

Reprise Joseph: 2. Forgiven
Genesis 50:16-21
May 7, 2017
Pastor Steve Richards

Have you heard the expression, “God is good”? God is good all the time; all the time God is good. Can I be honest with you, this morning? As your pastor, there are times when it is hard for me to say those words, times when there is a catch in my throat as I speak “God is good” and not because I don’t think God is good. I believe that. I believe the words of Psalm 100:5 “The Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.” God is good, but there are times when I don’t want good, I want fair!

Aren’t we taught: “Follow the rules, work hard, be nice to others – love your neighbor as yourself – and God will bless you.” After all, God is good. God loves you. And yet, there are times when it doesn’t feel like God loves me. In fact, I see other people who are not following the rules, not working hard, not being nice to others, not loving their neighbor, not blessing anyone but themselves – and things seem to be going rather well for them – even better than it is for me! It’s not fair! We say God is good, but...

And this brings us to Joseph’s story. It is wrestling with where is God in the midst of heart-ache and pain and brokenness, betrayal and rejection. Where is God in all of this? Joseph was the eleventh of twelve sons of Jacob. Joseph is the favorite son, and he loves being the favorite – but his brothers hate it. Joseph is given gifts that the others never receive – like a multi-colored coat. And if that wasn’t enough to mess with their relationship, Joseph has these dreams that his brothers are bowing down before him. And instead of keeping such dreams to himself, he says to his brothers, “Aren’t these great dreams?” If you ever have dreams like that, don’t tell your siblings! So, one day, they’ve had enough and sell Joseph to slave traders who bring Joseph to Egypt where he is sold as a slave to a man named Potiphar. Joseph isn’t where he wants to be but he digs in and works hard and it appears to be paying off. He’s moving up, until one day Potiphar’s wife falsely accuses him of attacking her and Joseph is thrown in prison. He goes from favorite son in an important family in Canaan to slave in Egypt to being thrown in a prison cell. God is good? Really? Genesis tells us: While Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him. (Genesis 39:20b-21)

While Joseph is in prison, Pharaoh has two of his servants thrown in prison – a baker and a cupbearer (the musical calls him a butler). While in prison, they have dreams. They meet Joseph and learn that he can interpret dreams. When the Baker and the Butler are released, Joseph says, “Put in a good word for me with Pharaoh.” But they don’t, and for two more years Joseph prays for his release.

How many times do we say a prayer and then expect an answer by the next day? We fill out a prayer request card and hope if enough people will pray with us for what we want, the answer will come – and if the answer doesn’t come by the next week, we’ve already moved on or given up or we get angry with God. God, are you even listening? Didn’t Jesus say, “Ask whatever you want and it will be given to you?” God, are you there? But Joseph prayed for two years. God’s way is not usually to supernaturally intervene and miraculously break all the laws of nature – every once in a while the unexplainable happens, but prayer is usually opening us to God’s work and preparing us and if we will look back over a longer period of time, we see God at work.

So, Joseph keeps praying and two years later Pharaoh starts having dreams that disturb him because he knows the dreams mean something, but nobody can interpret the dreams. Then one day the cupbearer remembers Joseph. “Pharaoh,” he says, “When I was in prison, there

was a man who interprets dreams.” Joseph interprets the dream as God’s forecast for the future. Seven years of bumper crops will be followed by seven years of drought, and unless they save up during the good years, they will not survive the bad years. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you. (Genesis 41:39-40)

He goes from prison to prime minister of Egypt. But would this have happened if he had not been sold by his brothers into slavery? Would he have become prime minister of Egypt if he hadn’t been wrongly accused and thrown in prison? Would he have been there when Pharaoh had his dreams if the cupbearer and baker hadn’t forgotten about him for two years? Look at what God was able to do through the pain and brokenness. The worst thing is not the last thing.

