

Love Versus Guilt

Bible Background • GENESIS 42

Printed Text • GENESIS 42:6-25 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 51

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLAIN why Joseph's brothers interpreted their misfortune as punishment for their sins, SENSE the need for wholeness in their personal relationships, and IDENTIFY ways to accept God's forgiveness and strive to offer grace to those who mistreat them.

In Focus

Denise was certain that Yuri was the cruelest girl in high school. Almost every day, Yuri would talk about Denise behind her back, spreading mean rumors about who she had a crush on or what she "really" thought about her friends. Even though none of these rumors were true, a few of Denise's friends had believed Yuri's lies and abandoned her. Denise felt alone and hopeless, just wanting this nightmare to be over. All of a sudden, things changed. Yuri stood up in homeroom and said, "My family is moving to Pittsburgh.

Today is my last day—just wanted to say goodbye to you all." Denise couldn't believe her ears! Yuri left. In an instant, school became easy for Denise. She graduated high school and went on to cosmetology school, and even opened her own salon. A few years later, a woman about Denise's age wandered into the salon for her first appointment. Denise gave her usual warm "Hi!" and "Welcome!"—but the other woman froze, and Denise realized why. The woman who came for an appointment was Yuri. The same girl who bullied her so long ago was now coming to Denise to style her hair. Yuri sat silently in the chair, feeling awful for things she had done as a teenager. Denise began the appointment and asked with a smile, "So, how've you been, Yuri?" The two women caught up about their lives. At the end of the appointment, Yuri and Denise each walked away feeling a little better about their past and more importantly, where they will go in the future in their new relationship.

Do you think Yuri apologized? Explain. How have you experienced reconciliation in your life? Describe that experience.

Keep in Mind

"And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required" (Genesis 42:22, KJV).

Say It Correctly

Reuben. **ROO**-bin.

Canaan. **KAY**-nin.

KJV

Genesis 42:6 And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.

7 And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food.

8 And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him.

9 And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

10 And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come.

11 We are all one man's sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies.

12 And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

13 And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.

14 And Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies:

15 Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither.

16 Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies.

17 And he put them all together into ward three days.

18 And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God:

19 If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses:

20 But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die. And they did so.

21 And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.

22 And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required.

23 And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter.

24 And he turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes.

25 Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way: and thus did he unto them.

NLT

Genesis 42:6 Since Joseph was governor of all Egypt and in charge of selling grain to all the people, it was to him that his brothers came. When they arrived, they bowed before him with their faces to the ground.

7 Joseph recognized his brothers instantly, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where are you from?" he demanded. "From the land of Canaan," they replied. "We have come to buy food."

8 Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they didn't recognize him.

9 And he remembered the dreams he'd had about them many years before. He said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see how vulnerable our land has become."

10 "No, my lord!" they exclaimed. "Your servants have simply come to buy food."

11 "We are all brothers—members of the same family. We are honest men, sir! We are not spies!"

12 "Yes, you are!" Joseph insisted. "You have come to see how vulnerable our land has become."

13 “Sir,” they said, “there are actually twelve of us. We, your servants, are all brothers, sons of a man living in the land of Canaan. Our youngest brother is back there with our father right now, and one of our brothers is no longer with us.”

14 But Joseph insisted, “As I said, you are spies!

15 This is how I will test your story. I swear by the life of Pharaoh that you will never leave Egypt unless your youngest brother comes here!

16 One of you must go and get your brother. I’ll keep the rest of you here in prison. Then we’ll find out whether or not your story is true. By the life of Pharaoh, if it turns out that you don’t have a younger brother, then I’ll know you are spies.”

17 So Joseph put them all in prison for three days.

18 On the third day Joseph said to them, “I am a God-fearing man. If you do as I say, you will live.

19 If you really are honest men, choose one of your brothers to remain in prison. The rest of you may go home with grain for your starving families.

20 But you must bring your youngest brother back to me. This will prove that you are telling the truth, and you will not die.” To this they agreed.

21 Speaking among themselves, they said, “Clearly we are being punished because of what we did to Joseph long ago. We saw his anguish when he pleaded for his life, but we wouldn’t listen. That’s why we’re in this trouble.”

22 “Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy?” Reuben asked. “But you wouldn’t listen. And now we have to answer for his blood!”

23 Of course, they didn’t know that Joseph understood them, for he had been speaking to them through an interpreter.

24 Now he turned away from them and began to weep. When he regained his composure, he spoke to them again. Then he chose Simeon from among them and had him tied up right before their eyes.

