

Healthy Reconciliation

Genesis 45

INTRODUCTION: One of the most easily recognized passages of scripture is 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Which might surprise you to know that the verse was first penned by the Apostle Paul, not Tim Tebow. However familiar that passage may be, it is the three verses that follow that Paul would likely have intended to arrest our attention. Remember the Law of Repetition we mentioned last week? Note the word, which I will emphasize, that is repeated 5 times in the verse immediately following 2 Cor. 5:17.

¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ **reconciled** us to himself and gave us the ministry of **reconciliation**; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was **reconciling** the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of **reconciliation**. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be **reconciled** to God.

The great Apostle wishes for us to comprehend and to engage directly in the ministry of reconciliation. Yet, this has become a stumbling block for the church for the last 2,000 years. We wish to be reconciled to God, yet we do not wish for others to be reconciled to us. We are comfortable in our lack of forgiveness. We prefer to sip the tea of the bitter root, rather than the savory soup of reconciliation.

The Great Evangelist D.L. Moody said, *“The one thing that is keeping revival from coming to the Church, more people being saved and God really working in His people, is the sin of an unforgiving spirit.”*

Yes, that root of bitterness has become the besetting sin of the church.

The writer to the Hebrews warns us of this tendency in **Hebrews 12:15 (ESV) where he writes,** ¹⁵ See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

Three truths about roots of bitterness:

- 1. They are under the surface** - they may exist for years unknown to those closest to us.
- 2. They will not remain under the surface; they will eventually spring up.** Just as a tree root might break through concrete itself, a root of bitterness will not remain hidden forever; it will eventually surface. And when it does...
- 3. It will defile many.**

CONTEXT: If anyone had a good reason to be bitter, it was Joseph.

- Sold into slavery at the age of 17 by his brothers, the very men who should have protected him.
- Falsely accused by a seductive woman.
- Forgotten by the man, he used his gifts to serve.

But all the while, Joseph apparently did what I hope each of us does today - rather than stew in bitterness, Joseph saved up forgiveness and grace for those who had sinned against him.

When they came to a place of repentance, he had saved up a reservoir of mercy from which he could offer them grace.

That doesn't mean that it wasn't terribly painful - Christ forgave us, but it was terribly painful for Him. Yet, he absorbed the pain rather than turning it back onto us. Joseph, a foreshadowing of Christ, does the same.

Today, I want to show you the elements that came together in a narrative for a **Healthy Reconciliation** to occur.

1. A Repentant Person

Last week, we saw that Joseph tested these brothers to verify their repentance. Remember what he did? He hid the golden chalice in Benjamin's bag to see if the brothers would turn on Benjamin as they had turned on Joseph.

What he is cleverly doing is recreating, 20 years later, the situation of his own betrayal. These brothers hated Rachel's two sons. They were jealous of them. Now, once again, a son of Rachel is in danger — Benjamin — just as Joseph had been isolated and in danger.

They had sold one son of Rachel for 20 shekels of silver. Now they can abandon the other son of Rachel for a much greater price — their lives and their freedoms. ***What will they do? Will they do now what they did before?***

Remember how they responded?

Genesis 44:13–16 (ESV) ¹³ Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

Notice that all of the sons of Jacob return to the city, that is, the city in Egypt - they all go with Benjamin.

¹⁴ When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground.

¹⁵ Joseph said to them, “What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?” ¹⁶ And Judah said, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord’s servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found.”

They are all fully and completely identifying with their presumed guilty brother, Benjamin. Oh, how completely they had changed. Time had deepened their empathy, sweetened their spirits, and emboldened their faith.

The change is most marked in Judah. His speech is the longest speech in the book of Genesis. One commentator calls it *“the most moving address in all the Word of God.”*

Note how full of tenderness it is. He uses the word **“Father” 14 times** in the speech. His heart is full of his father. Once, he didn’t care. He hurt his father. He broke his father’s heart. But now he shows deep compassion and deep understanding.

By the way, one of the surest signs that a deep work of the Holy Spirit has taken place is when the hearts of families become knit together.

Speaking of the coming of the Messiah, the Prophet Malachi reminds us, **Malachi 4:6 (ESV)** ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers...

These men care about how this will affect other people, specifically their father, Jacob.

Genesis 44:22 (ESV)

²² We said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.’

The time had been when these men bitterly resented Jacob’s favoritism. But Judah doesn’t resent it now. In fact, he uses it as an argument for mercy. Previously, they didn’t care enough about Jacob to spare Joseph, but they have changed. BTW, that is a good reminder for us that people can actually change. It doesn’t happen as quickly as we would prefer in our lives or in the lives of others, but change can happen.

He says in verse 22, “If the boy leaves him, his father will die.” He recognizes that Benjamin is the favorite — the special son. The time had been when these men bitterly resented Jacob’s favoritism. But Judah doesn’t resent it now. In fact, he uses it as an argument for mercy.

Most touching of all is that Judah offers himself in Benjamin’s place. This is the first time in the Bible that one human offers his life for another. Ironically, the offer was

made by Judah, whose descendant would ultimately be offered in place of all who would believe.