Meanwhile, back in Canaan, what’s happening with Jacob and Joseph’s brothers? In the midst of famine, their survival at stake, they decide to go to Egypt and buy food, not knowing that Joseph is still alive, much less the prime minister. And what happens? They bow down before Joseph just like Joseph dreamed when he was a child. Imagine you are Joseph, and your brothers have done to you what they did to Joseph. What do you do? Revenge – right? Make them suffer. Give them what they deserve. Why not throw them in prison for a while. They want grain? Absolutely not!

We have this tendency when we’ve been hurt to hang on to the hurt – one hurt after another – and we carry them around with us. Steve, are you hurting? You’re absolutely right that I’ve hurting. Let me tell you what they did to me. I have every right to carry these hurts around with me – and we do. But it gets heavier the longer we carry it until that’s all we focus on. Maybe Joseph was spending every day as prime minister thinking how he could get revenge one day. It may be just 25 pounds that I’m carrying around and if I carried this the rest of today and tomorrow and the next day and you come back here next Sunday or the Sunday after that and I’m still carrying it. Eventually you won’t even want to be around me. We’ve all been wronged. I’ve had people do things and say things that hurt me and betrayed me at certain points in my life – and you have too. That’s life in this world. And we can decide either to hang on to it – like drinking poison and hoping the other person gets sick – and become a slave to it. I remember talking with a man at the end of his life. He had been carrying this resentment toward another person in his family and I encouraged him to let it go and be free – but he felt it would mean he approved of what that person did – and so he carried that burden to his grave – when he could have been free.

Joseph’s brothers come and bow down to Joseph, asking for grain and Joseph tests them – for four chapters. When he finally decides they have changed, seeing how they treat his youngest brother, Benjamin with grace and mercy, here’s what happens. If Joseph could forgive his brothers after all they did, why am I holding on to bitterness and resentment? When I finally let go and forgive, I’m set free. What hurt or pain from the past do you need to let go? Or who is that person carrying the pain from your actions and the words, “I’m sorry” could set them free? This is the lesson that I think we are meant to hear in Joseph’s story. Forgive and be free.

So, where is God when life hurts? Why doesn’t God keep us from bad things? God never promises to be our bodyguard or some sort of shield that will keep us from everything that will hurt us. God never promises that everything will go the way we want. Life will not be fair. But God is good. God promises no matter what we go through – “I will be with you.” God promises that evil, suffering, and pain will not have the final word. And if we will let God, God can redeem the worst and turn it into good. Many of you are examples of that – out of the pain of the death

of a child came the passion to come alongside others who experience a similar pain; out of the despair of the loss of your dream job came a whole new direction with even greater fulfillment; out of a broken relationship came an opportunity to meet someone new; out of a failure in school came a whole new direction that became the perfect match for your gifts and interests. Don't think God has forgotten, that God is absent. God is with us in all that we face.

And at the end of Joseph's story, he says to his brothers, "You did something bad to me, but God used that to bring forth something good." God is good. His love endures forever and his faithfulness continues through all generations.

GPS for Week Beginning May 7, 2017

Weekly Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for forgiving me, time and time again. Set me free from past hurts. Let your forgiveness take hold in my life, shaping all of my relationships and attitudes. Amen.

Monday, May 8

Scripture: Genesis 40:1-15, 23-41:1, 8-16

Some time later, both the wine steward and the baker for Egypt's king offended their master, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief wine steward and the chief baker, and he put them under arrest with the commander of the royal guard in the same jail where Joseph was imprisoned. The commander of the royal guard assigned Joseph to assist them. After they had been under arrest for some time, both of them—the wine steward and the baker for Egypt's king who were imprisoned in the jail—had dreams one night, and each man's dream had its own meaning. When Joseph met them in the morning, he saw that they were upset. He asked the officers of Pharaoh who were under arrest with him in his master's house, "Why do you look so distressed today?" They answered, "We've both had dreams, but there's no one to interpret them." Joseph said to them, "Don't interpretations belong to God? Describe your dreams to me." The chief wine steward described his dream to Joseph: "In my dream there was a vine right in front of me, and on the vine were three branches. When it budded, its blossoms appeared, and its clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, so I took the grapes, crushed them into Pharaoh's cup, and put the cup in Pharaoh's hand." Joseph said to him, "This is the dream's interpretation: The three branches are three days. After three days, Pharaoh will give you an audience and return you to your position. You will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just the way things were before when you were his wine steward. But please, remember me when you are doing well and be loyal to me. Put in a good word for me to Pharaoh, so he sets me free from this prison. I was stolen from the land of the Hebrews, and here too I've done nothing to be thrown into this dungeon."

