7. Rest, Relationships, and Healing (3Q 2021—Rest in Christ)


Quotes
- The real moment of truth came, however, when Jacob finally died. Generous and forgiving as Joseph had been, his brothers couldn’t avoid the nasty suspicion that once the old man wasn’t around anymore to put in a good word for them, Joseph might start thinking again about what it had felt like when they tossed him into that pit and decide to pay them back as they deserved. So they went to see him, fell down on their knees, and begged his pardon. Frederick Buechner
- Many would have chosen revenge in this situation but Joseph chose the opposite. He did this because God planted forgiveness in his heart. His brothers plotted to kill him, put him in slavery and what did Joseph do? He forgave them. On top of choosing forgiveness, he received his entire family with love. This was always part of God’s plan. His brothers likely couldn’t have predicted this outcome. This just shows how incredible God is and how impactful choosing forgiveness can be. Lesli White
- There is no love without forgiveness, and there is no forgiveness without love. Bryant H. McGill
- We can improve our relationships with others by leaps and bounds if we become encouragers instead of critics. Joyce Meyer

Questions
How do we see the cosmic conflict playing out in relationships, such as the experience of Joseph and his brothers? What is the significant of the word “healing” in this context? What would you say is the basis for family reconciliation? How does this lesson fit into the wider framework of the series, “Rest in Christ”?

Bible summary
This lesson’s material completes the story of Jacob, Joseph, and his brothers. In Genesis 42 we have the story of how Joseph tests his brothers to see if they have changed. The demand to bring Benjamin back with them underlines the continuing issue of Jacob having a favorite son. In Genesis 45 Joseph cannot maintain his disguise any longer. He breaks down and reveals who he is to his stunned brothers. Here we see the beginnings of a basis for family reconciliation. However the brothers are still worried that maybe Joseph will take his revenge out on them after their father dies (Gen. 50:15–21). Matt. 25:41–46 is Jesus’ condemnation of the “goats,” those who while they professed to be his followers, did not help the poor and needy. Jesus asks for forgiveness even for those who are crucifying him (Luke 23:34).

Comment
Imagine the truly demonically-inspired plan of Joseph’s brothers. They fabricated evidence of Joseph’s death, knowing what this would do to their father. They sold Joseph into slavery, and perhaps eventual death at the hands of his masters. Their contempt for his life is inexcusable, whatever the truth of Joseph’s arrogance and superior attitude to them. This is background to this week’s study that looks at how relationships can be healed.
The arrival of his brothers in Egypt brings an opportunity for Joseph to exact revenge. They are in his power. But even though Joseph has the chance for payback, he does not do so, instead he hides his identity and through his own scheme tries to find out the kind of men they have become. It’s interesting that Joseph does not allow his bitter experiences at their hands to control his judgment, while he still is cautious about revealing who he is. There is no rush to judgment.

Resolution comes only when he knows they are different, that they have changed and no longer think as they did when they sold him into slavery. The at-one-ment that results, the reconciliation of those once estranged, is one of the most heart-warming stories in scripture. It is illustrative of our loving Lord whom we despised, hated and sold into the slavery of death, and yet who still wishes to win us back, to welcome us to the palace, and to restore the saving relationship that only he can bring.

This was a painful learning experience—both for Joseph and his brothers. Notice how they react when they are imprisoned by Joseph, and then forced to leave one of their number behind as a hostage before returning with Benjamin. They immediately see this as a punishment for the way they treated Joseph. Certainly a case of multiple guilty consciences!

They argue among themselves, and Joseph understands them, and turns aside to weep. But he does not reveal himself at this time. Why not? Hopefully not because he wants to see them suffer, but because he wants to see more evidence of who they have become.

The return of their payment by Joseph is not greeted with delight, but with concern. Immediately they worry, “What has God done to us?”

When they arrive back in Egypt with Benjamin, over Jacob’s protests, the brothers are terrified and suspicious of Joseph’s actions. They expect to be arrested or attacked at any moment. They explain about the repayment of their silver. Joseph gives the credit to God. Then there is the surprise about being seated in exact order of age. The whole situation was surely very disturbing!

Joseph can stand it no longer, and he has all the evidence he needs. In that emotive scene, he reveals his identity, comforts his brothers, and heals the pain of years. Notice his comment that God sent him on ahead to preserve a remnant and to save their lives. And in such a human comment to his brothers as they set out to go home and bring Isaac back to Egypt, Joseph tells them, “and don’t quarrel on the way!” He knew what they were like!

As a footnote—notice how deep-seated the brothers’ guilt really was. Even after all the reconciliation, all the restoration, the clear proof of Joseph’s forgiveness to them, they worry after Jacob dies. What if Joseph still holds a grudge, they wonder, and will pay them back! So they are still asking forgiveness, and still offering themselves as slaves. But just like God when we come to him, just like the Father welcoming the prodigal home, there is no discussion of slavery or the need for punishment or appeasement, but simply the loving acceptance back into the family.

**Ellen White comments**

Joseph gladly forgave his brethren, and sent them away abundantly provided with provisions, and carriages, and everything necessary for the removal of their father’s family, and their own, to Egypt... Jacob’s sons then made their humiliating confessions to their father, of their wicked treatment of Joseph, and entreated his forgiveness. Jacob did not suspect his sons were guilty of such cruelty. But he saw that God had overruled it all for good, and he forgave and blessed his erring sons. {1SP 151-3}