

BIBLE STORY: JOSEPH FORGIVES HIS BROTHERS

Genesis 50:15-21

Central Thoughts

- God's forgiveness and grace to us in Christ gives us the strength to forgive those who have sinned against us.
- Believing in the grace of God enables us to understand that God works in all things for our good, even in the evil things that others do to us (See Romans 8:28).
- Every Christian is called to be Christ to his neighbor in forgiving sin and speaking God's Word of comfort and love.

Discussion Questions

Who was Joseph and what had Joseph's brothers done to him?

Joseph was one of Jacob's twelve sons. Although Joseph was Jacob's second youngest, he was his father's most beloved son because he was the first-born son of Rachel, the wife Jacob loved most. Joseph was also a prophet to whom the Lord had revealed Himself in dreams and to whom Joseph had given the gift of the interpretation of dreams. Jacob expressed his affection for Joseph by giving him a coat of many colors. Joseph's brothers were jealous of him and the favored position he had in their father's eyes. When Joseph reported to them the dreams he had of eleven sheaves bowing down to his sheaf and of the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing down to him they hated him and wanted to kill him. His brothers sold him to slave traders. They covered up their crime by claiming to have found Joseph's shredded coat of many colors soaked in blood. Their father Jacob was grieved, believing his beloved son Joseph had been torn to pieces by a wild animal. While in Egypt, Joseph served Potiphar faithfully until Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of trying to commit adultery with her. Covering the woman's shame for not defending himself against the false accusation and revealing her repeated advances upon him, he was thrown into prison. While in prison he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker who were imprisoned with him. The baker would be executed, but the butler would be restored to his position. Joseph was forgotten by the butler until Pharaoh dreamed dreams that no one could interpret. Joseph correctly interpreted Pharaoh's dreams that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. He was released from prison and elevated to the position of Prince of Egypt in charge of the Egyptian granaries. People came to Joseph from many countries to buy grain during the famine, including ten of his brothers. His identity hidden from them, Joseph treated them harshly and strangely through a series of encounters with him. His mysterious treatment of them brought their sin into the light of day and called them to repentance. Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers in a tearful display of love for them, forgiving their sin and calling for them to bring their father and their households to the land of Egypt where he provided for them until the death of their father Jacob.

After Jacob died, what did Joseph's brothers doubt?

Joseph's forgiveness. They thought that might take revenge upon them for all their sins against him.

What message did they send to Joseph?

That their father told them to beg Joseph to forgive their trespass against him.

What was Joseph's response to the message?

He wept because he loved them and had already forgiven them, but they doubted his forgiveness.

What did the brothers also do to try to make up for what they had done to Joseph?

They fell down before Joseph and submitted themselves to him as his servants.

What Parable of Jesus does this remind us of?

How the prodigal son returned to his father and asked to be made like one of his father's servants.

What was Joseph's response to his brothers?

"Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." Joseph comforted them and spoke to their hearts to restore their faith.

What does "Do not be afraid" mean?

"I forgive you all your sins!"

Was Joseph speaking in the place of God when he forgave his brothers?

Yes! Joseph also correctly spoke God's Word to them that though they had sinned against him, God worked through their evil intentions to bring about His good purposes in saving many people (See Romans 8:28).

What enabled Joseph to forgive his brothers and give such a gracious interpretation to the evils that had befallen him?

Joseph had received and believed in the forgiveness and grace of God for himself.

What does it mean "to save many people alive"?

God not only saved many people from famine, but He also saved Joseph's brothers from hell.

What did Joseph repeat to his brothers to comfort them and strengthen their faith?

"Do not be afraid" They needed to hear his forgiveness to strengthen their faith in God's forgiveness.

