hurt and pain and anger, and then completely forgive.

**4.** One thing more: **JOSEPH COMFORTED AND CARED** for his brothers--a good indicator that his forgiveness was sincere.

Joseph tells them, "...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." (v.5)

And there is that tender scene in verses 14-15: "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."

These relationships were not only restored, they were much closer now than they had ever been before. Forgiveness can do that. It's so powerful when it's done right. It can be life changing! It can turn a "rocky" relationship into one that is "rock-solid."

Forgiveness is foundational to Christian living. We find it over and over again in the New Testament--that those who know God's forgiveness in Christ are to quickly extend forgiveness to others. Here's just one example from Paul's letter to the Colossians:

**"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." (Colossians 3:12-13)**

"Forgive as the Lord forgave you." It's not a suggestion. It's a commandment. And like all God's commandments, it's for our

good—so life can be at its best, and we can reach our potential unencumbered by old wounds and bitter emotions.

Well, we're coming to the end of this journey through Genesis. We've encountered the lives of people who lived a few thousand years before us; and yet, the problems they faced are much the same as ours.

And so are the answers. This is why these texts are so foundational for us. We still need God's strength and guidance to get us where we need to be in life.

Let's finish with this: in the frigid waters off the coast of Greenland, there are many icebergs. Some are small and just on the surface. Others, though, are huge and extend deep into the water.

There's an interesting phenomenon that people sometime observe there. The small chunks of ice may move in one direction, while the huge icebergs are moving in the opposite direction.

Why? Because the small chunks of ice are blown around by the surface winds; but those large icebergs--extending far below the water's surface--are moved by the deep ocean currents.

That's a picture of our lives. The challenges and difficulties that come our way are the surface winds. If we let them, they can control us--moving us in lots of different directions, none of which is helpful.

But if we're people of faith, our lives reach deep into the currents of God's love and grace and His eternal purposes in this world. And this is what moves us. These deep currents direct our lives, and keep us flowing in the ways God would have us go.

This is how it was for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. This is how it's been for people of faith from the time of Genesis right up to this moment.

We can be blown about by the whirlwinds of doubt and confusion, and by troubles of many kinds. Or... our lives can stay connected to the deep currents of God's will and way. It will be one or the other. So, decide, friend--which will it be in your life?