But the chief wine steward didn't remember Joseph; he forgot all about him. Two years later, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing near the Nile.

In the morning, he was disturbed and summoned all of Egypt's religious experts and all of its advisors. Pharaoh described his dreams to them, but they couldn't interpret them for Pharaoh. Then the chief wine steward spoke to Pharaoh: "Today I've just remembered my mistake. Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and the chief baker under arrest with the commander of the royal guard. We both dreamed one night, he and I, and each of our dreams had its own interpretation. A young Hebrew man, a servant of the commander of the royal guard, was with us. We described our dreams to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us, giving us an interpretation for each dream. His interpretations came true exactly: Pharaoh

restored me to my position but hanged him." So Pharaoh summoned Joseph, and they quickly brought him from the dungeon. He shaved, changed clothes, and appeared before Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, but no one could interpret it. Then I heard that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it." Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It's not me. God will give Pharaoh a favorable response."

Observation: Joseph was a Hebrew slave, jailed by a powerful Egyptian politician for something he didn't do. How could he possibly escape that fix? Then the Egyptian Pharaoh jailed two men who'd worked in trusted positions in his palace. Each man had a mysterious dream, and God helped Joseph explain those dreams. As the dream indicated, Pharaoh reinstated his steward to his trusted position. After two years, Egypt's king himself had mysterious dreams. At that, the steward finally remembered Joseph (who was still in prison).

Application: Joseph asked his two fellow prisoners, "Why do you look so distressed today?" (Genesis 40:7) It was a curious question—they were in prison, after all! But he was not absorbed in his own problems, but alert to the people around him. Has anyone ever helped you by noticing that you were down, perhaps when you were trying not to notice that yourself? Are you okay with honestly feeling what you feel, or do you feel a need to hide your emotions?

Prayer: Loving Lord, keep me aware of the needs of those around me, not just my own. And help me to always seek your glory before I seek my own. Amen.

Tuesday, May 9

Scripture: Genesis 41:17-41, 45, 50

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile. In front of me, seven fattened, stout cows climbed up out of the Nile and grazed on the reeds. Just then, seven other cows, weak and frail and thin, climbed up after them. I've never seen such awful cows in all the land of Egypt. Then the thin, frail cows devoured the first seven, fattened cows. But after they swallowed them whole, no one would have known it. They looked just as bad as they had before. Then I woke up. I went to sleep again and saw in my dream seven full and healthy ears of grain growing on one stalk. Just then, seven hard and thin ears of grain, scorched by the east wind, sprouted after them, and the thin ears swallowed up the healthy ears. I told the religious experts, but they couldn't explain it to me." Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh has actually had one dream. God has announced to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven healthy cows are seven years, and the seven healthy ears of grain are seven years. It's actually one dream. The seven thin and frail cows, climbing up after them, are seven years. The seven thin ears of grain, scorched by the east wind, are seven years of famine. It's just as I told Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. Seven years of great abundance are now coming throughout the entire land of Egypt. After them, seven years of famine will appear, and all of the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. The famine will devastate the land. No one will remember the abundance in the land because the famine that follows will be so very severe. The dream occurred to Pharaoh twice because God has determined to do it, and God will make it happen soon. "Now Pharaoh should find an intelligent, wise man and give him authority over the land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh should appoint administrators over the land and take one-fifth of all the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. During the good years that are coming, they should collect all such food and store the grain under Pharaoh's control, protecting the food in the cities. This food will be reserved for the seven years of famine to follow in the land of Egypt so that the land won't be ravaged by the

famine." This advice seemed wise to Pharaoh and all his servants, and Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man with more God-given gifts than this one?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, no one is as intelligent and wise as you are. You will be in charge of my kingdom, and all my people will obey your command. Only as the enthroned king will I be greater than you." Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Know this: I've given you authority over the entire land of Egypt."