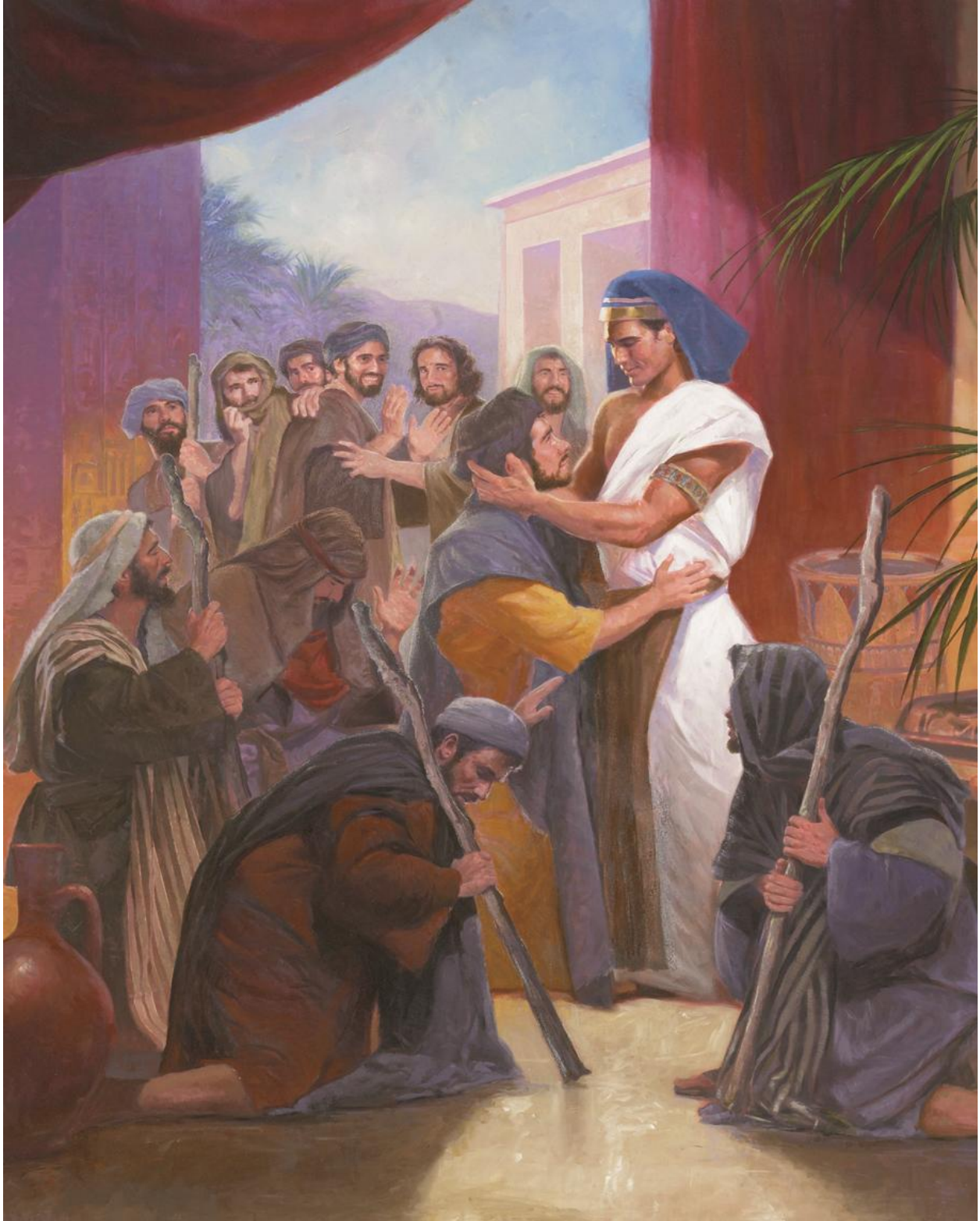
Meditation on the Bible Story

We forgive and love as we have been forgiven and loved by God in Christ. Joseph stood in the place of God. He was called by God's love and forgiveness to speak that word of love and forgiveness to his brothers. The radical way in which Joseph interpreted what had happened to him shows the power of God's grace and forgiveness in the heart and life of a believer: "Do not be afraid...you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive." Joseph was able to forgive his brothers and to treat them kindly because he was a believer who had received the Lord's forgiveness and who depended entirely upon God's grace.

Joseph lived the faith expressed under the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Since he believed that he daily sinned much and was only deserving of punishment, how could he withhold forgiveness from his brothers who had trespassed against him? But having received and believed in the Lord's forgiveness for himself, he too sincerely forgave and gladly did good to his brothers who had sinned against him. In this way, each one of us in forgiving others is called to be Christ to our neighbor.

Prayer on the Bible Story

Heavenly Father, as Joseph freely forgave and loved his brothers who had sinned against him, teach us to depend upon Your forgiveness that we do not deserve, so that we too sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



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