

Genesis 50,15–21

Joseph Forgives His Brothers

15 Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" **16** So they approached^b Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, **17** 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. **18** Then his brothers also wept,^c fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." **19** But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? **20** Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. **21** So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

If you think about your family, how does that make you feel? What does your family mean to you? Are you happy to be part of your family? Sad maybe? Angry? Proud? Did it change over the years?

Were there challenges, fights, losses? Were there happy times and joy?

What role did you play in your family and which do you play now? Is it still the same? Did it change? Did you change?

Families are tricky... and who if not Joseph had to find that out the hard way?

Joseph probably asked himself many of those questions over his entire life until and probably even after he was reunited with his family. After all that has happened to him there's more than enough reason for it.

Just imagine: Your own brothers, or sisters or whoever you consider family, throwing you into a well and leaving you! That wasn't just a prank, what Joseph's brothers did to him hit a lot stronger. In a way, family back then meant more than it does today. The family was the one system you could or actually had to rely on. Family meant protection, support, food, shelter. Losing that system often meant certain death. In fact, families played such an important role, that crimes against it, like betraying your father, or killing a brother were considered some of the worst crimes one could think of, leaving you an outcast if not even for execution.

Joseph's brothers did exactly that. Almost killed their brother, abandoned him and lied to their father about it. And they disrespected another important factor when it comes to family: responsibility!

They disrespected their own responsibility to take care of their brother and they put their father in the horrible position of letting him think that he failed to fulfil his role as his family's leader by losing one of his sons, apparently having misjudged the situation and giving him a too dangerous task.

It's hard to imagine what went through Joseph's mind while he was lying in that well. Betrayed by his own brothers, left for dead, unaware of what he did wrong. Did he misjudge the situation that much?

But I'm being a bit harsh on his brothers. Joseph wasn't a saint either at that time. He was naïve, lazy and full of himself. And probably quite annoying at times. It doesn't excuse what

his brothers did, but I think we all know how it can feel to have someone around who doesn't seem to contribute to anything whatsoever. And we were that person too at some point, I'm sure of that. So an unlucky combination of jealousy and entitlement eventually lead to where we are now with today's passage:

Call it luck, divine intervention or a last spark of petty by his brothers: Joseph got sold to slavers, survived, got to Egypt, climbed up a very steep ladder and became one of the most powerful men of the country. That's the short version.

Enter his brothers, begging him for forgiveness. I don't know how I would have reacted.

'Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good ...'

What a phrase! Ok sure, if it hadn't been for his brothers betraying him, Joseph couldn't have prevented hundreds or thousands of people from starving. But still, they tried to kill him! I don't know about you, but I wouldn't be that cool about it.

It shows how Joseph had grown over the years. Years of slavery and hardship obviously change a person, Joseph changed for the better, grew wise and confident. Not entirely though! He still scared the living hell out of his brothers by hiding the cup in his little brother's bag and basically taking him hostage. But he clearly did grow. He wasn't the naïve young boy anymore, who would rather dream through the day than doing physical labour. He had become a responsible leader, capable of making tough and wise decisions, leading an entire culture through a crisis. And his brothers weren't the same anymore either, willing to admit their mistakes, surrendering themselves into slavery just to protect their youngest brother as they had failed to do so years ago.

Joseph understood that paying his brothers back for what they did wouldn't help anyone and apparently he didn't need that kind of satisfaction. Nor would it have made his father happy. The last thing the old man learned was that his lost son was still alive. There couldn't have been a greater joy for him than learning that his sons reunited, the family was whole again.

Joseph now was aware of what I said about families earlier. They needed him. Everyone in the country needed him. Joseph had grown so powerful that he had the resources, the influence and therefore the responsibility of taking care of those under his protection.

It's incredible how he didn't hold a grudge against them, or at least didn't let it take over. But he managed to do so, used his position to do good. Took the chance to reunite with his brothers and his family, make sure they were safe, patiently repair what they had broken in anger.

We need leaders like him! People who use their power for good. People who know about their power, who are willing to accept their role even if they never planned for it to happen. People who are willing to change, to grow, to fix things. People who have the strength to become better versions of themselves, even if it's not an easy thing to do.

To finish, let me ask you one more question:

Can you be such a person?

Amen