

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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GENESIS 45:1-15

Joseph and His Brothers and Jacob, Their Father

As Joseph concealed his identity and strained to keep himself from displeasing God, he revealed his identity to them by acting out what he had suffered at their hands. He searched for ways to fulfill *an eye for an eye*, while scheming to get Benjamin and Jacob his father “away” from his other brothers.

Joseph resisted every compulsion to reveal his identity to his brothers. Concealing his identity served his disinterest to resolve anything with them. He had not set aside the right to use violence against those who had violated him. If he found a shred of evidence his brothers might be spies, Joseph contemplated killing them in the “interest of the state.” Joseph contemplated fulfilling a personal vendetta using the machinery of the state.

Often, people seek loopholes and permission to take revenge against a person or people who have hurt them. (See Peter’s question to Jesus about the parameters for forgiving one’s brother in Matthew 18:21-22.)

The brothers agreed to submit to the order of Zarephath-Paneah. They then turned away from him and confessed to one another in Hebrew, unaware that he understood what they were saying. They confessed that what they had done to Joseph years before was the reason they were suffering now. Joseph understood them and fled the room to cry. It became impossible for him to continue to conceal his identity. Yet, he returned to the room, imprisoned all of them for three days, and then kept Simeon while he released the rest. But still, he neither acknowledged their confession nor revealed his identity. Joseph was in the process of abandoning violence

as a solution for the historic trauma that still controlled his life. And back and forth he reeled.

Joseph’s steps toward revealing himself to his brothers. He called them into his house. He offered them a meal. He sought to allay their fear about the money they’d found in their sacks after their first visit. He had his servants hydrate them, wash their feet, and feed their donkeys. They talked about family matters for a while, but still they did not recognize Joseph. Only then did Joseph ask if the newest brother with them on this trip, was their youngest brother, “of whom you spoke to me?” (v. 29) Then Joseph acknowledged the curse over Benjamin because he was with their older brothers. In this way, Joseph indicated his fear—that *Benjamin was in danger with his older brothers*.

Joseph continued to reveal himself, indicating he knew these men. He sat them in order around the table, putting Benjamin in the last place. He gave Benjamin the most food of all of them. His brothers began to squirm and wonder how he knew their birth order and why he so favored Benjamin.

When it was time for him to send his brothers back to Jacob, Joseph’s anger and affection collided. Out of anger toward his older brothers and concern for the safety of Benjamin his younger brother, he filled each of his brother’s sacks with their money again, but this time he also had his servant put his divining cup into Benjamin’s sack. His servant caught up with them and accused them; they became indignant, suspicious, and certain the servant would not find what he had accused them of taking from Zarephath-Paneah. The servant led them back to Joseph and into a third conversation with the governor of the land.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Our world has so many opportunities for forgiveness to be practiced and realized. Your group may wish to learn more about one or more of these:

1. Monuments to the Confederacy in the United States are being taken down. Download the article, “All the Monuments to Racism that Have Been Torched, Occupied or Removed” by Camille Squires in the Crime and Justice section of *Mother Jones Magazine*. Read through the article and view some of the video clips and photos that are posted along the timeline. Select three or four paragraphs to read to the group and display a few of the photos or videos.

Discuss the descriptions of what people think about removing monuments that glorify racism, white supremacy, and injustice in the recent history of the United States.

2. Edward Baptist has been interviewed many times regarding his book, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*. Watch this one-hour lecture he gave at Google offices in Massachusetts.

3. Form a team to explore the group’s understanding of the history of white racial terror against Indigenous Peoples, African, and African American people in North America. A variety of resources are available for expanding our understanding of this neglected aspect of our history, including www.DoctrineofDiscovery.org and updated reports on racial terror against blacks by Equal Justice Initiative (EJI).

4. Form another team with congregations in your community to participate in campaigns to take down monuments that celebrate oppression, colonialism, white supremacy and environmental abuse. Two resources are: (1) activities suggested by the Southern Poverty Law Center and (2) activities that might be underway in your region. Check with your regional or national office of Mennonite Central Committee as a starting point.

5. Some participants will want to be equipped to understand and deal with trauma as it affects both victims and aggressors. Learn about the characteristics and phases of trauma. See this federal document, “Understanding Trauma and its Impact.” Another resource for learning about trauma is *Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience* (STAR), provided by the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University.

6. Invite participants to form a team that will sign up to participate in the Community Remembrance Project of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), Montgomery, Alabama. This project helps participants to resurface and memorialize events of racial terror and civil rights in their area,

through establishing memorials and historical markers on the sites of these events. EJI was established as a restorative justice-focused law firm by Bryan Stevenson, author of *Just Mercy* (book and movie). EJI also established the National Memorial for Peace and Justice.

7. Learn about five ways the historic Poor People’s Campaign “gets right to it” and unflinchingly, unashamedly, unhesitatingly discusses systemic racism, systemic poverty, systemic ecological destruction, the war economy, and the false moral narrative of religious nationalism that continue to control the structures of Canada, United States, and Mexico. See how these systemic realities interlock and perpetuate poverty.

8. Joseph struggled for a long time with two opposite ways to respond to his brothers when he knew them but they could not recognize him.

Silently, write a two-paragraph summary of the most recent way in which you have been offended or suffered at the hands of someone else. Or write a two-paragraph summary of the most recent way in which you have offended or caused someone else to suffer at your hands or because of your words. It doesn’t need to be written if it can be summarized orally in two paragraphs. Assure participants that they do not have to share their story with the group.

After a few minutes, invite each person to share their *response* to this two-part question with one another—even if they choose not to share about their *experience*:

- » Are you ready to discuss with another person(s) how they caused you to suffer and tell them what Joseph told his brothers in 45:4?
- » Or are you prepared to ask God to empower you to share God’s good news with the person(s) who caused you to suffer?

Or if your situation is one of those times when you offended someone else:

- » Are you ready to discuss with the other person how you caused them to suffer and ask him or her to forgive you?

Like Joseph and his brothers experienced, our grief comes in stages that include shock and deep silence when we find ourselves unable to face the people we have hurt or who have hurt us. If you are in a time of grief, shock, and deep silence, describe what you are thinking, feeling, and fearing. Ask God to be with you in this time, to heal you as you experience these things and to keep transforming you in spirit, soul, and body.

Finally, ask God to help you pursue the forgiveness of sins and to not avoid the cost of doing so.