Pharaoh renamed Joseph, Zaphenath-paneah, and married him to Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera the priest of Heliopolis. Then Joseph assumed control of the land of Egypt.

Before the years of famine arrived, Asenath the daughter of Potiphera, priest of Heliopolis, gave birth to two sons for Joseph.

Observation: Through Joseph, God warned Pharaoh that his two bizarre dreams (corn eating corn!) were a deadly serious warning of a coming famine. Pharaoh was so impressed by Joseph's wisdom and discernment that he made an unexpected (and shocking) announcement. He was freeing the imprisoned Hebrew, and promoting him to be his chief deputy, with power over all of Egypt!

Application: It's so tucked away in the story that it almost feels like a footnote to us. But one part of Joseph's elevation was marrying the daughter of an Egyptian priest—and she bore him at least two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. The founders of two of Israel's twelve tribes had an Egyptian mother! In what ways did this seemingly small detail already begin to show God's love for all people on Earth, not just the members of one ethnicity or nation?

Prayer: Lord, your guiding hand is at work in my life each day. Help me not to overlook or fail to value that just because you do not always produce reversals in my fortunes as dramatic as you did for Joseph. Amen.

Wednesday, May 10

Scripture: Genesis 42:1-11, 44:3-34

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why are you staring blankly at each other? I've just heard that there's grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us so that we can survive and not starve to death." So Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. However, Jacob didn't send Joseph's brother Benjamin along with his brothers because he thought something bad might happen to him. Israel's sons came to buy grain with others who also came since the famine had spread to the land of Canaan. As for Joseph, he was the land's governor, and he was the one selling grain to all the land's people. When Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him, their faces to the ground. When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he acted like he didn't know them. He spoke to them with a harsh tone and said, "Where have you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan to buy food." Joseph recognized his brothers, but they didn't recognize him. Joseph remembered the dreams he had dreamed about them, and said to them, "You are spies. You've come to look for the country's weaknesses." They said to him, "No, Master. Your servants have just come to buy food. We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants aren't spies."

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Observation: The famine in Egypt hit Palestine, too, and Jacob sent his sons (except Benjamin, Rachel's other son) to Egypt to buy food. They had to deal with Joseph, Egypt's famine "czar." They didn't recognize him, understandably, but he definitely recognized them. They bowed to him (remember his dreams?). He firmly tested them to see if they had changed. They were no longer "brother-sellers"—they put themselves on the line to protect young Benjamin and aged Jacob.

Application: Imagine yourself in Joseph's position. In all of Egypt, a "super-power" at that time, only Pharaoh held more power than he did. What range of choices did Joseph have available

when his brothers came before him? On a spectrum from “most vengeful” to “most generous,” where would you put his response? How do you think you would have responded in his place?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, this story makes it clear that Joseph’s brothers grew and changed for the better over the years. Keep me growing more into the kind of person you call me to be each day. Amen.