25 Joseph then ordered his servants to fill the men’s sacks with grain, but he also gave secret instructions to return each brother’s payment at the top of his sack. He also gave them supplies for their journey home.

The People, Places, and Times

Israel’s Sons. Jacob (whom God renamed Israel in Gen 32:28) worked seven years to marry Laban’s daughter Rachel. However, on the wedding night, Laban switched Rachel with her older sister Leah. Israel took Leah as his first wife, but Israel married Rachel as well, giving him two wives. A great rivalry grew between the sisters since the younger Rachel was the favorite above Leah, the first wife. Soon after marrying, God blessed Leah with children; she bore Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Rachel, who was barren, gave her handmaid Bilhah to Israel to have children by him in her stead. (This was similar to Sarah’s actions with Hagar, cf. Genesis 15). Bilhah bore Dan and Naphtali. Leah, believing she could not have more children and fearing she would fall behind in the race to bear sons, gave her handmaid Zilpah to Israel as yet another wife. Zilpah bore Gad and Asher. Then Leah was blessed to have two more sons, Issachar and Zebulun as well as a daughter Dinah.

After all this, Rachel finally conceived and bore Joseph, Israel’s favorite child. Rachel later gave birth to Benjamin but died shortly after childbirth. These twelve sons of Jacob (Israel) would become the nation of Israel with the generations of each son forming a tribe under that son’s name. Joseph is the only exception to this, with his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh each forming a half-tribe in his stead.

Famine. A period of extreme food shortage brought on by drought and excessively dry land. This was the cause of the famine that befell on Egypt during Joseph’s time. This was prophesied in Pharaoh’s dream of in Genesis 41:6, 23. With ancient agricultural methods providing only enough food for the anticipated population, dying of starvation during a famine was a real and present possibility. A famine could last several years.

Background

Egypt's seven years of agricultural abundance was revealed to Pharaoh in a dream interpreted by Joseph (Genesis 41). Although Pharaoh did not worship the God of Israel, he quickly recognized Joseph's divine connection. God's favor upon Joseph positioned him to receive a life of prominence. As displayed throughout Joseph's life, God also gifted him as a strategic thinker and administrator. Joseph's plan to store grain during the years of plenty prepared Egypt for the coming years of famine. At thirty years old, Joseph became the second most powerful man in the world. He married into one of the leading families of Egypt and was the father of two sons.

The famine hit Canaan where Israel, his sons, and their families lived. Israel heard there was grain in Egypt, and ordered all his sons—except for Benjamin—to travel there to purchase food for their families (Genesis 42:1-4). Benjamin was Israel's remaining son from his beloved wife Rachel who died giving birth to him (Genesis 35:16-19). Israel was especially afraid to send Benjamin out, after the presumed death of his favorite Joseph. He deeply mourned Joseph (Genesis 37:35) and did not want anything to happen to Benjamin while traveling.

Recount a time when you have seen the goodness of God in the midst of adverse circumstances

At-A-Glance

1. Confronting Shame (Genesis 42:6-8)
2. Confronting Opportunity (vv. 9-17)
 3. Confronting Pain (vv. 18-22)
4. Confronting With Mercy (vv. 23-25)

In Depth

1. Confronting Shame (Genesis 42:6-8)

Over twenty years have passed since the sons of Israel last saw their then-teenage brother Joseph. Now an adult, Joseph is unrecognizable to them. However, Joseph, after many years of pain and separation, immediately recognizes his brothers. He comes face-to-face with the men who turned his world upside down out of vicious envy. As the caravan of brothers approaches Joseph, he sternly asks where they are from, and they respond that they are from Canaan and had come to Egypt to buy food. Joseph's first reaction to seeing his brothers is to treat them as strangers. Because he is in authority and they are in need, he is within his right to treat them harshly. It is a very human response to be curt with someone who caused deep hurt. It is only by recalling God's grace that one can move away from hurtful emotions and respond differently.

As Christians, how can we manage our emotions and maintain godly character?

