

Transformed Characters **Joseph Transformed – A Godly Perspective** **Genesis 50:15-21**

In this passage we see for the first time, Joseph's brothers coming to him asking for forgiveness. Genesis 45 gives us the account of Joseph's revelation of himself to his brothers and the reconciliation that follows. Joseph had forgiven them even before they could ask for his forgiveness. Yet some seventeen years or more later (see Gen 47:28), they were unsure that he had really forgiven them. Their father Jacob is now dead and gone. What if Joseph had merely restrained himself from revenge while Jacob was alive? Had Joseph really forgiven them for all the wrongs they had done to him? As unbelievable to the brothers as it may seem, Joseph had indeed granted them *total* forgiveness. This was the ultimate hallmark of transformation in Joseph. Gripped by fear, the brothers may have momentarily forgotten the day in Gen 45 when Joseph pardoned them. But for Joseph, it was all water under the bridge and that the brothers doubted his forgiveness brought much grief to him (Gen 50:17).

What were the indications of total forgiveness?

Writing about the principles of forgiveness, R.T. Kendall in his book *God Meant It For Good* highlights five indications of Joseph's total forgiveness of his brothers, as seen in Genesis 45 and again here in Genesis 50. The following are excerpts from his book.

First, total forgiveness is demonstrated to us when someone shows that he doesn't want anybody else to know what we have done to him. If, when you forgive me, you make it clear that you don't want anybody to know what I have done to you – that you are not ever going to let them find out – I would call that truly forgiving me. When Joseph made himself known unto his brethren, it was done in secret (Gen 45:1). The Egyptians never found out what the brothers had done to him. It is the unforgiving spirit that wants to let the world know our own hurt. Love hides a multitude of sins. It is hate that wants to let the cat out of the bag. Hate wants everybody to know we have been hurt: "Here's what so and so did to me." Total forgiveness is when we protect the one we forgive.

Second, total forgiveness wants to make a person feel completely at ease. Hate hopes that another will feel uneasy. When we don't forgive we want that other person to feel uncomfortable in our presence. We want them to squirm! We hope he fully realizes what he has done! The look on our face tells it all – we don't forgive. Total forgiveness is not allowing them to feel uneasy. And this was Joseph. The brothers felt "troubled at his presence". He invited them to come close to him. He wanted them to see the look in his eyes, to know that he had forgiven them (Gen 45:3-4).

Third, total forgiveness will not even allow the person to feel bad or angry with himself. Joseph urged his brothers, "Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves" (Gen 45:5). He is saying, in effect, "Look. I know how you're going to react to this. Your immediate reaction is to feel awful. I don't want you to feel

bad. Don't even feel angry with yourselves." But how do most people tend to "forgive"? Sometimes we say, "Well, I forgive you, but I hope you realize what you've done. I hope you feel bad about it." When we really forgive another person, we want them to feel good. But if they think to themselves, *Why is it I don't feel good about it?* We haven't yet convinced them they are forgiven. Joseph didn't want his brothers to feel bad.

Fourth, you make it *easy* for that person to forgive himself: we do it in such a way that it is obvious we really do forgive. There are many people walking around who claim to have God forgiving them of all their sins, yet they are not living the present. They are living in the past. They cannot forgive themselves. God wants us to forgive ourselves. Our gracious God comes from behind to *shape your past* so that, if you will believe Him and give Him time, you will come to see that His hand was with you even at your worst moment. Total forgiveness shows God's sovereign plan in everything. If you really do forgive someone, show that you mean it by bringing in God's total sovereignty. This will convince them. This is what Joseph did (Gen 45:4, 50:20).

Fifth, total forgiveness is demonstrated when we keep someone's sin hidden from the person who means most to him. Total forgiveness is our not wanting the sin to be revealed where it would hurt most of all. We tend to threaten, don't we, and say, "Wait until so and so hears this." And we hang that over their heads. Joseph had this option at his fingertips. Yet, Jacob never found out what the brothers had done to Joseph and Joseph kept it that way. He said, "Go back and say to our father, Joseph is alive. God made him governor of Egypt. That's all you need to tell him."

Why was Joseph able to forgive?

The immature teenage Joseph when we first met him in Scripture did not remain the same. He was transformed. The self-centred, self-righteous, self-confident Joseph matured into a man fully surrendered to God and His ways. Joseph was able to look at things from God's perspective. It was a transformation born out of a profound experience of God's providence and sovereignty over his own life circumstances and a deep sense of gratitude for all that God had done. From this godly perspective, Joseph could truly say, "...am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good..." (Gen 50:19-20). And from this godly perspective, forgiveness flows.

Sources:

R.T. Kendall, *God Meant It For Good* (Wilkesboro, NC: Morningstar, 1986).

Questions for Cell Discussion

Question 1

Observe the passage. How can you tell that the brothers were contrite and fearful?

Question 2

How would Joseph's response be reassuring to the brothers?

Question 3

In what ways was Joseph's words in Genesis 50:20 true? "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."

Question 4

Joseph had a divine purpose. His life was not always easy and was filled with ups and downs. Yet Joseph found favour with God and he allowed God to use him wherever he went.

- Is there something going on in your life today that is hard for you to understand?
- Are you focused on your circumstances and the situation in which you find yourself?
- How may God want to use you? How may He want to accomplish His divine purpose for your life?

Share and pray for one another.