Thursday, May 11

Scripture: Genesis 45:1-18, 45:25-46:7

Joseph could no longer control himself in front of all his attendants, so he declared, "Everyone, leave now!" So no one stayed with him when he revealed his identity to his brothers. He wept so loudly that the Egyptians and Pharaoh's household heard him. Joseph said to his brothers, "I'm Joseph! Is my father really still alive?" His brothers couldn't respond because they were terrified before him. Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me," and they moved closer. He said, "I'm your brother Joseph! The one you sold to Egypt. Now, don't be upset and don't be angry with yourselves that you sold me here. Actually, God sent me before you to save lives. We've already had two years of famine in the land, and there are five years left without planting or harvesting. God sent me before you to make sure you'd survive and to rescue your lives in this amazing way. You didn't send me here; it was God who made me a father to Pharaoh, master of his entire household, and ruler of the whole land of Egypt. "Hurry! Go back to your father. Tell him this is what your son Joseph says: 'God has made me master of all of Egypt. Come down to me. Don't delay. You may live in the land of Goshen, so you will be near me, your children, your grandchildren, your flocks, your herds, and everyone with you. I will support you there, so you, your household, and everyone with you won't starve, since the famine will still last five years.' You and my brother Benjamin have seen with your own eyes that I'm speaking to you. Tell my father about my power in Egypt and about everything you've seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." He threw his arms around his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his shoulder. He kissed all of his brothers and wept, embracing them. After that, his brothers were finally able to talk to him. When Pharaoh's household heard the message "Joseph's brothers have arrived," both Pharaoh and his servants were pleased. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Give your brothers these instructions: Load your pack animals and go back to the land of Canaan. Get your father and your households and come back to me. Let me provide you with good things from the land of Egypt so that you may eat the land's best food.

So they left Egypt and returned to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. They announced to him, "Joseph's still alive! He's actually ruler of all the land of Egypt!" Jacob's heart nearly failed, and he didn't believe them. When they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the wagons Joseph had sent to carry him, Jacob recovered. Then Israel said, "This is too much! My son Joseph is still alive! Let me go and see him before I die."

Israel packed up everything he owned and traveled to Beer-sheba. There he offered sacrifices to his father Isaac's God. God said to Israel in a vision at night, "Jacob! Jacob!" and he said, "I'm here." He said, "I am El, your father's God. Don't be afraid to go down to Egypt because I will make a great nation of you there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I promise to bring you out again. Joseph will close your eyes when you die." Then Jacob left Beer-sheba. Israel's sons put their father Jacob, their children, and their wives on the wagons Pharaoh had sent to carry him. They took their livestock and their possessions that they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and arrived in Egypt, Jacob and all of his children with him. His sons and grandsons, his daughters and his granddaughters—all of his descendants he brought with him to Egypt.

Observation: Joseph had recognized his brothers as soon as they first appeared before him. But it's not surprising that when this commanding "Egyptian" official told them he was their brother Joseph, "his brothers couldn't respond because they were terrified before him." However, Joseph had let go of any ideas of revenge he might have had, and he set about to reunite his family with generosity and grace.

Application: Given what we know of Israel's developing view of God, it's very possible that Joseph and the writer(s) of Genesis believed that God caused everything that happened, and therefore caused his brothers to sell him to slave traders. Do you know why many believers today do not view God in that light? (If not, see passages like John 9:2-3, James 1:13.) In what ways does this story show God's providence in using even bad actions to accomplish good ends?

Prayer: Merciful God, how powerfully Joseph exemplified the spirit of your kingdom in the way he treated his brothers. Keep growing in me a capacity to embody and act out your mercy. Amen.

Friday, May 12

Scripture: Genesis 47:1-12, 48:1-11

Joseph went to inform Pharaoh and said, "My father and brothers with their flocks, herds, and everything they own have come from the land of Canaan and are now in the land of Goshen." From all of his brothers, he selected five men and presented them before Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph's brothers, "What do you do?" They said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, both we and our ancestors." They continued, "We've come to the land as immigrants because the famine is so severe in the land of Canaan that there are no more pastures for your servants' flocks. Please allow your servants to settle in the land of Goshen." Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since your father and brothers have arrived, the land of Egypt is available to you. Settle your father and brothers in the land's best location. Let them live in the land of Goshen. And if you know capable men among them, put them in charge of my own livestock." Joseph brought his father Jacob and gave him an audience with Pharaoh. Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How old are you?" Jacob said to Pharaoh, "I've been a traveler for 130 years. My years have been few and difficult. They don't come close to the years my ancestors lived during their travels." Jacob blessed Pharaoh and left Pharaoh's presence. Joseph settled his father and brothers and gave them property in the land of Egypt, in the best location in the land of Rameses, just as Pharaoh had ordered. Joseph provided food for his father, his brothers, and his father's entire household, in proportion to the number of children.