2. Confronting Opportunity (vv. 9-17)

Joseph inwardly recognizes the fulfillment of the prophetic dreams he had as a young man where God revealed how his brothers would bow to him (Genesis 37:5, 9-10). Knowing the brothers' explanation of their motives for traveling to Egypt, Joseph accuses them of being spies. The brothers respond that they are honest men and insist they are sons of one man, who has a total of twelve sons. There are only ten of them present, so the brothers go on to explain how one of the other two is with their father, while the last is deceased. As the highest authority in the room, Joseph refuses to believe their story publicly and continues to accuse the suspicious group of foreign men of being spies. Joseph commands that one of the brothers go back and bring Benjamin to prove their story.

Making them experience a little of his pain, Joseph commands the brothers to be locked up for three days.

What would you do if you had the opportunity to pay back someone who hurt you?

3. Confronting Pain (vv. 18-22)

Joseph releases the brothers from prison after three days. He tells them he fears God, and in another test, they must prove they are honest men by leaving one brother behind in prison while the others travel back home with grain to feed their families. If they return with Benjamin, the one in prison will be released and they will all be allowed to live. The brothers talk amongst themselves. The sons of Israel recognize they are being punished for what they did to Joseph whom they believe is deceased. After all the years that passed, the brothers never absolved the guilt of their envious, hate-filled plot to kill their brother and the grief their father experienced. Reuben, Israel's firstborn exclaims how he had warned his brothers, "Do not sin against the child" (from v. 22; cf. Genesis 37:21-22, 29). They all live with considerable regret.

When have you accidentally or purposely inflicted pain on a family member? Were you able to gain forgiveness? Have you forgiven yourself?

4. Confronting With Mercy (vv. 23-25)

Since the sons of Israel believe the man standing before them is Egyptian, the brothers did not realize that Joseph was able to understand every word spoken. Overcome with emotion after hearing the exchange among his siblings, Joseph turns away and weeps. It is too much for him to listen to the brothers take responsibility for what they did to him, and to hear how Reuben defended him against his brothers' plot.

He has Simeon, the second oldest brother, held and the other brothers watch as Simeon is sent back to prison, which places a sense of urgency on their return with Benjamin. Joseph shows mercy to the brothers by sending them back with the grain free of charge, having secretly returned their money to them. Joseph feared God, so seeing his brothers' pain and remorse propels him to give them what they did not give him—a chance to survive.

Recalling God's mercy in your own life, how have you been able to show mercy to others?

Search the Scriptures

1. When Joseph's brothers approached him to buy grain, what was his response (Genesis 42:9, 12, 14)?
2. What do the brothers say in response to Joseph's accusations (v. 10, 13)?
3. Which of the brothers was held in custody? Why (v. 24)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Do we ever have the right to stay angry? What steps must be taken to mend broken relationships?
2. How can we do a better job at extending grace to others when they fail to meet our expectations or disappoint us?

Liberating Lesson

In a fallen world, we have many occasions to be hurt and mistreated, even by people who are supposed to love us. We also have opportunities to be on the other side as the offender. We have to be prayerful that our actions and reactions are reflective of the love of God in Christ. One of the marks of Christian maturity is the ability to quickly forgive and make amends, which is not an easy task when hurt by someone near your heart. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that brings to remembrance the grace extended to each of us, as we all have been offenders of God. Our lives speak volumes when we can forgive and heal.

How can the Church be the agent of change in our world to usher in God's grace, which brings salvation?

Application for Activation

The body of Christ must model before the world the ministry of reconciliation as we to have been blessed to be reconciled to a Holy God. When there is conflict in the church, in our homes, or in our communities, it should acknowledge the validity of those emotions but also never shrink from the hard task of showing humility and forgiveness. We must always engage in a process of mediation that brings forth healing and restoration, not isolation. Jesus gives Christians the model by which to handle conflict (Matthew 18:15-17), and this process with the conviction of the Holy Spirit should bring a loving resolution. Just as God quickly forgives us, we to must be quick to forgive.

How can we examine ourselves and our relationships to show the kind of love demonstrated at the Cross?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Have Mercy on Me, a Sinner
(Psalm 51:1-12)

TUESDAY

Pilate's Judgment of Jesus, "Not Guilty"
(Luke 23:9-15)

WEDNESDAY

Brothers Sent to Egypt to Buy Grain
(Genesis 42:1-5)

THURSDAY

Joseph Returns Money with Grain
(Genesis 42:26-28)

FRIDAY

Joseph Questions Motives of Brothers
(Genesis 42:29-34)

SATURDAY

Jacob Vows Not to Send Benjamin
(Genesis 42:35-38)

SUNDAY

Joseph Confronts
Brothers for Past Behavior
(Genesis 42:6-25)