Consider the things God used to change the heart of Judah:

- Judah himself had lost two sons, Er and Onan. He knew how a Father can love of a son.
- He had known the heartbreak of losing a son in the death of Er.
- Through Tamar, he had been publicly humiliated and had to acknowledge his guilt.

All of this had changed Judah. He is no longer hard, violent, or judgmental. He is no longer the man who sold his young brother, as he was crying, begging him not to do it. He is no longer the man who broke his father's heart. He is no longer the man who condemned his daughter-in-law to be burned.

All of that change is captured in the cry - "How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me?" — Perhaps some of you know what it's like. Perhaps some of you have an unconverted son or daughter, and you can't imagine going to the Father without your child. You are moved as Judah was moved, and you intercede on their behalf, day and night, with tears.

Yes, there was Genuine Repentance.

This is important. Sometimes we get the idea that God is calling us to forgive and reconcile with unrepentant people. That is not the case.

God does not reconcile with us until we are repentant. Instead, He stores up grace for that moment of repentance and gives it liberally the moment we turn toward Him.

God does not reconcile with us until we are repentant. God does not call us to reconcile without repentance.

Now, at the same time, we must realize that we are not the Holy Spirit - we cannot weigh the thoughts and intentions of the heart, therefore Jesus tells us that we must take the offender at their word.

As our Lord said in Luke 17:3–4 (ESV)

³Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,⁴ and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

The first step in a healthy reconciliation is a Repentant Person...

2. A Reframed Purpose

Joseph gained a perspective that he carried through every test that allowed him to transcend his situation.

Genesis 45:4–10 (ESV)

⁴ So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And he said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.

You bunch of dirty, rotten, no good, sorry, heathens....is that what he said? No, that's what we would have said, but it's not what Joseph said. Look what he says...

⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

Joseph claims the narrative in the name of God. He declares that God has a purpose behind all that has happened to him.

⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ And **God** sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but **God. He** has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

I wonder if there is anything in your life that happened to you, you didn't choose it, it happened to you, it brought you to a bad place. I wonder if you have asked God to show you what He was doing in and through all of that?

⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, **God** has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. ¹⁰ You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have.

The compass needle of his life was always pointing Godward.

- Tempted by Potiphar's wife: “How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against **God**?”
- In prison: “Do not interpretations belong to **God**?”
- Before Pharaoh: “**God** will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.”
- Naming his sons: “**God** has made me forget all my trouble. **God** has made me fruitful.”

And now, here amid this radical moment of irony and revelation, Joseph confesses that God did this.

NOW, that understanding was partly what gave Joseph the strength not to grow bitter toward his brothers. Even their sin was subject to God's purpose. He is not minimizing human responsibility. He says in verse 4, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt.” They did it. They were responsible. But God overruled it. God used it for good.

Joseph says, God had a purpose in it. That doesn't excuse them. That doesn't absolve them from guilt. They will have to bear the responsibility for the wrong they have done.

But it sets me free. I don't have to be resentful or angry or sorry for myself. For my Father in heaven is able to use even these cruel and wicked things for my ultimate good and the good of my family.

Realthy reconciliation begins with a Repentant Person...it is met with a Reframed Purpose, then it produces...

3. A Remarkable Plan

⁷ And **God** sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.

The better translation of the final phrase is: *“to save you as a great band of survivors.”* That word “survivors” is important.

These two words — **remnant** and **survivors** — are loaded with theological meaning, with redemptive significance. They recur throughout the Old Testament: the remnant, the survivors, the covenant people of God kept safe in a hostile world.

With these words, Joseph is linking his experience to the stream of redemptive history. The remnant from whom the Messiah will come to bring the kingdom. This is part of the preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

Genesis 45:10–15 (ESV)

¹⁰ You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.’ ¹² And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. ¹³ You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” ¹⁴ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

This Hebrew word “come close” is a very intimate word — used, for example, of coming close to kiss or to embrace someone. **The long years of estrangement and separation have ended.**

He kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Perhaps Reuben first. Perhaps Judah first. Their arms around one another. Heart to heart. Not estranged anymore. No hatred. No bitterness. No division. They are all one.

Look at that lovely endnote: *“Afterwards, his brothers talked with him.”* Possibly the first time they had ever talked in their lives. Remember, right at the beginning of the story, we read in the family home: *“They hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.”* But now they talked.

Three things you give up when you forgive and reconcile.

1. The right to use this against you

Archibald heart a Christian Psychologist

"Forgiveness is when I give up the right to hurt you for hurting me."

2. The right to talk to someone else about it.
3. The right to dwell on what happened.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

Many of us have experienced such a moment. A moment even more transforming. And for some, it was not a moment but a more gradual, gentle process. But it was just as life-changing. And the content was exactly the same.

As I look at those words — "I am Joseph" — my mind goes to Saul of Tarsus, traveling along the road to Damascus, his heart full of hatred for the people of God. And suddenly, there appeared a shining figure who said, "I am Jesus." And Saul was never the same.

And this experience is possible for anyone here who hasn't yet truly met the Savior. To each of us this morning, that voice comes: "I am Jesus." How will you respond?