

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 24: Joseph and His Brothers in Egypt -- Genesis 42:1-45:28

The famine that Joseph foresaw now grips the whole region, and it drives ten frightened, hungry men down to Egypt to buy grain. They have no idea that the powerful Egyptian official they must bow before is the brother they sold into slavery more than twenty years ago. But Joseph knows them at once. And as they bow low before him, the old dreams of sheaves and stars come true in a way none of them could have imagined. The brother they threw in a pit now holds their lives in his hands. What will he do with that power?

He could destroy them. Instead, he tests them. Through a series of carefully arranged trials, accusing them of spying, holding Simeon hostage, demanding they bring Benjamin, secretly returning their silver, Joseph is not playing cruel games; he is searching their hearts. He needs to know whether these are still the same men who sold their own brother, or whether something has changed. And slowly, the change shows. Wracked with guilt, they say to one another, not knowing Joseph understands, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother." After all these years, the conscience they buried is alive and aching.

The test reaches its climax over Benjamin. Joseph has his silver cup hidden in Benjamin's sack and then threatens to keep the boy as a slave, the exact situation that once tempted the brothers: a chance to be rid of their father's favorite. And here the miracle of grace appears. Judah, the very one who long ago suggested selling Joseph, steps forward and pours out one of the most moving speeches in all of Scripture, begging to take Benjamin's place, to become a slave himself rather than break his father's heart again. The man who once sold a brother now offers himself for a brother. That is what real repentance looks like.

Joseph can hold back no longer. He sends the Egyptians out, and weeping so loudly the whole house hears, he says the words that change everything: "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" And then, instead of vengeance, he speaks grace: "Do not be distressed... for God sent me before you to preserve life." He sees, behind his brothers' cruelty, the hand of God working salvation. He forgives them, embraces them, weeps over them, and sends for his father. Read this passage and watch three of the most beautiful things in the Christian life come together: a conscience awakened to repentance, a sinner transformed into a servant, and a wounded man who forgives, all held inside the great truth that God was working His good purpose through it all.

Group Discussion: When Joseph finally revealed himself, he told his terrified brothers, "Do not be distressed... for God sent me before you to preserve life" (45:5). What strikes you about the way Joseph forgave the brothers who had so deeply wronged him, and where did he find the strength to do it?

Personal Reflection: Years after their sin, the brothers' buried guilt surfaced: "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother" (42:21). Is there an old guilt, a wrong you have never made right, that still surfaces in your conscience? What might God be inviting you to do about it?

Read Genesis 42:1–45:28

Study Questions

1. Decades after they sold Joseph, the brothers' consciences awakened: "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother" (42:21–22). What does this teach us about the conscience, about unaddressed guilt, and about the beginning of genuine repentance?
2. Is there an old guilt or unresolved wrong that still surfaces in your conscience? What does godly sorrow over sin look like, and what might God be calling you to do to make things right (compare 2 Corinthians 7:10)?
3. Joseph tested his brothers over time before revealing himself, to see whether they had truly changed (42:9–44:17). What does this teach us about the difference between mere words of regret and genuine, proven repentance?
4. How do you respond when you are tested, when circumstances reveal what is really in your heart? What evidence is there that God has actually changed you in an area where you once failed?
5. Judah, who had once proposed selling Joseph, now offered to become a slave himself in Benjamin's place rather than break his father's heart (44:33–34). What does Judah's transformation teach us about what genuine repentance produces, and how does his self-sacrifice point toward Christ, who came from Judah's line?
6. Where do you need your repentance to move beyond words into changed action and sacrificial love? What would it look like for your life to show the kind of transformation Judah displayed?
7. Joseph forgave his brothers fully, weeping over them, reassuring them, and providing for them rather than taking revenge (45:1–15). What does true, costly forgiveness look like, and how is it different from merely tolerating or excusing a wrong (compare Ephesians 4:31–32)?
8. Who has wronged you deeply, and what makes forgiving them so hard? How does the forgiveness we have received from God in Christ empower us to forgive others?
9. Joseph said, "It was not you who sent me here, but God... to preserve life" (45:5–8), yet he also plainly acknowledged that they had sold him. How do we hold together God's sovereign providence (turning their evil into good) and the brothers' real responsibility for their sin, without falling into a fatalism that excuses sin or erases human accountability (compare Acts 2:23)?
10. Look back over the whole passage. Name one specific way God is calling you to repent, to forgive, and to trust His providence over the wrongs and hardships in your own story.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Genesis 45:5–8 and 50:20, “It was not you who sent me here, but God,” and “you meant evil... but God meant it for good”; Acts 2:23, Christ delivered up by God’s definite plan and by the hands of lawless men; 2 Corinthians 7:10, godly grief producing repentance; Ephesians 4:31–32, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave us; Luke 6:27–28, loving and blessing those who wrong us.