After this happened, Joseph was told, "Your father is getting weaker," so he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him. When Jacob was informed, "Your son Joseph is here now," he pulled himself together and sat up in bed. Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me in Luz in the land of Canaan. He blessed me and said to me, 'I am about to give you many children, to increase your numbers, and to make you a large group of peoples. I will give this land to your descendants following you as an enduring possession.' Now, your two sons born to you in the land of Egypt before I arrived in Egypt are my own. Ephraim and Manasseh are just like Reuben and Simeon to me. Your family who is born to you after them are yours, but their inheritance will be determined under their brothers' names. When I came back from Paddan-aram, Rachel died, to my sorrow, on the road in the land of Canaan, with some distance yet to go to Ephrathah, so I buried her there near the road to Ephrathah, which is Bethlehem." When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" Joseph told his father, "They're my sons,

whom God gave me here." Israel said, "Bring them to me and I will bless them." Because Israel's eyesight had failed from old age and he wasn't able to see, Joseph brought them close to him, and he kissed and embraced them. Israel said to Joseph, "I didn't expect I'd see your face, but now God has shown me your children too."

Observation: Joseph's story fit into a much larger story of God working through Abraham and his descendants to share God's power and mercy with all people. In that larger story, Joseph's story set the stage for Israel's defining story, the Exodus from Egypt, by showing how they came to be in Egypt to begin with.

Application: We know that for most of the time, the ancient Egyptians worshipped multiple gods, and tended to view their Pharaoh as divine. What do you think the Pharaoh thought when Jacob, the ancient patriarch from Canaan, blessed him? Why did the God-fearing patriarch see value in offering his blessing to the Egyptian monarch, despite their many differences?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to go through my life eager to offer your blessing to any person I meet. And help me, like Jacob, to live in gratitude for your goodness to me. Amen.

Saturday, May 13

Scripture: Genesis 50:12-26

Israel's sons did for him just as he had ordered. His sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre, which Abraham had purchased as burial property from Ephron the Hittite. Then Joseph returned to Egypt, he, his brothers, and everyone who left with him to bury his father.

When Joseph's brothers realized that their father was now dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us, and wants to pay us back seriously for all of the terrible things we did to him?" So they approached Joseph and said, "Your father gave orders before he died, telling us, 'This is what you should say to Joseph. 'Please, forgive your brothers' sins and misdeeds, for they did terrible things to you. Now, please forgive the sins of the servants of your father's God.'" Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers wept too, fell down in front of him, and said, "We're here as your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I God? You planned something bad for me, but God produced something good from it, in order to save the lives of many people, just as he's doing today. Now, don't be afraid. I will take care of you and your children." So he put them at ease and spoke reassuringly to them. Thus Joseph lived in Egypt, he and his father's household. Joseph lived 110 years and saw Ephraim's grandchildren. The children of Machir, Manasseh's son, were also born on Joseph's knees. Joseph said to his brothers, "I'm about to die. God will certainly take care of you and bring you out of this land to the land he promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Joseph made Israel's sons promise, "When God takes care of you, you must bring up my bones out of here." Joseph died when he was 110 years old. They embalmed him and placed him in a coffin in Egypt.

Observation: Joseph saved his family (and all Egypt) from starvation. But after Jacob's death, the brothers still feared Joseph might use his powerful position to take revenge for what they'd done. Their fear led them to weep—their distrust made Joseph weep. He repeated that he'd chosen to forgive them. And, as the end of his life approached, he expressed his confidence that Israel's future did not lie in Egypt, and made them promise that he'd be part of the Exodus to come.

Application: Forgiveness doesn't change the past. It looks toward the future. In what ways did Joseph's willingness to forgive his brothers change their futures? Joseph went through a lifelong process of growth. Quite often forgiveness is a process over time and not necessarily a single act. It is like a boulder being chipped away, a little at a time. How can you and God begin or continue, each day, to chip away at the boulders that represent the hurts in your life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for forgiving me, time and time again. Set me free from past hurts. Let your forgiveness take hold in my life, shaping all of my relationships and attitudes. Amen.